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Towards a Green Medical Humanities

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Towards a Green Medical Humanities: Solastalgia, Ecological PTSD, and Beyond in Charles Rangeley-Wilson's *Silt Road: The Story of a Lost River*

Jens Kirk (Aalborg University)

Abstract

This article concerns the relationship between the environment and trauma-like states of mental crisis—a relationship that invites a merging of the concerns of eco-criticism and medical humanities, i.e., a green medical humanities. The article outlines the need for a medical humanities with a clear ecological dimension and introduces two terms that in very different ways combine concerns with the environment and mental health: *solastalgia* and *ecological PTSD*. Lastly, the article shows how a reading of a contemporary text—Charles Rangeley-Wilson's *Silt Road: The Story of a Lost River*—dealing with the dramatic changes undergone by a British river, benefits from, but also challenges, a combination of ecological and mental health perspectives.

Keywords: green medical humanities; solastalgia; ecological PTSD; Charles Rangeley-Wilson

Introduction

On 17 June 2021, CNN broke a story concerning the reduced water levels in Lake Mead, 'The shocking numbers behind the Lake Mead drought crisis', on their web site (Ramirez et al. 2021). The title of the article explicitly links a particular state of affairs in the environment—the drought crisis—with an accompanying state of mental crisis involving shock, distress, and alarm. In words, numbers, images, and graphs, the article then proceeds to document systematically how the lake is 'plagued by extreme, climate change-fuelled drought and increasing demand for water'. To cite just some of the article's subheadlines,

Lake Mead is around 143 feet below 'full,' a deficit roughly the height of the Statue of Liberty [...] 25,000,000 people rely on Lake Mead water [...] Lake Mead has lost 5.5 trillion gallons of water [...] The lake loses around 6 feet

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of water to evaporation each year [...] 90 percent of Las Vegas's water comes from Lake Mead (Ramirez et al. 2021)

Few people are able to stomach this kind of mindboggling information without either a growing sense of distress or, alternatively, apathy¹, I suggest. In its use of facts in the form of statistics and records, but also in its use of pathos (the image of the Statue of Liberty and the preference of verbs like *lose*, for instance), the CNN article does more than merely document various environmental facts. It also produces a particular mindset in its readers, i.e., the experience of shock mentioned in the article's headline, or it feeds our apathy and emotional fatigue in the face of unprecedented negative change.

In this paper, I deal with the relationship between the environment and trauma-like states of mental crisis of shock or apathy triggered by the CNN article—a relationship that invites a merging of the concerns of eco-criticism and medical humanities, i.e., a green medical humanities. I begin with an outline and discussion of Jonathan's Coope's argument for 'the need of an ecological dimensioned medical humanities' (Coope 2021). Then, I introduce two terms that in very different ways combine concerns with the environment and mental health. First, I address Glen A. Albrecht's neologism *solastalgia*. Secondly, I outline and discuss Timothy Morton's notion of *ecological PTSD*. Lastly, I show how a reading of a contemporary text concerning the dramatic changes undergone by a British river, Charles Rangeley-Wilson's *Silt Road: The Story of a Lost River*, benefits from, but also challenges, a combination of ecological and mental health perspectives.

Green medical humanities

In a recent article, Jonathan Coope argues that 'the project of a more ecological dimensioned medical humanities appears both timely and urgent' (2021: 123). He proceeds to make a map of how the green turn in the medical humanities is already underway in the shape of new areas, methods, and approaches. On his map, he first identifies three specific 'areas of progress' (123–124). Secondly, he outlines how our eco-crisis has been reframed as a healthcare opportunity (124). Lastly, he shows how

¹ For an introduction to climate apathy, see Barasi (2017).

an ecologically dimensioned medical humanities is beginning to challenge the key assumptions of modernity (125–126).

Concerning the areas of progress, he calls attention to the paradigm switch in healthcare from ‘reducing problems to their smallest components’ (Coope 2021: 123) to thinking in terms of systems. Secondly, and related to the swing away from *smallism*, or ‘discrimination in favour of the small over the-not-so-small’ (Wilson 2005: 239), he mentions how the field of public health is increasingly recognised as demanding ‘a multidisciplinary and historical informed approach’ (Coope 2021: 124). Thirdly, he mentions how more and more attention is devoted to the notion ‘that our relationship with non-human nature may have profound implications for our mental health’. More specifically, Coope recounts the conclusions made by Craig Chalquist from his study of the empirical literature on the far-reaching effects of ‘nature connectedness’ on mental health. Chalquist’s conclusions are phrased in terms of a binary relationship between humans and the natural world. The relationship is either one of connection or disconnection: you’re either in or out. Disconnection produces serious psychological symptoms, e.g., depression. Conversely, reconnection to nature in the form of, for instance, ‘gardens, animals, nature walks outside, or brought indoors’ carries positive effects for your mental health. Not only are serious symptoms like depression alleviated, nature connectedness ‘also brings a larger capacity for health, self-esteem, self-relatedness, social connection, and joy’.²

Referencing Thodore Rozak’s *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology* (1992), Coope concludes his review of the work done in the field of ecological mental health by mentioning that ‘some ecopsychologists argue that the commonplace presumption that mind “In Here” and nature “Out There” are, or ever were, separate realms has been an illusion, a cultural construction—although a remarkably persistent one

² The evidence from the canonical texts that we traditionally read in the humanities suggesting that connectedness to nature is related to mental health in a positive way is overwhelming, of course. To cite just a couple of examples of canonical British and American texts dealing with the mental healing power of rivers: Wordsworth’s ‘Tintern Abbey’ (1798) and Hemingway’s ‘Big Two-Hearted River’ (1927). Outside the field of fiction, rivers are regarded as therapeutic agents, too. For instance, in Laurence Catlow’s autobiography *The Healing Stream* (2016), the author celebrates the recuperative powers of rivers after his mental breakdown.

in western culture' (Coope 2021: 124). Coope refrains from bringing forward the contradictions between the two positions, however. Chalquist's assumption of two separate realms (the human and the non-human), which you can either be connected to or disconnected from, is the 'illusion' of the latter. No separate realm to disconnect from or reconnect to exists for Rozak.³

After introducing us to the three areas of progress, Coope points out that ecocrisis has been conceptualized as a 'healthcare *opportunity*' (Coope 2021: 124, my emphasis). For instance, ecocrisis is often framed apocalyptically in a manner that stuns people rather than motivates them into action. The CNN story I mentioned at the beginning of the article is a splendid example of stunning, I think. As a contrast, Coope shows how commentators are moving towards 'a different story' and 'a *we can fix this* mentality' that is not mentally paralysing.

Lastly, Coope reviews the extent to which a greening of medical humanities is capable of challenging some of modernity's most cherished assumptions. Here he refers broadly to the critique of medicine's traditional reliance on 'mechanical philosophy' and predilection for a concept of knowledge that hyperseparates subject and object (Coope 2021: 125).

In the following, I outline and discuss the work of two environmental thinkers who in different ways, I claim, exemplify Coope's call for an ecologically-informed medical humanities. Albeit in different ways, they manifest a paradigm change away from smallism, a focus on nature connectedness and mental health, and a challenge of the key assumptions of scientism and modernity.

³ The contradiction between the two positions does produce some inconvenient questions that I won't attempt to answer in this essay. Is the evidence of the positive effects of nature on mental health merely an example of the power of ideology? Are the positive effects fake when we can show that they are based on 'an illusion, a cultural construction'? Or, conversely, are the claims of cultural constructionism dismantled by empiricism? Are our age-old tropes of wilderness and pastoral actually real?

The ‘homesickness one gets when one is still at “home:”’ Glen A. Albrecht’s concept of solastalgia

Glen A. Albrecht’s recent monograph *Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World* demonstrates systematic thinking about the ecological dimensions of mental health mentioned by Coope.⁴ Here, in response to the Anthropocene, he coins a number of “‘psychoterratic” (psyche-earth) emotional concepts’ (Albrecht 2019: n. pag.). Together the terms form a typology of our positive and negative ‘Earth emotions’. More particularly, they conceptualise ‘the particular human emotional responses we have to the scale and pace of ecological and environmental change’—a change that constitutes ‘a defining feature of the twenty-first century’ (Albrecht 2020: 10) for Albrecht. However, the psychoterratic concept that has gained the widest traction—and found its way into, for instance Robert Macfarlane’s bestselling *Underland* (Macfarlane 2019: 317)—is a negative one: *solastalgia*. Solastalgia develops the notion of nature disconnectedness cited by Coope. Albrecht’s briefest definition of the term is ‘the lived experience of negative environmental change’ (Albrecht 2020: 9).

The long definition clarifies a number of important aspects,

Solastalgia, in contrast to the dislocated spatial and temporal dimensions of nostalgia, relates to a different set of circumstances. It is the pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault (physical desolation). It is manifest in an attack on one’s sense of place, in the erosion of the sense of belonging (identity) to a particular place and a feeling of distress (psychological desolation) about its transformation. It is an intense desire for the place where one is a resident to be maintained in a state that continues to give comfort or solace. Solastalgia is not about looking back to some golden past, nor is it about seeking another place as ‘home’. It is the ‘lived experience’ of the loss of the present as manifest in a feeling of dislocation; of being undermined by forces that destroy the potential for solace to be derived from the present. In short, solastalgia is a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at ‘home’. (Albrecht 2020: 9)

⁴ Former professor of Sustainability at Murdoch University, Glenn A. Albrecht is currently ‘an Honorary Associate in the School of Geo-sciences, The University of Sydney’ (<https://www.humansandnature.org/glenn-albrecht>). According to TEDxSydney, he is ‘a transdisciplinary philosopher with a focus on the intersection of ecosystem and human health’ (<https://tedxsydney.com/contributor/glenn-albrecht/>).

The complexities of the pain involved in the ‘lived experience’ of solastalgia become clear. First, the definition emphasises the physical desolation of landscape and the distressing realisation that your home is literally under attack and being destroyed. Secondly, the acute sense of physical desolation triggers psychological desolation according to Albrecht. Psychological desolation is a form of grief at the progressive disappearance of your sense of yourself as grounded in your home. However, psychologically, the term also involves a powerful and simultaneous futile longing for your home as your former place of well-being.

Thus, solastalgia seems to involve not only the pain involved in experiencing the destruction of your place of solace—your home—but also the distress involved in the simultaneous production of an impossible and unrealisable desire for that particular place.

Albrecht states that, originally, he coined the concept of solastalgia in order to conceptualise the effect of ‘open-cut coal mining and power generation in the Upper Hunter region of New South Wales’ (2020: 12).⁵ Mountaintop removal and open-cut mining are forms of negative environmental change that can seem particularly apocalyptic. However, Albrecht also advocates a wider, and even global, application of the term so that it comes ‘to define and describe the loss of the sense of place, especially an endemic sense of place, in people all over the world’ (13).

While Albrecht claims that we live in an age of solastalgia, he maintains that it does not have to imply apathy. Because solastalgia is the product of particular and ‘deliberate political policy’, it is ‘an emotional state that can be countered and overcome’ (2020: 20). Thus, it is possible to counter that emotional state by a ‘politics of solastalgia’. Albrecht has developed several counter-concepts. For instance, the symbiocene, which he calls a ‘meme,’ or ‘a vision of a desirable future state toward which social change can be directed’ (21). This is what Coope would call ‘a move towards a different story’, but a radical one since it would exemplify what Coope calls ‘the production of a new environmental awareness’ (Coope 2021: 124).

⁵ Dealing with the devastating social and psychological effects of mountaintop removal mining on a small community in the Appalachians, Ann Pancake’s novel *Strange as the Weather Has Been* (2007) is a fine example of a literary treatment of solastalgia.

'You just suddenly find yourself in a car crash:' Timothy Morton's notion of Ecological PTSD

Where Albrecht's concept of solastalgia in particular falls under Coope's heading of ecological mental health, Timothy Morton's work is more difficult to frame. Coope mentions him in a single sentence as an example of someone who mounts a full-scale attack on some of the most cherished assumptions of modernity (Coope 2021: 125). While he certainly has done that, I deal with him first and foremost in the context of Coope's area of ecological mental health, since Morton is very much about 'connectedness' too. Not unlike Albrecht, Timothy Morton has been responsible for the generation of a range of new terms intended to conceptualise the high level of complexity involved in the relationship between human beings and their environment. The *mesh*, for instance, signifies the radical idea of 'the interconnectedness of all living and non-living things' (Morton 2010: 28):

All life forms are the mesh, and so are all dead ones, as are their habitats, which are also made up of living and non-living beings. We know even more now [Morton is contrasting with Charles Darwin] about how life forms have shaped Earth (think of oil, of oxygen—the first climate change cataclysm). We drive around using crushed dinosaur parts. Iron is mostly a by-product of bacterial metabolism. So is oxygen. Mountains can be made of shells and fossilized bacteria. Death and the mesh go together in another sense, too, because natural selection implies extinction. (29)

This is a way of imagining connectedness that evokes the swing towards systems thinking and away from smallism mentioned by Coope. Also, it recalls Coope's outline of Rozak's ecopsychological approach deconstructing the inner-outer dichotomy. But Morton's mesh is far larger since it appears to include no less than *everything*.⁶ Certainly, in Morton's mesh, there is no outside. Thus, it involves a lived experience far greater and more complex than the one outlined by even Albrecht's broad notion of solastalgia.

In his *Being Ecological*, Timothy Morton claims that we are suffering from what he calls 'ecological PTSD' (2018: 13–14). According to him, we are traumatised by living anthropogenic global warming and mass extinction. He critiques the way in which science and media usually talk about those topics as if we were situated on the outside looking in. We're

⁶ Morton's mesh is an example of what he calls a hyperobject. See, e.g., Morton (2013).

not. We're inside the mesh living the traumatising experience of global warming and mass extinction. And, according to Morton, our preferred 'ecological information delivery mode' (7) is far from helpful for our situation. It involves 'dumping massive platefuls of facts on to us' (9)—the CNN story is a good example of what he has in mind—and Morton finds that 'dumping data on ourselves is actually *inhibiting* a more genuine way of handling ecological knowledge' (12, emphasis original). Using 'an analogy from the world of dreaming' (13), Morton claims that information dump mode is like 'the trauma dreams of sufferers of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)' (13):

By analogy, then, information dump mode is a way for us to try to install ourselves at a fictional point in time *before global warming happened*. We are trying to anticipate something inside which we already find ourselves. (2018: 14, emphasis original)

Like Albrecht, Morton identifies a strong link between the lived experience of global warming and mass extinction and mental health too. Morton, however, prefers to draw on the familiar notion of trauma rather than rely on a neologism. Morton spells out that he is using an analogy. Ecological PTSD is (to my knowledge) not a recognized diagnosis within the medical profession.⁷ But the image of anthropogenic mass extinction and global warming as agents of trauma is a striking one. Another striking image used by Morton to conceptualise our traumatic situation is that of the car-crash (2018: 14). While the crash is taking place, we are trying to speak about it, to deal with it, and to respond to it in a manner that is not helpful at all. By resorting to information dump mode, we are engaging a post-traumatic dream mode in which we try to beam ourselves back in time to a point before disaster set in (13).

In the following, I use the concepts of solastalgia and ecological PTSD as my starting point in a reading of *Silt Road: The Story of a Lost River*. In using the two terms, I hope to show how we can talk about texts in an interdisciplinary manner that involves medical humanities and ecocriticism. However, while his discourse dramatizes mental states in response to the environment that recall those outlined by Morton and

⁷ According to a recent study, PTSD is often used 'as a prototypical model' to describe 'the effects of global climate change on the general population, as well as at-risk groups and vulnerable communities' (Cianconi et al. 2020: n. pag.).

Albrecht, Rangeley-Wilson is clearly outlining experiences that problematize and transcend solastalgia and ecological PTSD.

'[A] fascinated longing for this imprisoned stream.' Charles Rangeley-Wilson and the Buckinghamshire Wye

British writer, photographer, and film maker Charles Rangeley-Wilson has been concerned with rivers for most of his career. As an angling writer much of his work is naturally concerned with rivers great and small (2004, 2006). As a film maker for BBC2 he made *The Accidental Angler* (n.d.), an episode of which looked at London trout and London rivers, for instance. And as a natural and cultural historian, he has documented and discussed the crucial role of fish in the history of Britain and its seas and waterways (2018). *Silt Road: The Story of a Lost River* (2014) deals with the Buckinghamshire Wye. Compared with large rivers, e.g., the Thames—the subject of countless books and poems including Peter Ackroyd's *Thames: The Biography* (2008), or the River Wye between England and Wales famously revisited by Wordsworth in 1798 and celebrated in 'Tintern Abbey,' or even the relatively small Dart, the eponymous hero of Alice Oswald's 2002 book length poem—the distinguishing features of the Buckinghamshire Wye are humble. So humble in fact that Ackroyd does not even grace it with a name in his map of the Thames tributaries (2008: Front Matter). Its topography is summarised quickly: rising from the chalk hills of the Chilterns, it flows for fewer than 20 kilometres through the Wye valley and High Wycombe before it enters the River Thames (Revive the Wye.org 2021).

However, for Rangeley-Wilson the Wye is a precious and crucial river. In my reading of his book length study of the river, I address solastalgia and environmental PTSD in the context of the two main stories Rangeley-Wilson narrates.⁸ The first story is what he calls 'the water's story' (2014: 2) and outlines the changing roles played by the

⁸ Rangeley-Wilson's mingling of two stories is an example of what a 2008 special issue of the literary magazine *Granta* christened *The New Nature Writing*. In contrast to the old nature writing identified as 'the lyrical pastoral tradition of the romantic wanderer', the new nature writers are dealing with their subject 'in heterodox and experimental ways' (Cowley 2008:10). For an outline of competing terminologies see, e.g., Kirk 2019: 128–129.

inconspicuous Buckinghamshire Wye in the history of High Wycombe and the Wycombe valley. The Wye's story is a story of environmental change culminating in its—in historical terms—relatively recent imprisonment underground in culverts, tunnels, and drains to make room for the A40 road. Walking along the A40, he realises '[t]he road is a river. The real river is lost' (16). The other story, '[his] story,' (2) is predominantly autobiographical and psychological and deals with his relationship with rivers in general, and the Wye in particular—a relationship intertwining inner and outer, mind and environment in what he describes as his 'fascinated longing for this imprisoned stream' (3).

Before I analyse and discuss the two stories, I want to comment briefly on Rangeley-Wilson's 'Prologue' which opens *Silt Road* by knitting together the two stories—that of the water and that of the author—in a manner that suggests a reading in terms of solastalgia and environmental PTSD. The 'Prologue' recounts an ambiguous dream between nightmare and wish fulfilment. In his dream he is trying to rescue dying 'fish from a pond in a city' (2014: 1). The dream draws heavily on the trope of apocalypse (Garrard 2012: 93–116). The pond is undergoing negative environmental changes culminating in disaster. The heat is unbearable. The sun is burning relentlessly, the concrete so hot that his 'feet are burning' (Rangeley-Wilson 2014: 1), the water in the pond is evaporating quickly, and fish are 'flapping helplessly in their death throes' in the black mud. All but one choke to death in spite of the narrator's attempts to help by fetching a bucket of water—a remedy that is absurdly out of proportion with the impending aquatic disaster. However, he does succeed in rescuing a 'vast and beautiful trout' in a spectacular, gravity-defying feat of escape. Failing to find a river for it in the city, he takes the suffocating trout—now bleeding profusely from its gills—to the roof of a tall building. Together they jump off the rooftop and fly into the suburbs, to a place outside the apocalypse, until they fall into a small stream. 'For a brief moment we were half swimming, half flying side by side, skimming through the water. And then the trout was gone' (2).

In spelling out the inevitable destruction of the pond and the narrator's strong, but futile desire to rescue the vast majority of its marine life, the dream enacts the lived experience of negative environmental change. In its combination of witnessing the extreme heat and piscine extinction, the dream also evokes the kind of ecological PTSD mentioned by Morton. In a way, the dream is like the trauma dreams mentioned by Morton. The

premise of the dream is that it is possible to intervene on a small scale and prevent disaster by rescuing the ‘vast and beautiful trout’ from certain death.

While the ‘Prologue’ clearly warrants a reading of *Silt Road* in terms of solastalgia and ecological PTSD, the two stories tend to both exemplify and problematize Albrecht’s and Morton’s ideas. Turning to the first story—the ‘water’s story’—Rangeley-Wilson documents the important role the small river has played in the history of the Wye valley since time immemorial. Notably, it has been the key source of food, water, and power for agrarian and industrial purposes. For instance, chapters nine and ten tell the rich history of the many—and many different kinds of—mills that occupied the banks of the Wye for centuries (2014: 171–208). However, the Wye has played a role far beyond that of a natural resource. As an equally important role, he demonstrates its use as a sewer for High Wycombe (77–96).

For Rangeley-Wilson this almost millennium old history is clearly one of environmental change, but not necessarily negative environmental change producing solastalgia and ecological PTSD. He subscribes to a broad definition of rivers—a definition that regards them as intimately involved with a host of actions and happenings:

A river is the breath of a valley. It is the distillation of everything that is washed by rain within the bounds of a line that rides the hilltops—of meadows and marsh, thickets and woods, springs, ditches, drains, of verges crushed by tyres, tarmac laid in a railway yard, antifreeze on a road, shit out of a pig farm, bleach from a sink: a river inhales it all, for good or bad and exhales the breath of a valley. A river is a living thing and it is inviolable. (2014: 12)

On the one hand, this ‘the breath of a valley’ definition of rivers seems to be merely metaphorical. Recognisably, it draws on the idea of the river basin as a basic large-scale ecological unit favoured by many ecologists today (e.g., European Environmental Agency 2021; Middleton 2012: 4). This definition embeds rivers within the breadth—I think the pun is intended by Rangeley-Wilson—of a valley bounded by mountains or hilltops. What is particularly striking about this part of Rangeley-Wilson’s definition is that it readily accepts rivers as parts of working landscapes inevitably tainted by all manners of natural and human activity. He emphasises that rivers are never pristine or untouched by civilisation and culture. On the contrary, they are—and have often been—the exact opposite—the sewer-like recipients of human and animal waste. On the

other hand, the final part of his definition suggests that he, in fact, is speaking literally—not poetically or metaphorically—when he identifies rivers as breathing. According to Rangeley-Wilson, rivers cannot and ought not be reduced to the functions we assign to them. A river is not merely a thing that we can instrumentalise. It is an organism; it really is ‘a living thing’. Therefore, like other living things, it is also inviolable. It is, like life, sacred.

However, his history of the Wye shows that it has been violated. According to Rangeley-Wilson the violation and desecration of rivers involves culverting them, i.e., covering and hiding them under, for instance, roads, pavements, industrial estates, car parks, and shopping malls. When a river is ‘forced into that underground channel [the culvert], to run through concrete pipes in the pitch black, unheard, unseen it has become the ghost of a river. A memory’ (2014: 12). Culverting, then, creates the equivalent of a lived experience of negative environmental change or solastalgia. By removing rivers from our lived experience, in terms of work or leisure, they are no longer sites of solace.

Into his story of the Wye, Rangeley-Wilson inserts a series of black and white photographic images documenting the places and moments of negative environmental change where the Wye has been culverted (2014: 4–5, 6, 11, 62, 192, 206–207, 246). They are sites of solastalgia. They are the visual documentation of the violation of river. They are physical sites of its imprisonment.⁹

The book looks into the reasons for the culverting of the Wye in the mid-1960s. He identifies the original decision to cover the river in the minutes of a town council meeting in January 1959 (2014: 261–262). He discovers that ‘the river was buried to widen a road’. Rangeley-Wilson also documents the recent decision by the High Wycombe town council *not* to uncover and deculvert it as part of the project of revitalising the town centre in the Noughties (253–261). He shows that there actually was a time when a project called *Phoenix* proposed to reopen the river. However, for reasons that he fails to uncover, the town council opted instead for a project called *Eden* that involved the building of a shopping mall and car park on top of the culverted river.

⁹ That Rangeley-Wilson is a prolific photographer is obvious from, for instance, his websites (2021). In this essay, I won’t attempt an analysis and discussion of the form and function of his photographic images in *Silt Road*.

In this manner, Rangeley-Wilson leads us to understand that this negative environmental change is here to stay. The Wye will most likely remain underground, an imprisoned stream for which you can only feel a futile ‘fascinated longing’. However, the story of the covering of the Wye is far from univocal and straightforward. It is accompanied by another narrative—a narrative in which a sacred principle—‘a living thing’—is discovered. To a certain extent this contradicts or problematizes the very secular story of negative environmental change he is outlining. In his walks next to the small stream, propelled by his fascinated longing for the Wye, but only finding proof of its absence in the sites of solastalgia, he experiences several sightings of trout that are uncannily like the one he rescued in his dream. In West Wycombe, he spots ‘a vast and beautiful trout’ (2014: 17) as he is looking over the parapet on a bridge across the river. Much later and further downstream he notices ‘a vast trout’ (114) and wonders if it is the one he saw earlier. Finding it difficult to explain its presence and feeling that he is being ‘haunted by visions’ of ‘a sacred trout’ (114), he comments suddenly, ‘I realised that I had been here before, that I had dreamt this place at the very beginning when we had flown side by side [...] into a river in a wooded park’. In the chapter entitled ‘The Spirit of the Place’, he recounts how, at a later point in time, he comes across ‘[a] dark and ancient trout. [...] A fish back from the dead’ (212)—a sign that the imprisoned Wye still lives and its *genius loci* persists.

Not only does he succeed in locating the *genius loci* that suggests that the river according to his definition is ‘a living thing’, after all—even if it is only in the form of a single harassed trout in the shallow stream running between culverts, or even if it is only in his mind. Much more uncannily, during his research into the covering of the Wye he makes a mesh-like discovery that his trout-rescuing dream is actually a kind of weird repetition of historical events. His attempt at rescuing the last trout of the dying river is echoed by the story of Australian and Tasmanian settlers and their attempts at bringing trout to the Antipodes during the middle of the nineteenth century in order to populate the new land with familiar fish—some of which, his research shows—came from the ova of ‘a magnificent 10-pound trout’ (2014: 224) from the Buckinghamshire Wye (217–239). Present solastalgia finds its inverted image in past nostalgia. There is a sense of relief in the fact that the ‘vast and beautiful trout’ of the Wye—trout which the lost river is ultimately unable to sustain—are alive and well elsewhere (234). But this side of the story is far from sunny. They

have been deposited there by the agents of colonial history, displacing native species of fish in a manner not unlike the displacement by force of the Aboriginals—a lived experience that on their behalf is not unlike solastalgia—by the settlers and convicts that colonised the Antipodes (234–237). In this manner the Wye, its spirit, and its vast and beautiful trout, live on elsewhere, but only in the wake of the violence inflicted by British colonialists and colonialism.

The other story, Rangeley-Wilson's inner story of fascinated longing for the Wye, he takes up in the chapter entitled 'Beginnings' (2014: 7–17). He opens by recounting how 'when for one reason or another' he 'lost [his] way,' he began spending 'days by a river, walking the streets it flowed beside and was lost beneath' (7). Thus, he spells out a conspicuous element of identification between him and the Wye. The strong affinity between the river and himself is conceptualised in terms of possession, '[t]he river came to possess me', he claims. This is in alignment with his general relation to rivers. For as long as he is able to recall, he has always been 'captivated' by spring-fed rivers like the Wye. He dates the beginning of his 'obsession' to seeing a picture in a book at age eleven. He still has a vivid recollection of 'the clear stream brimful under banks of yellow flag iris, its gravel bed bright between tresses of water-crowfoot, a thatched miller's cottage in the distance, willows shimmering in a breeze under billowing white clouds' (7). That image has been his guiding star and he recognises that much of his life 'has been a hunting after that perfection, or an attempt to rebuild it' (8), knowing well that the real book picture is a prosaic one and a far cry from his idealized recollection of chalk stream perfection.

So, his own story of being fascinated, possessed, and captivated by rivers becomes a story of being haunted by an ideal, a mere figment of the imagination. Solastalgia turns out to be a construction. The original place undergoing negative environmental change is a fabrication in the first place.

Earlier I suggested that the opening dream of the 'Prologue' recalls Morton's idea of trauma dreams where the dreamer tries to install herself at an earlier point in time in order to prevent the trauma. In a manner of speaking, the image of chalk stream perfection functions similarly by installing the recalling subject in an earlier moment in time before negative environmental change set in. His own story becomes an impossible quest for a trauma dream-like and wholly imaginary perfection that,

paradoxically, is worthwhile pursuing. Contrary to Morton, Rangeley-Wilson seems to insist on the value and usefulness of that kind of perfection even in the face of massive negative environmental change undergone by the Wye.

I suggest that Rangeley-Wilson sees his two stories as representatives of much larger, even universal or, at least, Western, ones. This expansion of significance is implied by the book's two epigraphs. The first stanza of W. B. Yeats' poem 'The Song of Wandering Aengus' is juxtaposed to a quote from W. G. Sebald's *The Emigrants* (1992). In the poem's first stanza, Aengus (a god in Irish folklore) recalls how he caught 'a small silver trout'. The poem then goes on to tell how it turned into 'a glimmering girl' (1996: ll. 9–16) only to disappear and become his eternal quest (ll. 17–25). In referencing the Yeats poem, Rangeley-Wilson anticipates his own autobiography, i.e., '[his] story'. He inserts himself and his quest in a mythological context. The Sebald quote outlines a 'conjecture' made by one of the characters linking 'the bourgeois concept of Utopia and order ... with the progressive destruction of natural life' (Rangeley Wilson 2014, viii). The epigraph from Sebald, then anticipates and sums up 'the water's story'—the story of negative environmental change culminating in its culverting in the pursuit of urban renewal and road space by politicians and town planners. So, while the two epigraphs anticipate the two stories, they also help to broaden and generalise their relevance and meaning. His story involving the paradoxical quest for an original that never existed is not pathological, then. Similarly, the Sebald quote inscribes the river's story of imprisonment within a universal (Western) human history of negative environmental change.

After the epigraphs, the paratext juxtaposes two unidentified maps of High Wycombe and the Wye valley (2014: ix-x). They look like sections from Ordnance Survey Maps. The one on the left is clearly older than the one on the right. Together they document the environmental change that has taken place. Relatively few examples of human infrastructure are present on the old map. It is relatively easy to trace the course of the Wye through the valley. On the more recent map, however, the signs of human habitation clearly dominate the valley while the river has all but gone. In this way, the two maps repeat Paul's 'conjecture' from the Sebald epigraph and visually document the loss of the Wye and prepare us for 'the water's story'. However, while the two maps do single out and home in on the Wye and the Wye Valley, they also invite a much more general reading.

Certainly, as sections of Ordnance Survey maps we can look at them in terms of synecdoche—they are parts of much larger entities, and they signify those large-scale objects, too. In this way, the Wye and its valley come to stand for *all* British rivers and valleys.

Conclusion

In pursuing a reading that involves perspectives from eco-criticism and medical humanities trying to foreground the issue of interconnectedness of inner and outer, the concepts of solastalgia and environmental PTSD are useful—but far from straightforward. On the one hand, a contemporary text of natural and cultural history such as Charles Rangeley-Wilson's *Silt Road: The Story of a Lost River* is deeply concerned with documenting a state of affairs *out there* that we can conceptualise in terms of solastalgia, desolation, and the lived experience of negative environmental change *in here*. Visually and verbally, the culverted Wye is unmistakably represented as a place devoid of solace. Similarly, *Silt Road* dramatizes mental states that can be described with reference to Morton's idea of ecological PTSD. The dream of the 'Prologue', for instance, echoes the dreams of PTSD-suffers. Also, the image of chalk stream perfection cherished by Rangeley-Wilson is strikingly like the illusory attempt by an ecological PTSD victim to cling on to a point in time of pristine riparian perfection before disaster set in for good. On the other hand, Rangeley-Wilson also undermines or problematizes a reading along those lines. He seems to insist that solace is there. If you look hard enough, you—in your fascinated longing—do come across the spirit of the place, the river as a living thing, even if it is elsewhere and in places that are tainted by the violent colonial history of human and ecological displacements. Also, his actions and thoughts are represented as more than, or other than, the symptoms of ecological PTSD in the face of global warming and mass extinction. The personal pursuit of impossible quests for riverine perfection is inscribed by Rangeley-Wilson within a broad, mythological context. Solastalgia and ecological PTSD may serve as starting points in a discussion of the relationship between *Out There* and *In Here*, making them particularly useful in the green turn of the medical humanities.

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