

Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*: Making Female Pleasure Visible

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In the light of the new readings that Nan Shepherd's texts are being subjected to as part of her academic and popular revival, I offer an analysis of her non-fictional volume *The Living Mountain* (1977) from an ecofeminist standpoint. Given the situation where, until now, the Scottish writer's masterpiece has been almost exclusively linked to travel literature, construction of regional identity and environmental issues, the conjunction of ecology and gender that my research proposes creates an opening for the less explored world of female physical sensation and pleasure. The aim of this article is to upset the exclusive Nature/Woman connection as opposed to Man/Reason, because, as I will show, it proves to be restrictive, arbitrary and unfair. To this end, I will respond to some of the issues Eva Antón raises in her article "Claves ecofeministas para el análisis literario" (2017), where it is suggested that all literary texts should declare their ethical stance with respect to ecology and gender. All the above suggests that, contrary to the classical attitude of possession and conquest of the land, love combined with pleasure is the recipe Shepherd recommends for successfully accomplishing her archetypal journey across the Cairngorms.

Keywords: Nan Shepherd; *The Living Mountain*; ecofeminism; nature/woman; female pleasure; archetypal journey

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The Living Mountain de Nan Shepherd: visibilizando el placer femenino

A la luz de las nuevas lecturas de la obra de Nan Shepherd, producto de la nueva ola de interés académico y popular que su figura ha suscitado, ofrezco un análisis de su obra de no ficción *The Living Mountain* (1977) desde los postulados ecofeministas. Dado que hasta la fecha los estudios de dicha obra la han ligado casi exclusivamente a la literatura de viajes, construcción

de la identidad regional y temas medioambientales, la conjunción de ecología y género que mi investigación propone abre la puerta al mundo menos frecuentado de las sensaciones físicas y el placer femenino. Este artículo aspira en último término a alterar la relación exclusiva que tradicionalmente se ha establecido entre Naturaleza y Mujer porque resulta restrictiva, arbitraria y, por ende, injusta. Para ello, respondo a algunas de las cuestiones planteadas por Eva Antón en su artículo “Claves ecofeministas para el análisis literario” (2017). Dicho artículo tiene por objeto precisar el compromiso ético que todo texto literario manifiesta acerca de la ecología y el género. De todo ello se infiere que, contrariamente a la actitud tradicional de posesión y conquista, el amor y el placer femenino conforman la receta que Shepherd recomienda para concluir con éxito el viaje arquetípico por las Cairngorms.

Palabras clave: Nan Shepherd; *The Living Mountain*; ecofeminismo; naturaleza/mujer; placer femenino; viaje arquetípico

I. INTRODUCTION

What are men to rocks and mountains?
Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 1813

Leveraging Nan Shepherd's popular and academic revival and new readings of her texts—she eventually became so popular that in 2016 her image was selected to feature on the Royal Bank of Scotland £5 note—, my research proposes gender as a lens through which to read *The Living Mountain* (1977). This opens the door to the notion of female pleasure and moves the debate away from exclusively environmental concerns and towards the nature/woman divide, more in tune with ecofeminist theories and their interest in denouncing violence against women and nature and in foregrounding examples of female empowerment. The precise aim of this paper is to upset the exclusive nature/woman connection because it is restrictive, arbitrary and unfair in that it has contributed substantially to marginalising the female gender and has ostracized a significant number of their texts. To this end, I present a female account that provides an alternative position to the hegemonic discourse: the slim but intense meditative volume by Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain* (1977). After that, I respond to the issues Eva Antón raises in her article “Claves ecofeministas para el análisis literario” (2017), where she suggests the necessity that all literary texts declare its ethical stance with respect to ecology and gender: 1) the relationship between nature and the human being; 2) the representation of the non-human world; 3) the portrayal of the human body; and 4) the types of gender roles portrayed. My analysis reveals that contrary to what might be expected from a text about a mountain, which is mostly abundant testosterone and virgin territories eager to be possessed, Shepherd's testimony of achieving female pleasure through nature leads her to a certain degree of sexual empowerment, challenging the classical identification of the female body with nature, and the categorization of women by their reproductive role.

2. REGARDING *THE LIVING MOUNTAIN*: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Gillian Carter (2001) employs the term ‘domestic geography’ to describe Shepherd's approach to the Cairngorms, that is, as a particular way of engaging with a landscape distinct from that of a traveller or scientist who passes through a region. Unlike the tourist, Carter suggests in “‘Domestic Geography’ and the Politics of Scottish Landscape in Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*” (2001) that the native dweller is involved in the repeated action of wandering around a single landscape as an important part of their engagement with the everyday space (27-28). Following Carter's line of reasoning, Samantha Walton (2020) points out that, from a dweller's or native perspective, the depth of the nature/culture divide is weakened precisely because of the particular relationship dwellers have with the land (56). This is no small matter as it lies at the core of so many examples of violence against women and abuse of natural resources.

In his introduction to Shepherd's masterpiece, the author best known for his books on landscape and nature Robert Macfarlane (2011b) refers to Shepherd as 'localist' and 'parochial' (54), in the sense that her recurrent choice of the same place "serves to intensify rather than limit her vision" (54), since her major concern while walking is going 'deeper', not 'higher'. As the epitome of the native dweller who pursues the hidden recesses, Shepherd is depicted as a pioneer of nature writing and an ardent champion of the environment. In "'To Get Leave to Live': Negotiating Regional Identity in the Literature of North-East Scotland" (2007), Alison Lumsden delves deeper into the 'domestic' issue through the exploration of Shepherd's regional identity, vernacular tradition and landscape. While Shepherd's works show a recurrent interest in the role played by the regional within the national, Lumsden (2007) claims that Shepherd's regional approach does not run parallel to poet Hugh MacDiarmid's objection about a certain 'mental parochialism' commonplace in north-east writing (101). Instead, Lumsden (2007) argues that Shepherd's intricate link to a locale might function as a way to reimagine it based on the dynamic between the regional and the national, seeking to move beyond the boundaries her local experiences describe.

Walton offers in her recently published volume on the Scottish writer, *The Living World: Nan Shepherd and Environmental Thought* (2020), a holistic reading of Shepherd's works from an ecocritical standpoint. While Shepherd has traditionally been classified as 'a writer of place' who is strongly concerned about environmental issues, she has more recently been inducted into the 'new nature writing' genre, "coined in 2008, in a Granta journal special edition" (Walton 2020, 22). Walton also indicates that the current debate about ecological literature is poised between encouraging more environmentally conscious behaviour through literary descriptions of beautiful landscapes and a more critical, radical and engaging attitude in this moment of environmental catastrophe. Considering Shepherd's non-fiction has gained importance within the current environmental degradation and climate change scenario, for Walton (2020), Shepherd's texts fit the latter position mentioned above in the sense that it helps us to rethink humanity's relationship with nature in the age of Anthropocene and to raise awareness about the role each individual plays in this crisis.¹

Written during the Second World War, though left in a drawer for thirty years (Macfarlane 2011a, 2011b; Bell 2014; Peacock 2017), *The Living Mountain* is a 'tiny' volume of barely 100 pages that constitutes a tribute to the Cairngorm mountains (eastern Highlands of Scotland). Following North American Aldo Leopold's (1949) environmental line of thought, rather than thinking *about* a mountain Shepherd tries to think *like* a mountain, in the sense that it is not just any kind of mountain she writes about, but a living one. The reader will subsequently notice how intricately bound the first-person narrator feels to the mountain she is describing (Sassi 2008),

¹ See David Farrier (2019) for an insight into the extent to which literature helps us to understand the new age, primarily triggered by the impact of human activity on nature.

since Shepherd's discourse is not "a pallid simulacrum of their [the mountains'] reality" (392), but "a reality of the mind" (390). As Martha, the heroine of *The Quarry Wood* puts it, "man does not learn from books alone" (Shepherd 2009, 1) because living the mountain means to Shepherd what living the earth does to naturalist Henry D. Thoreau, who explains it is "like the leaves of a tree, which precede flowers and fruit—not a fossil earth, but a living earth" (1854, 3809-11).

3. MOUNTAINOUS LANDSCAPE: UNSETTLING NATURE/WOMAN IDENTIFICATION

To aim for the highest point is not the only way to climb a mountain
(*The Living Mountain*, 1977)

Silent Spring (1962) by biologist Rachel Carson constitutes for a significant number of feminists a pioneering call for attention to be paid to the impact of technology on nature. The Cassandra of the ecological crisis evokes with this meaningful title the notion that the agrochemical industry might ultimately put an end to the trill of the birds and to the buzz of the insects heralding spring. By way of a brief introduction, the term *ecofeminism* was first coined in the seventies when Françoise d'Eaubonne used it in *Le féminisme ou la mort*—Feminism or Death—(1974) to underscore certain French feminist groups' concerns about overpopulation, the destruction of nature, and male domination:

Tout le monde, pratiquement, sait qu'aujourd'hui les deux menaces de mort les plus immédiates sont la surpopulation et la destruction des ressources; un peu moins connaissent l'entière responsabilité du Système mâle, en tant que mâle [...] dans ces deux périls; mais très peu encore ont découvert que chacune des deux menaces est l'aboutissement logique d'une des deux découvertes parallèles qui ont donné le pouvoir aux hommes voici cinquante siècles: leur possibilité d'ensemencer la terre comme les femmes, et leur participation dans l'acte de la reproduction. (D'Eaubonne 2017, 2717) [Practically everyone knows that the two most immediate threats of death today are overpopulation and the destruction of natural resources; fewer are aware of the entire responsibility of the male system—the system as male [...]—in creating these two perilous situations; but very few have yet discovered that each one of the two menaces is the logical outcome of one of the two parallel discoveries that gave power to men fifty centuries ago: reproduction, and their capability of sowing the earth as they do women; my translation].

Designated as 'plagues' in the introduction to her work, D'Eaubonne offers no other solution to overpopulation and destruction than feminism or death. However, because of her aim of uniting two terms—nature and feminism—which, according to what critics believed at the time, bear no relationship one to the other, D'Eaubonne's thesis was considered ridiculous (Puleo 2011; Antón 2017). Since then, while there seems to

have been as many ecofeminisms as there are feminisms composing them, Margarita Carretero (2010) endorses the idea that different schools of ecofeminist thought do share some commonalities, which has enabled them to restore the prestige the ecofeminist movement and its demands deserve. Fully aware of the loss of credibility and devaluation of nature, partially due to its traditional identification with women on biological grounds, Carretero chooses to use the definition of the term ecofeminism that Karen J. Warren presented in the introduction of *Ecological Feminism* (1994), which in turn was based on the ecofeminist writer Greta Gaard's (1993) assumption that the ideology which allows over-exploitation in nature displays the same pattern as the one permitting and perpetuating women's subordinate position and abuse:

'Ecological feminism' is an umbrella term which captures a variety of multicultural perspectives on the nature of the connections within social systems of domination between those humans in subdominant or subordinate positions, particularly women, and the domination of non-human nature. [...] Ecofeminist analyses of the twin domination of women and nature include consideration of the domination of people of color, children, and the underclass. (qtd. in Carretero 2010, 179)

In the same line of thought, Vandana Shiva (1998) advocates for the revaluation of the seminal role traditionally played by women in the field of conservation, where they pursue a more human and respectful relationship with nature as the recipe needed to solve the worldwide environmental and health crisis. Additionally, in the prologue of the Spanish edition to the work published in 1993 by the pioneers in ecofeminism María Mies and Vandana Shiva, they (2016) state that the current scenario, far from improving, is worsening, since violence against women is growing due to the marriage of convenience between patriarchy and the capitalist production system (19). In sharp contrast to the extensive use of genetic modification techniques, or geoengineering, Mies and Shiva (2016) propose the democratic Anthropocene, where conservation and healing prevail over conquest and hurt (28).

With the intention of casting light on the origins of female marginalization, among other polarities—body/mind, male/female, culture/nature—women have been assigned the embodiment of nature because their physical constitution is controlled by metabolic processes that require no conscious activity. Meanwhile, men are associated with reason and culture, the value of which clearly exceeds that of nature, and that is why men's institutionalized supremacy gives way to the persistence of inequalities (Puleo 2011; Antón 2015). According to this particular reading, the female figure constitutes a mere passive element of the landscape, conceived of as an instrument for male pleasure and desire (Rose 1996). In that sense, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu states in his well-known work *La Domination Masculine* (2002) that women might be accomplices to their own subordinate position due to what he calls *violence symbolique* (53-64). Unaware of their own submission, women unknowingly manoeuvre in favour

of their oppressors. Additionally, assisted by the Family, the Church, the educational system and the State, male power structures become timeless. To reverse the situation, Bourdieu (2002) suggests rejecting those structures constructed from an androcentric perspective in order, ultimately, to abandon the *habitus* that enables the perpetuation of male tyranny. It seems that it takes more than goodness to transform the structures that produce and reproduce male domination.

4. SHEPHERD'S JOURNEY: A TRAFFIC OF LOVE WITH THE MOUNTAIN

These tracks give to winter hill walking a distinctive pleasure.
(*The Living Mountain*, 1977)

While the notion that one's life is similar to a journey is not new, Shepherd's personal journey of discovery and exploration in the Cairngorms suggests a different approach to life. Bored of sermons and scientific books, the author is determined to indulge herself in the 'I' leading role and take action: to train her own body's senses and her mind to feel the mountain. During war time while struggling for survival, Shepherd took a particular interest in the Orientalist Lafcadio Hearn's (1850-1904) works on Eastern philosophy, as well as Irish author George William Russell's (1867-1935) theosophy. Encouraged by theosophic readings—to live and experience religion in nature—Shepherd can be seen as a pilgrim searching for the path to the sources of knowledge. In this context, since ancient times the notion of a road to be walked has been used as a simile for a person's life. Consequently, when Shepherd moves through the mountains, she alludes to a different journey, that of her own existence in search of the sources of Knowledge; that is, the supreme knowledge hinted at by the image of the spring at the source of a stream:

One must go back, and back again, to look at it, for in the interval memory refuses to recreate its brightness. This is one of the reasons why the high plateau where these streams begin, the streams themselves, their cataracts and rocky beds, the corries, the whole wild enchantment, like a work of art is perpetually new when one returns to it. The mind cannot carry away all that it has to give, nor does it always believe possible what it has carried away.² (Shepherd 2011, 413)

Given the streams above as the metaphor for sources of knowledge, everything suggests that Shepherd is alluding to the river of life, where life runs parallel to water, and is constantly moving. Much like Dorothy Wordsworth's walks and "perpetual motion" pursued an image of holistic unity that prevents the picturesque model and its representation being

² All citations referring to Shepherd's work have been extracted from the Canongate 2011 Kindle edition.

told apart (Kappes 2020), Shepherd's fluctuating body also seeks to blur the boundaries between herself and the elements of nature surrounding her. By way of comparison, Thoreau notes that in the same way that a willow's roots seek water and grow towards it, humans too want to dwell near "the perennial source of our life" (1674-77). *En route* to these sources, Shepherd celebrates Scottish biodiversity, as well as its uniqueness:

It [the mountain] has its own air; and it is to the quality of its air that is due the endless diversity of its colourings. Brown for the most part in themselves, as soon as we see them clothed in air the hills become blue. [...] These sultry blues have more emotional effect than a dry air can produce. One is not moved by china blue. But the violet range of colours can trouble the mind like music. (Shepherd 2011, 822)

The previous excerpt emphasizes the notion reverberating throughout the text, that the mountain is a living entity endowed with the ability to sense and respond. Likewise, convinced that no book can contain nature, Shepherd is more interested in describing each of the encounters she has with each element of nature:

I was startled by a musical call that resounded across the hill, and was answered by a like call from another direction. Yodelling, I thought [...] I realised that there was no other human being on the mountain and that the stags were the yodellers. The clear bell notes were new to me. I had heard stags roar often enough, in deep raucous tones. Bellowing. [...] For me belling will always mean the music of that golden day [...] the note changes to express different needs [...] stags are like human beings and some have tenor voices, some bass. (Shepherd 2011, 1778)

The scene relating to stags producing their unique bellowing turns out to be highly illustrative of the degree of originality performed by nature, which intrigues as well as haunts Shepherd. Later, the Scottish writer gives an account of a significant number of techniques nature uses in its struggle for survival. When it comes to deer, Shepherd notes that with the arrival of the snow, they camouflage themselves to avoid being caught shedding their skin: "greyish, the colour of dead snow, bleached heather and juniper and rocks" (1118). As for the ptarmigans, she describes their "broken wing trick," which is used to make the enemy approach the parent birds while their babies run away:

But at last I yielded to the mounting temptation to touch and fondle one of these morsels [some ptarmigans]. So I stooped to the one nearest my boot. And instantly the whole seven, cackling, were off. A noisy undignified scramble, contrasting strangely with their carved immobility. (Shepherd 2011, 1126)

Shepherd acknowledges in the preceding passage that after having played the 'broken wing trick' game on her many times, she only watches the behavior of the youngsters.

As for the strategy of pretending to be dead to deceive the enemy, while Shepherd seems familiar with the game performed by birds, she tells us how she learned that it can be also played by fawns:

The little creature gave no sign of life. The neck was stretched, stiff and ungainly, the head almost hidden; the eyes stared, undeviating. [...] There was no voluntary movement whatsoever, no smallest twitch or flicker. I had never before seen a fawn shamming dead, as young birds do. (Shepherd 2011, 1206)

The author also makes use of personification to describe some creatures' behavior, as though nature was trying to imitate humans. Scavengers are characterized as "hoodies" (1133), while wheatears "bob and chuckle on the boulders, or flash their cheeky rumps" (1135). The red-brown squirrel, meanwhile, appears "whacking his tail against the tree-trunk and chattering through closed lips" (1216). There is no doubt that the text is a catalogue of non-human nature: leverets, fox cubs, water-beetles, blue tits, curlews, tufts, crested tits, kestrels, blackcocks, and woodcocks; "life in so many guises" (1222). Given the tender descriptions of non-human nature exuding as much sensitivity as accuracy, the passage above sets an example of its magnificence. In response to the questions posed by Antón (2017) about the kind of relationship the author suggests with the "more-than-human world" (Abram 1997), Shepherd presents a lead female character in perfect communion with her surroundings, and whose life is intricately linked to the development of the ecosystem she is part of. Shepherd's description is far from the notion, as traditional as it is romantic, of a tame landscape, of mere scenery. It seems remarkably clear that all the species she encounters are treated as living and sentient beings. Furthermore, it is also evident that they share the human ability to care as well as the need to be cared for.

Still on the subject of Shepherd's meditation journey, and in line with the concept of open knowledge that permeates her writing, Shepherd warns the reader against delusions and misjudgements "so quick bright things come to confusion" (822):

I could have sworn I saw a shape, distinct and blue, very clear and small, further off than any hill the chart recorded. The chart was against me, my companions were against me. I never saw it again. On a day like that, height goes to one's head. (Shepherd, 2011, 403)

It is also remarkable to the author how the light can change everything depending on where the sun shines, its power sometimes achieving a 'nightmare quality':

The naked birches, if I face the sun, look black, a shining black, fine carved ebony. But if the sun is behind me it penetrates a red cloud of twigs and picks out vividly the white trunks, as though the cloud of red were behind the trunks. (Shepherd 2011, 1494)

Shepherd also talks of the effect of the mist over the snow. She claims that the mist erases all the landmarks uncovered by the snow, with some gigantic and monstrous shapes arising. The eye is deceived by the power of the mist. It turns out that ghostliness prevails over reason, despite reason being believed to be omnipotent. On the contrary, she considers that “mist, oddly, can also correct the illusions of the eye” (1508). Sometimes, Shepherd claims, “the eye has other illusions that depend on one’s own position” (1511). She lies on her back; she sees the mountains as ‘horizontal’. She can also change the nature of the things she looks at through half-closed eyes. The combination of the variables—position of the light, position of the observer, and the way of observing—leads Shepherd to the above-mentioned relativity of knowledge through sight:

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; it is only one of an infinite number. (Shepherd 2011, 1521)

Likewise, although Scottish tradition is rich in fairy tales, witchery and glamourie Shepherd also rejects them because they interpose themselves between the world and the self. They diminish the experience the self enjoys with nature. They corrupt it, somehow:

My one October night without a roof was bland as silk, with a late moon rising in the small hours and the mountains fluid as loch water under a silken dawn: a night of the purest witchery, to make one credit all the tales of glamourie that Scotland tries so hard to refute and cannot. I don’t wonder. (Shepherd 2011, 1432)

Having been deceived so many times by her eyes, Shepherd seems to suggest a less conventional way to comprehend and know more, which is training her body and its senses to perceive all the mountain has to convey, giving way to the world of female physical sensation and, ultimately, to female sexuality. Convinced of the relativity of knowledge and seeking to avoid having a single focal point, Shepherd invites the reader to acquire new skills through the practice of yoga:

By so simple a matter, too, as altering the position of one’s head, a different kind of world may be made to appear. Lay the head down, or better still, face away from what you look at, and bend with straddled legs till you see your world upside down. How new it has become! (Shepherd 2011, 494-97)

In addition to this ancient Indian practice, the author urges the reader to fall asleep on the mountain: “[N]o one knows the mountain completely who has not slept on it” (1398). It is as though she wants to break down any barriers between human beings and their natural surroundings: “There is nothing between me and the earth and sky” (1400). Shepherd appears to be suggesting the way to prepare the human body and mind to absorb all the knowledge possible:

When I fall asleep out of doors, perhaps because outdoor sleep is deeper than normal, I awake with an empty mind. Consciousness of where I am comes back quite soon, but for one startled moment I have looked at a familiar place as though I had never seen it before. (Shepherd 2011, 1407)

The transcendental experience with nature Shepherd alludes to constitutes her interpretation of what being 'in' the mountain means to her; that is, to know it with the mind opened wide. She ultimately seeks an out-of-body experience so as to annihilate the self and be in communion with the mountain.

Concerning the process of training her senses, while Shepherd was writing her own hymn to the mountain, French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty presented his prominent work, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), where he refutes the false division of Cartesian origins between body and mind, a division that resulted in depriving the body of its thinking capacity. Contrary to traditional Western thought, Merleau-Ponty attributes the ability of thinking to the body:

Tout ce que je sais du monde, même par science, je le sais à partir d'une vue mienne ou d'une expérience du monde sans laquelle les symboles de la science ne voudraient rien dire. (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 8) [All I know about the world, even through science, I know thanks to my own sight or my own life experiences. Without them, the scientific elements would be meaningless; my translation].

In doing this, he infers that our knowledge is 'felt' through our body; that is, prior to the act of thinking and the mind's knowing: "le monde est toujours 'déjà là' avant la réflexion, comme une présence inaliénable" (7) [the very existence of the world precedes that of our thought, like a genuine presence; my translation]. Consequently, the human body and the outside world are considered to be intimately connected. Unlike the unchanging image of the world we receive from science, Merleau-Ponty proposes instead a subjective portrait that is defined by our body's senses: "Je vois la maison voisine sous un certain angle, on la verrait autrement de la rive droite de la Seine, autrement de l'intérieur, autrement encore d'un avion" (95) [I see the neighbouring house from a certain point of view, I would see it differently from the other bank of the Seine, differently from its inside, and utterly differently from an airplane; my translation]. Much like Merleau-Ponty, Shepherd too aspires to live through her bodily senses:

Here then may be lived a life of the senses so pure, so untouched by any mode of apprehension but their own, that the body may be said to think. Each sense heightened to its most exquisite awareness, is in itself total experience. (Shepherd 2011, 1565)

However, she claims that the new experience, the deepening search for knowledge, can only be attained by walking, to the point that Macfarlane (2011b) describes it as Shepherd's own version of Descartes's *cogito*, "I walk therefore I am" (201):

These moments come unpredictably, yet governed, it would seem, by a law whose working is dimly understood. They come to me most 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. In some such way I suppose the controlled breathing of the Yogi must operate. (Shepherd 2011, 1578)

This passage gives all the more reason to compare Shepherd's journey with that of the pilgrim, whose journey paves the way for God: "it is a journey into Being; for as I penetrate more deeply into the mountain's life, I penetrate also into my own" (1603). At the same time, Shepherd's narrative emphasizes, according to Carla Sassi (2008), the intimate liaison "between the autobiographical (and gendered) 'I', that walks across, observes and tells [the reader] the 'living mountain', and the environment itself" (73). A second feature makes this text genuinely radical: the introduction of "an alternative po/ethics of the place" (Sassi 2008, 43):

There is more in the lust for a mountain top than a perfect physiological adjustment. 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. I cannot tell what this movement is except by recounting it. (Shepherd 2011, 470)

The above quote vividly illustrates that in her lifelong search for knowledge, Shepherd creates a new way of relating to nature, to the mountain, which engenders a different narrative. As Sassi clearly explains, this beautiful hymn to the mountain explores the intense "traffic" between the human walker and the "more-than-human" (43) elements of nature. Considering Shepherd's quote: "so I have found what I set out to find. I set out on my journey in pure love" (1585), the Scottish writer's intense meditation about the mountain becomes a new element of nature resulting from the melding of the author with the mountain: "from that hour I belonged to the Cairngorms" (1593). Given the situation, where, according to Merleau-Ponty, we are embedded in the flesh of the landscape, anthropologist Tim Ingold's (1993) notion that "body and landscape are complementary terms" (156) assumes its full meaning, not least because "through living in it, the landscape becomes a part of us, just as we are a part of it" (153). Additionally, taking into consideration that our cognition is "an experience that grows" (Shepherd 2011, 1574), it might be suggested that Shepherd establishes a comparison between the constant expansion of human knowledge and the willingness with which the landscape accepts being transformed by the lives and works of dwellers: "the landscape is never complete: neither 'built' nor 'unbuilt', it is perpetually under construction" (Ingold 1993, 156). Likewise, looking at elements with love does indeed "widen the domain of being in the vastness of non-being" (1535). Just as authors breathe life into the fictional characters of their novels, Shepherd's regard has the ability to confer life on the elements of the landscape. Away from expressions implying

thirst for appropriation and possession, love is an emotion often mentioned throughout Shepherd's text: "I set out on my journey in pure love" (1585). Everything suggests that love in conjunction with pleasure comprises the recipe Shepherd recommends for successfully accomplishing her particular pilgrimage:

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 the 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. (Shepherd 2011, 1561)

As the previous excerpt shows, hearing and touch become the major tools in this process of knowing. Walking barefoot on heather, feeling the wind running inside one's clothes or fresh water running against one's limbs are examples of what Shepherd experiences in trying to disentangle body and mind. At the same time, Shepherd draws attention to the world of physical sensation and female sensuality:

Frost stiffens the muscles of the chin, mist is clammy on the cheek, after rain I run my hand through juniper or birches for the joy of the wet drops trickling over the palm, or walk through long heather to feel its wetness on my naked legs. The hands have an infinity of pleasure in them. (Shepherd 2011, 1541)

The recurring use of the word 'naked' and the constant references to pleasure and enjoyment in the preceding passage emphasizes the *prima idea* this present research work proposes; i.e., women are entitled to feel and express enjoyment as much as their male counterparts. Thus, the use of the senses, i.e., the 'bodily thinking' situation, becomes pivotal to achieving the true knowledge Shepherd pursues:

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. (Shepherd 2011, 1584)

The previous excerpt suggests an out-of-body experience, where the self abandons the body and becomes, in conjunction with birds and plants, a component of the mountain. It could be read as a 'physical' transformation of the protagonist when, according to Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), "[t]he ego is burnt out. Like a dead leaf in a breeze, the body continues to move about the earth, but the soul has dissolved already in the ocean of bliss" (327). Eventually, Shepherd's journeys turn out to be as seductive as they are brave: "mad to recover the tang of

height, I made always for the summits” (475). This is how Shepherd spent years, exploring the landscape on foot, slowly learning its intricacies and secrets. While she appeared to conform to the rules, Shepherd’s subtle rebellious attitude towards the code of conduct, conventions and the establishment depicts her actively fighting on the subject of feminism. The previous notions are confirmed by a number of students, whose testimonies insist on her activism when Shepherd was an English lecturer at Aberdeen’s Teacher Training Centre. Ruth Fletcher, for instance, described Shepherd’s lectures as “revealing a feminist approach ahead of her time” (Peacock 2017, 2126). Meanwhile, Grace Law, another of her students, acknowledged that Shepherd encouraged her, as well as other female students, to go hill walking, because a woman’s job was not “just sitting by the fire knitting” (Peacock 2017, 2130). At a time when female mountain clothing was easily available, Shepherd never wore trousers even when walking in the hills (Macfarlane 2011a). Moreover, as a remarkably illustrative example of one of Shepherd’s peculiarities, Peacock (2017) suggests that Nan had already freed herself of the bra as a precursor to “the bra-burning seventies”. Shepherd does not appear to feel either embarrassment nor the need to justify the way she dresses, implying that however traditional Aberdonian society was, the female dress code had relaxed compared to the previous restrictive scheme.

Taking into consideration Antón’s (2017) questions, when it comes to the distribution of gender roles, Shepherd encourages women to give up the notion of domesticity as their exclusive role and to lay claim to the public space. By promoting walking and mountain climbing among women, Shepherd is paving the way for the recognition of the world of female physical sensation and pleasure. Peacock quotes Shepherd’s student Cameron Donaldson, who considered her teacher to be “way ahead of her time in many respects” (337). To her mind, Shepherd sought to prove that women too were able to go to the hills on their own. In that sense, Sidonie Smith (1991) states that, as far as a woman author who decides to write autobiographically does not endanger her reputation too much, she is allowed to take on the role of the adventurous male. Likewise, the resulting ‘phallogocentric discourse’ will be justified.

Taking everything into consideration, I read Shepherd’s narrative about the ascent of the mountain in terms of an archetypal journey in search of true knowledge, that is, engaging with nature as a means to self-knowledge and personal exploration. At the end of that process, I have understood the human body merging with the mountain—“from that hour I belonged to the Cairngorms” (1593)—as a metaphor for the deepest knowledge Shepherd can achieve about the mountain and herself. Along with the recognition of the world of physical sensation and female sensuality, I suggested that Shepherd’s rapport with nature turns out to be very democratic, exuding love as much as desire. Under these circumstances, it might be claimed that Shepherd seeks a particularly distinct relationship with nature, in contrast to the classical rapport of subjugation of the land; that is, the tantalizing source of pleasure. Unlike the explorer who seeks to discover a remote, unspoilt and alluring mountain, penetrate and eventually conquer it, Shepherd

seeks an interaction with an equal—“merely to be with the mountain as one visits a friend with no intention but to be with him” (548)—as though nature and Shepherd are in *status quo*. In fact, this brings to mind the term “place-connectedness”, coined by Lawrence Buell (2001, 791-936), who drew up a list of five distinct ways in which individuals make a deep connection to a place. Shepherd’s experience can be assigned to the fourth category, “identity-shaping places” (880); that is, those spaces an individual feels particularly attached to, so much so that they experience a delightful turning as a result of their transcendental experience with that particular location.

Given the conjunction of ‘gender’ and ‘nature’, Shepherd’s narrative challenges the prevailing aesthetics of mountainous landscape and presents an innovative and courageous way of looking at and understanding the world, different from the one perpetuated and naturalized through the discourses of history, science and iconography. To put it bluntly, nature does not play the simple role of scenery, but rather it has a major role in our existence, one that should be respected and valued. Likewise, gender equality and female autonomy are actively claimed, not least because Shepherd indulges herself with the use of ‘I’ in her account. As for the landscape, instead of the traditional identification of nature with the female body and the categorization of women in their reproductive role, in Shepherd’s work nature is represented from a—white, heterosexual—woman’s perspective, her body is a gendered one and she establishes an erotic relation with nature. Taking advantage of remoteness, Shepherd employs landscape descriptions as metaphors for her resistance to traditional imagery about women and nature, which allows her to gently write about a taboo subject, i.e., female pleasure. At a time when eroticism and candour about physical pleasure was widely regarded with suspicion, classical female passivity and vulnerability conceived as providing the male spectator with visual enjoyment is replaced by female physical pleasure; i.e., female empowerment.

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