The Material Front:

An Examination of Nonhuman Agential Forces in First World War Fiction

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Abstract

"The Material Front: An Examination of Nonhuman Agential Forces in First World War Fiction" reads ostensibly human-focused wartime texts for nonhuman experience. More specifically, it considers two Modernist novels, Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929) and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), from a Material Ecocritical perspective. The duration, technological evolution, and extreme violence of World War I fractured long-established Western frameworks and had ecological consequences that were overlooked on the battlefields and, subsequently, have been ignored in contemporary scholarship. This thesis advocates for placing the focus on often underestimated nonhuman actors and experiences in fictional war retellings. The body chapters address Aldington's and Hemingway's respective approaches. Chapter 1, "The Hazards of Underestimating Nonhuman Power in Aldington's *Death of a Hero*," tracks the consequences of Capt. George Winterbourne's dismissal of topographical, botanical, and zoological elements of the nonhuman in his passage from a rural British childhood to his suicide on the Western Front. Chapter 2, "Capitalizing on the Power of the Nonhuman in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*," follows Lt. Frederic Henry's journey from the Alpine Front to neutral Switzerland and examines the topographical, meteorological, and zoological elements he utilizes to aid in his escape. Drawing together the findings of the previous two chapters, and juxtaposing *Death of a Hero* and *A Farewell to Arms* explicitly, Chapter 3, "For the Acknowledgement of Nonhuman Agency," concludes the thesis by reiterating the implications of ignoring the nonhuman. It also reasserts the potential benefits of entanglements between the human and nonhuman.

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Introduction

The First World War shaped contemporary understandings of human violence and, as such, significant literary publications of the time period offer a glimpse into the true brutality humans are capable of enacting against each other, and against the omnipresent nonhuman. Highlighting the wartime experiences of nonhuman entities in human-authored, human-protagonist-focused texts furthers awareness of the former's agential abilities and pushes back against anthropomorphism, and the tendency to portray and interpret depictions of "nature" as merely symbolic. Material Ecocriticism, a contemporary Ecocritical theory, recognizes the validity of nonhuman agency and ability and encourages us to consider the as yet understudied nonhuman elements of literary works. The nonhuman is "broadly understood as organic systems (from animals and plants to microorganisms) and inorganic systems, which include all forms of materiality, such as planetary ecosystems, geophysical processes, xenobiotic substances, technological objects, elements, and subatomic particles" (Oppermann, "New Materialism and the Nonhuman Story" 258). Accepting that literary fictions express wider cultural experiences, this thesis reads two First World War novels, Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to* Arms (1929) and Richard Aldington's *Death of a* Hero (1929), against the human-centric grain in order to illustrate the hazards of human actions that dismiss the nonhuman.

Considering nonhuman involvement in human operations of war allows for a salutary analysis of nonhuman agential ability. Accentuated temporal discrepancies across human and nonhuman planes make it easier to explore the sometimes-divergent agendas of both categories. The extremity of World War I's events make it a prime case study for exploring the consequences of human actions carried out without first considering nonhuman latent agency,

which operates on its own timescales. For instance, gruesome deaths like that of Lieutenant Evans in *Death of a Hero,* and the ambulance driver, Aymo, in *A Farewell to Arms*, are attributed to unavoidable, solely human-induced, fast-paced incidents when, in fact, they can be directly correlated with human ignorance of the nonhuman slower timelines. While this thesis is firmly focused on literary texts from the early twentieth century, the theoretical and ecological developments of the present moment lend further value to my nonhuman-centred approach. To Elizabeth Black, "what is most striking when approaching Modernist texts from an eco-critical perspective is how visible this concern for the natural world and human/nature relations is" (40). However, this concern for the "natural world" within such texts is conceived solely from a human perspective, thus diminishing the validity of some nonhuman forms – including its sometimes dirty, ugly, and rotting manifestations. Recent Ecocritical scholarship on late 20th and early 21st-century texts emphasizes the validity of nonhuman experiences in response to escalating environmental catastrophe. However, as Black implies above, the seeds of contemporary environmental crisis were already visible in earlier texts and catastrophes, like the First World War.

Much contemporary Ecocriticism is rooted in the recognition of the contemporary Anthropocene, the era in which we currently reside. The Anthropocene is defined by "human impacts [on the nonhuman, which] have unfolded at an unprecedented rate and scale" (Pavid). The First World War constituted an important shift toward industrialism and, in turn, the Great Acceleration, the "rapid intensification of those anthropogenic effects… since the industrial revolution" (Marland 86), which ultimately led to the Anthropocene.[1] Theories around the

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[1] The term "Anthropocene" and the associated "Great Acceleration" are also problematic in their humancentric conceptualization. The idea that humans have "fundamentally altered the physical, chemical and biological systems of the planet" presents this geological shift as a one-sided event without acknowledging contributing nonhuman processes (Pavid), or recognizing that some humans (ie those with

Anthropocene, Material Ecocriticism, Green Modernism, assemblage, cyborgs, and nonhuman agency–all of which I will discuss further below– are modern in their conceptualization and therefore typically consider the nonhuman of the late 20th and early 21st century. Donna Haraway, for example, specifically conceptualized the theory of cyborgs post-Second World War as this event revolutionized "scientific and cultural objects of knowledge;" however, she also acknowledges the "radical[ism]" of the First World War as an important cultural shift in its own right (32;41). Applying contemporary theories to an antecedent expression allows for a deeper analysis of the actors whose individual power and agency may have been overlooked in the early twentieth century.

The First World War inspired enormous cultural shifts throughout Europe and the world at large.[2] Nationalism and blind patriotism surged to an all-time high during the leadup to conflict and plummeted to new lows in the aftermath – progressions that are reflected in both *A Farewell to Arms* and *Death of a Hero*. European and North American nationalisms, expressed through means ranging from anthems to identities, have long been tied to the nonhuman topography and botany of distinct regions; Aldington exemplifies this approach when he depicts the "silverygrey" area of the English downs (70), for instance. However, an Ecocritical approach can invite us to explore aesthetic representations of "nature" – and particularly pastoralism – from a nonhuman focal point rather than the anthropocentric standard. In addition to promoting national identity structures and cultural patriotism, the First World War also inspired the desire to contest them; Modernism was born of this appetite for condemning the structures that allowed

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the wealth to consume more) have been more instrumental in bringing about the Anthropocene than others.

[2] See Modris Ekstein's *Rites of Spring* for a detailed summation of the First World War's effects on culture.

for such tragedy to unfold as well as an evolution of society.[3] Typified by nihilism,[4]

individualism, and cultural criticism (among other attributes),[5] Modernist novels like *A Farewell*

to Arms and *Death of a Hero* highlight the extensive trauma that resulted from intense

nationalism.

Situating Aldington and Hemingway in a First World War Environment

      The First World War broke out in 1914 and lasted until 1918. In its wake, it left millions

of casualties across the continent, as well as long lasting scars for the human survivors and the

nonhuman terrain on which battles were fought. World War 1 introduced the idea of Total War:

the complete agreement and engagement of a society in a conflict in "which nothing and no one

is exempt" (Saint-Amour 420). This revolutionary shift shook many – soldiers and civilians alike

– to their very core. The fighting broke out between Austria-Hungary and Serbia after the

assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria. By 1917, Austria-Hungary had been

joined by Germany, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire on the side of the Central Powers fighting

against the Allied Powers composed of the British Empire, Belgium, France, Russia, Italy,

Romania, Japan, and eventually the United States. In Europe, the conflict was mostly centred on

three locations: the Western Front between France, Belgium, and Germany; the Alpine or Italian

Front between Italy and Austria; and the Eastern Front which involved most of Eastern Europe

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[3] Rather than seeing Modernism as solely a reaction to trauma, Bradbury and McFarlane claim "it is the art consequent on the dis-establishing of communal reality and conventional notions of causality, on the destruction of traditional notions of wholeness of individual character, on the linguistic chaos that ensues when public notions of language have been discredited and when all realities have become subjective fictions. Modernism is then the art of modernization…" (27).

[4] While the term "nihilism" is frequently associated with Modernism (Childs 1-2), Bradbury and McFarlane also use phrasing such as "internal self-scepticism," "crisis of culture," "futility and anarchy," and "meaninglessness" to typify the dark nature of Modernist writing (26-27). These are the sentiments I wish to convey in my use of the term.

[5] See the Introduction to Peter Child's *Modernism* (2016) for a summary of Modernist writing styles and commonalities.

and (what are now) the Baltic States. Some 40 million people were killed in a conflict that resulted in huge cultural, social, and economic shifts across the globe.

As the first conflict of this calibre, World War I inspired many literary works depicting the violence and nihilism of the battlegrounds, and in civilian life, during the war.[6] Shortly after *Death of a Hero* and *A Farewell to Arm*s were published in 1929, both Aldington and Hemingway were deemed to be authors of two of the "most successful and memorable war novels" (Willis 467). *A Farewell to Arms* is touted as "one of the century's most read war novels" (Putnam 2006) and studied frequently from Modernist perspectives (Addis 2018; Kale 2016; Hutchisson 2016). *Death of a Hero*, on the other hand, has received far less attention, especially in recent scholarship, though some Ecocritics have approached the work as a post-pastoral novel (Bolchi). Nonetheless, *Death of a Hero* and *A Farewell to Arms*, while providing very different depictions of the War, were born of very similar authorial experiences. Both Hemingway and Aldington served on the front lines with the Allied Powers during the First World War and witnessed mass violence and loss of life while fighting the Central Powers. *A Farewell to Arms* is widely accepted as a fictionalized retelling of Hemingway's own experiences (Chunnasart 62; Hutchinson 93; Willis 470) as an ambulance driver for the Italian army and, though Captain George Winterbourne's story varies from Aldington's own experiences given George's suicide, the romantic relationships depicted in *Death of a Hero* do roughly resemble Aldington's personal struggles with his wife, Hilda Doolittle, during the war (Willis 470; 473). Both *A Farewell to Arms* and *Death of a Hero* were heavily censored after

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[6] J.H. Willis declares that the four "most successful and memorable war novels of 1929 [were Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero*,] Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and Frederick Manning's *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (better known by the title of the expurgated edition, *Her Privates We*)" (467-68).

their publication due to their negative discussions of nationalism, and critiques of Western powers.[7]

The best-known literary depictions of the Great War are found in poetry and indeed both Hemingway and Aldington published in the genre and were recognized as War Poets (Childs 100). Their disillusionment was certainly evident in poetry as well as these focal novels, as Hemingway's "Champs d'Honneur" and Aldington's "War Yawp" very clearly demonstrate. However, the novel form allowed the two writers to follow soldier protagonists' fictionalized journeys over a longer stretch of time – from the early 1900s to 1918 – and thus engage more deeply with wartime experiences and disillusionment. For my purposes, *A Farewell to Arms* and *Death of a Hero* also give Hemingway and Aldington more space in which to extend their descriptions of scenic setting and include elements of the nonhuman in order to situate human plotlines; it is within these background structures that integral nonhuman actors can be found. The authors' different nationalities, military ranks, and stations allow for a comparative approach to the nonhuman as it appears from an Anglophonic Allied perspective from two very distinct zones of combat and national allegiances.

A Farewell to Arms follows the story of Lieutenant Frederic Henry: his service in the Italian Army, his mortar injury and recovery, his romance with Catherine Barkley, and his eventual flight from the same Italians with whom he had allied himself. Because of the negative depiction of the Italian Army and presumed anti-militarist sentiments, Hemingway's work was not published in Italy until 1948 (Donaldson 91). Furthermore, the illicit relations between the unwed Frederic and Catherine generated negative press around the release of the novel (Donaldson 90). *A Farewell to Arms* ends with the death of Catherine, and of Henry and

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[7] See J.H. Willis' "The Censored Language of War: Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* and Three Other War Novels of 1929" for historical context of the censorship of both novels.

Catherine's baby, in Switzerland, leaving Henry completely alone. The nihilism of the work and its dark narrative helped to cement Hemingway as a core Modernist writer (Ismail 51). Nihilism, in its contextual definition is the commitment to "the denial that life can have any meaning" but is sometimes synonymous with "pessimism" (Metz). Like that of many other war novelists, including Aldington, Remarque, and Manning, Hemingway's nihilism was inspired by his own experiences which, combined with the threat of censorship, posed the question of "how to be faithful to the bitter, life-changing experience of modern warfare in a realistic depiction of both action and dialogue" (Willis 470). In the end, Hemingway was forced to concede to some censorship to ensure publication of *A Farewell to Arms* (Willis 471). Though the human love subplots of the novels are unimportant to the analysis of nonhuman power within *A Farewell to Arms* and *Death of a Hero,* it is worth noting that both Hemingway and Aldington explored the idea of free love between their protagonists and English women, which further complicated their relationship with censors and publishers.

The ironically titled *Death of a Hero* opens with the death of Aldington's protagonist, Captain George Winterbourne, on the Western Front. The novel explores George's childhood, his life of affairs and drama amongst his academic and artistic peers in London, and his service with the British Expeditionary Forces in France. Unlike Hemingway's protagonist, George,[8] as the title of Aldington's novel overtly presages, does not survive the conflict; instead, after years of trauma amongst the trenches, Winterbourne effectively commits suicide by standing up before enemy fire. Aldington, unlike many of his fellow authors, omitted sections of his novels that might have been censored, replacing them with asterisks to avoid the publisher cutting any more

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[8] While Hemingway typically refers to Lieutenant Frederic Henry by his surname, "Henry," Aldington most frequently calls his protagonist by his first name. For the purposes of this thesis, the main characters will predominantly be referred to as Henry and George.

than the small section in which he "overstepped" (Willis 467). Aldington's "savage and belabored satire of Victorian and Edwardian values" was not well received though "the experience and death of his antihero… was written with such power and compression that it would bring critical praise" (Willis 474). In his autobiography, Aldington claimed that *Death of a Hero* contained everything he needed to say about the War, and that it served for him as catharsis and cultural critique (Willis 473).

While both novels tell stories of the First World War informed by firsthand experience, they differ in significant ways, including in their depictions of nonhuman elements. Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* features a first-person narrative voice, while *Death of a Hero* is narrated from a third person perspective–as if written by a comrade of Captain George Winterbourne. Hemingway's protagonist is removed from American nationalism because of his enlistment with the Italian forces, while Aldington's antihero is resolute in his Britishness throughout the novel. And, most importantly for the purposes of this thesis, *A Farewell to Arms* repeatedly demonstrates the power of topographical and meteorological nonhuman elements through Lieutenant Henry's cooperation with mountains, rivers, lakes, and precipitation; *Death of a Hero*, on the other hand, follows the protagonist as he attempts to resist the meteorological, geological, and biological elements of the nonhuman in the form of mud, seasonality, rats, and lice. Perhaps the death of Aldington's protagonist can be received as a warning: consider the nonhuman before harming it.

The two zones of conflict – the Western and Alpine Fronts – serve as contrasting examples of human borders. In *Death of a Hero*, the arbitrary human boundaries are established with very little consideration for the nonhuman, instead relying predominantly on human choice which, throughout the novel, reinforces the fickle nature of such boundaries. The Alpine Front of

A Farewell to Arms, however, avoids mass bloodshed because of the topographical basis of the boundary. Hemingway very firmly demonstrates this power and dismisses the notion of sustained warfare in the mountains when he writes that Henry does "not believe in a war in mountains" (195). Between the two novels, the notion of human boundaries in *Death of a Hero* pales in comparison to nonhuman-established topographical obstacles in *A Farewell to Arms* that present more daunting challenges.

While authorial intentions cannot be assumed with any semblance of certainty, both Hemingway and Aldington lack an explicit focus on primarily nonhuman conduct in their novels. Rather, they mainly appear to deploy nonhuman events and actions in the service of thematic exigencies. In these cases, the nonhuman features are written to be quite one dimensional in their expression and are not as consciously manipulated as human characters. For example, Hemingway describes the Tagliamento River current while it carries Henry, but by focusing on Henry himself, the narrative only peripherally engages with the power of the river without anthropomorphizing it (241). Rather than expressing its power in terms of humanlike attributes, Hemingway acknowledges it only as it relates to his human character. This peripheral treatment actually allows for a less biased analysis of nonhuman conflicts and, therefore, a more objective investigation of nonhuman agency. While these features are still anthropomorphized to an extent, the lack of authorial focus means that these nonhuman elements are less characterized and more ordinary. For example, Hemingway describes the Tagliamento River current while it carries Henry, but by focusing on Henry himself, the narrative only peripherally engages with the power of the river without anthropomorphizing it (241). Rather than expressing its power in terms of humanlike attributes, Hemingway acknowledges it only as it relates to his human character.

Rebuffing the Binary through Material Ecocritical Thought

The core of my argument about nonhuman power and latency is rooted in Material

Ecocritical theories. Ecocriticism was originally conceptualized to "create the theoretical space

in which to discuss that 'general physical presence'" of "nature," but this has drastically

expanded in contemporary theory (Marland 848). "Nature" has traditionally been typified as

green and living – sometimes domesticated and pruned but other times appreciated for its

wildness – and "widely represented in literature and culture as healing, redemptive, unspoilt, and

restorative" (Walton 1). One integral expression of this "nature" in *A Farewell to Arms* and

Death of a Hero is "pastoralism" which refers to "to any literature that described the countryside

in contrast to the court or the city. Theme rather than form came to define the pastoral mode"

(Gifford 3). In the context of this thesis, pastoralism is the beautification of the expression of

rural countryside. New conceptualizations of "nature" go beyond the physical presence of "all

that is bright, sunny, cute, living, and beautiful" (Walton 7) and includes aspects of the "dirty

human sphere" (Sullivan 1); the combination of which is termed "nonhuman" in Material

Ecocritical theory. The nonhuman encompasses all that exists outside of the primarily human

from the green, living things that typify "nature" to human debris and decomposing bodies.

Material Ecocriticism is, simply put, an amalgamation of Materialism and Ecocriticism –

two theories that recognize the power of the primarily nonhuman. In her *Vibrant Matter*, Jane

Bennett presents an alternative to historical materialism called "Vital Materialism," a theory that

argues for the recognition of nonhuman influence on events that affect both human and

nonhuman environments. Bennett's theory is informed by earlier theories of Materialism,

originally situated as "an articulated philosophical position" that predominantly reduced

everything to "matter" before evolving into the "science-friendly doctrine" from which Vital

Materialism, New Materialisms, and Material Ecocriticism were conceived (Wolfe 3).[9] For

Bennett, the "things" that are not human have their own agency and agendas that overlap with –

and therefore affect – human events. While not an Ecocritical text in its entirety, *Vibrant Matter*

informed "New Materialisms," an approach explored by editors Diana Coole and Samantha Frost

in "New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics," which extends the idea of Vital

Materialism to a categorically Ecocritical and literary place. New Materialisms posit that there is

matter – and agency – outside of the human:

> Conceiving matter as possessing its own modes of self-transformation, self-organization,
>
> and directedness, and thus no longer as simply passive or inert, disturbs the conventional
>
> sense that agents are exclusively humans who possess the cognitive abilities,
>
> intentionality, and freedom to make autonomous decisions and the corollary presumption
>
> that humans have the right or ability to master nature. Instead, the human species is being
>
> relocated within a natural environment whose material forces themselves manifest certain
>
> agentic capacities and in which the domain of unintended or unanticipated effects is
>
> considerably broadened. (Coole and Frost 10)

This disruption of the conventional human-nonhuman binary is an integral aspect of Material

Ecocritical thought.

Binaries are frequently questioned in Feminist and specifically Eco-Feminist theory.[10]

Early Eco-Feminist Annette Kolodny pushes back against an anthropomorphism which

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[9] In her "Preface" to *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett notes that the Materialism she pursues, which heavily informs the theory of Materialism discussed in this thesis, is "in the tradition of Democritus-Epicurus-Spinoza-Diderot-Deleuze" which she notes is the "historical materialist" approach. However, in place of social and economic values, Bennett explores "the material agency of natural bodies and technological artifacts" (xiii).

[10] See Mies, et al. 2014, Wardi 2019, France 2019, Welden 2021 for examples of binaries and dualism in Eco-Feminism.

conceives of landscapes as inherently feminine and rejects notions of domestication and female violation (6); instead, in *The Lay of the Land*, she presents the land as an entity that exists outside of the human conceived binary between human and nature. Binary, in this context, refers to the idea of a system or relationship that consists of only two separate entities: the human and nonhuman. Conceptualizing this human-nonhuman relationship outside of the binary requires certain, looser labels. For instance, rather than labeling the Alps as "nonhuman" or Lieutenant Henry as "human" in what follows, I instead describe these characters via categories of "primarily nonhuman" or "primarily human," thus adhering to the theoretical rejection of the binary while simultaneously providing distinction between the two.

Material Ecocriticism rejects the notion that the primarily human and nonhuman can remain independent from one another and instead considers their amalgamations. In doing so, Material Ecocriticism acknowledges the agential possibilities of both elements, therefore affording "the same agential power to the primarily nonhuman and the human as well as question[ing] where the former ends and the latter begins" (Oppermann, "Theorizing" 455). Acknowledging that nonhuman agency can exist in tandem with human agency allows for the argument that the primarily nonhuman can impede human agendas, while at the same time refraining from anthropomorphizing the nonhuman or its agency. However, when considering the primarily nonhuman's ability to interfere in human events, the idea of intention versus causation or reaction plays an integral role.

In "Theorizing Material Ecocriticism: A Diptych," Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann clarify the intricacies of acknowledging this nonhuman agency without trespassing into anthropomorphism. Iovino writes: "humans share this horizon [of body and agency as one] with countless other actors, whose agency – regardless of being endowed with degrees of

intentionality – forms the fabric of events and causal chains" (451). Nonhuman intention must be separated from predominantly human ideas of interaction or reaction, as these forces operate outside human notions of purpose. As Timothy Clark astutely acknowledges:

> We all know, many people only too well, that natural environments 'manifest certain agentic capacities' (e.g., that a river can flood, block roads, cause disease or worse), and with 'unintended or unanticipated effects.' (129)

To take an example from the First World War context that interests me here, the primarily human disruption of French terrain through berming[11]– or digging trenches – created an environment that caused mud, trench foot, and cave-ins when it rained (King 209).[12] The rainfall, an agent of the meteorological nonhuman, would have occurred with or without the trench and, therefore, the subsequent calamity was the result of a generally human disturbance rather than nonhuman active aggression.

Acknowledging that primarily nonhuman actors possess agential abilities is only a small part of the equation, because these agential abilities can – and do – exist outside of the human experience of the world. As Kohn states:

> Conflating resistance and agency blinds us to the kinds of agency that do in fact exist beyond the human. Because telos, representation, intentionality, and selfhood still need to be accounted for and because the way such processes emerge and operate beyond the human is not theorized, [the theory] is forced to fall back on humanlike forms of representation and intentionality as operative in the world beyond the human. (Kohn 91)

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[11] See Part II of *Death of Hero* for depictions of trenches.
[12] Unlike Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, which is set on the Alpine Front, Aldington's *Death of a Hero* focuses on the more commonly depicted mud, trenches, and No Man's Land of the Western Front, which accompany descriptions of the First World War both at the time of publication and in modern media (Badsey 1; 43).

While the predominantly human interpreters of the nonhuman inherently attempt to comprehend nonhuman agency through human perception, the primarily nonhuman exists within its own realm of understanding as well. For example, Aldington's description of the rats who "swarm" through the trenches attributes humanlike intention to the rats which, rather than seeking out human settlements with malice or revenge in mind, are biologically drawn to the easier food sources found with human settlements (Moore 253). From a human-centred approach, American psychiatrist, Merrill Moore, attributes this reliance to the rat's lack of a soul, but, from the perspective of a rat, an abundance of easily accessible food is simply more efficient (253).

The notion of agency is perhaps most evident to us when considering features of the nonhuman that possess mobility and are generally regarded by humans as active "things." Zoological components of the nonhuman possess this ability to move, plan, and act accordingly, while the less mobile topographical actors of the nonhuman are less clearly active. Nonhuman actors possess varying degrees of mobility that generally correspond with their degrees of intentionality – a rat can physically follow a platoon and assist in the decomposition of dead soldiers, while the mud of the trench does not, as far as we know, intentionally unearth bodies. However, both nonhuman actors possess the ability to react to the human stimuli within the trenches. This idea of varied degrees of ability and agency further rebuffs the binary.

While rejecting the binary between human and nonhuman is an integral tenet of Material Ecocriticism, the relationship between the primarily human and primarily nonhuman also plays an important role. The term "entanglement" frequently accompanies discussions of human and nonhuman relationships to refer to the indistinguishable boundaries between the two (Iovino and Oppermann, "Material Ecocriticism" 84). This entanglement, on one hand, invokes a complicated relationship between the two, but it also suggests the possibility of cooperation. The

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idea of the predominantly human and nonhuman working together is an inherent possibility of

Material Ecocriticism. Another related interdisciplinary term for such cooperation is

"assemblage," (attributed to Bruno Latour as well as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari) which

refers to "a paradigm shift that sees space and agency as the result of associating humans and

non-humans to form precarious wholes" (Müller 27). Therefore, relationships between the

primarily human and nonhuman occur within the context of assemblages of agencies –

collections of different entities that compose a whole. For example, the relationship between

soldiers and rats in *Death of a Hero* operates as an assemblage – the rats survive by consuming

human fare as well as assisting in the decomposition of human bodies. Through this assemblage

(relationship), primarily nonhuman experiences of war, like the aforementioned rats, become

more evident.

The Agential Nonhuman and Warfare and Machinery

Examining First World War authors through an Ecocritical lens has allowed for analyses

of connections between the primarily human and primarily nonhuman experiences of war-

induced trauma. For instance, Walton lauds Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Rebecca

West's *Return of the Soldier* for their Ecocritical nature and obvious focus on the relationship

between the mainly human and "nature" (Walton 3). However, while she celebrates the

environmental engagement of these texts, Walton, in her article "Nature Trauma: Ecology and

the Returning Soldier in First World War English and Scottish Fiction, 1918-1932," approaches

the connection between the human and nonhuman, and the validity of the nonhuman experience,

largely from a human perspective, and confines her discussion to traditional ideas of "nature."

The nonhuman experiences of wartime trauma are squarely situated in the human experience,

thus somewhat invalidating the independence and agency of the nonhuman (Walton 10). The

notion that the trauma of a landscape or countryside is a symbol for human psychological trauma

– demonstrated by "psychological and artistic engagement with the non-human world" – is

seemingly a given when discussing wartime works through an Ecocritical lens and therefore a

widely accepted interpretation of the nonhuman experiences of war (Black 2).

 Similarly, in concluding her article '"Earth! have they gone into you?" An Ecocritical

Reading of the Relationship Between Man, Nature and War in Isaac Rosenberg's Poems,' Erica

Maggioni clarifies that:

> The above analysis of three poems by Isaac Rosenberg has revealed how strong the
>
> relationship between man, nature and the First World War is. The poet displays an
>
> appreciation of the many living things around him, but the human interest is still central,
>
> however concealed. To a poet like Rosenberg who, unlike other war poets, tended to
>
> avoid the graphic representation of suffering and death, depicting the devastating effects
>
> of war on the environment indeed serves as a powerful metaphor for its tragic impact on
>
> human lives (61).

From this perspective, the nonhuman in the War is presented as a passive entity that reflects the

human experience. Some more recent wartime works acknowledge the nonhuman as a victim of

human warfare in its own right, though lacking any agency in its victimization (Wright 306).

This tendency toward romanticizing and anthropomorphizing the nonhuman neglects the

dynamic nature of the nonhuman and, most importantly, its agency (Glaser 33). Contemporary

Ecocritical theory (second and third wave)[13] engages with the problem of glorifying "nature's

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[13] In his "The Third Wave of Ecocriticism," Scott Slovic dismisses the clean break of "waves" of
ecocriticism, but writes that "a more comparative, trans-cultural approach to ecocritical studies" (6)
emerged in tandem with the second wave (circa 1995), and the trend toward a third wave (circa 2000) was

pre-War purity" thus returning some agency to the nonhuman by acknowledging that the nonhuman exists outside of human cultivation and human-favoured green, living "nature."

Given the technological advances of warfare machinery during the First World War, it is important to define the parameters of the nonhuman as it relates to the human. Previous explorations of the nonhuman through an Ecocritical lens would likely have clarified the distinction between the two by relabeling them as "the human world" and "the natural world" therefore clearly drawing a binary distinction (Marland 857). However, a Material Ecocritical approach to this binary requires that the nonhuman include more than typical understandings of "nature," and instead encompass immobile topographical features, geological constructions, recurrent meteorological events, and unsightly (to humans) biological actors and processes. Material Ecocriticism distinguishes the primarily human as one (indistinct) entity while all other agential matter falls under the umbrella of the nonhuman (Oppermann, "Rethinking" 41). This is not to say, however, that the two categories are exclusive or unwavering; instead, Material Ecocriticism "questions where the former [human] ends and the latter [nonhuman] begins" (Oppermann, "Theorizing" 455).

Many contemporary theorists have explored conglomerations of human and nonhuman entities in the forms of communities, both social in the form of a "sociology of associations" (Müller 30) and biological in the pursuit of "collaborative survival" (Tsing 20), and in terms of manufactured beings such as Donna Haraway's cyborg. However, these aggregated beings possess a distinct awareness that the machine alone cannot literally retain; the machine alone can

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characterized by a focus on materiality, "global concepts of place," and "post-national and post-ethnic visions of human experience of the environment" (7).

only operate at this level of agency with human direction or prompting.[14] What sets the machine and the cyborg apart is the active human involvement or the cyborg's hybridity – being both human and nonhuman in a literal, physical sense.[15] Perhaps Müller puts this best when he writes: "assemblages are relational. They are arrangements of different entities linked together to form a new whole" (29). The machine is an assembled being, but not ostensibly part of an assemblage as it is not an independent entity in its own right. For example, George is killed by an assemblage of man and machine – neither the German solider nor the machine gun alone could have killed him from that distance, but when operating together they are capable of murder from afar (Aldington 339).

While the notion of a fluid categorization of the human and nonhuman is generally accepted within the realm of Material Ecocritical theory, the placement of humanmade machinery is contested. In her "Rethinking Ecocriticism in an Ecological Postmodern Framework: Mangled Matter, Meaning, and Agency," Oppermann includes machinery in her catalogue of objects that fall into the category of nonhuman which, according to this article, consists of "animals, machines, [and] environments" (41). Other Ecocritical theorists such as Wendy Wheeler push back against this idea and assert that:

> Living things are not machines… In particular, no human-produced machine has
> consciousness and thus adaptability to its environment. To put it more pointedly, no
> human produced machine has any choice about its inputs (Kak 2005); it has no body

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[14] See Wendy Wheeler's "The Lightest Burden: the Aesthetic Abductions of Biosemiotics" in *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology* for further analysis of machines within the human-nonhuman dichotomy.

[15] See Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* for the full application of cyborg theory.

responding to its environment (although a human can input a facsimile, or model, of such

a thing into a programme) (34).

Each of these factions certainly has merit. However, in this thesis, and in order to delve more

deeply into the topics of topography, meteorology, and biological nonhuman actors, references to

the nonhuman will not include general machinery or technology involved in the processes of

war; instead, human-produced machinery will fall into a subcategory of human mechanisms and

therefore lie on the human side of this dynamic dichotomy. The primary elements of the

nonhuman in which I am interested here are topography, meteorology, and biological organisms–

both botanical and zoological.

A Green Modernist Approach to Pastoral Nationalism

The contentious relationship between Modernist styles and those of the earlier Romantic

era can be felt quite potently in the depictions of the primarily nonhuman in Modernist texts like

A Farewell to Arms and *Death of a Hero*. In Romantic portrayals of the nonhuman "the scenes

and incidents are more or less removed from common life" while the Modernist nonhuman is

more apocalyptic and typically industrialized and permeated with human elements (Childs 1-2).

The nonhuman in Romantic works by authors such as William Wordsworth is elevated to a near

divine status in its purity, wildness, and beauty – glorifying the nonhuman through its separation

from the human. On the other hand, emphasis on beautiful elements of the nonhuman is

sometimes parodied within Modernist writing as a means to critique industrialization and the

cultural shifts from the Romantic to Modern Era (Childs 3); Aldington, for example, does this

repeatedly in *Death of a Hero*. This glorified parody operates as a means to juxtapose the

supposedly idyllic British countryside of George's imagined childhood (Buell 85) with the

ravaged landscape of his station on the Western Front rather than commend the nonhuman. The nihilistic portrayal of the nonhuman in wartime is emblematic of Aldington's, and Hemingway's, Modernist expression.

While they do not feature emblematic stream of consciousness narrative styles, *Death of a Hero* and *A Farewell to Arms* are Modernist novels. Published in 1929, they both foreground nihilism, individualism, cultural criticism, and a focus on the horrors of the First World War though they do not adhere to more "common base" tenets of Modernism such as "stream of consciousness narrative in the novel" (Bradbury and McFarlane 26). In his *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell writes "every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected… But the Great War was more ironic than any before or since. It was a hideous embarrassment" (8). This perspective can be observed in both *A Farewell to Arms* and *Death of a Hero* in their incongruous descriptions of military leadership and national response to the conflict. The authors' dismissive depictions of the primarily nonhuman in relation to national identity feature both irony and disillusionment as they move away from the glorification of landscapes as domestic and nationalist symbols contributing to the "national ego" (Buell 33) and, wittingly or unwittingly, present less biased illustrations of the nonhuman. In these ways, the Modernist choices of Hemingway and Aldington lend themselves to a more potent Material Ecocritical reading of the fictionalized nonhuman, and to the appellation of Green Modernism.

Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy's *Green Modernism: Nature and the English Novel, 1900 to 1930* applies Ecocritical theories to the Modernist cultural and literary movement. Mathes McCarthy defies as Green Modernist:

One, works that would include nature while simultaneously resisting the romantic and pastoral models inherited from the literary past; two, novels that give nature a cultural

function and, in particular, explore an alternative English identity; three, writing that

foregrounds the material actuality of the natural world. (Mathes McCarthy 18)

This emphasis on "material actuality" alludes to an overlap between Green Modernism and

Material Ecocritical thought, though the former focuses more on the cultural implications of

literary expressions of "nature" while the latter is more concerned with latency. Mathes

McCarthy accepts the idea of materiality, though he is primarily more preoccupied with

traditional notions of "nature" than an expanded notion of the nonhuman along the lines Iovino

and Oppermann, for instance, advocate. Importantly, he does acknowledge that "the nonhuman

world [is] a crucial actor in shaping human experience" (26). Green Modernism investigates

figurations of "nature" in Modernist art in a way that allows for nonhuman agency and, in

consequence, provides a much-needed bridge between Modernism and Material Ecocriticism.

Existing environmentally focused scholarship around Hemingway and Aldington falls

into the camp of Modernist analysis framed around nature writing and symbolism.[16] In

opposition to this reductive approach, Mathes McCarthy claims that "nature can change the

dominant readings of Modernist novels and nature can broaden the archive for Modernist

studies" (2). Mathes McCarthy's work delves into the politicization of the nonhuman– a typically

anthropomorphic use of the nonhuman to act as a stand in for a nation – to support Modernist

cultural critiques. Hemingway's and Aldington's texts frequently politicize the nonhuman

through pathetic fallacy and "nature" symbolism. The romanticization of the bucolic landscapes

of pre-war Western Europe and emphasis on the destruction caused by the industrialism of the

war certainly lend themselves to a Modernist reading but, from a Green Modernist perspective,

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[16] See, for instance, "'To Tune In ... Idly': Place & Landscape, Nature & Attention, Science & Art in Aldington, Durrell, Hemingway, and Pound" for H.R. Stoneback's exploration of Modernism and "nature" in Aldington and Hemingway's work.

these changes reflect a unique human violence against the nonhuman rather than the static

nonhuman mirroring the sentiments of the human.

Inverting Pathetic Fallacy for an Anti-Anthropomorphic Analysis

Neither Hemingway or Aldington approaches the nonhuman directly in their work; instead, they frequently employ pathetic fallacy. It is in the periphery of these expressions of pathetic fallacy and pastoralism that the nonhuman elements of *A Farewell to Arms* and *Death of a Hero* are found. John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843) introduced the term "pathetic fallacy," the assignment of human emotion to the nonhuman. It has become such an integral part of anti-anthropocentric readings of the nonhuman that its "persistence" has even been studied (Buell 200). Ruskin was careful to clarify that all pathetic fallacy is reliant upon perception and, frankly, human opinion. Though Ruskin's focus was on visual art and its interpretation, the idea of human emotional projection has migrated into literary study through the desire to indicate place through "metaphoric language" therefore imbuing (human deemed) "inanimate" features with meaning and animation (Evernden 19). Ruskin alighted on the concept of "pathetic fallacy" by exploring the link between anthropocentrism and emotional projection:

> The state of mind which attributes to it these characters of a living creature is one in
>
> which the reason is unhinged by grief. All violent feelings have the same effect. They
>
> produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things, which I would
>
> generally characterize as the "pathetic fallacy." (205)

The idea that pathetic fallacy possesses an inherent falseness creates a fascinating precedent for literary portrayals of the nonhuman by human authors. Ruskin posits that emotions colour poetic (and presumably novelistic) depictions of the nonhuman in a manner that is "over-dazzled by

emotion" because emotions warp perceptions and make humans believe that the nonhuman adjusts to their overwhelming emotional output (208). This idea neglects the other side of this relationship – the inverse of pathetic fallacy. That is, that the primarily nonhuman can influence human emotion or, at the very least, warp human perception.

In turn, literary pastoralism, with its emphasis on the supposed beauty and simplicity of rural life, can also be inverted to an extent. Pathetic fallacy and pastoralism conceive of the nonhuman as reflecting both human emotion and human identity (Buell 183). Ramazani claims that pathetic fallacy is at the heart of pastoralism (569) – the application of human emotion around nationalism to the landscape. Of this idea, Love writes "nature, in the pastoral equation, is an embodiment of nobility, a trusted value against which we are invited to weigh our experiences of culture and society" (195). This "trusted value" is rooted in regional differences based in nonhuman elements such as topographical, botanical, or climatic differences between one region/country or another. In this way, pathetic fallacy and, more specifically, pastoralism link human identity and nonhuman locale.

Theories around pastoralism, as it is rooted in national identity, vary between countries and regions; within this thesis, these regional distinctions can be seen quite clearly. I focus on two distinct narratives: an American retelling of conflict on the Alpine Front in northern Italy, and a British retelling of the Western Front set predominantly in France. This distinction is important because Richard Aldington, as an Englishman, explores pastoral identity in a manner quite different from Ernest Hemingway's American characterization of the nonhuman (Addis 2). In order to explore these textual differences, it is worth considering the canonical differences between British/European and American pastoralism. Garrard's *Ecocriticism* and Buell's *The*

Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture address these distinctions:

> Garrard appears to be thinking of a genre with a canon of now 'outmoded models' for current notions of ecology that reject 'harmony and balance.' Buell's 'pastoralism' seems to refer to a mode of writing that engages with human relationships with land in a recognizable 'species of cultural equipment.' (Gifford 1)

Or put simply, America "produced a pastoral literature of her own, that literature hailed the essential femininity of the terrain in a way European pastoral never had" (Kolodny 6). Hemingway, for example, frequently describes a landscape that has been ravaged by soldiers with "bare" mountains, branches, and vineyards, the "rich green farms" and "smooth thick turf" of the Italian countryside or the "excitement" of a dark night or hot weather (1; 138-9; 21; 75). In this way, Hemingway seems to relocate his American pastoral sensibility to a European context (Italy). The language of these sections personifies the nonhuman as a feminine being that can be stripped bare or become excited – ideas that imply a sexual connotation.[17]

Both pathetic fallacy as a whole and pastoralism more specifically fall under the umbrella of anthropomorphism: the attribution of human characteristics to the nonhuman. While anthropocentrism typically risks overlooking the power of the nonhuman, it is not *necessarily* the enemy of the primarily nonhuman. Anthropomorphism, when explicitly identified as such, does not wholly negate the value of nonhuman agency nor does it inherently imply a negative depiction of nonhuman elements. However, the line between acknowledging anthropomorphic language and applying an anthropomorphic lens is a very fine one. Anthropomorphism is not the

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[17] See Victoria Addis' "Landscape and Masculinity in Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms" for an Ecocritical analysis of Hemingway's feminization of the nonhuman, and James M. Hutchisson's *Ernest Hemingway: A New Life* for a contemporary biographical approach to analyzing Hemingway.

enemy of Material Ecocriticism, but it risks romanticizing the nonhuman and neglecting its dynamic nature and, most importantly, its agency as a "natural" rather than supernatural entity. Extricating the "natural" from the supernatural demonstrates that assigning magical (or anthropomorphized) powers to the nonhuman actually forces it to appear as a "supernatural, human-like [being]" (Glaser 35).

Anthropomorphism, as it is found in pathetic fallacy and pastoralism, does at least allow for a closer examination of nonhuman elements within a human-centric narrative. For much of *Death of a Hero* and *A Farewell to Arms*, the nonhuman is simply written as a secondary character, therefore limiting the extent to which it can be analyzed; however, when the nonhuman plays an integral role through pastoral identity or pathetic fallacy it is brought to the forefront of each novel. From a Material Ecocritical perspective, the anthropomorphic expressions are also valuable in reading for the nonhuman. In some cases, anthropomorphism simply assigns human characteristics to the nonhuman and attempts to negate inherent nonhuman characteristics, which certainly carries negative connotations when reading for the nonhuman experience. However, from this Material Ecocritical perspective, the anthropomorphized nonhuman can foreground nonhuman factors because of the authorial focus on them. When the nonhuman is being anthropomorphized, at least it is also being brought to the forefront of a novel.

While the anthropomorphized nonhuman is frequently written to express the emotions, characteristics, and national identity of the human character to which it is aligned, it also appears in its full characterization. For example, Aldington assigns human emotions – like anger and pursuits of war – to the rats in *Death of a Hero* and this anthropomorphism requires that the rats feature more prominently in the narrative. In other words, Aldington's cultural critique through

the trench dwelling rats is achieved through anthropomorphism but also allows the reader to see the rats' experience in the trenches (136; 253; 261; 317). In this manner, anthropomorphism in all of its executions can contribute to a reading for the nonhuman.

Anthropomorphism, at its core, attempts to assign all power to the human element while stripping the nonhuman of its agency and ability. But inverting this idea returns the competency to the nonhuman without overcorrecting to negate the human experience; instead, this reversal of the power dynamic acknowledges the ability of both parties in tandem with the nonhuman power of influence. In turn, pastoralism can also be inverted to an extent – the landscape can certainly shape human experience in terms of national and regional identity. The inverted pathetic fallacy is less harmful to the nonhuman-human relationship as both entities retain agency. Inverted pathetic fallacy attempts to explore the manners in which the nonhuman experience affects the human – take for example, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) which is characterized by depression caused by lack of sunlight during winter months, especially in northern locations.

When closely examined, the nonhuman power demonstrated in *Death of a Hero* and *A Farewell to Arms* exceeds the power of any military or machinery advancements, and reading these texts from a Material Ecocritical viewpoint is thus instructive. Furthermore, comparing Lieutenant Henry and Captain Winterbourne demonstrates the significant dangers of acting without first considering the nonhuman. Through Material Ecocritical and Green Modernist analysis, the nonhuman actors of the narratives are revealed to be powerful, agential players who, through chains of causality, react to forceful human actions. The concept of No Man's Land in *Death of a Hero* demonstrates the subconscious assemblage of human and nonhuman in death and decomposition, while the bodies of water in *A Farewell to Arms* – the Tagliamento River and Lake Maggiore – illustrate the power of human and nonhuman conscious cooperation

as a form of assemblage. In their depictions of human and nonhuman violence, both Hemingway and Aldington reinforce the devastation of the First World War.

The first chapter of this thesis explores the agency of nonhuman characters in Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero*. It examines how topographical and botanical patriotism and pre-war pastoral romanticism in England are juxtaposed with the experience of an English soldier on French lands during a surge in wartime industrialism. Chapter 1 also reinforces the impossibility of a human-nonhuman binary through addressing the decomposition of human bodies in No Man's Land, and foregrounds Aldington's cutting cultural critique through his depictions of rats. The next chapter focuses on Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and how it operates dissimilarly from Aldington's narrative in its upfront recognition of nonhuman power in the form of topographical obstacles – the Alps, Lake Maggiore, and the Tagliamento River – and meteorological forces - temperature, precipitation, climatic winds, and seasonal changes. This second chapter also compares Aldington's cultural critique through rats to Hemingway's portrayals of horses. Through comparing Capt. Winterbourne and Lt. Henry, this thesis argues that human characters who acknowledge nonhuman power suffer fewer consequences from their human-nonhuman interactions. In the thesis's conclusion, human death and decomposition are explored as transitive human-nonhuman processes which refute any remaining binary. The final chapter also compares the finales of *Death of a Hero* and *A Farewell to Arms* and reiterates the implications of ignoring the primarily nonhuman.

Chapter 1

The Hazards of Underestimating Nonhuman Power in Aldington's *Death of a Hero*

Death of a Hero (1929) is a remarkably nihilistic representation of humankind and the failures of society. Aldington romanticizes the supposedly bucolic British landscape of the past as a means to acerbically address his protagonist's lost childhood innocence and purity and, in some cases, question the possibility of such an existence. Throughout his adult life, and especially during his time as soldier, George Winterbourne is preoccupied by "the point of view of humanity" (Aldington 143) and ignores the agency of the nonhuman, an approach that will (among other things) be the root of his demise. *Death of a Hero* is split into three distinct parts: Part I follows George's parents and introduces the novel's protagonist, situating him within the social hierarchy of the time period; Part II sees George attempt to make his life in London with Elizabeth and Fanny before the Great War breaks out; and Part III traces George's slow descent towards suicidal ideations, which culminate in his split second decision to stand up during active firing and invite the cold embrace of death. This novel, at its heart, reads as a critique of "modern" society, industrialization, and human cruelty. Crucially, the primarily nonhuman is frequently overlooked within the overt plot, and yet colours every facet of human interaction. With these observations, and the tenets of Material Ecocritical theory in mind, I argue that *Death of a Hero* demonstrates the consequences of ignoring the primarily nonhuman.

Aldington strikingly introduces George Winterbourne as a dead soldier in the Prologue to *Death of a Hero.* This approach removes any potential uncertainty about the outcome of the novel, as well as immediately sounding a warning of sorts, and compels the reader to remain focused on why George crumbled in the final hour. George Winterbourne, Acting Captain of the

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(fictional) 2nd Battalion 9th R. Foddershire Regiment of the British Expeditionary Forces,[18] leads his cohort against the Central Powers but also against his nonhuman surroundings: actively and intentionally disturbing the earth, dismissing the weather, polluting the waterways, and attempting to force the nonhuman to bend to the human agenda. George fails to acknowledge the power of the nonhuman around him and is punished for his trespasses, not in a conscious, intentional sanction at the metaphorical hands of "Mother Earth" but by the raw, reciprocal actions of the nonhuman. The relationship between human action and nonhuman reaction – and vice versa – is rooted in the idea of reciprocity rather than an anthropomorphism of nonhuman intention. This reciprocity serves as an acknowledgement of nonhuman power and agency removed from questions of intention: If you dig a hole in flat ground and it rains heavily, it will flood.

Nonfictional and fictional accounts of the First World War typically centre on the introduction and execution of trench warfare, Total War, and consequential shellshock. The extreme violence and high casualties of "the first truly global conflict" initiated a climacteric cultural shift (Meredith, "Introduction"). *Death of a Hero*, an English novel written during the InterWar Period by a famous War Poet who himself served in the British Army, insightfully examines the consequences of this violence. Richard Aldington's depictions of trench warfare and life on the Front are not romanticized from the safety of London but rather inspired by his own experiences. Part III of the novel is set in the Allied trenches of the Western Front in France and follows the deterioration of this terrain from 1914 until George Winterbourne's untimely death on November 4, 1918, just seven days before the end of the First World War (Aldington 339). *Death of a Hero* follows George's relationship with the nonhuman landscape from his

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[18] The irony of George belonging to a regiment with a name evoking the term "cannon fodder" further exemplifies how *Death of a Hero* operates as a critique of the First World War.

childhood fascination with the "non-industrialised parts of England," to his suicide amongst the looted, ruined villages of the Western Front (Aldington 70; 336).

In this chapter, I address depictions of primarily nonhuman elements in Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* in order to explore the consequences of human action that does not consider the power of preexistent and ubiquitous primarily nonhuman elements. Further, through George's childhood admiration of the topography and botany of rural England, Aldington presents a sharp critique of pastoral-based patriotism and mocks the idea of Englishness. The topographical element of the nonhuman is also examined in the context of the Western Front, in the form of trenches and graves in France and Germany, when Captain Winterbourne fights in the British Expeditionary Forces. Along the Front, and particularly in No Man's Land, the arbitrary nature of these human designated borders is evidenced through the relatively unchanging topography of the central European coastal plain and the visual similarities of both industrialized and more rural landscapes. While topography (and associated regional atmospheric and botanical changes) is important in examining the influence of the primarily nonhuman on human warfare, biological actors, specifically rats, also serve to eliminate any semblance of a human-nonhuman binary and reinforce the idea of assemblage through their role assisting in human decomposition. The active processes of human death and decomposition feature heavily in *Death of a Hero*, contributing to Aldington's cultural critique and a Material Ecocritical reading of predominantly nonhuman agency.

The Pre-War Idyll

In much of the literature published in the InterWar Period, "nature's purity," idyllic pastoral pre-war times, and "romanticized rural characters" (Sultzbach 28) are

anthropomorphized to the point of falsification and Aldington's work is no exception. The industrialization and mechanization of the First World War prompted a critical shift in literary depictions of the landscape of Britain, and Europe more generally (Diaper 1). Pastoralism initially surged in tandem with nationalism but, through the course of the war, shifted to align with a cultural critique of the country's actions and move toward military industrialism. Of this shift, Terry Gifford writes "the attempt to seek escape in the English countryside from the horrors of the First World War was doomed to be read by later critics as pastoral idealization at its most desperate" (5). In Parts I and II, George's recollections of England are full of lush gardens and "English spring flowers" (Aldington 141). His memories are starkly juxtaposed by the same gardens' wilted beauty when "the gardeners [are at] War, and there [is] no money in England now for flowers" (288). In this way, pastoralism was both intensely political and inherently falsified. Terry Gifford explains this falsification as a "mixture that is often in tension, between realism of close encounters with nature, a simplified life, real transferable learning about inner nature from dealing with and observing outer nature, and the acceptance of a degree of artifice in this construction and its discourse" (2). Within *Death of a Hero,* pastoral longing is demonstrated through the deterioration of George's mental state in tandem with the landscape of the Western Front and his increasingly romanticized recollections of the pre-war British rural idyll.

Part I of *Death of a Hero* paints the British countryside of George's childhood in the most idyllic light:

It was all fresh—fresh with the clarity of air which follows a great gale, with the scentless purity of young leaves, the drenched grasses of the empty downs. The sun moved majestically and imperceptibly downwards in a widening pool of gold, which faded, as

the great ball vanished, into pure, clear, hard green and blue. One, two, a dozen

blackbirds and linnets and thrushes were singing; and as the light faded they dwindled to

one blackbird tune of exquisite melancholy and purity. (Aldington 60)

In this quote alone, Aldington links the pre-war English countryside with "purity" three times, an

idea "founded upon a mythological purity that never existed in the first place" (Wright 302). The

"purity" and "freshness" of the pre-war pastoral is, on one hand, used to demonstrate the

destruction of wartime endeavours through comparison, but also creates a falsified pastoral idyll

which is wholly unattainable – past, present, and future. Garrard refers to this concept of

glorifying the nonexistent pre-war pastoral as a "distinctive *construction* of history," (452)

therefore acknowledging the idealized nature of this fantasy. In support of this, Laura Wright

notes: "a return to the past is impossible and counterproductive [because] the past is always

imaginary and illusive" (307). The intensity of this recollection increases with the juxtaposition

of the industrialized Western Front which George encounters in Part III:

The ground was a desert of shell-holes and torn rusty wire, and everywhere lay skeletons

in steel helmets, still clothed in the rags of sodden khaki or field grey. Here a fleshless

hand still clutched a broken rusty rifle; there a gaping, decaying boot showed the thin,

knotty foot-bones. He came on a skeleton violently dismembered by a shell explosion;

the skull was split open and the teeth lay scattered on the bare chalk; the force of the

explosion had driven coins and a metal pencil right into the hip-bones and femurs.

(Aldington 335)

This excerpt, which occurs a mere four pages before George's suicide,[19] emphasizes that the

industrial landscape is both filled with primarily human elements – skeletons, boots, rifles, and

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[19] George's suicide occurs on page 339.

rusty wire – and emptied of primarily nonhuman greenery, or "nature." The contrast with the beauty, purity, and romance of the botanical features of the British countryside as George remembers it from his childhood is so stark as to emphasize the inherent falseness of each perspective.

The beautiful, human-favoured aspects of the living nonhuman – such as the pre-war English countryside and lush gardens, saturated with the botanical nonhuman and pleasing (to the human eye) topography – may dominate in writing focused on national identity. However, such elements do not constitute the whole realm of the nonhuman. While George's reality on the battlefield is, indeed, devoid of lush gardens, it is not without the nonhuman; and in neglecting to really engage with the unsavoury (to humans) aspects of the nonhuman on the Western Front, such as rats, for instance, or to express empathy for the fate of the nonhuman unwittingly caught up in a human war, Aldington places the focus predominantly on human endeavours instead.

Just as the landscapes change drastically between Part I (England in the late 1800s) and Part III (France in 1918), George's interactions with the nonhuman around him change as well. Aldington's depiction of the areas is rooted in reality, as the landscape of the Western Front was physically desecrated by warfare (Nalewicki), but it was most decidedly not emptied of all nonhuman elements. In Part I, George walks 15 miles through the countryside of Hamborough "in a kind of golden glory of fatigue and exultation" (Aldington 80). The language around this trek carries chiefly positive connotations with phrasing like "fertile plain of woodland" and "shimmering… warm sunlight" and an emphasis on George's positive feelings toward the landscape (79). By contrast, George's final march, to his death on the Western Front, is associated with a night sky disturbed by "gun-flashes," "a sunken road," and "a confusion of smoke" (339). Younger George is able to interact with the nonhuman equitably and with respect

(Aldington 62), but once George has committed fully to his (human) war agenda at any expense, he begins to ignore the nonhuman around him and push forward blindly. In the final scene of *Death of a Hero*, Aldington revisits George's communion with the nonhuman – his peaceful walks through Hamborough – with a stark comparison.

At the end of the novel, the narrator seems to acknowledge George's inability to see beyond the war when he comments: "he moved through impressions like a man hallucinated. And every incident seemed to beat on his brain Death, Death, Death" (334). His blindness demonstrates the extent of his progression into melancholy. This emptiness also recalls Modernist subjectivity in Aldington's construction of George's worldview. George's inability to see beyond the war demonstrates the singularity of his mind as he devolves toward suicidal ideations. At this point in his nihilistic spiral, George cannot see anything possessing agency – neither himself nor the unseen nonhuman; instead, everything is inert. Even the act of committing suicide is removed from George's control – he does not decide to stand but is rather compelled to do so.

Chronological Chains of Causation in Human Unearthing

Trench warfare came about as a means to combat the new powerful weapons used by both the Western and Central Powers. Unlike previous European weaponry, the artillery technologies of the early 20th Century forced soldiers underground (King 209). The revolutionary military technique of trench warfare forced humans to dwell more closely with nonhuman cohabitants such as mud, unregulated temperatures, and rats, though with very little success (Atenstaedt). Indeed, the outcomes of Aldington's depiction of trench warfare provide an impeccable demonstration of the dangers of acting without considering impartial, but nonetheless

agential, nonhuman factors – especially the soil, antecedent topographical features, precipitation, and biological actors. This claim is complex as it leans dangerously into the anthropomorphic camp of nonhuman *intention.* However, to reiterate, nonhuman intention can – and must – be separated from human ideas of interaction or reaction, as these forces operate outside such bounds of intention or purpose (Iovino and Oppermann, "Theorizing" 451). In this sense, nonhuman action does not take the form of revenge or intentional reciprocation of violence, but rather of reaction or causal effect.

In order to understand the effects of trench warfare on the human and nonhuman elements of *Death of a Hero*, it is necessary to understand the realities of constructing such subterranean locales. The trenches of the First World War were not mere holes dug into soft ground; they would have yielded to the first rain and liquefied in short order. The trenches in which George Winterbourne lived for months on end – inspired by Richard Aldington's experiences[20] – were reinforced by sandbags, duckboards, wooden posts, and barbed wire.[21] The instability and alien construction of the trenches encroached upon pre-existing nonhuman structures. For instance, the terrain on which these battles are set, Northern France and Flanders, is a coastal plain with a bed of clay, much of which was unsafe for the construction of dugouts. However, this was rarely considered by the military strategists who decided the placement of trenches (King 204).

Death of a Hero describes the construction and maintenance of the trenches, as well as George's daily life within them. The novel offers repeated, unexamined, chronological chains of causation: a human action dislocates a primarily nonhuman configuration, which results in

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[20] See the *New World Encyclopedia* entry on "Richard Aldington" (2019) for biographical context.
[21] See the *National WWI Museum and Memorial*'s article entitled "Trenches" here
https://www.theworldwar.org/learn/wwi/trenches.

repercussions when concurrent, fundamental nonhuman actions occur in that location. For example, a soldier digs a hole (mainly human action) therefore removing the latent structure of level coastal geography leaving a place for water to pool (repercussion) once the inevitable rain falls (mainly nonhuman action or *re*action). This nonhuman reaction in the form of rainfall is not a punishment or conscious retribution but rather a meteorological process affecting a human fabricated situation resulting in a negative human reception. The rain would have fallen regardless of human action, but once human action has displaced an anterior structure the rain is received differently when it reaches the ground. The nonhuman action remains consistent, but the human distortion sparks a different (negative for humans) effect.

This is especially apparent in one of the many passages of *Death of a Hero* in which bodies are unearthed from poorly constructed graves. The novel's narrator tells us that George:

lived among smashed bodies and human remains in an infernal cemetery. If he scratched his stick idly and nervously in the side of a trench, he pulled out human ribs. He ordered a new latrine to be dug out from the trench, and thrice the digging had to be abandoned because they came upon terrible black masses of decomposing bodies. (334-335)

The bodies are unearthed not by primarily nonhuman processes such as flooding or rapid temperature fluctuations, but by human actions leading up to the exhumation. We have been told earlier that: "Winterbourne detested "berming." Hour after hour standing in wet, chilly mud, shovelling the stuff away to prevent its sliding back into the trench from which it had been laboriously thrown, and widening the space between the top of the trench and the parapet" (Aldington 270). It is not that the ground has deliberately rejected the bodies of the dead, but that human action has disturbed the arrangement of soil.

The idea that primarily human action can have side effects when ubiquitous primarily nonhuman events occur during or after such an action is perhaps most evident in George's encounters with the many disturbed graves (this ironic terminology is not lost) of the Western Front. The bodies of soldiers have been hastily buried in whatever location is most convenient to the human gravedigger without considering the primarily nonhuman setting. The ill-advised locations and depths of these graves create an environment ripe for unearthing bodies through pervasive nonhuman actions or events in the form of mudslides, animal disturbance, or drastic temperature changes. Instead, Aldington writes only of graves disrupted by humans:

> One night Winterbourne and the man next him dug up the bones, tunic, equipment, and rifle of a French soldier, who had been hastily buried in the parapet many months before. His cartridges fell from the mouldering pouches and still looked bright in the dim star-dusk. Winterbourne dug up the skull; it was large and dome-shaped, a typical Frenchman's head. They tried to find his identity disc, but failed. Pemberton, who was on duty that night, made them rebury what was left in a shell-hole. They stuck a cross over it next day, marked "UNKNOWN FRENCH SOLDIER." (270-271)

In this example, George himself is to blame for the desecration of the unknown Frenchman's body. Had the body been left to the nonhuman circumstance in which it was prematurely enveloped, it might have been managed by the nonhuman elements of decomposition. Another primarily human action that unearths bodies is the onslaught of trench mortars:

> He noticed that several large shells had fallen in the cemetery that morning or the night before, digging up the graves violently, scattering bones and torn blankets and broken crosses over the other graves. He turned in for five minutes, and walked down the long row containing the graves of his Pioneer companions. He stood a couple of minutes at

Thompson's grave. A shell splinter had knocked the cross crooked. He set it straight.

(330).

Rather than desecration at the literal hands of man, this places blame on the human mechanisms of war. The violent primarily human acts of warfare, in these cases, have displaced human dead. These examples prove how little the primarily human considers the nonhuman – George is only concerned when the primarily human is affected. He does not register the intense violation of the very soil itself by human actions. Furthermore, Aldington ignores the predominantly nonhuman and clarifies that the violation of humans – both dead and alive – occurs almost entirely at the hands of other humans. This focus on human-on-human violation supports Aldington's cutting critique of human warfare but does not consider the experience of the terrain itself from a nonhuman perspective.

While the disruption of the terrain is certainly a human violation of nonhuman elements, is an unanimated body buried in the dirt human or nonhuman? At what point does the human become nonhuman? Perhaps this question requires revisiting the notion of intentionality. When it becomes host to many microscopic elements of the nonhuman through the process of decomposition, the human body – a corpse – becomes more of a nonhuman phenomenon than an active, cognizant human endowed with intentionality. But this categorization is not so simple. In "Theorizing Material Ecocriticism: A Diptych," Iovino writes: "if human and nonhuman are constitutionally "entangled," the result of this entanglement – the effect of this "mangle" – is a posthumanist space," in which the human and nonhuman are indivisible, indistinguishable components of a whole world (456). While the human and nonhuman are inherently intertwined, some entities lean more wholly into one category or the other due to their different executive agencies, such as intentionality. Material Ecocriticism acknowledges the agency of nonhuman

actors regardless of intention or ability to act intentionally, though some nonhuman actors like animals do, indeed, possess intentionality (Oppermann, "Rethinking" 41). The degree of intentionality, in the form of cognitive ability, is what sets the human apart from the predominantly nonhuman. For example, both humans and rats rally for war in "armies" (Moore 252), but only humans possess the technology of machine guns and the subsequent ability to massacre their enemies with such precision and on such an enormous scale. Though, culturally, humans lay claim to human remains, the human body without active mental capacity (eg. the ability to act with intent) cannot qualify as predominantly "human" but rather shades into the "nonhuman" when it loses this ability; therefore, the disruption of a grave – with the exclusion of possible live burials – is a disruption of the nonhuman.

Critiquing the Human through Nonhuman Association

While the agency of the predominantly nonhuman in the form of topography and meteorology is expressed through its omnipresence and inevitability, other kinds of nonhuman actors express their power and agency through mobility and adaptability. For instance, rats, horses, dogs, and lice are all more obviously active agents. In Part III, there is an interesting distinction drawn between domesticated animals like horses and dogs and undomesticated rats. It is important to note that domesticated animals, especially horses, have been linked to warfare for thousands of years and have, therefore been frequently explored in the context of warfare and literature (Hediger 5); undomesticated animals, however, seem more tangential in their relationship to warfare. Physical horses feature four times in Part III of *Death of a Hero* and only once is the horse alive;[22] moreover, every other reference likens dead horses to dead soldiers.

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[22] See *Death of a Hero* pp. 264 for the brief description of Major Thorpe's horse.

Similarly, the only dog in Part III is "a large black dog [whose] owner had killed it with a bullet rather than leave it to possible ill-treatment" (Aldington 338). These intentionally domesticated animals have been slaughtered due to their proximity to human actors; rats, on the other hand, thrive organically amongst the soldiers–much to the men's dismay. Rats are "so closely linked to humans they are called domestic rodents. People supply their three basic needs: food, shelter, and water" (Indiana Dept of Health). Rats are not, however, intentionally integrated into the primarily human society; in this, they differ from dogs or horses that serve a human authorized purpose. Aldington casually acknowledges this point in his depictions of rats within the novel: Rats in *Death of a Hero* possess far more concrete cognitive and physical agency than the horses or dogs.

Rats are generally associated with large human settlements, congregating in sewers, cellars, hollow walls, and food stores. Rats represent a widespread, tangible demonstration of negative (from a human perspective) nonhuman reactions to human actions because when humans gather in settlements rats invariably follow, an occurrence that can be found across continents and time periods (Moore 252). The human action in this example is the disturbance of forested land with the construction of buildings, roads, and so on and the nonhuman reaction is the influx of rodents to feed on human stores. Additionally, the vast number of human corpses present on the Western Front – including buried among the trenches – provided a food supply resulting in very "well-fed rats" (Aldington 253). While rats possess a lesser degree of intentionality than humans and, as Merrill Moore poetically describes it, "the rat, as yet, has not become nationalized," they do provide a convenient example of "active" nonhuman agents at play (252). Unlike relatively immobile nonhuman entities such as mountains, rats possess both mobility and a degree of intentionality that sets them apart from other nonhuman elements like

topography. While categorized as primarily nonhuman, rats possess a near human level ability to wage "ferocious war," demonstrating the fragility of the border between human and nonhuman (Moore 252).

Rats also link the chaotic, ramshackle human settlements along the Western Front and culturally "superior" urban centres like London. In Part II of *Death of a Hero*, Aldington's unnamed narrator embarks on a brief, sharply Modernist, cultural critique comparing men to rats. He writes:

> Yet why should we mourn, O Zeus, and why should we laugh? Why weep, why mock? What is a generation of men that we should mourn for it? As leaves, as leaves, says the poet, spring, bourgeon, and fall the generations of Man—No! but as rats in the rolling ship of the Earth as she plunged through the roar of the stars to the inevitable doom. And like rats we pullulate, and like rats we scramble for greasy prey, and like rats we fight and murder our kin. . . . And—O gigantic mirth!—the voice of the Thomiste is heard! (136-137)

The comparison of humans to rats, while certainly an effective cultural critique, also finds footing in the social structures of both creatures. *Rats, Lice, and History* makes the claim that "both [rats and humans] fight bravely alone but know how to organize armies and fight in hordes when necessary" (Moore 252). However, in this quotation, rats do not function as nonhuman actors but rather as an anthropomorphized emblem of dirt. And as the heavily ironic title implies, *Death of a Hero* mocks the concept of warfare and piercingly criticizes the human actors who bring it about. By comparing the soldiers to rats, Aldington condemns the soldiers as repulsive creatures.

Aldington's narrator also describes how George in the trenches: "felt a degradation, a humiliation, in the dirt, the lice, the communal life in holes and ruins, the innumerable deprivations and hardships," a humiliation that he carries home to England underneath his nails as well (261; 317). Lice, dirt, and rats – all associated with filth – are the cost of infiltrating the nonhuman. These beings do not possess an inherent negative connotation, but the Western conceptualization of dirt and dirtiness is that of "craven fear," as it alludes to both disorder and impurity (Douglas 2; 5). George's humiliation is rooted in social mores as much as the physical discomfort of his bodily reality.

Death of the Binary through Human Decomposition

The human body is intimately imbricated with the nonhuman, from shifting dirt with a step to expelling carbon dioxide with each breath. The "body" part of the human is principally closer to the nonhuman throughout its animated life; as Marland argues, the "mind" and degree of intentionality are what distinguishes the human (852). Kohn offers an alternative understanding of thought (as mental ability) by proposing that "all living beings, and not just humans, think" (72). This statement establishes a graduated scale of mental capacity: all human and nonhuman entities possess agency, the living nonhuman (zoological and botanical) possesses the capacity to think, and humans employ "symbolic reference [which] is distinctively human" (133), and which implies (from an anthropocentric perspective) that the human possesses a more developed ability for thought. Sullivan and Phillips present human bodies as "agents and as small-scale, mobile environments in their own right" reinforcing the idea that the body is heavily infiltrated by the nonhuman and, therefore, the human and nonhuman are far less distinguishable than humans tend to believe (446). The entanglement and inherent interconnectedness of the

human and nonhuman are an integral tenet of Material Ecocriticism but it is worth exploring the limits of an object's categorization as chiefly human or nonhuman, as I touch upon above in my discussion of corpses. From an anthropocentric perspective, No Man's Land is the territory that has not yet been won by either side in battle, but this name – a place owned/populated by no man – also invites a nonhuman element. Does the title "No Man's Land" suit the territory because it is more populated by bodies than humans?[23] Perhaps this location is where human bodies have returned to the nonhuman through their decomposition and eventual disappearance?

While Sullivan and Phillips acknowledge the environment the body creates while alive, this environment is perhaps even more influential during decomposition. The live human body supports microorganisms, but the decomposing human body can support a huge host of small and large organisms from rats to fungi and more. The problem is that Western societies "idealistically treat [the dead human body] as a singular, stable object rather than acknowledging what it really [is]—a messy collection of organic material steadily advancing through the process of rotting" (MacNeill Miller 384). John MacNeill Miller recognizes decomposition – or rot as he describes it – as a transformative process which gives the human body over to the nonhuman world to be broken down. From this perspective, the human body does shift from a position of consciousness and intentionality (categorized as mostly human) to a more anchored agency (mostly nonhuman) when it loses its "mind" in death. The idea of No Man's Land then perhaps represents this shift from life to death and human to nonhuman.

George's melancholy increases as he becomes embedded in the Western Front and the English countryside of his romanticized childhood fades away, but perhaps it is the opposition to

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[23] J. Howard Randerson links many negative ideas to No Man's Land but generally interprets the term as referring to "a place unfit to live in" (12). Randerson, a former United States Army veteran converted the idea of "an island in Lake Champlain near Westport, New York, called No Man's Island" to refer to the overly claimed lands of Belgium, France, and Germany in the First World War (6).

the nonhuman that brings about his melancholy rather than the nonhuman surroundings growing (or shrinking) to meet his moods. As this argument has hammered home, the human cannot escape the nonhuman as the two are intrinsically linked, but some elements of the nonhuman are more appealing to humans while others have attributed negative connotations from a cultural/social perspective. For example, there is a cultural difference between dirtiness and dirt itself because "our idea of dirt is compounded by two things, care for hygiene and respect for conventions" (Douglas 7). Dirt, as soil, is not an inherently bad thing but dirtiness, as uncleanness, has been culturally designated as a negative state. For George, dirt goes from a beautiful thing:

> George opened the window and leaned out. The heavy, dank smell of wet earth-mould came up to him with its stifling hyacinth-like quality; the rain-drenched privet was almost over-sweet; the young poplar leaves twinkled and trembled in the last gusts, shaking down rapid chains of diamonds. (Aldington 60)

To an unhygienic, traumatic reminder of his impending doom after his relocation to the Western Front:

> Winterbourne washed, and worked desperately hard with a nail-brush to get out the dirt deeply and apparently ineradicably engrained in his roughened hands. He got a little more off, but his fingers were still striated with lines of dirt which made them look coarse and horrible. (Aldington 317)

Perhaps this drastic shift in his conceptualization of dirt and interaction with the nonhuman is what brings about George's melancholy rather than vice versa. If the tenets of Material Ecocriticism as they determine the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman realities are to be believed, then inverting the concept of pathetic fallacy seems quite palatable. Perhaps it is the

nonhuman experience – destruction, displacement, and decay – that is reflected in George just as its fresher and wilder experiences were demonstrated in his childhood peace and passion.

The idea that the primarily nonhuman – "nature" as it is referenced in the following text – is redemptive and provides solace to the weary or wounded separates human from nonhuman in a way that reduces the latter to situation rather than vital matter. Samantha Walton's "Nature Trauma: Ecology and the Returning Soldier in First World War English and Scottish Fiction, 1918–1932" explores "how interwar writers understood trauma's impact on their characters' connections with the natural world and sought more sophisticated and ecologically grounded ways of depicting the difficulties of returning to rural environments and reconnecting with known and natural places" (3). The issue with this approach lies in the assumption that "the degraded environments of battlefields and trenches characterised by mud, filth, decaying human and animal matter, and the obliteration of plant life" are not representative of "nature" (nonhuman) (Walton 5). While European terrain and its botanical and zoological features were disturbed by the First World War (Nalewicki), the area was by no means emptied of nonhuman entities. Mud, dirt, and even the bloated carcasses of war horses remain firmly in the camp of nonhuman matter regardless of their dirtiness or impurity (Douglas 41). Therefore, returning to urban London or even rural Hamborough is not a return to "nature" but simply a shift from one primarily nonhuman experience to another, different experience; human preference may classify the rural countryside as more pleasing, but the nonhuman is intertwined with every human experience regardless of its level of industrialization.

Upon his call to arms, George acknowledges his fate and gives in to nihilistic thought. On the surface, the nonhuman facets of the Western Front in *Death of a Hero* mirror George's melancholy and despair in an exemplary execution of pathetic fallacy, but a Material Ecocritical

reading allows for the analysis that it is George and his platoon that are pushing against the nonhuman and falling deeper into despondency with each failure. His nihilist spiral is not lost on the narrator or other characters in the novel with Fannie and Elizabeth noting "what was rare and beautiful in him is as much dead now as if he were lying under the ground in France" (Aldington 204). Committing wholeheartedly to his human agenda, at the cost of alienation from the nonhuman, brings about George's downfall. The trenches themselves operate as a sort of metaphor for George's neglect of the nonhuman; he continues to displace it, shoveling dirt and mud from his grimy hole, until more rain falls, and the temperature drops and his hole becomes an uninhabitable place and must be returned to the nonhuman, peacefully or, as George chooses, violently.

No Man's Land as the Ultimate Entanglement

The highly contested border between France and Germany is not based on any clear topographical (nonhuman) shift; instead, it is a human declaration that distinguishes one side from the other. By setting George's violent death in the disputed No Man's Land, Aldington removes his singular national identity. No Man's Land, though claimed by German, French, Belgian, and British forces, represents no singular location or country; in this same way, George dies not solely of his own volition but simultaneously at the hand of a German gunner. No Man's Land, in this sense, is the ultimate entanglement – the human and nonhuman weigh heavily upon the land through the transitionary assemblage from life to death while both Allied and Central Powers lay claim to the nonhuman terrain.

Aldington's ironic depictions of pastoral/topographical nationalism in *Death of a Hero* operate as a cultural critique of national boundaries and other markers of national identity. For example, the

German trenches are indistinguishable from the Allied side because the terrain has not changed

across the national border (Aldington 251); the literal landscape – in a tangible, topographical

sense – does not change when George steps across the Franco-German border, but rather his

human conceptualization requires a shift in understanding. The shifts in elevation between

northern and southern Germany are, in fact, more distinct than those of the French and German

sides of the coastal plain (NYPL). And given the unstable nature of these Western European

national boundaries, altered borders present an interesting albeit convoluted question. A large

section of land on the northeastern Franco-German border had been "won" by the German forces

and occupied for many years but was ultimately "returned" to the French (see Figure 1). *Death of

a Hero* engages with this historical reality when George and his cohort encounter "inhabited

villages, which had been held by the Germans for over four years" (Aldington 337).

Interestingly, these inhabitants remain French nationals and, therefore, not enemy civilians. The

Franco-German border of No Man's Land is entirely human-conceived and can, therefore, be

disrupted while borders that are based on primarily nonhuman topographical features are more

visible and rigid in their boundaries.

Figure 1. From H.G. Wells' *The Outline of History.*

No Man's Land, as a temporary, contested border between France and Germany, is an ever-challenged, purely human conceived idea. While the title implies a closer link to nonhuman claims to the land, Aldington's conceptualization of No Man's Land is actually almost exclusively human:

> By day the whole landscape was covered with the debris left by the broken German armies. Smashed tanks, guns with their wheels broken, stood out like fixed wrecks in the unmoving ocean of shell-holes. The whole earth seemed a litter of overcoats, shaggy leather packs, rifles, water-bottles, gas-masks, steel helmets, bombs, entrenching tools, cast away in the panic of flight. By night the sky glowed with the flames of burning Cambrai, with the black hump of Bourlon Hill silhouetted against them. (336-337)

Present, though overlooked, in this excerpt are the elements of the nonhuman which were also affected by the warfare. Firstly, the geophysical shift from day to night is acknowledged in the manner in which the carnage can be seen. The destruction of the terrain is also evident in the shell-holes, as the holes are only visible in the newly uneven topography. Furthermore, the terrain is acknowledged in its concealment by human wreckage and the raised topography of Bourlon Hill. While Aldington (and George) does not overtly acknowledge the nonhuman disruption in No Man's Land, the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman realities in this quote can be read against the anthropocentric grain for the effects of the First World War on the nonhuman.

Chapter 2

Capitalizing on the Power of the Nonhuman in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*

Pathetic fallacy colours nearly every chapter of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Hemingway's first-person narrator, Lieutenant Fredric Henry, attributes human characteristics and national affiliations to the most mundane nonhuman elements. Upon first glance, this dismisses nonhuman power. However, through a Material Ecocritical lens, this practice actually allows for further analysis of the nonhuman ability to alter the course of human agendas. Henry's submission to the agency of mountains, rivers, and weather systems saves his life more than once, though his conscious cooperation is never overtly acknowledged. This is not to imply that the nonhuman intentionally changes course to save Henry, but rather to suggest that humans can cooperate with nonhuman agents to aid in their own strategies. *A Farewell to Arms* offers valuable insight into the cooperation possible between human and nonhuman forces when the former acknowledges the presence of the latter.

Lieutenant Fredric Henry, an American academic, joins the Italian army as an ambulance driver at the start of the First World War. He enters the fray along the Alpine Front, deep in the Alps, where he meets an English nurse, Catherine, with whom he falls in love. When the Italian army breaks away from the Allied forces, Henry, as an officer, faces violence at the hands of both Germans and Italians because of his allegiances. This conflict reaches a breaking point when Henry is pulled aside by the carabinieri for questioning and, facing death because of his military rank and nationality, dives into the Tagliamento River which carries him away. Now facing prosecution as a deserter, Henry and his pregnant lover flee across Lake Maggiore to neutral Switzerland. After several months living contentedly in the mountains, Catherine dies in

childbirth, and her baby also fails to survive. *A Farewell to Arms* engages with several forms of topographical obstacles or, in the case of Lieutenant Henry, allies. The Austrian Alps serve as the stationary, impassable border between the Allied and Central Forces and prevent full scale violence from breaking out. And two bodies of water, a river and a lake, protect Henry after he deserts from the Italian regiment with which he was previously allied. After he and Catharine successfully cross the border, the Swiss mountains shelter them from their pursuers.

Material Ecocriticism posits that the primarily human and primarily nonhuman coexist and overlap. As Serenella Iovino suggests:

Recognizing that these embodiments are material and semiotic is the first step to redrawing the maps of knowledge and practice, and to rethinking object and subject, nature and culture not as juxtaposed terms but as a circulating system. Instead of nature and culture, we should therefore talk of "natureculture," and finally question the ontological boundaries set up by our cognitive practices, (Iovino, "Theorizing" 454)

However, the concept of nonhuman *preexistence*, of the fact that some nonhuman entities pre-date the initial evolution of humans, must also be considered. Some elements of the nonhuman, such as mountains, are relatively stable; others, such as deciduous foliage, shift seasonally, or, as in the case of cloud patterns, even by the minute. The foremost immobile facets of the nonhuman have some degree of permanence, and this matters in the context of *A Farewell to Arms*, in which they feature prominently.

In this Chapter, I argue that Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* inadvertently demonstrates the power of predominantly nonhuman characters. Hemingway's narrative places a heavy emphasis on the topographical features of Northern Italy, Austria, and Switzerland – albeit only granting them supposedly supporting roles. The Alps, Lake Maggiore, and the Tagliamento

River provide Henry with escape from his many antagonists, but only because he surrenders to their preexistent power. Henry also takes advantage of meteorological features such as temperature, precipitation, climatic winds, and seasonal changes in order to protect himself. While this chapter focuses most closely on the power of primarily topographical and meteorological characters, I also consider Hemingway's use of horses. *A Farewell to Arms* deploys horses as a vessel for cultural critique and shows them to be profoundly entangled with human characters. Such an approach further undermines any semblance of human-nonhuman binary.

The Topographic and Atmospheric Obstacles of the Alpine Region

While many aspects of the nonhuman pre-date the human, it does not follow that the nonhuman is static or rigid. For instance, biological components of the nonhuman also "adapt to changing problems and opportunities in their environments" via evolution in a manner that is tangible to humans (Godfrey Smith 158), albeit on different timelines from our own. As Anna Tsing reminds us:

> Making worlds is not limited to humans… Without the ability to make workable living
> arrangements, species would die out. In the process, each organism changes everyone's
> world. Bacteria made our oxygen atmosphere, and plants help maintain it. Plants live on
> land because fungi made soil by digesting rocks. As these examples suggest, world-
> making projects can overlap, allowing room for more than one species. (Tsing 22)

Crucially, this "world-making" ability goes beyond the motile nonhuman and also applies to the more "fixed" nonhuman characters. Geological structures such as dirt, rocks, and soil, for example, shift, change, and evolve as they are "moved by elemental forces like wind and water"

(Sullivan 1). This ability to move and evolve is an inherent power rather than an anthropomorphized humanlike capability. The "mind or consciousness (shin, 心) of mountains, rivers, and earth is not aware of something besides mountains, rivers, and earth" (Wirth 9) but such entities do possess the ability to alter and be altered. The Alps, for instance, continue to move and change thanks to erosion and tectonic shifts (Fitzsimons and Veit 341). People, too, play an increasing role in altering them through, for instance, destructive practices including blasting tunnels for transport, or causing the melting of mountain glaciers through climate change.

Many depictions of mountains describe them using human traits such as "looming" or "threatening," but mountains exist both within and outside frames of human understanding. For instance, their distinct and incremental evolutionary timeline operates outside of typical human perception (Fitzsimons and Veit 344). But, tangibly, humans understand the topographical, atmospheric changes associated with mountains – higher altitudes, more snow, colder weather – and observe readily visible phenomena such as rock slides. In addition, mountains exist in complicated assemblages with humans. For example, many biological actors have evolved to live specifically within mountain landscapes; certain mushrooms, like the matsutake Anna Tsing focuses on, are only found in these locales (13), and some humans have even evolved differently to suit mountain climates, genetically influenced by topography and atmospheric distinctions (Kohn 44). The interconnected nature of these relationships further reinforces the entanglement posited by Material Ecocriticism, and the multiplicity of human/nonhuman configurations.

The varied forms of assemblage are also illuminating in the context of the fictionalized bodies of water in *A Farewell to Arms*. In their chapter in the edited collection *Thinking with Water*, Mielle Chandler and Astrida Neimanis introduce the idea of 'gestationality.' Their

concept further complicates the parameters of nonhuman power and reasserts water's ability to change (62). Chandler and Mielle assert that water is capable of being both mobile and static, finite and infinite, and (theoretically) "defies the either/or structure of activity and passivity; it is neither active nor passive, and yet both active and passive" (Chandler and Neimanis 62). Revisiting a core tenet of Material Ecocritical theory, the inherent coexistence of matter and meaning, this idea of water's gestationality can be taken a step further, to encompass the nonhuman capacity to alter or "organize itself in auto-regulated patterns" (Iovino, "Theorizing" 450). In *A Farewell to Arms*, water takes on many forms and changes itself dramatically from stream to river to lake. So, while the nonhuman substance of water exists long before Lieutenant Henry, it too is not static.

The issue of temporality is important when conceptualizing primarily human and nonhuman capacities for change, because humans and nonhumans can perceive and implement time quite differently. As human timelines shift during cultural upheavals such as the First World War, primarily nonhuman timelines also operate at different paces depending on internal and external influences. As previously acknowledged, the nonhuman transforms continually but it does so on countless different temporal scales (including ones that have sped up since the Great Acceleration commenced). For example, the transformation of dirt to mud is nearly instantaneous compared to the opposite shift from dirt to dust; and, after centuries of relative stability, mountain glaciers are now in more rapid retreat because of climate change. Therefore, the preexistence of the nonhuman, and mountains in particular, does not imply absolute unchangeability but rather different temporal modes to human ones. The Alps may shrink by a fraction of an inch during Henry's entire lifetime, but they are evolving on their own schedule.

Throughout his time along the Alpine Front, Henry is confronted with the nonhuman in the form of the Austrian Alps. These mountains provide perhaps the most tangible representation of nonhuman power in the novel as they operate as an obstacle to human pursuits. *A Farewell to Arms* opens with a reference to the Alps: "in the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains" (Hemingway 11). Intentionally or not, Hemingway immediately acknowledges influential nonhuman characters of the story before even introducing his protagonist, Lieutenant Frederic Henry. Throughout the text, Henry reiterates the power of the Alps, an impassable nonhuman barrier:

> I meant tactically speaking in a war where there was some movement a succession of mountains were nothing to hold as a line because it was too easy to turn them. You should have possible mobility and a mountain is not very mobile. Also, people always over-shoot downhill. If the flank were turned, the best men would be left on the highest mountains. I did not believe in a war in mountains. I had thought about it a lot, I said. You pinched off one mountain and they pinched off another but when something really started everyone had to get down off the mountains. (Hemingway 195)

The line "I did not believe in a war in mountains" indicates a clear acceptance of the power of topography and Henry explains the changes humans must make to accommodate the nonhuman. But the power of the Alps is not limited to preventing violence in close quarters; the mountain range has already been established as a "natural" obstacle to human settlement, as Henry notes that the towns are not in the mountains either (Hemingway 24). In this instance, unlike many others, the human players have acknowledged and accepted the impossibility of altering the nonhuman (Alps) to suit their agendas; instead, people, including the Italian and Austrian forces, are compelled to work (and fight) around the mountains.

The physical terrain of mountain ranges varies between altitudes and each elevation presents its own obstacles to human endeavours. The nonhuman characters associated with the Alps whose agendas affect the human ones around them are as large as individual mountains and as small as particles of dirt or mud. During the fictional retelling of the Italian retreat of 1917, Henry and his compatriots face friendly fire on an embankment; Henry's life is saved by his slipping in the mud on a steep incline (Hemingway 226). His fellow soldier, Aymo, whose footing is more solid, is killed by two bullet wounds while Piani, and Bonello barely escape. An anthropomorphic reading might see this mud as a convenient safety device, but Hemingway's narrative actually clarifies that this muddy terrain had a legitimate cause. Firstly, the scene takes place in the Alpine Region, characterized by its "steep valley slopes" (Fitzsimons and Veit 343). And in the days leading up to the shooting, Henry describes multiple vivid recollections of the rain and snow falling continuously during the retreat. Precipitation and exposed dirt create mud with or without humans to fall in it. Furthermore, it is the very same muddy terrain that places Henry and his company into the situation in which they face the embankment with guns at their backs (Hemingway 218). The muddy terrain does not appear to suit Henry's agenda but rather appears as a direct consequence of the seemingly endless rainfall in this specific, mountainous location.

Topographic Justifications of National Borders

Throughout the First World War, national borders entered a state of flux. The Italy-Austria border, like the France-Germany border of Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero,* originally followed the nonhuman structures of the region, running along the Alps. However, it shifted during the conflict of World War I. Many human designated borders follow topographical

features during peace times, but war provides the opportunity to push back against nonhuman

structures that create so-called natural borders. That said, while mountain ravines and fastmoving

rivers can be meditated by human-constructed bridges, their power remains evident in the

impermanence of such structures. In *A Farewell to Arms*, the only means through which the

Italian and Austrian forces could confront one another were the mountain passes which provided

a brief reprieve from the impassable Alps. Scattered throughout the region, these passes initially

facilitated the Italians' northward progression, but the very same nonhuman features allowed the

armies of the Central Powers to regain the area (see Figure 2). As Henry so aptly points out in his

statement about mountain warfare, in order to make progress toward peace "everyone had to get

down off the mountains" (Hemingway 195).
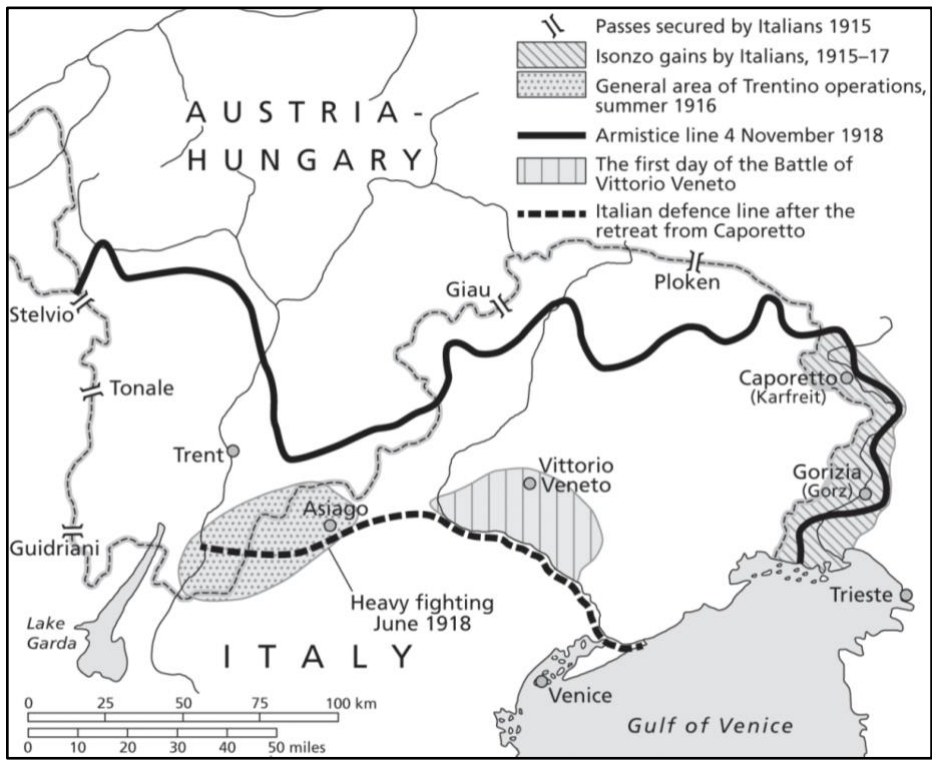

Figure 2. From Nicola Labanca's *The War in Italy 1915-18.*

The violence on the Alpine Front during World War I, and the topographical devastation

wrought by detonating mortars, re-routing roads, and other human actions, was exacerbated by

the fact the violence occurred amidst the isolated and uneven terrain of a mountain range. When Henry is hit by a mortar shell, his location high in the Alps creates an additional obstacle to his recovery: "as the ambulance climbed along the road, it was slow in the traffic, sometimes it stopped, sometimes it backed on a turn, then finally it climbed quite fast" (Hemingway 71). While Hemingway provides many examples of Henry's dislike of mountain warfare, he also provides more subtle examples of the ways in which daily life is harder in the mountains. For example, when Henry flees to Switzerland, he takes refuge in a small mountain town where the snow becomes hazardous on the steep mountain paths (Hemingway 305). But rather than altering the terrain with cobbled roads or leveling the grade of the mountain, the local people give Henry and Catherine "hobnailed boots" in a manner that changes the primarily human to suit the nonhuman.

While the primarily nonhuman power to affect human endeavours is subtly acknowledged throughout the novel, Hemingway invariably focuses predominantly on the human rather than the nonhuman. Interestingly, the human settlements through which Henry travels throughout Italy and Switzerland are named and situated within the context of human-drawn borders, but the river and lake that he employs as vital escape routes remain unnamed. With the use of a map, locating these bodies of water and determining their (human assigned) names is quite simple: Henry dives into the Tagliamento River and rows across Lake Maggiore (Hemingway 239; 280). From a Material Ecocritical perspective, the features, in their textual namelessness, are independent of human naming conventions, a stylistic choice that evokes the Modernist "dehumanization of art" (Bradbury and McFarlane 26), yet still recognized as powerful entities.

Both the Tagliamento River and Lake Maggiore have operated as human borders due to their power as topographical obstacles. During the First World War, the Italian military fortified the border with Austria-Hungary along strategic topographical lines "start[ing] in the mountains, proceed[ing] along the hills of Friuli, following the course of the Tagliamento to the sea" (Chiara Lai 5). Lake Maggiore serves as a boundary between Italy on the southern coast and Switzerland to the north. The lake provides safety in two forms; from a purely topographical perspective, the size of Lake Maggiore and its open water makes it difficult for humans to traverse, while its human designated status as a border provides shaky security in its different national coasts. The fact that the Tagliamento River and Lake Maggiore were chosen as national borders during the War is a clear acknowledgement of their power as topographical obstacles. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway also acknowledges their innate power through his depictions of Henry's escapes.

In both escapes, Henry must concede to the power of the body of water he enters. When he dives into the Tagliamento River, Henry only has one option for survival – to literally go with the flow (Hemingway 239). Henry directly acknowledges this power while in the river: "even with my momentum and swimming as hard as I could, the current was taking me away" (Hemingway 241). In order to survive, he gives in to the preexisting nonhuman agenda. On Lake Maggiore, Henry must similarly work with wind that moves across the lake as consistently as the current of the Tagliamento. The barman who lends his boat to Henry tells him to "go with the wind" because the "wind will blow like this for three days. It comes straight down from the [mountain]" (Hemingway 285). By utilizing the wind, Henry is able to avoid rowing constantly and makes it to safety much more quickly (Hemingway 286). By writing Henry's escape in this manner, Hemingway implicitly acknowledges the power of the topographic elements – the lake

itself and the mountains that create the climatic wind conditions. Even though human borders shift during war, the nonhuman features that create physical borders can prevail.

Exerting Nonhuman Power over Human Identity

As I noted at the outset of this chapter, pathetic fallacy predominates in *A Farewell to Arms*. Many of the overt descriptions of the nonhuman explicitly aim to elucidate human-centred experiences by linking human emotions and atmospheric/meteorological changes. Hemingway uses the weather and temperature to create an anthropocentric "falseness," to use John Ruskin's term (Ruskin 202), but his approach also embodies Evernden's emphasis on "sense of place" and the "relation of self to setting" (Evernden 19). While Ruskin posits that certain colours or features of a work of art inspire distinct emotions because of the false human belief that the nonhuman will accommodate emotions, Evernden takes this a step further to claim that the falseness of pathetic fallacy comes more from the desire to know and belong to the landscape of a text (19). This desire to belong and the human perceived link to the primarily nonhuman can be articulated as nationalism/patriotism expressed through nonhuman features – a Green Modern pastoralism of sorts. For example, one of Henry's fellow ambulance drivers, Gino, adeptly demonstrates the idea of human identity linked to a specific region when he states "I am a patriot…but I cannot love Brindisi or Taranto," implying that he identifies as Italian and specifically northern Italian, which he deems superior to being from the south (Hemingway 196). Gino attributes this northern superiority to "the soil [being] sacred" which, in turn, clarifies that the regional human-established superiority is based on topographical nonhuman expression – northern versus southern soil composition. Soil is "a hybrid of organic and inorganic matter" (Sullivan 2) which is, indeed, place based and varies depending on its location and local

contributors. Gino's patriotism is based in his regional identity, therefore linking his individual sense of superiority with his affinity for a particular nonhuman expression.

In a manner similar to linking human identity to the nonhuman through pastoral-based patriotism, human emotion is connected to nonhuman meteorological elements. Hemingway starts many of the chapters in *A Farewell to Arms* by establishing the time of day, weather, season, and/or location before switching focus to the human-centred narrative. For instance, the first page of Book III opens: "now in the fall the trees were all bare and the roads were muddy" (Hemingway 175). Pathetic fallacy is generally understood as a reductive rhetorical device that reduces the nonhuman to an anthropomorphized background feature and Hemingway certainly uses pathetic fallacy in this way; in the example I just quoted, the bare trees signal a trend of setbacks and hardships in the war rather than the onset of autumn. However, pathetic fallacy may actually lean so far into its anthropomorphism that it inverts the traditional device; rather than the weather changing to mirror Henry's mood, for instance, *A Farewell to Arms* could be interpreted as actually foregrounding the weather's importance before that of Henry's feelings. This introduces the concept of inverse pathetic fallacy, which prompts us to ask if the weather/season changes to suit Hemingway's narrative or if Hemingway's narrative follows the nonhuman example. In some instances, Hemingway directly demonstrates this inversion, such as when Catherine's tears are brought on by the rain (Hemingway 136), rather than the rain being used to represent her human emotion of sadness (Ramazani 580).

While some of the chapter introductions in *A Farewell to Arms* seem to demonstrate inverse pathetic fallacy, authorial motive cannot be conclusively determined. Assuming that Hemingway intended to leave behind pathetic fallacy and embrace the nonhuman is as problematic as concluding that he intended to fully employ the rhetorical device of having the

nonhuman mirror human emotion/energy: neither is stated explicitly. While definitive authorial intention is unattainable in this circumstance, reading for the nonhuman can provide alternative interpretations of traditional uses of pathetic fallacy. Perhaps, the overlap between the two perspectives actually provides additional fodder for the argument of nonhuman agential endowment. In this vein, if Hemingway sought to convey emotions in his novel through nonhuman correlatives, then, on some conscious or subconscious level, he had to acknowledge the power of such characterization.[24] If pathetic fallacy is a generally accepted concept and we are bold enough to assume that Hemingway meant to communicate Catherine's sadness with her tears, along with her fear of the ongoing rain, then the leap to rain being a powerful literary device is not too far (Hemingway 136). And by acknowledging the rain's power as a rhetorical device, we are, in part, acknowledging its power as an idea and reality.

Notwithstanding Hemingway's possible anthropomorphism, *A Farewell to Arms* recognizes the power of preexisting and motile nonhuman elements. The Alps cast a shadow on the Alpine Front, towering above the human soldiers in their impassable might and affecting the weather through their sheer height and gradient. It does not rain on the day in 1917 because Henry is forced to abscond from his fellow soldiers, but rather because of his location and the associated meteorological and geophysical reasons beyond his control. Lakes and mountains both affect climate and rainfall through their mass and residual temperatures so Lake Maggiore and/or the Italian Alps could create the rain and wind that shield Henry. Furthermore, the meteorological season in which the events occur is associated with harsh (to humans) weather, like the crucial rainstorm. Hemingway reveals this seasonal inclination by writing "the [tourist] season had been over a long time and no one met the train" (258), which implies that colder

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[24] This interpretation requires Hemingway to be allocated a poet of Ruskin's second rank: a man who feels. Ruskin 209

weather and unwanted precipitation would occur regularly in this location at this time of year. In this way, Henry's unique geophysical location aids in his escape.

While Hemingway's descriptions of pure spring and golden summer seem to be indisputable demonstrations of pathetic fallacy, his depiction of the winter in Switzerland goes against traditional personifications of the seasons. As Ramazani suggests, "Traditionally, nature reflects the changes in the dead person (autumn or winter, then spring) and in the mourner's grief (Milton's mournful vines, then fresh woods). Both the theological and the seasonal tropes are anthropomorphic, projecting the human onto the natural" (Ramazani 577). In contrast to this popular expression of pathetic fallacy, Henry and Catherine are happy and warm in the Swiss mountains all winter regardless of the weather swirling around them.

> We had a fine life. We lived through the months of January and February and the winter was very fine and we were very happy. There had been short thaws when the wind blew warm and the snow softened and the air felt like spring, but always the clear hard cold had come again and the winter had returned. In March came the first break in the winter.
>
> (Hemingway 322)

For Henry and Catherine, the cold mountain winters provide solace, safety, and love rather than melancholy. This seasonal emotional juxtaposition serves to further question the possibility that Hemingway's nonhuman depictions merely serve as conveyors of human emotion. The final section of *A Farewell to Arms* pushes back against the traditional depictions of the nonhuman as pathetic fallacy. Even though Henry walks away from the scene of Catherine's death in the rain – an almost comically common use of pathetic fallacy at this point (Ramazani 580) – the rest of the novel has solidified the notion that rain is not inherently a harbinger of negative emotions but simply a peripheral nonhuman occurrence.

Outside of the closing scene of *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway scorns established conventional associations between meteorological events and human emotions. In the novel, winter is a happy, safe time for Henry and Catherine (322) while the summer features heavy violence including Henry's severe injury on the front (64-65). This inversion of conventional expressions of pathetic fallacy serves a dual purpose in this analysis:[25] it demonstrates the war-induced nihilism through a human-nonhuman disconnect as well as reinforcing the idea that primarily nonhuman actions are ubiquitous. The human-induced atrocities of the war – mass violence, death, and emotional volatility – run destructively through each season regardless of the meteorological changes and their effects. And, regardless of the massive predominantly human conflict, the nonhuman maintains its meteorological timetable. By upsetting this traditional correlation, Hemingway simultaneously acknowledges the nonhuman ability and critiques the processes of human-waged warfare.

A Cultural Critique through Horse-Human Assemblage

While Hemingway avoids directly acknowledging the agency of the topographical or meteorological elements of the primarily nonhuman in *A Farewell to Arms*, he does seem to assign them a power of sorts in their importance to the plot. The Alps protect Lieutenant Henry from direct conflict with the Austrian forces and the Tagliamento River and Lake Maggiore protect him from the carabinieri; these topographical features and their subsequent meteorological influence – the climatic winds and seasonal precipitation which provide cover for Henry's flight – play an integral role within the narrative. These nonhuman entities are also

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[25] The aforementioned inversion of pathetic fallacy is an example of Modernist abstraction of reality and disestablishment of traditional notions of society. Other famous Modernists invert conventional projections of human emotion in a similar manner (Bradbury and McFarlane 27), such as T.S. Eliot's "April is the cruelest month" in "The Waste Land" or Virginia Woolf's chapter "Time Passes" in *To The Lighthouse*.

frequently depicted as separate from the human players – mostly as secondary characters in order to establish the setting of the novel. The placement of rivers or mountains is usually provided in order to demonstrate their value to ongoing human affairs. For instance, we are told: "the attack would cross the river up above the narrow gorge and spread up the hillside. The posts for the cars would have to be as near the river as they could get and keep covered" (Hemingway 25). In this excerpt, the river and hillside are only important in their ability to shield the Italians. The biological (specifically zoological) element of Hemingway's novel is, however, not afforded the same shrouded acknowledgement or physical interaction with the plot; instead, the horses in Hemingway's novel are used for overt cultural critique of society.

For Hemingway, horses are always linked directly to their human counterparts both literally and physically. And unlike Aldington's "contorted bodies of dead [war] horses" (336), Hemingway's horses are very much alive, separate from the conflict, and typically operate as a vessel for his cultural critique through their attachment to human characters. In *A Farewell to Arms*, horses are quite literally linked to the primarily human through reins, carts, carriages, and saddles, as well as being figuratively connected through their appearances during Henry's experiences in large groups of people. In "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," Haraway defines a cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (151), and with Haraway in mind, Nyman claims that "humans and horses share a world and construct joint identities, *become* together" (407). This becoming together – or assemblage – is most tangible in the physical connection between horses and humans through their reins. The idea that horses can only be associated with the primarily human is problematic not only because it removes the agency of horses, but also because it plays into the idea of an either/or scenario for

biological entities. By removing the either/or nature of the human-nonhuman relationship, horses can simultaneously fall into the primarily nonhuman category and, through their proximity, lean more toward the human category than rain, for example. Rejecting this binary is perhaps the most central argument of Material Ecocritics (Marland 855).

In the Western world, horses are rarely found without humans, and, concomitantly, horses were frequently used in the war effort (Hediger 179). The domestication of horses seems to deepen the relationship between horses and humans and create symbiosis. This aligns with the idea of multispecies assemblage:

> The question of how the varied species in a species assemblage influence each other—if at all—is never settled: some thwart (or eat) each other; others work together to make life possible; still others just happen to find themselves in the same place. Assemblages are open-ended gatherings. They allow us to ask about communal effects without assuming them. (Tsing 22-23)

Domestication is a form of assemblage; it implies that the relationship between horses and humans is mutually beneficial, something Tsing asserts is an integral part of the multispecies world (22). The frequent association of horses and humans in *A Farewell to Arms* does not, therefore, negate horses' position as predominantly nonhuman, but rather helps to eliminate any semblance of human-nonhuman binary as they are so entangled with human characters.

Recent explorations of horse-human interaction suggest that the "boundary between humans and horses is flexible" (Nyman 405). In discussing Gillian Mears's *Foal's Bread* (2011) Nyman claims that this indistinct boundary between horses and the primarily human:

> Promotes a new way of thinking about the connection between humans and the natural world, especially horses, as it endorses a perspective that seeks to rethink interspecies

relations. In so doing it both inserts humans into their natural contexts of land and

landscape, making them inseparable from it, and reconstructs the text as a form of nature.

(409)

While Nyman is exploring a much more recent novel, the application of Material Ecocriticism's

intertwinement of humans and horses as an element of the predominantly nonhuman is

incredibly valuable in exploring Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) because of its specific

focus on the horse-human relationship. Furthermore, Nyman directly positions horses as a

member of the primarily nonhuman category but simultaneously acknowledges intertwinement

with humans as an inherent facet of modern equines (407).

My claim that horse-human assemblages help further social critique in *A Farewell to

Arms* is supported by the descriptions of horse racing in chapters 20 and 21. The extravagance of

the horse races is juxtaposed with the horrors of the ongoing war as both Lieutenant Henry and

Cromwell Rodgers are only able to attend the events because of their life-threatening injuries

(Hemingway 138). Furthermore, the events are sandwiched between two outbreaks of conflict in

the text clarifying that the war is ongoing elsewhere in Italy outside of San Siro. To reinforce the

wartime placement of this event – and to situate it within his cultural critique – Hemingway goes

on to write: "the horses were a terrible lot but they were all the horses we had" (138).

Hemingway takes this juxtaposition a step further with the description of the event:

> There were many carriages going into the race track and the men at the gate let us in
>
> without cards because we were in uniform. We left the carriage, bought programmes, and
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> walked across the infield and then across the smooth thick turf of the course to the
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> paddock. The grandstands were old and made of wood and the betting booths were under
>
> the stands and in a row out near the stables. There was a crowd of soldiers along the

fence in the infield. The paddock was fairly well filled with people and they were

walking the horses around in a ring under the trees behind the grandstand. (Hemingway

138)

The "rich green farms" and "smooth thick turf of the course" placed against the "overgrown

gardens… with dust on the leaves" and the "crowd of soldiers along the fence in the infield" all

within the same image (138). These races are forced to a stumbling halt by the conflict, but

others continue in Milan regardless of the violence along the front (Hemingway 144; 147). The

opulent distraction of horse racing cannot erase the encroaching conflict as "the critique of

modernity [is] informed by the memory of a nature which has been lost, polluted, neglected or

denied" (Coupe 63). By anthropomorphizing the terrain in this way, Hemingway again subtly

calls attention to the power of these nonhuman features. And while his work is firmly rooted in

Modernism, Hemingway's depictions of horses alongside wealth and opulence recall Victorian-

era stylistic choices. Fulmer notes that Victorian writers characterized horses solely through their

interactions with humans – a rhetorical approach shared by *A Farewell to Arms*; though unlike

earlier Victorian writers, Hemingway has also interjected aspects of the Great War in order to

buttress his cultural critique.

Hemingway's anthropocentric approach to his fictionalized retelling of the First World

War along the Alpine Front can be interpreted as riddled with pathetic fallacy and

anthropomorphism, but *A Farewell to Arms* simultaneously recognizes the power of the

nonhuman, and entanglements between people and other entities. Given Hemingway's literary

significance and the cultural effects of the War, *A Farewell to Arms* is an ideal subject for the

application of Material Ecocritical theories. Lieutenant Henry, unlike his British counterpart in

Death of a Hero, acknowledges the power of many different elements of the nonhuman from

large scale topographical features to fleeting weather systems. While the end of *A Farewell to Arms* is far from optimistic, Henry does walk away from his experience along the Front while George returns home in a coffin. While these narratives are set in very different locations and feature different nationalities, the most distinct difference lies in the execution of human-nonhuman interactions. As demonstrated, Henry cooperates with the nonhuman and concedes to its power while George marches determinedly into his human driven fate.

Chapter 3: For the Acknowledgement of Nonhuman Agency

Though *Death of a Hero* and *A Farewell to Arms* were conjured of similar experiences and published in the same year, the two texts offer distinctly different depictions of both the First World War at large and the nonhuman elements they feature. The previous chapters stress the value of a Material Ecocritical reading of these InterWar Modernist narratives. Analyzing these ostensibly anthropocentric works from such a standpoint, emphasizes nonhuman agency and action, entanglements between the human and nonhuman, and, ultimately, the significant dangers of acting without considering nonhuman agendas. The interconnectedness of nonhuman and human experiences is especially evident in human warfare, from the topographical boundaries that establish nations, to the active processes of human death and decomposition. The physical changes humans enacted on the nonhuman terrain of the Fronts are visible even now – mortars and trenches deeply affected the topography of the Western Front and have influenced the plant life that has grown over time (Nalewicki) – but the effects of the nonhuman on the human in these locations seem to be overlooked in contemporary scholarship (Black 2). The preceding chapters have paid particular attention to expansive and powerful nonhuman actors such as topography and meteorology in *Death of a Hero* and *A Farewell to Arm*s, but smaller nonhuman entities deserve further consideration.

Nonhuman Life in Human Death

The vast number of men killed on the Fronts during the First World War has been presented as a lesson on the need for humans to lessen their violence (Willis 470), but the reality of the fate of the bodies of those killed is somewhat unknown. Given the speed at which conflict

occurred during active combat along the highly contested Front boundaries, many fallen soldiers were left unburied or in shallow graves which would quickly be disturbed. Perhaps it is in the obscurity of decomposition that the nonhuman power in these stories can actually best be found. However, as John MacNeill Miller notes:

> Our refusal to say what rot is thus prevents us from acknowledging how it serves all members of the ecosystem, humans included. Our literary forms and critical methodologies collude in this refusal, replicating the resistance to decomposition on a grander scale. Thus a commonplace of literary theory holds that death serves as the ultimate form of closure—a point beyond which linguistic representation is impossible. (390).

MacNeill Miller goes on to sum up this falsity by writing: "the idea of a lifeless corpse is itself pure fiction… corpses undergo constant change, and they frequently teem with life" (390). When human life dies, nonhuman life can spring forward, transforming this human character into many nonhuman characters. The notion that life ends with death plagues much more than simply our literary collections and extends into our anthropocentric Western societies. Indeed, the sheer number of dead bodies littering European countrysides after the First World War would have been overwhelming without nonhuman action.

Only once does *Death of a Hero* or *A Farewell to Arms* reference this nonhuman power to transform and decompose, but death and graves predominate throughout both works (see, for example, Aldington 241; Hemingway 84). Amongst the trenches, George encounters a large rat and thinks to himself "such well-fed rats! He shuddered, thinking of what they had probably fed upon" (Aldington 253) and this quote, previously referenced in Chapter 1, operates more as a cultural critique than analysis of decomposition. Even when engaging with the idea of dead

bodies, *Death of a Hero* is barely able to touch upon the realities of millions of human bodies slowly rotting in No Man's Land. Perhaps the reason for this lies in anthropocentrism – when a human being dies, the mind disappears and only the body is left. And it is the mind – with the ability to plan in advance, a higher degree of agency, and intentional motile actions – that distinguishes the human from the primarily nonhuman (Coole and Frost 10). In death, the distinction between human and nonhuman fades to near invisibility. In the faltering human consciousness and whispers of bodily decomposition, the binary can no longer exist.

Demonstrating Nonhuman Power through Comparison

As *A Farewell to Arms* and *Death of a Hero* demonstrate, the First World War was a time of cultural upheaval and mass death the likes of which had never been seen on this scale (Saint-Amour 430). While both engage with the Modernist tenet of nihilism, *Death of a Hero* most definitely explores the experiences of death to a greater extent – which is in line with the reality of the contrasting Western and Alpine Front experiences. Throughout *Death of a Hero*, the "nature" around George appears to be dying with him – horses and dogs as well as trees and other botanical elements – highlighting the industrialization of the Western Front and its destruction of notions of pastoral purity. But in this removal of the falsified pastoral through cultural critique, other elements of the nonhuman are exposed – such as the mud, rats, and lice of *Death of a Hero*. And through these less desirable (by human standards) nonhuman features, the human-nonhuman binary is further refuted.

Given the cultural influence of these texts and authors – as novelists, War Poets, and early proponents of Modernist literature – the application of Material Ecocriticism illustrates the power of the primarily nonhuman even in the most tumultuous human conflicts. In this

illustration of nonhuman power in human turmoil, the ubiquitous nature of nonhuman actors is made evident. Topographical features, even when altered drastically by human action, return to some semblance of their previous existence, like previously level coastal plains being flooded during trench warfare, creating mudslides, and slowly re-flattening the landscape. Similarly, meteorological seasons – and the precipitation, climatic winds, and temperature fluctuations associated with each season – will shift regardless of human bloodshed or active warfare and must be acknowledged. The human actors who acknowledge these events and alter their plans accordingly, like Lt. Frederic Henry, survive the conflict while Capt. George Winterbourne who ignores the preexistent/ongoing nonhuman actions dies violently.

Death as the Literary Finale

The final Chapter of *Death of a Hero* continues to demonstrate George's image of the empty nonhuman terrain through his nihilistic, suicidal mind and his refusal to acknowledge the primarily nonhuman presence. The overtly nonhuman is almost entirely absent in the final Chapter, even "the skeleton outlines of dwarf trees, twisted by the wind" (Aldington 239), have been replaced by human constructed "acres of wooden crosses" (Aldington 327). And within the trenches, nonhuman living entities are apparently entirely absent – in place of the rats and mud, the trenches are "littered up…with paper, bully-beef tins, and fragments of food, [and] urinated in" (Aldington 331). Each mention – direct or unnamed – of the primarily nonhuman is associated with human death and debris left behind by the human processes of war. Aldington (and George) focuses predominantly on the human in this final Chapter – human death, human wreckage, and human debris – until something "break[s] in Winterbourne's head" and he suddenly commits suicide (Aldington 340). But, from a Material Ecocritical perspective, these

depictions of human produced garbage actually fall into the realm of the nonhuman, just not the living, beautiful nonhuman which humans favour.

In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic Henry watches his friends fall around him and sees death firsthand, but his most traumatic experience actually occurs in neutral Switzerland (Hemingway 349). In this novel, Hemingway's brand of Modernist expression is less focused on death and more on human hardship – Lt. Henry suffers many personal losses and physical traumas from his time on the Alpine Front. His survival of the First World War seems doubtful in several chapters of *A Farewell to Arms* and, in these sections, only the power of the nonhuman's ubiquitous agendas saves him. Henry's life hangs in the balance only once in the novel, when he is hit by a mortar on the Front (Hemingway 65), and he faces friendly fire – a further critique of the Italian militaristic involvement – three times: during the Italian retreat, during the carabinieri search, and in Stresa again at the hands of the carabinieri (Hemingway 226; 239; 280). In each of these instances in which his life is directly threatened, Henry is saved by ongoing nonhuman processes. First, his leg injuries are lessened by dirt: "there was so much dirt blown into the wound that there had not been much hemorrhage" (Hemingway 66). Then, he slips in the mud while running up a hill (226), dives into the Tagliamento River (239), and escapes in a storm across Lake Maggiore (280).

The stark comparison between Hemingway's nonhuman depictions in *A Farewell to Arms* and the ways in which his protagonist interacts with its elements and Aldington's antihero's complete focus on human debris on a human realized landscape in *Death of a Hero* demonstrates the power of the nonhuman. The extreme human violence of both fictional First World War stories is enacted in acutely different manners and, as such, the finales of the novels differ markedly. In his final, jarring chapter, Henry is very aware of the impending rain and

"watche[s] it get dark outside" – he is aware of this coming storm long before he is aware of his lover's death (Hemingway 335). Henry interacts with the nonhuman equitably – using bodies of water and meteorological events to his advantage rather than acting against them or without considering them – while Winterbourne blindly pushes his humancentric agenda forward sometimes without even noticing the nonhuman around him. This comparison between *Death of a Hero* and *A Farewell to Arms* and their depictions of the human-nonhuman relationship exposes the dangers of carrying out actions without first acknowledging and consulting the ubiquitous nonhuman.

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