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NAN SHEPHERD'S *THE LIVING MOUNTAIN* (1977): A FORERUNNER OF TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BRITISH NATURE WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Nan Shepherd (1893- 1981), a Scottish author and nature lover, entered the literary scene with her novels *Quary Wood* (1928), *The Weatherhouse* (1930) and *A Pass in the Grampians* (1933) that focused on the effects of modernity on Scottish rural life and contributed to the intellectual movement known as Scottish renaissance. However, it is because of her 1977 memoir, *The Living Mountain* that she has gained popularity in recent years. In this mountain memoir, Shepherd shares her impressions about the years she spent hiking in the Cairngorms, a national park in Scotland. *The Living Mountain* can be seen as a pioneering work for its age due to Shepherd's deep interest in the non-human animals as well as the natural elements in the mountain range, her narrative which is not centred on a human but shaped around the non-human, her sensitivity to anthropogenic ecological problems and the importance she attached to writing about her bodily sensations and emotions as well as objective observations during her hikes. The purpose of this study is to analyse *The Living Mountain* considering Shepherd's alleged non-anthropocentrism, ecological sensitivity and amalgamation of subjective response with objective observations. This study claims that Shepherd's memoir can be read as a forerunner of twenty-first century nature writing, which some ecocritics like Jason Cowley and Alexander J. B. Hampton prefer to call as "new nature writing". Twenty-first century nature writing in Britain is supposedly marked by writers' ecological awareness, their efforts to create non-anthropocentric narratives and the importance they attach to their subjective experiences in nature in addition to objective observations. This paper discusses how Shepherd managed to integrate these characteristics into her writing, which can inspire and guide the new generation writers as they tend to show a non-anthropocentric reaction to the current ecological crisis in their own ways.

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NAN SHEPHERD'IN *THE LIVING MOUNTAIN* (1977) İSİMLİ ESERİ: YİRMİ BİRİNCİ YÜZYIL BRİTANYA DOĞA YAZININ ÖNCÜSÜ

ÖZ

İskoç yazar (1893- 1981) ve doğa aşığı Nan Shepherd, İskoç Rönesansı olarak bilinen entelektüel akıma katkıda bulunan ve modernitenin İskoç kırsal yaşamındaki etkileri üzerine yazdığı *The Quary Wood* (1928), *The Weatherhouse (*1930) ve *A Pass in the Grampians* (1933) isimli romanlarıyla edebiyat sahnesine çıksa da yazarın son yıllarda kazandığı popüleritenin asıl kaynağı 1977'de basılan *The Living Mountain* isimli eseridir. Yazar, bir hatırat olarak değerlendirebileceğimiz bu eserinde, İskoç milli parkları arasında yer alan The Cairngorms dağlarında geçirdiği yıllara ilişkin izlenimlerini paylaşmaktadır. Yazarın dağda yaşayan insan dışı canlılara ve dağı oluşturan elementlere olan yoğun ilgisi, tek başına insanı odağına almayan ve insan olmayan varlıklar etrafında şekillenen anlatımı, insanın sebep olabileceği ekolojik sorunlara yönelik hassasiyeti ve dağda geçirdiği zaman boyunca objektif gözlemlerinin yanı sıra bedensel ve duygusal olarak neler hissettiğini yazmaya verdiği önem düşünüldüğünde, *The Living Mountain* kendi çağına göre öncü sayılabilecek bir doğa yazını örneğidir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, *The Living Mountain*'ı Shepherd'ın insan odaklı olmayan yaklaşımı, ekolojik hassasiyeti ve sübjektif tepkileri özelinde inceleyerek eserin 21. yüzyıl Britanya doğa yazınına yakınlığını ortaya koymaktır. Jason Cowley ve Alexander J. B. Hampton gibi bazı eleştirmenlerce "yeni doğa yazını" olarak da isimlendirilen 21. yüzyıl Britanya doğa yazınının, yazarların çevresel kriz konusunda sahip olduğu farkındalık, insan olmayan varlıklar için bir anlatı yaratma çabası ve bunu yaparken anlatılarına sübjektif deneyimlerini dâhil etmeye verdiği önemle kendi çizgisini yaratmakta olduğu iddia edilebilir. Bu çalışmada, içinde bulunduğumuz ekolojik krize insan merkezli olmayan bir şekilde tepki göstermek isteyen yeni dönem yazarlar için hem bir ilham kaynağı hem de bir rehber olarak görülebilecek bu eserinde Shepherd'ın bu çizgiyi nasıl yakaladığı tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Britanya doğa yazını, Nan Shepherd, The Living Mountain, 21. yüzyıl doğa yazını

1. INTRODUCTION

Nan Shepherd (1893- 1981) is a Scottish writer, gardener and hill-walker, in whose legacy a nature writing competition was started in the summer of 2019 to find the underrepresented voices in nature writing in Britain ("About Nan Shepherd", n.d.). Shepherd entered the literary scene in 1930s and 1940s with her novels *The Quary Wood* (1928), *The Weatherhouse (*1930) and *A Pass in the Grampians* (1933) (Peacock, n.d.). Lyall (2019) informs that with her three novels published in 1930s, in which she showed interest in the pressure of

modernity on rural communities in Scotland, Shepherd greatly contributed to Scottish cultural revival known as Scottish renaissance (para.4). However, it is *The Living Mountain* (1977) that has brough Shepherd into the forefront in recent years (Peacock, n.d., para.4). A Cambridge professor who stands among the most well-known English nature writers of the contemporary era, Robert Macfarlane (2011) points out that even though Shepherd wrote *The Living Mountain* in the closing years of the Second World War, it was not until 1977 that she could have it published (p. xiii). In this article, I would like to focus on Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*, which is her best known book today although it was neglected for years. I argue that *The Living Mountain*, which was written in the second quarter of the twentieth century, can be seen as a remarkable achievement for British nature writing at a time when it was facing recognition problems. Also, it can be claimed that *The Living Mountain* has contemporary relevance in the current state of British nature writing because of the writer's non-anthropocentric attitude, which enables her to remain attentive to the non-human world in the mountain without attaching any superiority to human. Her ecological awareness accompanied by a scientific eye and her personal response to the mountain range she was utterly in love with also add to the memoir's strength, for Shepherd seems to have resolved the subjectivity and objectivity dilemma in British nature writing, which will be detailed below. Before analysing the book in terms of the writer's non-anthropocentric stance, ecological sensitivity and merger of an objective eye with a personal response, it would be useful first to have a brief look at twentieth century nature writing in Britain to understand why *The Living Mountain* can be regarded as an achievement for its age and then consider the present state of British nature writing to appreciate why *The Living Mountain* has contemporary validity.

2. Nature writing in Twentieth Century Britain

In the twentieth century British nature writing was most of the time trivialized and the respect afforded to the genre in the Romantic and Victorian literature was long lost (Hampton, 2018, p. 1). As Macfarlane (2013) puts it, "For much of the twentieth century in the UK, writing about wildlife or the countryside was regarded with suspicion tending to contempt" (p. 166). Clark (2011) also states that in the 1980s there was a consensus in British literary criticism that "Nature was only a spurious topic in literature, that any account of the natural world in poetry embodied a mode of false consciousness, an evasion of real political issues" (p. 15). In fact, discussions around nature writing, which has a very long history dating back to Antiquity in the west and was greatly influenced by Romanticism in Britain, had appeared earlier even among Romantic poets themselves, who are known for their love of nature. For example, John Clare harshly criticized Keats for metropolitan sentimentality (Mabey, 2013, para. 1). Clare himself wrote on natural world and rural life, but he blamed Keats for idealising nature: "The descriptions of scenery are

very fine, but ... he often described nature as she appeared to his fancies and not as he would have described her had he witnessed the things he described" (as cited in Canton, 2012, p. 13). As it is seen, such romanticisation of nature was disapproved of even by a Romantic poet. In addition, Oscar Wilde's 1889 contemptuous remark about landscape appreciation is worth attention: "Nobody of any real culture ever talks nowadays about the beauty of sunset. Sunsets are quite old fashioned. To admire them is a distinct sign of provincialism of temperament" (as cited in Macfarlane, 2005, para. 11). Nature writers were, thus, derided.

One of the reasons why the genre was not welcome in the twentieth century was the attack from writers like Stella Gibbons (Hampton, 2018, p. 454). Hampton (2018) informs that Gibbons, with her comedic novel Cold Comfort Farm (1932) offered a pastiche of countryside novels by such writers as Hardy, Lawrence and Brontë (p. 454). In this book, Wilson caricaturized nature writers as "steeple-climbers in flight from the high waters of modernity" (as cited in MacFarlane, 2003, para. 3). There was also Evelyn Waugh who "skewered the plush prose of country diarists in his novel Scoop (1938) with sentences such as 'feather-footed through the plashy fen passes the questing vole'" (MacFarlane, 2013, p. 167). Such a mocking attack on nature writers has been shared by many other critics and commentators over the past seventy years (MacFarlane, 2003, para. 3). Such derisive remarks could have discouraged writers from writing about nature. Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) is also claimed to have given permission to the dismissal of pastoral writing clouding the recognition of post-pastoral literature (Stenning & Gifford, 2013, p. 1). As a frequently cited reference book, *The Country and the City* offers a comprehensive analysis about the representation of rural life in English literature with a focus on the social and economic factors that shaped people's attitude to their landscape. In this book, Williams criticizes the idyllic and stereotypical representation of rural life as opposed to the hostile representation of the urban life and claims that such an idealized representation of the rural area led the social and economic inequities and the exploitation of natural and human resource to be ignored (Johnson & Howley, 2000, pp. 146-47). Though *The Country and the City* apparently has a Marxist agenda in its approach to writing about the countryside, it might have caused question marks about nature writing due to its strongly valid arguments. After all, as Garrard (2004) underlines, Marxist criticism has challenged even British ecocritics let alone nature writers themselves (p. 48).

For decades after Gibbons and Waugh, nature writing seemed self-indulgently sentimental in its longing for oneness with the natural world (Macfarlane, 2013, p. 167). In addition to exaggerated sentimentalism, Stenning and Gifford (2013) also mention the lack of philosophical sophistication in explaining the dismissal of nature writing in the twentieth

century: "Writing about the British countryside and rural life dwindled in the mid-to-late twentieth century, perhaps due in part to critical association with sentimentalism, or a lack of philosophical sophistication, while the international and urban travel narrative produced bumper crops" (p. 1). It is possible that such claims about too much sentimentalism and too little philosophical sophistication in nature writing cast doubt on the literary quality of the books written in this field. Moreover, to Stenning and Gifford (2013), there were also some structural problems concerning the genre: "Finding a structure for a series of narratives about the external environment is problematic. It sounds the risk of sounding, to the sceptical British ear, inauthentic and stagy on the one hand, or indulgently personal and egocentric on the other" (p. 1). In fact, it appears that this is neither just a simple structural problem nor an issue of pleasing British readers. This problem could be related to the question of whether nature writing should be scientific or personal. Within the tradition of nature writing, be it in the UK or USA, there has been a divergence of view as to the objectivity of nature writers. Such clash of ideas was observed in the Romantic period, as well. Canton (2012) reminds us of the tension between John Clare and John Keats: Clare spent years wandering in his locale and attached importance to the law of observation in writing about nature, which provided him with exactitude and expertise in his depiction of nature while Keats wrote in all emotions (p. 13). Similarly, Smith informs us that writers like Jim Perrin prefer brute facts and are disturbed by the way aesthetics distort facts while there is also a tendency that opposes the endorsement of nature as an object as if it was something that we could know the true character of through science (2012, pp. 114-15). The lack of a shared attitude among the practitioners of nature writing about whether the genre should be entrusted to a scientific eye or a personal experience might have prevented its establishment in a consistent way, too.

In brief, British nature writing of the previous century has been challenged from diverse perspectives. It has been cartooned variously as reactionary ruralism or as sentimentalism for a prelapsarian age of at-one-with-natureness, and all this hostility caused nature writing to be threatened with extinction in Britain (MacFarlane, 2003, para. 3). Macfarlane (2003) notes that "Since Gibbons, it has been increasingly hard to write about 'nature' with a straight face, and to expect a serious reception in Britain" (para. 2). As a result, the public voice of the individual who attempts to interact with nature has been gradually replaced by the objective voice of the expert, which left nature writing to scientists (Hampton, 2018, p. 455). In other words, as Hampton (2018) notes, twentieth century British nature writing was shaped more by naturalists, geologists and biologists than by writers (p. 455).

Though the criticism addressed at twentieth century British nature writing sounds harsh, it is an undeniable fact that British nature writing remained weak compared to American nature writing of the same era. In

Macfarlane's (2003) view, the reason why nature writing did not flourish in Britain of the twentieth century is twofold:

> Tradition's decline might be laid at the door of the kind of selfhood that has come to predominate in Britain: an acrid mixture of the acquisitive-materialist and the secular-humanist, which regards "nature" as a commodity, in no way connected with human enterprise. It might also be linked with changing employment patterns, which mean that more people work further away from where they live and move more frequently … and there is a diminished sense of interest in any place in particular, outside one's immediate, and often temporary, domestic sphere. (para. 9)

In the interview conducted by Ramos (2012), Kerridge said that the popularity of nature writing in Britain has fluctuated throughout its long history, with a decline after the Second World War (p. 137). According to Kerridge, nature writing was popular in the inter-war period as soldiers who survived the first war turned to the love of wild nature, which resulted in the genre to be associated with war trauma (as cited in Ramos, 2012, p. 137). After the second war, however, Kerridge says the genre lost its appeal because the ideological context was marked by war-related concerns such as a desperate wish to avoid another war with Germany (as cited in Ramos, 2012, p. 137). Nature writing in Britain was obviously disrupted by the Second World War. However, the apparently fragile outlook of twentieth century British nature writing does not mean that there was no work at all that merited appreciation. According to Macfarlane (2017), J.A Baker's *The Peregrine* (1967) and Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* (1977) are examples of the twentieth century nature writing masterpieces (para. 15). Thus, it is possible to allege that such pioneering books and the conditions emerging in the twenty-first century changed the course of nature writing in Britain.

3. Contemporary Nature Writing in Britain

With the turn of the twenty-first century, a group of writers began to challenge the view that nature writing should be strictly neutral and scientific, and they have been trying to rehabilitate British nature writing in a way to re-give voice to individual experience with nature (Hampton, 2018, p. 455). Twenty-first century nature writers seem to have determined their stance in the opposition between facts and aesthetics in nature writing: They are in between just as Shepherd was. According to Smith (2012), in contemporary nature writing, neither purely scientific nor purely personal method is welcome because "The distinctions between nature and culture are more blurred, as are the shifts in perspective between subjective, intersubjective and objective" (p. 115).

Indeed, it is possible to say that twenty-first century nature writers are now confidently getting on the stage. Drawing attention to the renaissance that

nature writing has recently enjoyed in Britain, Macfarlane (2013) points at two factors: One is the disembodiment people are increasingly feeling as they are spending more and more time in air-conditioned environments, and the second is the global ecological crisis we are currently facing (p. 167). Macfarlane brings literally vital and urgent reasons to our attention in explaining why people are increasingly tending to read and write about nature. People obviously need to re/connect with nature before it is too late.

In today's Britain, best-selling works are by nature writers such as Roger Deakin, Kathleen Jamie, Richard Mabey, Helen MacDonald and Robert Macfarlane, which can be regarded as a proof that "new nature writing" is now an established trope (Hubbard & Wilkinson, 2019, p. 253). Beaufils (2018) draws attention to what she calls the return of British nature writing in the twenty-first century making a reference to the popularity of nature writing in Great Britain in numbers: "The numbers show that sales in the 'animal and wildlife' category have increased significantly, from 426,630 books sold in 2012, to 663,575 books sold in 2015" (para. 6). In addition, there are new organisations springing up like Two Ravens Press started in Isle of Lewis, Scotland in 2006 to publish books and a magazine on nature and Little Toller started in Dorset in 2008 to republish rural classics encouraging a line of new and young authors to respond to this tradition in their own way (Smith, 2013, p. 30). These developments are a sign that a new literary movement is on the way. Also, a significant number of book reviews published in some leading British newspapers such as *The Guardian* have been dedicated to nature writing. Among them, Madeleine Bunting's book review of Mark Cocker's *Crow Country* (2007) is particularly important. In this book review, Bunting (2007) highlights the fact that a counter-cultural genre which advocates patient attentiveness to what is immediately around us and which calls for reconnection with nature in an age of virtual reality is emerging (para. 5). Referring to this book review, Smith (2013) informs us that a literary movement known as "the new nature writing" began to be noticed in the popular press in 2007 (p. 5). In addition, Moran (2014) underlines that "The term 'new nature writing' entered public consciousness in Britain in the late 2000s in a series of widely discussed books and a special edition of *Granta* magazine under that title" (p. 49). It was the editor, Jason Cowley who first identified and named "new nature writing" in that 2008 special edition which covered Robert Macfarlene's *The Wild Places* (2007), Kathleen Jamie's *Findings* (2005), Mark Cocker's *Crow Country* and Richard Mabey's *Nature Cure* (2005) (Smith, 2013, p. 3). What Cowley (2008) meant by new nature writing as opposed to old nature writing was as follows:

> When we began to commission articles for this issue, we were interested less in what might be called old nature writing – by which I mean the lyrical pastoral tradition of the romantic wanderer – than in writers who approached their subject in

> heterodox and experimental ways. We also wanted the contributions to be voice-driven, narratives told in the first person, for the writer to be present in the story, if sometimes only bashfully. The best new nature writing is also an experiment in forms: the field report, the essay, the memoir, the travelogue. (p. 10)

In fact, this special edition of the British literary magazine with such an introduction is claimed to have marked the establishment of a movement that has grown exponentially (Hampton, 2018, p. 455). Smith (2013) indicates that the movement began to receive academic interest through publications in academic journals and with David Matless's paper "Nature Voices" (p. 6). Matless (2009), a professor of cultural geography reviewed Mark Cocker's *Crow Country* (2007), Roger Deakin's *Wildwood* (2006), Richard Mabey's *Beechombings* (2007) and Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places* (2007) and qualified these four books as "'Nature voices' in their speaking up for things animal, vegetable or mineral ... with reflexivity concerning past conventions of nature writing and attention to uncertain boundaries of culture and nature" (pp. 178-179). Matless (2009) claims that these works mark out a current British context drawing attention to their widespread press coverage, which could be signalling a new nature bandwagon in a time of anxiety over local and planetary futures (p. 179). Considering the works included in the special edition of *Granta*, Cowley (2008) also accentuates the anxiety felt by authors. He explains that the authors in the edition all have the feeling that we are devouring our world and humankind has left no landscape or ecosystem untouched by its members (p. 9). Thus, twenty-first century British nature writing, namely "new nature writing", is marked by a feeling of anxiety about the ecological crisis we are in as well as writers' attempt to speak up for the non-human rather than a romantic quest for a self to be found in nature. In this regard, writers seem to be turning their attention to the non-human and move away from self-centred narratives just as Shepherd did in *The Living Mountain*. In their attempt to write about the non-human nature, nature writers also seem to be challenging separations like human-non-human, subjectivity-objectivity and scientificness-literariness.

4. Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* (1977)

Although *The Living Mountain* can be read as a mountain memoir, it is not that easy to categorise it. Bell (2014) notes that "On the surface it is an attempt to explore the Cairngorms and document the experience of walking in the mountains, but it is more deeply concerned with the sense of transcendence offered to those who are attuned; travel writing, nature writing, philosophical quest – all three are interconnected in *The Living Mountain*" (Bell, 2014, p. 129). In the introduction to the book, Macfarlane (2011) also admits that *The Living Mountain* is hard to describe: "A celebratory prose-poem? Geo-poetic

quest? A place-paean? A metaphysical mash-u of Presbyterianism and the Tao? None of these descriptions quite fits the whole, though it is all of these things in part" (p. xv). Macfarlane (2011) informs us that Shepherd wrote *The Living Mountain* in the closing years of the Second World War, but she got it published in 1977 probably because she was discouraged by the novelist, Neil Gunn, who said that it would be difficult to find a publishing house willing to publish it (pp. xii-xiii). Bell (2014) indicates that "*The Living Mountain*, it seems, was too difficult a text to be assimilated into its age, not purely as a consequence of the economics of publishing, but also due to the impossibility of its very categorisation" (p. 132). However, apart from the difficulty in classifying the book, the absence of the human element in it could have caused it to be kept in the drawer. In the aftermath of a world war, a book written on a mountain range without much reference to the war except for the image of plane crashes and blackout nights might not have received appraisal. Moreover, Shepherd chose to write about the mountain itself. To be more specific, she wrote about the mountain range not because what the mountain offered to her or its human inhabitants but simply because she loved the mountains for what they were. Thus, her narrative is not self-centred. It is not even human centred. Shepherd had no expectation from the mountain unlike other people who climbed it: "The talking tribe, I find, want sensation from the mountain...They want the startling view, the horrid pinnacle...Yet, often the mountain gives itself most completely when I have no destination, when I reach nowhere in particular, but have gone out merely to be with the mountain as one visits a friend with no intention but to be with him" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 15). As can be seen from this statement, Shepherd values the mountains merely for their intrinsic value. Her selfless attitude to the mountain range is arguably one factor that makes *The Living Mountain* exceptional for its age.

Shepherd (2011) organized her book in twelve chapters, which are respectively "The Plateau", "The Recesses", "The Group", "Water", "Frost and Snow", "Air and Light", "Life: The Plants", "Life: Birds, Animals, Insects", "Life: Man", "Sleep", "The Senses" and "Being". As the titles of the first nine chapters show, Shepherd (2011) does not create a self-centred plot but rather attempts to offer narratives for diverse elements of nature without excluding human. From the way she dedicates separate chapters to the non-human, it can be inferred that she recognizes the ontological status of the mountain range including its inhabitants and the elements it hosts, which makes her narrative non-anthropocentric. From this perspective, it can be claimed that Shepherd had what Leopold (1949) called "the land ethic". Leopold's concept of land ethic is a moral code of conduct that grows out of the recognition that the relationships between people and land are intertwined ("The Land Ethic", n.d.). Leopold expands the scope of ethics to soils, waters, plants and animals, all of which he calls "land" and argues that care for people cannot be separated from care for land ("The Land Ethic", n.d.). In Leopold's

(1949) words, "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land" (p. 434).

In Chapter 8, where Shepherd gives a mention to the animals, birds and insects in the Cairngorms, she beautifully stretches the boundaries of the community. For example, she refers to golden eagles that live on the mountain not because of the feeling that the sight of eagles triggers in her but because of what the eagles simply are. While Shepherd (2011) is on the mountains, she once comes across two young boys who want to climb Ben MacDhui, the highest summit in the Cairngorms just to see a golden eagle, and it is understood from this encounter that seeing a golden eagle is a rare possibility that attracts some hikers to the hills (pp. 62-63). Different from the young hikers she ran into, Shepherd considers walking the hills as an end in itself. Seeing a rare animal or climbing the summit is not really her objective. Yet still, when she reaches a summit cairn, she sees a golden eagle rise to the sky as the wind blows. She is apparently amazed by the eagle's speed and strength in the wind and writes "The more powerful the wind the more powerful the flight of the bird... the eagle, like the moss campion, is integral to the mountain. Only here, where the wind tears across desolate marches, can it prove the utmost of its strength" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 62). The way she responds to the unexpected sight of the eagle is non-anthropocentric as she immediately realizes the eagle's interconnection with the mountain and the wind instead of mentioning how she herself felt about this experience. In her description of the encounter with the eagle, she first remains in the background and when she turns to herself, she writes "Imagination is haunted by the swiftness of the creatures that live on the mountain- eagle and peregrine falcon, red deer and mountain hare" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 64). Although she implies that she is fascinated by the swiftness of the eagle, she does not tend to romanticize the animal. She even provides a scientific explanation and points out that "The reason for their swiftness is severely practical: food is so scarce up there that only those who can more swiftly over vast stretches of ground may hope to survive" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 64). It should also be noted that Shepherd's respect for the eagle does not involve any fetishisation of the animal, for she compares a golden eagle to a moss campion, a mountain-dwelling wild flower. Apparently, in her view, both are equal parts of the mountain ecosystem though even the adjective "golden" eagle hints the privileging of this species against the others by language.

Leopold (1949) says that to be able to develop an ethical relation to land, one needs to have love, respect and admiration for it in addition to a high regard for its value, which is definitely not defined by the economic gain it would bring to people but by its existence *per se* (pp. 446-48). Shepherd's eco-centred attitude to the eagle dovetails with Leopold's understanding. This non-anthropocentric attitude to the nonhuman without any aim of

instrumentalising, romanticising or fetishising it is arguably what makes *The Living Mountain* a pioneering example for contemporary nature writers. To Cowley (2008), new nature writers react to the state we are in not by walking into the wild or rhapsodizing but rather by trying to observe nature with a scientific eye and write about it with a literary effect (p. 9), and this is what Shepherd skilfully does.

In this vein, humans are represented in *The Living Mountain* just as the other living species in the ecosystem of the Cairngorms. Shepherd mostly takes solitary walks when she goes to the mountains, and throughout the book she rarely mentions her personal experiences with other hikers or climbers. In Chapter 9 titled "Life: Man", while she mentions the crofters, farmers and gamekeepers living at the skirts of the mountains, she does not tend to offer any characterization or create a storyline for the people she alludes to. In the way it is organized, this chapter is not different from the chapters dedicated to the elements, plants or other animals of the Cairngorms. When viewed from this aspect, *The Living Mountain* erases the hierarchical opposition between human and non-human, culture and nature. In her article titled "New British Nature Writing", Lilley (2017) argues that "The senses of place, nature, and humanity familiar to the cultural and ecological landscapes of Britain have become less certain, and the means by which they might be depicted and interpreted have become more precarious in response" (p. 11). Lilley's argument about today's less certain divisions between nature and culture must have already been accepted by Shepherd that when she wrote *The Living Mountain*, she did not make an essential distinction among the living organisms that constitute the Cairngorm ecosystem but offered an experimental way of writing about human and non-human on an equal basis.

In fact, such an attempt to remove binary oppositions signals a change in the anthropocentric mindset, which has privileged human against the rest of the planet since at least the Antiquity. As is known, "By firmly demarcating the human subjective world from the external realm of objects, classical science has placed human subjectivity in privileged opposition to the observable universe, positing that the latter and its governing rules could be understood through observation and experimentation" (Hutchings, 2007, p. 178). Shepherd challenges this human-centred thought system. This shift in the mindset is a characteristic of contemporary nature writing. Mabey (2013) maintains that "Most of us prefer to think of ourselves just as writers, who simply wish to embrace a rather larger than usual cast of characters, the other beings and landscapes with which we share the planet – and to respect them as subjects not simply objects" (para. 4). In the way she represents humans on an equal footing to other beings, Shepherd obviously achieved the bio-centric goal, which Mabey put forward.

Another important point about the depiction of humans in *The Living Mountain* is that Shepherd, a lover of the Cairngorms, does not provide a purely idyllic or pastoral representation when she gives an account of the lives of mountain people. She objectively informs the reader that the life on the mountain is hard: "The crofter's wife can't go to her brother's funeral in January, because the cows are beginning to go dry and if a stranger milks them, they may cease to yield altogether, and there's the income gone and milk to be bought *forbye*" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 81). She touches upon the difficulty of providing water and washing, as well:

> Sometimes there is no well- no spring rises within reach of the house, but all the water to be used must be carried from the burn, up steep and toilsome banks. Then the washing is done in the centuries-old fashion, down at the foot of the banks in the burn itself- sometimes on a windy day I have seen smoke rising, and caught the wink of fire, and coming near seen a great cauldron in a sheltered nook beside the burn and figures of women moving around it. (Shepherd, 2011, p. 81)

As it is seen above, Shepherd's depiction of the difficulties of mountain life does not involve dramatization or sentimentalisation. Williams (1973) criticizes the nostalgic accounts of rural life in country writing, which he thinks has marked English country writing tradition: "Against sentimental and intellectualised accounts of an unlocalised 'Old England', we need, evidently, the sharpest scepticism" (p. 10). Williams (1973) rejects the given existence of "old Englands to which we are confidently referred" and instead offers to look at country writing with a critical eye (p. 12). Williams (1973) warns the reader that in late nineteenth century "A traditional and surviving rural England was scribbled over and almost hidden from sight by what is really a suburban and half-educated scrawl" (p. 258). Shepherd (2011) seems to have kept away from the nostalgic representations of rural life, which Williams criticized. On the other hand, it should be remembered that in *The Country and the City*, Williams (1973) invites his readers to think critically about the rural life as depicted in English country writing taking into consideration its social and economic dimensions and tries to discourage readers from being trapped by idyllic representations. In this regard, *The Living Mountain* fails to answer Williams' criticism completely. Shepherd's portrayal of the life in the Cairngorms hardly contains any critical perspective in social or economic sense because she is not focused on human society or human problems. For example, as she refers to the young people who want to leave the mountains for better living conditions, she does not elaborate on socio-economic problems they might have encountered living on the mountains. Nevertheless, she can sympathise with them. She admits that "In these crannies of the mountains, the mode of supplying elemental needs is still slow, laborious and personal" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 82). She confesses that "If

I had to do these things every day and all the time I should be shutting the door on other activities and interests; and I can understand why the young people resent it" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 82). However, she makes it clear that young people's unwillingness to stay on the mountains is not to be generalized: "Not all the young want to run away. Far from it. Some of them love these wild places with devotion and ask nothing better than to spend their lives in them" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 82). As these examples reveal, Shepherd tries to remain objective in her depiction of the mountain people's lives without elaborating on possible socio-economic problems.

As Shepherd describes the life of mountain people, she also contrasts them with climbers without polarising mountain dwellers and mountain visitors. She highlights that mountain people welcome mountain climbing and tolerate people who wish to prowl at night and sleep in the open, but they do not support winter climbing due to the risks it involves: "They have only condemnation for winter climbing. They know only too well how swiftly a storm can blow up out of a clear sky, how soon the dark comes down, and how terrific the force of a hurricane can be upon the plateau and they speak with a bitter realism of the young fools who trifle with human life by disregarding the warnings they are given" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 84). Shepherd (2011) attempts to show the mountain life from the perspective of mountain people rather than reducing their life to an outsider's gaze. Nevertheless, no matter how objective she tries to be in her portrayal of the mountain people, she already had feelings for them whether she made acquaintance with them or not: "Many forceful and gnarled personalities, bred of the bone of the mountain, from families who have lived nowhere else, have vanished since I first began climbing here" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 85). Her hidden lament for the dwindling number of mountain families becomes much more evident when she shares the names of certain people she became friends with during her hikes. For example, she attends the funeral of Big Mary, an elderly mountain woman who died at ninety. Shepherd knew her in person and loved her: "Someone (whom I bless) had made a wreath for her, from heather and rowan berries, oats, and barley and juniper, the things she saw and handled day by day" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 88). The way Shepherd (2011) writes about Big Mary's funeral proves that Shepherd does not content herself with giving a crude account of mountain life, and she is open to reflecting her feelings, which new nature writers like to do, as well. Hampton (2018) argues that new nature writers do not want to devaluate their subjective experience (p. 458). Shepherd does not erase her subjective experience. Just as *The Living Mountain* is not centred on Shepherd as the only subject in the narrative, it is not deprived of Shepherd herself as a subject, either.

The human element in *The Living Mountain* is not limited to the mountain dwellers. Shepherd also turns a critical eye on human presence on the mountains. When she is up in the hills, she sees nobody and hears no one,

but she underlines that she feels man's presence: "I am touched at many points by his presence. His presence is in the cairns, marking the summits, marking the paths, marking the spot where a man has died, or where a river is born" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 76). She refers to cultural elements: "Man's presence too is in the map and the compass I carry, and in the names recorded in the map, ancient Gaelic names that show how old is man's association with scaur and corries" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 77). Given that Shepherd highlights the human-made marks on the geographical formations, the tools such as the map and the compass used to find direction and the names given to scaur and corries, it can be argued that she implies the interconnectedness of culture and nature. It is possible to see the impact of culture even up on the hills. Shepherd's allusion to cultural elements, however, does not involve the celebration of culture to the detriment of nature. It turns out that Shepherd is critical rather than appreciative of man's presence on the mountains, for she emphasizes his destructive effect on the ecosystem:

> Man's touch is on the best creation, too. He has driven the snow bunting from its nesting-sites, banished the capercailzie and re-introduced it from abroad. He has protected the grouse and all but destroyed the peregrine. He tends the red deer and exterminates the wild cat. He maintains, in fact, the economy of the red deer's life, and the red deer is at the heart of an economy that covers this mountain mass and its surrounding glens. (Shepherd, 2011, p. 80)

Man's banishing one species only to re-introduce it as well as his caring for one species while killing out another can be regarded as an arbitrary and dominating practice exercised by man upon the non-human. The attention Shepherd pays to the signs of such abuse during her walks demonstrates that she was ecologically conscious. Shepherd was obviously a mismatch for her time in terms of her ecological awareness because people's attention was then directed to the world war. Kerridge informs that after the second war the ideological context was marked by war-related concerns such as a desperate wish to avoid another war with Germany (as cited in Ramos, 2012, p. 137). Smith (2012), on the other hand, claims that in Shepherd's time, nature writing in Britain had a nationalistic tone: "The myth of nationalism seems unshakeable from the landscape painting and literature of the 1930s and, of course, only intensifies with the onset of the Second World War" (p. 13). Whether nature writing was an escape for the survivors of the war or a tool of nationalistic propaganda, it is clear that the Second World War delayed the questioning of human's place in and attitude to nature. In fact, it was only with the environmental movement of the 1970s that the public was awakened to ecological issues as the 1973 polls conducted among the then nine members of the European community revealed that pollution was seen as the most important problem leaving behind inflation, poverty and unemployment

(Schleicher, 1989, p. 260). Shepherd seems to have developed ecological sensitivity much earlier than the environmental movement. MacFarlane (2011) says that *The Living Mountain* is a book which embodies ecological principles without being overtly environmental (p. xxiv). Shepherd's perceivable ecological awareness at a time when environmental concerns had not yet been popularised sets her book as a model for new nature writers. Macfarlane (2015) draws attention to responsive consciousness of contemporary nature writers: "The best of the recent writing is ethically alert, theoretically literate and wary of the seductions and corruptions of the pastoral. It is sensitive to the dark histories of landscapes and to the structures of ownership and capital that organise – though do not wholly produce – our relations with the natural world" (para. 14).

Shepherd's ecological sensitivity expands to the elements, as well. For example, in Chapter 4 titled "Water", where Shepherd mentions the waters in the Cairngorms, be it in the form of rivers, lochs, snow or mist, she gives prominence to water itself as a power, not water being a natural resource disposable for the use of human:

> When the snows melt, when a cloud bursts, or rain teems out of the sky for days on end without intermission, then the burns come down in spate. The narrow channels cannot contain the water, which streams down the hillsides, tears deep grooved in the soil, rolls the boulders about, brawls, obliterates paths, floods burrows, swamps nests, uproots trees and finally reaching the more level ground, becomes a moving sea. (Shepherd, 2011, pp. 26-27)

With this poetic description of water and the diverse states it is found in, it seems that Shepherd accepts its intrinsic value and yields to its irresistible strength. Referring to the drownings in Scottish streams, she notes: "For the most appalling quality of water is its strength. I love its flash and gleam, its music, its pliancy and grace, its slap against my body; but I fear its strength. I fear it as my ancestors must have feared the natural forces they worshipped" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 27). As it is seen, Shepherd does not abstain from giving place to her emotions and feelings in nature, and when she does, she does not necessarily feature eulogic or epiphanic moments.

In *Nature Cure* (2005), Mabey criticizes the tendency to suppress subjective response to nature in British Nature writing: "It's become customary, on this side of the Atlantic, stiffly to exclude all such personal narratives from writings about the natural world, as if the experience of nature were something separate from real life, a diversion, a hobby; or perhaps only to be evaluated through the dispassionate and separating prism of science" (as cited in in Hampton, 2018, p. 458). Shepherd seems to have foreseen this criticism and includes her personal response to the Cairngorms. She dedicates

the last three chapters of her book to how she herself feels in the mountains, both physically and intellectually. In the introduction, MacFarlane (2011) notes that "[The book] is so full of life, death, body, gusto, touch and –subtly- sexuality. To Shepherd, being on the mountain is a profoundly physical experience" (p. xxvii). In Chapter 10 titled "Sleep", Shepherd (2011) writes: "No one knows the mountain completely who has not slept on it… One neither thinks, nor desires, nor remembers, but dwells in pure intimacy with the tangible world" (p. 90).

Her description of the moment of falling asleep on the mountain reveals how she gets to feel embedded and immersed in the mountains. The idea of human's being a part of the entire ecosystem is, thus, physically exposed. Physicality comes to the forefront also in Chapter 11 titled "Senses". To illustrate, Shepherd (2011) shares with the reader that she enjoys walking barefoot: "Once my shoes are off, I am loth to put them on again. If there are grassy flats beside my burn, I walk on over them, rejoicing the feel of the grass to my feet; and when the grass gives place to heather, I walk on still... Dried mud flats, sun-warmed, have a delicious touch, cushioned, and smooth..." (p. 103). Shepherd (2011) takes pleasure in bodily and sensory experiences in the mountains: "Walking thus, hour after hour, the senses keyed, one walks the flesh transparent. But no metaphor, *transparent*, or *light as air*, is adequate. The body is not made negligible, but paramount. Flesh is not annihilated but fulfilled. One is not bodiless, but essential body" (p. 106). However, Shepherd's insistence on bodily experiences does not mean that she separates mind from body. On the contrary, she implies that she can reach total oneness on the mountains: oneness of her body and mind and oneness with nature. As she puts it, "I have walked out of the body and into the mountain. I am a manifestation of its total life, as is the starry saxifrage or the white-winged ptarmigan" (Shepherd, 2011, p. 106).

Shepherd's personal response to the mountain is frequently enriched by her bodily and sensory experiences. Her emphasis on mountain hiking as a bodily and material experience matches with what is called new materialisms, which is a recent orientation in ecocriticism that puts emphasis on matter. Iovino and Oppermann (2012) argue that with the material turn that objected to the dematerialization of the world by postmodern and poststructuralist thinking, "The new attention paid to matter has emphasized the need for recalling the concreteness of existential fields with regard to bodily dimension and to non-binary object-subject relations" (p. 76). Shepherd (2011) seems to have embraced this bodily dimension and rejected mind/body opposition much before the material turn in humanities: "I began to see that our devotions have to more to do with our physiological peculiarities than we admit. I am a mountain lover because my body is at its best in the rarer air of the heights and communicates its elation to the mind" (p. 7). From this standpoint,

Shepherd goes far beyond her time, again. Macfarlane (2011) also thinks that the attention paid to body by Shepherd has a contemporary relevance:

> More and more of us live more and more separately from contact with nature. We have come increasingly to forget that our minds are shaped by the bodily experiences of being in the world- its spaces, textures, sounds, smells and habits- as well as by genetic traits we inherit and ideologies we absorb. We are literally losing touch, becoming disembodies, more than in any previous historical period. Shepherd saw this process starting over sixty years ago, and her book is both a mourning and a warning (p. xxxi).

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, with *The Living Mountain*, Shepherd broke a new ground in nature writing, posthumously though. Although the book had to be published a long time after it was written for reasons which can be further detailed in a separate study, it has managed to earn critical acclaim in recent years helping to pay Shepherd the due respect. As the organization committee of the Nan Shepherd Prize acknowledges, "Nan Shepherd is one of our most beloved authors and while her classic of nature writing *The Living Mountain* took three decades to first find a publisher, today the book is recognised as a masterpiece and Nan is inspiring a new generation of writers" ("A new literary prize"). This article attempted to show how Shepherd, with her *The Living Mountain*, can now be a source of inspiration for contemporary nature writers, who contribute to the revival of British nature writing in their own ways: Shepherd's interest in the non-human nature makes her narrative non-anthropocentric. Her attention to human influence on the mountain range shows her ecological sensitivity. Her inclination to provide scientific information about the non-human elements shows her objective eye. The importance she attaches to her own emotions and bodily sensations in the mountain highlights her skill in bringing together subjectivity and objectivity in writing about nature. All these aspects add to the book's contemporary relevance making it pioneering for its age, when British nature writing was in a fragile condition. As Greig says, it is "Hard to believe it was written in the Forties; it anticipates by sixty years aspects of the 'Nature writing' of our time" (as cited in Bell, 2014, p. 128). Thus, *The Living Mountain* can be read as a powerful example of nature writing which stands as a bridge with one foot in the twentieth century and the other in the twenty-first century encouraging contemporary nature writers to write from a non-anthropocentric and ecologically aware viewpoint without having to choose between scientific facts and personal responses.

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