

ABSTRACT

This thesis employs a creative and critical methodology to examine the body interacting with landscape in the context of contemporary memoir. Looking at links between the body, gender, and embodiment as discussed by autobiography scholars, this work questions how we think about being in wild places—who is allowed there, and in what manner—and explores how correlations between writing and bodily movement bear out as methodology in creative writing. The body, according to life narrative scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, is “a site of autobiographical knowledge” (49). But embodiment, or how the body is narrated, is dependent on cultural discourses that “determine when the body becomes visible, how it becomes visible, and what that visibility means” (50). The purpose of this work is to explore the ways in which bodies are visible in memoirs about being in nature, and also in eco-autobiography, an emerging genre—and thus highlight gendered conventions that exclude the body in genres that merge life writing and nature writing.

The creative component of this thesis, “Salt Marks,” is a memoir of the body, set in Scotland and woven through with myths about shapeshifting. The memoir explores how immediate, lived experience in wild places affects my broader and more complex sense of self. Beginning in the Orkney Islands, the narrator, fascinated by the myth of selkies—seals that could shed their skin and become women—travels alone through the north-western islands and Highlands of Scotland. As she explores these wild landscapes, the image of the selkie evokes the metaphor of multiple bodies and provides a way for her to redefine her relationship with her body after a recent heartbreak. Weaving travel writing, folklore, and an

essayistic reflection on how we interact with landscape, “Salt Marks” maps an experience of self-discovery in an unfamiliar landscape that comes to feel like home.

The exegesis discusses how people write about their bodies in memoirs about landscape, and explores gender and genre in relation to narrating embodiment. Chapter one of the exegesis discusses methodology in “Salt Marks” as an embodied act of walking and draws on Rebecca Solnit and Katrín Lund to do this. I also discuss working between the three modes of thinking in this exegesis: creative; scholarly; and the reflective voice that connects the two.

Chapter two considers Cheryl Strayed’s memoir *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*, and uses the concept of autobiographical embodiment to explore walking as a methodology for narrating women’s experiences of solitude, belonging, and wildness in contemporary memoir about nature.

Chapter three turns to *Island Home: A Landscape Memoir* by Tim Winton to explore a different relationship between narrator and body. I use this memoir to think through the emerging genre of eco-autobiography, and seek to identify why it might be a relevant mode of contemporary life narrative in which an intimate account of the body does not exclude the text from being read as ecocritical.

This discussion concludes this thesis’ creative and critical exploration of why writing about the body is important, and of the problematic standards around how bodies are narrated in relation to gender in memoirs about nature.