Panel Transcript

JW: Hello, my name is Jenni Wood. I'm a placement student at Glasgow Women's library. And today we're bringing you a panel discussion all about nature and environment writing. This podcast event is part of Glasgow Women's Library's annual Open the Door Festival, which is all about celebrating the achievements of women writers. Every second year, the festival is opened out to the world by being hosted entirely online and in 2020, we are focusing on the themes of the environment and ecofeminism. I'm delighted to be hosting this podcast with three fantastic guests, Christina Riley, Maria Sledmere and Rebecca Jones. Before we start, I want to say a massive thank you to them for their participation in this panel discussion. We had originally hoped to record together in person, but quite rightly because of lockdown had to make alternative plans. While we weren't able to have the same back and forth discussion we'd have liked, everyone has brought unique and thoughtful insights to the table, which brought together make for a really compelling listen, especially given the current pandemic situation. So, I'll start off by letting our panellists introduce themselves.

CW: Hi, my name is Christina Riley. I am an artist, sometimes writer and founder of the nature library.

MS: Hi, my name is Maria Sledmere. I'm a PhD candidate at the University of Glasgow doing a Doctorate of Fine Art in Creative Writing. I'm also a member of Art and Ecology collective A+E. And I'm the poetry editor of Spam Press and Dostoyevsky Wannabe, two indie publishers based in Glasgow and Manchester.

RJ: I'm Rebecca Jones. I'm a PhD researcher in English and ecofeminist animal studies at the University of Strathclyde. I'm also the coordinator of the Glasgow Women's Library book group, and former development worker on the library's Women in the Landscape Project.

JW: Well, thank you again to all of you for taking part to kick things off. I think it might be useful to open discussion by talking about what nature and environment writing means to all of you as individuals. Christina, would you mind starting for this one?

CR: For me it’s what kind of took me from being a casual reader to being someone who was really into books. I have always definitely been drawn more to non-fiction over fiction. I think I like to pick out the things that interest me and learn more about them and fiction I can sometimes find a little overwhelming. Not that I don't like fiction, I absolutely love it, but I never really know how to choose what to read. I've always enjoyed travel writing when I was younger. I think that that's probably what led me to Henry David Thoreau. I think he's just such a huge name in nature writing that it would always kind of lead back to him and it would seem like a good place to start. Nowadays, I think nature writing has been almost like an education for me. I was thinking about this. I didn't go to university and my college degree is in photography. So when I was younger, at Uni age, academia was never for me, but I have I've always wanted to know things. I just like really love learning things and I don't necessarily retain the knowledge much. And I was thinking, I said, I wonder why that is and a part of me kind of wonders if that's why nature and nature writing, is just constantly so enthralling. There's just always something else to know. I do forget a lot about the things that I learn and then I can learn them again. But really, there's just, it's just absolutely endless, which makes me think of the Nan Shepherd quote from The Living Mountain, where she says, "Knowing another is endless. The thing to be known grows with the knowing." So yeah, I think that's what nature writing is to me now.

JW: Thank you, Christina. That's a lovely quote and a really great place to start. What does it mean for you, Rebecca?

RJ: I think that if I had to sum up what nature writing means to me in one word, I suppose I would say escape. I have a history of anxiety and I think that nature writing has helped me to enjoy the outdoors when I sort of had limited confidence to enjoy it physically. And that's still the case for me sometimes. It also sort of helps me to organise my thoughts about humanity's place in the world. Of course, we live in a world that's sort of much, much bigger and more intricate than we often realise that we think about, we're quite a sort of self-absorbed and inward looking species. And I think that nature writing kind of invites us to challenge that perception of the world. I think it encourages us to sort of think outwards rather than inwards.

JW: Absolutely Rebecca, I think that's a really good point. And what about for you, Maria, where did your relationship with nature writing begin?

MS: I can't pinpoint exactly a moment where I became aware of nature writing. In fact, my earliest academic work was usually more concerned with technology. As I studied, however, I became increasingly aware that a lot of the imagery we use around technology comes from what would more traditionally be thought of as nature. Think about how we use words like cloud, mouse, BlackBerry, and so on. Rob Macfarlane has written about this in relation to children's vocabularies. I came across this book by Jussi Parikka, *Insect Media*, which looks at how insect forms of social organisation have been used to structure modern media technologies. I suppose I became interested in that overlap of nature and technology and soon enough realised that technology is nature, from the copper cables that connect me to the internet down to the mineral components of my iPhone. It is not just supplement to but very much a part of Earth history.

JW: So I suppose we're already seeing how our different perspectives and approaches as individuals might shape our understanding of nature and environment writing. When we talk about nature writing more broadly, we can be referring from anything to fiction, poetry, non-fiction, prose, really anything about our natural environment and our connection to it. And I just wonder if that makes it quite difficult to understand the genre sometimes. So I wonder if each of you think there's a crux to nature writing, or whether you think that defining it can be useful in any way?

MS: What constitutes nature writing or new nature writing, and how the term encompasses many genres such as journaling, travel writing, psychogeography, speculative fiction and memoir. These kinds of questions are forever coming up and growing more complex by the day. Within the literary market and media, nature writing occupies a certain space that is distinct from nature poetry, say or landscape cinematography. Nature writing for me is then more of a marketing tool. It's the section of the bookshop or online news column where the covers or the images are very bright and beautiful. And there are animals and tales of rivers, oceans clouds, what we conventionally think of as nature. Its crux might simply be the indication of a felt need for connection in a world of increasing digitization and climate crisis. Defining nature writing in the age of climate awareness is both imperative and tricky. The risk of course, is that we slide into nature porn, and grow dangerously nostalgic about a lost golden age of pastoral plenitude. I'm excited by writers who problematise parochial or provincial approaches, or the idealisation of nature. I'm seeing more and more work which weaves together tales of mental illness, queer autobiography and intimacy, among other things, with more than human encounters. I want to see nature glitched and confused. I want to read writers whose work touches on extinction, seasonal disorder and feelings of environmental displacement without necessarily thematising these issues as the crux of the work.

RJ: I think it is hard to define nature writing, and I'm not... I'm not convinced that it's always desirable to be able to. I think the trouble with trying to define a genre, I work a lot in science fiction, and climate fiction, and I think the power of that genre is very demonstrative of the point but it's actually quite hard sometimes to draw lines around a genre, because something will always come along that defies those lines, those boundaries and you know, kind of morphs the genre and I think that's something to be celebrated rather than something to be fearful of. I'm very suspicious really of any interpretation that refuses to admit new ideas into a genre. Of course, recently, cli-fi is very popular, climate fiction is very popular, and I think that sort of represents an interesting development in science fiction. And we can't have those developments if we hold on to the definition of a genre too tightly. I mean obviously, we need to have some broad understanding of what we mean when we talk about nature writing, when we talk about science fiction, climate fiction, you know, whatever the genre, we need to have some way of thinking about that genre. But I think it's important for us to have nice porous boundaries around these things really.

JW: Christina, I'm really interested to hear your point of view on this, especially because you have curated a nature library and founded that project, and so I guess another way to look at this question is also what defines the books and the nature library for you?

CR: I think the crux of nature rating is just any writing that considers the natural world as part of its story. Or it can be something that makes you think about or look at the natural world differently. It is very hard to define in that way, because what makes one person think about the natural world is not going to make the other person. But it's really important to acknowledge the genre itself, but then also the many, many, many subdivisions of it. Just like fiction can be an overwhelming term, I think nature writing can feel the same for some people. I mean, it could, it could be about anything on the entire planet. So you kind of need to be more specific, I think. I started a nature library after a chat with my friend Toby who works at the John Muir Trust. We met on Harris at one of the Trust's conservation work parties, and he very, very kindly gave me a seven hour lift back to Glasgow. So we had so much time to just talk about absolutely everything under the sun, the slowly setting sun on that very, very long drive. We talked about nature and writing and podcasts and our personal experiences in nature. And with the John Muir Trust, they had a campaign coming up called Wild Words. And it was all about how the written word and how literature can really make you connect with the natural world maybe when you can't get out there yourself. So he suggested that I just wrote a piece for their blog about the kind of nature writing that I was enjoying, and how it was influencing my visual art just we talked about that in the, on the drive. So, in doing that, I was just I was putting all of these quotes that I had kind of jotted down places and I was pulling them all together. And in it, I kind of I formed a section about, say, the first nature books that I enjoyed, and then there was another section, all about the sea, and another one that looked at colour and shape and abstract beauty of nature. And then another section that was all about the woman writers who reshaped my views on nature. So, it was just getting longer and longer and longer, kind of like this answer. I was looking at it and I thought wouldn't be nice, instead of just listing all of these, I could put them all in a room and rather than people having to look up the quotes and source the books themselves, they could just come in, flip through them all, and just see what they find.

JW: So one of the big focuses of Open the Door is accessibility, and I'm sure a lot of people listening to this, especially at the moment, might not have direct connections with the so called natural environment, in terms of the outdoors and wild landscapes we might typically associate with nature writing. Following on from the last question then, how do we grapple with those definitions of natural? And is there any room in this genre for more flexible understandings of our natural environment, which may vary from person to person?

CR: Yeah, I think there definitely needs to be room for flexible definitions of nature and the natural environment, because it does vary so much from person to person. I mean, the natural world is absolutely everywhere, so. It is overwhelming when you think about how many things really are affected and how many things we are affecting. So I think when you're trying to find something to read in nature writing, it's just about finding that point that interests you and that's yeah, any starting point. So whether you like hills, or traveling, or wildlife, flora, fauna, it's, it can be anything really. So you find that one thing and then that just branches out on to many, many more, and then you end up starting a library. What's really important to me with the Nature Library is that it's not all just stories about people setting off into the mountains, sticking a flag on top. It's not about endurance and struggle and battling the elements or living off the elements. I think there are really endless ways to experience the natural world.

MS: So, I love the romantics and would often read passages of Wordsworth when I was feeling homesick for the countryside. So something I was regularly teased about, Wordsworth's not like the coolest person to get into when you're doing an English Lit degree. But it sort of gave me a virtual access to a childhood space I couldn't return to even if I physically got myself back to Ayrshire, where I grew up. There's something about poetics itself as a sort of machine for restoring attention, care, and active memory. All things we need to work with if we are to salvage the world from increasing damage, and not to mention imagination as well. I think I've answered bits of this question already, but I will also say that personally, I've moved away from using terms like natural environment in my own writing. I'll try to be more specific or perhaps use a word like world or zone which seemed to have less baggage attached. Going back to Nan Shepherd, her encounters with the Cairngorms remind us that we are thoroughly immersed in the worlds we traverse, which are made up of objects that sensuously interact in so many different ways. I'm sure in the not too distant future if not already, there will be experiments with lush VR environments as a way of trying to solve for example, nature deficit syndrome. As a child stuck inside and endless summers of Scottish rain, I would often visit the brighter climes of video games, from Super Mario Sunshine to Sonic Adventure. A lot of the time I'd just roam around occupying a virtual body who could jump fly and traverse space in a way I could not as a pre-adolescent, who was painfully ashamed of her body. If I missed a kind of tomboyish childhood freedom in climbing trees, I could at least do that in video games. Now confined to my once a day state sanctioned quarantine work. I might try and re-wild the same routes by listening to different music. Since I can't currently leave Glasgow, I'll map out the city into zones pretending that entering this or that park is entering nature. These are obviously not ideal solutions so much as coping strategies, a further kind of game that reveals how unnatural our sense of nature really can be.

RJ: Nature and space and place mean very different things to different people, particularly if your circumstances are to some degree confining, and I'm thinking a lot about, you know, people with, with disabilities and with physical impairments that make certain spaces inaccessible to them. I think this is one of the beauties of nature writing is that it can, without wishing to be too twee, it can sort of bring something to you that you might not be able to access yourself for various reasons. But one of the things that that sometimes concerns me, with a lot of more mainstream rhetoric and discourse around nature and around getting outdoors is that there can be a sort of, almost I suppose a worthiness to it, that is alienating to a lot of people. I think part of the problem is that, certainly in mainstream conversations and discourse about nature and about being in the environment and outdoors, accessibility is sort of glossed over and not really considered. And it is good for that reason, it is absolutely excellent that Open the Door puts accessibility, front and centre. And that was certainly what we were trying to achieve with Women in the Landscape too. You know, making these things accessible to all different kinds of people, and almost challenging this idea that the outdoors belongs to a certain type of person, because I'm sorry to say that when that happens, I think all too often that certain type of person tends to be an able bodied, wealthy, white male. And I think it is really important that we have nature writing and environmental writing that really

goes to the heart of that and asks why that should be, which of course is at the heart of good ecofeminist theory anyway.

JW: Absolutely. I think you're all bringing really interestingly similar yet entirely different insights to these questions, which is brilliant. And it's a shame that we weren't able to meet up in person to actually bounce ideas off one another. I'm putting this together now, as if we were and doing my best to do that, but I think it's great that you're all picking up on different elements. If we move forward, I think we need to address the kind of elephants in the room of this conversation, which are, firstly, the climate crisis and second COVID-19, both of which you've already been touching upon as a group. So we currently live in a climate crisis. And I've personally seen a lot of non-fiction books appearing on the shelves recently, for example, just even within the last 12 months, those about Greta Thunberg. But I've also noticed more books within the category of nature writing more generally. So I'd like to know, do you think the climate crisis has influenced the kind of books people are reading and writing? Or has nature rating just always been an area of human interest that we'll continually go back to?

CR: I've been wondering this too, if there's more nature writing now, because there's a sense of needing it? Is that why there's more of an appetite for it? Or am I just noticing it more now because my interest in it has increased? Or has my interest in it increased because of the climate crisis? So yeah, it's a bit of a chicken and egg, I think. And I'm trying not to question it too much and just enjoy the fact that nature writing is so prominent on the shelves, no harm can be done, I don't think of having more, more nature books out there and more people writing it and reading it. Very glad it's an area of human interest. It's hard for it not to be really we are the natural world, you know like we are a species on this planet. We affect everything. Everything affects us. It makes sense that this area of human interest, especially now, with what the world is going through, on many levels, it's something that yeah, we seem to really be enjoying, or finding something in connecting to.

RJ: I think the climate crisis has certainly brought nature writing and environmental writing far more to it sort of more prominently into the collective consciousness. I don't think that nature writing can be said to be new. I mean, you know, off the top of my head Pliny and Aristotle were writing about the world that we live in and, and the environment in antiquity. And it's fair to say that, you know, this will have gone back even further into an oral history tradition as well. But I think like most things, what's happening in the world, writers, of fiction or non-fiction, respond to and influence what is going on in the world that we live in. So yeah, I mean, I think the climate crisis is definitely having an impact on what people are reading, what they're writing, and what publishers are choosing to publish as well.

MS: I mean, the problem with the term nature writing is that it does seem a relatively modern way of encompassing something which has been happening for centuries or even millennia. And that's why I think it's probably more useful as a marketing tool, or academic placeholder for a genre and sort of a set of trends maybe in mainstream or otherwise writing. So for example, the Greek poet Sappho was writing lyric fragments back in like 620 BC, and her work is all about desire, vibrant matter and various facets of nature. We still love her work today, and I think that speaks to a primal need for recognising the depth of those elemental intimacies. As for climate crisis, people will be turning to nature writing for solace and comfort as much as information. It's really exciting to see the sheer proliferation of books on environmental themes take center stage at mainstream book shops as much as independents, there's definitely a hunger for it. We're also all currently recording remotely as we're in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. On a basic level following what I said before people are going to want to become more informed. COVID-19 is an environmental crisis as much as a humanitarian, political and economic one. Fundamentally, it concerns the relationship between humans and animals as much as humans and humans. I know that Daisy Lafarge, a brilliant poet, is doing really exciting work around zoonoses, i.e. the study of diseases transmitted between humans and animals. And if you go back to her 2017 poetry pamphlet ‘Understudies for Air’, you'll find plenty in there that resonates with now. I mean, the poem 'Constitution Air' literally uses the word Coronavirus, and she makes the link between these literal diseases and other kinds of social disease that pollute the very air of the life we breathe collectively. An interesting effect of COVID and quarantine is of course the big reports about pollution levels dropping, and wildlife returning to former habitats. Since I massively misunderstand how nature actually works, and often tick by on wishful thinking, I keep waiting to see dolphins leap out of the Clyde. We've all been hearing bird song at unprecedented levels. My friend just sent me a photo of a fox curled up in his garden in Shawlands in the middle of the day. As millennials, never in our lifetimes have we seen the neoliberal world of demand speed and globalist flow slow down like this. Maybe we have more time to notice the in between of these moments of encounter. And so we'll be driven to read up more about certain animals or natural phenomena. I think there is a thirst to arm ourselves critically and think about the world the kind of normal we want to rebuild from this. It's all very well to celebrate ecological enmeshment when we think of our skin embracing a cool summer rain, eating sauerkraut as a digestive supplement or sharing a significant portion of our DNA with daffodils. But a virus is also an embodiment of that enmeshment. So we're going to need writing that delves into these ethical, aesthetic and personal challenges of conceptualising ecological intimacy.

RJ: Yeah, I absolutely think that the COVID pandemic is going to be a major influence on new kind of, new inventions, if you like within the genre of environment, writing and nature writing. I think it's a new epoch to be honest, because, you know, this is just such new territory for everybody. I think that people will be thinking about what it means to be isolated socially and physically. And I think actually, I mean, we don't really know what recovery is going to look like. I mean, personally, I hope that our recovery takes us somewhere different to where we were before the pandemic broke out. Especially, you know, in terms of the fact that the pandemic is, is largely a result of our species, our human species' inability to live sensitively and in a properly entangled way with the environment and with other species. So I mean, I think that I think it's going to be difficult for us to go back to the to business as usual, I suppose, is what everyone is saying.

JW: That actually leads really nicely on to my next question, which comes in relation to Maria's work on the Anthropocene and as an eco-poet and the fraught relationship we have between our technological lives and nature of writing. So I want to ask you, how do we get our heads around this kind of ethical dissonance where efforts to connect with nature become muddled with technology, or human intervention more broadly, as you were just saying there Rebecca, and that being the thing that also harms nature. So is it something that you are all conscious of or that you find to be a challenge? Maria, I think it'd be nice to start with you here as this is your area.

MS: As I've said previously, I see technology as nature. I think this is all a scalar problem about what it means to think ecologically. You can play this obsessive game of trying to go zero waste. If you're lucky, you can give up your laptop, your supermarket plastic, you can go live on a self-sustaining colony somewhere. A lot of nature right income pretend that it's possible for everyone to escape into nature and leave technology behind for the wild. Whereas the likes of Amy Liptrot and to be honest, countless poets will use social media platforms as a kind of poetics snapping their ventures while swimming, foraging, or arranging flowers at home. Dave Borthwick twitter feed for example is a kind of estuary of endless wildlife photography, and through it I access birds, bodies of water, trees and starlight I would never see in Glasgow. It's a form of ecological re-enchantment and it's just there every day. Sam Waltons adventures wild swimming, or Gloria Dawson's foraging stories and Instagram seemed to feed into their writing and become part of a general ecosystem of what it means to in some sense, be an eco-poet, or loosely a nature writer. Is poetry just another kind of content though, how are we perceiving value here? What is the data cost in terms of physical cloud storage of this kind of image generation of the environment? I'm thinking of Alaskan server farms. Having said that, we have to admit for our own sanity that we are all hypocrites. This is something Morton says we shouldn't beat ourselves up but think about the scale of the issue. Most of environmental damage comes from decisions made at the level of huge corporations, drilling pipelines through indigenous land, exploitative oil companies, governments with inadequate environmental policy. We need to be careful about reducing environmental ethics to neoliberal individualism and consumer choice. Yes, I feel guilt at using a MacBook but especially in times like these, my internet connection might be the only way I can do activism or contextualize global crisis beyond problematic mainstream news coverage.

RJ: You know, the concept of the anthropocene and whether that is what we are now in, especially given the awesome power of money and technology is, you know, it's a very interesting one, and very, very complex I think it's very hard to come up with, sort of who is excluded as well from these things. And I think that nature as a broad concept sometimes is accepted as kind of collateral. You know, environmental degradation I think is accepted as the necessary price to pay for the things that we have and, of course, that all stems from this idea that the environment is not where we are. We are outside of it, we're above it, and it's just a resource. But our dependence on the environment, I think, is becoming as much as I value enormously theoretical work on ecofeminism and the environment and nature. I think this kind of issue really benefits from fictional approaches and poetic and artistic approaches to help us grapple with it because it is so complex, that it requires that kind of, you know, that kind of emotional engagement with it that is afforded by, by art and by writing. And for that reason, I think the next few years are going to be really interesting in terms of nature writing and poetry and you know, creative writing around the environment, as well as in non-fictional discourse.

CR: Yeah, I think, definitely, the issues where, how we connect with the natural world, but also in a time where technology is just snowballing with advancements... a lot of it is, yeah, it's definitely a challenge. Everything is a contradiction it feels sometimes and I definitely often feel like a hypocrite for I mean, talking about nature writing so much, but, you know, if you still fly long haul or have a smartphone or don't buy everything organic, there's these little things that you kind of, it's hard not to feel like a hypocrite sometimes I think. But yeah, we can only do what we can as individuals and that does mean making some hard decisions. And I do... there's a big part of me that says these things like, "Oh, it's it's about little things", but it does need to be big things, now, I think and, I'm not saying that reading nature writing this didn't change the world. But it's definitely spurred on how much I feel about the issues and also how quickly I want to act on them. So if everybody is doing that, and I believe that a lot a lot of people are, it has to make a difference. It's hard to go backwards when you're becoming more aware of that and becoming more involved.

JW: Thank you for your answers there. I think you're all highlighting that despite these moral challenges and obstacles, which do need to be acknowledged, it's still extremely important that people are connecting with nature through writing and reading and that's pertinent now more than ever. To take a new direction, I'd like to ask you guys what you think about the link between nature writing and feminism. So Rebecca, maybe you would like to start for this one.

RJ: I think there's absolutely a distinct link between nature writing, and feminism, and I think that really sort of stems from the fact that for so long, and arguably, even still nature and the environment were coded female. They were considered as in the material realm of the sort of the fleshy realm of women and I think that that is... personally I don't think about this in an essentialist way, but it doesn't change the fact that there are essentialist ideas about Mother Earth. And I think that that is certainly among the foundational thought around eco feminism. I mean, thinking about the Women in the Landscape project. The whole point of that project was to create and curate resources about women in the environment and women in the, in the landscape, and to some extent women and animals to curate these resources into a an easy sort of searchable list that anyone with an interest could go online and freely access and sort of, and start their own threads of research, I think. I suppose I really wanted us to think about where we feel we have a right to be, because that's something quite close to my heart. You know, I've had experiences where I've felt like an imposter, just for being in a certain... just for, you know, hiking somewhere, or, you know, that kind of thing. And I believe that that is largely gendered. And I wanted to give women the opportunity to sort of think about how we, how we kind of got to where we are.

MS: The way we talk about nature is similar to the way we once talked and often still talk about women and a lot of nature writing involves a kind of sensuous or scopophilic description of aesthetic phenomena, a kind of erotics without context. Donna Haraway's "Situated Knowledges" does great work in reclaiming vision as a practice of embodied partial and communal feminist science. We need an ecofeminism that does not reproduce the essentialising tendencies of early nature writing but rather recognises that nature itself is inherently queer, unstable, vibrantly in flux and multiple. This is why I'm excited about a nature writing which gets beyond the stability of the first person, the eye the eye, and interrogates instead those reflexive slippages of language and mediation, which are faithful to our own enmeshed partial and lossy subjectivity. So in a way, the kind of weird nature writing I want for the world and want to read or write for the world has to be queer, myriad and generous, like the best of feminism, people like Sara Ahmed, for instance.

CR: I think the link between nature writing and feminism, there's... there is this argument that, as I said, all writing this nature writing, if it involves, like living breathing people and those people are interacting and being influenced by, if not directly, then at least indirectly with nature. I feel like in the same way, I find it really difficult to read any book now without it somehow linking to feminism. I mean, they both they both go through our daily lives and influence... influence us and the people around us whether we realise it or not. You can read nature writing, or not, and nature is still going to be there. You can read about feminist issues or see the links between the books you're reading, or not, but feminism and feminist issues are still going to exist. So yeah, I think as long as the world is as it is, then all books in some way, will tie into these issues because those issues are there, everywhere. So yeah, there's definitely a link between nature racing and feminism. There just has to be.

JW: Okay. And finally, as this is part of the Glasgow Women's Library's Open the Door festival, who are some of the key writers who have opened the door to nature writing for you?

CR: Kathleen Jamie brought nature writing in Scotland for me. It was such a different time of nature writing than I was used to. It was just honest and full of humility. Like where she talks about what she doesn't know. And she goes in search for the answers. And she goes in search for the answers from people who know more than she does. And learning their stories and I think she she said something at Edinburgh Book Festival last year, about how she managed to find herself in Alaska on this archeological dig. And she says she just asked if she could go, just asked if she could tag along and they said yes, and I think often, or at least I know that I do this I'll almost assume the answer is no. So it makes it quite easy just to not start something at all. But with Kathleen Jamie she's definitely inspired me to just just ask more often just you know, why not just try like think of all of the things you did learn and the people you could learn from? You don't know if you don't ask the questions, so yeah... you might find yourself in Alaska! Nan Shepherd, and The Living Mountain that's just a book that's gonna stay with me forever. I, I didn't really know that nature had ever been written about in that way. The way she's talks about kind of like coories into the mountain and looks closely at things like things that will just rush past you in a blur when you're stomping up the side of a mountain to get to the top. I just never heard of the hills written about in this way and I love the sea and the coastline and water. And to be honest, when I first started reading the living mountain, I just thought this is beautiful but it's not a book for me. And then, of course, Nan Shepherd has this really beautiful way of talking about the natural world as if it is not of this world. But at the same time, it's the places that you know. And it's little things. It's these like tangible things that you do recognise whether it's heather, or streams, common flora and fauna, written about in a way that is just spellbinding. And I think that's the kind of thing that really opens the door to a lot of people to get fascinated and just completely enthralled by with nature writing is that sense of wonder that kind of not realising that what is outside your door is just so magnificent. That's the kind of thing that I think nature writing is essential for and it's what Nan Shepherd does, I think just as easily as breathing.

RJ: My favourite writers in environment and nature is such a fun question to answer, because it's such a rich field. There's just so many. I mean, I suppose that thinking back I think one of the first texts that I read that I ever read and really sort of realised that it was environmental and eco feminist was *Staying Alive* by Vandana Shiva. Shiva has done for years and years decades has done a lot of work around the growing of food in India, and how organisations have effectively disempowered the people and particularly women by effectively buying things and selling them back to them. It's a very, very good book and I definitely recommend it. In terms of poetry, Kathleen Jamie is a real favorite of mine and particularly her collection *The Tree House* is really, really excellent. There's a beautiful anthology that was recently published by Vertebrate. It's called *Waymaking* and it's an anthology of women's adventure writing and poetry and art and it's absolutely, it's such a sumptuous book. I mean, it's just a joy to flick through and just to dip into, but it really it you know, it really touches on women's relationship with outdoor activities and with outdoor space, you know, and swimming and bouldering and hiking and all kinds of things. And it's really, really just a beautiful escape, really.

MS: I could talk about Ursula Le Guin, Amy Liptrot, Macfarlane, Derek Jarman and others, but I'm going to use this space to talk about more emerging writers I'm currently excited about who probably get less press. Firstly, a shoutout to Nina Mingya Powles, who recently won the Nan Shepherd Nature Writing Prize. I discovered her through an amazing essay she wrote for the Willow Herb Review called ‘Small Bodies of Water’, where she addresses the complexity of identifying home, heritage, gender, and embodiment. Beautifully, she weaves together reflections on menstruation, swimming in Shanghai and Hampstead Heath, learning to write in Mandarin, girlhood, family identity. I’m interested in writers who do this work of weaving. Theoretically, I am indebted to Sandeep Parmar, Bhanu Kapil and Nisha Ramayya’s book *Threads* on this matter. I also love Rachael Allen whose book *Kingdomland* is a brilliant collection that looks at female bodies, meat, violence, myth and working-class experience. Caspar Heinemann’s *Novelty Theory* which came out last year with the 87 press is just stunning as this irresistible work of anthropocene poetics played out in the space of everyday consumer capitalism, queer experience and millennial anxiety. Lisa Robertson’s work on soft architecture, civic space, the garmen and the body also play into my own sense of a gendered poetics of ecological attunement. Along with Rhian Williams I’m editing a forthcoming anthology called ‘The weird folds: everyday poems from the anthropocene’ which will be out later this year with Dostoevsky Wannabe, a Manchester based indie press that I’ve already mentioned. So the anthology will include original work from some of my favourite writers. I obviously can’t give you an exhaustive list of our contributors but every single one offers something new and challenging to our sense of what nature writing or Anthropocene poetics is or could do. Their poems ask questions, open portals and seem to almost come from the future.

JW: I think that’s a lovely note to leave things on and one which will hopefully leave listeners with some great lockdown reading material. I’ll leave details of any books or other noteworthy mentions in the show notes of this podcast. There will also be a full transcript of the panel discussion available. I just want to say another massive thank you to Christina Riley, Rebecca Jones and Maria Sledmere for their participation in this panel discussion. I’ve honestly had a brilliant time putting it together and working with you all, albeit remotely. There will be lots of other digital events for the Open the Door festival this week, so make sure to look up the Glasgow Women’s Library for details, or you can follow what we’re up to over on Twitter. Thanks again for listening.