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*Nature Writing and Detection in Ann Cleeves' The Crow Trap*

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#### DOI

[10.4324/9781003091912-4](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003091912-4)

#### Publication date

2024

#### Document Version

Final published version

#### Published in

The Routledge Handbook of Crime Fiction and Ecology

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[Link to publication](#)

#### Citation for published version (APA):

Kenny, I., & Souch, I. (2024). The Goshawk Did It: Nature Writing and Detection in Ann Cleeves' *The Crow Trap*. In N. Ashman (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Crime Fiction and Ecology* (pp. 26-38). (Routledge literature handbooks). Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003091912-4>

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# THE GOSHAWK DID IT

## Nature Writing and Detection in Ann Cleeves’ *The Crow Trap*

*Ian Kenny and Irina Souch*

Rachael worked from a large scale map. She had already chosen her survey areas using the natural boundaries shown on the map. Neither sample was on Black Law land. One, a patch close to the burn and a disused lead mine, was heavily grazed. It was farmed by one of the Holme Park tenants, almost denuded of heather. It would be easy for walking but not, she suspected, very interesting for birds. The other was a piece of heather moorland, managed for grouse. It had been leased by the Holme Park Estate to a syndicate of Italian businessmen. She suspected they would not find the shooting so enjoyable with the industrial noise of the quarry in the background, but she presumed that Slateburn Quarries has offered the estate such a tempting deal that income from the shooting rights would hardly be missed.

(26)

This passage is from Ann Cleeves’ 1999 detective novel, *The Crow Trap*. It is emblematic of the way the author depicts the rugged Northumbrian landscape in which the story is situated, showing nature as deeply imbricated within the interwoven narrative threads. Although visually picturesque, the countryside is far from idyllic: it is not so much concerned with the tourist gaze as it is with geographic isolation and conflicting industrial, political, and environmentalist interests. In Cleeves’ book, human lives are not separated from the environment but revolve around and are given shape and meaning by their relationship to it. It is where people conceal their secrets, relive their memories, and earn their livelihood. At the heart of the novel’s human-centric dramas stands the quarry: limestone has been dressed and used in the region for generations, and what initially began as a small-scale local operation has grown from humble beginnings, expanding its hold on the landscape. The Langholme’s, landed gentry of the great house, Holme Park, and its encompassing territories and reserves, are traditional aristocratic stewards. They practice hunting and trapping (now made into international business), but also control the species that are indigenous to the landscape. Farmers, like those at Black Law Farm, graze cattle on the wide commons of the hills, distinct from village life, but remain the traditional (and waning) lifeblood of the community. The area is also known as a popular ground for ramblers and naturalists. Thus, the novel shows how the strict boundaries of the human and natural worlds fade as they refract various traits and realities.

*The Crow Trap* (best known from its successful 2011 ITV adaptation to the small screen, which initiated the internationally acclaimed television series *Vera*) starts when three young women – botanist Anne Preece, ornithologist Rachael Lambert, and mammal expert Grace Fulwell – come together at Baikie’s Cottage to work on an Environmental Impact Assessment of the proposed quarry. First to

arrive, the team leader Rachael finds her friend Bella, who lives nearby at Black Law Farm, hanged in the shed along with a suicide note. Despite this tragic discovery, the survey goes as planned. Although the holders of the land are eager to see the project approved, the owners of nearby Slateburn Quarries, who would be developing the site, seem less enthusiastic. The survey continues until Grace is found strangled near Baikie's cottage, having recently observed an unexpectedly high number of otters in the stream running through the area. Assigned to the case is Detective Vera Stanhope, who many years earlier, as a local rookie beat-cop, investigated the disappearance of a young boy close to the same spot.

Despite *The Crow Trap's* essentially anthropocentric plot – the crimes revolve around a knotted family drama and have, in the end, little to do with environmental opposition to the quarry – it can be undeniably considered as an example of “nature-oriented mystery novels . . . [helping] to understand the degree to which environmental consciousness and nature awareness has permeated popular and commercial fiction” (Murphy 143). And it is not only because, as Jo Lindsay Walton and Samantha Walton argue, “crime fiction is a form of specialist knowledge in its own right, with its own distinct contribution to make to cultural understandings of human-nature relations and environmental crisis” (3). The heated controversies throughout the novel around how much damage the development of the quarry could do to the landscape already align Cleeves' narrative with contemporary ecological themes. However, the novel's environmental stance is most convincingly achieved through the incorporation of stylistic properties inherent to the British school of new nature writing known for its commitment to ecological accuracy and meticulous examination of the impact of human action on the environment (Cowley).<sup>1</sup> New nature writing has emerged within the past decade as a literary tradition that builds upon previous generations of authors whose environmentally focused narratives offered insights into the natural world. New nature writing combines these past approaches with new stylistic elements to create ecologically minded narratives that are affective descriptions and detailed encounters with landscapes and ecosystems. Indeed, without being aware of *The Crow Trap's* genre, one could arguably perceive the quoted paragraph as pertaining to the new nature writing tradition that eschews the easy “pastoralization” of rural life but, instead, is “closely concerned with the mutual inflection of human and non-human in the idea of place” (Smith 11) and “marked by an attentiveness to the relationships that make up the landscape, the places and forms in which they can be found, and the various ways that they can be seen” (Lilley 3).

One can argue that the thorough analysis of unexpected intersections of environment and human legacies is a feature that makes detective fiction remarkably akin to nature writing, and the connection between these two distinct genres, as Cleeves' novel demonstrates, may prove conducive for generating new narratives bearing “a particular potential for reshaping the individual and collective ecosocial imaginary” (Heise 258).

The book's title refers both metaphorically and literally to this particular sort of genre blending. While Rachael happens upon a trap that uses live bait to lure crows into a large cage, Detective Stanhope sets a similar ploy later in the novel, using the isolated surveyors as bait to entice the murderer into her snares. Mimicking a common method of controlling crow populations in the region, Vera's plan and Cleeves' title gesture to the intricate genre intersections that are developed throughout the text. Such productive genre crosspollination allows readers to enjoy the detective's careful unravelling of multiple mysteries while equally acquiring better understanding of our ecological enmeshment through the complex ways in which the “characters' experiences both shape and are shaped by their engagement with aspects of the natural world” (Lehtimäki 137).<sup>2</sup>

Ann Cleeves herself is a remarkable example of such engagement. The author's recollection of how the novel came into being is inseparable from a distressing personal experience she lived through while embedded in the landscape she so vividly depicts in her story:

*The Crow Trap* . . . was conceived while I walked miles round the Northumberland countryside with my husband, Tim. He had suffered a major psychotic episode and been hospitalised.

Though he'd been allowed home, he was still very poorly and very restless. Walking was the best remedy. It was autumn. I remember low sunlight, hedgerows loaded with haws and sloes, and to the rhythm of our footsteps, I brought to life the dishevelled, compassionate middle-aged detective who would very soon become part of my life.

(Cleeves 2020)

It is not surprising that Cleeves is often compared to new nature writers when it comes to offering precise, locally informed descriptions of natural environments. Thus, for instance, in their digital writing workshop, Norwich Castle Museum compares her *Shetland* book series to Mark Cocker's *Crow Country* as "in both cases the [authentic] settings are almost characters in themselves" (Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery). A British ornithologist website, *Fat Birder*, in turn, names Cleeves as the best-known representative of "birding fiction" – novels written from a birder's perspective or depicting a birder's murder ("Birding Fiction: Novels from a Birding Perspective"). Accordingly, Cleeves' personal webpage keenly mentions her previous employment at the Bird Observatory of Shetland to explain her ornithological knowledge and fascination with the island ("Shetland").

In Cleeves' work, the small-scale emplacements characterised by meticulous and tangible descriptions of the local flora and fauna encourage readers to imagine a real place, enmeshed with(in) other real places and ecologies thus counterbalancing an age wherein both often take on abstract and intangible (global) forms. These images are invaluable and, as Tim Ingold warns us, very fragile because they can be

all too readily crushed by the high-powered impact of a global science more intent on establishing the authority of its own particular view of the environment, and of what human beings are doing to it, than on enhancing our own awareness or powers of observation.

(Ingold 95)

Yet, it is exactly the references to "concrete specific places", as Cathy Elliott argues in relation to British new nature writing, that enable contrasting totalising narratives of the whole world as being on one and the same path of doom (35). For Elliott, nature writing possesses a great political potential which lies in the interrupting of standard dystopian stories of the planet's future:

[W]e are invited to imagine a landscape in which the creatures (including humans) that inhabit it, as well as different times and their legacies, are piled on top of one another in no particular order . . . engaging with and writing about nature in detailed ways resists the politics of complacency and apathy that too readily suffuse engagements with climate change.

(Elliott 35)

*The Crow Trap* demonstrates this kind of engagement with the complex temporalities of concrete places. The land – in its variety of distinct locations that are knit together – is where the traces of different times overlap. While people survey the landscape, looking to see what organisms – what lifeforms and stories – are associated with it, they weave their human understanding and ordering onto the places around them. The places themselves, and the memories of their past uses and forms, all butt-up against one another throughout the narrative. Described in interwoven layers of the physical features, each place is itself often a harbinger of the memories that suffuse them. These hybrid natural/cultural spaces exist across a variety of timelines, both real and imagined, making pasts present and presenting pasts.

In what follows, we will closely look at how, in the novel, people go about their business in and around a multiplicity of places, noticing and naming things that unfold along the way as they come in and out of focus, rekindle memories, and acquire (new) meaning(s). We ponder how these acts of

‘stocktaking’ create a sense of familiarity and belonging but also how, occasionally, the most familiar settings become uncannily incomprehensible, disturbing the existing modes of knowing, prompting new revelations and discoveries. Importantly, the latter experience also solicits our acceptance that places refuse fixity and tidiness: the constancy of the morphing landscape and its permeable and imbricated boundaries makes *The Crow Trap* an unconventional detective novel. While Vera’s quest to restore order upon the human dramas is palpable, albeit at times convoluted, her relationship to the physical spaces negotiated in the novel is more ambiguous, inhabiting the terrain of remembrance and recollection, as she also negotiates the landscape of her past. Vera is ultimately able to solve the crime on account of her affective encounters with the disruptive and untameable landscape that the novel depicts. And so, being acted upon by both natural forces and human agency – always in process – the land itself perpetually undermines the received oppositions between nature and culture, science and intuition, perpetrator and victim, and past and present.

### **Taking Stock of Things: Landscape Exploration, Aesthetic Pleasure and Detection**

Rather than adhering uncritically to the foundational tropes of the detective fiction genre that uphold myths of mastery and knowability proceeding on account of “superficially convincing evidence that is ultimately irrelevant” (Encyclopaedia Britannica), *The Crow Trap* brings to the fore the puzzle-solving nature of detective fiction through its affective engagement with landscape and place through multiple acts of stocktaking undertaken by different characters. While Vera comes across a number of red herrings and circumvents them in time, ultimately mastering the human-centric dramas and solving the constitutive crimes, Cleves also elicits a subtle critique of the perceived simplicity by which detection narratives proceed. Typical genre themes of control and categorisation effectively fall short of the mark when turned away from the human psyche toward the presence that the landscape exerts throughout the novel. This landscape cannot be adequately contained on account of conventional methods. Instead, it is perhaps better understood as part of what Charles J. Rzepka describes as the nearly geological turn inherent in some of the earliest examples of crime fiction, which propose to disentangle the various agents within the text as an act of puzzling in order “to enable readers not to solve the crime but to exercise their retrospective imaginations. As we read forward, we imagine backward, analeptically” (Rzepka 3). Lingering within the relationships between various puzzle pieces – landscape and the natural world prominent among them – not only opens up a view on a wide variety of phenomena that might otherwise be overlooked but also invites for reflections of the genre itself. In *The Crow Trap* the puzzle pieces are continuously (re)arranged in intricate patterns by the police team, Vera (who in particular engages with the terrain both physically and psychologically), and the affective and deeply attentive work of the female surveyors.

The novel’s prologue opens with a description of an Ordnance Survey map of “The North Pennines, Kimmerston and the Surrounding Areas” (1). Intended to provide sufficient information for tourists, the map does not mention Baikie’s cottage by name nor does it convey an idea of “the dark shadow of the forest, the grey stone buildings beyond the yard” and the rocky snow-topped silhouette of the Faiburn Crag, which can be observed from the window of the neighbouring Black Law Farm (2). Echoing the quote from the beginning of this chapter, the description points to the inevitable disparity between the Ordnance Survey’s uniform design, levelling the topography and the living experience of the land the map is expected to represent.

Maps may attempt to assert control but . . . they are always open to subversion . . . The meticulous detail of the Ordnance Survey map (a detail that nonetheless is never complete as the nuclear power station, the bunker, disappear from view) make it open to renegotiation,

writes Barbara Bender (307). Time and time again, the novel addresses the insufficiency of abstract administrative methods of exploring the natural territory *and* investigating the crime, setting them against the value of local knowledge and place lore. Just as the tourist maps fail to relay the full range of vernacular features rendering the area distinctive, so to the large-scale maps and satellite landscape surveys used for the fieldwork need “ground-truthing . . . bending close to the soil . . . getting things right” (Cleeves 89). For the botanist Anne, the most rewarding part of her job is

the detailed investigation, identifying plants within the [randomly placed two-meter square wooden] frames, recording their abundance. She loved teasing through the sphagnum moss for plants like cranberry, bog rosemary, bog asphodel, squatting so close to the ground so she could smell the peat, feel the insects on her fingers.

(Cleeves 90–91)

Throughout the narrative, relying on maps is counterpoised with the intense sensory experience of being in the landscape. Survey maps, as feminist geographer Gillian Rose reminds us, are representative of geographic fieldwork which was once considered “a particular kind of masculine endeavour” (154) and “involved mastering the skills of surveying, mapping, sketching and photographing the land” (153). Arguing against the division of geography into the human, concerned with studies of social relations, and the physical, focusing on the natural environment (which tapped into the traditional nature/culture dichotomy), Rose advocates a different kind of geographical imagination, which goes beyond the disembodied, rationalised knowing of the land, and instead requires “the sensibilities of the aesthete as well as the objectivity of the scientist” (158). “For many, there is pleasure and wonder in fieldwork; looking gives the researcher the gorgeous scene, the enlightening detail, the breathtaking view, the beauty of diversity”, suggests Rose (157). In *The Crow Trap* the female scientists (and Detective Stanhope, as we will argue later) maintain their professional gaze and analytical distance but also experience an intense pleasure from taking in the complex and magnificent Northumberland scenery. The fieldwork expeditions speak to all their senses attesting that, as Ingold contends, “the environment is, in the first place, a world we live in, and not a world we look at” (95). Ingold elaborates:

We inhabit our environment: we are part of it; and through this practice of habitation it becomes part of us too. We see with eyes trained by our experience of watching what is going on around us, hear with ears tuned by the sounds that matter to us, and touch with bodies that have become accustomed, by the lives we lead, to certain kinds of movement. Smells, too, excite memories and anticipations. This inhabited world – the world of our perception – includes the earth beneath our feet, the sky arching above our heads, the air we breathe, not to mention the profusion of vegetation, powered by the light of the sun, and all the animals that depend on it, busily absorbed in their own lives as are we in ours.

(Ingold 95)

In the novel, the women’s “ambulant encounters” (Bender 306) with the landscape, are imagined as “arriving in a different world” (Cleeves 153) and, indeed, affect all their senses. They find themselves “out on the hill . . . [able to] see to the horizon in every direction” (211) and take in “the smell of gorse, damp peat and crushed heather, the sound of skylark, curlew and distant sheep” (383). They notice “primroses in bud and violets” in the sheltered bank of the river ford (89) and the long grass “mixed with buttercups and clover” in the low meadow towards the hill (437); they inhale “the smell of the peat” (157) and watch “cormorants standing on the staites in the river” (259) and “the goshawk fly out of the forest to swoop onto a young grouse” (270); they walk into “a thicket of gorse in full flower with its sweet scent of roasted coconut” (382) and listen to “a burst of a birdsong” (357).

As previously noted, such naming, and careful description of a large variety of life animating the landscape clearly reverberates with new nature writing's aesthetic repertoire. Apart from enacting a heartfelt enjoyment from being there – inhabiting the environment in Ingold's sense – the ambient details oppose the flattened spatiality of maps and make readers acutely aware of the Northumberland geography with its unique species, patterns, and ecosystems. These scenes also confuse the perceived difference between human figures and landscape, simultaneously opening and grounding the possibility of ecological consciousness.

In concert with Rose's argument, the fieldwork experiences in *The Crow Trap* further illuminate the inseparability of scientific observation, measuring and recording, and the emotional commitment that informs the desire to know and understand nature's dynamic and self-regulating capacity. Assuming a position of the landscape's responsive inhabitant inevitably brings into question the correctness of easy scientific assumptions. The unbiased perusal of the local plant and animal population at the place of the abandoned lead mine does not confirm the prognoses of the survey's outcomes.<sup>3</sup> No calamitous environmental anomalies are found to advise against the prospective quarrying, which complicates the antagonism between the industrial intervention and what used to be the unpolluted wild area. The evidence of the land's multilayered history and never-ending resilience starts early in the narrative when Rachael visits the disused mine to see it colonised by nature and the elements:

The track crossed the stream and came to the old lead mine. The estate had talked once of doing it up, turning it into a living museum, but nothing had come of it. Soon there would be little left to preserve. There was still a chimney but it was crumbling from the top, eaten into by the weather, so the brickwork seemed to unravel like a piece of knitting . . . There was the smell of stale water and decay.

(Cleeves 29)

Parallel to this spontaneous process, there are the Forestry Commission's plantations bordering to the old mine area (Cleeves 519), and the Wildlife Trust's recent initiatives to make one of the nearby worked-out quarries into a new natural reserve by flooding the pits and turning them into ponds, which has already "attracted mallards, coot and moorhen" (109). Although not implying the pristine return to the wild, the organised attempts of "rewilding" along with the ad hoc adaptation of natural life to new circumstances do emphasise the long-lasting and entangled relationship between human and non-human worlds and bring in stark relief nature's perpetual refusal to recede.

The detective plot develops along a similar line of registering the land's patterns and rhythms and unveiling the ways in which all stories are brought together through temporary alliances between human and non-human nature, the echoes of which outlive their immediate purposes. We learn that as a child, Vera often accompanied her father on his visits to Constance Baikie – the artist and local naturalist – and has indelible memories of the cottage and her endless rambles through the adjacent fields and lanes. Vera's father, who was never fond of children and a widower, was a fervent amateur naturalist (Cleeves 235). Over the years, he and Constance developed a deep friendship through their shared hobbies: both stole (rare) bird eggs, forcing Vera to partake when wardens and park rangers were present, and amassed sizeable collections, even after foraging in this way was made illegal.<sup>4</sup> These complex childhood undertakings – and an early exposure to the landscape combined with her adult experience as a police detective – give Vera an intuitive and affective edge over other less locally attuned colleagues, whose traditional methods of inquiry that mimic the regulatory nature of the mine, the survey ordnance maps, and the rigidity of scientific knowing, result in little to no useful knowledge. Just like in the case of the female researcher team, Vera's investigation requires an objective, disinterested gaze, but also an ability to "inhabit" the environment abandoning herself to emotions and reminiscences it inspires, combining her deeply personal associations with the local natural world and the broader machinations at work in the novel. Armed not

with fancy gadgetry that might enable a mastery over the environment and subsequent secrets it might be hiding, instead, she is armed with her natural observations, memories, and keen knowledge of the land. As a detective, Vera proceeds by unearthing and negotiating what lies hidden in the psychological and physical body of the landscape rather than attempting to control and organise. Such affective attunement suggests Detective Stanhope is a new type of a bottom-up detective who is sensitive to place-based details, rather than the traditional top-down, patriarchal figure once common in detective literature who is concerned primarily with the objective ‘bigger picture’. This both functions as critique of the genre conventions while also forging important progressions: Cleaves develops a different sort of detective within an affective and feminist turn who senses and puzzles with greater variety, melding impartial observation, intuition, and aesthetic engagement into a new detective figure who also further nuances the propositions of Rzepka developed earlier.

In the final part of the narrative, Vera is walking the public footpath from Langholm towards the mine intending to finally apprehend the culprit:

She . . . followed the well-worn path towards Black Law, walking steadily, only turning her head from time to time to check that no one was following her. The path crossed the hill. On the lower slopes there were dry stone walls. The grass was cropped low by sheep. When she’d walked here in her childhood she’d been fit. . . . It was another clear, hot day and soon she was sweating and dizzy with exertion. . . . She walked through a gap in the last crumbling wall and the path climbed steeply. The ground was more uneven. Bright green bog and tufts of juncous, curlew and skylark. . . . At the tarn she allowed herself to rest. . . . A slight breeze rippled the water and dried the sweat of her face. From where she sat she could look down into the valley, to Baikie’s and Black Law farmhouse and the old mine. She stood up and walked on, finding the going easier because it was downhill.

(518–519)

Presenting Vera’s walk as an embodied, sensory experience, the fragment highlights how one’s sense of self and the environment are mutually constituted. This attention to the simultaneity of the human and non-human worlds together with the unhurried description of the smells, sounds, and textures of things considerably postpone the denouement. W.J.T. Mitchell seminally argued that the emphasis on the acts of seeing (and, as we argue, other sensual experiences) and on spatial relationships, often happening in women’s writing, undermines the domination of space by linear narrative progression (1989).<sup>5</sup> The dramatic, purposeful, temporal narrative becomes suspended by what in classic narrative theory has a supportive function: namely by space, description, the sight and material qualities of objects, people, and relationships. Interspersing the linear narrative movement of a whodunnit, these moments of stasis impart a different narrative rhythm. They also challenge the restrictive definition of the landscape as the “natural” setting for the “cultural” story. Creating spaces for remembering and reflective distancing, the landscape here emerges as an actor within the narrative that is more-than scene of the crime, undermining the assumption of a detective story itself: that its solutions can resolve cultural complexities or redeem the past.

### **Affective Encounters With Landscape and Memory**

Throughout *The Crow Trap*’s ecologically-oriented narrative, a variety of “clues” make the traces of the past present. Couched in the stark countryside these clues signify not only criminal acts, but often other memories of intricate family and small-town dramas that particular places give rise to. Thus, the landscape the characters walk and survey functions as a sort of living archive that can be unpacked through their close engagement with the natural world. This is not only undertaken by Vera, but by



the entire cast of characters as they engage with the spectres of the past and puzzle through the circumstances of the present. From the get-go, the recollections of the surveyors are tessellated within Vera's, the sum total of which eventually help to unveil the perpetrator.

The piece of land around the abandoned mine emerges as a central and multilayered location within the narrative that assists in marking various memories and their associated meanings. These psychosocial strands are woven into the physical landscape, which operates not only geologically, but also, we argue, culturally, as a "store of information that can be accessed by users" (Skaloš and Kašparová 63). Near the end of the story, when Rachael and Anne return to the mine to clear the quadrats from the survey zone, they describe

Look[ing] down on the site. With the grey block of the mine, the dark moss of the conifer, the pale snake line of the burn, it was like looking down onto a map. They could see the curve in the burn where Grace's body had been found.

*(Cleeves 383)*

Completing their business is interrupted when they come across a particular spot that elicits an immediate affective response within both women, as they register it as the scene of their colleague's murder. While the two women associate the area with both their work and Grace's untimely death, for Barbara Waugh – the murderer herself – the ruined buildings and channelled streambeds are the burial site of a long-dead child whom she interred in the shallow earth under the floor of the decrepit engine house (Cleeves 531). Barbara commemorates this distant crime by visiting regularly and laying a posy of non-indigenous flowers, "lily of the valley and pale narcissi", at the entrance to the ruin (Cleeves 29). Although unaware of the small bouquet's purpose, Rachael remarks upon it when she first visits the mine, depicting Cleeves' entangled conceptualisation of landscape and memories. The posy of flowers, engine house ruins, and gentle curve of the stream all function as memorial anchors that tie both criminal and commemorative acts to the landscape and are emblematic of the inwrought aspect of the memories that the landscape conceals within plain sight.

Developing upon Mitchell's notions explored in the previous section that descriptions of the natural world advance environmental consciousness as well as provide narrative clues, rather than being an unremarkable happenstance of the novel, local engagements with memory and landscape are essential elements that develop a robust ecology of place. Memorials – be they constructed to those ends or less-official sites – are dependent upon what James E. Young has called the "vast array of . . . material, aesthetic, spatial, [and] ideological [forces] converging in one memorial site" (Young x). But memorial sites, as Young goes on to suggest, are not shut-off from the locales in which they are situated. They are in conversation with the wider world around them. Indeed, as Canadian geographer Edward Relph wrote in his 1976 book *Place and Placelessness*, lived-in/living landscapes achieve their meaning through the experiences of those who dwell there. But a sense of place is not determined by human acts alone, and Relph helps to further nuance our notion in the previous section, that self and environment are mutually constitutive: it is rather a complex relationship between a wide variety of human actions and natural processes, settings, and features that mix together to (in)form these collaboratively produced entities and identities. He writes:

In our everyday lives places are not experienced as independent, clearly defined entities that can be described simply in terms of their location or appearance. Rather they are sensed in a chiaroscuro of setting, landscape, ritual, routine, other people, personal experiences, care and concern for home, and in the context of other places.

*(Relph 29)*

Relph's text, an early frontrunner in the renegotiation and subsequent attunement of the field of geography to affective and philosophical questions, elaborates upon and grounds Rose's later theorisations on moving from rationalised landscapes towards place-based experiences and imaginative relationships between people and the places they inhabit and encounter. The chiaroscuro – the gradient (non) boundaries – that Relph describes are particularly visible in *The Crow Trap*, woven into the narrative at every turn, helping to read the landscape of the North Pennines as more than mere setting. The landscape that emerges throughout the text takes on new agency and identity as the characters negotiate memories that are roused through their engagement with the environment, enlivening the mode of detective fiction. While the grammar of geology – unearthing, digging, sifting – has been present in crime fiction's structure from its earliest moments, reading with Relph helps reinterpret these earthly encounters, moving away from human interventions carried out by detective and reader alone, reframing the role of landscape within the narrative puzzle to realise its affective imbrications.

Tending toward the “the sensibilities of the aesthete” (Rose 158), during one of her first thorough walks of the landscape, Rachael describes the area near the old mine with a local's level of detail (Cleeves 29, cited in the previous section) situating the focal point of the abandoned buildings – and the time to which they gesture – within the broader panorama when she summits Hope Crag. “The land sloped gently in a series of plateaux to the horizon, which was softened by woodland”, including strips of managed and burnt heather in various stages of growth: “[t]here was a soft westerly breeze blowing into her face and all around her was the song of meadow pipit, skylark, and curlew” (Cleeves 30). Such descriptive passages permeate *The Crow Trap*, creating the chiaroscuro of setting that help to define that specific place: these natural/cultural features also function as memory markers, occurring on a scalar variety from the massive size of Hope Crag to the mine's engine house, the swollen skirl, and the migratory range of local birds. Thus, Relph's work helps situate the experience of place in the novel within a series of overlapping concentric circles: from the now-abandoned mine that links the Pennines to resource extraction and industrialisation on a global scale, to the professional acts of surveying the landscape to catalogue the flora and fauna (Cleeves 29), and ultimately to the deeply personal experiences of the people that help to develop and articulate a sense of *this* particular place (Cleeves 63).

Utilising this relational framework encourages a co-constitutive view of self and place where both give meaning to each other, moving towards recognising what Anna Tsing has called “polyphonic assemblages” to illuminate how autonomous identities intertwine their non-unified but nonetheless simultaneous and particular narratives and rhythms (24–25). Frequently, the places that encourage this sort of engagement are themselves liminal: in-between, neither entirely natural nor human, neither entirely present nor past, timeless yet bearing time's trace, echoing Relph's contention that “places are emerging or becoming; with historical and cultural change new elements are added and old elements disappear. Thus, places have a distinct historical component” (3).

Cleeves employs a specific grammar of place descriptions that is informed by the tradition of nature writing, allowing for “different times and their legacies” that are piled-up on top of one another “in no particular order” to come to the fore (Elliot 35, cited earlier). The places that jog the character's memories are often decrepit/abandoned sites that were previously dominated by human usage, but have since slipped into new, similarly liminal versions of themselves, in what Relph conceives as neither uniform nor homogenous (5) and where they are “never empty, but [have] content and substance that derive both from human intention and imagination and from the character of the space” itself (10). In *The Crow Trap*, this includes not only the mine and outbuildings there, but also the cared-for spaces where the local nature is woven into human actions and purposes, like the priory garden replete with “overblown blooms” lovingly nurtured by Anne (347), or the parish church, St. Bartholomew's, “separated from the roads by low stone walls” and a “wooden lych-gate”, bearing the trace of past generations who have lived and died in Kimmerston and the surrounding region (261). These liminal territories open room for reflection through people engaging with them: the business

of human concerns (alone) recedes, and the vastness of the living landscape in its variety fills the atmosphere of the novel.

While all characters find many echoes from the past while walking the landscape, Vera's occupational function as the detective makes her retrospective moments of primary interest: it is Vera's private reminiscences of her visits to Baikie's that ultimately enable her to expose the sinister acts – both past and present – perpetrated near the cottage, farm, and mine. And while uncovering distant memories and events is a standard feature of crime fiction, brought about by an affective engagement with the surrounding landscape, here they culminate in solving the crime(s). As such, we argue that Vera might be read as a restitutive figure, able to navigate the boundaries between past and present that would otherwise obfuscate one another. As a witness to these recollective occurrences, she is not only a detective, but also an archivist working with and through the memory repository that is the landscape: the reward of bringing the perpetrator to justice requires digging into the traces the past leaves upon the present, searching for clues, and correlating webs of stories, actions, and phenomena. This proffers a new kind of epistemology, highlighting the ways in which the scientific and analytical methods of ordnance, survey, and detection would have been inadequate on their own to solve the crime.

Cleeves' novel also engages with what Andreas Huyssen defines as one of the potential pitfalls of memory – “its hypertrophy” which has the possibility to lead to “self-indulgence, melancholy fixations, and problematic privileging of the traumatic dimension of life” (6). Yet, in crime fiction, this possible pitfall proves to be a central aspect of memory-work: ruminating on complex and conflicting memories brings key features of the previously unexamined to light. Vera's fixations in the latter half of the novel as she contemplates her childhood spent at Baikie's – triggered by her contact with the environmentalists and the cataloguing that they have been brought in to perform – are key to her solving the crime. While walking the terrain at Baikie's and mulling over her past, Vera first navigates the landscape in which the crimes take place in the archive of her memory, ultimately utilising this uncovered knowledge – enabled in turn by the landscape itself – to help her catch the killer. One afternoon at the cottage, Rachael is joined by Vera who tells her about her childhood there, and her motivations for doing so.

“I expect you think I'm odd”, she said. “Eccentric. Even that I'm dragging up my past for effect. That's not the case, and if I do have a reputation for eccentricity, I have one too for getting results . . . I'm telling you, so you know I understand what goes on here.”

*(Cleeves 235)*

In the final scenes, the narrative crescendos. After stopping at home for sturdy boots and other hiking equipment, Vera takes to the hills, departing from the edge of the village, transitioning through the liminal spaces that border the settlement to the rugged Pennines, taking note of and negotiating the landscape that she knows so well, accompanied all the while by her own childhood recollections of the place as she hunts down the perpetrator of the crimes (Cleeves 518). Upon arriving at the mine's abandoned engine room, out of breath but invigorated, Vera catches the criminal.

Tonight the moon was covered by the low, dense cloud which had rolled in like fog. From the shell of the engine room came another sound, the scrape of metal against stone and soil . . . The woman was standing with her back to the gap in the wall [and] had loosened a flagstone from the corner of the room and shifted it enough so she could dig out the soil underneath. The grave must have been shallow because already Vera saw a fragment of bone, cream as ivory, waxy in the candlelight. The woman squatted and began to scabble at the soil with her fingers.

*(Cleeves 525)*

Vera discovers the woman in question, Barbara Waugh, as she is scrabbling unhinged and nervous at the limestone and soil to exhume the bones of the unnamed child whom she killed in a psychotic episode near Baikie's Cottage long ago. The true purpose of the posies of flowers left at the site as well as the motivation for stopping the environmental assessment by any means necessary – including murder – come to light. Barbara's interment and exhumation of the child further elaborate on and add to the chiaroscuro of actions that Relph describes, adding another layer of memory on to the already elaborately woven sense of place developed throughout the novel. Her criminal and ritualistic acts commemorate the body of the murdered child to the earth, mingling the two together, performing a literal covering up of her crimes in an attempt to bury her deeds within the land itself. Later, half-crazed and frightened of being discovered, Barbara is undone as she brings the physical remainder of those memories – the bones of the deceased child – back to the surface. The interactive and often messy framework of memory, landscape, and detection is the engine driving the narrative throughout *The Crow Trap*. Cleeves achieves her innovative plot resolution through tessellating a confluence of human and natural/cultural forces that work together.

### Conclusion, or the Goshawk Did It

While crime fiction is not always ecologically focused, it is, we argue, often concerned with constituting an ecology of a particular place. As the developments of the present spin ever onward, blurring distinctions and shrinking the experiential dimension of space and time, in crime fiction, the local and particular open before us again as a repository not only of memory, but certainly in *The Crow Trap*, as a worthy place to be engaged with. That's in part because places to which we are most attached, according to Relph, might be thought of as "fields of care, settings in which we have had a multiplicity of experience and which call forth an entire complex of affections and responses" (Relph 38). Crime fiction of this sort helps to establish an ecology of place through cataloguing what is right around us – the physical elements of the natural/cultural world, which often also feature as markers of human memories. They might be reminders of a deep ecological past brought forth by contemplating the weathered sky-reaching Pennines, the history and course of a meandering river through a gentle vale, or even a series of crimes committed and commemorated by a disturbed mind.

As we have established, Cleeves' novel is doubtlessly a fascinating continuation and exploration of the trends developed in the British School of new nature writing that were (re)kindled in the late nineties and early aughts and are part of a longer tradition that renegotiates the relationships between people and place through precise and often affective description. Passages in *The Crow Trap* are reminiscent of nature writing frontrunners, such as Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* (1977), where attention to and description of minute detail brings the lived-in reality of the natural world prominently to the fore as more than mere setting. Cleeves and Shepherd both share what Robert Macfarlane has called the "localist perspective" whose "closeness serve[s] to intensify rather than to limit [their] vision" and testifies to a local intuition and affinity that counteracts the placelessness and estrangement often charted in contemporary narratives of global capitalism, as their authors attempt to think on a planetary scale (Macfarlane 2011 xiv, foreword in Shepherd 1977). This sort of writing has the ability to permeate a wide variety of genres, and Cleeves employs it in her crime fiction to the effect that the text reads, like Shepherd's own work, as "field-note, memoir, natural history and [sometimes] philosophical meditation" (Macfarlane xiv). In these sorts of texts, the more one reads them, the more they reveal about not only the environments and places described, but also, of the imbrication of human actions within the living physical bodies of the landscapes and the living psychosocial body of memory.

In Cleeves' novel, people form their relationship with land through both criminal and restitutive acts: they kidnap children by a swollen river in the spring; they bury their dead in an abandoned and

crumbling building; they pick flowers and lay them next to a shallow grave. The descriptions and realities of the places themselves – and the mediated recollections of their previous forms – intermingle throughout the story, by turns discontinuous and complementary, are also harbingers of the memories that suffuse them. These hybrid natural/cultural spaces exist across many different timelines, both real and imagined, making pasts present and navigable as they imitate the hidden collies and ravines, the skirls and burns, of the narrative and physical landscape.

While *The Crow Trap* promotes at nearly every turn the reading of an interwoven natural/cultural narrative, at some point, it also opens a different reflection while sketching the challenging and often insurmountable human-imposed schism between natural and cultural worlds. In the final pages of the book, Vera recounts the story of the initial crime committed by a disturbed and mentally unstable Barbara Waugh many years before:

At the same time as one of Barbara's disappearances, a toddler disappeared. His mother and her boyfriend had brought him for an outing to the hills . . . While the pair were otherwise engaged the boy vanished. If you believed the local newspapers he'd been swept away by a large hawk to its eyrie. If you believed me at the time he was drowned in the skirl which was in flood. In fact we were both wrong. The boy was taken by Barbara Waugh on one of her crazy moorland wanderings . . . later she took him to the old mine and kept him as a pet, a toy, a replacement son . . . We don't know yet how he died . . . At some time, either then or later, she buried him under the flagstones of the engine house. She tried to forget him but couldn't quite.

*(Cleeves 531–532)*

When Vera was a young police officer, the unresolved disappearance of the child was attributed to nature: if not a goshawk carrying off the young toddler, symbolically robbed of its young by egg poachers, then a tempestuous and dangerous river that had swollen beyond its banks was responsible for carrying the child away. In either scenario, the agents of nature are employed as scapegoats that inhabit a curious double bind. On the one hand, it appears that they cannot be guilty of committing a crime or held responsible for doing so. While Cleeves' novel shows a thoroughly blended natural/cultural world, the details of the historical case imply that the divide between the natural and the cultural still exists. On the other hand, when something cannot be explained through the pernicious, premeditated, or passionate criminal acts of humans, then nature is substituted as a necessary catch-all, a summary "Act of God" that is decidedly non-human, to blame, and yet seemingly incapable of true culpability. The human-devised resolution to a conundrum that cannot be adequately solved through lack of evidence when no other option is present? The goshawk did it.

## Notes

1. New nature writing as a distinctive literary movement was first conceptualised in the 2008 themed issue of the popular literary journal *Granta*, edited by Jason Cowley. The issue included a wide range of pieces on nature, from writers such as Kathleen Jamie, Jonathan Raban, Richard Mabey, Robert Macfarlane, and Lydia Peelle.
2. Recent developments in landscape theory work to affirm this claim (see Elkins and DeLue). The roots of the word in the Nordic and Germanic languages suggest a close relation between physical features of a place and the population that dwells there. This underscores the mutual shaping of people and place not only through physical tools but also through ideology and policy (Spirn 92–93).
3. In the novel, the impartiality of the environmental survey bears a risk of being compromised when it transpires that Grace deliberately augmented the number of otters in the area. What is more, the readers learn that the women's employer Peter Kemp not only has plagiarised Rachael's sampling technology but also attempts to steer the survey in the direction that would better suit his own career plans.
4. Without exonerating individual people from environmental responsibility, Cleeves juxtaposes the small-scale egg collecting with large-scale and officially authorised industrial activities, showing how humans idiosyncratically

define limits of acceptability with regards to environmental intervention, privileging global and expansive operations above the local by making one legal (and financially lucrative) and the other illicit and shameful.

- Mitchell illustrates this by turning to the classic examples of Jane Austen's *Emma*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*.

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