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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

STORIED MIDDLE AGES: MATTER, NATURE, AND BECOMING

Master Thesis

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Supervisor

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Herhangi bir zamanda, çalışmamla ilgili yaptığım bu beyana aykırı bir durumun saptanması durumunda, ortaya çıkacak tüm ahlaki ve hukuki sonuçlara razı olduğumu bildiririm.

Melih Sezgin

Preface

Ever since I was a child, I have been fascinated by stories. I have believed in stories and the worlds they create. I have always believed that stories and their components continue to live beyond the pages on which they are written. Therefore, I consider myself blessed to have the opportunity to study stories and their components in this dissertation.

This dissertation was made possible by the contributions of many valuable people. First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Associate Professor Züleyha Çetiner-Öktem, whose guidance, encouragement, and help throughout my master's program always made me feel her support. Additionally, I extend my sincere gratitude to the esteemed Associate Professor Emre Çakar, whom I have known for many years and have always considered myself very fortunate to know.

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İzmir, 2026 Melih SEZGİN

Özet

Bu tez Geoffrey Chaucer'ın *The Canterbury Tales* adlı eserini ve Gawain şairinin *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* şiirini yeni maddecilik ve maddeci ekoeleştiri kuramları perspektifinden incelemektedir. Kartezyen düşünce sisteminin inşa ettiği insanmerkezci yaklaşımlar bu çalışma tarafından reddedilerek, her iki anlatıda da maddenin failliğini irdeleyecektir.

Bu tezde Orta Çağ anlatılarından *The Canterbury Tales*'in seçili hikâyeleri ve *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* şiiri, Serpil Oppermann ve Serenella Iovino tarafından geliştirilen hikâyeli madde teorisi uygulanarak, maddelerin diğer maddeler ile hikâye kurabilme faillikleri incelenecektir. Ele alınacak bu Orta Çağ anlatıları, maddeci bakış açısı getirilerek, maddenin aktifliğinin, eyleyiciliğinin ve dönüştürücülüğünün hikâyelerle ilişkisi irdelenecektir. İnceleme sonucunda canlı maddelerin insan ve insan olmayan varlıklar üzerindeki etkileri de analiz edilecektir. Bu sayede, Orta Çağ İngiliz edebiyatının önde gelen *The Canterbury Tales* ve *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* şiirleri, posthümanist düşünce ile gelişen madde ve insan dışı failliğin hikâyelere etkisi mercek altına alınacaktır.

Bu etkiyi ortaya koyabilmek için, Serpil Oppermann ve Serenella Iovino tarafından geliştirilen maddeci ekoeleştirinin köklerini oluşturan ekoeleştiri, posthumanizm ve yeni maddecilik kuramlarına başvurulacaktır. Bu çalışmada Karen Barad'ın eyleyici gerçeklik kuramı, Jane Bennett'in şeylerin gücü, Stacy Alaimo'nun bedenler arası kavramları, her iki geç Orta Çağ eserinde de ele alınacak ve bu kavramlar hikâyeli madde çatısı altında incelenecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Orta Çağ, Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, maddeci ekoeleştiri, yeni maddecilik

Abstract

This thesis examines Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and the Gawain poet's *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* from the scope of new materialism and material ecocriticism theories. Rejecting the anthropocentric approaches established by the Cartesian system of thought, this study will explore the agency of matter in both narratives.

This thesis will examine selected stories from *The Canterbury Tales* and the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* from medieval narratives, applying the storied matter theory developed by Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino to investigate the agency of matter in constructing narratives with other matters. These medieval narratives will be analyzed from a materialist perspective, exploring the relationship between activity, agency, and the transformative power of matter and narratives. The study will also analyze the effects of living matter on human and non-human entities. In this way, the influence of posthuman thought and the concepts of matter and non-human agency on the stories of leading poems of medieval English literature, namely, *The Canterbury Tales* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, will be explored.

To demonstrate this effect, this study will draw upon the theories of ecocriticism, posthumanism, and new materialism, which form the roots of the material ecocriticism developed by Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino. In this study, Karen Barad's theory of "agential realism," Jane Bennett's "thing-power," and Stacy Alaimo's concepts of "trans-corporeality" will be examined in both late medieval works and analyzed under the framework of storied matter.

Keywords: Medieval Age, Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Material Ecocriticism, New Materialism

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INTRODUCTION

A spring breeze, summer, love, a winter wind, fall, unhappiness, a journey, illnesses, armor, an axe, birds singing, grass growing in the meadows, an apple falling from a tree, two people eating the apple… Creating and telling stories is one of the most fascinating abilities through which both living and non-living things convey what has been experienced or imagine what has not. It would not be wrong to say that, consciously or unconsciously, we are all part of stories. However, to think that these stories are only those in which we are the protagonists would be to overlook the non-human living and non-living world, their ability to create stories, or the fact that they are components of a story. The stories that have existed, exist, and will exist in every moment of life demonstrate that life cannot be conceived of separately from stories. Even though we may not know what this very ground beneath our homes was like in a past we cannot recall whether it was a swamp or a garden in bloom-we are now creating our own part of a story on top of the stories that existed in the past. Over six hundred years ago, pilgrims gathering at the Southwark Tabard Inn to visit Canterbury Cathedral with the arrival of spring were forming fragments of a palimpsest.

Just like these pilgrims, around the same time, a green giant becomes part of a different story by visiting King Arthur's court in Camelot—a place whose existence is unknown. Neither the pilgrims nor the Green Knight are the mere owners of these stories; they are the actors in them, because these stories are not built solely by people. They are composed of the Tabard Inn where the pilgrims gathered and which has not survived to the present day; the imaginary Green Chapel, nature awakening with the arrival of spring, the seasons that challenge both living and non-living things with the arrival of winter, the grove, the rocks, the ship, the poison, the gold, the axe-in short, all the elements, both seen and unseen, told and untold.

Although the pilgrims plan to tell two stories each on their journey there and back, seemingly to pass the time or to get a free meal, storytelling is not simply a recounting of past events. The stories and the narratives within them draw the reader's and listener's

attention by prompting them to question life, reminding them of the living and non-living things in this world. For example, in *The Canterbury Tales*, the rocks that Dorigen fears will harm her husband on his return journey, and the green girdle that Sir Gawain wears, hoping for protection just before confronting the Green Knight, demonstrate that human life cannot exist and tell its story independently of other living and non-living life; it is co-constituted. Matter and culture, human and non-human, are not opposed to each other but co-constitute. These co-constitutive elements, in a constant state of becoming, are not only the matter of today, but also of the past and the future.

Although medieval narratives use narrative techniques such as romance and fable to tell stories in different ways, nature, living, and non-living matter are present in all of them. In other words, even if the types and techniques of storytelling change, the matter is present in these stories. It is possible to witness this journey of matter in medieval works. Although the stories are told from a human perspective, the narratives always include nature, the environment, and matter. For readers, reading stories with their natural and material components helps them understand the issue of human equality with other living and non-living beings, which is grounded in posthumanist thought.

While this perspective, which the anthropocentric thought system attempts to construct, causes matter to be ignored in stories, the idea that life is also composed of different actors opens the way for the material turn. The material turn, which forms the basis of fourth-wave ecocriticism and new materialism, opens a new door in environmental humanities. This transformation, which reinterprets animate and inanimate life, is about entanglement and becoming, as Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino describe: "Whether visible or invisible, socialized or wild, they are all material forms emerging in combination with forces, agencies, and other matter. Entangled in endless ways, their 'more-than human' materiality is a constant process of shared becoming that tells us something about the 'world we inhabit."[1]

Evaluating stories not only as they are told, but also from the perspective of their material aspects, helps the reader better understand the stories by comprehending their discourse. The idea that humans, like other non-human matter, are part of this mash,

[1]Serpil Oppermann, "From Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism: Creative Materiality and Narrative Agency," in *Material Ecocriticism*, ed. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 1.

paving the way for materialistic thought, is evident in medieval texts. Stories demonstrating that matter can interact with other living and non-living things through co-constitutive or shared becoming can be found in *The Canterbury Tales* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. These stories, which allow observation of different social environments, reveal that matter is in an active, productive, and continuous state of shared becoming, demonstrating that living and non-living life together form a whole.

This thesis aims to examine the concepts of storied matter and becoming, which have contributed to the formation of material ecocriticism—a field shaped by ecology, ecocriticism, posthumanism, and new materialism—in medieval literature, specifically in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, using various theories and an interdisciplinary framework, in order to reveal matter's ability to produce stories. Although *The Canterbury Tales*, consisting of 24 stories, is composed entirely of animate and inanimate matter, six of them—*General Prologue, The Knight's Tale, The Miller's Tale, The Franklin's Tale, The Canon's Yeoman's Tale, The Merchant's Tale,* and *The Pardoner's Tale*—as well as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which consists of a single narrative, will be analyzed entirely within a materialist ecocritical framework.

This thesis consists of four chapters. The first and second chapters supply a theoretical framework in order to analyze the Late Medieval Age narratives, *The Canterbury Tales* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In chapter three, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* will be examined with the General Prologue and several tales. In the final chapter, the Gawain poet's *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* will be scrutinized comprehensively. Both narratives will be analyzed through posthumanist thinking, through new materialist concepts; such as Karen Barad's agential realism, Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality, and Jane Bennett's thing-power, under the umbrella of storied matter developed by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann.

The first chapter of this thesis argues that ecology and ecocriticism are the roots of material ecocriticism. Ecology, which studies living organisms using the scientific method, demonstrates that the relationship between the environment, nature, and humans is based on coexistence, thereby showing that nature and humans exist not separately, but together. Eco-criticism, which brings scientific discipline into the realm of art and

focuses on the relationships between living beings and their environments, is a theory that connects literature and culture. From its theorization in the 1990s to the present day, ecocriticism has undergone various stages, interpreted differently by various critics.

Emerging in waves, eco-criticism initially focused primarily on nature writing and wilderness studies, but over time, its scope has expanded to include topics such as environmental justice, urban space, and eco-cosmopolitanism. More recently, eco-criticism has opened up a new field of study within environmental humanities through the "material turn," emphasizing that matter is also an active, agency-bearing component.

The second chapter examines how posthumanist thought, one of the roots of material ecocriticism, has dismantled the anthropocentric hierarchy that has prevailed since the time of the sacred texts and the Enlightenment. Posthumanism is, at its core, a movement that challenges binary oppositions. While the materialist ecocriticism movement aims to bring to light the stories of living and non-living organisms, it is philosophically informed by posthumanism's elimination of binaries such as nature/culture, human/human, and matter/meaning. This is because the notion of social identity superiority, which has been sought to be constructed over a long period, is, in fact, a fragile and mutually generating form. By breaking down these binary oppositions, posthumanism allows ecocriticism to consider living and non-living matter on a horizontal plane.

Material ecocriticism, a recent theory in the environmental humanities that synthesizes the new materialism movement with ecocriticism, emphasizes that all living and non-living entities have their own stories. Published as a book in 2014 by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, *Material Ecocriticism* discusses the core premises of new materialism from an ecocritical perspective. According to this theory, humans are not the only living beings with stories. This theory, which intersects with the "material turn," emphasizes that matter is in constant motion, productive, and capable of generating narratives, while also highlighting that the boundaries between human and non-human are blurred, intertwined, and mutually constitutive.

In the third chapter of this thesis, *The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer's magnum opus and a work of the Late period in English literature, is examined through a

material ecocriticism framework, focusing on the General Prologue and several tales. The vitality, narrative, and transformative power of matter within the tales are explored. In the final chapter, another canonical work of the late Middle Ages, the anonymous Gawain-poet's *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is analyzed through the same theoretical lens. In both medieval works, key new materialist theories Karen Barad's agential realism, Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality, and Jane Bennett's thing-power, all taking place under the umbrella term "storied matter," will be examined. How materials construct their own stories through "storied matter," as developed by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, will be revealed.

CHAPTER I: ECOLOGY AND ECOCRITICISM

1.1. Ecology

Coined by German Biologist Ernst Haeckel, the term ecology is formed by combining two different Greek words, *oikos* (house) and *kritis* (judge), meaning "house judge." Ecology is not limited to individual activities of organisms or biological processes but also encompasses the whole entanglements through which organisms interact with their environment. This complex entanglement of organisms with the environment comprises conditions of existence. In order to survive, grow, and reproduce, organisms require "partly organic and inorganic"[1]1 matter. In other words, to achieve these three goals, organisms' interactions depend upon the material determinants. These interactions form a dynamic network in which living beings and their surroundings mutually shape one another. Similar to Ernst Haeckel's approach, Timothy Morton strongly attributes coexistence as a key feature of the environment and ecology; in other words, he highlights the significance of existence, thus:

> Ecology includes all the ways we imagine how we live together. Ecology is profoundly about coexistence. Existence is always coexistence. No man is an island. Human beings need each other as much as they need an environment. Human beings are each others' environment. Thinking ecologically isn't simply about nonhuman things. Ecology has to do with you and me.[2]

Placing "coexistence" at the heart of ecology shows that ecology is not simply a matter of nature; it contains other beings as biotics (living organisms i.e., humans, animals, plants, algae, etc.) and abiotics (non-living entities, i.e., stones, water, air, temperature, and more). These living organisms and nonliving entities together constitute the ecosystem or the ecosphere. Hence, thinking about ecology without biotic and abiotic components might be a shallow interpretation.

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[1] Robert C. Stauffer, "Haeckel, Darwin, and Ecology," *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 32, no.2 (1957): 140.

[2] Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 4.

However, Morton utilizes John Donne's poem *No Man Is an Island* [3] in his theory to emphasize that living beings not only coexist with different species but also with members of the same species. For instance, Donne tackles how humans form unity by pointing out that "a piece of the continent,"[4] he implies, they are members of the same species, an island. Therefore, for sure, when any man dies, he indicates "diminishes me". Considering that, every human is a piece of humanity, and even if anybody dies, it affects the whole of humanity. At first sight, either John Donne's poem or Timothy Morton's approach may seem anthropocentric (human-centered) because both of them deal with humans as a subject in their works. Because, when examined more comprehensively, it would be more accurate to claim that a human being, as an entity, is not self-sufficient but needs other living and nonliving beings in its surroundings; in other words, like a cog in the machine, the human is not a macrocosm but rather a microcosm that constitutes a part of the macrocosm.

Viewing the human being, a single organism, not as an ecosystem itself but as a participant in the biosphere, is a more comprehensive and holistic perspective. The idea of viewing humans as participants in the biosphere allows us to conceive of the biosphere as a home—a place to live—just as William Rueckert emphasizes: "The biosphere (or ecosphere) is the home that life has built for itself on the planet's outer surface."[5] The use of the biosphere here as an umbrella term underscores its holistic nature. Encompassing all realms of life, the biosphere includes organisms, populations, communities, ecosystems, and biomes. Hence, living or nonliving entities can be participants only. In this gigantic macrocosm, no being is superior to another; in fact, they are interconnected to each other and coexist. Furthermore, in his following sentence, Rueckert indicates: "In that ecosphere, there is a reciprocal interdependence of

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[3] John Donne, *Meditation 17*, in *Major Works: Including Songs and Sonnets and Sermons*, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 344.

[4] See Donne, *Major Works*, 344.

[5] William Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 112.

one life process upon another, and there is a mutual interconnected development of all the earth's life systems."[6]

Ufuk Özdağ explains the condition of non-superiority, coexistence, and interconnectedness within the biosphere or an ecosystem through the example of a fungus.[7] Özdağ indicates that if mushrooms become extinct, we all assume that nothing will change; yet it is the opposite. When mushrooms become extinct, it would be a disaster for the biosphere. Mycorrhiza is the general name of a mushroom species that lives symbiotically [8] with plants. There is a reciprocal interaction between these mushrooms and plants. Whereas mycorrhiza mushrooms enable water and minerals, plants provide sucrose and carbon. Indeed, the loss of these fungi would be catastrophic for the environment; nevertheless, as noted earlier, it is important to recognize that entities in nature coexist as interconnected parts of a whole. It is paramount to witness even a single, mostly disregarded mushroom and its effect on nature; however, what would happen if these mushrooms and *the wood wide web* [9]of life disappear? According to Özdağ, the biosphere, its hydrology, atmosphere, and temperature will alter.[10]

The network, circulation, coexistence, and symbiosis in nature are not limited to mycorrhizal fungi, which are part of terrestrial ecosystems. Corals and algae in aquatic ecosystems form a similar symbiosis through a mutually beneficial relationship. These algae, using the carbon dioxide of the corals for photosynthesis, produce sugar and oxygen through photosynthesis and transfer a significant portion of the produced nutrients to the corals. Thanks to this symbiosis, growing corals produce calcium and form reefs. This mutually beneficial transfer also lays the foundation for a practical relationship. However, although these algae or corals are organisms on their own in the aquatic ecosystem, that is, the smallest structures of the biosphere, they form a whole

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[6] See William Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 112.

[7] Ufuk Özdağ, *Çevreci Eleştiriye Giriş: Doğa, Kültür, Edebiyat* [Introduction to Ecocriticism: Nature, Culture, Literature], 2nd ed. (Ankara: Ürün Yayınları, 2017), 2.

[8] The term "symbiosis" was first introduced by the German botanist Anton de Bary.The term is based on the principle that different organisms can coexist.

[9]The term is a term coined by the journal Nature in 1997, based on the research of Suzanne Simard to describe the connection between tree roots and mycorrhizal fungal networks. For more information, see: Simard, S.W., Perry, D.A., Jones, M.D., Myrold, D.D., Durall, D.M., & Molina, R. (1997). "Net Transfer of Carbon between Ectomycorrhizal tree species in the field." Nature, 388 (6642), 579-582.

[10] See Özdağ, *Çevreci Eleştiriye Giriş*, 3.

after forming a symbiotic relationship through a mutually beneficial relationship. Furthermore, these organisms and genomes, the compartments of the biosphere where genes circulate, that is, these structures in constant flux and dynamic form, make up the big picture, the biosphere.

1.2. Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism, which examines the environments that shelter living and non-living things, has been a subject of scientific research since ancient times. The term is the only approach that analyzes the relationships between literature, environment, ecology, and culture from an environmental perspective.[11] The most frequently used initial definition of ecocriticism since its inception was provided in the introduction to the book *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the pioneers of the theory, and Harold Fromm in 1996. As Glotfelty states,

> Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies.[12]

Based on this definition, the relationship between humans and nature becomes a field that literature questions and reimagines. At this point, according to Cheryll Glotfelty, ecocritics should ask certain questions significant questions like:

> How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre?[13]

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[11] Serpil Oppermann, "Giriş: Ekoeleştiri: Çevre ve Edebiyat Çalışmalarının Dünü ve Bugünü," içinde *Ekoeleştiri: Çevre ve Edebiyat*, ed. Serpil Oppermann (Ankara: Phoenix Yayınevi, 2012), 9.

[12] Cheryll Glotfelty, "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xviii.

[13] See Glotfelty, "Introduction,"xix.

Before ecocriticism was theorized, nature was frequently overlooked, and classic literary criticism focused on human-centered (anthropocentric) perspectives. Thus, nature was in the background and disconnected from literature. In fact, as Glotfelty suggests, nature has representations and underlying ideologies that need to be discussed and questioned. One of the missions of literature is to produce a perception of nature and to reveal that the human identity is shaped not only by society but also by nature. Thus, literature can demonstrate that concepts such as nature, environment, humanity, and culture are not separate or superior to one another, but rather exist together and are equal, and that the focus should be on environmental problems.

David Mazel, in the introduction of his book, which was published in 2001, *A Century of Early Ecocriticism*, states that "just as nature writing and environmentalism predate Earth Day, so must a kind of Ecocriticism predate the essays of Glen Love, William Rueckert, Joseph Meeker, and Lynn White Jr."[14] Claiming he is not alone in this idea, Cheryll Glotfelty also argues that individual literary and cultural researchers have been conducting studies based on an ecological perspective since the 1970s.[15] However, Glotfelty goes on to explain why the efforts of individual researchers were insufficient: "they did not organize themselves into an identifiable group; hence their various efforts were not recognized as belonging to a distinct critical school or movement."[16]

In literary studies, the concept of ecocriticism, which successfully introduced environmental awareness[17] in a well-organized and comprehensive manner, was first encountered in William Rueckert's 1978 article, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." In his article, Rueckert states,

> Specifically, I am going to experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for a human vision) has the greatest relevance to

[14] David Mazel, ed., *A Century of Early Ecocriticism* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2001), 1.

[15] See Glotfelty, "Introduction," xviii.xvii.

[16] See Glotfelty, "Introduction," xviii.xvii.

[17] See Oppermann, "Giriş," 11.

> the present and future of the world we all live in of anything that I have studied in recent years.[18]

Rueckert, implying that traditional literary criticism is no longer sufficient, views ecology either as a concept or as a scientific endeavor that can be experimented upon. Besides considering ecology as a "basis for a human vision," he also views it not only as a matter of the present, but also as a matter of the future.

With this radical stance, he highlights the main problem of ecocriticism as follows: "the problem now, as most ecologists agree, is to find ways of keeping the human community from destroying the natural community, and with it the human community."[19] Here, Ruckert argues that the ecological crisis is not so much an environmental problem as a survival or existence problem. The concept of humans destroying or harming nature will harm humans as much as it harms nature. Thus, it can be said that these actions, a kind of paradox created by the human species, will create problems for themselves.

In addition to Glotfelty's definition of ecocriticism, other ecocritics have also defined the concept in their own definitions based on their perspectives. According to American ecocritic Greg Garrard, ecocriticism is based on the examination of the relationship between humans and non-humans throughout cultural history and on the critique of humanity itself.[20] At the heart of Garrard's ecocritical approach lies the relationship between humans and non-human entities. The concept of "non-human" here is not limited to nature; different ecosystems and inanimate matter are also encompassed within the framework of ecocriticism. Furthermore, as Garrard emphasizes, the human-nature relationship has undergone changes throughout history. For example, in antiquity and paganism, humans were intertwined with nature; with Christianity, they became central to creation; during the Enlightenment, reason and science were used not to understand nature, but to dominate it; and with the Industrial Revolution and in the

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[18] William Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (University of Georgia Press, 1996), 107.

[19] See Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology," 107.

[20] Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 5.

present day, natural resources continue to be exploited. From a post-humanist perspective, in order to better interpret ecocriticism, it is necessary to analyze how human identity has been constructed throughout history.

Moreover, while Greg Garrard's approach, which views ecocriticism as a historical and cultural process, Scott Slovic addresses ecocriticism by altering the scope and perspective. In his book, *Going Away to Think*, Scott Slovic defines ecocriticism as follows: "(…) the term means either the study of nature writing by way of any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any literary text, even texts that seem (at first glance) oblivious of the nonhuman world."[21] According to Slovic, a text doesn't necessarily have to be about nature. That is, texts that don't take place in nature can also be the subject of ecocriticism. In addition, the complete absence of nature in a writer's text, and the relationships characters form with other living and non-living things, should also be questioned by the ecocritic. Contrary to the conventional approach, Slovic's innovative perspective transforms ecocriticism into a perspective-focused concept. As both definitions suggest, ecocriticism is no longer focused on a limited area, but is instead an interdisciplinary field of study.

1.3. The Development of Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism, an interdisciplinary study of the environment and literature, traces its development back to "literary ecology," as argued by Mazel, Glotfelty, and Opperman in Joseph Meeker's 1972 work: *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Studies*. Six years later, after Rueckert introduced ecocriticism, studies in the field of ecocriticism began to gain importance and accelerate.

[21]Scott Slovic, *Going Away to Think: Engagement, Retreat, and Ecocritical Responsibility* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2008), 27.

The depletion of natural resources, climate change, population growth, waste, the rapid disappearance of biodiversity, global warming, the rapid consumption of water resources, energy problems, seasonal changes, harmful substances in food, raw material production, and increasing demand for fossil fuels are all environmental disasters that lead to ecological degradation. Thus, Glotfelty points out,

> We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them.[22]

Despite the problems being evident, the people and states that created this destruction are not seeking a solution: "We're part of the problem."[23] For this reason, Glotfelty emphasizes in his text the importance of historians, scholars, anthropologists, and philosophers contributing to the understanding of these issues, even if they cannot objectively reshape the system.[24]

In order to establish an interdisciplinary approach to understanding nature and highlighting its problems, ecocriticism first emerged as an academic field in literary studies with Harold Fromm's 1991 MLA session titled "Ecocriticism: The Greening of Literary Studies"; and, as Oppermann points out, with the establishment of ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) in the USA in 1992 which later expanded to include branches primarily in England and Japan,[25] and gained momentum with ISLE (Inderdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment), the publication of ASLE, in 1993.[26]

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[22] See Glotfelty, "Introduction," xxi.

[23] See Glotfelty, "Introduction," xxi.

[24] See Glotfelty, "Introduction," xxi.

[25] Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 4.

[26] See Oppermann, "Giriş,"10.

Ecocriticism, which has gone through various stages from the 1990s to the present, undoubtedly has its foundations in American literature, where the theory was first formulated, and then extends to various periods of British literature in particular. Ecocriticism, which many researchers argue has gone through three distinct phases, begins with the examination of literary works by American authors such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Aldo Leopold. Early literary critics, such as Scott Slovic, Lawrence Buell, and Jonathan Bate, were interested in how these authors depicted nature in their works; for example, Thoreau treated nature as a teacher, whereas Muir and Emerson approached nature in a more sacred and spiritual way. By conveying that nature is intertwined with humanity, these authors also questioned human identity, thus foreshadowing future ecocritical and posthumanist discussions.

Among these ecocritics, Lawrence Buell, in particular, examines the history of environmental ecocriticism in his 2005 book, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, and discusses it in two distinct periods: the first and second waves of ecocriticism. Lawrence Buell defines the first wave of ecocriticism as follows:

> For first-wave ecocriticism, "environment" effectively meant "natural environment." In practice if not in principle, the realms of the "natural" and the "human" looked more disjunct than they have come to seem for more recent environmental critics—one of the reasons for preferring "environmental criticism" to "ecocriticism" as more indicative of present practice. Ecocriticism was initially understood to be synchronous with the aims of earthcare.[27]

The ecocriticism of the 1990s narrowed the definition of the environment to specific geographical areas such as nature, wilderness, rural areas, forests, and rivers. In first-wave texts that excluded humans, nature and humans were treated separately, even though they were part of the same biosphere. The main reason for this was the definition

[27] Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 21.

of nature as clean, pure, and untouched by human hands. In fact, the concepts and points that the first wave of ecocriticism focused on are explained by Lawrence Buell in his book, *The Environmental Imagination*, with four criteria used to determine whether a work is environmentally friendly or not:

> **1.** The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
> **2.** The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
> **3.** Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation.
> **4.** Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text.[28]

However, these four points discussed by Buell and the first wave of ecocriticism elevate nature from a background element to a subject. Undoubtedly, there were pioneers of nature writing, including Thoreau, Wordsworth, and Muir, as Greg Garrard emphasizes, "modern environmentalism begins with 'Fable for Tomorrow' in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962)."[29]

Carson's *Silent Spring*, despite being well-written, is a book that, unlike many contemporary books of its time, has had an impact on public policy.[30] The reason the book is so impactful is that it portrays how pesticides used in soil, such as DDT, harm nature and humans in a highly poetic, parable, pastoral, and apocalyptic manner.[31] *Silent Spring's* success was not limited to the academic field; it also led to a change in pesticide policy in the USA, resulting in the banning of the chemical DDT.

Deep ecology, a concept developed by Arne Næss, holds an important place within the first wave of ecocriticism. The term was first used in an article *The Shallow and the*

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[28] See Buell, *Future of Environmental Criticism*, 21. 7–8.
[29]See Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 1.
[30] See Buell, *Future of Environmental Criticism*, vii.
[31]See Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 2.

Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement in 1973 by Arne Naess. Just like David Rothenberg claims, deep ecology, which takes a position based on Naess's understanding of ecocriticism, actually relies on an ecocentric foundation.[32] In contrast to anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, which acknowledges that nature's role is not to serve humanity, advocates the view that nature has intrinsic value and is of greater importance than humans.

Naess divides ecology into two branches: shallow and deep ecology. Regarding the Shallow Ecology movement, Naess states: "fight against pollution and resource depletion. Central objective: the health and affluence of people in the developed countries…"[33] In terms of the shallow ecology, saving nature is fundamental, yet not for nature itself, but for humans. This anthropocentric approach deals with nature as a resource for humans. Nevertheless, the second categorization, which is named the deep ecology movement, highlights biospheric equality. Naess argues that human impact on the environment and nature is excessive and advocates for the protection of non-human components of the biosphere.

According to Naess, deep ecology supporters should follow the eight principles of the deep ecology movement.[34] Without a doubt, one of the most prominent concepts among these eight points is intrinsic value. The deep ecology movement highlights the intrinsic value of both animate and inanimate entities. This approach, which emphasizes the integrity of the biosphere, deconstructs the anthropocentrism that has developed since Christianity, based on the principle of human superiority. Beings in nature are valuable not for human sake, but for their own existence. The shallow ecological approach considers the purpose of a tree's existence to be the oxygen it produces for life and the wood it provides for human use; however, in contrast, Deep ecology emphasizes the intrinsic value of a tree's existence in itself. The deep ecology movement, in other words, which also addresses the importance of the diversity of life forms (the second principle), emphasizes that humans have no right to reduce this diversity except to meet

[32] Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, trans. and ed. David Rothenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 28.

[33]See Naess, Ecology, *Community and Lifestyle*, 28.

[34]See Naess, Ecology, *Community and Lifestyle*, 29.

their vital needs (the third principle). In addition, it stresses that human intervention is extremely intense (the fourth principle) and argues for population reduction (the fifth principle). It also advocates for the necessity of reforms to allow both living and non-living life to thrive (the sixth principle), and further champions the quality of life (the seventh principle).[35]

Naess's contribution to the first wave of ecocriticism is not limited to the concept of deep ecology; as Freya Mathews also emphasizes in her article *Conservation and Self-Realization: A Deep Ecology Perspective*, "constitutes the very heart of deep ecology philosophy—self-realization." [36] Australian Warwick Fox, who developed Naess's idea of deep ecology and put forward the transpersonal ecology approach, reveals in his 1990 book *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* how Naess actually used Spinoza's concept of *conatus* while developing his concept of self-realization. The word conatus, derived from the Latin conari, meaning to try or to strive, argues, according to Spinoza, that the fundamental driving force of every being is the effort to perpetuate its own existence.[37]

Warwick, drawing on Spinoza's metaphysics, states that we are united to the whole since there is ultimately only one substance,[38] implying that reality resides within a totality that Spinoza defines as God or Nature. Once individuals recognize this, they find themselves within a larger self, embracing, through a holistic perspective, the interconnectedness of other beings in nature. Influenced by this view, Naess argues that the self can expand not through preservation, but through self-realization.

For Naess, the term self-realization refers to the realization of the narrow self, which is consistent with self-aggrandizement and "ego-trips," whereas the term Self-realization refers to the realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible.[39] From Naess's framework, our self-realization develops when we see ourselves as part of larger

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[35] See Naess, Ecology, *Community and Lifestyle*, 29.

[36] Freya Mathews, "Conservation and Self-Realization: A Deep Ecology Perspective," *Environmental Ethics* 10, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 350.

[37] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 75.

[38] See Naess, Ecology, *Community and Lifestyle*, 105.

[39] See Naess, Ecology, *Community and Lifestyle*, 106.

wholes. Thus, a human with a developed ecological self lives a balanced life with an identity free from all prejudices and egocentrism.[40] Consequently, balanced identity formation, the individual, rather than being driven by a moral obligation, possesses an inner desire to protect the natural world. Naess's thesis that with increased self-realization, the individual can integrate with non-human beings is a justified reason for its positioning in first-wave ecocriticism by Lawrence Buell. This thesis aligns with the Spinozan metaphysical connection between humans and nature, and with the biocentric approach that advocates for the conservation of wildlife and the minimization of human intervention, forming the basis of the eight principles discussed in deep ecology. This approach deconstructs the conventional anthropocentric standpoint and foregrounds the importance of the intrinsic worth of animate and inanimate entities that take place in natural life.

The second wave of ecocriticism, introduced by Lawrence Buell, focuses on urban life, society, and ecological justice rather than the wildlife approach of the first wave. Buell describes the second wave as having "tended to question organic models of conceiving both environment and environmentalism."[41] Considering the first wave of ecocriticism, a culturally detached understanding of nature prevails, focusing on green ecology and wildlife. The second wave of ecocriticism, however, abandons this romantic approach, breaking down the wall between nature and the environment, and between city and environment. Buell argues that humans and culture are not separate from nature. Cities, created by humans, are also part of this ecosystem. This emphasizes the need to redefine nature. Second-wave ecocritics move beyond this pastoral narrative, centering on broader terms such as environment and ecology.

From this perspective, since cities are also part of the ecosystem, problems such as air pollution, water pollution, noise pollution, lack of green spaces, waste problems, and population growth within cities become the focus of second-wave ecocriticism. Another perspective Buell incorporates into second-wave ecocriticism is the concept of justice. In his article "Toward an Environmental Justice Ecocriticism," included in his 2002 book *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics and Pedagogy*, Reed elaborates on

[40] See Oppermann, "Giriş," 21.
[41] See Buell, Future of Environmental Criticism, 22.

the concept of environmental justice ecocriticism within an ecocritical context, detailing social justice and environmental concerns. The concept of "garbage ecology," put forward by Kerimcan Yazgunoğlu, is also quite striking. It is clear that these wastes and chemicals transform not only nature but also human health. From this perspective, it is clear that harmful substances are recycled and burned more often in suburbs rather than in relatively developed areas of cities, leading to environmental injustice. With the inclusion of environmentalism and social justice advocacy in the second wave of ecocriticism, ecocriticism broke out of its shell and began to spread across a broader spectrum.

The concept of third-wave ecocriticism, which is still being debated today, was developed by Scott Slovic and Joni Adamson, in contrast to Lawrence Buell, who revealed the first and second waves. In 2009, the term third-wave ecocriticism was effectively introduced in the introductory article of a special issue of *MELUS* magazine, "The Shoulders We Stand On: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism," as follows: "this third wave of ecocriticism, which recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries; this third wave explores all facets of human experience from an environmental viewpoint."[42] As can be seen, third-wave ecocriticism, while acknowledging national and local identities, argues that these identities have transcended local boundaries in the present day, thereby broadening the scope of ecocriticism to a wider perspective.

In his 2010 article, "The Third Wave of Ecocriticism: North American Reflections on the Current Phase of the Discipline," Slovic expands on the definition of the third wave. According to the article, Patrick Murphy's approach of transcending ethnicity and culture is not limited to one nation, emphasizing the international context with a comparative perspective.[43] However, third-wave ecocriticism brings with it concepts such as "eco-cosmopolitanism," "rooted cosmopolitanism," "the global soul," and "translocality." [44]Unlike the neo-bioregionalist environmental approach, the third wave,

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[42] Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic, "Guest Editors' Introduction: The Shoulders We Stand On: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism," *MELUS* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 6–7.

[43] Scott Slovic, "The Third Wave of Ecocriticism: North American Reflections on the Current Phase of the Discipline," Ecozon@ 1, no. 1 (2010): 6–7.

[44] See Slovic, "Third Wave of Ecocriticism," 7

adopting a multi-layered and global understanding that transcends national borders, develops the discussion of nature. The concept of eco-cosmopolitanism, conceptualized by Ursula Heise and emphasized by Slovic, emphasizes a biospheric connection by "envisioning individuals and groups as part of planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds."[45] With this global perspective, Heise considers individuals not only ethnically but as part of the entire planet, emphasizing that the human species is not the only component of this cosmopolitan life; other living and non-living beings are also members of these communities.

Thanks to this pluralist understanding of the third wave, the idea of the cultural coexistence of living and non-living things has been opened up, and socio-cultural differences, identity issues, and genders have become visible. The expansion of the concept of environmental justice, spreading to interdisciplinary fields such as material ecofeminism, animal studies, cultural ecology, and postcolonial environmental criticism, shows that ecocriticism has begun to transcend its self-defined boundaries, demonstrating the extent of its influence.

The transformation and expansion of ecocriticism into different fields in the third wave have recently shaped literary and cultural criticism. Leading to discussions of the existence of matter, objects, and things, this turning point in ecocriticism has also caught the attention of Scott Slovic, one of the pioneers of the third wave:

> It now seems to me, as we near the end of 2012, that the material turn in ecocriticism is broadening to the extent that it may well represent a new "fourth wave of ecocriticism." I see a proliferation of studies and courses emphasizing the fundamental materiality (the physicality, the consequentiality) of environmental things, places, processes, forces, and experiences.[46]

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[45] Ursula K. Heise, Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 61.

[46] Scott Slovic, "Editor's Note," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 19, no. 4 (Autumn 2012): 619.

Beginning with an understanding of untouched wilderness (first wave), continuing with an inquiry into environmental justice and urban/built environments (second wave), and transcending ethnic-cultural boundaries with several perspectives (third wave), ecocriticism now centers on material reality, physicality, and consequentiality. This fourth wave, in addition to its intersections with previous waves, is influenced both by posthumanism and materialism. This emerging perspective, which accepts the notion that nature and the living and non-living entities within it are agents endowed with agency, also forms the foundation of materialist ecocriticism. In order to interpret and comprehend material ecocriticism, core components such as posthumanism and new materialism should be examined thoroughly.

CHAPTER 2: THE ROOTS OF MATERIAL ECOCRITICISM

2.1. Theoretical Shift Beyond Anthropocentrism

The question of what it means to be human has been a subject of inquiry for thousands of years, giving rise to countless interpretations. Numerous religious, social, and research sources have discussed this issue, with plenty of philosophers contributing. To illustrate, in the Old Testament, the idea of the human is demonstrated explicitly by referring to their position in the universe:

> What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? / For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. / Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: / All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field.[47]

Similarly, in the Qur'an, the importance of man is highlighted as: "Indeed, We have dignified the children of Adam, carried them on land and sea, granted them good and lawful provisions, and privileged them far above many of Our creatures."[48] Both the Old Testament and the Quran explicitly state that humans are the holiest, most exalted, and most superior of all created beings. Furthermore, both holy books affirm that humans are powerful enough to dominate nature and that all beings in nature should serve humanity.

In the Middle Ages, the Great Chain of Being, humans were positioned after God and angels, above animals, plants, and inanimate objects; however, each being had a fixed place and nature, meaning the position of beings was not open to change. Pico della Mirandola, one of the architects of Renaissance humanism, in his 1486 work, Oration on the Dignity of Man, fundamentally breaks this traditional idea with a fictional discourse from God to Adam: "We have given you, Oh Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor any endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place,

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[47] *The Bible*, King James Version, Psalm 8:4–9.
[48] *The Qur'an*, trans. Mustafa Khattab, Sūrat al-Isrāʾ 17:70, https://quran.com/17/70.

whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgment and decision."[49]

Under the influence of humanism, which emerged during the Renaissance, the idea that God and the Church were at the absolute center of everything underwent a major transformation. Pico's fictional speech demonstrates that as well; in contrast to the Middle Ages, humans were no longer bound by chains and had begun to have a chance in their own destiny. Additionally, Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man had a considerable impact on the Renaissance. The depiction of the human figure within a circle (macrocosm) and a square (microcosm), using the golden ratio, aligns with Protagoras's idea that man is the measure of all things, emphasizing the perfection of the human body. This depiction of the human body evidently revealed the value that humanity would receive in this new era.

In the Renaissance, the two main reasons for placing humanity at the center were reason and knowledge. In the Middle Ages, however, knowledge should be directed towards God; in other words, the point humanity aims to reach is God, and reason alone is insufficient to comprehend God. As Thomas Aquinas, one of the medieval philosophers, stated in his *Summa Theologica*, "We also stood in need of being instructed by divine revelation; even in religious matters, human reason is able to investigate."[50] Since humanity does not possess sufficient reason alone to comprehend God, it could only be the object of this purpose. Conversely, Francis Bacon, one of the important figures of the Age of Reason, emphasized the importance of empiricism in his work *Novum Organum*, arguing that human power and knowledge are identical in the following way: "Knowledge and human power are synonymous, since the ignorance of the cause frustrates the effect; for nature is only subdued by submission, and that which

[49] Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. A. Robert Caponigri (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1956), 7.

[50] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Volume 1, Christian Theology (1a. 1)*, ed. and trans. Thomas Gilby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 11.

in contemplative philosophy corresponds with the cause in practical science becomes the rule."[51]

The human mode of thought, proposed by Aquinas in the Middle Ages, that used knowledge as a tool to understand God, transformed with the Age of Reason into a tool of domination, where man became the subject of nature and nature the object. Furthermore, if humanity desires to dominate nature, it must first submit to and comprehend the rules and mechanisms of nature; only then can it dominate nature.

While Bacon's approach to nature and reason played a significant role in laying the foundation for René Descartes' Cartesian thought, Descartes' philosophy arrives at true and certain knowledge by doubting all forms of knowledge. Unlike the Sophists, Descartes embraced skepticism through a methodological approach, arguing that thinking is an integral part of human existence. He posits that the mind, unlike the material body, is a thinking substance. Thinking is a substance that elevates humans beyond other beings; thus, it guides Western philosophy with the mind-body dualism and the phrase "I think, therefore I am."[52] This means that if humans can exist through their ability to think, then all living and non-living things that cannot think merely occupy space in the universe and serve humanity.

The Enlightenment, which demonstrated how unique abilities such as the capacity to think and doubt—a capacity that distinguishes humans from other living and non-living beings—gained momentum with science and technology, while simultaneously isolating humans from their natural environment. This way of thinking persisted through the modernist movement until the 20th century, and was profoundly challenged by postmodernism, influenced by the wars of that century. The meta-narratives, which is rejected by Jean-François Lyotard as: "I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences, but

[51] Francis Bacon, *Bacon's Novum Organum*, ed. Thomas Fowler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1878), 11.

[52] René Descartes, *A Discourse on Method*, trans. John Veitch (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1912), 168.

that progress in turn presupposes it."[53] The Renaissance and the Age of Reason, which posited that the advancement of civilization was based on reason and that knowledge meant power, were structurally deconstructed in postmodernism. World Wars, the use of the atomic bomb, and the fact that reason and science could be used to destroy humanity as much as to advance it can be explained by the *pharmakon*.[54] Thus, narratives weakened by the idea that scientific knowledge is not absolute and that truth does not arise from a single truth give way to pluralism. The multiplicity and diversity of truth, the relativity of reality, fragmentation, and blurring of boundaries introduced by postmodernism form the basis of the posthumanist movement.

2.2. Basis of Posthumanism

Posthumanism, which emerged under the influence of the discriminatory understanding of non-human beings brought about by the Enlightenment ideal, and this new understanding, which underlines the necessity of accepting non-human beings, was first articulated in Ihab Hassan's article "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?" (1977) as follows:

> We need first to understand that the human form-including human desire and all its external representations- may be changing radically, and thus must be re-visioned. We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism.[55]

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[53] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), xxiv.

[54] The term *pharmakon*, developed by Jacques Derrida, derives from the Ancient Greek words for medicine and poison, and implies that something can be both positive and negative at the same time. See Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), "Plato's Pharmacy".

[55] Ihab Hassan, "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?," *The Georgia Review* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1977): 843.

In his article, referring to Elizabeth Mann Borghese, Hassan put forward that "human nature is still evolving."[56] However, this entanglement in the posthumanist era extends with technology. Hassan claims that this new approach evolves with human and technological unity. In Hassan's view, "…from the humblest calculator to the most transcendent computer, help to transform the image of man, the concept of the human. They are agents of a new posthumanism."[57]

Nevertheless, the technology Hassan deals with goes beyond just cyborgs and cybernetics; it dates back to Prometheus, who stole the fire from the gods and gave it to humanity. Through this metaphor, Hassan states that Prometheus's mind converges such dualities as myth and technology; imagination and science. Claiming that humans can coexist with technology by blurring binary thinking, he extends the boundaries of postmodernism rather than limiting its scope.

Francesco Ferrando proposes that posthuman, defined as the philosophy of our time, in which uncertainties are expanded and boundaries are stretched, brings together the concepts of transhumanism, philosophical posthumanism, new materialism, and anti-humanism under an umbrella term.[58] Of the terms grouped under the umbrella of posthumanism, transhumanism is the one most often conflated. The concept of transhumanism,[59] which can be seen as a continuation of the Age of Reason and also anthropocentric, as Nick Bostrom states, "human nature in this broader sense is dynamic, partially human-made, improvable."[60] The incomplete but improvable human body can be enhanced through technological advancements and physical enhancement of the human body. According to this ideology, as the human body develops, it can become more resistant to disease and aging and eventually transcend death.

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[56] See Hassan, "Prometheus as Performer,", 845.

[57] See Hassan, "Prometheus as Performer,", 846.

[58] Francesca Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism*, ed. Rosi Braidotti, Theory (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 1.

[59] The term was coined by Julian Huxley first. See Julian Huxley, *New Bottles for New Wine* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957).

[60] Bostrom, Nick. "In Defense of Posthuman Dignity." *Bioethics* 19, no. 3 (2005): 213.

Just as in humanism, the fact that the concept of human is never questioned in transhumanism leads to the emergence of antihumanism. Thus:

> The critical undermining of the human, which is almost absent in the transhumanist reflection, is crucial to Antihumanism. Both Antihumanism and Posthumanism abandon the universalist rhetoric of humanism; "we" are not the same, we are actually all very different, but being different does not mean being better or worse; difference is not hierarchical. [61]

In his book *The Order of Things: Archeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), Michel Foucault criticizes the human thought that has reached the position of subject through the harm caused by humanism: "As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent history. And one perhaps nearing its end." [62] (422) Foucault points out that the concept of man invented by Western epistemology is not permanent. Therefore, the human thought that has been attempted to be formed for hundreds of years begins to be comprehensively questioned with posthuman thinking.

Following the introduction of the term "posthumanism" by Ihab Hassan in 1977, it has been discussed since the 1990s in conjunction with feminist, cultural, philosophical, and materialist movements. Philosophical posthumanism and transhumanism, while falling under the umbrella of posthumanism, are two concepts that are never closely related. According to transhumanist thought, "posthuman" refers to the technologically advanced form of humanity, while posthumanism aims to move beyond the anthropocentric thinking that has persisted since the Renaissance and to rethink humanity in relation to technology and the living and non-living environment. Thus, philosophical posthumanism, placing humanity at the very top of the humanism and transhumanism pyramid, views humanity solely as a biological species. In this way, posthumanism, which rejects anthropocentrism and hierarchy, reconstructs the idea of an ontological network by dismantling the pyramid that narrows from bottom to top, ending with humans.

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[61] See Ferrando, Philosophical Posthumanism, 45.

[62] Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (London: Routledge, 2002), 422.

However, as Bruno Latour argues in his book *We Have Never Been Modern*, "no one has ever been modern. Modernity has never begun. There has never been a modern world."[63] Because the distinctions between nature and society, between humans and non-human components, were merely an illusion. Katherine Hayles supports Latour's thesis by stating, "we have always been posthuman."[64]Although since the 15th century, nature and culture, humans and objects have been considered separate, this was only an illusion. Humans have never truly managed to be superior to or separate from nature or technology; on the contrary, they have continued to evolve alongside non-human components. As Hayles also states, the posthuman subject is "an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction."[65] Thus, the defeat of modernity does not change the fact that the posthuman condition has always existed.

In *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* (1985), Donna Haraway blurs the boundaries between humans and non-humans, introducing the cyborg metaphor. Through this metaphor, Haraway challenges the binary oppositions inherited from Cartesian thought:

> Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive **(…)** High-tech culture challenges these dualisms in intriguing ways. It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. [66]

As can be seen, the cyborg is more than just a half-human, half-machine being that we see in films; it is the basis of a concept that eliminates all those rigid boundaries between machine and organism, between nature and culture.

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[63] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 47.

[64] N. Katherine Hayles, How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 279.

[65] Hayles, How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics, 3.

[66] Donna Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991), 73-74.

Furthermore, the term *companion species*, introduced by Haraway in her book *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), does not ground the relationship between humans and non-human beings in a relationship of ownership. Rather, it is based on the idea of a reciprocal formation or co-evolution between humans and non-human beings. According to many researchers, the idea of co-existence and the ability of non-human beings to sustain their own existence led to the development of materialistic thought.

2.3. New Materialism

Towards the end of the 20th century, different disciplines developed a new approach called new materialism to reinterpret matter. Unlike all other perspectives, new materialism produced an innovative viewpoint that prioritized the agency of all living and non-living matter in this universe. Thanks to this innovative perspective, all matter that existed in the past, exists now, and will exist in the future began to gain meaning in this universe, where it had been ignored for a considerable time.

In classical materialism, matter is related to the extrinsic, and agency belongs only to human-centered ideologies. New materialism, on the other hand, reconsiders and re-evaluates matter, which Cartesian thought had marginalized for years:

> For materiality is always something more than ‘‘mere’’ matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable. In sum, new materialists are rediscovering a materiality that materializes, evincing immanent modes of self-transformation that compel us to think of causation in far more complex terms (…)[67]

Anthropocentrism, for centuries, has juxtaposed human and agency, yet as Frost and Coole also argue, this is not limited to humans alone. The matter we see or do not

[67]Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 9.

see around us has power, existence, and agency within causal structure. Matter should not be considered fixed and susceptible to human intervention. By its nature and without human influence, matter can establish relationships with its environment and is flexible.

One of the most important points in the discussion of new materialisms is that inorganic substances such as stone, water, minerals, and metals, which originate from inanimate nature, perform vital functions, just like living matter, and interact with both living and non-living components around them. De Landa's view on human bones is a compelling example of this. Arguing that the first living things, up to 5000 million years ago, consisted of soft tissues, De Landa suggested that bones formed as a result of the sudden reaction of mineralization, an inorganic substance. Bones, which are of paramount importance for life, are evidence that these inorganic substances are alive and have agency.[68] Thus, contrary to anthropocentric belief, inorganic matter has the capacity to affect and transform the organic world.

Prior to posthumanism and new materialism, the triangle of relationships between humans, nature, and non-human entities was based on the anthropocentrism imposed by Western thought. However, with these two movements, this triangle has begun to be re-examined. Thus, the ontological identities of nature and non-human entities became a subject of debate. That is, the existence of a river will not be reshaped according to human interpretation. Similarly, the existence of a bacterium that both causes illness in humans and is an active part of the trophic chain has a political basis. Thus, a bacterium is not merely an object to be observed in a laboratory, but also possesses an agency that can alter life forms.

Dualism, which was influential from the 15th century to the mid-20th century, has been deconstructed by philosophical posthumanism and new materialism. For a considerable period, these dualisms rhetorically distanced human/non-human beings, nature/culture, matter/discourse. New Materialist criticism rejects the ontological and

[68] Manuel De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (New York: Swerve Editions, 2000), 26.

epistemological distinction, proposing the idea that these dualities are not separate but integral parts of a whole. Thus, ontology and epistemology come closer to each other.

Criticism of new materialism emerged with the contribution of theorists such as quantum physicist and feminist Karen Barad, and material feminist scholars such as Stacy Alaimo, Susan Hekman, Samantha Frost, and Jane Bennett. The studies of these pioneering theorists in their fields point out that substances, things, and objects are not passive, inanimate, and static; on the contrary, they have a performative, lively, and active form. Karen Barad, a leading scholar in the critique of new materialism, in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007), reveals the agential realism of matter, building upon Niels Bohr's quantum approach.

According to quantum physics, two subatomic particles, no matter how far apart they are, establish non-local interactions. In other words, in classical physics, for two different atoms to influence each other, there must be contact between them, whether physical contact or electromagnetic. Even though in quantum entanglement, these two atoms are no longer two separate atoms, yet, in Barad's words, "A and B must be understood as a single entity."[69] By bringing A and B together within a single phenomenon, Barad argues that "phenomena are the ontological inseparability."[70] It means that in creation, everything exists within the phenomenon, implying that nothing occurs before or after another. Moreover, cause and effect cannot occur at different times. Therefore, since humans are also involved in this phenomenon, they cannot observe the other components.

One of the breakthroughs of new materialism undoubtedly begins with Karen Barad's reinterpretation of classical thinking. She argues that the classical system of thought is focused on reflexivity, or reflection, and this is insufficient for understanding the relationship between matters. Here, drawing on quantum physics, Barad proposes the term diffraction. When waves are observed separately, they remain independent;

[69]Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 271.

[70] See Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway, 139.

however, when waves undergo diffraction, this demonstrates their intra-action. Thus, it is clear that the substances are not disconnected from each other. These diffraction patterns that occur through their intra-actions are the precise phenomenon produced by these substances.

Barad identifies the notion of intra-action as a key element of agential realism.[71] The usual concept of interaction, which Barad opposes, describes the relationship between pre-defined, mutually reinforcing components, separated into subject and object. However, from Barad's perspective, different agents exist together in an intra-action state. That is, one object influencing another is a state of quantum entanglement based on reciprocal and simultaneous interaction. Intra-action functions as the key to terminating all forms of binary opposition and anthropocentric thinking. Since components come into being with interrelations. Hence, no object has a fixed location. The fact that one entity is not fixed implies that it cannot be superior or subordinate to another. To illustrate, thanks to intra-action, both humans and nature occur through entanglement. We need nature to define humanity, and we need humanity to define nature; thus, both entities mutually constitute each other. Barad's concept of entanglement, borrowed from quantum physics, is of great importance in comprehending everything, along with intra-action. Forming a fixed identity is not possible with entanglement because entities are not separate components, but interconnected and influence each other reciprocally. Consequently, considering the core components of agential realism, entanglement and intra-action, together leads to a broader definition of agency.

According to Barad, individuals do not exist before an interaction because they are already part of entangled relationships and come into being through them.[72] Therefore, it is not possible to temporarily separate individuals without an agential cut. Because individuals are defined by material-discursive practices within this entangled network. For instance, a substance, subject, agent, or individual in one agential cut of an intra-action may take a different position in another agential cut. Because individuals are

[71] See Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33.
[72] See Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, IX.

defined by material-discursive practices within this entangled network. This is because matter is not static, but fluid. With each new intra-action, matter is repositioned because matter ontologically arises through relationships. The concept of agency is opposed to the anthropocentric understanding of agency produced by traditional thought. Karen Barad, who opposes the Enlightenment's deterministic focus on agency, argues that agency is not exclusive to humans, but that non-human and even cyborg beings can also be agents.[73] Moreover, agency is not constant; rather, it emerges through intra-action, and it is performative enough to articulate matter and meaning together.

In conclusion, by developing the concepts of Niels Bohr and quantum physics, Barad criticizes Western ways of thinking with his concept of agential realism, which she brings to the new materialist philosophy. Thus, she brings ontology and epistemology closer. As she argues in agential realism, by emphasizing the performativity of matter, she asserts that subject and object continuously exist through intra-action and entanglement.

Another important concept in new materialism is trans-corporeality, coined by Stacy Alaimo in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010). Focusing on the materiality of the human body, Alaimo argues that the body is trans-corporeal with non-human nature and matter, and that human existence is in entanglement with the environment and matter. [74] Within the concept of trans-corporeality, Alaimo describes the incalculable interconnection of the human body with other material bodies as follows: "a rather disconcerting sense of being immersed within incalculable, interconnected material agencies that erode even our most sophisticated modes of understanding."[75] The fact that the boundaries of bodies are so flexible and porous, even if immeasurable, reveals that the human body cannot be considered separately from other bodies.

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[73] Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 826

[74]See Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2.

[75] See Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 17.

A "contact zone," as Alaimo describes, forms human corporeality and "more-than-human nature." Attributing agency to the material world is seen as questionable because agency is generally associated with humans as rational entities.[76] This contact zone, nevertheless, suggests that agency is not attributed solely to humans. The material world can also be an agent, just like humans. That is, material components such as objects, climates, and chemicals can also lead to new ethical and political possibilities through their interaction with human bodies.

Considering the porosity of the human body, the mutual exchange between humans and nature reveals that it is not a homogeneous structure. In fact, nature is as close to humans as their skin[77] highlights the importance of this condition. Changes occurring in one body inevitably affect the bodies around it. To illustrate, human pollution of water sources with various types of waste causes the poisoning or death of fish living in these water sources. When poisoned fish are consumed, heavy metals such as mercury and lead can pass through the human body. Alaimo's sending a sample of her hair to Greenpeace for toxicology analysis serves as evidence of transcorporeality, helping to comprehend these toxic bodies.[78] The test results revealed the presence of mercury, a heavy metal, in Alaimo's hair. Thus, the waste that humans irresponsibly leave in water sources at the beginning of the chain enters their own bodies through fish. This condition demonstrates that humans are not the sole agents, that the human body and nature co-evaluate each other, and the body's porous nature.

Thus, it can be argued that Stacy Alaimo's ethical approach conflicts with traditional ethical understanding. According to Alaimo, this is because denying nature agency will subjugate it to human power, transforming it into a "passive repository of resources."[79] In contrast, posthuman environmental ethics opposes this approach,

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[76] See Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 143.

[77] Stacy Alaimo, "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature," in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 238.

[78] Julia Kuznetski and Stacy Alaimo, "Transcorporeality: An Interview with Stacy Alaimo," *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* 11, no. 2 (2020): 139.

[79] See Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 143.

asserting that humans are formed through reciprocal interactions with nature and are a part of material reality.[80]

Jane Bennett, a proponent of the vitality of matter and a key thinker of the materialist turn, offers a new approach to viewing human and non-human beings. In contrast to classical materialism, the new materialism developed a post-anthropocentric approach that posits that *efficacy* or *effectivity* is not solely produced by humans; non-human entities also ontologically possess agency.[81] This ontological foundation, which forms the basis of Bennett's thought, is heterogeneous and rooted in Spinoza's philosophy. The terminology for this heterogeneous structure within distributed agency is derived from the assemblage concept developed by Deleuze and Guattari; yet Bennet defines assemblages as "ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts."[82]

According to Bennett's approach, the unplanned or temporary nature of these events prevents the agency from residing in a single subject. Thus, agency is distributed in a heterogeneous form rather than a homogeneous one. Matter that exists in a heterogeneous form and possesses agency is in a transformative vibranic form. Bennett's concept of vibrant matter, a key concept in new materialism, challenges the traditional understanding of matter. Like Karen Barad, Jane Bennett believes that matter is formed through relation, in other words, through intra-action. In the second chapter of her book, "The Agency of Assemblages," she illustrates the heterogeneity of agency with the example of the power outage that lasted for several days in the US and Canada in 2003. This power outage doesn't occur solely due to human decision or action; it's caused by coal, sweat, electromagnetic fields, computer programs, electron streams, profitable movies, beat, lifestyles, nuclear fuel, plastic, fantasies of mastery, static, legislation, water, economic theory, wire, and wood—to name just some of the factors in the electrical grid.[83] Thus, a sudden power outage is not something that can be initiated by a

[80] See Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 157.
[81] See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 23.
[82] See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 23.
[83] See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 25.

human alone. The outage could be caused by various matters entering into intra-action, even if only for a short time.

Another important point Bennett points out is that inorganic matters possess life activities. To illustrate this, she references Deleuze's "Immanence: A Life," stating that the tendencies of a metal, an inorganic matter, are not passive but possess a conatus. The metal, referencing Cyril Smith, strives to preserve the curved surfaces of its crystal structure.[84] The metal's conatus is not provided externally, as it is internal. The fact that the metal is not in a dead state, and this striving behavior, indicates that it is a vibrant matter.

2.4 Material Ecocriticism and Storied Matter: The Influence of the Materialist Turn and Postmodern Ecocriticism

Materialist ecocriticism, which is intertwined with the new materialism movement, is a product of a common ground where postmodern and ecological ideas converge.[85] In her article "From Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism: Creative Materiality and Narrative Agency" (2012), Serpil Oppermann reveals how ecological postmodernist approaches establish the basis for material ecocriticism. As Oppermann asserts, rejecting the mechanistic, dualistic, and anthropocentric approaches put forward by modernity, postmodern thinkers such as Charles Hartshorne, David Ray Griffin, and Charlene Spretnak argue that a radical epistemological shift is necessary.[86] This radical epistemological shift occurs immediately after the linguistic turn. The main reason for this is that the linguistic turn relegated matter to the background in language, culture,

[84] See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 25.
[85]See Oppermann, *Ekoeleştiri* 36.
[86] Serpil Oppermann, "From Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism: Creative Materiality and Narrative Agency," in *Material Ecocriticism*, ed. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 22.

and social construction. Thus, "one of the key points of the 'material turn' is a pronounced reaction against some radical trends of postmodern and post-structuralist thinking that allegedly 'dematerialized' the world into linguistic and social constructions."[87]

In contrast to the mechanical, inanimate approach to nature brought about by modernism, and to some postmodern approaches that reduce nature to a social language, nature should be considered in its entirety as a creative unfolding[88] process. Therefore, it can be asserted that "ecological postmodernism perceives nature as being primarily constituted of interacting, interrelated phenomena." [89] This postmodern ecocritical approach, based on the premise that nature is a living and relational process, argues that the vitality of matter is independent of the human mind. Nature's vibrant and independent value ascends it to a subjective form. This is because nature is responsive and purposeful, and it possesses internal relationships. "In this regard, the influence of ecological postmodernism on some of these accounts of matter is far from speculative, because it does underpin the shifting definitions of matter, life, nature, and agency."[90]

Postmodern ecocriticism's focus on matter and nature undoubtedly juxtaposes it with new materialism and material ecocriticism. The common ground shared by these three approaches is that the components are constantly intra-acting; in other words, there is no fixed or predetermined relationship. As stated in the previous section, the agency of nature and matter exists through intra-action, as conceptualized by Karen Barad. The fact that nature and culture exist through intra-action in the form of naturecultures, rather than as two separate concepts as modernism claims, brings these three approaches even closer together. Because nature and culture are forms that change, transform, and are produced through these mutual relations. Thus, nature and culture are involved in this intra-action, proving just how productive and open to entanglement the world actually is.

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[87] Serenella Iovino ve Serpil Oppermann, "Material Ecocriticism: Materiality, Agency, and Models of Narrativity," *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* 3, no. 1 (2012): 76.

[88] Charlene Spretnak, The Resurgence of the Real: Body, Nature, and Place in a Hypermodern World (New York: Routledge, 1999), 3.

[89] See Iovino and Oppermann, "Material Ecocriticism," 78.

[90] See Oppermann, "From Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism,"25.

Material ecocriticism, developed by Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino, introduces a return to matter within the environmental humanities, recognizing the agency and vitality of matter through an ecocritical approach. Materialist ecocriticism, by revealing the agency and narrative-creating power of matter, argues that matter has a story to tell:

> Developing in bodily forms and in discursive formulations, and arising in coevolutionary landscapes of natures and signs, the stories of matter are everywhere: in the air we breathe, the food we eat, in the things and beings of this world, within and beyond the human realm. All matter, in other words, is a "storied matter."[91]

Material ecocriticism, which combines the vitality of matter with textuality, adopts the view that matter and text are inseparable. This reveals that the texts we read are not only formed by language, but also have a material aspect. The convergence of the language of this subject (biosemiotics) and the materiality of language can be considered as material-discursive practices.[92] Bodies are enclosed with vibrant matters in the processes of porous becoming. Serenella Iovino's Bodies of Naples can be read as an example of this porousity.

The city of Naples, with its spatiotemporally porous[93] structure, is full of examples of storied matter in every corner. One of them is Largo Corpo di Napoli. The ancient statue of the Nile, or Corpo di Napoli as it is popularly known, located in this small square, has been the setting for various stories throughout history. This ancient statue, marked as referring to an Egyptian colony, was found some time after it was lost, but because it was missing its head, it was initially thought to resemble Parthenope. However, after restoration work, when a male head was added to the statue, it was revealed that it actually represents the Nile River.[94] As seen in Iovino's example, the

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[91]See Iovino and Oppermann, "Material Ecocriticism," 1.

[92] See Oppermann, *Ekoeleştiri*, 44.

[93] Serenella Iovino, "Bodies of Naples: Stories, Matter, and the Landscapes of Porosity," in *Material Ecocriticism*, ed. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 100.

[94] See Iovino, "Bodies of Naples," 97.

transformation of the concept of gender after the restoration of the sculpture's head, the intertwining of different centuries, and undoubtedly the permeability of the sculpture's meaning and the fact that it remains the sculpture of the city even if its story changes for people, reveal the vitality and narrative of the material. Because "matter and meaning are not separate elements,"[95] constantly generating each other, "(…)emerge together in the world's process of becoming,"[96] and "(…) interesting creative possibilities emerge from the coconstitution of matter and meaning(…)."[97]

The new materialism movement, which forms the roots of materialist ecocriticism, constitutes the beginning and ontological foundation of the materialist turn. As discussed in the previous chapter, theorists such as Karen Barad, Stacy Alaimo, and Jane Bennett have paved the way for material agency, allowing matter to regain its long-neglected power. Matter is alive, matter exists, and matter will continue to exist. Matter is agentic, matter is transformative, and matter is open to transformation. But matter also has a story. Matter, long relegated to the background, possesses an agentic and ontological existence that attempts to tell a story through agential realism, encompassing both living and non-living organic and inorganic matter. No, matter does not thus exhibit anthropomorphic behavior; matter does not need a human agent to create a story. Matter has its own story, and materialist ecocriticism provides this space for matter to resonate within the environmental humanities. Thus, materialist ecocriticism constructs the narrative of matter upon the conceptual foundation established by new materialism's approaches to agency, permeability, vitality, and transformative power.

Ecocriticism, although it has undergone numerous changes and transformations since its coining, is closely related to posthumanism due to its rejection of anthropocentric thought. Posthumanism dismantles the concept of humanity at the top of the pyramid, a position that has dominated since the Enlightenment and the Renaissance. Instead, it establishes a new foundation for thought by placing humanity alongside all living and non-living components. According to this new system, nature and culture,

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[95] See Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway, 3.

[96] Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, "Theorizing Material Ecocriticism: A Diptych," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 19, no. 3 (2012): 453.

[97] See Oppermann, "From Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism,"27.

living and non-living matter, and discourse are not separate or superior to one another, but exist side-by-side. The dismantling of Cartesian thought reveals that humanity exists alongside other living and non-living beings, nature alongside culture, and matter alongside discourse.

Material ecocriticism, which argues that all matter—whether organic or inorganic, visible or invisible—has a story to tell, actually regards "storied matter" as an umbrella term. This umbrella term encompasses the core theories of the new materialism movement: Karen Barad's agential realism, Stacy Alaimo's theory of trans-corporeality, and Jane Bennett's theory of vibrant matter. By bringing these theories together under one umbrella, "storied matter" posits that everything is interconnected, in motion, and entangled. Thus, matter possesses a narrative that is alive, capable of generating meaning, and has the power to change.

Another innovation introduced by the theory of storied matter, which laid the groundwork for the development of the material turn, is the idea that meaning and matter are not separate from one another, but rather constantly shape one another and emerge together. The binary oppositions that form the backbone of traditional thought are thus dismantled through a posthumanist perspective, bringing to the forefront the agency of matter and its capacity to generate narratives. Consequently, the anthropocentric perspective is dismantled, and the stories of literary texts and material objects in life are incorporated into environmental humanities, where they can take center stage.

Thanks to this new perspective gained by environmental humanities under the umbrella of stored matter, the traces of matter can be traced not only in modern literary works but also in those of past eras. In this way, by bringing to light stories co-constituted by matter and meaning, it will be possible to demonstrate that matter's agency and vitality are as rich as those of other life forms.

For thousands of years, all these stories, myths, and epics have been read from an anthropocentric perspective, but did these texts only tell the story of humanity? The idea that only humanity has a story has been transcended by the door opened by posthumanism. Of course, humanity alone could not be the sole and most powerful

actor; countless living and non-living actors are involved in life. The idea of other actors supported the formation of the new materialism movement, leading to a return to matter. The agency of matter in the biosphere, its power to change and transform, and the way this matter flows and passes into other living and non-living bodies through reciprocal exchange, keep these relationships alive. This living matter is everywhere in life. They are on our tables, in the streets, in the bodies we love, in our days, in our memories, in our relationships, in nature, in our food. However, the material ecocriticism that puts forward the idea that these materials have stories offers a deep analysis of how materials create stories through vibrant interaction, drawing on different disciplines and exhibiting an interdisciplinary perspective. The story of matter does not begin with the 21st century; thus, it can be said that reading, thinking about, and revealing the story of matter is applicable retrospectively.

CHAPTER 3: THE MEDIEVAL ERA AND CHAUCER

3.1. Medieval Life and Chaucer

The Medieval Era encompasses the period from the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the Renaissance. It is a transitional phase, situated between antiquity and modernity, and therefore shares similarities with both eras. The beginning and end of the Middle Ages witnessed significant events. The fall of the Roman Empire, considered its beginning, is of great importance to European history. "The Visigoths went on to win the battle of Adrianople in 378. Drifting westwards, they took Rome itself in 410, exactly 800 years after it had last been captured by a foreign enemy."[98] This was the first time the Roman Empire was shaken. With this, the pressure from barbarian forces on the Western Roman Empire intensified. Later, military leader Odoacer dethroned Romulus Augustulus in August 476.[99] The rise of Christianity, the migrations of peoples, and the rise of barbarian tribes in the surrounding areas led to the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. Thus, "[w]hen the Italian humanist Giovanni Andrea, the pope's librarian, invented the term Middle Ages in 1469, he did so in order to draw a contrast between the "ancients" of that era and "the moderns of our time," that is, the men of the Renaissance."[100] In this era, we see not only the innovations of the modern age but also the barbarity and backwardness of the past. "We view the Middle Ages as primitive, attractive, perhaps, like African art but definitely barbarous, a source of perverse pleasure and a way of revisiting our origins."[101] It received the name "middle" because it falls between two periods.

Following the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the concept of a strong state crumbled, and the military weakened. As the state lost power, landowners began to gain authority. The absence of a central authority led to the emergence of an independent feudal system which is "a total organization of society. It specifies the status of the individual and his relations with his superiors and inferiors. It includes an economic system based on land; in general, a man's rights to land correspond with

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[98] Edward A. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians: The Decline of the Western Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982),17.

[99] See Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, 65.

[100] Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 18.

[101] See Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, 19.

his social rights."[102] This situation arose as a result of political division and social inequality.

Feudalism persisted throughout the Middle Ages. During its existence, social justice was not established in Europe, and therefore, people were divided into various classes, such as nobles, clergy, bourgeoisie, and peasants. The vulnerable and powerless, from the smallest to the largest, protected themselves by seeking the protection of the more powerful. This system applies to every social class. The work generally consisted of agriculture and animal husbandry. Peasants carried out the vast majority of agriculture. The feudal system led to the exploitation of land. Farmers, at the bottom of the system, served every group except themselves. Despite the harsh working conditions, the laborers did not receive adequate compensation for their work. This was because they spent much of their time working for the church and the nobility. The church was considered an almost absolute power; therefore, what the church and its clergy said was not open to question, only obedience. The clergy and the Pope were so powerful that they even limited the authority of the kings of the time.

With the economy becoming agriculturally based, the people became dependent on landowners. The Church owned a considerable amount of land during this period. The church exerted great dominance over the lands. This led to people becoming dependent on the Church, and thus on religion. This transformation, brought about by the feudal system, caused the powerless people to be oppressed by the landowning lords. The church represents God, and people are compelled to submit to the system through religion. In doing so, they must obey the Lord to whom they are bound.

Bishops now collected tax income that had once been paid to imperial governors, and with it they fortified their cities against attack, ensured regular water and grain supply, built churches for growing communities, dealt summarily with vestiges of pagan worship, established charitable arrangements, and comforted their flocks at times of hardship.[103]

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[102] Morris Bishop, *The Middle Ages* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 109.

[103] Miri Rubin, *The Middle Ages: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 60.

During this period, the clergy was at the very top of the feudal system. This meant that religious authority directed social order in accordance with Christian teachings. The prominence of religion led to a backwardness of science and technology in medieval Europe. With the Church's initiative, the Inquisition courts were established, and numerous individuals were tried in these courts. The thirteenth century was a time of trial for the Church, and the aim was to prosecute those who disrupted social order and opposed Christian teachings, thereby maintaining its own authority.

The medieval period, with the changes brought about by the feudal system, divided society into distinct classes. Landowners became the nobility, those loyal to the Church became the clergy, and the laborers working in the fields became the peasants. "Preachers liked to compare society to the human body: priests were the head and eyes; nobles, the arms and hands; commoners, the legs and feet. As the head of all mankind, the church claimed the right to direct and rule society."[104] The analogy of the human body here is quite significant because each limb in the human body has a different function and a different importance. The brain represents the clergy, those who make decisions and have the power to govern; the hands and arms represent the nobles, those who physically struggle; and the feet, likened to the commoners, are those who bear the burden. Here, the hierarchical order imposed by the feudal system symbolizes everyone by dividing society.

Peasants occupied the lowest rung of the feudal system. They produced goods by cultivating the land and raising livestock, representing the productive class. However, they produced these goods not for themselves, but for those above them in the feudal system. The peasant class, not receiving fair compensation for their labor, was like the servants or slaves of the lords. The church determined their working days and holidays, and peasants were not allowed to deviate from these. This meant that peasants could not be as free as they wished. "In the countryside, discontent turned readily to violence. 'We are men formed in Christ's likeness, and we are kept like beasts,' said the peasants."[105]

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[104] See Miri Rubin, *The Middle Ages*, 109.
[105]See Bishop, *The Middle Ages*, 77.

In addition to peasants, knights were considered quite important in the Middle Ages. Knights, belonging to the noble class, were the most important figures in the Middle Ages after the clergy. They were described as brave, valiant, and warriors. They possessed ethical values such as devotion to religion, protection of the weak, and fulfillment of duty, and all knights were expected to adhere to them. Based on Christian teachings, this Chivalric Code demonstrated that knights should remain honorable and dignified even in contexts such as war.

Literature came to the forefront during the Middle Ages. In medieval literature, poetry was initially more dominant than prose: "Early in the Middle Ages, English literature began with the poet Caedmon and with *Beowulf*, composed with conscious artistry in a demanding poetic form."[106] The art of poetry, which began with the epic poem *Beowulf*, continued throughout the Middle Ages. Medieval literature primarily utilized oral storytelling techniques. In a world where religion and the clergy were prominent, religious and didactic texts were also prominent in literature. "It was a time of storytelling, written as well as oral, and of tales such as the exemplum, the edifying anecdote that was a gift from the monks of the East in the fourth century to the Western world."[107] Furthermore, knights, associated with the nobility within the feudal system, and their courtly romances were frequently depicted in medieval literature. The chivalric code and honorable lives of the knights were central themes in these texts.

The medieval era in English literature includes many famous works. *Beowulf*, written in Old English, is the oldest surviving epic poem, telling tales of heroism. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a famous text about heroism and being an idealized knight in the Middle Ages. Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is a collection of stories told by each character during a pilgrimage that begins in April. These texts contain numerous elements of chivalry, courtly romance, satire, and theological themes found in medieval literature. The themes, subjects, and stories of that era are embodied through these texts.

In medieval literature, Geoffrey Chaucer held a very important place. His book, *The Canterbury Tales*, is considered one of the masterpieces of English poetry.

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[106] See Bishop, *The Middle Ages*, 36.
[107] See Le Goff, The Medieval Imagination, 22.

"Deemed to be the 'father' of the English language, the fourteenth-century poet Geoffrey Chaucer has been regarded as the person who ignited the initial spark of the English Renaissance, following in the path of his Italian contemporaries."[108] The story tells of 29 pilgrims embarking on a pilgrimage to see the tomb of Saint Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. The general prologue begins at the Tabard Inn, where the pilgrims spend their first night. Here, Chaucer introduces us to the characters' appearances, allowing us to visualize the story. Once on their journey, the characters decide to tell stories—two on the way there and two on the way back to pass the time. The first story is told by a knight, the highest-ranking member of the group according to the feudal system.

The stories told along the way reveal the personalities of the storytellers. The knight, by telling the story of another knight, focuses on the theme of courtly love of the time. However, Chaucer includes both the respected and the ridiculed knights in the story. Because *The Canterbury Tales* is an estate satire, it means it criticizes almost all social classes in some way. In his stories, he particularly satirically addresses social inequalities and injustices. He explores this through a pilgrimage that brings together different people from society. The characters in these stories reflect the society of their time very well. While criticizing the feudal system, the author Chaucer also criticizes the estates and people of his time. Instead of praising a knight solely for his rank, he also contains characters in his stories who are disrespected and defy chivalric codes.

All in all, the Middle Ages, known as the period between antiquity and modern times, began with the fall of the Western Roman Empire and lasted until the Enlightenment. This period is referred to as the Dark Ages in Europe because religion took center stage, relegating science and technological advancements to the background. Power was in the hands of the Church, and Christianity had spread throughout Europe. The feudal system that emerged in the Middle Ages meant that people were hierarchically ranked by occupation. The Church used this unequal system for its own benefit. According to this system, the King was at the top of the pyramid, followed by the clergy, nobles, knights, and peasants. This categorization led to increased social injustice in society. The feudal system made land important,

[108] Züleyha Çetiner Öktem, "Memory, Men and Chaucer" (PhD diss., Ege University, 2013), 1.

enriching landowning nobles while peasants contributed to the system by working on these lands.

Land was extremely important during this period. Landowning nobles maintained their power and authority through these lands. Peasants formed the backbone of production and were controlled by the church. On the other hand, the nobility represented military and political power, held a high position in the feudal system as landowners, and were respected by the people. The emergence of the feudal system completely shifted the balance of power. The weakening of central authority led to its replacement by the Church, which glorified religion. The Church held all the power and showed no tolerance for heretical ideas that opposed Christianity. It maintained its authority by establishing Inquisition courts to punish those who opposed it.

Life in the Middle Ages in England was quite arduous; the degree of difficulty varied for each social class. The importance of religion and its influence on social life led to backwardness and hindered technological advancements. For this reason, the Middle Ages in Europe are remembered as a difficult transitional period marked by the negative influence of the Church. An examination of the daily life and traditions of medieval society is essential for understanding medieval texts.

One of the characteristics that distinguishes Geoffrey Chaucer from his contemporaries is that he foreshadows the Renaissance in his writings. While the works of his contemporaries Langland and Sir Thomas Mallory were generally limited to themes of feudal life and chivalry with a serious tone, Chaucer's texts portray church oppression and the social estate across a broad spectrum with humor and polyphony. Additionally, according to many critics, although Chaucer's works show French, Italian, and Latin influences, his main works were drawn from English culture.

Chaucer, a leading poet and writer of medieval English literature, reflects daily life and the feudal system of the Middle Ages in his book *The Canterbury Tales*. In the book, Chaucer brings together many people from different parts of life for the purpose of pilgrimage, often underscoring professions such as knighthood and clergy, which were particularly valued by the church in the Middle Ages, through social satire. This is precisely what distinguishes Chaucer from his contemporaries.

Compared to other texts of its time, *The Canterbury Tales* cleverly critiques people in professions that were expected to command respect, and juxtaposes their characters with medieval realities. Thus, when reading *The Canterbury Tales*, one does not get the impression of reading a classic medieval text; on the contrary, one encounters a realistic-satirical medieval text that reveals the depth and variety of narrative techniques it contains.

3.2 Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*

In the *General Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer outlines a story in which 31 pilgrims—29 from different parts of life, the narrator Chaucer, and the host Harry Bailey—come to Canterbury to visit St. Thomas. During their journey, they will tell four stories—two on the way there and two on the way back—to pass the time. This group of pilgrims, representing different estates of society, comes together for a pilgrimage. While some members are described individually in detail, others are briefly introduced as a group, ultimately revealing a kind of human comedy.[109] The diversity of these pilgrims ranges from the Knight to the Miller. Thus, Chaucer's pilgrims are a realistic portrayal of people from different social classes, ages, and professions.[110]

However, as Speirs indicates, the opening of *The General Prologue* is "a superb expression of a sense of harmony between man and nature."[111] The first eighteen lines of the General Prologue reveal the awakening of nature due to the arrival of spring, which actually motivates pilgrims about to embark on their pilgrimage, directing the human body to action.

> Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
>
> The doughte of March hath perced to the roote,

[109] John Speirs, *Chaucer the Maker* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 98.
[110] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3. edition. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 4.
[111] See Speirs, *Chaucer the Maker*, 99-100.

And bather every veryne in swich licour

Of which vertu engendred is the flour (1-4)[112]

These first four lines at the beginning of the general prologue are a clear indication that spring has arrived. The April rains, following the dry March, reach the soil and roots, allowing the flowers to bloom. Thus, it reveals that rain is a key actor in the ecosystem and has an active role. In this respect, the fact that *The Canterbury Tales* initiates with the April rains highlights the vitality of rain. Rain, which is formed as a result of evaporation and condensation, nourishes the soil, which is composed of air, minerals, and organic matter in nature, and reaches the roots of plants. What is even more striking, however, is that this rain first penetrates deeply into the soil and then reaches the flower's roots, thereby demonstrating that flowering occurs through the mutual interaction of rain, soil, and roots. Rather than being under human control, the root operates through an intertwined process of interaction. Considering that the arrival of spring occurs at roughly the same time every year, the regular blooming of flowers in the rain reveals just how productive and bountiful nature is. In short, in these first four lines heralding the arrival of spring, there is no sign of human intervention; on the contrary, nature's influence in shaping life forms and the vitality of matter are clearly felt.

As with the first four lines, no human beings are encountered in lines 5-8 of the prologue:

Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth

Inspired hath in every holt cours yronne,

The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne

Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne, (5-8)

Another harbinger of spring, Zephyrus, follows the material process that is started by rain, exhaling vitality to groves and heaths with its gentle breezes. The fact that matter breathes life into something here does not make it human; on the contrary, as

[112] All quotations from the *Canterbury Tales* are from the Riverside Chaucer edition, and will be given in-text.

Oppermann also stated, “With its creative energy, matter emerges in meaningfully articulate forms of becoming that can be interpreted as storied matter, even though this claim carries a heavy dose of anthropomorphism.”[113]

The way rain nourishes the soil and the formation of the Zephyrus winds is a process that includes the sun. The depiction of the sun here as young and half-course indicates that its annual movement is continuing. The sun is in motion within itself, without any external intervention, as Timothy Morton points out, “a circulation that implies an inherent movement, a constant deviation from the integral.”[114] The axial tilt and annual movement necessary for the formation of seasons demonstrate that nature does not exhibit a static ontology, but rather exists in a state of constant becoming and deviation. As can be inferred from this, the rain pierces the soil, Zephyrus exhales, and the young sun runs. These matters are not passive; rather, they are active, and make their stories together, and do not require any human touch.

Lines 9-18 of the general prologue indicate that the awakening in nature has now reached living life:

> And smale foweles maken melodye,
>
> That slepen al the nyght with open ye
>
> (So priketh hem nature in hir corages),
>
> Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgiramges,
>
> And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
>
> To ferne halwes, kowthe in soundry londes;
>
> And specially from every shires ende
>
> Of Engelond to Caunterbury the wende,
>
> The hooly blissful martir for the seke,

[113] See Oppermann, “From Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism,”29

[114] Morton, Timothy. *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, 57–58.

That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke. (9-18)

The birds' melody-making reveals that their agency and storytelling are active in this material process. The nature in which these non-human bodies exist is, as Alaimo puts it, "is, in fact, a word of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims, and actions."[115] Thus, the birds' making melody is not intended to motivate humans, but rather a biological expression of their response to the vitality produced by nature. However, Chaucer's use of the adjective "small" to describe birds does not mean that birds are not negligible creatures in nature, but rather that this awakening in living life begins with the smallest bodies. These small bodies are in relation to nature and the matter within it, as indicated in lines 10 and 11, and spend the nights in a semi-awake state, have permeable bodies.

The awakening of spring reaches people with the 12th line. People cannot remain indifferent to this awakening of nature because nature "is always as close as one's own skin—perhaps even closer".[116] The human body's desire to be part of the story unfolding in nature, in the world of matter and life, sharply rejects the anthropocentric approach. The active power of nature and matter itself, the awakening it initiates, forms the basis of a trans-corporeal transition through the permeability of the human body. This awakening of nature and the vibrancy of matter awakens in the human body a desire to migrate. This migration, of course, is a pilgrimage.

Nevertheless, the city of Canterbury, which people want to migrate to, is home to the tomb of a saint. Martyr Thomas Becket, who was killed in Canterbury Cathedral, is a sacred memorial visited by different estates of the community, as seen in Chaucer's pilgrims. From a material ecocritical perspective, the sanctity of this "hallowed in sundry lands" narrative is not limited to this grave alone. This grave in Canterbury is more than just land and a place; it has its own story. Hence, it is intertwined with nature, matter, people, and culture.

[115] See Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 2.
[116] See Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 2.

These people, who are eager to go to Canterbury to fulfill their pilgrimage purpose, are not pilgrims before they set out on the journey. Considering Karen Barad's concept of intra-action, being a pilgrim is not a preexisting identity; rather, it arises through an entanglement of both human and non-human matters, such as a journey and other people. "Individuals do not preexist as such, but rather emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating."[117] In other words, pilgrimage is not an agency that can pre-exist; rather, it is an agency that emerges through intra-action.

Gathering at the Tabard Inn, agreeing to tell stories, and travelling to Canterbury constitute the essence and dynamism of the pilgrimage. Thus, these pilgrims are "part of the world in its differential becoming."[118] Moreover, the act of pilgrimage can be considered in conjunction with Donna Haraway's concept of co-constitution.[119] The pilgrim identity is formed through co-constitution, through the call of nature and the spiritual call of Saint Becket. Thus, nature and culture constantly build upon each other; in Haraway's words, this relationship between species "is knit from the silk-strong thread of ongoing alertness to otherness-in-relation."[120]

Furthermore, not only the first 18 lines of the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, but also the rest of it, lends itself to a material ecocritical analysis. The portraits Chaucer depicts throughout the General Prologue present not only the characters' behavior but also their clothing and bodies in great detail. For instance, the black-stained fustian tunic left by the Knight's armor is of considerable importance in assessing the character. The Knight's armor, tunic, and even his body bear the marks of the metal within the armor. These marks are the memories of the battles the Knight fought, as described by Chaucer. Similarly, Yeoman's identity is formed by the equipment he intra-acts with. The Yeoman, described through his "sheef of pecok arwes, bright and kene, (…) myghty bowe," (104; 108) shield; and

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[117] See Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, ix.
[118] See Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway, 89.
[119] Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 7.
[120] See Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 50.

the sharpness of his sword, can be evaluated within the framework of Latour's assemblage because the Yeoman is not merely the Knight's servant, but a complete identity encompassing the Yeoman, peacock-feathered arrows, mighty bow, shield, and sword.

The examples are not limited to characters at the very top of the social estates; characters from different estates are also depicted by Chaucer through their bodies and clothing. The Cook is one of them. A transcorporeal connection exists between the ulcerated wound on the Cook's knee and the chicken dish he cooked (379-308; 386) the boundaries between Cook's body and the food he prepared blur, and, involuntarily, a permeability exists between the two substances. Chaucer, in describing Cook's portrait, first speaks of his delicious food, then of the ulcer on his knee. This grotesque scene highlights the risk of infection in the human body being transmitted to food. The fact that the color of Cook's wound matches the color of the food he cooks enhances this grotesque effect. However, another striking detail here is that chicken bones and marrow have structures similar to wounds in the human body. Thus, Chaucer's text reveals how blurred the lines are between humans and animals.

In summary, the *General Prologue*, the introductory section of *The Canterbury Tales*, serves as a preparation for the reader. The opening begins with the awakening of spring and the gathering of people at the Tabard Inn to travel to Canterbury to see the tomb of Saint Thomas Beckett, which is a multi-layered pilgrimage. The announcement of spring, through both living and non-living things, allows living beings to make new decisions and change the course of their lives. Thus, these people from different socioeconomic ranks of society set off for Canterbury in April, accompanied by stories.

Before the journey, the narrator Chaucer introduces these people, some individually and in detail, others in groups, revealing that their stories are told through their bodies and the things they possess. The fact that both the portraits and the storytelling begin with the Knight is more than just a matter of chance. While it is a display of the respect held for knights in the Middle Ages, the narrator Chaucer treats this satirically: "Were it by aventure, or sort, or cas, / The sothe is this: the cut

fil to the Knight, / Of which ful blithe and glad was every wyght" (844-46). Nevertheless, regardless of the outcome of the lot, this Knight has no choice but to go with the pilgrims from the lower classes of society. Thus, the vibrancy of nature awakening with the arrival of spring creates a sense of agency not only for those in the estates respected by the community, but also for those in the lower estates of society.

3.3. *The Knight's Tale*

The Knight's story is the second-longest story in *The Canterbury Tales* after *The Parson's Tale*. Influenced by Boccaccio's epic narrative *Teseida*, Chaucer, through free adaptation, bases his own story on romance.[121] By utilizing the romance genre, Chaucer weaves the Knight's tale of understanding, love, and destiny. In summary, the Knight's tale initiates with Theseus, Duke of Athens, conquering Scythia, and upon returning to his city, noticing weeping women and deciding to avenge them by seizing Thebes from Creon. Shortly after conquering Thebes, he notices two noble cousins, Arcita and Palamon:

> Two Yonge knyghtes liggynge by and by,
>
> Bothe in oon armes, wroght ful richely,
>
> Of whiche two Arcita highte that oon,
>
> And that oother knight highte Palamon.
>
> Nat fully quyke, ne fully dede they were (1011-15)

Theseus, having captured these two nobles, declares that no ransom will suffice to free these cousins. Imprisoned in a castle, Arcita and Palamon fall in love when they see Emily in the garden. Arcita, returning from exile to Athens for the sake of their love, and Palamon, fleeing from the fortress, fight valiantly. Tragically, Arcita loses

[121] See Chaucer, *Riverside Chaucer*, 6.

his life in this battle, and Palamon, after some time, marries Emily thanks to Theseus's favor.

When the Knight's story is analyzed in depth, it becomes clear that the primary reason the Theban women weep and beg Theseus for help at the very beginning of the story is that Creon refused to give them their husbands' bodies, intending to feed them to the animals. Therefore, in the words of Shawn Normandin, mourners "characterize him as a sadistic tyrant, not a deep ecologist, Creon's burial policy defies anthropocentrism, the belief that humans are qualitatively different from and superior to other life forms."[122] The violation of anthropocentrism, by depicting bodies being left to be eaten by animals in the plain instead of normal burial practices, takes the text outside the realm of traditional narrative. This is because, in anthropocentric texts, animals hunt in the plain or in nature; whereas in the Knight's Tale, the plain serves as a home for dead human bodies. Nevertheless, the plain is narratively enriched here by the dead bodies; this stems from the plain, which allows once-living matter, even after death and decay, to be transported here, to mingle with the earth, and regain agency. Although the mourners described this situation as a disgrace, the bodies brought together by the plain are affected by heterogeneous energy.

With Theseus' intervention, his army returns to the plain, and "alle the feeldes glyteren up and doun" (977). The plain's self-revelation through intra-action and its display of agency in various forms demonstrate the productivity of matter. However, the ambiguity in the text arises from Theseus's handing over of the husbands' bones so that the mourning women could perform their rituals after he killed Creon. First, Chaucer does not specify how long the siege of Thebes lasted; furthermore, it is unclear whether the fact that only bones remain of the human bodies is due to animal attacks or biological decomposition. The army may have burned the bodies to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Although definitive answers to these questions are unknown, the transience and fragility of bodies are undeniable. In real life, too, the fact that bones, composed of inorganic matter, remain behind as in the

[122] Shawn Normandin, *Chaucerian Ecopoetics: Deconstructing Anthropocentrism in the Canterbury Tales* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 51.

poem, reflects their continued existence as active elements that enable women to mourn their husbands. However, after the war, two young knights, Arcita and Palamon, are held captive for years in Athens by Theseus, where they "dwellen in prisoun / Perpetuelly" (1023-24) within the castle's core on the assumption that they are of noble birth. One May morning Emily wakes from her bed and begins to change the entire course of the story:

> For with the rose colour stroof hire hewe,
>
> I noot which was the fyner of hem two—
>
> Er it were day, as was hir wone to do,
>
> She was arisen and al redy dight,
>
> For May wole have no slogardie anyght.
>
> The sesoun priketh every gentil herte,
>
> An maketh it out of his slep to sterte,
>
> And seith "Arys, and do thyn observaunce."
>
> This maked Emelye have remembraunce (1038- 46)

Just as April awakens nature, the month of May symbolizes Emily's awakening through her psychological impulses. Thus, May's presence permeates Emily's body and soul, adorning her and demonstrating its power to lead her to gather flowers in the garden, to move, and to sing. It was at this moment that Palamon, with the guard's permission, looked down from the top of the city and saw Emily:

> Was risen and romed in a chambre an heigh,
>
> In which he al the noble citee seigh,
>
> And eek the gardyn, ful of braunches grene,
>
> Ther as this fresshe Emelye the shene
>
> Was in hire walk, and romed up and doun. (1065-69)

The prison where Palamon and Arcita were held captive, and the garden where Emily spent her time, are two different matters with their own stories. This prison, where these two noble cousins have lived for a long time, is a place of high security, with deep windows and "thikke of many a barre / Of iren greet and square" (1075-76), restricting their freedom. These two, miserable with their situation for years, could be considered prisoners of the tower until they meet Emily. On the other hand, this tower where they are kept also supplies a chance to see Emily. Thus, it is evident that the tower and state of imprisonment have the power to produce meaning and impact on these two knights' lives radically. Correspondingly, the garden where Emily wanders and gathers flowers without restraint possesses both physical and discursive agency that affects her life, although she is not aware of the imprisoned knights' platonic love.

Hence, two lovers, the prison where they are captured, Emily, who is unaware of their love, the garden, and May; they are all the components of the entangled intra-action, and as Oppermann and Iovino state: "In material-ecocritical terms, the human agency meets the narrative agency of matter halfway, generating material discursive phenomena."[123] Thus, human agencies such as Arcita, Palamon, and Emily do not construct a narrative by themselves; the chamber, garden, and May construct as much.

Subsequently, Duke Perotheus visits Athens in order to see Theseus. Upon learning Arcita is in prison, he ensures his release. Thereby, Arcita is released, yet he has no chance of coming back to these lands:

> Now is my prisoun worse than biforn;
>
> Now is me shape eternally to dwelle.
>
> Noght in purgatorie, but in helle.
>
> Allas, that evere knew I Perotheus!
>
> For elles hadde I dwelled with Theseus,

[123] See Iovino and Oppermann, "Introduction," 9.

Yfetered in his prisoun everemo.

Thanne hadde I been in blisse and nat in wo. (1224-30)

Given that he had been imprisoned for years, being released is now agonizing for him because he thinks he will no longer be able to see Emily. He assumes that Palamon is the winner of this love:

O deere cosyn Palamon." quod he,

"Thyn is the victorie of this aventure.

Ful blissfully in prison maistow dure—

In prison? Certes nay, but in paradys! (1234-37)

Conversely, Palamon is in prison, yet he supposes that Arcita is the lucky one because after he is released, he can go to Thebes and assemble people for his revenge. Thus, Arcita could potentially become Emily's husband, and Palamon would be miserable in prison:

Moore than is myn, that sterve here in a cage.

For I moot wepe and wayle, whil I lyve,

With al the wo that prison may me yive,

And eek with peyne that love me yeveth also,

That doubleth al my torment and my wo." (1294- 98)

It is quite clear that both cousins consider themselves unlucky and the other lucky. These two different assessments can be analyzed through Merleau-Ponty's spatiality of situation: "spatiality is not, like that of external objects or like that of 'spatial sensations,' a spatiality of position, but a spatiality of situation." [124]

Palamon describes Arcita as free in terms of its spatial location, and this is true. Arcita is free outside the prison and the borders of Athens. But the situation is clear

[124] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 114–115.

in terms of spatiality because he is too far away to see Emily. Although Arcita may experience spatial freedom, his body is still physically trapped within a prison. On the contrary, Palamon experiences the exact opposite of Arcita. He is a prisoner in terms of spatiality of position, yet fortunate in terms of spatiality of situation since he can see Emily. The tower, which literally imprisons him, liberates him in terms of the spatial context of the situation. In this respect, this part of *The Knight's Tale* reveals how the situation and the position interact as storied matter. The matter emerges in entirely different ways through the cousins' various experiences. Thus, the storied matter is not only related to its location but also to the state of the other matter with which it shows up in intra-action. Material ecocriticism is not limited to telling the story of physical matter; it also claims the state of matter.

After being exhausted by his love for a long time, Arcita one day picks up a mirror and realizes how much he has changed:

> And saugh that chaunged was al his colour,
>
> And saugh his visage al in another kynde.
>
> And right anon it ran hym in his mynde,
>
> That, sith his face was so disfigured
>
> Of maladye the which he hadde endured (1400-04)

Arcita's sickness weakens his body, causing pathological changes. The sickness here displays such a power that it alters Arcita's body. Additionally, Arcita's body can be evaluated through Moira Gatens's concept of the human body's openness: "The human body is radically open to its surroundings and can be composed, recomposed, and decomposed by other bodies."[125] The changes that the sickness caused in Arcita's body reveal that matter is not passive, but active. The sickness thus decomposes Arcita's once healthy body. However, the agency of sickness allows Arcita a viable way to return to Athens. Arcita, whose face and body were different from before, also

[125] Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (London: Routledge, 1996), 110.

"cladde hym as a povre laborer" (1409) seeking hire. Thus, even if he returned to Athens and worked at the palace, people would not recognize him.

Two years after Arcita's return to Athens, in another May, Palamon escapes from prison by supplying the jailer with a drink that consists of Theban opium and narcotics. Palamon's escape is not solely a product of his own mind; the matters that intoxicate the jailers also have a power: "human and nonhuman bodies recorprealize in response to each other; both exercise formative power and both offer themselves as matter to be acted on."[126] Thus, Palamon's escape is accomplished through the nonhuman matters of opium, narcotics, and trans-corporeal permeability in the jailer's ingestion.

The fact that Palamon, while escaping from prison and searching for a place to protect himself, prefers to take refuge in the grove, enriches the text from a material and posthuman ecocritical perspective. For Palamon, who believed that Theseus's power could not reach the grove, nature represents a sense of security here:

> And in the nyght thanne wolde he take his way
>
> To Thebes-ward, his freendes for to preye
>
> On Theseus to helpe him to werreye;
>
> And shortly, outher he wolde lese his lif (1482-85)

The grove's concealment of the human body here demonstrates its non-human agency. Furthermore, Palamon's arrival at the grove, described as "terror-stricken feet," blurs the boundaries between the human body and the grove, creating an ontological relationship: "especially those between human and nonhuman, are not only shifting but also porous."[127]

The arrival of May allows Arcita's body to take action just like other bodies, and to celebrate May, he rides his horse into the countryside, nature, and the grove.

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[126] See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 49.

[127] Serenella Iovino, "Posthumanism in Literature and Ecocriticism," *Relations. Beyond Anthropocentrism* 4, no. 1 (June 2016): 12.

Arcita, who is celebrating May here, later confronts Palamon in the grove. In this grove, these two knights challenging each other agree to duel the following day. Arcita and Palamon, equipped with technological gadgets such as armor and spears, meet again in the forest the next morning. These technological gadgets combine with human bodies to form a heterogeneous assemblage.[128] In other words, without these metals that possess agentic power, Arcita and Palamon are two cousins fighting on their own. However, the powers of these technological devices, or "things," enhance their physical bodies. This is a form of "thing-power."[129] And the power of these technological devices, or "things," elevates their bodies to the identity of knights.

> And as a crueel tigre was Arcite;
>
> As wilde bores gonne they to smyte,
>
> That frothen whit as foom for ire wood.
>
> Up to the ancle foghte they in hir blood. (1657-60)

The dust in the grove, the sweat and blood flowing from the bodies of the two knights as they fight, can be interpreted in terms of Alaimo's trans-corporeality. Dust, produced by the aggregation of different organisms, and these fluids expelled from the body, "emerge from the literal contact zone between human corporeality and more-than-human nature."[130] Thus, human bodies form a transcorporeal ontology with the matters surrounding them, and "the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from the environment."[131]

While this duel is ongoing, due to May's agency, Theseus goes hunting. After hearing that a deer was in the forest during a hunt, he sees Arcita and Palamon dueling and quickly stops the fight. Upon learning the knights' identities, Theseus, for Emily's sake, decides that the two knights will duel in the same place a year later.

This grove, which hides Palamon and witnesses the duel between Arcita and Palamon, is prepared throughout the year for the two knights who will fight to

[128] See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 23.
[129] See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 13.
[130] See Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 2.
[131] See Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 2.

become Emily's husband a year later. Following Theseus' decision, the grove is physically rebuilt for the duel:

> That swich a noble theatre as it was
>
> I dar wel seyen in his world ther nas.
>
> The circuit a myle was aboute,
>
> Walled of stoon, and dyched al without.
>
> Round was the shap, in manere of compas,
>
> Ful of degrees, the heighte of sixty pas (1885-90)

Theseus's transformation of the grove is an anthropocentric approach that denies his agency. His decision to hunt the deer in the same grove and his order to cut down and burn the oak trees reinforce this idea. Theseus, uses his political power to transform the grove, as Gillian Rudd also points out:

> The trees are cut down and we are forced to remember that it is only Theseus who has right to order such felling, for this woodland is more correctly regarded as royal forest, that is, a region defined as set aside for the provision of the royal hunt. Everything within the designated area, trees, wildlife, open spaces is under the protection of the King, but also subject to his whim.[132]

But even though Theseus physically altered the grove by using his power, its storied matter, its agency, is still there, so it is impossible to remove its trace because "feeld hath eyen and the wode hath eres" (1522). The following May, the knights gather in this arena, which was arranged by order of Theseus, to fight. He declares that Arcita is the winner of this fierce duel. However, Arcita is then severely hurt by Pluto's intervention and the resulting storm:

> Out of the ground a furie infernal sterne,

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[132] Gillian Rudd, *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 65.

From Pluto sent at requeste of Saturne,

For which his hors for fere gan to turne,

And leep aside, and foundred as he leep;

And er that Arcite may taken keep,

He pighte hym on the pomel of his heed,

That in the place he lay as he were deed,

His brest tobrosten with his sadel-bowe. (2684-91)

The fury sent by Pluto undermines Arcita's horse's movements, and Arcita's ribs are damaged by the saddle-bow. Thus, this intervention, possessing narrative agency, is a geological, biological, and cosmic narrative.[133] More specifically, Pluto's connection with Saturn (cosmic) causes the fury to occur (geological), and the horse's body, affected by this, injures Arcita (biological). Arcita's body can also be considered a palimpsest, because it is entangled with these various matters. As Karen Barad expresses, the body "reacts to the forces, manifest as shifting material alignments and changes in potential, and becomes not simply the receiver but also the transmitter or local source of the signal or that operates through it."[134] Arcita's body responds to the contact of saddle-bow with damaged ribs, a darkened face, and blood flowing down through his face. These are the stories of Arcita's body.

Despite trying ointments, herbal teas, and cupping to reduce the damage to Arcita's body and alleviate his condition. This is because Arcita cannot expel the impure blood from his body, and it poisons him:

The vertu expulsif, or animal,

Fro thilke vertu cleped natural

Ne may the venym voyden ne expelle.

The pipes of his longes gonne to swelle,

[133] See Serpil Oppermann, "Material Ecocriticism and the Creativity of Storied Matter," *FRAME* 26, no. 2 (November 2013): 57.

[134] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 189.

And every lacerte in his brest adoun

Is shent with venym and corrupcioun.

Hym gayneth neither, for to gete his lif,

Vomyt upward, ne dounward laxatif. (2749-2756)

The saddle-bow's thing-power upon contact with Arcita's body causes bleeding and poisoning, representing a trans-corporeal phenomenon. Arcita's body, like other human bodies, is "never a rigidly enclosed, protected entity, but is vulnerable to the substances and flows of its environment."[135] Matter's contact with the body reveals how permeable and fragile the human body is. This corruption that occurs in the body also represents a material exchange; this object, as the agent, radically alters the human body.

Arcita's death plunges everyone into mourning. By Theseus's decree, Arcita's tomb will be built in the grove. To this end, fires are lit, oak trees are cut down, and a crown of laurel leaves is made. The physical representation of Arcita's body transforms. This organic body, once a living organism, is now transformed into an inorganic matter, a component of a ritual. Not only Arcita's body, but also, by the duke's decree, his assemblages—his shield, spear, Turkish-made bow, and quiver—are paraded through the city. Thus, these technological tools, representing Arcita's chivalric attributes, travel through the city, intensifying the grief of the people with their inherent power.

The grove where Arcita is to be buried is deeply deforested. This ecologically devastated area stems from Theseus's anthropocentric understanding of conquering nature. This anthropocentric view, which attempts to construct a boundary between nature and humanity, cannot eliminate the power, agency, and discourse of storied matter. The Duke's actions, born from Cartesian thought and driven by an effort to prioritize human superiority, are refuted by Chaucer through the story of a stone and the horizontal positioning of humanity in relation to other living beings:

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[135] See Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 28.

"Considereth eek how that the harde stoon

Under oure feet, on which we trede and goon,

Yet wasteth it as it lyth by the weye.

The brode ryver somtyme wexeth dreye;

The grete tounes se we wane and wende.

Thanne may ye se that al this thyng hath ende. (3021-26)

The finitude of the human body contrasts with the infinity of nature and matter. The human body disappears after losing its vital functions, but through decomposition, the matter and organisms within it remain vibrant matter, open to intra-action and possessing agency. The stone mentioned deforms and ages, but its material production is infinite. Just like the stone, the grove in the Knight's story constructs the narrative, produces meaning, engages in intra-action with the characters—in short, it is an agent. Palamon, fleeing from the tower, and the deer, fleeing from the duke's crowd, both take refuge in the grove. After a long time, the two cousins meet in the grove and have their first duel there. Emily also visits the grove when the duke arrives to hunt the deer. The love triangle is physically depicted together only twice throughout the story: the first time in the palace gardens, and the second time in this grove. The grove, the unifying element of the story, is living matter; it alters the current course of the narrative once again. This area, transformed into an arena by Theseus's decree, undergoes a physical change in location, but its material production never ceases. It brings together noble people from different places to watch the duel between two knights. In this duel, they witness Arcita's death.

However, by the duke's decree, even though the life in the area where the grove is located is harmed, the grove still continues to produce meaning. Arcita's lifeless body mixes with the soil in this grove. Thus, the boundary that Theseus tried to build becomes blurred by the intertwining of the human body and the earth. Arcita's inorganic body, despite the decrease in biodiversity in the grove, continues

to produce material things by combining with countless matter because "Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers."[136]

3.4. *The Miller's Tale*

After the Knight's story, even though the host says it is the Monk's turn to tell his story, the Miller, being quite drunk and pale, intervenes and begins to tell his own tale. The story is about a carpenter in Oxford whose tenant, Nicholas, an astrology student, deceives him with his wife Alison, by claiming there will be a flood similar to the biblical flood. The language of the story, unlike that of the *Knight's Tale*, is everyday conversational. In this story, an example of a fabliau, Chaucer, contrary to the French fabliau tradition, applies a simple plot with short dialogues.[137] Unlike the previous text, Chaucer completely changes the tone of this one. Following a romance, the narrative in this story "tends to turn the tale into a parody of all courtly romance, the ideals of which are subjected to the harshly naturalistic criticism of the fabliau."[138]

The story opens with a jealous newlywed carpenter going to Osney, where his tenant, gallant Nicholas, expresses a sexual attraction to the carpenter's wife, Alison. Here, Alison, is described by the Miller as follows:

> Fair was this yonge wyf, and therwithal
>
> As any wezele hir body gent and smal.
>
> A ceynt she werede, barred al of silk,
>
> A barmclooth as whit as morne milk
>
> Upon hir lendes, ful of many a goore.
>
> Whit was hir smok, and broyden al bifoore

[136] Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 59.
[137] See Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 8.
[138] E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1983), 29.

And eek bihynde, on hir coler aboute,

Of col-blak silk, withinne and eek without. (3233-3240)

These lines argue that Alison's body and the matter within it are actants. It begins by portraying Alison's body through the metaphor of a weasel, in other words, by drawing parallels between human and animal bodies, blurring the lines between them. Alison's contact with animals are not limited to the weasel; silk has agency on her body as well. Before silk becomes a part of Alison's body, the silkworm grows by feeding on mulberry leaves, first forming a cocoon. Subsequently, the aim is to prevent these cocoons from turning into butterflies by altering their temperature through human intervention, and then transforming them into textile material. Silk has vibrant agency. The presence of silk in different forms on Alison's body converts her into an object of desire.

In order to be with Alison, Nicholas tricks her husband John, and brings him to the house he rents. By pretending to be insane at home, he tells John that if they drink an ale, he will relate something quite significant and that John must not tell anyone. The two start drinking ale after John brings it from the cellar. In Barad's words: "Space, time, and matter are mutually constituted through the dynamics of iterative intra-activity."[139] John's drunkenness here is not solely due to the beer. The beer, Nicholas, the cellar, and John are all part of an intra-action. As a material production of this intra-action, John gets drunk. The carpenter's consumption of beer represents a threshold, as it fully changes the rest of the story. This is because the change the carpenter experiences before and after drinking the beer causes Nicholas's story, leading to the distribution of agency.

Nicholas says that on Monday, tomorrow, a flood worse than Noah's flood will engulf the world:

That now a Monday next, at quarter nyght,

Shal falle a reyn, and that so wilde and wood

[139] See Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 181.

That half so greet was nevere Noes flood.

This world," he seyde, "in lasse than an hour

Shal al be dreynt, so hidous is the shour.

Thus shal mankynde drenche, and lese hir lyf." (3516-3521)

The flood, referred to as Noah's, is a myth. In this myth, in order to punish people, God sends a flood disaster; yet, by God's commands, Noah must construct a ship to save believers. After the flood, the ship and the people are saved. In Noah's flood, water has a transformative power because water can shape both human and non-human life in the form of a catastrophe. Water, which is vital for both living and non-living life, as in Noah's Flood, may give rise to a disaster. In terms of intra-action, water and life co-constitute through this relationship. For this reason, the entanglement that water enters with different matters gives rise to different material discourses. The power of the water surrounding the planet possesses a strong agency force that will compel John the Carpenter to forge his own barge:

"Anon go gete us faste into this in

A knedyng trogh, or ellis a kymelyn,

For ech of us, but looke that they be large,

In which we mowe swymme as in a barge,

And han therinne vitaille suffisant (3547- 3551)

John assembles these matters because the material power of water is, as Coole and Frost point out, active, self-creative, and unpredictable.[140] The murky and unpredictable nature of the water is why John wants to be prepared for a possible flood. This possible excessive rainfall, in other words, the flood, can be explained by Lowell Duckert as something that "propels (non)human things into new relationships

[140] See Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," 9.

and new material embodiments; it showers becomings."[141] These becomings can be thought of as the matters that must be prepared by John.

Through the humorous narrative style of his fabliau, Nicholas suggests that the only thing that can save John from this flood is a tub or a kneading-trough. The fact that the elements here could not save John in a potential flood is consistent with Chaucer's fabliau narrative and Jane Bennett's theory of trajectories. According to Bennett, matter has trajectories and possesses its own vitality;[142] therefore, it does not have to serve an anthropocentric intention. The trajectories of the tub, or kneading-trough, diverge from the trajectory of the flood. This is primarily because the flood is an unrealistic narrative established by Nicholas. Yet, the idea of the flood never disappears from John's mind and even follows him in his sleep. Waking up with a start, John has a nightmare:

> Noees flood come walwynge as the see
>
> To drenchen Alisoun, his hony deere.
>
> He wepeth, weyleth, maketh sory cheere;
>
> He siketh with ful many a sory swogh (3616-3619)

John's startled reaction to this dream, and the flood scene he saw, prompted him to gather the necessary materials, reflecting the idea that, as Oppermann argues, "the borders between meaning and matter are constitutionally porous."[143] While the boat and food prepared by John carry a material discourse, the boat hanging from the ceiling beam carries a semiotic representation. This porosity demonstrates that the flood scenario in John's dream possesses a powerful agency, influencing John's emotions and body and producing a material semiotic relationship.

When the day of the flood arrives, while John, Nicholas, and Alison are asleep, Absalon, another of Alison's lovers, visits the house. Annoyed by Absalon's

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[141] Lowell Duckert, "When It Rains," in *Material Ecocriticism*, ed. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 115.

[142] See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 119.

[143] See Iovino and Oppermann, "Introduction," 4.

persistence, Nicholas and Alison play a prank on him, resulting in Absalon kissing Alison's naked arse. Ashamed of this, Absalon goes and gets a hot iron bar for his revenge and visits the house again, but this time Nicholas opens his arse:

> "Spek, sweete bryd, I noot nat where thou art."
>
> This Nicholas anon leet fle a fart
>
> As greet as it had been a thonder-dent,
>
> That with the strook he was almoost yblent;
>
> And he was redy with his iren hoot,
>
> And Nicholas amydde the ers he smoot. (3805-10)

Nicholas's farting in Absalon's face is more than just a grotesque element; it directly affects the course of the story. Gut bacteria, air, gas, Nicholas's arse, and Absalon's hot iron are all agents that arise through intra-action. The gut bacteria in Absalon's body involuntarily exert their activity through air and gas. Thus, Nicholas's arse acquires two distinct agencies: the first is through farting, and the second is through the contact of the hot iron with his body, producing pain and thus possessing an agentic identity. Prior to this intra-action, none of the matters possess these agential identities; they acquire these perpetrator identities through the intra-action. Absalon's heated iron, through intra-action, becomes the agent that inflicts pain on Nicholas's body. After the hot iron touches his body, Nicholas screams, and his scream awakens John in a panic, who thinks the storm has arrived. However, as he rushes to the barge he has built, he faints and breaks his arm.

Chaucer's fabliau demonstrates that this Noah's flood narrative and discourse, constructed by Nicolas, as Oppermann states, "has the power to change the world."[144] Excessive rainfall cannot be controlled by human intervention. Just as a lack of rainfall can harm biodiversity, so can excessive rainfall. Thus, it is clear that water, as a living matter, possesses the material power to alter, transform, and produce life.

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[144]See Oppermann, *"From Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism,"*35.

3.5. *The Franklin's Tale*

The Franklin's Tale, like many other tales, revolves around the theme of love. A Breton lay tale, a short romance written by the Celtic people of Britain, the *Franklin's Tale* tells the story of Arveragus, a knight living in Armorica with his wife Dorigen, beginning with Arveragus's departure to England for two years. After his departure for military service, his wife, the noblewoman Dorigen, mourned her husband daily, weeping. One day, her friends took her to the edge of a cliff near their castle to cheer her up. Here, Dorigen's sorrow, filled with longing for her husband, continues under the influence of the rocks. In the garden, celebrating the arrival of May, a squire named Aurelius, who has been in love with Dorigen for over two years declares his love for her. Dorigen jokingly replies that she will reciprocate if he removes all the rocks; however, Aurelius, taking this seriously, hires a magician with money to make the rocks invisible. When Dorigen's husband Arvergarus who is caught in the middle of this dilemma arrives, he learns of the situation through his wife and tells Dorigen to keep her promise. Upon hearing this, the magician also cancels Aurelius's remaining debt.

The lives of Arveragus and Dorigen, who pledged their loyalty to each other, begin to take shape within a materialistic and ecocritical framework when Arveragus moves to his hometown of Penmarch thanks to his wife's wealth. The castle's location is crucial to the story because it is situated between land and sea:

> Now stood hire castel faste by the see,
>
> And often with hire freendes walketh shee
>
> Hire to disporte upon the bank an heigh,
>
> Where as she many a ship and barge seigh (847-850)

The castle's location overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, and Dorigen's stroll high on the ramparts, offer an important resource for understanding the relationship between aquatic life and the human body; as Oppermann and Iovino also point out, "bodies,

both human and nonhuman, provide an eloquent example of the way matter can be read as a text."[145] The materialistic production of the sea and walls that Dorigen visits is more than just a place. These non-human elements are story-producing entities.

Dorigen, waiting for her husband to return from England, frequently anticipates a ship that will bring him. Here, the wait for the ship isn't a passive element, but rather an active, story-generating matter capable of bringing Arveragus. Yet the ship never arrives. The ship, the sea, the ramparts, and Dorigen are determined through the same entanglement within a single phenomenon of the intra-action. Consequently, Dorigen's sorrow occurs with this determination. Further in the story, she rebels against God, who creates nothing without reason, and asks why God created these monstrous rocks:

> For by this werk, south, north, ne west, ne eest,
>
> Ther nys yfrosted man, ne bryd, ne beest;
>
> It dooth no good, to my wit, but anoyeth.
>
> Se ye nat, Lord, how mankynde it destroyeth?
>
> An hundred thousand bodyes of mankynde,
>
> Han rokkes slayn, al be they nat in mynde,
>
> Which mankynde is so fair part of thy werk
>
> That thou it madest lyk to thyn owene merk. (873-80)

Dorigen's discourse against the rocks is entirely anthropocentric. Accusing the rocks of not supporting any living species, she claims that these rocks have caused the deaths of many people as well. Thus, Dorigen emphasizes that the existence of rocks is actually insignificant compared to other forms of life, especially human life.

[145] See Iovino and Oppermann, "Introduction," 6

Claiming that rocks have no agency; yet, as Cohen also points out, "they are neither inert nor mute, but like all life are forever flowing, forever filled with stories."[146]

In terms of material ecocriticism, the idea that agency or vitality is not solely attributed to humans reveals that matter, both visible and invisible, also possesses agency. Thus, these rocks, which Dorigen believes are responsible for the deaths of humans, are, according to Cohen, "fears of lithic agency."[147] The reason for this is the concern that if Arveragus were to return, he would die from the agency of the rocks. Apparently, the rocks are not silent matter, but living matter full of stories.

When Dorigen's friends realize that seeing the rocks and the sea is not good for him, they take her to the garden on a May day. There, the vibrancy of May, the beauty of the garden, and the delight of the flowers do not preexist before the intra-activity; in fact, determinate together in the new phenomena with her body. As a result, the solace of human emotions found in dance leads Aurelius to declare his love for Dorigen. Initially reluctant, the woman, under the young lover's persistence, promises to become his lover in exchange for her doing what he asks.

> Looke what day that endelong Britayne
>
> Ye remoeve alle the rokkes, stoon by stoon,
>
> That they ne lette ship ne boot to goon—
>
> I seye, whan ye han maad the coost so clene
>
> Of rokkes that ther nys no stoon ysene,
>
> Thanne wol I love yow best of any man;
>
> Have heer my trouthe, in al that evere I kan. (992- 98)

With these words, Dorigen takes the fear of lithicism a step further, as Gillian Rudd also points out: "If Dorigen gets her way, these rocks will disappear entirely from the actual shoreline, which they help define and become merely props in her own tale;

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[146] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Stories of Stone," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 1, no. 1/2 (2010): 62.

[147] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 48.

there for the sole purpose of being removed."[148] Seeing no possibility of the rocks moving, the bargaining leads the young lover to turn to the goddesses and pray for a flood. However, the absence of a flood for two years and the continued presence of the rocks reveal a non-human agency of matter.

Two years later, his brother takes him to Orleans to a magician who performs nature magic. After negotiating and reaching an agreement, Aurelius returns to Armorica and goes to Dorigen, telling her that there are no more rocks left on the beach.

> I have do so as ye commanded me;
>
> And if ye vouche sauf, ye may go see.
>
> Dooth as yow list; have youre biheste in mynde,
>
> For, quyk or deed, right there ye shal me fynde.
>
> In yow lith al to do me lyve or deye—
>
> But wel I woot the rokkes been aweye." (1333-38)

In fact, the mathematical, physical, and astrological calculations performed by the magician gains agency through intra-action. The phenomenon resulting from this intra-action is that the rocks disappear for only two days, in other words, temporarily. But this agential cut is within the entanglement of the same phenomenon.[149]

The temporary absence of the rocks does not mean that their material and discursive forces have disappeared. The rocks' thing-power continues. The greatest example of this is Dorigen's complaints after returning home. After spending days thinking about her own death, her husband, knight Arveragus, returns. According to the knight, his wife must keep her word. Following this advice, Dorigen finds Aurelius in the garden where they first met. Aurelius, who declared his love for the first time in this garden, now forgives Dorigen. The garden, here, becomes a component of an intra-action for the second time, but the resulting phenomenon is

[148] See Rudd, *Greenery*, 142.
[149] See Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 181.

different, as Barad also states: “different intra-actions produce different phenomena.”[150]

In conclusion, Chaucer's Franklin's Tale should not be analyzed solely from a human-centered perspective; it should also be examined and its voices heard as a story of non- human matters with agency. The rocks, seas, ships, and the month of May mentioned in the text all participate in the enactment of agency. For instance, the formation of the rocks in the story doesn't require human intervention. These rocks are formed through geological processes. Just like these rocks, the seas are also formed through many different processes. The sea and the rocks cannot be defined and preexist without each other, as new materialism discusses. When evaluated within the conceptual framework established by new materialism and material ecocriticism, which draws on posthumanism, the dichotomy between inorganic and organic matter is dissolved; Dorigen and these material objects become intertwined. In other words, Dorigen and the rocks are not separate from one another but generate meaning together. Consequently, it becomes clear that Dorigen’s sorrow stems not only from her husband but also from her involvement in the intertwined interactions of these inhuman forces.

3.6. *The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale*

While all of Chaucer’s pilgrims meet at the Tabard Inn before setting out on their journey, only two join them along the way: The Canon and his Yeoman. Although the Canon leaves the group shortly afterward, the Yeoman remains among the pilgrims. While critics are not at a definitive consensus on whether the Yeoman was planned by Chaucer at the beginning of the stories,[151] the *Yeoman’s Tale* differs from those of the other pilgrims in that it deals with alchemy. Larry D. Benson states that the Yeoman’s story consists of two parts; the first part contains the Yeoman’s

[150] See Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 58.
[151] See Chaucer, *Riverside Chaucer*,19.

confession about himself and his master, while the second part recounts the deceit of a fraudulent Canon.[152]

Because the Canon and Yeoman join the group later, their portraits are not included in the *General Prologue* by Chaucer. However, by depicting their portraits from the Yeoman's perspective, Chaucer presents a social satire, implying that alchemy, contrary to legends and stories, was not a lucrative profession, by describing the Yeoman's master's clothing as very poor and dirty. However, after the Yeoman mentions that their living conditions are quite poor, the Host asks how the Yeoman's body became to be in this condition. The response is as follows:

> I am so used in the fyr to blowe
>
> That it hath changed my colour, I trowe.
>
> I am nat wont in no mirour to prie,
>
> But swynke soore and lerne multiplie.
>
> We blondren evere and pouren in the fir,
>
> And for al that we faille of oure desir (666-71)

Looking at the Yeoman's words, it is clear how trans-corporeal his body and fire are. The Yeoman's body changes color from blowing on the fire, drawing the attention of even those seeing him for the first time. Even though they are constantly in close contact with heat so as to obtain gold, the result is always the same; they never succeed. This shows that fire is not a passive form, but rather a matter that can affect the human body through heavy contact. As a result of this internal conflict, Yeoman, who is in a constant state of struggle, is now a darkened figure who can no longer look in the mirror.

After the Yeoman's words and his explanations of how they constantly deceived people, the Canon becomes even more unpleasant and leaves the pilgrims. Upon his master's departure, the main story begins, with the Canon declaring that he will never see him again. The Yeoman, who claims his life has been ruined by

[152] See Chaucer, *Riverside Chaucer*,19.

alchemy, never ceases to express at every opportunity that alchemy was a disaster for his life. But then he explains what they actually do to obtain gold: they combine substances with chemicals. The process involves first measuring the substances, then grinding them, placing them in a glass container, and then coating the container first with clay and then with fire.

> That of the eyr myghte passe out nothyng;
>
> And of the esy fır, and smart also,
>
> Which that was maad, and of the care and wo
>
> That we hadde in oure matires sublymyng,
>
> And in amalgamyng and calcenyng
>
> Of quyksilver, yclept mercurie crude? (767-72)

The Yeoman, who dedicated seven years to this work, claims that their process essentially involves trying to obtain gold by using substances such as lead, copper, mercury, and iron. However, he states that manipulating the fire's heat or the materials they work with during the process once again harms their bodies. Matters such as fire, mercury, silver, orpiment, iron, and glass, all agents in the process, transform the Yeoman's body. This supports the idea that agency is not exclusive to humans, but that matter itself can possess agency. Despite repeated attempts, the result remains unchanged; even when combining matter with different chemicals, the alchemists fail to achieve their goal. This is because, during the Renaissance and the Age of Reason, humans believed they could dominate everything. Matter is too resilient to be dominated by humans. Diana Coole's view that matter is not passive and does not have to serve humanity's various desires or needs demonstrates why alchemists failed to achieve their goals.[153]

Further in his story, the Yeoman also mentions the explosions that occur during the process of making these alloys:

> Thise metals been of so greet violence

[153] See Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," 92.

Oure walles mowe nat make hem resistance,

But if they weren wroght of lym and stoon;

They percen so, and thurgh the wal they goon.

And somme of hem synken into the ground—

Thus han we lost by tymes many a pound—

And somme are scattered al the floor aboute;

Somme lepe into the roof. Withouten doute (908-15)

Although metals are often considered as "usually the avatar of rigid and inert substance,"[154] they are living, mobile, and active substances. According to the Yeoman, when metals combine with different chemicals, they react in the opposite direction to what is expected. This expectation is entirely wrong. This is because metals, like other substances, are thought of by humans as passive substances with no story, substances that they try to neutralize. Nonetheless, according to Bennett, metals are vibrant substances with a polycrystalline structure. The behavior of these polycrystalline metals is far from regular, meaning they are variable. Therefore, when they combine with other substances, the destruction they cause can reach incredible levels.

The Yeoman, beginning the second part of his story, uncovers even at the very beginning of the plot how deceitful the Canon is. The Canon visits a priest, who is portrayed as having some fortune, and asks him for a loan of gold. The Canon gains his trust by returning the loan three days later. When the Canon comes to pay his gold debt, the priest begins explaining the intricacies of alchemy. He combines different substances and chemicals, as the Yeoman had previously instructed, yet he already knows it yields no results. Therefore, while the priest is busy with another task, he secretly puts his plan into action:

Out of his bosom took a beechen cole,

In which ful subtilly was maad an hole,

[154] See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, xvii.

And therinne put was of silver lemaille

An ounce, and stopped was, withouten faille,

This hole with wex to kepe the lemaille in. (1160-64)

Looking at these lines, the trick the Canon employs is clearly visible: he seeks to deceive the lord by making matter serve him. This selfish human perspective reveals how material forms are manipulated for their own purposes. For instance, beech wood is a highly resistant and strong tree. However, after being cut down by human intervention, the resulting coal is used to conceal silver dust, which is then sealed with wax. Wax, an organic substance that coats silver, is secreted by bees. According to material ecocriticism, even when these organic substances undergo changes, they continue to produce stories. No matter what the Canon does, it can never achieve its goal because substances are living entities that do not lose their agency and their own narratives. In the end, this deception leads them to a goldsmith to confirm that what they produced is silver. The priest, upon hearing that the Canon could teach this alchemy for 40 pounds, pays the money, but will learn nothing.

The social satire that Chaucer frequently employs throughout *The Canterbury Tales* is also present in the Yeoman's story. With this story, Chaucer underscores that a respected priest in the Middle Ages would do anything for gold or silver. It demonstrates that even when the forms of these metals change, they continue to generate narratives. There is no power hierarchy between human and non-human matter. The Canon and Yeoman seek to alter matter, but matter asserts its agency. Thus, matter and discourse, human and non-human beings are inseparable.

3.7. *The Merchant's Tale*

Unlike Chaucer's other stories, *The Merchant's Tale* is a tale of an old man's marriage to a young wife, presented from a poetic-dramatic development perspective,[155] illustrating that people can deceive themselves at any age. In this

[155] Speirs, *Chaucer the Maker*, 97.

story, Chaucer uses the fable once more, but this time depicting a knight in a ridiculous situation. Thus, Chaucer satirically illustrates that in the Middle Ages, a knight at the top of the social pyramid would be no different from someone on the bottom rank of society.

There are parallels between the Merchant's own life and the story he tells. Undoubtedly, the Merchant, like January, is unable to end his unhappy marriage. However, the Lombardy knight, at 60 years old, is someone who wants to marry. Even after talking to those around him, his decision remains unchanged; he desires a young, virgin wife. Despite his own old age, this knight, wishing for a blooming wife, likens himself to a tree:

> Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree
>
> That blosmeth er that fruyt ywoxen bee;
>
> And blosmy tree nys neither drye ne deed.
>
> I feele me nowhere hoor but on myn heed;
>
> Myn herte and alle my lymes been as grene
>
> As laurer thurgh the yeer is for to sene. (1461-66)

The knight's parallel between the tree and his own body and soul leads him to create an illusion of himself with natural elements for the sake of marriage. January, who defines his masculinity through organic matter such as trees and flowers, states that organisms are active throughout the four seasons of the year. His intention, seeking to use nature discursively, is to demonstrate through nature that his body is still alive and strong.

After searching for a young woman to marry, January deems May worthy of becoming his wife. January's general perceptions of women are geared towards the commodification of the female body. Chaucer's choice of the name May for the woman here also reinforces this commodification.

The comparison of May to the beauty of a May morning reflects the fusion of nature in this month with the essence of May's being. Both the month of May and May's body reveal January's body and impulses. Following their marriage, the knight's squire, Damian, also falls in love with the same woman. January's expression of love for May is reciprocated by her. While waiting to be reunited, January goes blind. As he tries to come to terms with his blindness, he wants to go back to the walled garden they always visited with his wife. This garden is a place known only to January and May, and only January has the key.

In the Merchant's story, the garden is not a passive matter exploited by people. Furthermore, the garden is a constitutive matter possessing storied matter. May, brought to this garden by January to satisfy sexual urges, enters this walled place after unlocking the gate. Analyzing this context through Karen Barad's concepts of intra-action and agential cut is quite fruitful. The key, the garden, the walls, May, January—none of them produce a phenomenon prior to intra-action. Because intra-action does not occur before relations, it occurs through relations. May's entry through the walled garden gate is an example of the agential cut, a set of confining apparatuses.[156]

The garden is open to interpretation not only within the framework of agential realism, but also through Jane Bennett's concept of vibrant matter and Bruno Latour's concept of actants. To start with, the key that opens the garden's gates, the garden itself, the walls, and the pear tree, all non-human elements, are actants with the power to change the story. These living things are interconnected. For example, the fact that accessing the garden is provided by a key demonstrates both the key's living nature and its connection to the garden, as it only works in that specific keyhole.

After her husband, January, goes blind, May, using wax, copies the key to the garden gate and gives it to Damian. As can be seen, the story has a rich structure interwoven with vibrant matters. Another actant, beeswax, allows for the creation of a new key, increasing the number of times one can access the garden. Damian enters

[156] See Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway,148

the garden before the married couple, and May signals him to climb the pear tree. After a while, claiming to be hungry, she leads her husband to the pear tree and climbs it. This scene by Chaucer bears a striking resemblance to the Garden of Eden. The pear tree's agency invites sexual desires, making eating a pear feel like eating an apple.

May's mind and body, as she climbs the tree to have sexual intercourse with Damian, can be analyzed by Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality. It is clear that within this walled garden, May's essence cannot be considered separate from her surroundings.[157] Instead of simply leading Damian to go anywhere in the garden, May points to the tree, indicating that her mind and body are not separate from nature, but intertwined with it. Additionally, the pear tree and its branches act as actants, not just background elements, directly guiding the story; they are part of the narrative itself.

Just like the garden and the grove in Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, *The Merchant's Tale* also features a garden and a pear tree. In both stories, non-human organic matter found in nature is a material component that creates meaning and provides refuge for humans. However, the fundamental difference between the stories is that in *The Knight's Tale*, the living elements in nature are interpreted by Chaucer as a sacred narrative praising the valor of knights through the concept of courtly love. *The Merchant's Tale*, on the other hand, features a garden and a pear tree, a 60-year-old knight, and a narrative that puts him in a comical situation through the fabliau storytelling of his squire. These two different stories represent ecologies with different intra-actions, and therefore agential cuts and various material storylines. However, in both stories, the human body is not a life form separate from nature; rather, in two distinct gardens, the passive and inert form is far removed from the human experience, and the narratives blur the boundaries between humans and agents, presenting them not as a single entity but as a dispersed one.

[157] See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2.

3.8 *The Pardoner's Tale*

When examining the reflection of medieval social estates in *The Canterbury Tales*, it becomes clear that, with the exception of the Parson, all other clergymen are undoubtedly discussed by Chaucer, both explicitly and humorously, through their portraits and stories. One of these portraits is that of the Pardoner. While the Pardoner may not hold the same high social position as a prioress or monk, he is still within the religious framework. This pardoner, who has official documents from the church, does not hesitate to admit to taking bribes. The story the Pardoner tells is about three young men living in Flanders at an unknown time, who, while seeking death for their earthly sins, are led by an old man to the foot of a tree where they find gold. Two of the friends stay there while the third goes to the city to get food and wine. However, in the end, overcome by greed, the three friends kill each other.

The arrival of the plague, one of the greatest infectious diseases in human history that profoundly affected medieval demographics and social life in England, is not far off from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The plague, which gripped the period and caused the death of many people, also makes its presence felt in Chaucer's *The Pardoner's Tale*. Taken comprehensively, the plague is one of the key actors in the various events that unfold in the story.

In this story of the three rioters, the characters' fondness for alcohol, as Peter G. Beidler deals with in his article "*The Plague and Chaucer's Pardoner,"* is considered a realistic narrative stemming from the characters' fear of death created by the plague epidemic.[158] This fear of the plague, when considered alongside the sins of excessive drinking and mutual killing in the Middle Ages, reveals that the story serves as an exemplary narrative.

However, the resulting corruption and psychological trauma occur on the basis of the plague. The plague epidemic can primarily be evaluated within the conceptual boundaries of storied matter, as defined by material ecocriticism. Respiratory

[158] Peter G. Beidler, "The Plague and Chaucer's Pardoner," *The Chaucer Review* 16, no. 3 (Winter 1982): 265

transmission is one way the plague can enter the human body. At this point, the respiratory tract perfectly aligns with the breath approach, just as material ecocriticism defines the boundaries of storied matter. These bacteria, which can enter the human body through the respiratory tract, are proof that bacteria also have a story, and that this infectious disease, originating from rodents and requiring no human intervention, is also the agency of non-human bodies.

Nevertheless, when examined through the lens of Bennett's new material understanding, which borrows from Latour's actor-network power theory, it becomes clear that not only humans but also non-human living and inanimate bodies can be actants. However, Bennett considers the agency of actants in conjunction with the concept of assemblage developed by Deleuze and Guattari, because: "While the smallest or simplest body or bit may indeed express a vital impetus, conatus, or clinamen, an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces."[159] The idea that things cannot act without each other, specifically in the context of *The Pardoner's Tale,* is open to examination through the lens of wine.

Three brothers, while drinking in the morning, hear the sound of a bell announcing that someone has died. The murderer, referred to as Death, killed a drunkard with a sword; this occurrence is depicted by Chaucer as occurring during a plague.

> He was, pardee, an old felawe of youres,
>
> And sodeynly he was yslayn to-nyght,
>
> Fordronke, as he sat on his bench upright.
>
> Ther cam a privee theef men clepeth Deeth,
>
> That in this contree al the peple sleeth,
>
> And with his spere he smoot his herte atwo,
>
> And wente his wey withouten wordes mo.

[159]See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 21.

He hath a thousand slayn this pestilence. (672- 79)

As discussed, considering the corruption of the people during the plague and the constant threat of death, and the understanding that people could alleviate these traumas by drinking alcohol, the wine in the story is an actant. The main reason for consuming wine is the plague, the entertainment venue where the three rioters receive news of death, the Death they are searching for, and their own bodies are actants. The old man who guides the three rioters in their search for Death, the oak tree they visit in the hope of finding Death, and the gold they find are also actants. Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* is entirely woven together by assemblages of actants. These assemblages are rich and productive, bringing together various people, the oak tree, death, and wine. The fact that actants are found not individually but together with various actants and the assemblage shows that agency is not concentrated in a single subject, but rather distributed. When considered in the context of posthumanism, which also forms the roots of new materialism and material ecocriticism, the acceptance that agency is not unique to humans, but that other living and non-living bodies in nature produce agency, represents an important threshold in dismantling the Cartesian-centered anthropocentric understanding. The human body, considered as a single actant throughout *The Pardoner's Tale*, acts alongside other actants such as wine, death, oak trees, and gold. This indicates that agency is distributed throughout the story.

However, the story is not limited to these aspects in terms of its richness in new materialism and material ecocriticism. The Three Rioters come to the oak tree on the advice of an old man to seek death.

Til he cam to that tree, and ther they founde

Of floryns fyne of gold ycoyned rounde

Wel ny an eighte busshels, as hem thoughte.

No lenger thanne after Deeth they soughte (769-72)

The reason gold was found at the foot of the oak tree is more than just a coincidence. According to Beidler, this gold belonged to someone who died of the

plague, because it is impossible for someone with the plague to take precious things like gold to the afterlife.[160] Just as today, in the Middle Ages, bubonic or pneumonic deteriorations seen in the bodies of plague patients after microbes entered the human body caused significant health problems. The fact that individuals died shortly after contracting the plague demonstrates the powerful effects of these non-human viruses. Thus, the fact that these viruses, once they infiltrate the human body, quickly lead to death can be explained by the fact that the gold remained at the foot of the oak tree. From a material ecocritical perspective, it is not surprising that the plague-infected human body sees the tree as a place of refuge. This is because, as in Chaucer's other stories, in *The Pardoner's Tale*, the line between nature and culture, between human and non-human, blurs. Considering the distance of the microbe-infected human body from death, it brings nature and humanity closer together and actually supports the idea that nature and humanity cannot be conceived without each other.

The Three Rioters' decision to abandon their search for Death after discovering the gold demonstrates the profound influence gold, an actant of the assemblage, can have on human decisions. Even with the plague at the doorstep, the power of gold can still activate human bodies and desires. Thus, instead of seeking death, the Three Rioters decide to keep the gold for themselves, leading them to a different plan. A lottery was held to determine which of them would return to town to retrieve the wine and bread, while the other two would guard the gold. As soon as the young rioter leaves, the two men devise a plan to divide the treasure between themselves. Their plan is to kill the young rioter with a knife. The young rioter, unable to suppress his inner voice, obtains rat poison and meticulously mixes it with wine. Both sides succeed in their plan and kill each other.

When the events are considered sequentially, the two rioters killing the younger one with a knife points to the thing-power of the knife. As Bennett explains in *A Life of Metal*, these polycrystalline structures, formed by the vibration of free atoms, possess a living nature.[161] The moment this metal blade touches the young rioter's

[160] See Peter G. Beidler, "The Plague and Chaucer's Pardoner," *The Chaucer Review* 16, no. 3 (Winter 1982): 259.

[161] See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 59.

body, these free atoms cause the vital functions of the organic human body to cease, revealing the vitality of the metal.

Referring to Nietzsche in the "Edible Matter" chapter, which includes wine, Bennett says: "edible matter appears as a powerful agent, as stuff that modifies the human matter with which it comes into contact."[162] The power of wine, frequently consumed during the plague, to alter the human body and actions is undeniable. However, when the young rioter goes to town and mixes rat poison with the wine, its influence undoubtedly increases. Physically, it pushes human actions to a new extreme; the wine and rat poison, as two separate actants, distribute their agency, ultimately leading to the end of the human body. The termination of the human body's vitality by edible matter demonstrates that the body is not unique or superior to other living beings.

In fact, the oak tree, gold, knife, and poisoned wine are various actants found within the same assemblage. These actants possess different agencies of influence on living and inanimate bodies. The distribution of agency across a tree, an object, or a human body reveals the richness and stories of the object. The Three Rioters dying at the foot of the oak tree with the gold beside them would result in their bodies returning to the earth. However, the story ends here with the Pardoner, and therefore Chaucer, concluding the matter, leaving the fate of their bodies and the gold open to interpretation. However, it is quite possible that during the plague, the three dead bodies near an oak tree would avoid touching other human bodies for fear of contamination. Thus, the three dead rioters would decompose and return to the earth. As the bodies return to the earth, a transition between bodies takes place.

[162] See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*,49

CHAPTER 4: *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT*

Written in the 14th century by an unknown author, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* recounts the adventures of Sir Gawain, King Arthur's cousin, and the Green Knight. On Christmas Eve, at a feast where King Arthur meets with the Knights of the Round Table in Camelot, an unexpected guest appears. This knight, with an extraordinary physique, is adorned from head to toe in green. This knight, whose body and gear are entirely covered in green, arrives with only his horse and a green axe. This giant wants to play a Christmas game with King Arthur. However, Gawain, who obtains the axe after much insistence, challenges the Green Knight. According to the agreement, Gawain, failing to strike the Green Knight in the neck, must visit the Green Knight at the Green Church in Wales exactly one year later. When the time comes, Gawain sets out to fulfill his promise to the Green Knight, and after much effort, takes refuge in a castle. The owner of this castle claims to know the church he is looking for, but in the meantime, he offers to entertain him and play a game. According to this game, the landlord will give Gawain the animals he hunts, and Gawain will give him what he has won during the day. Although the landlord's wife repeatedly tries to seduce him, Gawain resists and gives the landlord the kisses he wins. Agreeing to play the game one last time, Gawain is offered a girdle along with the kisses by the landlord's wife. Gawain gives the kisses but not the girdle, and goes to church on Christmas Day to find the Green Knight. Although the Green Knight strikes Gawain's neck with an axe as part of the deal, the girdle makes the blow ineffective. Then, the Green Knight reveals his true identity: he is actually the landlord himself. He reveals that Gawain was spared death because he ultimately resisted temptation; however, his failure to disclose the green girdle resulted in only a slight wound. After his adventure at the Green Church, Gawain returns to Camelot and tells his story.

4.1 The Color Green

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, one of the chivalric tales from the Arthurian Legends, the color green is quite dominant. At the very beginning of the

poem, a giant horseman appears in King Arthur's palace. When this giant horseman enters the hall where the feast is taking place, the nobles initially think he is a ghost, a mere hallucination. This is mainly because the giant knight's body is made of green: "Man gaped at the hue of him / Ingrained in garb and mien, / A fellow fiercely grim, / And all a glittering green."[163]

The fact that the Green Knight's body is covered in green is, of course, unusual. This is why the knight's physique attracts the attention of both the Knights of the Round Table and the nobles in the court. However, upon closer examination of the knight's body, it becomes clear that the green is not limited to his body alone; various parts of his body are also the same color.

> Marvellous fur-trimmed material, with matching hood
> Lying back from his locks and laid on his shoulders;
> Fitly held-up hose, in hue the same green,
> That was caught at the calf, with clinking spurs beneath
> Of bright gold on bases of embroidered silk.
> But no iron shoe armoured that horseman's feet.
> And verily his vesture was all vivid green,
> It would be tedious to tell a tithe of the trifles
> Embossed and embroidered, such as birds and flies,
> In gay green gauds, with gold everywhere.[164]

The green color is not limited to the Green Knight's body and the matter within it. His horse, which accompanied him to Camelot, is also green. This non-human body, described as impulsive to others but obedient to the Green Knight, shares physical similarities with a human body. While having a green body is the most striking resemblance, the knight's hair and the horse's mane are also the same color.

Both bodies are large and striking beings, covered in gold and precious jewels. Based on this, it can be said that there is a hybrid connection between the human and animal bodies, composed of various actants. In particular, as expressed in the poem, the color and shape of the knight's hair bear a striking resemblance to the color and shape of his horse. Thus, the human body and the non-human body mingle, creating a hybrid trans-corporeal bodily form that blurs the boundaries.

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[163] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 26
[164] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 27

However, the similarities that deconstruct the anthropocentric narrative are not limited to these. The poem's portrayal of the horse as quite brave and daring exemplifies that it is not merely a living but inactive entity, but a living and active entity. Thus, this horse, which arrives in Camelot with the knight, is presented to the reader as an actant with the power to change events, as brought forth by the Bennet's approach. Furthermore, the heterogeneous distribution of agency is pluralistic. That is, nonhuman entities such as the golden bells on the horse, the precious jewels on both the horse's and the knight's bodies, and the axe carried by the knight are also actants with vibrancy. To illustrate, the golden bells on the horse and the axe are vital entities with enough power to frighten the nobles attending the Christmas celebration.

In medieval texts that highlight the code of chivalry, although the combat equipment possessed by the heroes is more limited compared to today, knights and their elements are vibrant units. To illustrate, the Green Knight arrives at Camelot with no equipment other than his axe; yet his axe is described in the poem in a rather magnificent way.

> And an axe in his other hand, huge and monstrous,
> A hideous helmet-smasher for anyone to tell of;
> The head of that axe was an ell-rod long.
> Of green hammered gold and steel was the socket,
> And the blade was burnished bright, with a broad edge,
> Acutely honed for cutting, as keenest razors are.
> The grim man gripped it by its great strong handle,
> Which was wound with iron all the way to the end,
> And graven in green with graceful designs.[165]

The Green Knight's axe, much like those in stories of *The Canterbury Tales* such as the Canon Yeoman and the Pardoner, has a polycrystalline structure and possesses thing- power, capable of producing dramatic and subtle effects. [166] Considering that the Knights of the Round Table and nobles were not averse to battles and challenges where physicality was paramount, the Green Knight's axe once again emphasizes the vibrancy of matter.

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[165] See *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 10-11
[166] See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*,6

Additionally, the lines between matter and body are invisible when the polycrystalline axe is initially in the knight's hand. However, it is quite accurate to say that the axe undergoes an agential cut when it is described as separate from the knight's body, made of green steel, and patterned with gold. Thanks to this agential cut, the intertwining between the axe and the human is briefly broken, and the vibrancy of the green color of the non-human matter is brought to the forefront. However, the agential cut ends when the axe is reunited with the knight's hand. Thus, the line between the human body and living matter blurs again, returning to a unity where the boundaries are indistinct. Thus, the ambiguity between bodies occurs for the first time in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*

Only a short time later, it becomes clear that the mysterious knight's purpose for arriving is not a duel, but, in his own words, to play a Christmas game. According to this game, if he cannot kill him with a single axe blow, his turn will come on the same day a year later. Although Arthur initially takes the axe, Sir Gawain takes it from him at his request. After delivering the blow, he manages to sever the Green Knight's head from his body. But then, something surprising happens, and the Green Knight picks up the head lying on the ground.

> Yet the fellow did not fall, nor falter one whit,
> But stoutly sprang forward on legs still sturdy,
> Roughly reached out among the ranks of nobles,
> Seized his splendid head and straightway lifted it.
> Then he strode to his steed, snatched the bridle,
> Stepped into the stirrup and swung aloft,
> Holding his head in his hand by the hair.[167]

These lines allow for an analysis of the Green Knight's body from posthumanist and new materialist perspectives. They reveal that a vibrant substance, in other words, the axe, possesses an agency powerful enough to sever a man's head from his body. However, the axe transforms Green Knight's body, which can be explained by Karen Barad's idea: "Bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are material discursive phenomena. 'Human' bodies are not inherently different from 'nonhuman' ones."[168] At the heart of Cartesian thought, which posthumanism opposes, lies a dualism: the head, or mind, is positioned as

[167] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 37
[168] See Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway, 153

discourse and subject, while the body is reduced to material and object. However, the material discursive approach introduced by posthumanism and Barad considers the mind (discourse) and the body (matter) together. Looking at the poem, the fact that the Green Knight's head, struck by an axe, falls to the ground, altering the anatomical structure of the human body, yet the knight picks up his own head, demonstrates a co-constitute structure between matter and discourse. Thus, bodies are objects open to change, with no fixed boundaries.

The Green Knight's visit to Camelot, with an axe in one hand and a holly cluster in the other, offers a rich and intense narrative in terms of material ecocriticism. In Christian and Pagan narratives, and throughout the Middle Ages, the religious or existential interpretation of the holy cluster, often relying heavily on metaphor and symbolism, represents an anthropocentric approach that disregards its material agency and storied matter. This is because elements, especially those in nature, can easily be transformed into metaphors, as Bennett points out.[169] The ability of elements or substances to become metaphors supports anthropocentric thinking and relegates matter to the background in the face of human dominance. In this context, the holly cluster, as noted by the book's translator Brian Stone, is a plant branch of Pagan origin.[170] symbolizing good luck at Christmas. The Green Knight's act of holding an axe, a metaphor for war, in one hand and a cluster of holly in the other, while declaring that he has come for peace, proves how these elements can be reduced to mere metaphors.

The concepts of agency and vibrancy, which form the core of material ecocriticism and the new materialist understanding that underlies it, are also relevant to Holly Cluster. Holly Cluster's presentation of Bennett's idea that matter possesses conatus undermines the anthropocentric view that reduces matter to metaphor;[171] the fact that matter possesses agentic capacity, capable of intra-action with both living and non-living matter, undoubtedly reveals the significance of storied matter.

Considering that in the times before industrialization and the great wars in which technological tools caused great destruction, the damage inflicted on the Earth

[169] See Bennett, "The Elements,", 111
[170] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 167
[171] Jane Bennett, "The Elements," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2013):106

by human power was less than it is today, the climate and temperatures are within seasonal norms. Thus, the unusually cold winter months can directly impact biodiversity. The holy cluster's ability to remain green even during the winter months and the thorns it has developed to protect itself from the threat of damage by other living creatures make it a resilient and tangible entity. Ecological postmodernism, another root of material ecocriticism, by dismantling binary oppositions, as Opperman points out, "sets in motion a nonanthropocentric paradigm,"[172] bringing nature and culture closer together. In the poem, the holly cluster representing nature and the chivalric codes and religious symbols representing culture blur the boundaries between culture and nature, pointing to a structure in which boundaries are not defined, and non-human matter possesses agency equivalent to humans. Consequently, this green plant with red berries, which can withstand the harsh winter months, is a living entity with its own storied matter, capable of generating stories.

4.2 Winter Season and Hautdesert Castle

A year later, before confronting the Green Knight, the poem first describes the arrival of spring and summer. However, the changing of the seasons bears striking parallels to the Prologue of another medieval text, *The Canterbury Tales*.

> THEN comes the season of summer with soft winds,
> When Zephyrus himself breathes on seeds and herbs.
> In paradise is the plant that springs in the open
> When the dripping dew drops from its leaves,
> And it bears the blissful gleam of the bright sun.[173]

The heralding of spring and summer is associated with Zephyrus's breath in both texts. Earth, plants, and dew are all organic and inorganic substances that demonstrate the vibrancy of nature and the richness of life. Unlike *The Canterbury Tales*, these movements of nature and biodiversity are described quite briefly in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, without going into detail. In the poem, summer is quickly bid farewell, giving way to winter.

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[172] See Oppermann, "From Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism," 25.
[173] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 41

Wrathful winds in raging skies wrestle with the sun;
Leaves are lashed loose from the trees and lie on the ground
And the grass becomes grey which was green before.
What rose from root at first now ripens and rots;
So the year in passing yields its many yesterdays,
And winter returns, as the way of the world is,[174]

The arrival of winter is conveyed through the shedding of leaves that bloomed in spring, the transformation of green to gray, and the decay of flowers. This narrative demonstrates that life in nature exists by its own material being, without needing human intervention, and possesses the power to bring about change, contributing to the narrative in the poem. Additionally, Sir Gawain's decision to take his fur-lined cloak with him as he prepares to travel in winter to fulfill his promise to the Green Knight shows the effect of winter's agency on the human body. This demonstrates that non-human bodies and matter are also agents and existents.

However, as Sir Gawain prepares to depart, he not only wears clothing covered in special fabrics to protect him from the winter cold, but also equips himself with weapons, steel boots, armor, knee pads, and iron gloves. Each of these devices that surround the human body possesses its own thing-power and is composed of assemblages. But as Sir Gawain wears these pieces of equipment, the merging of human body and inanimate matter blurs the lines between bodies, leaving behind unclear, ambiguous, and intertwined relationships.

Like the Green Knight, Gawain is accompanied by a horse on his journey to find the Green Church. This horse, named Gringolet, has a saddle surrounded by gold, gleaming spikes, and silk embroidered with expensive jewels and silhouettes of various animals, all specially prepared for this journey. Just as the Green Knight's green horse has its storied matter, Gringolet has a material story. The main reason for this, of course, is the golden saddle that it will wear for the first time, meticulously prepared for this journey. The emphasis on its gold construction in the poem distinguishes the saddle from others, highlighting its unique and distinct story. In addition, the saddle on Gringolet contains a material narrative power that can create an assemblage of Gringolet and Gawain. Throughout the journey, the formation of Gawain's chivalric identity is possible through these materials, as he rides Gringolet,

[174] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 41

who wears the golden saddle and all the other items. For Gawain to create a strong knightly portrait, the material assemblages, such as mounting his horse and putting on his equipment, make him worthy of the Round Table. However, the winter effect, which previously indicated that the season had reached winter and hinted at the potential difficulty of the future journey, is felt during Gawain's adventure to find the Green Church.

> Yet the warring little worried him; worse was the winter,
> When the cold clear water cascaded from the clouds
> And froze before it could fall to the fallow earth.
> Half -slain by the sleet, he slept in his armour
> Night after night among the naked rocks,
> Where the cold streams splashed from the steep crests
> Or hung high over his head in hard icicles.

As mentioned before, considering Bennett's approach, which reveals the conatus of the elements, both water and glaciers possess various conatuses; in other words, neither substance is a silent or passive element that can be relegated to the background. On the contrary, water, glaciers, and of course winter, are so alive and active that they bring Gawain closer to death, forcing him to sleep in his own armor and ultimately causing him to pray for a place to take shelter. Apart from that, the reflection of winter is not limited to Gawain alone. It is also visible in the morning when Gawain visits a wild forest where birds sing in the branches of large trees. The cold brought by winter not only ravages the human body, but it is also challenging for other living bodies in nature. Thus, it is observed that agency is once again distributed to the cold weather, the rains, and the glaciers.

Following his prayer, Gawain is impressed by the castle, which is integrated with nature; as he proceeds, this lays the groundwork for a highly fruitful analysis in terms of storied matter, which is the focus of material ecocriticism.

> When in the wood he was aware of a dwelling with a moat
> On a promontory above a plateau, penned in by the boughs
> And tremendous trunks of trees, and trenched about;
> The comeliest castle that ever a knight owned,[175]

Looking at the verses, it can be observed that the elements surrounding the castle carry a narrative of nature. Plato, promontory, and boughs are geographical

[175] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 33

processes created by nature's own material agency. This geographical process begins with the erosion of rocks by factors such as heat, transforming them into soil. Subsequently, the plateau is formed by a series of tectonic movements and river erosion. The castle that Gawain encountered is located on the promontory of this plateau. Surrounded by huge trees and their branches, this castle captivated Arthur's nephew, the famous king of Camelot. This magnificent landscape is an indication that various materials did not behave in the way attributed to them, but acted with their own ontological existence. To give an example, the tectonic movements and the power of the stream in the formation of the plateaus cannot be controlled or regulated by humans because these materials have their own power, their own ability to move, and, as Oppermann and Iovino stated, "...every being has a story to tell..."[176] Thus, it can be said that this castle is a living place with a story.

However, the narrative of this vibrant place is described in more detail as Gawain expresses his gratitude to Saint Julian and approaches the castle more closely; the number of elements in the formation of the place increases, the narrative becomes richer, and the agency disperses.

> The wall went into the water wonderfully deep,
> And then to a huge height upwards it reared
> In hard hewn stone, up to the cornice;
> Built under the battlements in the best style, courses jutted
> And turrets protruded between, constructed
> With loopholes in plenty with locking shutters.[177]

When Bennett's perspective is applied to these lines, the wall, the water, the stone, and the turrets are all actants. Each of these elements possesses a variety of stories conveyed within a castle narrative. These elements also possess trajectories, much like in *The Canterbury Tales*. In other words, the depth of the water has a power to shape the wall's formation, its lines, and even its boundaries. Similarly, considering the example of the stone, it is clear that it was hard-hewn by humans; that is, the material's reaction to this sculpting is evident.

However, despite all these hewn processes, the stone has a protruding, indented structure. Considering that the stone descends to the depths of the water, it is highly

[176] See Iovino and Oppermann, "Introduction," 7
[177] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 34

likely to be covered in algae. This means that when water and stone come together, a physical reaction occurs, and thus their material vibrancy can be physically observed. Furthermore, when Gawain obtains the opportunity to see inside, the number of actants increases as the depiction continues. Splendid high hall, towers, turrets, crenellations, and chimney form the castle. The profound depiction of the castle points out the significance of the storied matter. With all its actants, the castle is a place where different materials meet and leave their mark on each other. It fascinates a knight from different lands with its living materials and stories.

This relationship between different matters is also quite open to being evaluated through the concept of intra-action. Water, stone, turrets, hall, towers, crenellations, chimney, and Gawain all co-constitute with each other through intra-action. The agential cut is the point where the agents in the intra-action are observed and measured for a short period of time. In this context, Gawain's transformation from a helpless and lost state to a hopeful and visiting identity is the equivalent of this agential cut. By wishing to be a guest at this magnificent castle, Gawain becomes part of the castle's material and discursive narrative.

After Gawain is received as a guest, he first enters a special room containing knightly clothes made of precious fabrics:

> And fine carpets Wlderfoot, on the floor, were fittingly matched.
> There amid merry talk the man was disrobed,
> And stripped of his battle-sark and his splendid clothes.
> Retainers readily brought him rich robes
> Of the choicest kind to choose from and change into.[178]

On his arduous journey from Camelot to Bertilak's palace, during which he overcomes various obstacles as mentioned earlier, Gawain removes his knightly attire and puts on new clothes made of special fabrics provided to him. The meticulous attention to detail regarding these garments, made from materials of a quality befitting a knight, is, of course, a requirement of the chivalric code, especially considering medieval estates. However, upon closer examination through the lens of the new materialist understanding, the materials that compose each of the garments Gawain wears are in intra-action with his body. The way the thoughts of the people

[178] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 53

in Bertilak's palace are conveyed after Gawain puts on these garments is met with appreciation, thanks to the ambiguity between matter and man.

> In a trice when he took one, and was attired in it,
> And it sat on him in style, with spreading skirts,
> It certainly seemed to those assembled as if spring
> In all its hues were evident before them ;
> His lithe limbs below the garment were gleaming with beauty[179]

The clothes Gawain wears are agentic matters. These non-human matters exist within the same intra-action as the human Gawain's body. In other words, these garments do not create a knight's costume until Gawain puts them on; they only come into being when Gawain wears them, that is, when the intra-action occurs. Similarly, when Gawain's clothes change, he is redefined as a knight. Thus, it is incorrect to define the clothes and Gawain without each other, because these two separate matters intertwine and produce each other. The fact that people around him see Gawain in his clothes as conforming to the code of chivalry is a phenomenon that constitutes his identity. However, it should not be forgotten that Gawain alone can't create the code of chivalry; the clothes he wears also contribute to this definition. This is because Gawain's body and clothes are co-constituted. These agentic matters and the body produce each other, becoming narrative matters that actually eliminate the anthropocentric structure.

4.3 Feasts and Hunts

In medieval literature, including *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, banquets are depicted as social gatherings, particularly for the upper classes, where they often came together at the same table to celebrate, frequently with luxurious food and drink. These celebrations can be organized for different periods and for different purposes. For example, the Christmas celebrations, both in Camelot at the beginning of the poem and at Hautdesert Castle at the end, and again in the evenings of Bertilak's three-day games, bring together the knights and the nobles of the court. On the day Gawain visited Bertilak's Castle, the food on the table included soups made with various spices, fish prepared with four different cooking methods, boiled meat,

[179] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 53-54

stewed and savored with spices, while it is mentioned that wine was among the drinks.[180] But the banquet menus are not limited to these; according to the agreement between Bertilak and Gawain, three more banquets are held. At the first banquet, as per the agreement, venison (some organs given to the raven), bread well imbrued with blood, and wine are served.[181] At the second banquet, boar's head, brawn, offal, bowels broiled on coals, and wines are offered.[182] The final feast does not mention any food; it is simply referred to as a supper[183]. Considering all these, the world of food and drink is quite rich in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

However, viewing food solely as nourishment would be a very superficial analysis. A more comprehensive analysis reveals that a large portion of the food consumed by knights and nobles at feasts consisted of animals and their organs. For example, the journey and transformation that a fish, venison, or brawn undergoes before being eaten by humans is quite long. In particular, according to the agreement between Bertilak and Gawain, who were to share what they had obtained that day, Bertilak always greeted Gawain with the animals he had hunted. The animals that roamed freely in nature during Bertilak's first hunts were killed by human intervention. They didn't just die; they underwent various processes: slaughtering, deboning, cooking, and decorating, before being presented to humans.

This intervention into nature, ecology, and living creatures in nature is one of the discussion points of various waves and branches of ecocriticism. Humanity's effort to establish superiority and dominate nature and its creatures, which has tended to increase especially in the Age of Reason and its aftermath, dates back to the Middle Ages, as seen in this poem. This anthropocentric perception actually provides more than a simple analysis, as it directly affects the diversity of living things in nature, by hunting non-human creatures, especially animals, and eating them and their organs by crowds accompanied by celebrations. Following the killing of a living body, its transformation and consumption through various processes coincide with the concept of trans-corporeality of Stacy Alaimo. In order to better understand

[180] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 54
[181] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 73
[182] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 81
[183] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 83

the relationship between trans-corporeality and poetry, the example of the third hunt, the fox, can be analyzed.

> And, according to custom, had them cut open with finesse.
> Some who ceremoniously assessed them there
> Found two fingers' breadth of fat on the worst.
> Then they slit open the slot, seized the first stomach,
> Scraped it with a keen knife and tied up the tripes.
> Next they hacked off all the legs, the hide was stripped,
> The belly broken open and the bowels removed[184]

These verses describe in detail how the hunters who hunt the fox decompose the animal's body. Following this decomposition process, it is very important that this animal, brought to the castle, be presented to Gawain. However, as Alaimo states: "Perhaps the most palpable trans-corporeal substance is food, since eating transforms plants and animals into human flesh." [185] From Alaimo's perspective, after Gawain consumes these animals, the hunted animals not only recompose the knight's body as food, but also, during this exchange of winnings, Gawain himself becomes prey to the Green Knight, just like the animals offered to him. Gawain's body, slightly wounded by the Green Knight's axe blow to his neck, is as fragile as the hunted animals, making it vulnerable to external influences. Thus, the fluid and dynamic nature of the boundaries between the hunted animals and the knight's body is conveyed.

4.4. Exchange of Winnings and Visiting the Green Chapel

Playing games, winning, losing, and trading are frequent occurrences in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The poem begins with the Green Knight offering a game, and continues with Gawain visiting a magnificent castle after failing to win. There, his host, Bertilak, suggests playing a game of exchange, based on Bertilak's winnings from a three-day hunt, with Gawain exchanging his winnings at the castle. On the first day, Bertilak gives Gawain a deer he hunted, and in return, Gawain gives him a kiss gifted by Lady Bertilak. On the second day, Bertilak brings another animal, this time a wild boar, and in exchange receives two kisses from Gawain.

[184] See *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 71.
[185] See *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 12.

Although the Knight of the Round Table does not reveal who kissed him, it is Lady Bertilak. On the final day of the exchange, the host, having hunted a fox, offers it to his guest; Gawain exchanges three kisses from his host's wife but deliberately refuses to give back the green girdle he was given. He explains that this is because Lady Bertilak had given him this green girdle, which prevents anyone who wears it from being killed.

> But one who was aware of the worth twined in it
> Would appraise its properties as more precious perhaps,
> For the man that binds his body with this belt of green,
> As long as he laps it closely about him,
> No hero under heaven can hack him to pieces,
> For he cannot be killed by any cunning on earth.'[186]

When these lines are examined, it is noteworthy to consider the green girdle through the concept of assemblage, which Jane Bennett draws upon from Manuel DeLanda, in order to reveal the matters and their vitality. As developed by Bennett, assemblage theory is a concept in which matters, regardless of whether they are living or inanimate, temporarily appear through distributed agency in a heterogeneous way. Upon examining the poem, it becomes clear that when the green sash, made of silk and gold, merges with the knight's body and armor, it, together with the other elements within this whole, saves him from the blow of the axe in the Green Chapel, in the presence of the Green Knight. This occurrence, a powerful example of the distributed agency concept, shows that the green girdle is a living material capable of saving the knight's life, and powerful enough to dismantle the traditional anthropocentric narrative.

The Green Knight knew from the beginning that the green girdle was given to Gawain. In fact, before delivering the blow to his neck, the Green Knight, knowing the knight wouldn't die, gifted him the green girdle after the game. Following his return to Camelot and the recounting of Gawain's adventure, the green girdle became the symbol of the Round Table, immortalizing this tangible, discursive story. Thus, this living substance, which first saved the knight's life, as Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino also point out, "bodies, things, elements […] intra-act with each

[186] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 90

other and with the human dimension, producing configurations of meanings and discourses that we can interpret as stories." [187]

However, before he puts on his green sash and sets off for the Green Chapel, accompanied by a guide, to fulfill the promise he made regarding the play he lost exactly one year ago, the poem's final section, Fit IV, begins with descriptions of just how stifling and gloomy winter can be.

> Now the New Year neared, the night passed,
> Daylight fought darkness as the Deity ordained.
> But wild was the weather the world awoke to;
> Bitterly the clouds cast down cold on the earth.
> Inflicting on the Besh Bails from the north.
> Bleakly the snow blustered, and beasts were frozen;
> The whistling wind wailed from the heights,
> Driving great drifts deep in the dales.[188]

In these lines, where various effects of winter can be observed, it is depicted that, by God's command, darkness triumphs over daylight, resulting in the loss of the summer heat, sunlight, nature, and biodiversity; and with the arrival of winter, the climate and weather begin to change. As mentioned in the lines, the arrival of winter is always associated with negative connotations. For example, constant storms and atmospheric cooling create challenging conditions for both biodiversity and living and non-living things. This harsh and wild weather brings snow, and with the snowfall, animals in the ecosystem freeze to death.

However, the effects of winter are felt not only by animals but also by people. It is indicated that Gawain could not sleep all night. Gawain's state of mind before facing his probable death is no different from that of animals freezing to death. Considering the parallels between Gawain's life and the lives of animals already mentioned in the poem, it can be said that the permeability of the cold is about to reach Gawain's body as well. With the awareness brought by the cold, Gawain puts on his clothes.

> First he clad him in his clothes to counter the cold,
> Then in his other armour which had been well kept;
> His breast-and belly-armour had been burnished bright,

[187] See Iovino and Oppermann, "Introduction," 7.
[188] See *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 83.

And the rusty rings of his rich mail-coat rolled clean,
And all being as fresh as at first, he was fain to give thanks
Indeed. [189]

Upon careful examination of the verses, it becomes clear that Gawain, in accordance with the code of chivalry, dons his equipment, taking into account the effects of the cold; his breast-and-belly armor, which was dirty when he arrived a few days earlier, now gleams as before. The specific mention of Gawain's equipment at this point stems from the fact that the material itself reveals its vitality.

This time, the impact of the harsh winter season, which began just before Gawain's arrival at the Green Chapel, extends to biodiversity and animal life; as indicated in the poem's verses, this ambiguity continues in the human body. Through both a rich analysis of material ecocriticism and a deep examination of new materialism, particularly trans-corporeality, the poem observes the extent to which animal and human bodies are vulnerable to the harsh winter months.

Considering human and animal bodies separately from their environment is impossible from an ecocritical and trans-corporeal perspective, because these bodies are elements constantly interacting with other living and non-living matter in their environment. The fact that cold, winds, snow, in other words, winter, are not passive structures but active structures that can permeate bodies and flesh reveals that they are powerful enough to alter the vibrancy of the living bodies in the poem.

Early in the journey, the effects of winter, previously seen only on human and animal bodies, are now observed on other living and non-living things in nature.

Climbed by cliffs where the cold clung:
Under the high clouds, ugly mists
Merged damply with the moors and melted on the mountains;
Each hill had a hat, a huge mantle of mist.
Brooks burst forth above them, boiling over their banks
And showering down sharply in shimmering cascades.[190]

On this path to the Green Chapel, as the verses above suggest, the vigor of winter is felt both in nature and on Gawain. The path Gawain walks is a wild one, where mists merge with moors and streams overflow. This narrative, where different

[189] See *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 96.
[190] See *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 99.

elements merge and boundaries blur, is a dangerous one that could affect and test the knight's route.

As they were about to reach the valley, the guide, startled by the Green Knight's power, informed Gawain that he could no longer accompany him and left him alone near the valley. Thus, Gawain continued on his way to the valley to find the Green Chapel and settle his score. The valley, located in a wild place, consisted of paths surrounded by trees. However, the knight, unable to find what he was looking for in this valley, continued his search until he noticed a mound.

> The knight, urging his horse, pressed onwards to the mound.
> Dismounted manfully and made fast to a lime-tree
> The reins, hooking them round a rough branch;
> Then he went to the barrow, which he walked round. inspecting,
> Wondering what in the world it might be.
> It had a hole in each end and on either side,
> And was overgrown with grass in great patches.
> All hollow it was within, only an old cavern
> Or the crevice of an ancient crag: he could not explain it
> Aright.[191]

Gawain cannot easily find the Green Chapel and has to piece together various clues. This is because the chapel is shrouded in a different discourse, surrounded by natural materials. The chapel the knight seeks is nothing more than an ancient cave formed from rock fissures fractured by geological effects. Considering this context, the Green Chapel, or matter, is, as Serenella Iovino notes, "a corporeal palimpsest in which stories are inscribed."[192] The arduous path to the chapel, this hollow structure made of stone-derived materials surrounded by water and linden trees, is consistent with the concept of storied matter as presented by material ecocriticism. One of the reasons for this is undoubtedly the palimpsest nature of the Chapel's narrative. The fracturing of the rocks is the reason why people considered this place a chapel in the past. Subsequently, Gawain's arduous discovery of the chapel contains an inscribed narrative. This layered structure of the chapel reveals a story in which living and

[191] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 102.
[192] See Iovino and Oppermann, "Theorizing Material Ecocriticism," 451.

non-living matter in nature are intertwined within a palimpsest narrative inscribed at different times.

4.5 Confrontation, Axe, Scratch, and Green Girdle

After waiting for some time inside the chapel, Gawain finally confronts the Green Knight. He does not refuse the Green Knight's request to expose his neck and await the axe's fall, and the Knight of the Round Table, though filled with anxiety, is ready to keep his word. As the axe falls, Gawain's body recoils in a way one would expect from a knight:

> With all the brute force in his body bearing it aloft,
> Swinging savagely enough to strike him dead.
> Had it driven down as direly as he aimed,
> The daring dauntless man would have died from the blow.
> But Gawain glanced up at the grim axe beside him
> As it came shooting through the shivering air to shatter him.
> And his shoulders shrank slightly from the sharp edge. [193]

While it's not explicitly stated whether Gawain intentionally or unintentionally pulled his shoulders back, he should stand still and welcome the axe to his neck, as a medieval knight should. However, Gawain's inability to control his body with his mind lays the groundwork for rejecting the Cartesian system of thought, because the body, acting on its own initiative without waiting for the mind's command, retreats, thus avoiding the first blow. But the real reason for Gawain's body recoiling is that the axe about to strike his neck possesses thing-power. The trembling of the knight's body as the axe descends demonstrates that matter "to act, to produce dramatic and subtle [194]." This is because the axe possesses a substance capable of ending a human life.

Following the first attempt, the Green Knight's statement that the frightened person was not Gawain demonstrates how the fear created by the vibrancy of matter can shake the social identity of a medieval knight. The axe blow to Gawain's neck in

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[193] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 105.
[194] See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 6.

the second attempt, after he declared he would not move, resulting in only a slight wound to the Knight of the Round Table, provides a suitable framework for examination within Karen Barad's concept of agential realism. In the poem, the axe is defined by its ability to cut into the knight's flesh, while Gawain's body suffers only a minor graze from the axe's action. Considering Barad's theory, the axe and Gawain's flesh reveal permeability between matter and body. In other words, the blood flowing from the knight's neck, mixing with the axe and the snow, is an example of permeability between bodies. The axe, Gawain's neck awaiting the blow, the chapel they are in, and the falling snow are all co-constitutive elements of the intra-action. Additionally, Barad's concept of an agential cut refers to the temporary delimitation of boundaries between elements within an intra-action situation. In the poem, the point where these boundaries are defined by the agential cut and the injury to Gawain's neck reflects the vulnerability of the knight's body, which, hierarchically, occupies a high position among medieval social estates. Thus, the association of the axe, one of the apparatuses of this intra-action, with Sir Gawain, one of the famous Knights of Camelot, is quite important in the context of recognizing the agency of matter, expressing that matter is not passive and, in the background, but rather active, dynamic, and possesses agency.

Although the agential cut causes only a superficial wound, it raises questions about Gawain's identity as a knight. The green girdle given to the knight by Bertilak's wife is a matter with its own agency. Thus, while one matter reveals the knight's physical frailty, another protects his life. However, the poem does provide some references to the Green Knight's identity. First, Gawain speaks to the Green Knight to take refuge in the castle in Hautdesert, which resembles the Green Knight in his stupendous size and strong, stalwart legs.[195] The second implication is that, just like the Green Knight and Gawain played the Beheading Game in Camelot, Bertilak also plays a game called Exchange of Winnings with Gawain. However, he reveals his identity towards the end of the poem.

He explains that body switching is possible thanks to Gawain's aunt, the sorceress Morgan the Fay:

[195] See *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 53

> SHE sent me forth in this form to your famous hall
> To put to the proof the great pride of the house,
> The reputation for high renown of the Round Table;
> She bewitched me in this weird way to bewilder your wits,
> And to grieve Guinevere and goad her to death
> With ghastly fear of that ghost's ghoulish speaking
> With his head in his hand before the high table.[196]

Bertilak's body, transformed into the Green Knight by the magician's spell to test the Knights of the Round Table, is open to examination through interdisciplinary theories such as ecocriticism, posthumanism, new materialism, and material ecocriticism.

Nevertheless, Bertilak's transformation of his body into a green one opens up a debate about the color green. This issue is discussed extensively in Gillian Rudd's article "Being Green in Late Medieval English Literature." In the modern world, Rudd defines the color green as follows;

> Green for many now is Good. It is, for some at least, the color of ethical and political awareness, equal respect for the human and nonhuman world, animal, vegetable, and mineral, both collectively and in its constituent parts as each animal, plant, or landscape is accorded intrinsic worth.[197]

However, Rudd's interpretation suggests that in the Middle Ages, the color green evoked associations and symbols that were the complete opposite of those of today. In a poem from the Late Medieval period, this color is associated with the Green Knight's body. During his visit to Camelot, both the nobles at court and the Knights of the Round Table express their confusion, stating that they have never encountered such a colossal being. Considering the Green Knight's body, not only his clothes but also his beard and entire body are green. According to the article, green is the color of deception and is worn only to reveal the intentions of those who

[196] See Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 112-113.
[197] Gillian Rudd, "Being Green in Late Medieval English Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 30.

are untrustworthy[198]. Although he knows that Gawain cannot kill him, by deceiving him, he actually reveals his untrustworthiness.

His transformation into the Green Knight, a green figure that astonished the people of Camelot he visited, reveals that nature is not an object to be relegated to the background, but rather that nature and culture coexist. An ecocritical examination of the color green suggests that nature is not passive and motionless; it is active and dynamic, as observed in the Green Knight's body and actions.

When examined from the perspective of posthumanism, which forms one of the roots of material ecocriticism, the anthropocentric understanding that humans are superior to nature disappears after Bertilak's transformation into Gawain, under the spell of Morgan the Fay. With Bertilak's (human) transformation into the Green Knight (nature), the boundaries disappear, revealing that humans and nature are not separate or superior to one another, but rather intertwined. Additionally, through magic, Bertilak can change bodies many times. These transformations demonstrate that the line between humanity and nature is blurred. But the Green Knight's body does not fully contain either humanity or nature. In other words, his body is neither purely human nor purely natural. His body is exactly a hybrid body. In light of all this, the constant change of bodies is compatible with the understanding that humans do not have a fixed identity, which is one of the main discussion points of posthumanism. Posthumanism, arguing that there is no ideal human being as in the Vitruvian Man, maintains that the definition of humanity is not fixed but fluid and changeable, as seen in the hybrid body of the Green Knight. However, considering this medieval text through the lens of posthumanism underscores that agency is not solely human; non-human entities can also be agents. Matter is the agent, as exemplified by the green girdle that saved Sir Gawain from death.

The new materialism movement, which is another important theory in the formation of material ecocriticism, includes concepts frequently encountered in this poem, which is a work of the Late Middle Ages. First of all, in the poem full of Jane Bennett's concepts of vibrant matter and thing-power, elements such as color, the Green Knight's and Gawain's horses, the precious jewels on these horses, the armor

[198] See Rudd, "Being Green in Late Medieval English Literature," 33.

on the knights, and the axe emphasize that matter is alive and suggest that it can come together with human and non-human beings. Karen Barad, a pioneer of the new materialism movement, developed agential realism, and its concepts, such as intra-action, agential cut, and entanglement, can be applied to poetry. The poem, particularly incorporating these concepts in the scene with the axe during Gawain's visit to the Green Chapel to fulfill his promise, demonstrates just how close the boundaries between humanity and nature actually are. Another important figure in this theory, Stacy Alaimo's theory of transcorporeality, suggests that the permeability of human and non-human bodies in poetry is evident; contrary to what is claimed, the human body is not closed off from the outside world, but rather open to interaction with other matter, just like other living and non-living bodies.

Radically rejecting the anthropocentric approach that has asserted since the dawn of civilization that the ability to tell stories belongs solely to humans, material ecocriticism argues that things also have stories and that these stories must be understood. In the late medieval work *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, it reveals that animate and inanimate matter are in no way inferior to human agents in their ability to produce stories. Hautdesert Castle and Green Green Chapel are places that possess elements of storied matter. The material ecocriticism approach is not limited to these; it also explores Gawain's human body, Green Knight's hybrid bodies, and the stories within the bodies of all living and non-living matter, demonstrating how interdisciplinary ecocriticism can be when combined with new materialism.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation examines the primary texts of the Late Medieval period of English Literature, *The Canterbury Tales* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, within the framework of material ecocriticism, which underlies theories such as ecocriticism, posthumanism, and new materialism. It aims to demonstrate that the understanding of material ecocriticism not only provides a basis for analysis in modern times but also reveals the presence and narrative of matter in medieval texts. These two narratives, which offer highly productive analyses for the history of Medieval English literature, provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between matter, nature, and culture when evaluated through a materialist perspective.

This study offers a robust theoretical framework because material ecocriticism provides an interdisciplinary approach situated precisely at the heart of ecology, ecocriticism, posthumanism, and new materialism, intersecting with and bearing traces of other theories. Rooted in environmental humanities and the application of scientific methods, material ecocriticism draws upon a rhizomatic network that intersects with these theories. This materialist approach is applied to fourteenth-century texts such as *The Canterbury Tales* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, uncovering the integration of these theories in both works and demonstrating that matter has been a vital component of life throughout the ages.

In the third chapter of the thesis, Geoffrey Chaucer, one of the pioneers of medieval English literature, is discussed in terms of his magnum opus, *The Canterbury Tales*, which he wrote in his mature period, following works that demonstrate the influences of French and Italian culture and literature. Although an unfinished work, it is one of the most important works of its time, written with different techniques and narrative styles. This study, instead of evaluating *The Canterbury Tales* from an anthropocentric perspective, analyzes it materially and discursively, indicating that the book is composed of stories told by non-human matters. The general prologue, beginning with the awakening of nature, demonstrates how the arrival of spring brings together pilgrims from different social estates, revealing a trans-corporeal relationship between the seasons in nature and the pilgrims' bodies. This ultimately leads the pilgrims to take action to visit Thomas

Beckett's tomb. In this medieval work featuring diverse social estates, the stories are consistent with the characters introduced through their portraits. For example, *The Knight's Tale* conveys a narrative imbued with chivalric codes befitting a knight, while *The Pardoner's Tale's* story is intertwined with its own portrait and prologues. Regardless of their social estates, all the stories in this thesis possess storied matter, carrying narratives of agent and living matter. Thus, although the stories are divided into social classes, the material story is everywhere, regardless of class and social difference. For example, just as the garden where Palamon and Arcita first see Emily in The *Knight's Tale* contains a narrative of intra-action and storied matter, in *Merchant's Tale*, the garden where January, May, and Damian are located also possesses intra-action and storied matter. For the two gardens in the two stories, it can be said that matter can have agency in different ways.

In the fourth and final chapter of the thesis, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, another canon work of Late Medieval literature, is examined from rich perspectives such as materialism and ecocriticism, and the vitality and agency of matter are extensively discussed in relation to other living and inanimate bodies. Chaucer's reputation for his various roles during his lifetime, besides his poetry, and the inclusion of the pilgrim Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales,* allows for the identification of the book's poet. Although the poet of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which survives in a single manuscript entitled Cotton Nero A.x, is unknown, many sources identify it as Gawain's poet. Nevertheless, considering how closely the poem depicts knights revered by medieval estates, we can say that the poet was not detached from chivalry and court circles. Unlike *The Canterbury Tales*, this long medieval work with a single story is a four-fit romance. Like *The Canterbury Tales*, it is interwoven with storied matter, grounded in posthuman thought, developed by new materialism theories, and material ecocriticism. The green body of the Green Knight, the axe, the holly cluster, the materials in Gawain's clothes, and the green girdle all these matters demonstrate that matter is a highly influential factor in shaping the identity of the knights.

This study explores the concept of trans-corporeality, a key figure in new materialism and rooted in the rhizome network that draws from material ecocriticism, as examined in the poems of both Chaucer and Gawain. For instance,

the plague in *The Pardoner's Tale*, which caused mass deaths in the Middle Ages, and the story's depiction of a late rioter killing his friends for gold, reveal how porous human bodies are to disease and poison. Similarly, in *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, his burned face while handling chemicals demonstrates how matter can enter bodies through inhalation. However, the fact that the prey hunted and processed by Bertilak is then eaten by Gawain suggests a trans-corporeal relationship, indicating that Gawain himself becomes the prey. In contrast to Cartesian thought, the narrative in both poets' works portrays the human body as constantly interacting and materially intertwined with other living and non-living bodies.

The application of agential realism, as formulated by Barad through his interpretation of the fundamental principles of quantum physics, in both significant poems demonstrates that matter exhibits a performative tendency, meaning that its continuous state of becoming strengthens the narratives of matter in the stories. The green girdle given to Gawain parallels this becoming. For example, the green girdle given by Bertilak's wife, while bearing the trace of intra-action, the knight's emotional bond with the woman transforms into a protective matter within Gawain's body through a different intra-action. Like the green girdle, the key in *the Merchant's Tale* shows that matter does not exist prior to intra-action. While the key is a means of access to her garden for January, its copying by May produces betrayal as part of an intra-action. This work reveals in the poems of both poets that matter is not passive and repressed; rather, it is a constantly changing, active being.

In the material ecocriticism theory developed by Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino, Jane Bennett's concept of thing-power is examined in detail in *The Canterbury Tales* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which are the focus of this study. Bennett's theory demonstrates that in both texts, matter possesses power and narrative creating ability independently of human intervention. For example, in *Franklin's Tale*, the rocks possess a thing-power that, independently of human action, can shape the story. Similarly, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the axe, with its polycrystalline structure, is a living agent in the story, whether either knight holds it or not. Thus, both the rocks and the axe, without needing human intervention, are not relegated to the background in medieval tales but are, in fact, narrative-creating elements thanks to their own thing-power.

The narrative approach to matter, which is the main focus of this study, is examined through the seasons in both *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Canterbury Tales*. Unlike *The Canterbury Tales, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* begins with winter. Throughout this long poem, winter is discussed not only in its relationship with the human body but also in its transcorporeal relationship with other bodies. While the beginning of spring in Chaucer's work is the agent that awakens living things in nature and brings pilgrims together, the winter season in this anonymous poem carries an agent capable of influencing life without human intervention. As can be seen, both Chaucer and the anonymous poet express the effects of the seasons on living and non-living life in their poems. Thus, we can say that these seasons, which can affect living and non-living life in the ecosystem, consist of various elements such as wind, rain, and living matter, and feed the narrative of matter. However, one element that distinguishes the two poems is that although *The Canterbury Tales* begins with spring, in the poems, the transitions between seasons are seen in the stories told by the portraits depicted in the general prologue. For example, the awakening of love and emotions, which is central to *The Knight's Tale* and *The Merchant's Tale*, takes place in May, while the disappearance of the rocks, which forms the center of *The Franklin's Tale*, occurs in winter. On the contrary, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* consists of a single story, and the season in the story is winter. Both the Green Knight's visit to Camelot and Gawain's journey to the Green Chapel take place in winter. Consequently, when looking at both books, it should be said that both summer and winter are important components that make up the storied matter.

In conclusion, this study relates material ecocriticism, one of the current theories in the environmental humanities, to *The Canterbury Tales* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, arguing that the story of matter did not begin in the 21st century; rather, the story of matter can be understood, read, and revealed in the past as well. The story of matter, spanning from the green girdle and the Green Chapel in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to the gardens and cliffs in *The Canterbury Tales*, reveals that matter has been a fundamental agent throughout the ages. The recognition of matter's agency, transformative power, and might in the Middle Ages reveals how matter defies time. The story of matter retains its relevance for every era; for matter itself is timeless.

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ÖZGEÇMİŞ

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