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# Climbing to the Heart of Stone. Reading Moffat through Plumwood

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#### ABSTRACT

Gwen Moffat is celebrated in the mountaineering world for becoming the first woman mountain guide in the UK in 1953. However, though she authored 35 books - fiction and non-fiction - so far, her works have received very little scholarly attention. The purpose of this paper is to focus mainly on her first autobiography Space Below My Feet (1961) and to provide a literary analysis of it from the ecofeminist point of view elaborated by Val Plumwood. Though Moffat and Plumwood seemingly never met nor read each other, their attitude towards nature and the points in common between the British mountaineer and the Australian philosopher are astoundingly numerous. In one of her last writings Journey to the Heart of Stone (2007), Plumwood claimed that a "radically intentionalising anti-reductionist writing of the world might make visible whole new interspecies

dialogues [...]that can re-open the door to the world of wonder"<sup>1</sup>, adding that such "a radical writing project should encourage us [...]to reinvest with speech, agency and meaning the silenced ones, including the earth and its very stones"<sup>2</sup>. This paper will show how Space Below My Feet, with its depictions of animal intelligence and personality, and its being "so passionately in love with the rock"<sup>3</sup>, prefigures Plumwood's invitation to reconceive nature "as capable of agency and intentionality,"<sup>4</sup> and presents Moffat as one of Plumwood's "climbers who can see themselves [...] as being in conversation with stones".<sup>5</sup>

KEYWORDS: Ecocriticism, ecofeminism, mountaineering, mountaineering writing, nature writing

#### **AUTORE**

<sup>1</sup> V. PLUMWOOD, Journey to the Heart of Stone, Culture, in Creativity and Environment. New Environmentalist Criticism, edited by F. Becket and T. Gifford, Rodopi, Amsterdam – New York 2007, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> G. MOFFAT, *Space Below My Feet* [1961], Phoenix Kindle ed., 2014, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> V. PLUMWOOD, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> EAD., *Journey to the Heart of Stone*, cit., p. 22.

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#### Introduction

The name of Gwen Moffat is well-known in the mountaineering world and among the scholars of travel and sports studies. She belongs to the growing crowd of women mountaineers that are celebrated for their first – absolute or female – ascents, manless rope teams and other achievements. Moffat, in particular, will go down in history for being the first woman to become a mountain guide in the UK in 1953 – about thirty years earlier than women did in any other European country. "A free-spirited, barefoot-climbing vagabond with no interest in adhering to traditional gender roles of the 40s and 50s"<sup>6</sup>, Moffat lived an adventurous life made up of travels, temporary jobs, frugal living in isolated cottages and, above all, mountaineering and writing. Her first autobiography *Space Below My Feet* (the main object of this study), was published in 1961 and was followed by many other books: mountaineering memoirs, travel accounts, other non-fiction, and a long series of detective novels. Despite this remarkable production, Moffat's works have received very little scholarly attention, and almost none outside the specialist areas of sports and travel research.

Val Plumwood was an Australian philosopher and activist who, like Moffat, had an eventful and non-conformist life. After completing her studies in philosophy, she became one of the most innovative and ground-breaking voices of the rising ecofeminist movement. "Always independent and iconoclastic",<sup>7</sup> Plumwood loved travelling alone in the wilderness, lived in a "stone hideaway"<sup>8</sup> built together with her second husband "in the forest at Plumwood Mountain",<sup>9</sup> and survived a crocodile attack which consolidated her belief in "human–animal mutuality, equality and reciprocity in the food web."<sup>10</sup>

These two unconventional and forward-thinking women never met and, as far as I was able to ascertain,<sup>11</sup> never read or heard of each other. Nonetheless, they seem to share a specific sensibility for nature and a posthumanist attitude towards the land and other non-human actors that justify the proposition of this study, which

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> N. BERRY, *Reading Between the Lines – Gwen Moffat Interview*, in «UKClimbing», 28 June 2017, www.ukclimbing.com/articles/features/reading\_between\_the\_lines\_-gwen\_moffat-9478. Accessed 27 April 2023.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> K. GREEN, Val Plumwood, in «Australasian Journal of Philosophy», 86, II, June 2008, p. 344.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ibid. <sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> V. PLUMWOOD, *The Eye of the Crocodile*, edited by L. Shannon. ANU e-Press, Griffin Press, 2012, p. 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> In a personal e-mail dated 12 April 2023, Moffat confirmed to me that she had never heard of Plumwood before I mentioned her name. So far, I have found no reference to Moffat's works or life in Plumwood's writings so I assume that the philosopher didn't know of the mountaineer either.

is to provide a literary analysis of Moffat's first climbing memoir *Space Below My Feet* (1961) based on the ecofeminist theories elaborated by Plumwood.

In one of her last essays *Journey to the Heart of Stone* (2007), the philosopher devotes her attention to what she calls "Stone Sagas" because, she maintains, "even the smallest stone represents an amazing conjunction of earth forces whose complexity puts to shame the puny puzzlings of humankind."<sup>12</sup> Thus, the act of "building a small stone shelter" in the forest allows Plumwood to elaborate on "what stones have to teach,"<sup>13</sup> on their individuality and stories, and to reject the instrumental split between "use and respect" that "lies at the heart of modern dematerialisation".<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, the section which gives name to the essay, the account of her "journey into the heart of [...] the stone country of Arnhem Land", a place "where stone is the main actor, and knowledge of stone is the meaning of a journey,"<sup>15</sup> offers her the opportunity to express the need to "write stone teaching, stone acting, stone speaking, stone guiding"<sup>16</sup> in ways that overcome the traditional dichotomies between science and art, philosophy and poetry, reason and emotion. This ambitious "task for writing" can only be attained through a "big work of cultural change"<sup>17</sup> that aims at conceiving "nature as active, responsive partner for everyday stone and daily experience, not just for the occasional impressive or exceptional place".<sup>18</sup>

With the publication of *Space Below My Feet* in 1961, at least a decade before Plumwood would start elaborating her first theories, Moffat had already laid the groundwork for the writing project later invoked by the philosopher.

## **Terra Nullius**

In truth, a mountaineering memoir might seem an unlikely candidate for such a pioneering task. The narratives of mountaineering enterprises belong to a genre which originated with the first Alpine ascents and are usually "intimately tied to the literary and cultural tradition of imperial adventure"<sup>19</sup> – "male imperial adventure".<sup>20</sup> Indeed, not only does mountaineering have "a long masculinist history as-

<sup>12</sup> V. PLUMWOOD, Journey to the Heart of Stone, in Culture, Creativity and Environment. New Environmentalist Criticism, edited by F. Becket and T. Gifford, Rodopi, Amsterdam – New York 2007, p. 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Ivi, p. 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Ivi, p. 24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Ivi, p. 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Ivi, p. 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ivi, p. 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Ivi, p. 34.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> P.L. BAYERS, *Imperial Ascent: Mountaineering. Masculinity, and Empire*, UP of Colorado, Boulder, 2003, p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> *Ibid*.

sociated with masculine ideals of physical strength, risk-taking, conquest, militarism, and adventure",<sup>21</sup> but, thanks to its "elevation" of the "imperial male body to dominate the natural environment"<sup>22</sup> it also helped "to shape, codify, and justify some of the central ideologies of imperialism".<sup>23</sup>

In her insightful essay *Alpenreich / Alpine Riches*, Muller equates the British colonization of the Alps to that of "the distant, mysterious, and exotic places of imperial conquest"<sup>24</sup> with the only difference that, being easy to reach "in a single day-long journey",<sup>25</sup> the Alps became an affordable "pleasure periphery for *Europe's* imperial centre".<sup>26</sup> Romantic and Victorian writings devoted to the Alps contributed to reinforce the idea that "mountains were [...] places that have no intrinsic value and only gain worth when they can be taken, exploited, and related to the self"<sup>27</sup> and that the highest purpose of mountaineering consisted in climbing, and thus claiming, "unconquered" mountains. The implicit, but "culturally violent",<sup>28</sup> idea behind this construct is that the Alps – and, by extension, all mountain regions – were conceived of as empty spaces, lands of no one, "terrae nullius", waiting for the European alpinist to explore, subdue, and, finally, seize them.

Dear to postcolonial studies, the rubric "terra nullius", traditionally used to refer to any area of wilderness or "only" inhabited by indigenous peoples, is used by Plumwood in its broader meaning, embracing all "alien, fearful and disordered domain of animals, women, savages and the underside of the human psyche."<sup>29</sup> One of the points Plumwood makes in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* is that, in the traditional dualism between reason and nature or culture and nature, women had always been associated with the latter, thus determining that both, nature and women, were "defined as passive, as non-agent and non-subject, as the 'environment' or invisible background conditions against which the 'foreground' achievements of reason or culture (provided typically by the white, western, male expert or entrepreneur) take place."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 

<sup>30</sup> Ivi, p. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> S. FROHLICK, "Wanting the Children and Wanting K2": The incommensurability of motherhood and mountaineering in Britain and North America in the late twentieth century, in «Gender, Place & Culture», 13, V, 2006, p. 479.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> P.L. BAYERS, Imperial Ascent: Mountaineering. Masculinity, and Empire, cit., p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ivi, p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> E. MULLER, Alpenreich / Alpine Riches: Writing Back Mountain Stories, in Uncommon Wealths in Postcolonial Fiction, edited by H. Ramsey-Kurz and M. Kennedy, Ebook, Brill, 2017, p. 265.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ivi, p. 266.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Ivi, p. 267.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> V. PLUMWOOD, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p. 163.

Hence, if not only exotic places, not only the highest mountains, not only the unpopulated wilderness, but all nature and women were traditionally considered "terra nullius", it does not surprise that the relationship of women with mountaineering was – and still is – problematic. Without attempting here to summarize in a few words the rich history of female mountaineering or the different nuances of patriarchal attitudes - from condescension to hostility - with which male climbers often treated their female colleagues,<sup>31</sup> it is just worth pointing out, as Moraldo reconstructs by analysing 62 autobiographies of English and French climbers, that women mountaineers' behaviours tended to be twofold: either openly transgressive, or discreet and secretive in the attempt to "reconcile mountaineering with respect for gender roles."<sup>32</sup> Thus, "in the 60s, [...] Claude Kogan, after leading a male party on a high summit" in the Himalayas, "still cooked at the base camp",<sup>33</sup> whereas in 1978 Arlene Blum led "thirteen women to Nepal to climb Annapurna"<sup>34</sup> to prove wrong all those who believed that "a team of women lacked the strength, skill, and courage necessary to make such a climb."<sup>35</sup> Dissension on such themes continues today with harsh disputes on the incompatibility between motherhood and mountaineering which were exacerbated by Hargreaves's death in 1995.<sup>36</sup>

#### **Moffat's Own Ground**

Looking at Moffat's life and writings, the neat impression one gets is that she does not align with either party. In her "atypical and varied career path",<sup>37</sup> Moffat seemed to privilege those "physical professions"<sup>38</sup> which used to be considered "forbidden activities"<sup>39</sup> for women. She was a truck driver in the Auxiliary Territorial Service during WW2, she worked in the fields, milked cows, felled trees, worked as

<sup>32</sup> D. MORALDO, *Women and Excellence in Mountaineering from the Nineteenth Century to the Present,* «The International Journal of the History of Sport», vol. 37, no. 9, 2020, p. 734.

<sup>34</sup> A. BLUM, Annapurna, A Woman's Place [1980], Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1998, p. IX.
 <sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> See S. FROHLICK, "Wanting the Children and Wanting K2": The incommensurability of motherhood and mountaineering in Britain and North America in the late twentieth century, cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> In addition to the works quoted in the text, see also R.A. BROWN, *Women on High: Pioneers of Mountaineering,* Appalachian Mountain Club Books, Boston, 2002.; A.C. COLLEY, *Ladies on High,* in EAD., *Victorians in the Mountains. Sinking the Sublime,* Ashgate, Farnham and Burlington, 2010, pp. 101-141; R. DA SILVA, *Leading Out: Women Climbers Reaching for the Top,* Seal Press, Seattle, 1992.; M. LOOMIS, *Going Manless. Looking back, forward, and inward 75 years after Miriam O'Brien Underhill's milestone all-female ascent of the Grépon in the French Alps,* in «The American Alpine Journal», 2005, pp. 98-115; C. OTTOGALLI-MAZZACAVALLO AND E. BOUTROY, *Manless Rope Team: A Socio-Technical History of a Social Innovation,* in «The International Journal of the History of Sport», 37, 1X, 2020, pp. 791–812.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Ivi, 739.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> N. BERRY, *Reading Between the Lines – Gwen Moffat Interview*, cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> D. MORALDO, Women and Excellence in Mountaineering from the Nineteenth Century to the Present, cit., p. 740.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> *Ibid*.

a deckhand on a schooner, did many other temporary jobs but, mainly, she climbed, both for pleasure and as a profession, when she managed to become the first woman mountain guide in Europe. With such a curriculum vitae, Moffat cannot certainly be said to have ever tried to abide to traditional gender roles.

However, in her first autobiography there are no traces of any programmatic transgression, driving ambition, or feminist agenda.<sup>40</sup> Her choices were not made "against" social norms but "regardless of" them; she didn't make statements and seldom resented the moral stigma and the sexual discrimination she often had to face. Motherhood changed her risk assessment – "now the responsibility of Sheena and the memory of many accidents weighed heavily"<sup>41</sup> – but did not harness her passion. The encounter with Johnnie Lees proved to be perfectly timed: "I had lost my nerve. It was Johnnie who showed me another way to climb. He thought on rock",<sup>42</sup> and Moffat had enough humility and strength to allow herself to learn "shamelessly, from scratch".<sup>43</sup> When in 1955 she was asked to lead a women's expedition to the Himalayas, she "reluctantly" refused because as "the climbing leader and a professional *she* had everything to lose".<sup>44</sup>

Yet, the difference in Moffat's writing does not only reside in the biographical facts she recounts, nor in the ironic and unassuming narrative style that, rather than celebrating the conquest of a peak with grandiloquent expressions, indulges in the humorous narratives of small or big mistakes and failures. Moffat's writing differs from traditional mountaineering memoirs because she never constructs the mountain as a "terra nullius". This becomes evident relatively early in the book, when she goes to the Alps for the first time in 1948. The account of the brutal assault she endured while hitch-hiking to Chamonix is probably one of the most harrowing moments of the whole memoir. After being hit and fighting back several times, she was finally let go in the middle of nowhere: "They'd shouted that the wolves would get me. *That meant I was in mountainous country. Then I was safe. They wouldn't get me on my own ground* if they decided to come back."<sup>45</sup>

It was the first time in France for Moffat, those were mountains she didn't know, where she was setting foot for the first time, yet they were "her own ground", a place where she could be safe from the worst of predators: men (not wolves). The male attempt to forcibly colonize the female body, to claim her as property and subjugate

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> In the email she wrote to me on 12 April 2023, Moffat said that she became acquainted with the feminist movement later: "in my forties I was reading the feminists of the sixties. It was a bad moment in my life and when I came out of that I found Margaret Mead".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> G. MOFFAT, Space Below My Feet, cit., p. 222.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Ivi, p. 224.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Ivi, p. 226.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Ivi, p. 322.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Ivi, p. 126. Italics are mine.

her, is, according to Brownmiller, at the origin of all other "concepts of hierarchy, slavery and private property"<sup>46</sup> and, here, Moffat's resistance and her finding safety and protection in the wilderness cannot but recall Plumwood's abovementioned citation which gathered together nature, women, animals, and "savages" under the rubric of "terra nullius".

Indeed, just like indigenous peoples with the land, Moffat writes of her relationship with the mountains in terms of mutual belonging. She is drawn to them ("Ben Nevis was the mountain which dominated me completely"),<sup>47</sup> she describes her passion in terms of *love* ("being so passionately in love with the rock that you can't have enough of it),<sup>48</sup> and associates her feelings with the awareness of being at "home"<sup>49</sup> in mountainous regions.

If Moffat belongs to the mountains, they also belong to her: in her second autobiography *On My Home Ground*, watching the landscape from a mountaintop, she writes "Almost every hill I could see I knew from its combes and its secret streams to the bare wild windswept tops. This was my world",<sup>50</sup> and describes her feeling as "the true pride of possession".<sup>51</sup> However, this is not the triumph of a conqueror – just a few lines above she writes "Rock wasn't an arena nor an opponent. I wouldn't be set against it by anyone. The climb was there to be enjoyed"<sup>52</sup> – but, using Plumwood's words, it is the intense "pleasure and significance"<sup>53</sup> felt by a climber who sees herself "as being in conversation with *stones*, physical intimacy being a way to bring over the stone's own remarkable features and formations."<sup>54</sup>

#### **Living Land**

The knowledge of the mountains, gained by climbing and spending her life in them, allows Moffat to describe them as "a living entity, a *terra viva*"<sup>55</sup> which the mountaineer can "encounter"<sup>56</sup> but never claim. Seventeen years later, Blum will write, "You never conquer a mountain. / You stand on the summit a few moments, / Then the wind blows your footprints away."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> V. PLUMWOOD, Journey to the Heart of Stone, cit., p. 22.

<sup>54</sup> Ivi, pp. 22-23

<sup>55</sup> V. SHIVA, *Terra Viva. My Life in a Biodiversity of Movements*, Chelsea Green Publishing, Chelsea, 2022, p. 233. Italics are mine.

<sup>56</sup> V. PLUMWOOD, *Journey to the Heart of Stone*, cit., p. 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> S. BROWNMILLER, *Against Our Will. Men, Women and Rape* [1975], Ballantine Books, Fawcett Columbine and New York, 1993, pp. 17-18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> G. MOFFAT, Space Below My Feet, cit., p. 250.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Ivi, p. 70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Ivi, p. 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> G. MOFFAT, On My Home Ground [1968], Kindle ed., Lume Books, 2021, chap. 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> A. BLUM, Annapurna, A Woman's Place, cit., p. VII.

The land lives, in all the creatures that populate it, plants and animals, wild and domesticated, and Moffat always describes them "as capable of agency and intentionality,"<sup>58</sup> and recognizes for them equal rights to existence. If Moffat had published her first memoir in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the "respectful and reverential ways to use the earth to meet *her* life needs"<sup>59</sup> that she adopts in all her activities (from everyday chores to the most challenging ascents) would undoubtedly be defined "posthuman" for their "decentring of anthropocentrism"<sup>60</sup> and the refusal of a utilitarian "condescending approach to non-human others".<sup>61</sup> But she published her work in 1961, well ahead of that time, thus revealing an extraordinarily modern sensibility and vision. So – immune to the plant blindness<sup>62</sup> that affects most Western populations – when climbing with Lees, she used to plead with him "to clean away only grass from vegetated climbs, to leave those plants which would die on the exposed scree below."<sup>63</sup> Even more significant is an episode in the Alps when she was climbing with an American student.

Traversing the Feekopf ridge he said, "We have probably made the first ascent of this route this season." "Of the Allalinhorn – possibly, but not this last bit." "Why not?" "Tracks." "Those aren't tracks!" "Chamois." The animals were using the ridge as a route between pastures.<sup>64</sup>

Moffat's reply to the student's pretension to primacy (typical of traditional – masculine – mountaineering) is exceptional for its clear acknowledgement of the equal stance between earth creatures and, also, of their occasional superior climbing skills.

<sup>60</sup> R. BRAIDOTTI, *The Posthuman*, Polity, Cambridge, 2013, p. 58.

<sup>63</sup> G. MOFFAT, *On My Home Ground*, cit., chap. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Ivi, chap. 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> V. PLUMWOOD, Feminism and the Mastery of Nature, cit., p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> EAD., *Environmental Culture. The ecological crisis of reason*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002, p. 145.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Ivi, pp. 77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> For a discussion of the origin and development of plant blindness see M.GAGLIANO, Seeing Green. The Re-discovery of Plants and Nature's Wisdom, in The Green Thread. Dialogues with the Vegetal World, edited by P. Vieira, M. Gagliano, and J. Ryan, Lexington Books, Lanham – Boulder – New York – London 2016, pp. 19-35.

When I asked where her connection with animals came from, her answer was "Propinguity? Heredity? It was always there, intensifying with age",<sup>65</sup> and indeed in the book she writes: "It is always to me that the mangy old cats and the stray dogs come. No one else sees the ewes with broken legs, lambs with great abscesses in the cleft of their hooves, cows with ingrowing horns."66 In Journey to the Heart of Stone, Plumwood claims that a "radically intentionalising anti-reductionist writing of the world might make visible whole new interspecies dialogues, dramas and projects previously unimaginable, that can re-open the door to the world of wonder"<sup>67</sup>, and Moffat seems to be doing precisely that: in her book cows are mean,<sup>68</sup> rats are wellbehaved,<sup>69</sup> kittens can curse,<sup>70</sup> and, when woken up in the morning, her dog Thomas "opened a bloodshot eye, grumbled about no breakfast and the cold, turned round and went to sleep again."71

However, when I suggested that she was anthropomorphising animals, Moffat's answer was clear-cut: "I don't do anthropomorphism. [...] some may appear to have a sense of humour but all this may be only reflections of our own feeling for them. [...] Animals don't have human feelings; they are themselves."<sup>72</sup> Moffat's reaction to what Plumwood calls "the sin of anthropomorphism"<sup>73</sup> is an explicit refusal of a mode of representation – which Plumwood defines "strong anthropomorphism"<sup>74</sup> – that denies "the difference of animals and represents them in terms of a human model" 75 thus "expressing a colonising dynamic." 76 Still, I maintain that Moffat adopts a "weak anthropomorphic"77 writing style that depicts nature "in intentional or communicative terms",<sup>78</sup> as a way to translate "non-human agency or communication"79 into human words. Thanks to her ability to describe the world as "active, intentional, ecological"<sup>80</sup> Moffat refuses to "minimise the space allowed the Other"<sup>81</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Ivi, p. 100.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Personal e-mail to author, dated 12 April 2023.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> G. MOFFAT, Space Below My Feet, cit., p. 304.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> V. PLUMWOOD, Journey to the Heart of Stone, cit., p. 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> G. MOFFAT, Space Below My Feet, cit., p. 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Ivi, p. 293.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Ivi, p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Personal e-mail to author, dated 12 April 2023.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> V. PLUMWOOD, *Journey to the Heart of Stone*, cit., p. 32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> EAD., Environmental Culture. The ecological crisis of reason, cit., p. 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Ivi, p. 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Ivi, p. 57.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Ivi, p. 58. <sup>79</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> V. PLUMWOOD, Journey to the Heart of Stone, cit., p. 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Ivi, p. 19.

and "to enforce segregated and polarised vocabularies that rob the non-human world of agency and the possibility of speech".<sup>82</sup>

## Conclusion

What Moffat depicts in Space Below My Feet is a living land and a world of wonder, where humans and animals can entertain genuine interspecies relationships, where all nature comes to life, and where rocks, stones, mountains, and the elements are invested with agency, personality and, sometimes, intentionality. The wild lands, the mountain regions, are not "terrae nullius" waiting to be colonized by men, to be conquered by climbers, or to be given meaning by poets. They are living entities, and the task of the writer is to know and describe them as they are, without reducing them to insignificant or instrumental objects. Thus, throughout Moffat's memoir, the reader discovers that a house can seem "to be settling itself like a cat, drawing its paws under itself as it basked in the last of the golden light",<sup>83</sup> that clouds lie "up the valleys like sleeping fish",<sup>84</sup> that mist can play about a summit "like a kitten teasing an old cat",<sup>85</sup> and that the mountain can be "kind".<sup>86</sup> If only Plumwood had known Moffat's work, she would have realised that the "radical writing project"<sup>87</sup> she hoped would "reinvest with speech, agency and meaning the silenced ones, including the earth and its very stones, cast as the most lifeless and inconsiderable members of the earth community",<sup>88</sup> had already found a voice.

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<sup>82</sup> Ivi, p. 20.
<sup>83</sup> G. MOFFAT, *Space Below My Feet*, cit., p. 98.
<sup>84</sup> Ivi, p. 39.
<sup>85</sup> Ivi, p. 114.
<sup>86</sup> Ivi, p. 181.
<sup>87</sup> V. PLUMWOOD, *Journey to the Heart of Stone*, cit., p. 19.
<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*.

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