

Order out of Disorder Applying Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory to Charlotte McConaghy's *Wild Dark Shore*

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الترتيب من الفوضى: تطبيق نظرية الشبكة الفاعلة لبرونو لاتور على رواية شاطئ البرية

المظلم لتشارلوت ميكوناغي

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المستخلص

الرواية الخيالية الأحدث لتشارلوت ميكوناغي، "شاطئ البرية المظلم"، هي حكاية غامضة عن الحب والفقدان والحتمية. من خلال وجهات نظر متقطعة لشخصيات تشغل - جسديًا وذهنيًا - عوالم شبه متباينة لا قياس بينها، تتحول الرواية إلى استعارة لعالمنا غير المتجانس ذي الطبيعة التي تبدو عشوائية، والتي حاول علماء الاجتماع والأنثروبولوجيا مرارًا إضفاء الشكل والهيكلي عليها. وقد اختار أحد هؤلاء الأنثروبولوجيين، وهو برونو لاتور، بدلاً من ذلك التأكيد على ضرورة دراسة الطبيعة الأنطولوجية لهذا العالم غير المتجانس، عوضًا عن محاولة إدراكه من خلال قوانين عالمية وتصنيفات صارمة مشتركة. يصر لاتور على أن علماء الاجتماع يجب أن يبدؤوا بالتفكير بدلالة الشبكات الشعرية، حيث الأبعاد الزمانية والمكانية تفقد أهميتها، بدلاً من محاولة تقسيم العالم إلى ثنائيات القريب والبعيد، والصغير والكبير، والداخل والخارج. هذه النظرية، المسماة "نظرية الشبكة الفاعلة"، توفر إطارًا متينًا لفهم الأحداث التي تتكشف في "شاطئ البرية المظلم". وتطبيقها يكشف كيف أن شخصية "شيررووتر" لم تكن منعزلة عن العالم، بل أصبحت جزءًا من شبكة فاعلة، مما أدى إلى الفوضى التي تلت على "شيررووتر"، والتي انبثق منها أخيرًا اتحاد عائلة سالت. الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية الشبكة الفاعلة، فلسفة الفوضى، لاتور، المقدره الفاعلة للكائنات غير البشرية، النظرية الاجتماعية

Abstract

Charlotte McConaghy's latest fictional publication, *Wild Dark Shore*, is an enigmatic tale of love, loss, and the inevitable. Told through fragmented point-of-views of characters that physically and mentally occupy worlds that are more or less incommensurable, the novel becomes a metaphor for the heterogeneous, apparently arbitrary quality of our world to which sociologists and anthropologists have often tried to give shape and structure. One such anthropologist, Bruno Latour, instead chose to emphasise the need to study the ontological nature of this heterogeneous world instead of trying to perceive it in terms of universal laws and common but strict categorisation. Latour insists that instead of trying to divide the world into the distinctions of near and far, micro and macro, inside and outside, social scientists must begin thinking in terms of capillary networks where temporal and spatial dimensions do not matter. This theory, called the Actor-Network Theory, provides a robust framework to understand the events that unfold in *Wild Dark Shore*, the application of which reveals how far from being alienated from the world, Shearwater becomes part of an actor-network, which results in the ensuing chaos on Shearwater from which finally emerges the union of the Salt family.

Keywords Actor-Network Theory chaos philosophy Latour nonhuman agency social theory

Introduction

There are few works of literature that make a case as poignant for the merits of the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as Charlotte McConaghy's *Wild Dark Shore*. The novel that is pieced together with the point of views of its various characters, one of whom appears to be giving her account posthumously, becomes a physical metaphor of how irreducible and unconnected localities can form meaningful networks that translate into life events. The novel *Wild Dark Shore* follows the lives of the Salt family, that is stationed at Shearwater, a fictional

island near Antarctica. A series of seemingly unconnected events brings the various people together for a bittersweet end that emphasises the invisible chain that is forged by actants, both human and nonhuman, and which defies the obvious geographical and sociological categorisations and yet fosters connections so strong that it impacts many lives. The novel, like the proponents of the Actor-Network Theory, sheds light on the importance of rejecting traditional categorisations and attributing respect and agency to all actants, whether humans or non-humans. Scholars such as O. Amsterdamska, G. Walsham, and McLean have commented on the limitations and shortcomings of ANT, chiefly for its insistence on giving nonhumans the same level of agency as humans and secondarily for its repudiation of the traditional spatial and temporal distinctions. Indeed, with ANT's rejection of the "tyranny of proximity" as Latour calls it (Latour, 1996, pg. 370), scale system, structure, and categories, it might appear slightly vague and wishy-washy at the outset, but the world of literature perhaps provides the most apt resource to prove its viability. The world of the Salt family, like the Actor-Network, rejects all notions of structure and social categorisations. To an extent, it even rejects spatial and temporal demarcations so that both the Shearwater island and its inhabitants appear to be existing in a state of constant flux. This alienation from traditional geographical and sociological categorisations is made even more glaring by the very literal spatial and temporal separation of the Salt family from civilisation. Living alone on the island near Antarctica, thousands of miles away from any organised society, the Salt family has constituted its own categorisations and perceptions of space and time, which the analysis will strive to make sense of through the actor-network framework of Bruno Latour.

Research Questions

1. How does the novel invert or modify traditional perceptions of space and time in Shearwater?
2. To what extent can the Actor-Network Theory account for the apparent chaos that ensues in the novel and the resolution that follows?

Framework of the Study

"Order out of Disorder: Applying Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory to Charlotte McConaghy's *Wild Dark Shore*" is a qualitative study that offers a thematic analysis of order emanating from chaos in the novel *Wild Dark Shore*, penned in 2025 by Charlotte McConaghy. To this end, the research applies the theoretical framework of the Actor-Network Theory as explained by the French philosopher and anthropologist, Bruno Latour. According to Latour, the Actor-Network Theory is primarily a theory of material resistance that rejects all sociological and geographical demarcations of space and time. Instead, it insists that our world is formed by networks that, instead of being layered and structured, comprise a capillary, stringy, thread-like quality that defies all notions of proximity, scale and surface (Latour, 1996, pg. 370). This allows one to examine innumerable irreducible, seemingly unconnected localities that form invisible networks which then turn into ontological processes that explain how the world works. The research applies this framework to the most pertinent sections of the novel and draws a commensurate conclusion pertaining to the research questions delineated in the final section.

Significance of the Study

This study strives to offer new and unconventional approaches to understanding the operations of the world. Literature has always been the foremost site of exploitation for testing the veracity of any emerging school of thought, and this research finds the justification of the ANT school of thought in Charlotte McConaghy's latest publication, *Wild Dark Shore*. This study also aims to create a space to challenge the now cemented sociological and topological understanding of the world taken to be the de facto truths. The following analysis, therefore, becomes an attempt to keep the scholarly world from delving into complacency when it comes to understanding the nature, categorisations, and perceptions held in and of this world.

Literature Review

Surfacing in the 1980s as a supplementary theoretical tool contributing to the branch of sociology by dealing with the explanation of "knowledge", the Actor Network Theory (ANT) finds its roots in the sociology of science and technology. This theory has the biggest contributions from sociologists Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law. According to Florian M. Neisser in his article "Riskscapes' and Risk Management", ANT is not a unitary concept but, as the name suggests, intersects various theoretical viewpoints related to culture, anthropology, sociology, environmentalism, technology, etc. Today, there even exists a post-ANT theory that, combined with its earlier interpretations, allows various uses for it across multiple domains (Neisser, 2014, 84). At its core, ANT is a way to gain new insights into the understanding of patterns of ordering. In other words, the theory offers alternatives to how we have come to organise structure and ideas. Its primary insistence

is that the world does not comprise universal layers of organisation but that this world is the result of innumerable co-evolutionary relations of society, technology, and nature. According to Neisser, the strong suit of ANT is that there is no other theoretical framework that offers such a vast revisioning of our current understanding of the world order. ANT offers a “powerful, analytical schema” (Neisser, 2014, p. 98) that can be then used for a variety of purposes, starting from understanding the scope of literature to disaster management. Wickramasinghe et al in their article, “ Using actor-network-theory to facilitate a superior understanding of knowledge creation and knowledge transfer” offer a witty summation of ANT when they say that as a theory what seems to be social is partly technical and what appears technical is in partly social (Wickramasinghe et al, 2010, pg. 33). in his article “Notes on the Theory of the Actor Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity”, John Law explains that the theory was originally launched as part of the Science and Technology Studies and served as a model that explains knowledge as an ontological process. In other words, ANT claims that knowledge is the effect or result of a network of interrelated and heterogeneous elements that work together in a randomised fashion as opposed to a highly structured fashion (Law, 1992, pg. 381-382) This overt emphasis on hybridity and heterogeneity allows ANT to surface as a standalone framework different from other theories whose empiricism insists on some form of a reductionist approach to understanding the world around us. Neisser also quotes Akrich, according to whom, ANT’s rejection of technological determinism and social constructionism makes it an interesting subject of study, which can be used to account for a wide array of topics comprising both human-nonhuman interactions and means of knowledge production as well as managerial processes. In other words, the fluidity of ANT makes it a theory that is very commensurate with several ontological processes ongoing in our world (quoted in Neisse, 2014, pg. 84-85). In his research, “Actor-Network Theory and methodology: Just what does it mean to say that nonhumans have agency?” Edwin Sayes explores the idea of attributing agency to non-human entities and the problems that germinate from it (Sayes, 2014, pg. 134). Questions even arise whether ANT belongs to the field of sociology or not. Sayes references Collins and Yearley’s polemic against Latour and Callon, where they imply that social scientists find it difficult to come to terms with understanding the competencies of nonhumans and should therefore refrain from commenting on this subject in favour of authorities more competent and relevant. Their main concern is that ANT theorists tend to speak of nonhumans as though they were completely human. Another scholar, Olga Amsterdamska, in his review “Surely You Are Joking, Monsieur Latour!” woefully quotes Latour when deriding his insistence that all distinctions between humans and nonhumans should be “abandoned” (Amsterdamska, 1990, g. 499). Sayes further quotes Schaffer and other scholars who have been suspicious of the extent to which Latour grants agency to the nonhumans. According to them, Latour commits the crime of “heresy of hylozoism” (Sayes, 2014, pg. 139) when he attributes some kind of purpose, will and life to nonhuman entities. However, critics of ANT remain divided on the extent to which the nonhuman entity has agency. Scholars such as Bloor, while dismissive of the level of agency ANT attributes to the nonhumans, admit of a limited “causal agency” (quoted in Sayes, 2014, pg. 139), but on the other extreme are scholars such as Collins and Yearly who absolutely reject any such notion. However, regardless of how much agency one can attribute to the nonhuman, one clear merit of ANT, as explained by Neisser earlier, is that it asks for a revision of the categorisations of our world or our understanding of the world order and in this way it is similar to the theory of neo-materialism. In an interview conducted by Claudio De Majo, Timothy J. LeCain insists on the need to call into question our “evolutionary trajectory”. In a way, the novel *The Dark Wild Shore* does exactly that. It’s a literary revisioning of what the collective humanity has come to understand as the power of nature. LeCain is aware of the influences of two main schools of thought in discourses surrounding the interconnectedness of humans and the environment. One, according to him, takes a more anthropogenic route while the other focuses on the role that the natural forces have played in driving and shaping the events of today (LeCain, 2020, pg. 659). LeCain likes to describe human history as a “co-evolutionary” process. For example, while human genius and skillset have forged an incredible pathway for advancement and “smart spaces” (LeCain, 2020, pg. 660), ultimately, the extent of this advancement is determined by copper’s natural qualities. In his interview with De Majo, LeCain strives to give an updated account of what neo-materialism has come to mean. According to him, neo-materialism strives to correct a long-standing mistake made by authors of cultural studies who, although they admit of the evolutionary role of nature in human studies, continue to dismiss its impact from studies around culture. Neo-materialism takes a clear stance: culture is the product of the constant interaction of humans with the environments where everything and anything, from copper wires to the cows grazing in the meadows, can act as agents. In this way, culture is material and material is culture (LeCain, 2020,

pg. 660). The Actor-Network Theory can therefore be seen as a more nuanced and sophisticated developmental offshoot of neo-materialism. While Sayes is aware of the level of criticism charged against ANT, he himself sees it as a viable tool for analysis and creating methodological frameworks. He more than believes in the agency of the non-humans and attributes to them four different functions. He firstly takes the nonhumans as the “condition” (Sayes, 2014, pg. 139) for the existence of the human society or in other words, nonhumans are agential insofar as the society cannot exist without their cooperation. Secondly, he sees nonhumans as potential mediators. Latour stresses an important distinction between intermediaries and mediators. While intermediaries simply exist in order to, at least, semiotically fill in the space between two different orders or as placeholders doing what any other entity in its place could do, mediators serve their roles with intention and purpose. This is an important distinction because it immediately attributes important agency to nonhumans. In the words of Sayes, nonhumans are mediators because they contribute something to the chain of reactions/ associations. Once the nonhumans begin to be seen as mediators as opposed to intermediaries, it is impossible to simply see them as substitutes but instead as actants that continue to modify relations between actors (Sayes, 2014, pg. 139.) Next, he sees them as having moral and political associations, and finally, they serve as an assembly of actors that connect with one another to form networks that surpass temporal and spatial orders. In his article, “On Actor-Network Theory”, Bruno Latour describes ANT as an ideology that strives for “order out of disorder”. Latour makes a point of understanding the distinction between the terms 'actor' and 'network' in the simple Anglo-Saxon sense and what it means to theorists of ANT. The word network, according to Latour, does not mean the interconnectedness of various nodes as happens in a computer system, a subway, or a telephone network. This is because networks in ANT are not connected in the same way as our everyday networks are. ANT is far from being a system of nodes that are typically distant but connected compulsorily using a singular, rigorous path. An actor-network, instead, can lack all of these characteristics of a typical network. It may or may not have compulsory paths, may or may not have strategic alignments, and it does not fit the spatial and temporal definitions that encompass ordinary networks (Latour, 1996, pg. 369). Latour makes three key distinctions to bear in mind regarding Actor Network Theory. The first is spatial, or the distinction between far and near. For Latour, geographical distance holds no significance in ANT. As he puts it, he may be geographically close to the stranger in the next telephone booth, but at the same time completely disconnected and alien to him. In ANT, they are part of completely distinct, non-commensurable networks or are the furthest away from one another (Latour, 1996, pg. 370). The second distinction he makes is of scale. There is no macro or micro in ANT. Rejecting the social theory of scales going from small to large or from individuals to extended kin to institutions and nations, we now have networks that are more strongly or less strongly connected. The scale comprising connections, types, and topography is, in fact, determined by the actors, who may not necessarily be humans but can be anything that has agency or to which agency can be ascribed (Latour, 1996, pg. 370-371). The next distinction Latour makes is of the third spatial dimension of things having an inside and outside. Unlike most surfaces that have an inside and outside separated by a boundary, ANT only has boundaries. There is no need to try and fill in the spaces between a network. There is no background or foreground, just nodes that are in constant flux. In the end, Latour describes the purpose of ANT as threefold. 1) It serves to provide semiotic definitions of how entities are built. 2) It offers a methodological framework that dissects the heterogeneity involved in such a building. 3) It proves how the actants possess an ontological charter to their networking (Latour, 1996, pg. 373). Our world order which is divided into levels, layers, territories, categories structures and systems is instead replaced by the ideology that that this world has a capillary, stringy, fibrous quality to it—a thread-like nature that has no distance in between, no inside or outside and no near or far but only connections that can be categorized as weak/strong or short/long (Latour, 1996, pg. 370). So, ANT proponents tend to assume a different lens of perception when observing this world. Instead of looking at universal laws that may be socially or naturally contingent on local events and actants and either dismissing the latter as expendable anomalies or alternatively protecting them, proponents of ANT begin by identifying and distinguishing irreducible and unconnected localities that lead to commensurable connections, although at times, at a great price. And through this reversal of the foreground and the background, ANT achieves affinity with the theory of chaos or the theory of order out of disorder (Latour, 1996, pg. 373). The following section will delineate how ANT provides the perfect framework to make sense of the chaos that ensues in Charlotte Macconaghy’s *Wild Dark Shore* and the way in which nature acts as a mediator to bring about the unification of the Salt family, although, as Latour puts it, this order out of disorder, this commensurability comes at a great price.

Analysis

Wild Dark Shore unfolds on a remote island called Shearwater- a fictional location near Antarctica inspired by the real-life Macquarie Island near Tasmania. The Salt family resides at the Shearwater lighthouse, which has withstood several brutal batterings by the stormy sea and the oceanic weather that is egregiously changing for the worse. McConaghy establishes at the onset of the novel that it is only a matter of time before both the lighthouse and Shearwater are devoured by the now encroaching waters that have invaded Shearwater like an unstoppable force. The lighthouse on Shearwater was built to oversee the operations of the world's largest seedbank until it had to be evacuated due to rising sea levels, and the bank itself was destroyed by the oncoming sea storms. Interestingly, this seemingly chaotic end to the island was one of the prices that needed to be paid in order to bring the Salt family together. In fact, the entire novel can be seen as a witty manifestation of the Actor-Network Theory that supports the philosophy of order out of disorder while simultaneously rejecting hyper-structured systems based on geographical and topological proximities. The following section will delineate how ANT's rejection model of spatial dimensions (far/close, inside/outside, macro/micro) provides the perfect framework to understand how an unseeable network of multiple actants, both human and non-human, was always in play to lead the novel towards a more commensurable ending.

Rejecting Spatial Dimensions in *Wild Dark Shore*

Right from the beginning, the novel *Wild Dark Shore* captures the essence of disconnection and the absence of spatial dimensions as we are thrust on the shaft that carries the beaten and bruised body of a woman who is rescued by Fen, who brings her onshore and takes her to her family at the lighthouse. The woman, who later identifies herself as Rowan, stands as an anomaly to the Salt family living on Shearwater, especially the father, Dominic, who cannot seem to place Rowan's uncanny and unnatural arrival out of nowhere in Shearwater. Certainly people don't wash in from the sea. I am having trouble making sense of how she's alive—the ocean around us is perilous and so cold, and there is no land for many thousands of kilometers. She must have come off a boat, but it doesn't make sense that there should be a boat close enough to our shores. The supply ship isn't due for weeks... (McConaghy, 2025, pg. 15) These musings by Dominic continue to haunt several pages of the novel sporadically. Dominic's chief source of exasperation is his inability to place Rowan in the grander scheme of things but that may be attributed to his insistence on thinking about the social fabric of this world in its most traditional sense- local contingencies (the lack of availability of ships this time of the year) and geographical proximities (there is no land for many thousands of kilometers) and universal laws (people don't wash in from the sea). In fact, looking from a more traditional perspective of sense-making, Rowan's arrival at Shearwater is indeed quite perplexing, and it will take Dominic until the final pages of the novel to place Rowan in the grander scheme of things. This analysis, however, will cut through the temporal limitations to make sense of Rowan's presence at Shearwater in real-time as well as the invisible, capillary, stringy network of relations that exist in a seeming weak nexus. At one end of this nexus is Dominic Salt. The father of three, who brought his children to Shearwater around eight years ago, shares a network of connections with his family only in terms of his physical proximity to them. Recalling Latour's insistence on the rejection of the "tyranny of proximity" (Latour, 1996, pg. 370), it is safe to state that while Dominic might be in physical proximity with his family, his inability to bond with his daughter, especially following the departure of his wife, means that he is miles apart from forming any kind of meaningful union with them. This estrangement forms a weak nexus in the actor-network that permeates the Island of Shearwater. So glaring is this estrangement that at one point, Dominic looks at his daughter Fen and declares that he "misses her". This declaration invokes Latour's insistence that two actors may be in physical proximity and yet may be miles apart in terms of the worlds that they inhabit and strive to create for themselves. There are so many thoughts that remain unsaid between Dominic and his daughter, Fen. When he wishes to tell Fen that she has grown into a remarkably beautiful woman or when he wishes to hug her because she stupidly encounters a near-death experience but tells her instead that she disappointed him, we as readers find ourselves in much closer proximity to Dominic than to his daughter, Fen. However, it is also important to remember that the weakness of these ties does not necessarily insinuate unimportant contingencies. In the grander scheme of things, Fen's estrangement from her father, this weak nexus of mental affinity between the father and daughter, becomes the very catalyst that pushes Dominic to do better, making their reunion in the near final moments of the novel all the more meaningful. Another character that defies the traditional spatial distinction of far/near for Dominic is Rowan. As a survivor of a boat accident on the ocean, she is already an anomaly to Dominic. Her battered and torn body only reemphasizes the strangeness of her survival. She should have been devoured by the sea already, and indeed she is towards the

end of the novel, but not before she plays her part in the invisible network of Shearwater's inhabitants. As Latour once put it, the theory of Actor-Network is essentially the theory of resistance, but this resistance is not obdurate. In the grand network of actors, the smallest, seemingly meaningless connection may be the most vital. And once we understand these connections, the miraculous workings of the world begin making sense to us. Orly, Dominic's youngest son, inadvertently provides the best examples of how the Actor-Network Theory of resistance comes into play. He once tells the story of a single dandelion that starts life in an apple orchard in North America. While it almost gets trampled on, it survives by a stroke of luck. It blossoms earlier than most flowers, so it becomes a great source of food for plants and animals alike. One day, its pollen is rubbed on the underside of a bee that transfers it to a female dandelion. As it ages, it continues to feed hummingbirds and butterflies with its nectar. One day it grows a seed head that has hundreds of seeds with tiny hairs growing out. One day, a gust of wind lifts these seeds. Some are eaten by goldfinches and sparrows, while others are gobbled up by wild turkeys and grouse. What is left of this dandelion then travels to Minnesota, where it feeds a deer, which is kept moving by a pack of hungry wolves. And so the land is kept cleared and fertile, making it easier for more dandelions like this one to grow and thus the cycle of life continues. This life cycle is just one example of the capillary, stringy networks forged by both human and nonhuman actants and which are apparently naked to the eye and defy temporal and spatial alignments. More importantly, however, regardless of the countless lives it touches and helps to keep on going, outside of the actor-network theory, this dandelion is simply a weed. Rowan's arrival at Shearwater itself follows contingencies that seem outwardly disconnected but, on closer inspection, on the level of irreducible, unconnected localities, begin making sense. Rowan books a perilous journey to Shearwater by boat after receiving emails from her husband, Hank Jones, who was serving as the head researcher at the seed vault on Shearwater Island. In these emails, Hank makes sinister and vague comments about being in danger and in need of help. When the emails stop showing up, Rowan decides to find her husband by sailing to the edge of the world. She survives a wild storm that destroys her boat along with her steerer and washes up at the lighthouse. This arrival spurs a chain of reactions that seemingly appear catastrophic but only serve to ameliorate the occupants of Shearwater in the end. But before diving into how the events take such a turn, it is important to comment on the mediating agency of the nonhuman entities. Firstly, Hank Jones's decision to lead a group of botanists at Shearwater emanates as a result of a wildfire that consumes his and his wife Rowan's house in the Australian Outback. Originally, it is the natural beauty of the place that drove both Rowan and her husband to make the place their sanctuary. In fact, Rowan's first encounter with Hank is a chance encounter where it is Hank's smitten enthusiasm for the beauty of the place Rowan calls her own that brings the two together. "...how lucky you are that this is yours? You could do *Prostanthera cuneata*, and *Grevillea*, and *Myrtus*, they would all thrive in each other's company and the light is perfect..." ...and as he smiles at me with the delight of this, with the plants he has imagined and brought to life around him, I start to see what he sees. Not the plants specifically—I have no idea what any of those names mean—but I see the hill we stand on covered in color. He has painted it for me." (McConaghy, 2025, pg. 62) While initially sceptical, Rowan begins sharing her husband's enthusiasm for how they can rally with nature to create their perfect home, and for a while, they succeed in it, until the wildfire consumes everything that they strive so hard to achieve. Although sympathetic to nature, Hank and Rowan's one big mistake was underestimating the agency and power of nature. In Rowan's own words, she had taken every possible preventive measure to keep the fire from destroying her house. This false illusion that she can weather something as overwhelming and catastrophic as a wildfire is what leads her to lose her house. This, in turn, spurs her husband Hank to drop everything he has in Australia and accept the position of head researcher in Shearwater, and right in that moment, two families that were thousands of miles apart become part of a singular network that will change the course of their lives forever. It might also be of some interest to bring in Sayes's methodological framework about nonhumans having moral and political associations, since it is only after Rowan loses her house, and in a way her husband, to the wildfire that she realizes how she never really knew her husband, and he is far from the man he poses to be. Once Hank Jones arrives at Shearwater, the mask slowly pulls off when he realizes that he will never be able to outrun time and the destruction that nature will bring with it. On the other hand, Dominic's daughter is the first one to see the real Hank at Shearwater, whose hubris compels him to drown Fen and then possibly end his own life rather than squaring up to his own inabilities in the face of nature's agency. Once Rowan arrives at Shearwater and eventually finds out about her husband's adulterous affair with a seventeen-year-old minor, she is finally able to sever the now extremely weak network of ties with her husband Hank and foster a new and stronger one with Dominic and his family. When Rowan tells Fen that Hank is a narcissist who is "very good at

convincing people he cares about them. But in reality, his whole world is just—himself” (McConaghy, 2025, pg. 273), suddenly, the destruction of the house begins making sense in a metaphysically moral sense. The house was never about cherishing nature but about cherishing the talents of Hank, for whom the Australian Outback was his canvas and deserved to look exactly as he envisioned. The wildfire destroying his house becomes an apt metaphor for both its physical and moral domination that not only brings a quick reality check to Hanks, who escapes to Shearwater as if unable to meet the truth of man’s inadequacy, but also helps to reveal his true self to other actors in the Shearwater network. In this way, the nonhuman actant, the wildfire, becomes a mediator that reorganises the relationship between all of the characters in the novel who, until then, were spatially and temporally occupying completely different worlds. The second time nature acts as a mediator is when the storm brings Rowan to the lighthouse. It is not incommensurate to think that had the storm not battered the body of Rowan the way it did, her arrival at Shearwater and its eventual outcome would have been quite different. Sent to the Salt family this way, however, the latter had no choice but to accept her within their sphere, where she eventually gained their sympathy if not their trust and managed to forge further meaningful connections. Her arrival at Shearwater initially throws the family network into small disruptions. Her stories of the wildfire cause Orly, Dominic’s youngest son, to have nightmares. At one point, her insistence to visit the beach forces Fen to see the washed-up dead body of Yen, the man who was steering her boat when the violent storm pulled her out of the ocean and washed her on the rocky ridges of Shearwater. The sight terrifies Fen and raises another slew of alarms for Dominic, who has been resenting Rowan’s arrival since day one. For Dominic himself, Rowan’s arrival interrupts his own fleeting moments with his dead wife’s spirit; an anomaly that deeply upsets Fen. However, these alarms subside when the capillary, stringy nature of connections forging between Rowan, Dominic, and the other inhabitants of Shearwater begins turning more tenuous in part due to Rowan’s insistence on finding out the truth about her husband’s whereabouts and in part due to the nonhuman actants’ intervention. One example of such intervention is when Dominic, Rowan, Fen, Raff, and Orly brace themselves against the call of death that means to claim the lives of a stranded whale and its calf. In what appears to be nothing short of a miracle, Shearwater’s human occupants are able to save the stranded whale and its young one, but they do not do it alone. The ordeal is too humongous, and at one point, Rowan almost gives up when suddenly the high tide seeps under the massive fin of the mother whale and slowly moves her into the water. Throughout all of this, Rowan is aware of a silent communication between the mother whale and herself- an exchange of unspoken words that, for Latour, would form the weakest of ties but strong enough that it pushes the mother whale to hang a little bit longer for its calf. “I washed up on this beach,” I tell her softly. “My body was brought here by the sea and lived. Yours will too.” Her eyelid falls closed and in this moment she seems so weary. But it opens again and she looks at me, and I know why. “What do you want me to tell it?” I ask her, but I already know.” (McConaghy , 20125, pg. 239) In this moment, Rowan seems one with the spirit of Shearwater. But it is only when it appears that she has learnt the ways of this estranged and exquisite world that it claims her back. In the final climactic moments of the novel, Rowan and Orly crawl through a small tunnel that has been flooded with water after a massive storm breaks out. As the water level in the tunnel rises, Rowan gives her final breath to Orly before the water takes over. While Orly is pulled out of the tunnel in time by Dominic, he fails to do the same for Rowan, and she is lost to the ocean. Although her body is recovered, her spirit becomes one with Shearwater. Interestingly, her demise is predicted at the very beginning of the novel by none other than Dominic himself when his daughter first rescues Rowan. “Inside the sea is still fighting for her, it retains its hold. I think, deep in the darkest hours, that even if she survives this night, that ocean will have her back one day.” (McConaghy , 2025, pg. 13) While many might cast aside this moment as one of mere whimsical fancy by the author, it appears to be more than that. The setting of the novel, the fictional Shearwater, is a place that is riddled with spirits- having lives and a certain sentience of their own. Dominic and his family have stayed long enough forming connections with these spirits for him to develop a feeling that Rowan has been marked as the outsider; that she will never truly be able to understand the full breadth and agency of this place, which will one day cost Rowan her life. In the end, the dandelion will outlive Rowan because of the numerous, apparently meaningless, connections it manages to foster in its single lifespan that Rowan could not due to her outsider status and her inability to fight nature at Shearwater

But Rowan’s passing is portrayed as a necessity to bring together the broken Salt family. It is the price that needs to be paid to cull the order of the disorder.

I feel him calm a little, and then I think I feel him pulled from my arms and I am falling. But there is someone here. A woman. Down here in the dark with me. She catches me and holds me so tenderly, and I know her. She

is his mother, and she died so he could live. I understand it so simply now, it is a love that lives in the body, but unlike the body it never dissolves. It lasts forever. (McConaghy , 2025, pg. 301) What seems like a pointless death is in itself the result of many invisible connections formed. The motherly love Rowan feels for Orly and which forces her to give her last breath to him, is one of them, but this incident will also serve as the glue that will hold the family together in the future. In Dominic's own words, she "returned" (McConaghy, 2025, pg. 301) her kids back to him one at a time, and with her death seals the fate of the Salt family's love that will not tire.

Conclusion

The study set out to answer two pertinent questions related to the reversal of sociological and topographical perceptions of the world and the feasibility of the Actor-Network Theory in understanding and accounting for this reversal. The analysis section delineates that the concepts of time and space are, in fact, in the world of McConaghy's *Wild Dark Shore*, insignificant if not reversed. Alternatively, events that might be apparently unconnected and therefore insignificant for the characters become decisive and fateful. One of the ways the novel subverts the perceptions of space and time is through the mediation of nature/nonhuman entities. Characters that inhabit spaces with physical proximity, for example, Dominic and his daughter, have at the same time an incommensurable distance between them. The daughter feels invisible and unheard, while the father is bound to the world of his dead wife. In this way, Dominic remains closer to the spirit of his dead wife, who no longer inhabits this world, than his daughter, who is alive and yearns for his affection. This gulf between the father and daughter only begins to heal after the arrival of Rowan, which was contingent on the mediation of certain natural effects, such as the wildfire that consumes her house and the sea storm that washes her badly bruised body ashore. Thus, the untenable gulf that kept growing between the father and daughter begins to heal over the common necessity of looking after a stranger woman who has potentially come from a place thousands of miles away and whose presence at Shearwater apparently makes no sense. However, anomalies such as temporal and spatial disruptions continue to occur throughout the novel, calling for an ANT approach to the unfolding of events. ANT, with its rejection of far/close, inside/outside, small/large categorisations, demands an analysis of seemingly irreducible and disconnected events/localities and tries to make sense of how these form a network with the help of certain actants. The research analysed how separate events occurring over large geographical distances were, on closer inspection, related to each other, although the strands tying these nodes together in a network may not have been the strongest. Nevertheless, their presence is what allows for the possibility of culling some kind of calm after a storm, for example, the emotional reunion of the Salt family after Rowan's death or the possible resurrection of Rowan's Australian Outback home after its destruction in the wildfire by the Salt family as their gratitude for Rowan's sacrifice.

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