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MELISSA TUCKEY

Introduction

Ecojustice poetry lives at the intersection of culture, social justice, and the environment. Aligned with environmental justice activism and thought, ecojustice poetry defines environment as "the place in which we work, live, play, and worship." It is poetry born of deep cultural attachment to the land and poetry born of crisis. It is poetry of interconnection.

One of the inspirations for me in creating an anthology of ecojustice poetry was Camille T. Dungy's Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry. This was the first ecopoetry book I read that dealt with social, cultural, historical, and political concerns as part of its exploration of nature poetry. Though not all of the work is political, and I would not expect it to be, Dungy points out that you cannot collect African American nature poetry without also including social concerns; those concerns are part of the experience of being black in America. Reading this anthology, after a lifetime of reading nature poetry written mostly by white writers, I was able to see more clearly that, as humans, our relationship to the environment is always shaped by culture and history.

Each culture has its own story of land use, connection, dispossession, and cultural resistance. We can find a wide body of nature poetry among working class, Appalachian, Chicano, Latino, Mestizo, Asian American, and Native American poets. So it seems important to ask, why are these poets not more fully represented in our nature anthologies and ecojournals? I recently picked up an anthology of early Native American poetry, Changing Is Not Vanishing: A Collection of American Indian Poetry to 1930. These poems, written in English during a time of colonization, displacement, re-education, and genocide, are poems that had been all but forgotten; how differently might we understand our current environmental crisis if more of us had been exposed to these creative works?

I began work on Ghost Fishing: An Ecojustice Poetry Anthology (forthcoming from the University of Georgia Press) three years ago. Many of the poems in this portfolio are part of that collection. The anthology began as a quest to understand how poetry responds to environmental and social crises. I looked for poems that contained

both the complexity of this ecological moment and a social consciousness—an awareness that environmental crisis is social and political crisis. I sought out voices that have long been under-represented among nature poetry collections: those of people of color and those of low-income populations, whose environmental situations are often the most dire.

In collecting poems for the anthology, I've learned to fully appreciate the role of culture in connecting us to the environment, as well as the historic way that colonization, war, white supremacy, and other forms of dispossession have robbed generations of their cultural connection to the land; poetry and other arts have served throughout as a form of resistance, an act of resurgence, and cultural memory.

Poetry has a lot to offer a world in crisis—and, in particular, in environmental crisis. For centuries, poets have given voice to our collective trauma: naming injustices, reclaiming stolen language, and offering us courage to imagine a more just world. In a world such as ours, poetry is an act of cultural resilience.

NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

300 Goats

In icy fields.

Is water flowing in the tank?

Will they huddle together, warm bodies pressing?

(Is it the year of the goat or the sheep?

Scholars debating Chinese zodiac,

follower or leader.)

O lead them to a warm corner,

little ones toward bulkier bodies.

Lead them to the brush, which cuts the icy wind.

Another frigid night swooping down —

Aren't you worried about them? I ask my friend,

who lives by herself on the ranch of goats,

far from here near the town of Ozona.

She shrugs, "Not really,

they know what to do. They're goats."

DAVID BAKER

Peril Sonnet

Where do you suppose

they've gone the bees now

that you don't see them

anymore four-winged

among flowers low

sparks in the clover

even at nightfall

are they fanning have

they gone another

place blued with pollen

stuck to their bristles

waiting beyond us

spring dwindle is what

we call it collapsing

neonicotinoids

"high levels in pneu-

matic corn exhaust"

loss of habitat

or disappearing

disease in the way

of our kind so to speak

what do you think

they would call it

language older than

our ears were they

saying it all along

even at daybreak —

YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA

Crossing a City Highway

The city at 3 a.m. is an ungodly mask the approaching day hides behind & from, the coyote nosing forth, the muscles of something ahead,

& a fiery blaze of eighteen-wheelers zoom out of the curved night trees, along the rim of absolute chance. A question hangs in the oily air.

She knows he will follow her scent left in the poisoned grass & buzz of chainsaws, if he can unweave a circle of traps around the subdivision.

For a breathy moment, she stops on the world's edge, & then quick as that masters the stars & again slips the noose & darts straight between sedans & SUVs.

Don't try to hide from her kind of blues or the dead nomads who walked trails now paved by wanderlust, an epoch somewhere between tamed & wild.

If it were Monday instead of Sunday the outcome may be different, but she's now in Central Park searching for a Seneca village

among painted stones \mathcal{E} shrubs, where she's never been, \mathcal{E} lucky she hasn't forgotten how to jig \mathcal{E} kill her way home.

Sperm Oil

Housed in a boom of blubber & bone, harpooned six times, the giant grew into a dynamo hitched to six taut rope-lines skipping the boat across waves toward the blurry lighthouse.

It bled out a long silence but men in oilskins labored with hydraulics of light on water, walked its flank, & tore it down to a storeroom of Nantucket scrimshaw.

Ballast stone or sledge? They bashed in the skull & lowered down the boy to haul up buckets of oil for candles that burned a slow, clean, white glow.

At ten, he was almost a man whose feet sank into the waxy muck of ambergris. His sweat dripped into a long hour. Big as a barrel, the head echoed a temple nave.

ELISE PASCHEN

The Tree Agreement

The neighbor calls the *Siberian Elm* a "weed" tree, demands we hack it down, says the leaves overwhelm his property, the square backyard.

He's collar-and-tie. A weed tree? Branches screen buildings, subway tracks, his patch of yard. We disagree, claim back the sap, heartwood, wild bark.

He declares the tree "hazardous." We shelter under leaf-hoard, crossway for squirrels, branch house for sparrows, jays. The balcony soaks up the shade.

Chatter-song drowns out cars below. Sun branches down. Leaves overwhelm. The tree will stay. We tell him "no." Root deep through pavement, *Elm*.

SAMIYA BASHIR

Blackbody Curve

Stairs: a rushed flight down thirty-eight; French doors unlocked always.

Always: a lie; an argument.

Argument: two buck hunters circle a meadow's edge.

Edge: one of us outside bleeding.

Bleeding: shards of glass; doors locked.

Locked: carpet awash with blood.

Blood: lift and drop; a sudden breeze.

Breeze: its whistle through bone.

Bone: the other was looking at —

Bone: cradled to catch drips.

Drips: quiet as a meadow fawn.

Fawn: faces down each hunter each gun.

Gun: again.

Again: somebody call someone.

Someone: almost always prefers forgetting.

Forgetting: an argument; a lie.

Lie: a meadow; a casement; a stair.

AILISH HOPPER

Did It Ever Occur to You That Maybe You're Falling in Love?

We buried the problem.

We planted a tree over the problem.

We regretted our actions toward the problem.

We declined to comment on the problem.

We carved a memorial to the problem, dedicated it. Forgot our handkerchief.

We removed all "unnatural" ingredients, handcrafted a locally-grown tincture for the problem. But nobody bought it.

We freshly-laundered, bleached, deodorized the problem.

We built a wall around the problem, tagged it with pictures of children, birds in trees.

We renamed the problem, and denounced those who used the old name.

We wrote a law for the problem, but it died in committee.

We drove the problem out with loud noises from homemade instruments.

We marched, leafleted, sang hymns, linked arms with the problem, got dragged to jail, got spat on by the problem and let out.

We elected an official who Finally Gets the problem.

We raised an army to corral and question the problem. They went door to door but could never ID.

We made www.problem.com so You Can Find Out About the problem, and www.problem.org so You Can Help.

We created I-800-Problem, so you could Report On the problem, and I-900-Problem so you could Be the Only Daddy That Really Turns That problem On.

We drove the wheels offa that problem.

We rocked the shit out of that problem.

We amplified the problem, turned it on up, and blew it out.

We drank to forget the problem.

We inhaled the problem, exhaled the problem, crushed its ember under our shoe.

We put a title on the problem, took out all the articles, conjunctions, and verbs. Called it "Expremntl Prblm."

We shot the problem, and put it out of its misery.

We swallowed daily pills for the problem, followed a problem fast, drank problem tea.

We read daily problem horoscopes. Had our problem palms read by a seer.

We prayed.

Burned problem incense.

Formed a problem task force. Got a problem degree. Got on the problem tenure track. Got a problem retirement plan.

We gutted and renovated the problem. We joined the Neighborhood Problem Development Corp.

We listened and communicated with the problem, only to find out that it had gone for the day.

We mutually empowered the problem.

We kissed and stroked the problem, we fucked the problem all night. Woke up to an empty bed.

We watched carefully for the problem, but our flashlight died.

We had dreams of the problem. In which we could no longer recognize ourselves.

We reformed. We transformed. Turned over a new leaf. Turned a corner, found ourselves near a scent that somehow reminded us of the problem,

In ways we could never

Put into words. That

Little I-can't-explain-it

That makes it hard to think. That

Rings like a siren inside.

BRENDA HILLMAN

Describing Tattoos to a Cop

After Ed Sanders

We'd been squatting near the worms in the White House lawn, protesting the Keystone Pipeline =\$=\$=\$=\$=\$=>>; i could sense the dear worms through the grillwork fence, twists & coils of flexi-script, remaking the soil by resisting it ...

After the ride in the police van telling jokes, our ziplocked handcuffs pretty tight,

when the presiding officer asked:

- —Do you have any tattoos?
- Yes, officer, i have two.
- What are they?
- Well, i have a black heart on my inner thigh & an alchemical sign on my ankle.
- Please spell that?
- Alchemical. A-L-C-H-E-M-I-C-A-L.
- What is that?
- It's basically a moon, a lily, a star \mathcal{E} a flame. He started printing in the little square

MOON, LILY, STAR

Young white guy, seemed scared. One blurry
tattoo on his inner wrist... i should have asked
about his, but couldn't
cross that chasm. Outside, Ash
Wednesday in our nation's capital. Dead
grass, spring trees
about to burst, two officers
beside the newish van. Inside,
alchemical notes for the next time—

LAREN MCCLUNG

Birth of the White Bison

In the age of the fish, cobblestones shift through a square & in hand turn

old weapon — beyond the city an ocean swings in pelicans & spinner dolphins,

leaves them on the Peruvian shore, or in a small town two thousand blackbirds fall

from the Arkansas sky "just like last year" -

but far off in the silence of the rural plains this cow wallows on a grassy mound

till a muzzle merges from another world, onlookers gawk along a picket fence

as she pushes the head & two hooves & then stands to open for the calf

that makes way with a message a woman in the shape of a cloud saying

return to your people & tell them I am coming.

HONORÉE FANONNE JEFFERS

Wampum

In the early contact period, New England Indian wampum consisted of small tubular-shaped shells drilled and strung as beads.

- Alfred A. Cave

The breaking of clouds begins with seizure.

A man grabs another, reasons ransom.

A murder averted in the thing's scheme.

A cape's shell transformed, more than one supposed.

What stands behind this? Enemy or friend?

(Yes, they can be both. Don't you think I know?)

List: Dutch. Indian. Pequot. Puritan.

List: Then. War. Event. Now. History. List.

The shell buys glories of iron and pelt.

Wampum is dismissed. Joke. Sneer. Currency

of the disappeared whose children live still.

List: Blessing. Curse. Wife. Slave. Savior. Savage.

The shells make their noise. The robbed graves cradle.

He who brings food to the starving gets cooked.

CRAIG SANTOS PEREZ

From "understory"

for my pregnant wife, nālani, during her second trimester

nālani and i walk

to our small community

garden plot in mānoa —

the seed packets in

my pocket sound like

a baby's toy rattle —

when do they spray

glyphosate along the sidewalks?

from kunia to waimea,

fifty thousand acres of

gmo fields how will

open air pesticide drift

affect our unborn daughter,

whose nerve endings are

just beginning to root? —

we plant seeds in

rows, soil gathers under

our fingernails — syngenta, dupont,

dow, pioneer, basf, monsanto

\$240 million seed sector —

corn for cattle feed

and syrup — runoff turns

[our] streams red—poisons

loʻi—50,000 heart sea

urchins die off—what will

our daughter be able

to plant in this

paradise of fugitive dust —

JAMAAL MAY

Water Devil

Spout of a leaf, listen out for the screams of your relentless audience: the applause of a waterfall in the distance,

a hurricane looting a Miami shopping mall. How careful you are with the rain-cradling curve of your back.

Near your forest, all are ready to swim and happy to drown in me: this lake of fire that moats the edges.

From my mouth, they come to peel the flames and drink their slick throats into the most silent of ashes.

Respiration

A lot of it lives in the trachea, you know.
But not so much that you won't need more muscle: the diaphragm, a fist clenching at the bottom.
Inhale. So many of us are breathless, you know, like me kneeling to collect the pottery shards of a house plant my elbow has nudged into oblivion. What if I sigh, and the black earth beneath me scatters like insects running from my breath?
Am I a god then? Am I insane because I worry about the disassembling of earth regularly? I walk more softly now

into gardens or up the steps of old houses with impatiens stuffed in their window boxes. When it's you standing there with a letter or voice or face full of solemn news, will you hold your breath before you knock?

MARY MORRIS

Yellowtail

The war was over. We sutured the wounded,

buried the dead, sat at the bar with the enemy, near the blue

throat of the sea. A sushi chef slivered salmon into orchids,

etched clouds from oysters, as they rose snowing pearls.

From shrimp and seaweed he shaped hummingbirds,

which hovered above our heads.

With the world's smallest blade he carved from yellowfin,

miniature flanks of horses. They cantered around our hands.

JANE MEAD

The Outstretched Earth

Do you know what whole fields are? They are fields with a dog and a moon. Do you know the answer — for the many?

Except there would be vineyards. Meaning there would, as usual, be commerce. Money, and a game of sorts to play it.

Meanwhile — Emma lost in the cover-crop. Top of her head bobbing through mustard-flower. It is, after all, still here —

The real world, the outstretched earth, Rain, soil, copper for pennies.

JAN BEATTY

An eater, or swallowhole, is a reach of stream

An eater, or swallowhole, is a reach of stream or a tidal area given to violent currents and waves that often upset and/or suck under boats and kayaks and the like as they are attempting passage.

— William Kittredge

The eater, my birthmother, was speaking:

I can't tell you his name. You have to promise me you won't look for him. He's not a nice man.

Agitated, frenetic, the eater falling into her own waters. Sobbing, almost wailing.

She said:

I'm so ashamed. I'm sorry. It was one night.

I was swirling into the streambed, lost in the downstream plunge.

I said:

Can you just tell me his name? I won't look for him.

The eater filled with water, driving toward the boulder's edge.

I rocked:

into the lava break, into the fault.

DANEZ SMITH

From "summer, somewhere"

somewhere, a sun. below, boys brown as rye play the dozens & ball, jump

in the air \mathcal{E} stay there. boys become new moons, gum-dark on all sides, beg bruise

-blue water to fly, at least tide, at least spit back a father or two. I won't get started.

history is what it is. it knows what it did. bad dog. bad blood. bad day to be a boy

color of a July well spent. but here, not earth not heaven, boys can't recall their white shirt

turned a ruby gown. here, there is no language for officer or law, no color to call white.

if snow fell, it'd fall black. please, don't call us dead, call us alive someplace better.

we say our own names when we pray. we go out for sweets & come back.

this is how we are born: come morning after we cypher/feast/hoop, we dig

a new boy from the ground, take him out his treebox, shake worms

from his braids. sometimes they'll sing a trapgod hymn (what a first breath!)

sometimes it's they eyes who lead scanning for bonefleshed men in blue.

we say *congrats*, *you're a boy again!* we give him a durag, a bowl, a second chance.

we send him off to wander for a day or ever, let him pick his new name.

that boy was Trayvon, now called *RainKing*. that man Sean named himself *I do*, *I do*.

O, the imagination of a new reborn boy but most of us settle on *alive*.

sometimes a boy is born right out the sky, dropped from

a bridge between starshine & clay. one boy showed up pulled behind

a truck, a parade for himself & his wet red gown. years ago

we plucked brothers from branches unpeeled their naps from bark.

sometimes a boy walks into his room then walks out into his new world

still clutching wicked metals. some boys waded here through their own blood.

does it matter how he got here if we're all here to dance? grab a boy, spin him around.

if he asks for a kiss, kiss him. if he asks where he is, say *gone*.

no need for geography now that we're safe everywhere.

point to whatever you please & call it church, home, or sweet love.

paradise is a world where everything is a sanctuary \mathcal{E} nothing is a gun.

here, if it grows it knows its place in history. yesterday, a poplar

told me of old forest heavy with fruits I'd call uncle

bursting red pulp \mathcal{E} set afire, harvest of dark wind chimes.

after I fell from its limb it kissed sap into my wound.

do you know what it's like to live someplace that loves you back?

•

here, everybody wanna be black \mathcal{E} is. look — the forest is a flock of boys

who never got to grow up, blooming into forever, afros like maple crowns

reaching sap-slow toward sky. watch Forest run in the rain, branches

melting into paper-soft curls, duck under the mountain for shelter. watch

the mountain reveal itself a boy. watch Mountain & Forest playing

in the rain, watch the rain melt everything into a boy with brown eyes $\mathcal E$ wet naps —

the lake turns into a boy in the rain the swamp — a boy in the rain

the fields of lavender — brothers dancing between the storm.

if you press your ear to the dirt you can hear it hum, not like it's filled

with beetles & other low gods but like a mouth rot with gospel

& other glories. listen to the dirt crescendo a boy back.

come. celebrate. this is everyday. every day

holy. everyday high holiday. everyday new

year. every year, days get longer. time clogged with boys. the boys

O the boys. they still come in droves, the old world

keeps choking them. our new one can't stop spitting them out.

ask the mountain-boy to put you on his shoulders if you want to see

the old world, ask him for some lean -in & you'll be home. step off him

& walk around your block. grow wings & fly above your city.

all the guns fire toward heaven. warning shots mince your feathers.

fall back to the metal-less side of the mountain, cry if you need to.

that world of laws rendered us into dark matter. we asked for nothing but our names in a mouth we've known for decades, some were blessed

to know the mouth. our decades betrayed us.

there, I drowned, back before, once. there, I knew how to swim but couldn't.

there, men stood by shore \mathcal{E} watched me blue. there, I was a dead fish, the river's prince.

there, I had a face & then I didn't. there, my mother cried over me

but I wasn't there. I was here, by my own water, singing a song I learned somewhere

south of somewhere worse. that was when direction mattered. now, everywhere

I am is the center of everything. I must be the lord of something.

what was I before? a boy? a son? a warning? a myth? I whistled

now I'm the God of whistling. I built my Olympia downstream.

•

you are not welcome here. trust the trip will kill you. go home.

we earned this paradise by a death we didn't deserve.

I am sure there are other heres. a somewhere for every kind

of somebody, a heaven of brown girls braiding on golden stoops

but here—

how could I ever explain to you —

someone prayed we'd rest in peace & here we are

in peace whole all summer

MARGARET NOODIN

Umpaowastewin

Ode'iminibaashkiminasiganke She makes strawberry jam

ginagawinad wiishko'aanimad, waaseyaagami mixing sweet wind and shining water

miinawaa gipagaa nibwaakaa, with thick wisdom

bigishkada'ad, dibaabiiginad pounding, measuring

gakina gaa zhawenimangidwa everything we've cared for

gakina gaa waniangidwa everything we've lost

nagamowinan waa nagamoyaang the songs we have not yet sung

miigwanag waa wawezhi'angidwa the feathers yet to decorate

ezhi-zhoomiingweyaangoba and all the ways we've smiled

mooshkine moodayaabikoong into jars filled to the brim

ji-baakaakonid pii bakadeyaang. to be opened when we are thin.

FADY JOUDAH

The Floor Is Yours

My chicken pox hotel your machine gun pointillism

My bamboo branch severed but nimble name in the air of two alphabets Picassos in bull-light routine

Your mantis welded on a pole with a spiral staircase my romance between pillager and villager

timed & timely intensity inversely proportional to frequency

the chickadees in my voice the thrush in your mouth

our polymers of I skipping their archipelago stones

Your touchscreen my ringtone heart

Your mahogany gift bag puffed with confetti

my songs to appear as gauze for a new island

SARAH BROWNING

When the sun returns

it is hallelujah time, the swallows tracing an arc of praise just off our balcony, the mountains snow-sparkling in gratitude.

Here is our real life — a handful of possible peonies from the market — the life we always intended, swallow life threading the city air with our weaving joy.

Are we this simple, then, to sing all day — country songs, old hymns, camp tunes?

We even believe the swallows, keeping time.

LILACE MELLIN GUIGNARD

Lullaby in Fracktown

Child, when you're sad put on your blue shoes. You know that Mama loves you lollipops and Daddy still has a job to lose.

So put on a party hat. We'll play the kazoos loud and louder from the mountaintop. Child, when you're sad put on your blue shoes

and dance the polka with pink kangaroos, dolphin choirs singing "flip-flop, flip-flop." Hey, Daddy still has a job to lose —

don't be afraid. Close your eyes, snooze, because today our suns have flared and dropped. Tomorrow when you wake, put on your blue shoes.

Eat a good breakfast. Be good in school. Good boys go to college goody gumdrops so someday too you'll have a job to lose.

Waste trucks clatter by as the gray bird coos. Flames pour forth when the faucet's unstopped. Child, when you're sad put on your blue shoes. For now, Daddy still has a job to lose.

EVIE SHOCKLEY

senzo

carnegie hall, october 19, 2014

beauty eludes me, usually. i soak up the lush red, violet, indigo blooms abdullah ibrahim's cool fingers pluck from the keyboard's bed, but bring to these 'rooms'

(stanzas forged from replayed past as today's not-news) no solacing bouquets. my weeds?

i conjure rough green to rupture from seeds so furious they bleed — or, grieving, raise

crabgrass and blue notes, peppered with rust, where he grows flowers. yes, i tend my plants incisively: no phrase that droops or wants out of the sun survives long. but the rest

run wild, flush vivid, throw shade, deluge fruit, lavishly express their dissonant root.

JOAN KANE

Epithalamia

Butane, propane and lungful of diesel. I did not stand a chance.

Always with poison breath, bill, responsibility: a man with rote hands.

Everything in exchange, rain in a frozen season. Our roof, roofs strung

with hot wire. Our love, what was, an impression of light, gaunt: there is

nothing to get.

Magnifying Glass

No one would burn your name for not seeing the ant's careful antennae testing the air next to your shoe, six legs almost rowing it along. Who

would be upset if you brushed one off-handedly off your arm, undone by the tiny steps: what do they want, you ask — unaware that they breathe through their sides. Do they sleep? Do they dream anything? No one should

mark your soul short if you mash one: when two ants meet there's no tongue for hello—it's a bug, a nearly less than
little thing: at most,
made to chisel
crumbs
under the fridge
with eyes that,
even in brightest
day, see not reds
or greens but gray
and gray again.
Who would

curse your life if you bring out the *Raid*? How many books have they read? — that brain a virtual speck. Is all they carry *really* work

or just some dumb old daily ado? — the heart spending what blood, what prehistoric nudge on that handsome, brittle head.

ELEANOR WILNER

Ars Poetica

To grasp, like Prometheus, the fire — without the power to give it away ... — Betty Adcock

At first a silhouette on the horizon, then turning solid, like Schiller coming up the path to meet the adorable sisters, and they, pretending not to watch,

their hearts, all the time, pounding, driven by the same spring force (that would

tear them apart), the same force that drives the salmon upriver, against the current, the odds,

back to the home pool, even as

the autumn mind, in spite of itself, turns backward, with the same feverish glow as autumn gives to the summer's leaves, a deceptive glamour, warming the past with an amber light, like brandy held up to the fire, or the sun sinking at dusk

into the water, into the Baltic Sea
each night, where, in the mythical depths
of Lithuanian folktale, lies the amber castle
of the female sun, burning in the dark water,
a globe the color of harvest, aglow
there in the depths of the past, though

the amber, congealed sap of a once living force, is broken into bits, and the mythic castle with it — strung now as beads, and hung, a charm, around the neck of a daughter,

like the one in a Greek dream, picking flowers when the earth opened,

and in a swirl of violet cape and the pounding of hoofs, the dark god broke out of the earth driven by the same spring force, consequential and mortal,

and up there, hanging over the mythic fields of what recurs and recurs (though never the same,

and never to be reconciled) — what is that?

A hot air balloon filled

with passengers who paid to be raised in a basket, to be up there looking down on the ground where they live, a place shrunken now beneath their gaze, while their bloated shadow floats like a jellyfish in a green sea, barely a smudge on the pastures below, the trace of their passage less than a breath of smoke from a coal-fired engine — a blast of tarnished air from the actual past, heavy metal delivered from memory.

Useless to warn the girl, whose

hand will always be reaching out for the flowers, or the sisters inflamed with Schiller, as he with the tricolor dream of a world he could never inhabit...

useless to comfort

the eyeless Tiresias who knew how terrible was wisdom when it knew itself useless,

and useless to read

the names on the shining black wall of the Vietnam Memorial, the text of exactly what war has accomplished —

and look, there, standing high above the tragic scene, not the little figures of the wise ancients that Yeats saw carved into the deep blue stone — but there, standing high above Arlington, against the blank lapis of the sky: a horse with the torso and head of a man, yes, it is Chiron, the last of the hybrids, the wise and terribly wounded centaur for whom immortality was a curse,

and he gave it away

to Prometheus, who stole the god's fire and gave it away, as art gives the power to give it away, for that fire is the gift that cannot be held, for it will burn to an ash those (born and born again, war without end) who would hold it.

JAVIER ZAMORA

Saguaros

It was dusk for kilometers and bats in the lavender sky, like spiders when a fly is caught, began to appear. And there, not the promised land, but barbwire and barbwire

with nothing growing under it. I tried to fly that dusk after a bat said *la sangre del saguaro nos seduce*. Sometimes I wake and my throat is dry, so I drive to botanical gardens

to search for red fruit clutched to saguaros, the ones at dusk I threw rocks at for the sake of slashing hunger.

But I never find them here. These bats say *speak English only*.

Sometimes in my car, that viscous red syrup clings to my throat, and it's a tender seed toward my survival:

I also scraped needles first, then carved those tall torsos for water, then spotlights drove me and thirty others dashing into palos verdes, green-striped trucks surrounded us,

our empty bottles rattled and our breath spoke with rust. When the trucks left, a cold cell swallowed us.

TIFFANY HIGGINS

Dance, Dance, While the Hive Collapses

Oh my, oh my, I lose myself I study atlases and cirrus paths in search of traces of it, of you

> of that thing, of that song I keep pressing my ear to the current of air to hear...

> > I hear it and it disappears It was all I wanted to do in this life to sense that phantom tap

on my nerves, to allow myself to be hit by it, attacked, aroused until, as if someone else, I arise

I dance my part in paradise

I read that bees who've drunk imidacloprid

> can't waggle to indicate to others where the best nectar is located

(you and I also long to map for each other the sweetest suck of sap)

> Workers carry far less food back to the waiting hive.

> > They wander, wobble can't bring their way home alive

The imidacloprid-imbibed can't bring it back to the colony.

Some hives collapse entirely.

I desire to say that I, I would do it differently

I would be the bee, bloomed with pesticide

that still would shake out a wiggle like the finger's signature on the iPad at checkout:

> not quite you, but still identity more like a wave than solid you yet enough to signify:

> > There, there, in the far off field spiked acanthus, trumpets of datura

in the abandoned lot on the corner of International and High

the mystic assignation the golden throat of light:

> gorge, gorge, take your fill, I would cry

before I too failed and my bumbling body lay down to die

I'd dance my last dance

to rescue the hive						
yes, I'd carry the amber whirrers						
out alive						
Or not. Perhaps I too would succumb						
to the corn syrup, chemical						
piped into our supply.						
(I, too, longing to find my						
way to you,						
would go off course.)						
Alas. There is still melody,						
rhythm, someone is streaking						
out in air, droning						
around the phonograph, which is the grooved heart valve of the black vinyl divine who is winding this universe.						
Someone is dancing us.						
Will it be you?						
Dance, dance, as the hive collapses						
Dance, dance, while the colony disassembles						
Dance the occasion						
Dance the gorgeous design						
inside the honey						
of our lit up veins						
between the stripes and streams of these swift rays						

STEPHEN DERWENT PARTINGTON

Satao

Satao, Kenya's last great tusker, was poached in 2014

Cowards, let us sing in dead Elmolo how the elephants have died.
We thank the cavemen, that they drew them, that zoologists described them, for the photos of them herding which the tourists left behind, for who would ever, fools, believe us?
Teeth from heaven to the ground!?

I stretch my arm out like a trunk to palm the graveyard of its cranium; it's how, I hear, they mourned.
The brain within worked tools and language. I have none: a useless pen (it's only good for drafting elegies) and even then, no words.

We once had tuskers. Tell the birds!

TRUTH THOMAS

Urban Warming

Stoned by no Rosetta, merchants allowed through the fence learn to misspeak "black speak,"

in Edgar's harbor village, at HipHop Fish & Chicken on Route number 4 × 10.

"Baby Girl" becomes XX. "My Man" assumes all XY.

For salt & pepper curls, & baby stroller crowds, their broadcast is the same:

"Baby Girl, your diabetes is ready." "Main Man, your stroke order is up."

They know their audience: french fried lives, french fried luck, french fried us.

They know corner markets of cornered markets, seldom scale the wall. Their shit

is always hot. Their shit is always cheap. Their shit is

always landmark of poison in pens, along with: windows wearing boards, hubcaps

leaning curbs, the sound of

"bitch," the sound of "motherfucker," the sound of "niggah"

sounding off, projectile vomiting from children's lips — our hush puppy young, made beasts

behind these bars. Some days you will see them, dirt bike knights, riding Edmondson

Avenue, armor-less. They are wheelies, jousting against traffic, wheelies, jousting against stop-

lights, gas tanks bleeding out on stretchers, as sirens serenade, metal flies hover. There are

skeletons of chickens scattered on the ground. There are meeting bones of children fractured in the street,

cordoned off.

This is urban warming. This is underwear in exhibition, pants saddened to sag, hanging off ass

cracks, like wet clothes on a line. This is the ecology of locks, since our country is locks, since our

color is locks, since this block is locked. When your order is up,

you will eat anything tossed inside the cage.

ANGÉLICA FREITAS

microwave

how to explain brazil to an extraterrestrial: your face on a flag. they'd recognize you as leader and knock you off. dirty part of the conquest. but it already happened, in another shape: aerial view of the amazon, a hundred-odd hydroelectric plants to fry your eggs in the microwave. and they'd finish you off: just part of the conquest. and what if they came to tour the waterfalls? or to be taught by the elite how to make a democracy? the spaceships cover the sky completely. all the offices and fast food joints declare an end to the working day. cockroaches and rats fled first. it's christmas, carnival, easter, our lady of aparecida, and the final judgment all at once. lovers fuck for the last time. atms dry heave. the supermarket was a cemetery! the malls, the freeways! to explain civil unions to an iguana, to explain political alliances to a cat, to explain climate change to an aquarium turtle. it's done, already. now, wait.

eat an activia.

dwell in philosophy. imagine!

in our tropical country ... disastrous!

not one river more. tragic!

worse than locusts,

your marvelous hydroelectric plants will be seen, in flames, from sirius:

"my country was a sweet corn pamonha that a starving alien put in the microwave."

watch us burn:

possible epitaph.

Translated from the Portuguese by Tiffany Higgins

Now I Pray

Ashen face, wool hat bobbing, the young boy's eyes dart to me, then up at the man pulling a rolling suitcase, whose hand he holds, then back at me. His legs move as if without gravity. The man asks: Do you know a church on this street that serves free food? I want to say I know. That the names of churches on an Avenue called Americas roll out of me. I want to tell you it is temporary, their condition: suitcase, darting eyes, seeking free food at 9 pm in a big city on a school night. I want to tell you I don't for a moment wonder if that is really the boy's father or uncle or legitimate caretaker something in the handholding and eyes, having watched too many episodes of Law and Order. I want to tell you I take them to a restaurant and pay for a warm meal or empty my wallet not worrying how offensive that might be because in the end hunger is hunger. I want to tell you I call someone who loves them — that there is someone and say your guys are lost, can you come? I want to tell you I sit down on the sidewalk at the corner of Waverly and pray - that all passing by, anonymous shoes marking the pavement, join in a chorus of prayer humming like cicadas in the Delta. I want to

tell you the boy and the man eat food encircled by the warmth of bodies. I want to turn the cold night into a feast. I will tell you I am praying.

LECONTÉ DILL

We Who Weave

On Tyrone Geter's "The Basket Maker #2"

Weave me closer to you with hands dyed indigo that rake oyster beds awake Smell you long before I see you Vanilla sweet Sweetgrass weaving wares that keep Yankees coming on ferries, no bridge Waters been troubled Makes you wonder who put the root on whom first with doors dyed indigo Pray the evil spirits away at the praise house Make John Hop to stave off John Deere We migrants fighting to stay put Even nomads come home for a Lowcountry boil a feast for hungry prodigal sons and daughters with hearts dyed indigo Dying for you to weave us closer

GALLERY

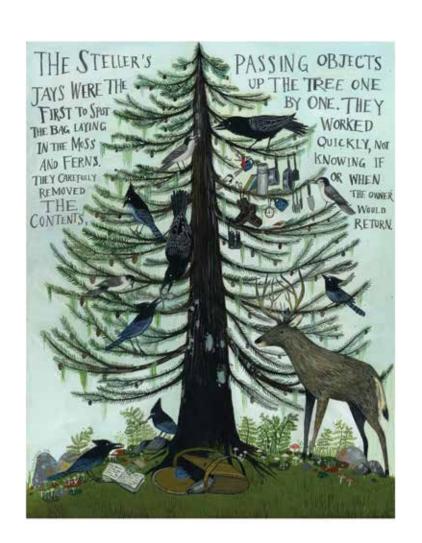
DIANA SUDYKA

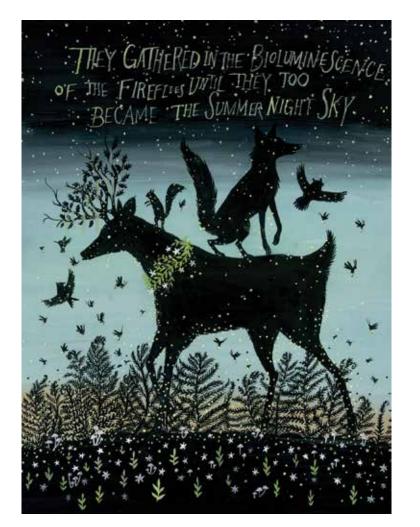
Biophilia Hauntings



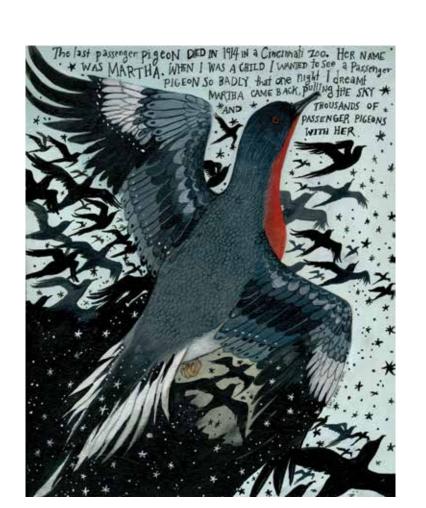


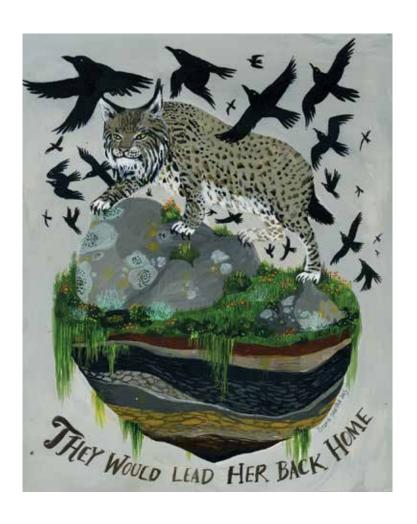












TITLES: Bear of Burden, 2014; Madrones, 2013; Black Fox, 2014; The Backpack, 2014; Bioluminescence, 2014; Sami Girl, 2015; Martha, 2014; Lynx, 2015.

COMMENT

JOHN SHOPTAW

Why Ecopoetry?

Before getting to why, I need to ask what: What is ecopoetry? What must an ecopoem be to do justice to its name? My answer is twofold: an ecopoem needs to be environmental and it needs to be environmentalist. By environmental, I mean first that an ecopoem needs to be about the nonhuman natural world—wholly or partly, in some way or other, but really and not just figuratively. In other words, an ecopoem is a kind of nature poem. But an ecopoem needs more than the vocabulary of nature. Consider John Ashbery's "River of the Canoefish":

These wilds came naturally by their monicker. In 1825 the first canoefish was seen hanging offshore. A few years later another one was spotted. Today they are abundant as mackerel, as far as the eye can see, tumbled, tumescent, tinted all the colors of the rainbow though not in the same order, a swelling, scumbled mass, rife with incident and generally immune to sorrow.

Shall we gather at the river? On second thought, let's not.

The first tipoff that this amusing poem is not about nature is the "canoefish," which don't exist; another is the "river" of "Shall we gather at the river?" which is from the familiar hymn. Ashbery is a poet of manner, less of nature than of "naturally." A parody of natural history, the poem riffs on gay culture ("rainbow," "tumescent," "immune"). Ashbery's culture poem is still fine and fun. But in my terms it can't count as an ecopoem.

This is not to say that ecopoetry is merely nature served uncooked on the literal page. In Redstart: An Ecological Poetics, Forrest Gander declares himself "less interested in 'nature poetry' - where nature features as theme—than in poetry that investigates—both thematically and formally—the relationship between nature and culture, language and perception." I share Gander's preferences, and I think he makes an important point: ecopoets cannot be naive about

matters of perception and poetic representation, which are biologically and culturally specific (a bee's world is not a human's). Yet I'm sure Gander would agree that nature exists not only in the sensorium of the beholder; it's really "out there." There are, for instance, environmental facts—such as the unnerving one that the level of atmospheric carbon dioxide has now reached an unsustainable 400 parts per million—that we know objectively and can render independently of our personal or cultural perceptions, in an essay or a poem. However self-aware and self-reflexive it may be, an ecopoem must be tethered to the natural world.

The second way in which an ecopoem is environmental is that it is ecocentric, not anthropocentric. Human interests cannot be the be-all and end-all of an ecopoem. A familiar example of an anthropocentric nature poem is Stevens's "Anecdote of the Jar":

I placed a jar in Tennessee, And round it was, upon a hill. It made the slovenly wilderness Surround that hill.

How I've relished this impish poem, though for me, a son of the shallow South, "slovenly" always rankled. How ardently I lectured my classes that nature here mimics art, as in a sculpture garden; that this artifact, though non-generative, gives birth to "Tennessee," itself an artificial domain bound on top and bottom by imaginary parallel lines, not unlike the poem's "Tennessee" borderlines. Now, though I still love "Anecdote of the Jar," I am sobered by the line "It took dominion everywhere." So God blessed the humans in Eden: "Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Genesis I:28), a blessing which created anthropocentrism. (It does no good, by the way, to claim that "Anecdote of the Jar" merely or ironically represents the domineering posture; you can say that about any problematic poem.)

Ecopoetry must be really environmental, and so cannot be distinguished from nature poetry by form or technique alone. Here I part ways with writers such as Timothy Morton, who offers as an example of an environmental poem a one-liner by Charles Bernstein:

THIS POEM INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

I suspect Bernstein thinks of this as a conceptual poem, a found poem that by transposition becomes paradoxically self-referential. But for Morton, the poem is environmental because it is "recursive" and so "ambient," like our surroundings. Morton gleefully concedes that Bernstein's poem has no natural content or environmentalist message: "The poem is not about bunny rabbits, mountains, or pollution." I agree that subject matter alone doesn't make poetry significant, but I bristle at Morton's mockingly sentimental rhetoric of "bunny rabbits," a discourse used by anti-environmentalists to ridicule those defending wildlife. Morton argues that by waking us from an immersion in a "lifeworld," ambient art such as Bernstein's poem "compels us to assume responsibility for global warming, a direct cause of the ongoing Sixth Mass Extinction Event." Really? As Morton knows, these imminent extinctions are of plants and animals, not of recursive algorithms. My second objection to this line of argument is more general: if Bernstein's poem is environmental, what poem isn't? Morton agrees: "All poems are environmental, because they include the spaces in which they are written and read." OK, but why environmental and not, say, spatio-temporal? If all poems are environmental poems, environmental poetry means nothing and matters not at all.

A similarly formal approach to environmental poetry is made by Angus Fletcher. In A New Theory for American Poetry, Fletcher traces the US tradition of formally environmental poetry (culminating in Ashbery's prosaic poems) back to Whitman's "environment-poem," with its cataloging phrasal lines. Like Morton, Fletcher foregrounds form by dismissing content: "His poems are not about the environment.... They are environments." Though I understand how one may be immersed in a poem, my problem with this definition is that it turns every Whitman poem into an "environment-poem." I am happy to apply this label to "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" because of the specificity of its descriptions — such as the unsnatched and unhatched "four light-green eggs spotted with brown" - and because of its story of the Long Island boy delivered into song by hearing a mockingbird grieving for its mate, and finally because of its translation of the mockingbird's mournful song into an operatic aria:

> High and clear I shoot my voice over the waves, Surely you must know who is here, is here, You must know who I am, my love.

But it isn't the form that makes "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" environmental. Whitman mounted a similarly operatic poem in 1874, "The Song of the Redwood-Tree," which he set in Northern California: "Just back from the rock-bound shore and the caves,/In the saline air from the sea in the Mendocino country." The scene is a disturbing one of deforestation: "I heard the mighty tree its death-chant chanting.//The choppers heard not." As he did earlier, Whitman verbalizes the redwood's chant in operatic italics. But the redwood's song is startlingly hospitable:

With Nature's calm content, with tacit huge delight, We welcome what we wrought for through the past, And leave the field for them.

For them predicted long, For a surperber race.

The word "race" confirms Whitman's unwritten pun on *sequoia*. The clearing of the redwoods in the 1850s meant the genocide of the red men—primarily the Yuki. Their land was occupied by the "superber" white-skins, their trees sold, their inhabitants killed, enslaved, or herded into reservations—all of which led to the so-called Mendocino War of 1859, nationally notorious for its brutality. I know Fletcher would find "The Song of the Redwood Tree" objectionable, but I don't see how he could deny its being an "environment-poem" by his strictly stylistic criteria.

I turn next to another pair of stylistically similar poems, both from *The Arcadia Project: North American Postmodern Pastoral*. In his introduction to the anthology, Joshua Corey imagines the right balance between Arcadian simulacra and their underlying reality: "To write the postmodern pastoral poem is... to be a digital native with dirt between one's toes." Yet the opening selection, from Brent Cunningham's "Bird & Forest," soars above vulgar reality into postmodern pastiche:

An empty background for the bird's traversal, set with obstacles to be navigated: isn't this the principle?

The bird enters the forest; it is introduced. It doesn't think, but uses the machine of instinct buried in its flesh, a device

wrapped in an assembly.

Cunningham is an accomplished poet who has adapted Whitman's prosaic measures to the stately abstractions of Stevens and the deadpan ruminations of Michael Palmer. But his notion that birds are machines for whom trees are not habitat but obstructions is mired in an intensely problematic argument advanced by Descartes. In his Meditations on First Philosophy, the philosopher famously described animals, as opposed to ensouled humans, as mere animated automatons, devoid of thought or emotion, incapable even of experiencing pain. Come now, aren't birds bird-brained? Let's consult one. Laying out a pair of green and blue rectangles on a tray, the animal psychologist Irene M. Pepperberg asked her African gray parrot, "Alex, what's same?" "Shape," Alex replied. "What's different?" "Color." When I read about that experiment in Alex and Me I had to get up and go for a walk. If Alex, with a brain the size of a walnut, was capable of abstracting color from shape and then shape from color, then Descartes's claims about animals were based not on scientific observation but on arbitrary belief.

Later in the anthology we find another poem in the same stanzaic prose, Juliana Spahr's "Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache," which I do not hesitate to call an ecopoem. This poem (recalling Whitman's "There Was a Child Went Forth") is an Edenic allegory of our fall from love for nature into love for each other, and our consequent entry into an environmentally ruinous economy. It is charged with natural specifics:

Our hearts took on the shape of well-defined riffles and pools, clean substrates, woody debris, meandering channels, flood-plains, and mature streamside forests.

Here Spahr is drawing on Randall E. Sanders's A Guide to Ohio Streams:

While everybody knows clean water is essential for a healthy stream, few realize they also need diverse physical features such as well-defined riffles and pools, clean substrates, woody debris, meandering channels, floodplains, and mature streamside forests.

To be sure, Spahr's postmodern poem is choral and citational rather than personal and recollective. But her citational method doesn't disqualify "Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache" as an ecopoem. The detailed environmental language reverberates in the hollows of the fallen consumerist world:

I replaced what I knew of the stream with Lifestream Total Cholesterol Test Packets, with Snuggle Emerald Stream Fabric Softener Dryer Sheets, with Tisserand Aromatherapy Aroma-Stream Cartridges, with Filter Stream Dust Tamer, and Streamzap PC Remote Control, Acid Stream Launcher, and Viral Data Stream.

The language of this collage is postmodern but it's also referential. It draws its energy and its pathos from the difference between the real stream and the metonymic "stream" of products.

Now for my second criterion. An ecopoem must be not only environmental but environmentalist. First, the environment of an ecopoem is, implicitly or explicitly, impacted by humans. As Ursula K. Heise puts it, ecopoetry is "related to the broader genre of nature poetry but can be distinguished from it by its portrayal of nature as threatened by human activities." In Well Then There Now Spahr draws a similar distinction: "even when [the nature poem] got the birds and the plants and the animals right it tended to show the beautiful bird but not so often the bulldozer off to the side that was destroying the bird's habitat." While we should remember that Gary Snyder had already in 1959 written from bitter experience about the bulldozer in the ancient forest, I appreciate Spahr's problem with nature poetry. If a contemporary nature poem leaves its reader in still contemplation of Mother Nature's creatures, it risks being complacent, even what Spahr judges "immoral." But when Spahr adds that nature poems "often show up in the New Yorker or various other establishment journals," she is talking not environmental but poetry politics. An ecopoem may be innovative or it may be what I call "renovative" (where any poetic feature, past or present, is available for renewal), or it may even be resolutely traditionalist — and it may appear anywhere. We need all kinds of poems to find and stir up all sorts of poetry readers.

An ecopoem is environmentalist not only thematically, in that it represents environmental damage or risk, but rhetorically: it is urgent,

it aims to unsettle. But doesn't environmentalist poetry then risk complacency at least as much as nature poetry? Aren't ecopoets deluding themselves into thinking that their poems can change anything? "For poetry," as Auden declared in his elegy "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," "makes nothing happen." Auden's proposition, though, is not a fact but a belief. A similar skepticism today informs discussions about efficacy and causality. Hurricane Sandy, arctic glacial melt, the California drought, and so on, can't be specifically linked to global warming - so climate change makes nothing in particular happen. At least so far as we know. But Rachel Carson's Silent Spring helped make legislation happen. Is poetry uniquely ineffectual? Who thinks now that sixties culture didn't help make the sixties happen? Even if we can never specify its means or results, ecopoetry can also help make environmentalism happen.

The more immediate hazard for ecopoetry, then, is didacticism. If a contemporary nature poem risks being immoral, an ecopoem, whatever its effects, risks being moralistic. How can an ecopoem usher us into a new environmental imagination without teaching us a tiresome lesson? In light of the prevailing tendency to value poetic form over (natural) content, it may be instructive to summarize the history of aestheticism, from which this tendency derives. Kant's nonteleological, purely formal "purposiveness without purpose" passes into romanticism ("Beauty is truth, truth beauty") and the aesthetic movement ("art for art's sake"); then into New Criticism with its "autotelic" verbal icon and Wimsatt and Beardsley's affective fallacy, which might have been called the effective fallacy ("a confusion between ... what [a poem] is and what it does"); from there into de Manian deconstruction and early non-representational Language poetry. Whatever the variety of formalist aestheticism, the antithesis to form is not so much content as it is message or moral, though as the aesthetic movement progresses into pure poetry, meaning itself becomes suspect by association ("A poem should not mean/But be." - Archibald MacLeish). Poetics wasn't always this way. For Horace, a poem both pleases and instructs. (*Didaskein* means to teach; a chorodidaskalos trained the chorus.) A familiar argument against didactic poetry is that it preaches to the choir. A poem should not preach, but it may teach the choir a new tune, the chorus a new step. Of course, there will always be self-indulgent didactic poetry; a poem won't save the rhinos by telling us to. But I don't believe poetry that changes us, moves, unsettles, motivates us, or awakens us to

the pleasures and wonders of the natural world is by definition bad.

How might poetry be good and environmentalist? Here are a few instances from the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. Frost wittily broached didacticism in "The Oven Bird." The song of the bird (whose domelike ground nest is shaped like a dutch oven) is commonly translated *preacher*, *preacher* or *teacher*, *teacher*. Frost plants thoughts and words into his didactic bird's beak and brain. Here is his sonnet's discordant sestet:

And comes that other fall we name the fall. He says the highway dust is over all. The bird would cease and be as other birds But that he knows in singing not to sing. The question that he frames in all but words Is what to make of a diminished thing.

Wagon dust? Maybe, but I think he had the automobile in mind. The first triumph of fossil-fueled industry, Ford's Model T, began raising dust throughout the U.S. in 1908; it wasn't until 1913 that most highways were paved. Frost wrote "The Oven Bird" the following year in England. The poem is not overtly didactic. Frost doesn't tell us what to think; but he knows better than to celebrate and sing the Model T.

Marianne Moore is variously unsettling in "He 'Digesteth Harde Yron," perhaps the first poem in English to take up species extinction ("the aepyornis," "the moa"; "the harmless solitaire//or great auk"). Her poem focuses on the ostrich, the last of the large flightless birds. In The Necessary Angel, Stevens took Moore's poem as a test case, arguing that even a poem of "an extraordinarily factual appearance" (he quotes a horrifying passage beginning "Six hundred ostrich-brains served/at one banquet") represents not an objectively "bare fact" but "an individual reality," conveyed by means of Moore's "finical phraseology," "irony" (activating Moore's titular pun), and "abstraction." But Moore's abstraction is not Fabergé's. Her eggs do not appear jeweled and mounted but brooded, hatched, and guarded by a father ostrich "with/a maternal concentration, after/he has sat on the eggs/at night six weeks." If we had the gift "To see oursels as ithers see us!" as Burns imagines in "To a Louse," "What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us." In Moore's case, the noble and cunning hunter is imagined ironically from the perspective of his "birdwitted" prey (I quote from Moore's first version, which preserves her alternately

unrhymed and rhymed couplets):

How

could he, prized for plumes and eggs and young, used even as a riding-beast, respect men hiding actorlike in ostrich-skins, with the right hand making the neck move as if alive and from a bag the left hand

strewing grain, that ostriches might be decoyed and killed!

I know what you're thinking, Darwinian reader. In disdaining their "actorlike" hunters, in preserving their species, ostriches guarding their eggs are behaving not courageously but instinctively. (Something they've so far been quite good at; their current conservation status is Least Concern.) However well-intentioned, Moore's poem is moralistic, not to say anthropomorphic. Let's take up these objections in turn. The outraged exclamation is not tacked on here, but flows from Moore's bird's-eye view. Imagine you are hunted by an alien, who, donning the skin of a relative's corpse, nods at you with it, and with it crumbles up some bread for you, and you have something of the horror and disgust of Moore's "individual reality."

The rhetorical strategy of taking up an animal's case by assuming its viewpoint is now pervasive. Anthropomorphism—the ascription of human attributes to something nonhuman (God, animals, plants, things)—assumes that nonhumans exist on an utterly alien order of being. Hence, we can only project human attributes, not recognize them, in other animals. But this presumption is not something we know; it's only something we believe. The opposite belief is probably more familiar to us today: the reduction of the mind to the brain, which makes us all automatons. Not so fast, argued Thomas Nagel in his influential 1974 essay, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" Not what it's like for us to be a bat—to wheel about, bat-winged, by echolocation—but what it's like for a bat to be a bat. This, the subjectivity or consciousness of another animal, is something we'll never really know—and this is why we can never confidently reduce humans or other animals to machines. What we do know is that it is like something

to be a bat. And if a bat has experiences, it can think and feel. In my view, those who refuse to grant animals subjectivity are not cognitive skeptics but consciousness-deniers (with their heads buried in the sand, something not even ostriches do!). The bonobo and the human are woven from at least ninety-eight percent of the same DNA strands. How can we humans be sure we're unique? While it may be fanciful to describe goats as sarcastic or clouds as weeping, the prohibition against anthropomorphism and its offshoot, John Ruskin's pathetic fallacy, strikes me as arbitrary. To empathize beyond human-kind, ecopoets must be ready to commit the pathetic fallacy and to be charged with anthropomorphism.

Let's return for a moment to "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking": can birds really grieve? Isn't such a belief an unscientific, sentimental projection? In *Bird Sense*, the ornithologist Tim Birkhead writes of being in the Canadian High Arctic:

I notice a pair of brent geese ... and am saddened to see that one of the geese has been shot. Beside its lifeless form stands the bird's partner. A week later I pass the same pond again, and the two birds, one live and one dead, are still there.

Was the vigilant goose grieving? Darwin would have said so. But many contemporary ornithologists, wary of projecting, restrict their descriptions to external behavior. Is there any way beyond such behavioralism? Birkhead describes an experiment. Wild-caught great tits were shown, on separate occasions, an owl and a finch. Their behavioral responses were identical, but only the owl "elicited a surge of the stress hormone corticosterone, clear evidence that the great tits were more frightened by the owl." If birds can be fearful, can't we grant them the possibility of being mournful? But, the skeptic persists, how do we know that their fear is the same as our fear? Well, how do I know that your fear is the same as mine? Biology (hormone analysis, shared genomic evolution) and situation (a bird lingering with a dead mate) reveal the unreasoning denial behind an unfeeling skepticism. I act on the assumption that my experiences are not wholly unique, to me or to humans.

In this century, environmentalist poetry is suffused with the deniable but inescapable conditions of species extinction and global warming. Still, today's green poets confront the familiar prejudice against didacticism. In an interview with *Earthlines*, Jorie Graham

articulates what ecopoetry can do to persuade suspicious readers, who

feel anything remotely "political" to be polemical and thus didactic. They feel they "know this information already, so why do they need it in a poem." That is precisely the point. They "know" it. They are not "feeling it." That is what activists in the environmental movement are asking of us: help it be felt, help it be imagined.

In her two primarily ecological poetry books, Sea Change and Place, Graham helps readers see feelingly into "the 'deep future'—seven to ten generations hence." How? By imagining the far in terms of the near. "Dialogue (Of the Imagination's Fear)" (from Place) opens the morning after the bursting of the housing bubble, with its bleak economic environment of mass expulsions "All around in/houses near us." Meanwhile, it's the exclamatory "Spring!" of E.E. Cummings and William Carlos Williams. But if our future on an earth laid waste is also foreclosed, Eliot's season of resurrection seems cruel. Harking back to George Herbert's "The Flower," Graham's buried bulbs think twice about coming up:

I cannot say it but the

smell is hope meeting terrifying regret, I would say do not open again, do not go up,

stay under here there is

no epoch, we are

in something but it is not "the world," why try to make us feel at

home down

here, take away the poem, take away this desire that has you entering this waste dark space, there are not even pockets of time here,

there are no mysteries, there is no laughter and nothing ever dies, the foreclosure

you are standing beside look to it, there is a

woman crying on the second floor as she does not understand what it will be like to

not have a home now, and how to explain to the children at 3:35 when the bus drops

them off—

For her two ecobooks, Graham invented a chimerical form of immeasurably long and vertiginously short lines, a form that is environmentalist not in imitating an environment, but in eliciting an unsettling feeling. Most of us can't experience or feel global warming, but we can imagine what it's like to be dispossessed, to be at a loss to explain to one's children why they must leave home. But when it comes to a foreclosed Mother Earth, as the placard says, there's no Planet B.

Whereas Graham imagines the apocalyptic future, Ed Roberson witnesses it in his own lifetime. Like Moore, Roberson studied biology in college, and like Snyder he works in nature. As he relates in "We Must Be Careful," his essay on ecopoetics in *Black Nature*, "I was an undergraduate research assistant in limnology, freshwater chemistry, collecting samples in the field," in particular, the frozen streams of Alaska, as recorded in his 1970 poem, "be careful":

i must be careful about such things as these. the thin-grained oak. the quiet grizzlies scared into the hills by the constant tracks squeezing in behind them closer in the snow.

Care taken by the limnologist is care modeled for the poem's readers. Returning to the scene in the title poem of his recent volume, *To See the Earth Before the End of the World* (2010), Roberson testifies to the acceleration of glacial into human time: "watched ice was speed made invisible,/ now — it's days, and a few feet further away." Roberson refracts his personal experience through a journalistic headline — "Media note *people chasing glaciers*" — an occurrence of what we now call ecotourism. At the end, the poem teeters on the tipping point of mutual extinction:

All that once chased us and we chased to a balance chasing back, tooth for spear, knife for claw,

locks us in this grip we just now see

our own lives taken by taking them out. Hunting the bear, we hunt the glacier with the changes come of that choice.

Graham in "Dialogue" imagined the deep future through the imperiled present; Roberson here imagines the endangered present through the deep past. According to one theory, the paleo-American Clovis people, known for their fluted spear points, hunted the megafauna (including the short-faced bear) through North America, driving them, and themselves, into extinction. And do we choose to follow them? The "we" in Roberson's cautionary tale includes not only curious ecotourists (and greedy petroleum deposit hunters) but the rest of us who choose (or not) to do what we can to preserve the environmental balance.

Graham crosses economics (eco-, oikos: home) with nature, Roberson crosses ecology with anthropology—both increasingly common hybrids in ecopoetry. Robert Hass proceeds similarly in "Ezra Pound's Proposition," but his crossings are causal. The "proposition" is Hass's rendering of Pound's multi-disciplinary poetics, gleaned from "Mauberly" and the Cantos:

Beauty is sexual, and sexuality
Is the fertility of the earth and the fertility
Of the earth is economics.

As Hass explained in a 2007 interview, the poem draws on his experience with International Rivers, "which has been concerned particularly with where environmental issues meet human-rights issues around big-dam projects, many of which have proved destructive, displacing millions of people around the world." The International Rivers website reproduces "Ezra Pound's Proposition" and directs readers to the building of the Pak Mun Dam in Thailand. International Rivers itself resists dam construction by "provid[ing] unbiased hydrological and financial analyses of these dam projects to the dam-affected people in the Third World." Its pedagogical method bears interesting comparison with Hass's own. The poet might have recorded the history of the dam, along with the local occupations and chaotic displacements; instead, he begins downstream, in Bangkok, with a child prostitute's own disarming "proposition": "How about a party, big guy?" In the poem's second and final stanza, the poet explains how she got there:

Here is more or less how it works: The World Bank arranges the credit and the dam Floods three hundred villages, and the villagers find their way
To the city where their daughters melt into the teeming streets,
And the dam's great turbines, beautifully tooled
In Lund or Dresden or Detroit, financed
By Lazard Frères in Paris or the Morgan Bank in New York,
Enabled by judicious gifts from Bechtel of San Francisco
Or Halliburton of Houston to the local political elite,
Spun by the force of rushing water,
Have become hives of shimmering silver
And, down river, they throw that bluish throb of light
Across her cheekbones and her lovely skin.

"Ezra Pound's Proposition" is not polemical or didactic in the usual sense. Hass does not tell us what to do or how to feel. But he does tell us what happened, and he teaches us that the economic injustice flows from a damnable environmental injustice. In a single "unbiased," just perceptibly ironic, meandering sentence, Hass traces the inhumane misdeed to its source. Beauty of wealth and expertise at the beginning sheds light on the beauty of displaced youth at the end. Having laid out the chain of events, Hass leaves us to ponder the links.

Ecopoetry is nature poetry that has designs on us, that imagines changing the ways we think, feel about, and live and act in the world. If an ecopoem is only a postmodern or a contemporary nature poem, why ecopoetry? The essential difference between nature poetry and ecopoetry cannot be stylistic. But as Frost, Moore, Spahr, Graham, Roberson, Hass, and many other poets have shown us, the ways of being ecopoetic are increasingly diverse. Let me add what my last decade of reading and teaching confirms: nature poetry, even without broaching ruination or restoration, can also be environmentalist. If Hopkins can get me excited about species acting out their names ("As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame"); if John Clare or Emily Dickinson or Snyder or Kay Ryan can encourage me to see myself in an animal; or if Wendell Berry or W.S. Merwin or Brenda Hillman can place me in and beyond the poem, then they have motivated me to want these creatures and environments to stay. By showing us also that some things must go (dams, oil rigs, plastic bags, animal concentration camps, virtual disconnectedness), ecopoetry doesn't supplant nature poetry but enlarges it.

VIDYAN RAVINTHIRAN

All the Animals in My Poems Go into the Ark

Complete Poems, by Jon Silkin.

Carcanet. £29.99.

Complete Poems, by R.F. Langley.

Carcanet. £12.99.

A C.H. Sisson Reader, edited by Charlie Louth and Patrick McGuinness. Carcanet. £19.95.

As founding editor of Stand Magazine — which, associated with the University of Leeds, still represents an important Northern contribution to the English poetry and short prose scene — Jon Silkin used to scribble his own verse on the back of submitted poems. Those, that is, whose authors failed to include the all-important Stamped Addressed Envelope. (The SAE has always been, I suppose, a gesture of status-confirming humility—you provide the editor with all necessary postage, then your spurned works return in an envelope on which you've written your own name, almost as if you've rejected yourself; nowadays, of course, there's often a website telling you "How to Submit.") The poems Silkin wrote over others' were biblically-tinged in cadence and seriousness; left-wing-political; intrigued by man's relationship to nature, and, not quite the same thing, man as an instance of nature. Here is "Orion and the Spiders," one of "Three Poems to Do with Healing," from a posthumous collection he wished to entitle *Making a Republic*:

We hunt the squealing mouse. But we gasp at the ocelot, mostly she's grey, tinged with fawn in naked ovals, her lovely glistening polar underside. Who would fire into her belly? Who?

Silkin's is nature red in tooth and claw, but also hopefully glimpsed as an egalitarian utopia. (The influence of D.H. Lawrence is evident here—"We foul/The stones we have sprung from/That we share

this modest space with,/Brutishly refined/In plucked skirts, and

stiff pants"—as is the Quaker folk-painter Edward Hicks, whose *Peaceable Kingdom* provided a book title and an idea to live and write by; Jon Glover and Kathryn Jenner's introduction suggests an ecopoet ahead of his time.) Born in London in 1930, and of Lithuanian Jewish stock, Silkin wrote a monograph on the Jewish WWI poet Isaac Rosenberg, and a famously microscopic close reading, requoted at length by Christopher Ricks, of Geoffrey Hill's "September Song," that acknowledged masterpiece—if too clever-clever, too Silkinanticipating?—of Holocaust elegy. So it's not surprising that he was troubled by the influence of T.S. Eliot on his own work. ("Mister Eliot was a Jew-hater," says the speaker of "A woman from Giannedes," previously unpublished.) Our political beliefs, our deeply held convictions about who we are, don't always coincide with the opinions of those who creatively inspire us.

But to return to how Silkin wrote, rather than what, for I realize the American reader might be under the impression that he could *only* write all over other people's poems: a demented fetishist driven to repeat within the creative act the literary critic's passive-aggressive lunge for dominance. In fact, he was an omnicompositionalist who, the introduction tells us, "wrote everywhere," a double-sided phrase that links Silkin's global travels with his habit of writing on all possible surfaces, envelopes and letters as well as other people's poems. On page lxxxv (!) of Glover and Jenner's heroically and at times stiflingly meticulous introduction, we find this explanation:

Even in lengthy poems with a background (or foreground) story he couldn't resist letting language "just happen." The temptation to "slow down," to let interpenetrating metaphors and similes do what they want, was something he either enjoyed successfully or (depending on the reader's point of view) failed to control. Perhaps he did not appreciate that intense imagemaking could itself tell stories and explore action.

"Enjoyed successfully" nicely captures how, experimenting with language, the ambitious poet may also be indulging himself. Yet this introduction too often replaces the literary fact (the poems on the page; their style and value) with the literary life. Sure, for Silkin, "writing and publishing were not an adjunct to a 'normal' life; they were life"—and it's important, if dispiriting, to understand how networks contribute to a poet's reputation. But Glover and Jenner seem

to argue at points that because Silkin always was writing, because he did so much as an editor, and published his verse with such frequency in so many places (the magazine publications preceding each collection are exhaustively listed), and knew so many people, especially when he broke into America — that, because of all this, he must be a major poet. Swathes of unpublished work are collected here, with alternative versions of poems, and an extensive bibliography of Silkin's published articles. (Of the previously unpublished poems, my favorites are "From the inside of the wilderness," "Going On," a smack at Thom Gunn, and "Choosing"—the poem on page 219; there is another with the same title on page 822 — which gives both the discrete and the processual its due; acknowledges in the erotic the presence of cognition; and discovers quickly something marvelous within the word "completely": " 'Love' I said / 'Is ... ' You completely/Leaned forward, and kissed me/As if you were naked.")

A massively impressive editorial achievement, is this nine-hundred-page tome the best way to experience Silkin as a poet? A poet who wrote too many poems, and also, perhaps, wrote his poems too much; an accretive process, confirmed and extended by the editors—I certainly don't approve of the disfiguring of poems on the page with endnote markers. The image that suggests itself is an allinclusive ark, because of the first poem, or "Prologue," of Silkin's true debut, The Peaceable Kingdom:

All the animals in my poems go into the ark The human beings walk in the great dark The bad dark and the good dark. They walk Shivering under the small lamp light And the road has two ways to go and the humans none.

The other two stanzas also begin with "the animals in my poems go into the ark." Repetition is important to Silkin (I have a soft spot for his lines about "love" in which that ineffectual ultimate word bumpily and beautifully repeats, heading nowhere) and is key to his curious mixture of active urging of language and passive wondering at its restlessness. The poet as both editor and anti-editor of himself — Silkin treating Silkin both as he treats others (for example, those hapless contributors to Stand) and also differently, as someone special. A refrain, or a repeated word like dark - Milton's Samson Agonistes lurks behind this seeming nursery rhyme - might parse either as a

restatement of the poet's ordering power or an abdication of it. The words, stripped, apparently, of authorial control, brilliantly or hollowly self-replicate.

The Peaceable Kingdom also features Silkin's most famous poem, "Death of a Son" — a more simply understandable and touching elegy, the rhyming epigraph tells us, for a child "who died in a mental hospital aged one." The rhyme of title and epigraph, "son" and "one," is the first intimation this is no straightforwardly anecdotal poem, even though the awful incident can be retrieved from its texture without too much trouble:

Something has ceased to come along with me. Something like a person: something very like one.

And there was no nobility in it

Or anything like that.

A scornful start. In fact this could function as a whole poem, a statement of elegiac seriousness akin to Hill's. The icily impersonal pronoun "it" — as if the child who never became a person were turned, cruelly, into a thing—is reminiscent of Marianne Moore's shortened version of "Poetry": "I, too, dislike it." Yet she does continue: "Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in it, after all, a place for the genuine." And Silkin's poem also goes forth, writing itself onward, refusing to be laconically realist and instead allowing, as elsewhere, the language to do its own thing, to live.

The form is repeated throughout his first collection—a diamond-shaped four-line stanza, which Silkin breaks with at the very end:

He turned over on his side with his one year
Red as a wound
He turned over as if he could be sorry for this
And out of his eyes two great tears rolled, like stones,
and he died.

The repetition is more than a repetition of Eliot's Ash Wednesday—"Because I do not hope to turn again / Because I do not hope / Because I do not hope to turn"—and the refusal to cauterize into fact a complex experience also recalls Rosenberg, in whom "the language-inducing process" (this is Silkin in Out of Battle, his monograph on WWI poets) understands the "full and proper expression" of an idea

as inseparable from "its sensuous ramification — the poetry itself."

It isn't right to judge a poet simply by their popular, well-known, even radio-friendly verse. But Silkin wrote so much that peters out in try-hard scrimmage; he stage-manages, perversely amplifies. His voyeurism in the face of linguistic drift might read as self-regarding, for could authentic self-suspicion put forth so unendingly? The poem "A self-directing psalm" compares to "an aphid that cannot let itself be destroyed" the light in a summer night's sky, which is also "unlike the burned prisoners in a camp," and then the vertiginous phrase "like, and not like" takes us to "the journey of Abraham with Isaac." A rich nexus, then, in Rosenberg's vein. But though "Death of a Son" was right to go on, press through, continuance isn't always heroic. Silkin may begin compellingly: "Many liberals don't just / Make love, they first ask each other." But this poem, "Respectabilities" — from The Re-ordering of the Stones, which I see I've dog-eared less than any other section of this book, and is crammed with these dull titles — just doesn't know when, or how, to stop. "All men are treated/With such perception as stones/Get into subjection to/Their shaper": the judged thrill of each line-ending provides the poet with a sufficing hit, no doubt, of electrifying clarification the reader cannot share.

I believe the problem lies precisely with Silkin's omnicompetence, his facility, his possession of both an elaborative and compressive gift. This second often recalls Hill in its insistence on historical time and the civic attentiveness of the poet capable of honed micro-miracles of attention. Of Jews taken by train through the snow to concentration camps: "Some vomit, softly, in lumps, falling past the edge/of a wagon. Prayers made. None bidding us safe conduct./In a woman's back/the butt's thud." Ghastly facts, shaped: "some" hesitates harshly between describing vomit or (dehumanized) people; there is the little rhythmic shift in that line, and the reversed syntax at the end. "Bruised" reveals the influence, on the "lapidary poems" of The Psalms with Their Spoils, of another Northern poet, Basil Bunting, whose clenched and tender sadism deepens wonderfully here:

> Lapidary words: for it is hard to chisel stone; and to detain the reader at the tomb softened by moss, and the lichen's bruised studs of gold, is not seemly.

You, too, would not want to take from the wanderer grazing the mild squares of London his time you now bear.

There's no more; the lichen's nail innocently feeds its point into the child's burying place.

-Lapidary Words

"The lichen's nail" is both tender moss and nature's chisel. A tomb is softened, ruralized, its hard truth disguised by its verdure; the final stanza complicates a dual vision of the lichen as both naive growth and long-standing destroyer. How strange it is to read this poem, with its statement about the limited attention of the reader, and how it mustn't be abused, alongside Silkin's more interminable verse!

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R.F. Langley wrote and published sparingly. A mystique attaches to poets of this kind—really, they are super-poets, repeating and reinforcing on a career level the standard value-logic of lyric verse: drastically fewer words than in any other literary form, but each, for that reason, precious. (And they seem so uncareerist—Langley taught English and art history to schoolchildren before retiring to the Suffolk countryside—so unforcing of their rare lovely bursts of inspiration; they have *grown up*, lived well, in a wider world.) Educated at Cambridge, Langley is linked with the school of poetry named for that university, but while his verse does move in unobvious ways, fusing wittily (modern complexities are assumed) mysteriously different registers, there remains the feeling of—he differs here from his friend J.H. Prynne, who read at his memorial service—an individual mind making sense of its surroundings.

That said, simple sense can't always be made. A reductive immediacy is complicated, perception combining with, flooded by, intellection; Jeremy Noel-Tod, the editor of this wonderful *Complete Poems*, has argued persuasively that they "shrink interestingly from the single, arrogating point of view, the self-possessed lyric 'I'. You, I, he, she, we, it are liable to take each other's place without warning." Langley's sentences fragment, they are crisp, multifarious, hastened

by internal rhymes, sometimes wordplay:

The warm sun in some June. This June. Both Junes. Take now and make a then. A room. A roomy workshop. Elderflowers. Forget the scent. Here is a carpenter, singing. It is a hymn.

— From The Ecstasy Inventories

A wineglass of water on the windowsill where it will catch the light. Now be quiet while I think. And groan. And blink.

- From Still Life with Wineglass

The beetle runs into the future. He takes to his heels in an action so frantic its flicker seems to possess the slowness of deep water. He has been green. He will be so yet.

- From Blues for Titania

The final quotation enlarges the phrasing of Langley's introductory "Note," first published in 1994, where running becomes a metaphor less for conscious composition than for the eerie volition of poems themselves: "Juan Fernandez," he says, "ran ahead of me well, feeling fit, keeping me surprised.... I don't write many poems, so each one has to be able to keep running, faster than I can, for as long as possible." The slow flicker of that weightily frantic beetle also evokes Langley's style, which has a way of sounding at once both urgent and curiously unurgent. A breathy swiftness of utterance—or is this silent and self-directed speech, a rapid mental flusker? — doesn't prevent more sculptured effects. The poet frames, underlines, points things out.

Given Langley's profession I do catch the teacher's accent in these lines, though the bad word "didactic" isn't relevant, not in the least. I also wonder how quickly, and with what emphasis, he should be read. The shaping is undeniable, as a duration is lifted out of the tingling instant and allowed to expand:

The wineglass stands fast in a

gale of sunlight, where there is one undamaged thistle seed caught on its rim, moving its long filaments through blue to orange, slowly exploring the glorious furniture.

- From Still Life with Wineglass

"Where" and "its" do much of the work here; these are subtle ligatures, intimate and unobtrusive. Perception is renovated and a field of force—Langley's own phrase, which I quote later—is acknowledged. Here the sentence elongates under scrutiny and the recognitions of the poet's wonderfully attentive ear. (Of its umpteen delicacies I would pick out the interaction of "stands fast" and "thistle," which ever so gently quashes that sandwiching st sound; also the lingering Keatsian richness of "caught," "long," "orange," "exploring," and "glorious.")

In this "Still Life" the interest in color is indeed painterly, and those "filaments" turn the thistle seed into a paintbrush moving along the palette or canvas. (These lines also recall Frank O'Hara's "Why I Am Not a Painter," which reaches a crescendo with the word "orange," and has the same lightly lineated look on the page.) As Langley writes in his aforementioned note, "every brushstroke changes the picture. If it's crimson it intensifies all the greens and there's the new problem in how to respond to that." In discussing him as both an experimentally vagarious and an immediately exciting poet, the parallel that suggests itself is with Howard Hodgkin, whose paintings seem abstract but, he insists, are actually representational — one should lift, as out of a magic-eye poster, the emotional situation of two lovers in embrace out of swoops of luscious color.

Langley extends a strand of pictorial writing (he's particularly fond of the word, and color tone, "cream") that develops out of the poet's journal, expresses a fascination with the overlap of casual prose with verse artistry, and is turned into publishable set-pieces by John Ruskin before it marvelously matures in the neglected notebooks of that queasily and deliciously Victorian-modern genius, Gerard Manley Hopkins. Langley's own *Journals* were published in 2006 by Shearsman, and extracts previously appeared in *PN Review*; these are private writings, "necessarily impromptu," says Langley, which have yet reached an audience through an intelligently understanding

magazine, and are pitched—like Hopkins's supposedly private jottings — at an understanding reader. In his preface, Langley mentions,

a series of journals that I have been keeping since the 1970s. During the years they cover my parents have died, I have been divorced and remarried, our two children have been born and have grown up, found jobs, left home.

Yet none of this is mentioned in the journals, which "are not the sort of journals that directly confront such things." So do they indirectly confront them, in their energized minute descriptions of birds, beasts, and flowers, so close to those of his verse, but also apprehending of the propensities and potentialities of prose? In August 1992: "So long since I wrote. A year. Who cares? What then? Little. Not really any better. No change after the journeying." Yet elsewhere those short sentences are, as in the verse, molecular wonders—"small flints crunch"; "the bent leaves are a sight I see"; "small flies tickle" — alert, like Ruskin and Hopkins, to the question of how, in a modern disenchanted universe, to "string all this together." December 25, 1970: "No sound of the snow except when you stand by bits of the hedge where oak leaves are thick, golden fawn, dry as chapattis, and broken like them, rather than torn, at their edges."

Here the oak, that most English of trees, is compared to an Indian flatbread—an ingenious and even cosmopolitan connection. As Homa Khaleeli writes in The Guardian, although Indian restaurants in England "multiplied in the 1950s and 60s to feed the newly arrived south Asian factory workers, their boom time only begun in the 70s, when they adapted their menus for a working-class, white clientele." So the journal observation is very much of its moment; and if I've lingered overlong on a tiny detail—race isn't one of Langley's subjects — it's because there does seem to be a cultural idea behind his community of particular details, sometimes harshly separate, and vanishing, but elsewhere unified. Langley also takes, I think, not only from nursery rhyme but also from Hopkins, his everyman "Jack," who first appears as "Man Jack" in Twelve Poems and later in a versesequence from the Collected Poems: "Jack built himself a house to hide in and / take stock"; "Jack meets/me and we go to see what we must do"; "There's Jack./A figure I imagine/I can see far off in a/dark library." And in "Tom Thumb":

We should accept the obvious facts of physics. The world is made entirely of particles in fields of force. Of course. Tell it to Jack. Except it doesn't seem to be enough tonight. Not because he's had his supper and the upper regions are cerulean, as they have been each evening since the rain.

This perspective isn't anti-scientific, but it does insist on the more than material, on a sense of universal being evasive of empirical explanation. "Tell it to Jack" is interesting, because the more clearly impatient "Tell that to Jack"—where Jack would represent the stalwart resister of such unspiritual blockheadedness—is the expected phrase. "It," which repeats, shows Langley playing with pronouns again, and it occurs to me (returning here to Noel-Tod's remark, that in his poetry "You, I, he, she, we, it are liable to take each other's place without warning") that not just an atomic universe but an atomized society is apprehended with sensitivity in his verse.

Langley's style (those short sentences; the darting doubt; recognition of beauty; the desire, as he puts it in "Tom Thumb," to "stop taking stock, and listen") would, then, be a style of cultural enquiry, into how disparate minds could possibly meet, or at least communicate. This is why, in that poem, Jack is said to have

involved himself in how the gnats above the chimney shared their worrying together, working out their troubles in a crowd. They must have done that every summer, all my life. Jack says he never saw them doing it till now.

Langley searches for, and postulates, uncommon experiences that may yet be held in common: "We leave unachieved in the/summer dusk. There was no/need for you rather than me"; "It is a common experience to come upon a/pale, glittering house set far back across/a meadow. It is certainly inside you." "The Gorgoneion," named for a protective and horrifying pendant with a gorgon's head on it, is rightly compared by Noel-Tod with Larkin's "Aubade." Yet Larkin describes of the pre-dawn hours a state of total isolation from both other people and the religious myths that once enlivened and made life meaningful. He speaks out of an Englishness entirely sure of the

hard bare facts of the matter denied by the weak, and skeptical of the suggestion that life among others could evince its own joyousness. Langley begins in the same darkness, but unlike Larkin he doesn't speak on behalf of a presumed "we," a cultural grouping that apparently shares the poet's opinions, and yet with whom he could never belong. He moves, instead, uncertain yet responsive, from "you" to "someone":

> Once more the menace of the small hours and of coming to light and of each sharper complication. There was a loosening which let much neglected detail out of the dark. You can't look away once it's started to move. This. Must. And so must this. In bitter little frills and hitches. About in a suspicious twiddle are the tips of someone's ten fingers which could, sometime, touch mine.

Larkin's poem is surer and for that reason the more spectacular. It knows what it knows. "I know/the sort of thing," says Langley, less convincingly, and more likeably. His isolato acknowledges, yet is skeptical of, his suffering. (Does a differently recognizable, unmelodramatic English voice lurk within these lines, saying tersely: "Mustn't complain"?) The poem cannot utterly embrace disaster given its saving recognition of the presence, the similitude in pain, of others: a both threatening and redemptive "touch." It ends: "a hand is laid down and /another turns itself upward to be clasped."

To say that C.H. Sisson is an "unfashionable" poet, as Charlie Louth and Patrick McGuinness do several times in their introduction to the new Reader, is to refuse the vulgar media criterion of, God help us, "relatability" - though the lucid back note does say that, published on the centenary of his birth, this book restores to us a writer who "speaks with clarity to the twenty-first century reader's expectations and discontents." Sisson is both different to us, then, and the same. A modernist conservative ("Toryism as defined by Johnson," he writes, "has almost always been a doctrine of opposition, and so it will remain") whose politics, in shrewdly sculpted essays on not just verse but culture more broadly, reveals a—the editors again—"specifically English suspicion of the grand scheme, the total plan, a willingness to work with what is fallen and imperfect."

Reading the prose collected here alongside the verse, I found myself repeatedly underlining effects of style, where patrician tonalities are renewed by a constant, conscious liveliness — Sisson remarks the priority of "rhythm" in verse, and understands its value in prose, too. On the style of Wyndham Lewis, whose work "is so intensely patterned that, starting from almost any sentence chosen at random, one could start an explanation which would not stop short of the completed *oeuvre*":

Not unrelated to the difficulties of using speech as the medium of political philosophy are the difficulties arising from those aspects of Lewis's writing which are called his personality. Not even Ben Jonson himself emitted a more obsessive penumbra. One is the presence of mannerisms, not unrelated to art, apparently as compulsive as the habit a woman might have of screwing up her handkerchief, or a swallow has of building, repeatedly, a certain sort of nest.

I'm afraid this is one of those hackneyed moments where the critic, me, says of the poet-critic writing of another—a skein of commentary tough to acknowledge without wincing—that he may as well be talking about himself. (Perhaps style is the outward struggle of our egotism, a hope that, in talking of ourselves, we may say with surety real things of others, too.) In Sisson's prose the mannerisms we might designate reductively, for the moment, "middle-class English," establish a tonal music: it reminds me of reading through and being ravished by the nature descriptions of Hopkins, wishing absent from his journals words like "delightfully," but coming to accept these Victorian social tics as inextricable features of his prose fabric, no less than his identity. The equivalents in Sisson may even be load-bearing.

The first sentence quoted is instantly donnish: "not unrelated to" has, like the querying of the label "personality," its air of fussy specification—not for Sisson, the inadvertence or vulgarity of direct statement. Yet there follows the contrarily forthright assumption that in discussing Lewis's prose along these lines, Ben Jonson is the

benchmark; "himself," which bridges unobtrusively the style and the man; and that self-consciously relished, and even overwritten close: does "obsessive" really belong, there, before "penumbra"? Stymied by Sisson's tortuousness, in my first reading of this passage I mistook the next clause for "One is in the presence of." In the presence of whom, I wondered - royalty? No one uses "one" quite like Sisson, and he appeared here to insist on proper respect before a figure of authority, on reading as an activation of exquisite proprieties. But I had in fact supplied—reading with the skimming eye, alas, not the hearing ear — the missing word in, which he didn't write.

"One" actually refers back to the "difficulties" arisen from "aspects of Lewis's writing." I missed this because of the intervening sentence about Jonson, for Sisson's gliding spoken drift doesn't pause to place that aside in parentheses. "Mannerisms"—though his own style makes the case for them - is possibly pejorative, so there's need of arch nuance: "not unrelated to art." "Apparently" is a social word, a tic of speech, which masks a depth/surface judgment about the value of Lewis's writing, and "compulsive" (pejorative again) is gradually redeemed, if not by the woman screwing up her handkerchief, then by the swallow "building, repeatedly" (another comma-ruffle!) its true nest. If there is a complexity to Sisson's politics, so difficult to pin down, because of its coarse coding today but also his own elusiveness, it must inhere in, inhabit, his curated style.

At least this is what I would like to believe, for if one tots up more simply the grumpy propositions a less sympathetic figure emerges. I've starred with my pencil Sisson's various objections: to our "age," in which "a certain sloppiness goes into the general conception of art, and nowhere more than in Anglo-Saxondom," and "fashions now well up from the lower orders, happily supplied with money to indulge their fancy in a world of mass-produced gew-gaws"; to "that rubbish of imaginary rights which are conceived of as a sort of metaphysical property of each individual"; and all in all "the great obligatory truths of the left, which all decent people" — you can hear the sneer — "take without choking: put compendiously, a belief in the harmony of democracy, large-scale organization, and individual self-expression." He confronts "the idiotic dogmatist of the permissive," thinks "the word 'democracy' is now so full of air that it is about to burst," and claims that the "ease of technology will, in any case, in the end produce a race of diminishing consciousness, for whom the only persuasion is by force." He describes Edward

Thomas's wife and children, with a typically coat-trailing remark, as among the "natural objects" that tutored him, and there is an essay here praising the work of Montgomery Belgion, the anti-Semitic essayist whose opinions, published in *The Criterion*, have damaged the reputation of T.S. Eliot and were indeed taken by some commentators for those of Eliot himself. You don't want to believe Sisson is a crypto-fascist—"this brand of conservative cultural politics... does not tarry with the radical right," insist Louth and McGuinness—but in this case he doesn't do himself any favors.

He is also, however, anti-economistic, a now attractive position: an excerpt from The Case of Walter Bagehot makes the case against the "shadow republic" of high finance. It's unsurprising that previously, yes, "unfashionable" writers like Sisson and F.R. Leavis now seem possible spokespeople: the humanities feel the need of selfdefense, and imagination-confounding wealth disparities reveal a society drastically in need of restructuring. We want something else, something better, but seem to have pledged ourselves, and those who theorize on behalf of culture, quality, and, in short, art — who have defended the sensibility of, often, an unhappy few against the beancounters and their death of a thousand cuts - tend to arrive with a good deal of reactionary baggage in tow. For if you don't believe in capital, what form of (intangible, non-empirical, snobby) currency do you endorse? Fine, Sisson is reactionary, but can we, intent on preserving, through our attentions to literature, the radical thought of past ages, be so sure that the spirit of the age, iPhone in hand, doesn't understand us, too, as culturally conservative?

Many who, in a more rational system,
Would be thought mad if they behaved as they do in this one
Are obsessed by the more insidious forms of property:
They buy and sell merchandise they will never see,
Hawking among Wren's churches, and, if they say their prayers,
Say them, without a doubt, to stocks and shares.

That's "The London Zoo," a longish poem published in 1961 but still absolutely on the money in its jibes at economic "rationality" and the unquestioning faith in funds that turn out, to the detriment of all but the super-rich, to not exist. One might not agree with Sisson that the church provides any longer an intact alternative, but it's hard to read this variously dated and hyper-relevant, both mannered and

scorchingly immediate, poem without longing for the return to the poetic scene of full-blown (rather than knowingly compromised, complicit, self-deprecating) satire:

Out on the platform like money from a cashier's shovel The responsible people fall at the end of their travel. Some are indignant that their well-known faces Are not accepted instead of railway passes; Others faithfully produce the card by which the authorities Regulate the movement of animals in great cities. With growing consciousness of important function Each man sets out for where he is admired most. The one room in London where everything is arranged To enlarge his importance and deaden his senses. The secretary who awaits him has corrected her bosom; His papers are in the disorder he has chosen. Anxieties enough to blot out consciousness Are waiting satisfactorily on his desk.

The influence of Eliot and The Waste Land (a poem, writes Sisson, healing the pejorative again, of "decisive novelty") is strong here in both content and form; couplets clobberingly arrive, others are strangled in the cradle, as Pound did with "The Fire Sermon." But the key word is "consciousness," which occurs twice: first as a type of bad self-regard, and then as a given, obscured by false anxieties. It's a concept Sisson returns to in both verse and criticism. For him, "consciousness — as is not perhaps widely understood — is purely traditional," a "product of history." It is what anchors us in time and place and answers to the more parochial side of the poet's thinking: "You cannot be Plato in Bechuanaland or George Herbert in Connecticut," he says, sounding, himself, weirdly like Wallace Stevens. But Sisson also requires of poetry that it should not be willful or calculated, and explains his turn to translation as a defense against "the embarrassing growth of the area of consciousness" that imperils original creation. He quotes, and appears to agree with, Shelley's revolutionary contention (you couldn't, on first glance, imagine two thinkers or writers so far apart) that poetry "is not subject to the control of the active powers of the mind, and that its birth and recurrence have no necessary connexion with the consciousness or will." "So much," remarks Sisson drolly, "for recording that moment

when Philip Larkin got up for a piss"; and you could argue that his baffled talk of "consciousness" represents only a cripplingly English self-consciousness trying to outwit its own hampering borders, and a weapon to be used, in this case, against the "journalistic" verse he happens to dislike. (He does sound like Larkin, whatever he claims: "Now I am forty I must lick my bruises/What has been suffered cannot be repaired/I have chosen what whoever grows up chooses/A sickening garbage that could not be shared.") But Sisson also follows Shelley to the point of rejecting conventional notions of identity, and writes in "My Life and Times":

So damn the individual touch Of which the critics make so much; Remember that the human race Grins more or less in every face.

Characteristically acid—"more or less"—these lines nevertheless present a poetics, and an ethics, heartening in its confusions. Not a tepid universalism but an agonized thinking of individuals as centerless extrusions from different places, soiled by alternative parishes with the dirt of selfhood.

Despite a few early squibs, Sisson really began writing verse while serving in India during WWII, and there's a relevant poem here, "In Time of Famine: Bengal," about, apparently, a starving beggar-child:

I do not say this child
This child with grey mud
Plastering her rounded body
I do not say this child
For she walks poised and happy
But I say this
Who looks in at the carriage window
Her eyes are big
Too big
Her hair is touzled and her mouth is doubtful
And I say this
Who lies with open eyes upon the pavement
Can you hurt her?
Tread on those frightened eyes
Why should it frighten her to die?

This is a fault This a fault in which I have a part.

This isn't an entirely successful poem, but I quote it in full since its unsuccess — all those thistly and unyieldingly separate pronouns; the poised and happy, specific child, overlaid with a conventional fantasia of poverty and domination — does reflect Sisson's concern with consciousness and the individual and how these concepts or categories give to airy nothing only a local habitation and a name. It's one of Sisson's poems that refuses or at least troubles everyday syntax and grammar, it splinters and repeats; the later work isn't always so obvious about it, but still looks, stop-start and cautious, in more than one direction. Although he wouldn't be impressed by my leap from literary form to politics—"the world is changing fast, and not even formal rhyme-schemes will save us from this," quips Sisson—it does seem to me that the conservative poet's belief, like that of Edmund Burke, in the slow organic growth of an irresistible culture, sits oddly, if at all, with his more periodic, oblique, fractured verse. "It is as if Eliot would not yield to the muse until he had tested all that rationality could do for him" and this opinion-clad civil servant, essayist, and editor would also follow his embattled sense of nationality, his prickly, perhaps merely prickly, architectures of contumely, into the void:

> Alone But to say "alone" would be to give validity To a set of perceptions which are nothing at all — A set as these words are Set down Meaninglessly on paper, by nobody. — From The Desert

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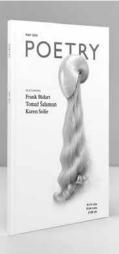
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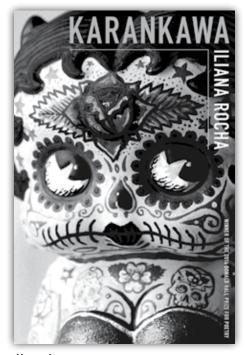
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Poetry Off the Shelf, a weekly podcast, explores the diverse world of contemporary American poetry. Check out the recent conversation between Roger Reeves and Hannah Gamble.

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