

## Nurturing the “Right” Nature: Environmental Poetics and Pedagogies

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**Abstract** *Poetry has long been employed as a vehicle for protest and, with environmental concerns developing on a daily basis, ‘environmentally-conscious’ guides to writing nature poetry (or ‘ecopoetry’) are increasing in number. Yet do these exercises proposed by educators raise responsibility, or merely recognition, of contemporary environmental issues? This paper seeks to answer this question by making a comparative study of the chief literary modes and poetic devices prescribed by these pedagogies - such as protest, mimesis and metaphor. Employing key ecocritical texts to critique the theoretical intentions behind the guides, and contemporary nature poetry to illustrate their potential outcomes, this paper highlights the divergent vocabularies of environmental poetry and environmental policy.*

Felstiner’s introduction to *Can Poetry Save the Earth?* considers the place of poetry in relation to the environmental crisis ‘[r]ealistically’ and asks ‘what can poetry say, much less do, about global warming, seas rising, species endangered [...] and so on and on? Well, next to nothing. “Poetry” and “policy” make an awkward half-rhyme at best.’ (7). ‘Yet’, Felstiner continues, ‘next to nothing would still be something’. After such candid argument this compromise seems to come at the expense of poetry as Felstiner draws attention to ‘an awkward *half-rhyme*’ rather than a device inherent to ‘policy’ (my emphasis).

Nonetheless, Jonathan Bate joins Felstiner to ask ‘[c]ould the poet be a keystone sub-species of *Homo sapiens*? The poet: an apparently useless creature, but potentially the saviour of ecosystems.’ (327). Although Bate focuses on the place of the ‘poet’ whilst Felstiner concentrates on the place of ‘poetry’, obsolescence is confessed to in both. ‘[W]hat can poetry say, *much less do*’ asks Felstiner as Bate calls the poet ‘an apparently *useless* creature’ (my emphases). These comments appear to acknowledge both poet and poetry as overlooked by today’s society. Whilst it would be an exaggeration to equate society’s neglect of poetry with society’s neglect of the environment, and to call poets a ‘species endangered’ thereby, it is still somewhat accurate to admit the position of poetry is threatened by its waning readership. Thus the poet who believes in Bate’s statement, that he or she can become an environmental ‘saviour’, faces two tasks in balancing poetry and policy: firstly how to pitch work successfully to a wide, if not world-wide audience; secondly how to inspire this potential crowd with a consciousness of ‘water and air polluted, wilderness road-ridden, rain-forests razed, along with strip mining and mountaintop removal, clearcutting, overfishing[...]’ (Felstiner 7).

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With these tasks in mind, this paper will explore the various roles of the poet prescribed in contemporary guides to writing nature poetry (otherwise referred to as nature writing guides throughout this paper). Whilst interrogating the range of approaches that prompt the poet towards a 'saviour of ecosystems', consideration will be given as to whether an environmental message could pollute poetry (and vice-versa) in this 'awkward' drive to force 'poetry' and '[p]olicy' together.

An interesting first example of a nature writing guide comes from Mario Petrucci, an Italian but British-based poet. 'The Green Poetry Pack' is intended for teachers and individual writers of all ages, and is endorsed by The Poetry Society. Within it Petrucci gathers model poems and writing exercises that range from the brief '[a]re we an integral part of nature, or do we simply use it? Write a poem in response'(2), to longer guides aimed to ruffle a few feathers. Indeed, Petrucci provides his own poem, 'Windmill', to lead a particularly contentious exercise. His windmill invites

Crank me up and I'll recycle kilowatt-hours

from the gas of every good intention.

How? Don't fret! It'll be a breeze –

just get MPs to talk in my direction. (7).

Petrucci states of his own poem '[a]s well as a certain amount of humour and pathos, the poem provides a base from which to raise awareness of local history and developmental issues'(2). The exercise goes on to guide the would-be nature poet in constructing a similar 'base':

[y]ou are a journalist. You have heard that your local windmill is going to be bulldozed to make way for a new development (e.g. a shopping mall). List the advantages and disadvantages of saving the windmill[...]It helps if there is strong "human interest" in your story, and lots of provocative quotes[...] After the role play has ended, compose a poem of your own on any of the issues raised. (3).

Petrucci's approach replaces the role of the poet with 'a journalist' and replaces poetry with creative non-fiction. Consequently Petrucci appears to value the thought-processes of policy over poetry ('compose a poem' comes like an afterthought).

This top-heavy relationship between policy and poetry is noticeable throughout the opportunistically named 'Green Poetry Pack'. Yet simultaneously, Petrucci's attitude to policy is not sustained. Petrucci inadvertently presents a jumbled manifesto in 'The Pack' that is riddled with loopholes. For instance, not only does Petrucci assume the poet will follow his own model and list more 'advantages' than disadvantages to save the windmill, but whilst doing so Petrucci fails to pay attention to the windmill as an example of successful technology before he ridicules all technology in later exercises because it 'falls short of matching the primary functions of natural species' (4).

In the context of Earth's expanding technological and man-made environments, Dana Phillips has made a suggestion as to what the place of the poet should be. Overthrowing early ecocritical arguments on nature versus culture, Phillips advises the poet to engage with both – and to refuse an 'awakening from the metropolitan dream' (Buell 82) for awakening 'ignores the fact that our understanding of the environment has come about through the

disruption of nature by agriculture and industrialism and the concomitant rise of science.’ (Philips 598).

Indeed, in *The Truth of Ecology* Phillips upholds A. R. Ammons’ *Garbage* as a model poem with such an ‘understanding’ that consistently engages with culture as nature. After all ‘[i]n the garbage dump, one set of qualities is composted back into the other, and culture becomes natural again, not by means of epiphany but through [...] less visionary processes.’ (244).

Perhaps a British equivalent to Ammons would be Roy Fisher who superimposes stages of Birmingham’s development to parallel the narrative of a natural cycle in *A Furnace*. ‘Kentish Road,/Belmont, Paddington, Malvern – just now caught up and lacquered/as Urban Renewal’ snake over the derelict sites of ‘foundries’ and ‘stamping mills’ (Fisher 13-14). So like Fisher’s city or Ammons’ garbage dump, technology could also appear as ‘an organism with a life of its own’ (Wills 270) and to favour certain types of technology and dismiss others (as Petrucci does) would be the equivalent of preferring the rose and not the wildflower; the butterfly and not the earthworm. In other words, whether natural or artificial, each thing contributes to ‘our understanding of the environment’ today.

Yet if guides to nature writing were to prescribe ‘encoding something perennial and entering Nature thereby’ (Fisher 12), the poet could potentially relate such large-scale ‘disruption [...] by agriculture and industrialism and the concomitant rise of science’ that nature (with a lower-case n) would appear long gone, as in recent post-apocalyptic films. Furthermore, concentration on such ‘disruption’ could be seen to generate a kind of *mean* poetry that aims to help society keep environmentally *clean*. Like the poetry in *Earth Shattering*, this approach would surely return poems ‘to alert and alarm anyone willing to read or listen’ (15) rather than allow the reader to take pleasure in them. Whilst *Garbage* may aim to galvanise ‘modern humanity’ not to ‘wallow helplessly in its literal and figurative garbage but find a way to make it meaningful and the future possible’ (DiCiccio 5), Ammons risks simply rubbing the reader’s nose in the enduring mess we have made of

disposable diapers, good to last

five hundred years: cute little babies’ shit (61)

Alongside these risks, sometimes a mere awareness of ‘disruption’ ‘spoils the world for you’ as Ted Hughes admits in ‘his greening as a poet’ when interviewed by Forde.

To begin with I wasn’t too worried and when I wasn’t too aware of it and when these rivers were pretty full of fish they were just paradisa. ...but now I look at these rivers and it’s just like looking at a sort of dying relative. You can no longer see them as they were...(148)

Although Ammons concentrates on the synthetic endurance of ‘diapers’ to rouse environmental action, all incentive diminishes with a looming inevitability when Hughes questions the enduring nature of rivers by comparing them to a ‘dying relative’. Contrary to reckoning ‘in the very asshole of comedown is/redemption (Ammons 21), Hughes’ “fall” provides no potential redemption to Edenic perspective. In such a situation the role of the poet as a ‘saviour of ecosystems’ would surely benefit by waking from ‘the metropolitan dream’. In so doing, the poet might be able to return to nature as ‘paradisa’ and therefore return to a nature worth saving (instead of mourning it in a premature eulogy). Consequently, the poet-cum-saviour’s task of inspiring a consciousness of nature ‘razed’ by man could benefit by taking a different stance and inspiring a consciousness of nature to be

valued by man. At the very least this would avoid poetry becoming, primarily, a chastising medium.

Responding to this argument, John Felstiner refers to Denise Levertov's 'In California' as a poem that 'moves through both possibilities' (personal communication). Whilst paying attention to 'the whole sky,/vast, unstinting' (33-34), and 'the malls, the industrial parks' (38), Levertov's poem pivots on a question within a question. 'Who can utter/the praise of such generosity/or the shame?' (41-43) regarding this 'fragile paradise' (32) which 'persists in beauty' (46) despite man's 'destructive construction' (23). If the first question is resolved by the role of poets (as Bate and Felstiner suggest) then Levertov's second question seems to ask whether they should 'utter [...] praise' or 'shame'. As suggested by the nature writing guides so far, the poet could grab a protest board and stand glaring at 'the Developer [...] peering at the field through a visor' provoking 'shame'. Or, on the other hand, the poet could return to nature like 'the mice in the field [...] listening to the Universe, and moving in the body of nature' in order to find its 'generosity' (Hughes 130).

Most nature writing guides, with the exception of Petrucci's, do not really suggest the former. In the exercises that comprise *The Alphabet of the Trees* a rally for 'return' is evident. Despite being written from a range of American educators, each text guides the poet to re-engage with nature's 'generosity'; to 're-engage us with what we know in some distant way, but find ourselves increasingly estranged from' (Hermesen 242).

'A Great Excuse to Stare' is an exercise with such a premise. Sarah Rabkin, a teacher at the University of California, states that 'teaching writing [...] is teaching philosophy, citizenship, and ethics' that will engage students with 'a sustainable way of relating, not only to other people, but also to the planet that nourishes us all.' (88). Rabkin continues to explain this 'relating' is her reason for writing; 'to awaken to a bit of the world as it comes alive to me'. This utters the foundation for her exercise that manages to slip past Phillips' denial of awakening 'from the metropolitan dream', to attempt a re-engagement with a wholly natural environment through 'staring'.

Yet this 'staring' could seem comparable 'to the developer peering at the field through a visor', especially as Rabkin bases her idea on an approach from a colleague who advises her art students to 'see the world and snag it and make it their own' (88, my emphases). But Rabkin advises an unassuming stance. Quoting her colleague once more, Rabkin warns '[w]hat we've memorized before can actually get in the way of what we see now' and advises that an environmental representation should be based 'on what you see, not what you think you know.' (89). Consequently, Rabkin's exercise shrinks from subjectivity to objectivity: from ego to ecological 'integrity' (87), and as Rabkin parallels her colleague's teaching on a Science Illustration Program, Rabkin's exercise moves increasingly towards advocating an impersonal, realist style.

A similar approach is taken in Bruchac's exercise: 'The Land Keeps Talking to Us'. Bruchac recommends a 'literal' (32) rendition of the environment, not via 'staring' like Rabkin, but through listening the poet can re-engage with nature. The poet's 'job is to listen and to absorb, to accept whatever is about to be given to them', to 'write down the sound of a bird song, [...] to try a "translation" into English from the language of nature.' (33).

But,

[...] what do you

mean teaching school (teaching poetry and

poetry writing and wasting your time painting  
sober little organic, meaningful pictures)  
when values thought lost (but only scrambled into  
disengagement) lie around demolished (Ammons 13)

Such an interrogation of the 'sober little organic [...] pictures' these nature writing guides prescribe provides a useful prompt to argue against realist depictions.

In *Can Poetry Save the Earth?* Felstiner heralds Gary Snyder as a poet with an 'Eye for the Real World' and for poems that document nature he 'saw as real' (344). Praised for letting go of the Romantic 'I', like a Zen Buddhist, Snyder is 'nothing himself' (140) in such a poem as 'Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout' collected in *Riprap*:

Down valley a smoke haze  
Three days heat, after five days rain  
Pitch glows on the fir-cones  
Across rocks and meadows  
Swarms of new flies (1-5)

Felstiner draws on this text as an example of poetry that can save the Earth. He commends Snyder's economic representation of ecology: '[f]rugality guides this poem' (346) in a world where our increasing appetite has landed us with garbage. Yet by using a 'sober', realist approach Snyder is aware, in *Back on the Fire*, that he may create 'plain poems' that 'run the risk of invisibility.' (67). Indeed, the passage from 'Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout' could be compared to a photograph readers skip across in a copy of *National Geographic*. Yet, Felstiner argues, by taking 'no needless adjectives' Snyder creates an atmosphere where 'one verb draws us close, illumining an immense vista' (344), and Snyder concurs - explaining that by 'seeing the world *without* any prism of language' he can 'bring that seeing *into* language.' (67).

Thus the order of language to looking is reversed: instead of finding language to fit the world, Snyder attempts to fit the world into language. Snyder's explanation somewhat complements Heidegger's philosophical notion of 'poiesis' as 'bringing-forth into presence' (Bate 253), which ecocriticism has embraced as a theoretical structure. Indeed, Bate aligns himself with Heidegger's own question and asks '[w]hat are poets for?' (252). After demonstrating, and experimenting with, various interrogations of language by Heidegger, Bate anticipates that 'we need poets to do the work of dwelling' (231). Thus as Snyder manages to fit 'an immense vista' into 'one verb', poets employing a similar language of *da-sein* (or 'being-there' as Bate translates, 253), could realise environments so that 'by reading them, by inhabiting them, we can start to imagine what it might be like to live differently upon the earth' (Bate 251).

Bate's notion of 'inhabiting' poems is pleasant but appears insubstantial especially in the context of his earlier notion of the poet as a 'saviour of ecosystems'. Whilst the world suffers

from 'overdevelopment, overpopulation' (Felstiner 7), the idea of dwelling comfortably in a poem such as Snyder's would appear ironic. Although Snyder's 'sober little organic, meaningful picture' has pitched well to a wide (even world-wide) audience, such description falls short of rousing an imagination into wondering 'what it might be like to live differently upon the earth'. Perhaps partly responsible is Snyder's meditative approach as 'nothing himself'. By denying an 'I', Snyder becomes as objective as a camera and this returns the comparison of 'Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout' to a photograph, or a wildlife documentary's establishing shot. In turn, Snyder's poetry could be seen to provide an image of nature that can be ignored and ultimately switched off from. Furthermore, by employing such a direct, realist approach Snyder could be misinterpreted as overlooking all need for humans to 're-engage' with nature, despite his Buddhist leanings.

Thus the poet is still not quite with 'the mice in the field': instead of 'moving in the body of nature', the poet remains outside, observing it. However, other exercises in *The Alphabet of the Trees* such as Christian McEwen's 'O Taste and See!' refuse methods such as Rabkin's, and in doing so find more constructive processes to let the poet be a part, not apart, of nature. Developing the argument on the effect of the wildlife documentary above, with a solution of sorts, McEwen reasons

[a]gain and again, teachers of nature writing emphasize the value of "close-looking" [...] but for many children, reared on the exotic close-ups of the TV nature documentary, such local moments can seem thoroughly humdrum. They are simply not interested, either in the natural world, or in their own ability to describe it. One of the best exercises I know for counteracting such an attitude is, quite simply, pretending to be blind. (100)

McEwen continues with an account of the exercise put into action. In partners, one student covered 'his or her eyes with the bandana, while the other was to act as guide' to find anything from 'a feather, a leaf' to 'a piece of bark' for the "blind" student (101). The effect, writes one of McEwen's "blind" students in an acrostic poem,

Brings extra feeling to your other senses  
Like being  
In the middle of a dream.  
Nothing you can see or  
Do but trust (102)

So rather than a group of passive students resembling the 'romantic poet (or tourist, for that matter) [who] desires to be spoken to', so as to 'accept whatever is about to be given to them' by the natural world (McKay 27), McEwen fosters an active curiosity in her students to go into nature themselves. Consequently, the students are distracted from 'snag[ging]' or framing nature through the camera lens of the eye, thereby heightening their remaining senses. By attuning touch, smell, sound (and perhaps taste) towards nature, the place of the poet would seem to move from the place of the 'tourist' to the intrinsically instinctive and 'trust[ing]' place of the 'mice [...] listening to the Universe'.

Holly Masturzo adopts a similar stance to McEwen in pointing out the problems with a realist approach. She borrows from Viktor Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose* to introduce her guide to nature writing (132).

After being perceived several times, objects acquire the status of “recognition”. An object appears before us. We know it’s there but we do not see it, and, for that reason, we can say nothing about it...The achievement of art is the transformation of the object, describing it as though for the first time, communicating its particularities... (6)

Adopting Shklovsky’s argument here suggests that trees and streams, by their endurance and familiarity, are also ‘objects’ that ‘acquire “recognition”’. McEwen’s reasoning as to why we may view nature as ‘thoroughly humdrum’ is then supported. By seeing nature everyday ‘we do not see it’, ‘we can say nothing about’ nature: we can say nothing to save it. But this is not to imply that a better way of ‘communicating’ the natural world would consist of contradicting nature’s perseverance by representing trees and streams as rare or extinct. Whilst Susan Stewart has experimented effectively with a ‘disappearing’ (2) environment in ‘The Forest’, Hughes’ account of the ‘dying’ rivers has found this approach unhelpful. Instead, Shklovsky suggests a ‘transformation of the object [...] describing it as though for the first time’. This regard for fresh description leads to a deeper understanding as to why Snyder’s poem risks ‘invisibility’. For if Snyder’s objects, such as the vista, fit directly into words then his words are in danger of also acquiring ‘the status of “recognition”’. A way of counteracting this is demonstrated in McEwen’s exercise that denies sight and therefore allows other senses to generate fresh descriptions. This results, paradoxically, in ‘a vision’ of the natural world ‘rather than mere “recognition”’.

After quoting Shklovsky, Masturzo then explains how she guides writing nature poetry with *The Butterfly Alphabet*: a book comprised of a series of photographs; each a close-up of a butterfly’s wing that reveals in its pattern a letter of the alphabet. Before showing the book to her students she asks ‘[h]ow many of you have ever seen something in the shadows of the moon? Or shapes in the clouds?’ (134). With these questions and *The Butterfly Alphabet* Masturzo instigates a relationship between culture and nature that is less obvious and less top-heavy than those introduced by Petrucci or Ammons. Masturzo’s students are encouraged to look into nature, and rather than finding it recognisably ‘humdrum’, they see something of themselves looking back. The exercise continues by asking the students to create their own butterfly wings with spots of ink on paper. Afterwards, the students write about what they see in their pictures. The only rule is that they must use ‘[w]ith my artist’s eyes I see’ before their description. This is a useful device as the line becomes a concession for ‘vision’: with such a line the students acquire an artistic license. Yet whilst experimenting with abstraction, the students also ‘discover that concrete description and details, like those in more “scientific” observations, are what help to communicate our associative visions to others.’ (135).

This guidance takes into account the need, previously highlighted, for engaging with the real world and communicating it to a wide audience. Indeed, on a much larger scale than Masturzo’s ‘details’, Terry Gifford appeals for poetry to use the ‘new vocabulary’ of ‘scientific content’ (10). Owing to poetry’s indirect, sidelong quality this question returns the problematic relationship between poetry and policy. Gifford’s inquiry may stem from his reading of Ted Hughes’ ‘Lobby Under the Carpet’ [sic] which selectively quotes Hughes’ inclusion of scientific statistics: ‘a 40% drop/in the sperm count of all Western Males’. And yet, whilst inclusion of this ‘data’ allows the poem to vacillate between environmental recognition and responsibility even Gifford concedes that it ‘failed as poetry due to the difficulty of finding an appropriate form.’ (147).

This criticism about ‘form’ chimes with the problem relating to Petrucci’s exercises that guide the poet into becoming ‘a journalist’. When Petrucci asks whether it would be a better

option to save a windmill rather than build 'a shopping mall', any response is limited to present facts and opinions. Perhaps if Petrucci's poet became a historian instead, a new dimension of environmental consciousness could be uncovered regarding the windmill site. For example, in 'A Matter of Scale' John Tallmadge requests a different kind of 'data' by asking each student to 'research the history of the land on which they live [...] going back at least 10,000 years' before they write anything (65).

Alternatively, environmental questions like these can become the 'form' for a poem as Wertsch's exercise illustrates. Whilst understanding the need for concrete detail, she elaborates upon journalism's "Five W's" and reminds '[i]n addition to Who? What? When? Where? How?, there are also Is it true? Does it seem? Have you ever? Will I?' (170). Pursuing Masturzo's focus on 'transformation', Wertsch encourages students to write questions rather than fact-based answers to widen imaginative scope. Her exercise, 'What Is the Voice That Whispers?', is based on *The Book of Questions* by Pablo Neruda. She gives this example of his work.

In the middle of autumn  
do you hear yellow explosions?

By what reason or injustice  
does the rain weep its joy?

Which birds lead the way  
when the flock takes flight?

From what does the hummingbird hang  
its dazzling symmetry? (47)

Such an approach forces rather than warns against '[w]hat we've memorized before [...] what you think you know' and favours the unknown rather than recorded 'data'. The following text is by a student who followed the exercise:

How can a path be truly neglected when it is used all the time by deer and  
foxes? [...]

Will this place of wonders be here forever? (171)

These questions release nature held in "recognition" through fresh and inquisitive enquiries using both abstract and concrete - but not scientific - language. To return to the idea that words can also 'acquire the status of "recognition"', questions such as these arrange familiar words in unfamiliar ways. The phrase 'a neglected path' is transformed by questioning its authenticity with the juxtaposition of 'deer and foxes'.



Comprising 'deer' and 'wonders' this exercise aims to create a balancing act between the tangible and intangible. This same balancing act yields an interesting result within Phillips' examination of a non-fictional piece in light of *adéquation*: 'a literary equivalence that respects the thing and lets it stand forth' (Paul 19). Phillips criticises Buell for interpreting this seemingly Heideggerian notion as 'equivalence'; as 'an activity in words that is *literally* comparable to the thing itself' (my emphasis, Phillips 587 on Buell 98). This is because Phillips takes 'adéquation' to mean an *impression* through language that 'skirt[s] the edges of realism'. Finding this relevant to Peterson's factual description and drawing of a chickadee in *A Field Guide*, Phillips explains the effect produced.

The "stylized image" has not put the user of the guide in touch with the environment, as Buell argues. In this instance, quite the reverse has happened: the environment has put the user of the guide in touch with the "stylized image". And that "transaction", as Buell calls it, in turn puts her to considering another stylized image, and yet another, while she returns, now and again, to the environment for fresh impressions. Every transaction entails further action. She is going to have to engage in a lot of this back-and-forth between text and world, and world and text; between "stylized image" and bird, and bird and "stylized image" if she really wants to know what kind of chickadee she saw. (595-596)

This constant act of comparison is even more understandable when Phillips then quotes Peterson's explanation of his "stylized image" where

form and feathering is eliminated where it can be managed, so that simple contour and pattern remain. Even color is often an unnecessary, if not, indeed, a confusing, factor. (19)

Thus by using an image that skirts the edge of mimesis; an image that hinges between realism and abstraction, Peterson inspires more questions than answers for the user of the guide. Consequently, whilst Neruda's poem is not entirely applicable to 'adéquation', the poem does eliminate a complete sense of "knowing" and thereby questions more than it answers, prompting an engagement of 'transaction [...] between text and world, and world and text'. 'By what reason or injustice/does the rain weep its joy?' Is the rain *really* weeping its joy? Return 'to the environment for fresh impressions'.

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Can poetry save the earth? For sure, person by person, our earthly challenge hangs on the sense and spirit that poems can awaken. (Felstiner 357).

Felstiner's closing lines are somewhat anti-climactic. 'For sure' does not impart confidence and the notion that 'our earthly challenge hangs on [...] poems' appears embarrassingly forgetful of the ever-expanding work of scientists worldwide. Indeed, it is unlikely, if not impossible, the poet will ever be a 'saviour of ecosystems', least of all the Earth. Yet in these last words Felstiner suggests he has found an answer to the place of poetry in regard to policy. Poetry is to 'awaken'. Expanding on such a suggestion, Denise Levertov explains '[i]n so far as poetry has a social function it is to awaken sleepers by other means than shock.' (412).

However, in certain approaches to nature writing (like Petrucci's 'provocative' Windmill exercise, or in Ammons' *Garbage*) shock is either prescribed or present in the very nature of

the poem. Perhaps a reason for this is that the style of communication environmental policy lends can overburden the often subtler style of communication through poetry. Or as Gifford explains: the 'urgency override[s] the aesthetics' (10). So rather than a poem nudging a 'sleeper' awake to natural value, such policy-heavy approaches slap or pour cold water over a sleeper's head in order to raise consciousness of 'our earthly challenge'.

Nevertheless, nature writing exercises by McEwen, Masturzo and Wertsch are not so policy-heavy. Their sense of policy manages to slip into a poetic, not political, vocabulary. This is particularly evident in Masturzo's cultivation of metaphors in 'With My Artist's Eyes I See...'. Appropriately for an environmental crisis, 'metaphor is a way of understanding hidden connections, of reunifying the world which scientific understanding has fragmented.' (Bate 247).

Underpinning this notion of 'connection' is the very derivation of 'metaphor': "to transfer", or "carry beyond". In connecting details of human culture to the non-human world of nature (as in Masturzo's exercise) a more promising realization of Bate's hope that poets can help humanity 'imagine what it might be like to live', if not look, 'differently upon the earth'.

Indeed, the idea that the 'goal of Revolution is Transformation' recurs (Snyder 'Poetry and the Primitive' 60). It is evident from Shklovsky's argument that transformation can release objects from the dull state of "recognition". Certainly, this continues through McEwen's and Wertsch's exercises where a revolution in perspective is encouraged through releasing control and knowledge of natural objects respectively. Being blindfolded, for instance, weakens (if not reverses) the traditional position of human dominance over nature. Additionally, questioning nature like Neruda seems to free nature, to some extent, from humanity's 'assumption that the mind can, without much self-examination, directly and objectively "know" whatever it looks at' (Snyder 'Unnatural Writing' 257). Thus nature poets can abandon the approach Genesis takes towards a relationship with nature that aims to

have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and  
over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that  
creepeth over the earth.

Instead, the nature poet may help return a

natural curiosity which is the daughter of ignorance and the mother of  
knowledge, and which, opening the mind of man, gives birth to wonder.  
(Vico 13).

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