



CLIMATE CHANGES GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Lena Pfeifer,
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Climate Changes Global Perspectives

Challenges of Modernity I

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Catrin Gersdorf and

MaryAnn Snyder-Körber

The Challenges of Modernity publication series provides a platform for innovative and engaged scholarship in the humanities.

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Climate Changes Global Perspectives

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As the symposium took root in the nascent Environmental Humanities cluster at the University of Würzburg, Catrin Gersdorf generously agreed to shepherd this collaborative endeavor to its ends. It was Catrin Gersdorf who broadened and deepened the critical work we carry out here with mentorship and recourse to an expansive personal network, which included our keynote speakers and discussion group leaders Heather Houser (University of Texas, Austin), Hannes Bergthaller (National Taiwan Normal University), Louis Mendy (Cheikh Anta Diop University), Michaela Fenske (University of Würzburg), Catriona Sandilands (York University), and Susan Morrison (Texas State University). Coming into conversation with such dedicated scholars anchored this symposium in critical conversations central to the field and an ethics of care that permeated both the symposium and our approach to this volume.

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Würzburg 2022

Lena Pfeifer
Molina Klingler
Hannah Nelson-Teutsch

Preface

Catrin Gersdorf and MaryAnn Snyder-Körber

Challenges of Modernity is a publication series, but yet more fundamentally a project of expressly ‘engaged’ inquiry in humanities scholarship, pedagogy, and writing practices.

First, the series proceeds from the model of an *Engaged Humanities*. Much ink has been spilled (and, more recently, tweeting energy expended) on the promises and perils of what is generally known as ‘activist scholarship’ (see, for example, June and Sider). Such discussions are hardly limited to one discipline, tradition, or institutional framework of higher education. Nonetheless, one often has the feeling as an American Studies scholar working in German academia that this particular position places you in the path of quite a bit of that ink.

Why is this so? Answers tend to focus on the tensions between supposedly ‘interested’ versus ideally ‘disinterested’ approaches to scholarship. This tension is consequently figured as a smash-up between American Studies as the incarnation of agit-propping interest, on the one hand, and the German university as an Immanuel Kant-quoting, Max Weber-invoking higher ground of impartiality, on the other. As with all caricatures, the scenario is overdrawn, but not wholly untruthful. American Studies began as a project of resistance to what the midcentury scholar Henry Nash Smith termed “‘academism’ or the detachment of scholarship from public life” (Deloria and Olson 84). The aim of attaching scholarly inquiry to ongoing real-world dynamics, along with a multidisciplinary approach, has made American Studies a ready ally and, at times, a partner for further scholarly formations energized by movement-based social activism and intent on academic institution building. Native American Studies, African American Studies, Women’s Studies, and LGBTQ+ Studies constitute only an initial short list of fields that from the 1960s on were not just setting up programs alongside American Studies in the United States. Scholars in these areas have often worked with Americanists more directly through the classroom collaborations, course cross-listings, and courtesy arrangements common for younger and less generously funded academic units. Such proximity shapes the questions asked in a field, the stances taken by its practitioners, and inevitably also the ends and outcomes pursued in scholarship.

Not everyone wants to join in on such interactions. Even scholars who concern themselves with North America and the United States have noted an “estrangement” between disciplinarily grounded work and the looser multidisciplinary Americanist approach (Böger 242). Keeping American Studies at a distance from work in the disciplines is not necessarily a consequence of the field’s foundational commitment to social relevance. Nor is alignment with social justice concerns inevitably taken umbrage at. For the German university context, and perhaps for higher education

outside the United States generally, the marked political interests behind the export of the initially US-based field to the wider world of post-World War II are a more likely source. While the functionalization of a formation born out of anti-academism into a means of internationalizing soft power was too internally contradictory to fully succeed in terms of scholarly thinking even at the height of the Cold War, the maneuver certainly accomplished its mission institutionally in terms of centers, study programs, and teaching positions (for an account focused on the Salzburg Seminar, but generalizable in terms of this larger history, see Schmidt). Americanists abroad long lived with that bargain. More to the point of the interest versus disinterest tension under consideration here, enough colleagues acquiesced to the underlying suppositions of the bargain often enough to engender a general distrust that is still prone to flare up when an American Studies initiative appears more political than philological, for instance. Opportunism is the specter that haunts American Studies; and it regularly makes its presence felt when work in the field is critiqued as too interested, overtly topical, or methodologically thin (compare, for example, Wasser's identification of 'principled opportunism' as a fundamental American Studies mode in his recently republished midcentury state-of-the-field essay).

Fair enough. One hardly has to look far in modern history, in German-speaking countries or elsewhere, for cautionary lessons regarding politically motivated and coopted scholarship. Against such a backdrop, the desire to quote Kant on "objective validity" and maintain that ideal as an anchor for methodologies is more than understandable. In fact, a reflected turn to objectivity holds promise for moving humanities inquiry and particularly interdisciplinary and engaged humanities endeavors forward. Historian Lorraine Daston calls objectivity in the Kantian tradition "aperspectival" (600). According to Daston, "aperspectival objectivity" first became a discursive standard not in the natural sciences, as one might suspect, "but rather in the moral and aesthetic philosophy of the latter half of the eighteenth century" (600). The goal was to eliminate individual or group "idiosyncracies" in practices of moral and aesthetic analysis (599). Enlightenment, in this sense, did not only mean the creation of hierarchies and injustices. Epistemologically, it meant finding ways of sharing information and knowledge across lines of difference and particular interests (for a concise precis of Kantian "objective validity" and an orienting sketch of its adaption in the early nineteenth-century establishment of the objective ideal, see Daston and Gallison 30-31). By the end of the twentieth century, objectivity and disinterestedness as the related epistemological ideals of the Enlightenment became the culprit of postmodern politics. The pursuit of knowledge was now a politically and socially situated affair, and differences were 'irreducible' (see Haraway). Against this background, literary and critical theory scholar Satya P. Mohanty revisited objectivity, not in a reactionary attempt to reinstall the false claim of objectivity and disinterestedness as political, ethical, or aesthetic neutrality, but as a "realizable goal" to reduce "the risk of repeating our culture's ideological errors" or "projecting our metaphysical blindnesses" onto the ideal of building a better society (805-06; for an extended discussion of various positions on Mohantyan objectivity, see the 2001 *NLH* special issue *Objectivity in Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics*).

We revisit these discussions because we think these backgrounds are important for parsing the profound stakes of current higher education debates. Our more specific examples have been drawn from the disciplinary and institutional intersections that we as series editors most often work within. However, such discussions are hardly unique to German American Studies. Our suspicion, bolstered by perusing higher education reporting, is that the constellations and consequences we have outlined are recognizable beyond our own narrower networks (compare, for example, recent developments in Classics, Medieval Studies, and History as recounted by Bartlett, Poser, and Sandkühler, respectively). We are equally sure, however, that our view of the humanities is far too short-sighted if we limit our attention to issues of interest versus disinterest, pro-active distrust, and further discontents of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century academy.

Challenges of Modernity instead holds with the account laid out historically by Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon in *Permanent Crisis: Humanities in a Disenchanted Age* (2021). Their focus is on the specifically *modern* humanities, as opposed to the classical *artes liberales* or the *studia humanitatis* of the Renaissance. In historical terms, this humanities is roughly continuous with the emergence of the modern research university in the German-speaking territories of Central Europe from the early nineteenth century on. More important than the timeline alone, however, is the intersection with contemporary times constitutive of the modern humanities from this beginning onward. Reitter and Wellmon speak of “the persistent present mindedness and situatedness of intellectuals and scholars who tried to define, defend, and justify something like the humanities” (6). What unites humanities disciplines and moves inquiry within its frameworks forward is, from this perspective, not a narrow method and most certainly not a tradition. Coherence rather comes from a “permanent relationship to the present” (6). Wellmon and Reitter specify: “[T]he *modern* humanities address not disordered desires, unruly passions, or the presence of evil but historical changes: industrialization, new technologies, natural sciences and capitalism” (6, emphasis original). One could hardly ask for a more pertinent initial catalogue of the *Challenges of Modernity* that this publication project aims to engage with moving forward – with the necessary addition of nature, the environment, and climate as objects of study in the humanities.

With the challenges of ‘what’ we would like to analyze in this series very broadly and boldly sketched, the question of ‘how’ to proceed presents itself. Our answer regarding procedure is two-fold, accentuating a second and third dimension of engagement key to the project: *Engaging Teaching and Scholarship* and *Writing as Engagement*.

Connecting teaching with research is, of course, a key element of the modern humanities and the university model we are a part of. Unfortunately, the ‘and’ in such constructions is frequently experienced as a division between teaching as the relentless ‘day job’ versus scholarly research as an all-too-often deferred fantasy of sabbatical isolation and archive-diving bliss. Again, the fantasy feeds on the factual. But there are also notes of ‘woe-is-me’ melodrama that we should be wary of. That said, the principal danger of the ‘research library on a desert island’ dream lies not

so much in delusion, but in distraction. Specifically, our attention is drawn away from the engaging productivity of ‘and’ as a multi-level connector: between teaching informed by ongoing research *and* scholarly inquiry shaped by teaching; the dialogue of established *and* emerging thinkers that ideally carries through from first-semester seminars through graduate training to professional-collegial interaction, and, hardly least, the intersections in thinking in *and* across disciplines as much as in *and* beyond traditional university frameworks. Accordingly, the second understanding of engagement central to our project might be written out as *Engaging Teaching and Scholarship* for reasons of brevity, but the accent should be placed on an expansively engaging ‘and’ that connects teaching and research, creative works in the arts, including but not limited to literature, with scholarship, public debates, and scholarly discussions, and further onward from there.

Humanities scholars are hardly alone in thinking through the challenges of the modern. We are in good company with artists, filmmakers, theater creatives, and others whose thinking efforts we often might even prefer to our own analyses, and for reasons beyond the fact that their work is often our designated object of study. Hard as it might sometimes be to admit after the many years scholars dedicate to disciplinary training, specifically academic modes of thinking are not always the most adequate medium for ‘thinking through’ an issue. In planning academic monographs and articles as much as in plotting traditional lectures, we are instead encouraged (and, in turn, encourage our students) to assert that the thinking has been done because now it is time for an argument to be made. To understand *Writing as Engagement* is to take a more expansive view on when writing connects with thinking: namely, from the very beginning and throughout the intersecting processes of thinking in, through, and with writing. As a further consequence, a wider range of writing forms and modes offer themselves as a means for addressing and thinking through modern challenges. There will always be a place for the monograph and argument-led analysis in scholarly inquiry, but space can be made (again) for the essayistic, the personally inflected, and/or formally experimental in scholarly writing.

As series editors, we are thrilled to begin this endeavor with *Climate Changes Global Perspectives*. We are equally thrilled to be working with Würzburg University Press (WUP): a publisher committed to sustained engagement between teaching and scholarship at the University of Würzburg as well as to expanding dialogue through innovative publishing models. This volume exemplifies the *Engaged Humanities* in grappling with the charged entanglements between environmental crises, challenges of representation, and possibilities of critical analysis and further forms of response. That these explorations began during a two-week international and interdisciplinary symposium in which emerging scholars and established academics learned together and from each other speaks to our aim of *Engaging Teaching with Scholarship* as an element of wider interactions. The texts collected in the book you hold in your hands or read on the screen all speak for themselves in demonstrating *Writing as Engagement*.

Catrin Gersdorf is Chair of American Studies at the University of Würzburg, Germany, with a focus on the Environmental Humanities and a particular interest in conceptual links between literature, democracy, modernity, and ecology.

MaryAnn Snyder-Körber is Professor of American Cultural Studies at the University of Würzburg, Germany, with a focus on intersections of modernity and modernism and research interests that include gender discourse and feminism as well as aesthetics and media histories.

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Introduction

Hannah Nelson-Teutsch and Lena Pfeifer

Sustaining Change

The idea for this volume and the textual engagements called together here originated with a two-week symposium that took place in August 2021 – roughly one year ago – at the Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg. Planning for our symposium developed as the world had settled into a profoundly disruptive global pandemic, confounding our attempts to bring researchers from around the world together in Würzburg and moving both the development of the symposium and the event itself online. The pandemic offered particular provocations that tangled fruitfully with our critical concerns. We began with the assumption that the climate crisis is also a crisis of representation in which previously established form(at)s come up against their own limitations. And, as isolation set in, moving us from the commons we had known into new digital spaces, we found ourselves mired in processes we had previously described at a distance – the forms and formats we had developed to do scholarly work were faltering in the face of so many emergent limitations. As we moved up against, around, over, and through the limitations that confronted us in planning this symposium, we embraced the changes we promised ourselves with the framework for our symposium – *Climate | Changes | Global Perspectives*. Confronted by fundamental transformations to the work of trans-national scholarship and the many meaning(s) of environmental crises, we found sustenance in new representational form(at)s.

Entering into Entanglements

Thinking about environmental crises as crises of representation in a globalized world requires a dual understanding of the concept of ‘representation.’ The politics of representation pertain both to the object of study and to our very own scholarly practices. In the spirit of the Environmental Humanities, which foster not only an interdisciplinary, but also an international character in research, our symposium called together different perspectives in order to question standardized patterns of representation, exploring the ways in which what Heather Houser terms “entangled epistemologies” (2) require new, entangled form(at)s of scholarship in the humanities. Considerations of representation in the Environmental Humanities tend to think at scale – to ask how it is possible that narrative can begin to wrap its arms around such slow violence (Nixon 2), such deep time (Dimock 3-4). Of course, representational form(at)s that develop within the Environmental Humanities are

also finite, limited, and particular, emerging from the situated knowledges of the scholar-writer (Haraway 581). Thus, thinking about representation always also entails thinking about language. In taking global perspectives seriously, we developed our thinking in both English and French over the course of our symposium. Working bilingually meant making room for spoken and written contributions in both languages and providing live translations to bridge the language gap for those not fluent in both languages. For publication, we worked with translator Zoe McNamee to develop English-language translations of texts constructed in French. These linguistic movements nuanced and deepened our understanding of representational entanglements and offered new ways of seeing and knowing one another.

Situated Knowledges

Our time together was divided into two parts. The first week of the symposium was dedicated to in-depth scholarly engagement with different theories, themes, and concerns related to the global dimensions of the climate crisis. In her opening keynote on **The Entanglements of Environmental Art and Knowledge**, Heather Houser (Austin, USA) anchored this symposium in the work of *undisciplining* the Environmental Humanities, issuing a call to “imagine the environment *otherwise*” (Walker 36, our emphasis). By engaging data as an aesthetic resource, Houser established art that includes data and data that constitutes art as active modes of knowledge production and suggested that attending to voices from *within* those processes of knowledge production is vital to unsettling the dominance of established form(at)s of representation.

Hannes Bergthaller (Taipei, Taiwan) offered one such attempt to *think from within* in convening our first workshop session: **Decolonizing the Environmental Humanities**. Critiquing and questioning the center-stage-position of Western conceptions of history, Bergthaller developed distinctions between an epistemic anthropocentrism, which views the human as different from – but not necessarily more valuable than – other life forms, and a value-based anthropocentrism that supports pervasive conceptions of human exceptionalism.

Our second workshop, **Environmental Justice/Violence**, took up these modes of critique and deconstruction in its focus on environmental violence as a slow and differentiated consequence of the actions and collective or structural behavioral patterns of human beings as well as the global extraction industry. In convening this workshop, Louis Mendy (Dakar, Senegal) encouraged ways of reading beyond literature to surface environmental violence at the intersection of the social and the political.

Our third workshop focused on questions of **Environmental Activism and Literary Practice** through a careful consideration of literature in the context of global environmental crises and its role as an aesthetic form(at) of activism. Catrin Gersdorf (Würzburg, Germany) shared a reading of Annie Proulx’s novel *Barkskins* (2016) to suggest at the ways in which the Anthropocene can – or perhaps must –

transform the perception of (literary) narratives. Developing along these thought lines, the discussion then moved towards the affordances as well as the limitations and shortcomings of literature as a means of activist scholarship and speculative engagement amidst the global climate crisis.

The first week closed with our final workshop – **Globalizing(ed) Knowledge Cultures: Production, Representation, Transmission** – which shifted focus towards the creative explorations that would take shape in our second week. Michaela Fenske (Würzburg, Germany) developed a framework for engaging other-than-human actors from the perspective of multispecies studies before introducing an artist-collaborator to offer vivid examples of entangled life. The Berlin-based artist Bärbel Rothhaar presented examples from her own co-creations with honeybees, who contribute to artistic productions by way of social behavior (such as swarming patterns) and through their engagement with materials (such as paper) given to them by the artist. Both Rothhaar's collaborations with bees and Fenske's collaboration with Rothhaar offered new possibilities for knowledge production and representation.

To expand upon and anchor the critical engagements of the first week in writerly praxis, the second week of the symposium developed an active framework for engaging the climate crisis *otherwise*. Raphaëlle Jung's contribution to this volume offers a vivid report of her collaboration with Caterina Schmitz in conceptualizing and conducting the writing workshops that formed the core of our symposium's second week. Reading the **Story of a Writing Workshop** offers both a sense of and a feel for the scholarly environment within which the contributions to this volume germinated and began to take shape.

Thinking on the Page

The writing that evolved during the second week, some of which finds its more final form in these contributions, breaks free from the boundaries of conventional academic writing – the journal article, the monograph, or the edited volume produced for academic qualification. The break we embark upon together is neither a creative intermission in the midst of more serious work, nor a flight from academic writing altogether. Instead, following Houser, we conceive of this work as a practice of *undisciplining* the genre of academic writing. To undiscipline academic writing is to unsettle established epistemological processes by attending to representational practices as intimate and personal acts of creation. As Susan Morrison and Catriona Sandilands emphasized in their keynote conversation **Story into Theory, Theory into Story**, which kicked off week two of our symposium, writing is essentially *thinking on the page*. It is thus fitting to open this volume with a disruptive textual form(at) – the conversation between Sandilands and Morrison – that was so formative to the thinking that developed on the page in the second week.

Steeped in an understanding of writing as thinking on the page, we conceive of all writing as essentially a creative process – a process of formation rather than a

mere transfer of meticulously developed thoughts into text. The writing assembled here is devoted to exploring the possibilities that emerge from an emphasis on the generative possibilities of thinking through writing. This rich and fertile process is a personal one. Creative approaches to academic writing forgo any allegiance to the illusion of objectivity in favor of knowledge that emerges from within. In a riot of form(at)s, the texts within this volume try to do justice to the various ways in which we as scholars are inevitably entangled with our objects of study. In “a spirit of experimentation” (273), as Hannes Bergthaller et al. have it, these texts explore diverse form(at)s of scholarly production in order to generate a “starting point for alternative ways of becoming-subjects-together” (Braidotti 73).

Writing Otherwise

In hot pursuit of ever more expansive entanglements, we have come to this volume to practice and as practice. What you will find here is a collection of our creative explorations in personal, intimate, and embodied thinking on the page. As scholars we are entangled in our climate worlds and in our writing; we cannot – we do not want to – untangle ourselves. We want to write from within the tangle (Tsing), the mesh (Morton), and the hot compost heap (Haraway), and we want this writing to make its way into the world. And so, we conceive of this volume as a necessary experimentation in new form(at)s of calling together academic writing for publication, which can stretch and expand to welcome not only established modes of scholarly knowledge production, but also new and creative approaches. Moving to publication roughly one year after the symposium that started it all, this volume collects contributions that have come into existence not according to the directive logics of a call for papers, but in response to personal interests and private curiosities. Our editorial process has developed not as an exercise in disciplining diverse and unruly texts, but as a practice of recognition and acknowledgement. We write and edit for one another, and in doing so we consciously retain the traces of our writerly selves. Within this volume you will find both British English and American English; you will find French language texts with English translations and English texts from authors writing beyond their mother tongue. We work to honor the relations to place and personhood that take shape in textual structures and come to constitute uniquely situated form(at)s of knowledge production.

Coming Together

Before we invite you to find your own way through this volume, please allow us to introduce to you the writings and writers who have come together here.

Ridhi Chaturvedi's poem “I’m Scared” is a deeply personal engagement with some of the most devastating affective responses elicited by the many omnipresent ramifications of global climatic changes. Bending and broadening the genre of

poetry by adding an extensive commentary in the form of footnotes – including critical reflections, personal anecdotes, and guidance for the reader –, this text is an invitation to engage with the genre of poetry and the impact of climate change differently.

David Lombard offers another reflection on concerns of subjectivity and positionality, in both its metaphorical and its literal sense, in his contribution “Still Looking for the Sublime: Science, Arts, and Spirituality in the Era of Emotionally Overwhelming Environmental Disruption.” Lombard’s take on contemporary revisions of the sublime, which has been reshaped and molded by the environmental concerns of the present day, invites his readers to “find the sublime . . . in places at which Longinus, Burke, or Kant would never have bothered to glance” (51). Lombard’s core argument – that the sublime, as an aesthetic category, affects each of our bodies in the moment of encounter – is enriched by considerations of his own engagements with sublime settings.

Sonakshi Srivastava’s “What My Grandmother Talked about When She Talked about Life” is a rich meditation on the interconnectedness of human life forms and the lives of bees. This connection crystallizes in and is mediated through memories of Srivastava’s grandmother Nani, which elicit meditations on the tradition of honey in Hindu culture (literary and spiritual), cultural customs, and, most importantly, the intimacies of food.

“Arrival: A Distillation” by **Hannah Nelson-Teutsch** offers a poetic harvesting of colors from Christopher Columbus’ diary and a rearrangement that takes shape to develop what Heather Sullivan terms an “ecology of colors” (80). The text itself is an engagement with climate change in its effects on both individual and collective bodies, reshaping the Columbian source text by way of the methods of chemical distillation; separating specific components of a substance into a raw, condensed version.

Tening Diouf’s short story “On the Eve of All Saints’ Day” explores the ways in which memory shapes, impinges upon, and, at times, even infiltrates the lives of four women. Through variable focalization, the story transports the reader across space and time in order to bring home the importance of localized forms of knowledge and memory.

Becoming attuned to the affects of cows is the focus of **Andrea Färber’s** “Empathy for Everything: Why the Portrayal of the More-Than-Human in Literature Matters” – a potent invitation to engage with interspecies entanglements in an age of climate crisis. Roaming from considerations of climate writing as a personal process to critical examinations of climate literature as a locus of new possibilities for engendering empathy in the Anthropocene, Färber anchors her analysis in the affective engagements she advocates for.

Illustrated in witty and sumptuous style by **Raphaëlle Jung**, the short story “Petite Conspiracy entre Baobabs” authored by **Camille Lavoix** and translated by Zoe McNamee begins with an encounter between the baobab who narrates a personal story, the story “of a baobab planted in the roots of words” and “her” (109). From there, the text traces movements and encounters, disruptions and displace-

ments, casual touches, scratches, and sweats – conjuring up a more-than-human storyworld that is alive to the many meanings of enmeshed existence.

Marija Krstic's "Environmental Violence and Oil Extraction Culture in Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit*" embeds itself in Osage oil history with a deep and close reading of what Rob Nixon terms "the vernacular landscape" (17) in Hogan's narrative. Drawing out transcultural modes of developing and disturbing land relations, Krstic theorizes a complex displacement that surfaces and makes meaningful the ties between literature, land, peoples, and petrocultures.

Within "Le Désir de l'Éléphant de Taï," translated by Zoe McNamee, **Samuel Logbo** constructs a poetic collage of other-than-human and human voices, in which the poetic voice of Taï elephants merges with that of a more detached observer, creating a vibrant discussion about the relevance of forests as both scientific and cultural ecosystems as well as their relevance for the vitality of all life on Earth.

Emerging from meditations on scale that are intimate, personal, and materially anchored in the impacts of representational forms like the atlas, **Lena Pfeifer's** "A Short Commentary on Scale and Perspective" telegraphs the complexities of thinking at and with scale by entangling personal emplacement and critical theorizations of the function and power of scale in the Anthropocene.

Nina De Bettin Padolin approaches critical theory as forever situated in the ongoing work of reading with her essay "Reading and *Listening to* as a Decolonial, Feminist, and Anti-Racist Approach." Drawing deeply on her own experiences of coming up against structural oppressions, De Bettin Padolin offers an intimate theorization of knowledge production as the work of living.

Emmanuel Ngor Ndiaye's critical essay – "Climate Change and its Effects on Displacement to Urban Areas: A Socio-Economic and Environmental Reading of Willa Cather's *O'Pioneers!*" – situates Willa Cather's *O'Pioneers!* (1913) within discourses of environmental displacement that occur as a result of the local and global ramifications of climate change as well as the various challenges these changes provoke for people working in the agricultural sector.

Sunu Rose Joseph's "Myth, Migration, and Memory: Unfolding the Anthropocene in Contemporary Asian Fiction" engages with new form(at)s for representing memory, stories about migration, and mythological considerations in contemporary Asian climate fictions. Rose analyzes two novels – Wu Ming-Yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (2011) and Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* (2019) – as texts which are embedded within the complex realities of the Anthropocene as it unfolds in Asia.

Veronika Arutyunyan's "Narrativity and Agency of the More-Than-Human: Reading Ecopoetry in the Light of Transgeneric Narratology" is a critical reflection on other-than-human presences in poetic form and diction. Arutyunyan applies narratological insights to her reading of lyric poetry in order to consider the narrative agency of other-than-human presences in contemporary ecopoetry such as Ellen Bass' *The Human Line* (2007) and Camille Dungy's *Trophic Cascade* (2017).

Eldad Sangare's short story "Le Pollueur de la Lagune Zalou," translated by Zoe McNamee, follows Dadel and his friend Zana, who both live in close proximity to and symbiotically with the environment of the Zalou lagoon and its flora and fauna.

A sudden event interrupts the harmony of these relationships, transforming the village and its environs into a crime scene.

An Invitation to Read Otherwise

We have come together here to partake of the work of *undisciplining* the Environmental Humanities. To that end, we have grouped the works loosely – flexibly – with the understanding that there are many ways to read, think, and collect these writings. The table of contents offers you sections that cohere according to writerly conceits: genre, voice, character, and world. We invite you to indulge in these categories or to ignore them, to follow unfamiliar thought-lines and become tangled up with us – more connected, newly connected, connected in new ways to climates of thought, feeling, being, and the many changes they afford. We invite you to make yourself at home – you are very welcome here.

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Story into Theory, Theory into Story: A Conversation on Braided Scholarship

Susan Signe Morrison and Catriona Sandilands

On Monday August 9, 2021, Susan Morrison and Cate Sandilands opened the keynote conversation that would anchor our symposium's engagement in scholarly writing as creative praxis with a reading from two texts that bring to life a 'braided' approach to story and theory: "Daphne," a short story by Cate Sandilands, and Susan Morrison's "The Stylite," a creative work of fiction published in the journal Feminist Spaces. The conversation that followed has been edited for clarity and reproduced here.

Cate Sandilands

Susan and I had a good time preparing for this presentation. We had a lovely conversation about the kinds of questions we would consider and the directions we would take in a conversation about the relationship between creative and academic writing. We decided to interview each other with a set of questions that would take us through some of our writing autobiographies and also some of the things we wanted to say – particularly to students and junior scholars – about the joys and sorrows, promises, and pitfalls of incorporating narrative, autobiographical, poetic, and creative approaches to writing in scholarly work.

I'm going to ask the first question, to Susan. Susan, tell me a bit about your academic career. What has your work involved, and how did you get interested in alternatives to conventional academic writing?

Susan Morrison

Thanks, Cate. I am a medievalist, and recently I have started dealing with more contemporary texts in my academic writing as well as a lot of creative or creative non-fiction pieces, personal narrative, and so on. Just as an example, the piece I just read is called "The Stylite"; I could have written an academic article about stylites or taken up a feminist analysis of stylites. But, I chose to write a creative piece to speak to a different audience: this is one of the main points I want to emphasize in talking about using personal narrative. The issue of audience is a really important one. I love writing scholarly articles – traditional scholarly articles – and I'm very happy when people read them, but there is a limited audience for scholarly articles. So, I wrote a novel. I've also been blogging a great deal, sometimes in response to what happens in the classroom, because my students will say something brilliant,

and we will have a great conversation, but there's no way for that to enter the public conversation. It remains in the classroom. Sometimes there are issues that come up that I think are important to talk about.

Concerning this particular piece, "The Stylite": I knew that it was going to be published. It had just been accepted. Cate sent me a story, because we were trying to figure out what we should read to all of you. At that point, we weren't sure. We were just sort of sharing different pieces of writing. Cate sent me her piece about Daphne, who turns into a tree. I had this piece coming out where the female stylite essentially turns into a tree at the end. I would love to ask Cate: what does this mean? Is it that there's something in the air about it? This resilient and almost defiant way of resisting negative forces embodied, if you will, in something like a tree, a feminized tree? I also think it's interesting that we're both drawing on the ancient Mediterranean for inspiration.

To be honest, I wrote this piece during COVID, at the beginning of COVID when everything was shut down. I mean, basically, I was in my house for like two or three months. I regularly teach works by or about women anchorites. These are women in the Middle Ages who lived in cells, they were solitary, they were confined in these spaces. "The Stylite" came out of my feelings about these anchorites. I have a couple more things to say, but I want Cate to respond to the kind of coincidence in what we were working on. If you have any idea why? I don't know why.

Cate Sandilands

I love "The Stylite"! Trees are definitely the new green. There have been so many popular books written about trees recently, and across a range of genres. In fiction, there is Richard Powers' *The Overstory* and Michael Christie's *Greenwood*. In non-fiction, there is Suzanne Simard's *Finding the Mother Tree* and Peter Wohlleben's *The Hidden Life of Trees*. There is also Sumana Roy's genre-crossing memoir *How I Became a Tree*. And that's just a few of them! In these turbulent times of climate and political emergency, I think it's not surprising that people are looking admiringly to life forms that are often connected to temporalities much longer than ours, even as human activities threaten trees and forests alike. I think it's not surprising that, with Daphne and Sumana Roy, some people are not only turning to trees, but also turning *into* trees. I also think it's very interesting that so many of these stories are about women's entanglements with trees, but that's a topic for another day.

I also wrote "Daphne" during COVID, and I think there is something in the story about exploring the idea of rootedness, staying very still, staying put. In the story, when Daphne becomes a tree, she becomes the god she has always wanted to be and she's sensuous and beautiful and very much alive. The fixity of trees allows us to perceive different registers of movement. Focusing on what it feels like to be in place – to be a creature that doesn't pick up and move when something bad (or good) threatens to happen – allows us to see things differently.

Going back to the question about what led me to think about writing the story about Daphne, as opposed to writing an academic article about trees: Yes, I'm also writing academic articles about trees, one of which is about trees and literature. In this latter work, I'm particularly interested in the recurring motif of women turning into trees in literary texts. Obviously, there's Daphne, and Roy also talks about stories from different literary traditions – for example, Rabindranath Tagore's – that also involve an arboreal transition of some kind or another. More recently, there's Han Kang's 2016 *The Vegetarian*, which won the International Booker Prize, which has a lot of similarities to Shani Mootoo's 1996 *Cereus Blooms at Night* in that women turn into trees in response to misogynist violence and specifically sexual violence.

In Ovid's telling of Apollo and Daphne, she is turned, by her father, into a laurel tree to avoid being raped. She becomes infinitely available to Apollo's desires for her foliage because she can't run anymore: also a form of rape. Once she is a tree, she is the source of evergreen laurel leaves: always there to crown his glory even though it's not what she wanted. So, I really wanted to retell the story of Daphne away from all this sexual violence. I didn't just want to write *about* the story: I wanted to write a *different* story, a version of Daphne in which she actually gets to be a *god* because she's a tree, not an immortal plaything for Apollo. I needed to *reimagine* the story.

Susan has raised an important question around audience in terms of the difference between academic and creative writing. I think theory and story do different kinds of work. I don't think story and theory are in neat, separate boxes – theory does this, story does that – but I do think storytelling is a way of inviting other stories, inviting people to get inside the story and think along with you in relation to their own stories, rather than argue with a more theoretical, expository account of the world. I don't argue with Ovid; I simply respond to him by creating a different story, a different world.

I just finished a project called “Storying Climate Change,” which centred on an edited book of creative writing on climate change and specifically on climate change in one particular region – the BC south coast of Canada/Salish Sea – although contributors were involved from farther afield. The project included a workshop on Galiano Island in 2018 about storytelling and climate change; participants, who included writers, activists, and climate experts of various stripes, took our conversations away with them and wrote short pieces of literary nonfiction, memoir, fiction, and poetry, which we edited and compiled into the anthology *Rising Tides: Reflections for Climate Changing Times* (Caitlin, 2019).

The final part of the project, which of course got cut short by COVID, was to travel the book around and do readings and workshops with different local participants and different local creative writers to get people to start thinking about their own climate stories: what people have witnessed, what they're afraid of, what they hope for. In the book, all the stories are intentionally quite small and personal. Some of them clearly gesture to larger forces – colonialism, extractivism, CO₂ emissions, capitalist development – but they do so in a way that grounds huge, world-changing processes in intimate experiences. They show climate emergency is not just happening on an almost unimaginably large scale, but also something that is experienced

in very small ways, in very small details. The book has been criticized for not being apocalyptic enough. And perhaps that means I did my job: I think we have plenty of apocalypticism, and *Rising Tides* intended to be something else. The point was to understand climate change as braided with people's stories, not just to think about how climate change is unfolding on a larger scale.

Again, I don't want to create an opposition between theory and story, but I do think there's something about storytelling that allows for that kind of organic sense of connection among different forms of experience. Sharing stories invites other people to tell stories, and also to understand experiences that may be very different from our own as residing in the world of another storying being, someone who is the subject of a life in the same way we are.

Susan Morrison

Might I just build on that? I think there's perhaps a misperception by people who aren't writing 'within the academy' that somehow when you write a scholarly piece, you're totally objective, cold, unfeeling. There's no emotion there, no passion. That you are writing the truth for all time.

But that's not it at all.

I totally agree with Cate that you cannot separate personal from professional writing. I'll just give an example from my own career, when I was a young professor many years ago. I taught medieval literature, and I would regularly teach pilgrimage literature like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, or *The Book of Margery Kempe* by a fifteenth-century woman pilgrim who wrote the first autobiography in English. I taught fictional women pilgrims as well as a real women pilgrims; and so, I went to the library – in my innocent trust in the world – to look for a book on women pilgrims. Surely there would be a book on women pilgrims in the Middle Ages! *Of course*, I naïvely thought. And guess what I discovered: there was no book on women pilgrims. At the time, in the standard book on pilgrimage – which was 350 pages long – there were three pages on women pilgrims. I thought, *that can't be right*. I'm sure women experienced pilgrimage differently. That's why I ended up writing my first monograph on medieval women pilgrims: because the book I wanted and needed wasn't there. I always tell my students that if what you're looking for is not there, if the book or article is not there, that's a gift; it means you are the person meant to work on that particular topic. It's a personal interest that is driving you in some way in that particular field or topic that you're exploring.

It was only much later, after I published that book on medieval women pilgrims, that I realized that my interest in pilgrimage and gender really stemmed from when I was seven years old, believe it or not. My parents took us to England, and we walked on the Canterbury Way, the pilgrims' way, a route that led to Canterbury, the great pilgrimage shrine. That's why one of my articles is talking about memory and walking through personal narrative. Cate used the metaphor of braiding, and I think that's a great way of looking at it – braiding together scholarly insights that

one has received from other great thinkers on the topic, but also seeing how your personal narrative fits in with them or expands on them; or, how your personal experience deepens and textures these more theoretical topics that may be less easy to grasp sometimes. I think it's important, if it's appropriate and you feel comfortable enough to use personal narrative, to judiciously use it in your writing, even in 'scholarly writing.' Concerning the separation of scholarly writing and personal narrative: I think those boundaries have obviously been broken down, but there needs to be more recognition of the importance of it.

Cate Sandilands

So, not surprisingly when you have two people who are pretty excited about the topic they're talking about, we have already gone off script. I'm going to intervene by asking the second question.

Susan, what are the major differences between your scholarly and literary writing objectives and processes?

Susan Morrison

Well, I've mentioned audience. That's definitely one. I want to reach more people – and a more diverse audience – rather than 'just' an academic audience. Some scholarly articles might get a hundred readers, maybe several hundred readers, and that's great and wonderful. But, it is nice to think that one might be able to touch more people than that. Another reason for literary writing is to make money. Let's be real about this. I wanted to make money from my novel. I made a tiny, tiny bit, I mean almost nothing. So that didn't quite pan out the way I thought it would!

In many ways, the differences between creative and literary writing and scholarly writing – well, sometimes there's no difference at all for me. I'm still doing a ton of research, whether it's for something scholarly or something creative, sometimes even more for creative things. So, for example, in my novel, *Grendel's Mother*, if I'm trying to describe the structure of a building in fourth-century Denmark, what do I know about that? I have to do all this research and look at archeological journals to find out what they think buildings looked like at the time. So, there is still a lot of research involved, even for more literary or creative writing.

I guess for both literary and scholarly writing a big issue is when to stop the research. It is so easy just to keep on researching and never finish whatever article, book, essay, or creative piece you're writing. At a certain point, you have to tell yourself "this is good enough." I'll just say, "this is done for now." You can always come back to it later or create a new piece.

So, I guess I'll turn the tables here and ask Cate, what are the major differences between your scholarly and literary writing objectives and processes?

Cate Sandilands

I will start out by saying there are many similarities. Research and attention to detail are in my academic blood. You will see in the Daphne story, for example, that I got the key details right, which indicates that it's in direct conversation with Ovid's version. I think this is a sort of respectful citational practice, which is my responsibility as a scholar.

In my writing about plants, I feel strongly that I need to pay attention to the same kinds of detail. Understanding botanical knowledge about, say, Scotch broom, enables and enriches what I learn from and say about the plants. These knowledges come from many sources, of course – both Western and Indigenous science, for example – but in order for me to add to the stories these knowledges tell about the plant, I have to have a deep understanding of them and get the details right. This is why I tend to write about particular plants rather than plants in general. I think that there is an enormous amount of merit to starting with the particular, which is increasingly my form of theory as well as my form of storytelling.

So, there are lots of overlaps between my scholarly and my literary writing; I have also written several hybrid essays that include both forms in conversation. As a result, one of the things that I have struggled with as a creative writer is how to tell stories without footnotes. And that's part of the larger tendency in academic writing; in academic writing, you want to make sure the people who are reading your work know exactly what you are saying. You are explaining things in detail in order to be clear and exact. Many essential points you want to make, including the sources of the ideas, go into the footnotes, because it's important that readers have that piece of information in order to be able to correctly interpret what it is that you're saying, as well as the lineage of your thinking. In storytelling, you have to let go of that desire to explain everything. Obviously there are different kinds of literature, but I find that in doing creative writing you have to leave space for the reader to join you from where they are, rather than say "hey, reader, here is all the stuff you need to know."

In telling a story, you need to leave space for the reader to be able to find themselves in your story. There are forms of theoretical writing, particularly as informed by feminism – as both Susan and I practice – that also lend themselves to a more conversational relationship between the writer and the reader. In the works we do that combine personal with scholarly theoretical work, part of the work we're doing is showing places in which the theory is personal and inviting the reader to approach the ideas from an embodied, personal experience. But if you're going to tell a whole story without the intervention of footnotes, you actually have to make the invitation within the story itself, rather than rely on the edifice of all of these other academic works to show it's part of an ongoing conversation. And for me, that's been the hardest thing to let go of, particularly when I'm writing creative non-fiction. Fiction is a little bit easier that way, but if you're writing creative non-fiction, to be able to tell those stories and to give the essential information without referring to the weight of scholarship that preceded you is much harder than it looks.

There are lots of scholarly and popular writers who do it really well, and it's important to read those kinds of text to see how it can be done. One author I can think of in particular in my field is Richard Mabey, who writes a lot about relations between nature and culture, especially about plants. He is extraordinarily knowledgeable and has spent years doing research both in the field and in the archives, but he is able to write about plants in a way that is just delightful. He tells stories about plants and it's obvious that there's a huge weight of scholarship behind what he's writing, but in most cases, there are no notes, or at least they're in another section at the end, for people who really want to know. I find his writing hugely inspirational, both for the depth and complexity of his thinking and for the almost deceptive lightness with which his writing conveys his expertise.

Susan Morrison

Could I just leap in here for a minute? Cate, I really loved your piece called "Loving the Difficult" where you explore Scotch broom. I think I've heard of Scotch broom maybe once or twice in my life, but here I was getting a whole education in a really delightful way about this particular plant: its significance, personal and biological. But to pick up on what Cate is talking about, I think personal narrative or fiction – creative writing – leaves room for the reader as though the reader is part of the conversation.

I happen to be a footnote junkie, so I know what Cate is talking about. Sometimes when I read books, I look at the footnotes first because they're really interesting. Footnotes are often packed with information that can't fit into the text itself, so you see what the author is intrigued by but has to leave out.

Using personal narrative or writing fiction entails trusting the reader and also being very vulnerable yourself. You're opening yourself up to perhaps someone reading your work in a way that you did not expect. There's a story that Tom Stoppard, the playwright, told at an academic conference. He was asked, "What do you think about all these academics reading your plays and interpreting them and theorizing about them?" And he said, "Well, it's rather like when you go on a trip, and you pack a suitcase. You put in your suitcase a toothbrush, a pair of socks, and a clean shirt. And you go on the plane and when you get off, customs stops you. They open up your suitcase, and in addition to the toothbrush, the pair of socks, and the shirt, there's a block of cocaine, there's gold bullion, and a smuggled exotic animal. And you say, 'I never put that in there.' And the customs official says, 'That's what I see.'"

So, sometimes when you're writing, using personal narrative or fiction, people will see things you didn't expect. This is actually great because that means they're participating. Once you release it to the world, it's in a sense not yours anymore. It's everyone's. And so that's another way of thinking about your writing: it's everyone's, and you don't have all those footnotes to rely on and say "but so-and-so says this, so I know I'm right here. They're supporting what I say." It's a very different kind of

writing, where you have to trust people; and, I hope, people trust you for being open and vulnerable in your writing as well.

I guess I'll ask the next question, shall I, Cate? This is one of the questions that we crafted together. In your work, you've entangled scholarly with literary writing and personal narrative. How has the use of personal narrative influenced your writing? What have been the benefits and drawbacks of bringing them into one place?

Cate Sandilands

There are several answers to your question. For one, I find that in the tradition of nature writing, which is one of the formative genres that gave rise to ecocriticism – particularly ecocriticism in that part of North America that is south of the 49th parallel – there is an abundance of work that blends the personal with the scholarly.

There has been a lot of emphasis on first-person narrative in the genesis of this tradition of thinking about the natural world. There is a lot of observational *flânerie*, or meditation while hiking in the woods, or epiphany happening while hoeing rows of beans if we're starting with Thoreau. These works demonstrate a tradition of narrative observation and autobiographical reflection as a legitimate way of theorizing, of thinking about the natural world. My scholarship has taken up that tradition quite seriously, if also critically: the romantic individual 'discovering' nature is a complicated, and colonial, tradition.

There's also a lot of first-person garden writing: me and the plants, or me and the bugs, or me and the soil. There's a lot of autobiographical work going on in a variety of different forms of feminist scholarship, in which the idea that the personal is political continues to be very important. There are many traditions of thought that blend personal writing with scholarly writing. It's not like this is new; it's not like this is a radical invention. The use of personal narrative has, I think, helped me create a mode of thinking that is very grounded in particular circumstances and situations. The version of theorizing that I do tends to be small. It tends to be slow. It tends to be very focused and place-based. And these small slices of life open up enormous worlds: they are metonyms for huge, world-changing events and processes. I find it very hard to know when to stop researching. I just finished writing a paper about mulberries and I could have gone on and on: mulberries are absolutely fascinating and reveal global histories of imperialism, commerce, cultural adaptation, and multispecies engagement. I get very boring at cocktail parties because not everyone is as interested in them as I am.

This kind of very fine-grained, grounded, embodied, situated work is a particular kind of theorizing. I now find it much harder to write big, high-concept work because I keep wanting to filter it through either my personal experience or some other intimate set of relationships. So, it has allowed me to develop a particular kind of theorizing, which means I am no longer doing another kind of theorizing. I've been thinking about that recently, because I tried to write a very broad theoretical work, and I really struggled with it. There is certainly a place for theoretical work

that does not rest in one body and one set of experiences. However, I think my particularity as a queer white woman who lives in specific places is something that needs to be acknowledged in even more high-theoretical work: recognizing the position from which the ideas emerge helps avoid the tendency in a lot of white, male philosophical writing to universalize, and to claim the universal, where it is in fact grounded in specific experiences of the world.

One of the pieces of my writing that has been most read and commented on over the course of my career is one I wrote in the early 2000s, which grounds a large, philosophical conversation about land, language, and memory in my experience of my mother's dementia: she remembered the land even as she forgot almost everything else. It's a vulnerable, personal piece, and it was the first time I chose intentionally to write in a hybrid autobiographical/scholarly form.

I've had a lot of feedback on it, including personal letters, much of which has been along the lines of "I've had that experience, and I've never thought about it that way." So, I think this kind of writing is actually quite enriching. I've not just given people resources with which to write their dissertation, I've given people resources with which to interpret their own lives, which is a pretty good outcome for an academic paper. Over to you, Susan.

Susan Morrison

Thank you. And that is a fantastic article by the way.

So, talking about personal narrative in scholarly writing, I want to talk about my book on the literature of waste, which was the follow-up to my book on excrement. Let me tell you, excrement has gotten me more responses than almost anything else I've written in the scholarly world, just because it's excrement and people make jokes. But they are very interested in it. I think they come to see how important excrement is in terms of the environment and so on. I ended that book by saying that we should have a waste studies approach to literature and culture. I kept waiting for somebody to write that book and nobody was writing that book. Which meant I had to write that book. In it, I grapple with the Western canon. Of course, I couldn't deal with every single work. I used case studies – beginning with the Bible and continuing on to present day writers – to look at instances of waste. Waste is defined in many different ways throughout the text. At the beginning of the book, I look at excess and money or the way people are constituted as wasted people depending on the culture – if they're women, if they're people of color, or Jews under the Third Reich, and so on. Certain groups of people are designated as waste by a particular culture. The metaphor for wasted people is what really drives most of my research. I'm very influenced by the work of Zygmunt Bauman on wasted lives.

One of my early chapters, for example, deals with the fragmentary, incorruptible body. I wanted to explore Freudian approaches, psychological approaches, the abject, and those moments of waste that appear in literature. Because I was grappling with a very huge topic; and, as Cate was saying, you've got these huge,

expansive topics, but then you have very particular things, I thought it was helpful for my readers to start each chapter with a small personal anecdote or narrative in order to focus people's minds on this enormous topic. In one particular chapter, I tell the story, a true story, about a date I went on when I was very young – in my twenties – with a young man who invited me to dinner. He wanted me to see his collection. He had a collection of nails. Not the nails you use to build houses, but finger- and toenails. He had jars and jars of people's finger- and toenails that they would send him every year. Don't worry. I didn't date him after that. I write it as a funny story because it's so weird. One of my attempts was to force the reader to think "Egh". Why are nails disgusting? Why are we disgusted by this? In order to lead into a discussion of feelings of the abject and when the body is corruptible and produces waste. The purpose in that particular instance was to use a personal narrative in order to focus the reader's mind on a very huge topic that they could viscerally respond to.

I regularly teach a course on composition to university writers just starting out. I share some personal narratives that I've used in my published writing. I say that sometimes it's very useful to start off an essay with a personal narrative in order to show where you're going. It's a kind of guide to where you're going that also gives your writing an emotional impact. It helps the reader really engage with you and care about you by having even just a paragraph of something personal. Not everyone wants to do this – and that's fine; but sometimes a personal narrative can be a very useful way to focus your own writing and to help the reader engage with your writing.

I wanted to come to something that Cate mentioned about feminist theory and the personal as political. Absolutely. Even scholarly writing is very personal – I mean, even if you don't use personal narrative, we're all writing on topics that we feel passionately about. Otherwise, why would we look up all these articles? Why would we devote all this time to writing scholarly works?

You mentioned the word *slow*, Cate. I want to offer another personal narrative on this aspect. Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Clerk's Tale* features a very put-upon woman named Griselda, who is often called Patient Griselda. Different medieval writers wrote her story: Boccaccio, Petrarch, Chaucer, and Christine de Pizan. Patient Griselda really suffers. I finished my PhD in 1991. In one chapter of my dissertation was my analysis of Griselda and this particular tale. I never published that chapter. Well, flash forward. Last year, in 2021, finally, I published the chapter, 30 years later, because I had time to really think about it. It's slow scholarship.

In the interim, I had been working on personal narratives that dealt with pilgrimage and walking, yet another theme that keeps coming up today. Over the past few years, I've focused on something I call slow pilgrimage ecopoetics – looking at pilgrimage as a process of interacting with the landscape. In pilgrimage texts – and there are many in the Middle Ages – there's a slowness. Walking is obviously not a hyper-driven transportation system. You're really walking and engaging in the landscape. By dealing with my personal experience, walking in the landscape as a pilgrim, I was able, after all this time, to bring that to bear on something scholarly I

had worked on many, many years ago. Even though it is now published as a scholarly article, there's so much personal narrative behind it and such a personal commitment to it, much more than I ever had when I was a graduate student. The personal enabled me to come at this material in a much richer and more nuanced way. And so, I guess another thing I'd like to say is – and I know it's hard – sometimes being slow is a good thing. If you write something you don't think is quite ready, that's okay. Maybe ten years from now the right configuration will happen in your scholarly and personal life to make it ready to see the world. Of course, everything's creative whether it's a scholarly or a personal narrative. It's all creative writing. You're being creative when you're fashioning a text.

Let me ask you the next question about turning story into theory and theory into story. What is your take on that?

Cate Sandilands

I have learned from my writing teachers that good essay writing involves thinking on the page. Going back to the meaning of the word *essay* – to attempt, to try – the essay is something that takes an experience or a phenomenon or an idea or a problem, and in the process of the writing, actually moves the thinking from somewhere to somewhere else. I don't think all academic writing does that. I think a lot of academic writing begins with an idea and argues it, particularly the kind of stuff that is supposed to go into journals in which you have the abstract, the theory, the methods, the discussion, and the conclusion. In this kind of writing, there's a sense that you know what the answer is – that you know what the narrative is going to be – before you set word to the page.

An essay does something different and performs the relationship between knowledge and writing differently. I don't want to start on a long treatise about the difference between hypothetico-deductive reasoning and inductive reasoning: it's not my point. But I love to write and think in a more essayistic form, to think on the page, and in that sense, the relationship between story and theory is quite permeable.

So, I currently have two projects in the works. *Plantasmagoria* is a series of essays into relationships with particular, often 'difficult' plants in the context of literatures about the Anthropocene. It combines autobiography with wildly interdisciplinary scholarship. It includes literary texts as sources of knowledge, as well as Indigenous, scientific, and social science understandings of the plants and their global and local contexts. In these essays, I feel that I don't fully understand what I think about a particular plant until I've finished writing the piece (and maybe not even then). For example, in my Scotch broom essay, I didn't know what I was going to think about broom until I actually finished writing and revising the piece.

Honestly, I tend to get bored with my writing if I already know what I'm going to say at the end of a piece!

The second project is doing a similar kind of work with fiction. In *Dear Jane Rule*, I am also essaying, but I'm using fiction as a way of exploring the life and writing of a particular author, Jane Rule. Jane was, from the 1960s until her death in 2007, an important contributor to many publics, including lesbian, gay liberationist, literary, and local communities, especially but not only on the west coast of Canada. The project involves writing short stories that illuminate her influence, rather than writing about that influence in a more direct way. The stories are deeply informed by archival research, interviews, and also higher-level thinking about her overall writing and contributions in particular places and times.

In the interest of time, to make sure there's lots of space for questions, I'm going to end it there. I think story and theory can have a wonderful relationship. If you take care of both sets of practices – thinking with story, thinking with theory – you can develop in both nonfiction and fictional forms. I'm not a poet and can't comment on poetry, but I'm thinking about Adam Dickinson, for example, whose poetry is theoretically extraordinary in both form and content. So, I think literary forms of all kinds can do theoretical work. Scholarly writing can tell stories, and stories can do good theory, but it's important to think about the differences: not all story is theoretical, and not all theory tells a good story.

Susan Morrison

Great. Thank you! I love that idea of moving the thinking ahead. I guess that's a good jumping-off point for the piece of writing that I wanted to mention: my novel called *Grendel's Mother: The Saga of the Wyrd-Wife*. Wyrð is the Germanic word for fate or 'Schicksal.'

I teach *Beowulf* and other Old English literary pieces, which is something I have done for a long time. I often teach various important feminist interpretations of *Beowulf*, the first major English epic. I wanted to add my voice to the conversation – the feminist conversation – about *Beowulf*, but I didn't want to just write another article. I wanted to embody, if you will, the perspective of Grendel's mother, who is vilified, is considered a monster, and so on. Obviously, when you read my novel, it's a feminist novel. It presents different women's stories in this particular culture. I wanted to do it through story – through a novel form – so that many people could access it. I've had a lot of very positive response from people because they're able to engage with it really emotionally and to think about women's lives at the time and make connections to women's lives now. I wanted to make this feminist approach more memorable for people through story.

That's my example for theory into story and story into theory. I also just wanted to say, when I teach now – maybe it's because I've been teaching such a long time – I feel quite comfortable in assigning the option of a creative project as a final project for students, not just a research paper. In my classes, students have already written a couple of research papers. I know they can do that. They can choose to write a final research paper if that's what they're most comfortable with at the end of the

semester. For many of them, the material that they're reading affects them emotionally a great deal. They want to express it in some medium other than a research paper. I teach in an English department. I often think that English majors first become English majors because they loved writing poetry or stories when they were 10 or 12. Then, once they hit high school and beyond, they really have to focus on the academic essay, and they lose that joy in the creative process. I want to be able to give them the opportunity to find that joy again. Some of them find painting, music, even cooking inspirational. Cooking was appropriate for *Beowulf*; I had a student create a mead hall for us all in the classroom – though without the mead, because that's alcohol! Some write short stories, screenplays, even make movies, and then they have to justify it in an academic analysis of a few pages. Their story is infused with theory, but it's a story that is personal to them and really engages them.

I'll just conclude the way Cate did by talking about what I'm currently working on. I'm working on something – I'm not sure if it's going to be a memoir or a novel – about my experiences teaching in East Germany in the 1980s. I have a lot of my documents from that time, including Stasi files about me. I'm doing shorter pieces right now – creative nonfiction pieces – including a piece called “Throbbing with Life.” I haven't decided yet if it's going to be a memoir or a novel, but that's another lesson. Sometimes you go into something, and you aren't sure how it's going to look at the end. Like Cate, I'm bored if I know where I'm going to end up. I want to be surprised by my own writing and my writing process. I can't tell you what it will be yet, but I hope to one day, a few years from now. I hope to finish it. So, I'll stop there.

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Raconte-moi une Histoire: The Story of a Writing Workshop

Raphaëlle Jung with Caterina Schmitz

Introduction

Four days, two working languages, twenty-two participants, five countries (Austria, Belgium, Ivory Coast, Germany, India), three time zones and one question: *how can we approach academic writing creatively?* The writing workshop, which took place during the second of week of the WueGlobal Summer Symposium, was placed under a few different signs. For one, even though it was meant to function relatively independently from the first week, the writing workshop was not to be entirely untethered from the rest of the symposium. The latter's title *Climate | Changes | Global Perspectives* therefore informed our approach. Additionally, the University of Würzburg's writing center being an important partner in the WueGlobal project, we had decided the second week of our symposium would revolve around *creative approaches to academic writing*. This central idea soon became the official motto of this writing week. While the word *creative* is open to a breadth of interpretation, we decided early on that the second week should not merely look like a *creative writing* workshop. Rather, academic writing and academic knowledge production should remain at the center of our preoccupations. The point of the undertaking should not be to exercise novelty and creativity for their own sake but rather to challenge participants to re-think the ways in which scientific knowledge is produced and distributed. Knowing that form impacts function, and that *how* we write has a bearing on *what* we write, we hoped that the participants – most of them PhD or advanced master's students – would discover new ways of thinking about their respective fields of study.

Additionally, the WueGlobal project having been conceived as a laboratory for experimental formats from its very beginning, the writing week's imperative was to let our participants *experiment*. Practically, this meant giving them the opportunity to write in different ways, in different formats.

Finally, building on our search for *creative approaches to academic writing*, we wanted to pursue questions about subjectivity, the question of the objective scholar and the idea of (academic) knowledge production, which so often is thought to happen “by matching something in the mind with something that we believe exists independently of us in the world of matter” (Segal 12). Our writing week aiming to foster creative avenues, we decided to encourage our participants to reflect on what Segal calls the “myth of objectivity” (5) and to lean into their own subjectivity, something the workshop's experimental nature easily lent itself to.

The following contribution chronicles our journey imagining, organizing, and carrying out a four-day writing workshop during the second week of the 2021 WueGlobal Summer Symposium. It was an adventure – we hope it reads like one.

Draw Me a Symposium

Settling in front of a virtual drawing board – because much like the symposium itself, its organization mostly took place online –, we were acutely aware that the workshop's format would determine much of what we could and could not do logistically. With these technical aspects in mind, we first set out to determine our didactic goals and the methods we would employ to reach them. In parallel, we developed a portfolio of three workshop readers which would both function as a source of theoretical input *before* and as a companion how-to guide *during* the writing sessions. Believing that self-reflection should play a part in our planning process, we set out to define our goals and expectations regarding our role as organizers and moderators. Finally, as we were looking at a heterogenous group including a few exclusively francophone students, we attempted the development of a workable bilingual concept.

The symposium's participants were all young researchers working on subjects connected – in one way or another – to the field of the Environmental Humanities. During the first week, we knew they would work on the same texts, participate in the same discussions, and exchange on the same topics. However, rather than using the second week to have them write about the topics and questions they encountered during the first one, we decided to embrace the diversity of scholarship and ask them to write about their own research topics.

Infrastructure-wise, our symposium was a fully digital event: conferences, workshops, and discussions would all take place online. Its *raison d'être*, born out of the necessity to re-think international mobility in the age of COVID-19, went hand in hand with the hope that all interested parties could participate, regardless of their financial situation. Indeed, organizing an international, in-person gathering inevitably opens up discussions about geographical distance, transport, and accessibility. Questions about financing, the cost to each individual participant, and the possibilities of internal or external financial aid are rarely answered satisfactorily. Often, the lack of networks and resources keeps (young) scholars, particularly those hailing from the Global South, from attending such international, academic gatherings. Our symposium's online format was one answer to this problem: the cost of creating the necessary internet infrastructure – and there *is* a cost – would be significantly lower and the symposium, as a consequence, more inclusive. Yet, however unavoidable or sensible, the choice to conduct the symposium online profoundly impacted the writing week, as it did everything else.

Goals

Academic writing is subject to a long list of rigid expectations, and while there is a certain amount of variation between disciplines, national academic practices, and cultural expectations, the high standards governing written-word scholarship in the humanities are a daunting prospect for any young researcher. Blank page anxiety, excessive self-regulation, and a two-steps-forward-one-step-back writing process are a staple of academic writing practices. Therefore, our workshop was aimed at demystifying these practices and pushing our participants to reconsider the way they thought about their own writing acumen. Production over perfection, lowering inhibition thresholds, and encouraging the joy of writing: those were the leitmotifs which informed our workshop concept. Trite as these ideas might seem, we believed they would play a positive role when encouraging scholars faced with the avowed dreariness and hermetic eruditeness of traditional scholarly writing.

Our priority was fostering open yet constructive discursive practices, where incisive questions could be asked and lived experiences could still be acknowledged. However, the combination of an extremely diverse group of people and the many roadblocks associated with an online format posed a real challenge. We entertained the idea of creating a feedback guideline document to frame our expectations regarding peer-to-peer interactions especially during discussion-heavy sessions (see **Exchange and Communications**). However, we discarded the concept in favor of a more laid-back approach, foregoing the written recommendation to simply remind everyone of elementary discussion etiquette – a decision which proved effective.

Methods

The Research *Is* the Story

Early on, the idea of storytelling as an entryway into writing in general, and a *creative approach* to academic writing in particular, became the unofficial motto of our writing week. The interest in storytelling as a means of knowledge production, reception, retention, and reproduction, is evidenced by the wealth of research and publications, both old and new, on the topic.¹

¹ The interest, both lay and scholarly, on the topic is reflected in a remarkable variety of publications. These range from mainstays old and new (such as Propp's *Morphology of the Tale*, 1958 for the first English edition; Genette's *Discours du récit* and *Nouveau discours du récit*, respectively 1972 and 1983; or Bal's *On Story-Telling: Essays in Narratology*, 1991), to theoretical deep-dives (e.g., Früh et al.'s *Narration and Storytelling*, 2014) and how-to guides geared towards would-be writers, seasoned journalists, and blogging enthusiasts alike (e.g. Storr's *The Science of Storytelling*, 2019) some of which

Reading and digesting what we could of it, we decided on a four-faceted approach towards storytelling: autobiographical narratives, world- and character-building, narrative multi-perspectivity, and genre experimentation. The writing workshop would thus consist in a steady, four-day progression throughout these different aspects, to which we allotted at least a full writing session each.

Linda Anderson writes, citing Candace Lang, that “if the writer is always, in the broadest sense, implicated in the work, any writing may be judged to be autobiographical, depending on how one reads it” (*Autobiography* 1). Telling a story, we thought, is always a little like telling your own story. The first writing session of our workshop was therefore dedicated to autobiographical writing. We would ask the participants to tell *their* story of academia, to write about how *they* came to their research topics, how *they* became interested, and how *they* had arrived at their current project. Autobiography served the dual purpose of letting students work with material they were well acquainted with – after all, which story do we know better than our own? – and of signaling our interest in their personal and subjective approaches towards academic research.

While autobiography was a good starting point, the workshop was aimed at exploring various other aspects of storytelling. Each story needs a good setting: telling a story carries the implication that there is someone, anyone, it is being told to, and the setting plays an essential role in contextualizing, defining, and explaining a story to its audience.² The background against which the story unfolds – the world in which it takes place – is “necessary for the understanding of media creation and for the interpretive process is stimulates” (Boni 9). World-building can be an exhilarating process, its possibilities endless and, while closely associated with the fantasy genre – in that context, the term often means more than the mere expository aspects of storytelling and takes a character-like front-and-center dimension –, it is a requisite part of any narrative.³ However small or expansive, whether contained in “a single droplet of water” (VanderMeer 211) or sprawling like a Tolkienesque

have become beloved staples (see Del Negro’s *Storytelling*, 2021), to studies on storytelling as a “process of reclaiming the story” of traditionally marginalized groups (e.g., Toliver’s *Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research*, 2021) or the inextricable links between people’s stories and ecological realities (e.g. Bainbridge et al.’s *Discourses, Dialogue and Diversity in Biographical Research*, 2021); to say nothing of studies on the storytelling practices of specific authors, genres, or media. The interest of using storytelling techniques in academic writing has been the very subject of recent publications (e.g., Pollock’s *How to Use Storytelling in Your Academic Writing*, 2021) – the studies edited by Griem and Reichertz, *Mehr als Storytelling: Erzählen in den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften* (2022), promise a current Germanophone take on the role of storytelling in twenty-first-century scientific communication. For more, see **Further Reading**.

² While this statement holds true in the context of our workshop, the role of the audience, or reader, in the communicative situation surrounding narrative texts, particularly the question of the presence or absence of an implicit reader, has in fact been a subject of vivid discussion – although one mostly focused on the instance of an implicit author (as a counterpart to the implicit reader), see Genette and Booth as presented in the anthology *Texte zur Theorie der Autorschaft*, edited by Jannidis et al., 2000.

³ “Never forget that the world is an integral character.” (Genesse 61)

universe, fictional worlds are “built from everyday details” (Anderson, *World-building* 11) which give stories the support they need to develop. If the participants were to work on telling the story of their research, we wanted them to think of their thesis as a fictional world and to paint the picture or draw the (graphical and verbal) map of its geography and attributes. What would the terrain and climate of their fictional thesis-world look like? What would it sound and smell like? What animal and plant life, what colors could one spot?

Worlds, and the stories which unfold in them, are peopled with characters. Persons, fictive or not, who move, and talk, and think, and act, and thus drive forward the story – the plot – taking place in a particular setting (for an overview of the relation between setting and plot, description and narration, see Genette, *Figures I* 168-71). This is why we decided to add a character-building session to the workshop. The “ubiquity of characters” often means they are not subjected to too-detailed an analysis in spite of being “highly complex objects in a number of ways” (Eder et al. 3). In our case, considering the limited amount of time we could dedicate to this topic, its complexity meant that we would need to synthesize and simplify a vast field of study in order to provide the participants with a workable set of tools. From Jungian archetypes to Propp’s character types and Greimas’ actantial model (see Propp 25-65; Greimas 49-66), we wanted to arm our participants with tools to reflect upon, develop, and flesh out the fictional characters who existed and functioned inside the ‘world’ of their thesis. As was the case for the world-building section, we included a theoretical framework, background information, and practical tips on character-building in the workshop portfolio.

The third day would be devoted to a writing-and-rewriting experiment. Placed under the label of multi-perspectivity, we wanted the participants to engage with the texts they had written during the first two days of the workshop and examine them from the standpoint of voice – or, as Abbott calls it, “the question of who it is we ‘hear’ doing the narrating” (64) – and focalization – or, to say it with Genette, the question of “who perceives” (Jesch and Stein 60)? Practically, we imagined the participants could analyze which voice and type of focalization they had unwittingly employed in their texts and re-write them, as often as they wanted, while changing one or both of these aspects or combining them in new ways. In light of the topic’s substantial theoretical weight, we decided to spend the whole third day – two entire writing sessions – on exploring voice and focalization respectively.

Finally, the last aspect we wanted to focus on was the question of literary genre and the influence a particular genre will have on the story it facilitates. Different genres have different codes, work with different tropes, employ different techniques, plotlines, and narrative devices to create different effects. In our case, we wanted our students, who would enter this fourth and final workshop day with three days’ worth of texts and stories under their belt, to experiment with what would happen if they were to tell their thesis’ story using the codes and techniques of several different genres. Because they tend to be strongly codified, literary genres often call forth precise expectations from the reader, logic dictating that the more codified a genre is, the more rigid these expectations would be. Additionally, the greater a

reader's experience with one genre is, the broader their knowledge about its typical characteristics and the ways in which they can be subverted, the more nuanced their expectations towards it would be. Taking these aspects into consideration, we decided on providing the participants with a catalogue of six distinct genres, complete with definitions, a list of characteristics, a few chosen examples, and a selected bibliography: crime fiction, fairy tales, fantasy, horror fiction, science fiction, and children's literature, the latter arguably a genre of a different kind as it is "the only category of literature that is defined in terms of its intended readership" (Grenby 199). We hoped this last writing task, to which we dedicated two full sessions, would prompt the students to ask questions such as: What if my thesis were a crime thriller? What if, rather, it were told to children? What shape would it take if it were a work of epic fantasy? How would it come out if it were written as a horror story?

From writing about their thesis as the story of their own self, to imagining it as a fictional world to be built, to fleshing out the characters inhabiting this world, and experimenting with the effects different voices and perspectives have on their story, to finally re-thinking their stories inside the framework of different genres, we hoped the participants would embark with us on a four-day writing journey.

Grammar of Poetry

In *Linguistics and Poetics* (1981), Roman Jakobson writes about the poetic function, defining it as "the Set (*Einstellung*) toward the message as such, [and the] focus on the message for its own sake" (24) alluding, among other things, to the role the form plays on function. Just as in verse poetry, the often-conflicting imperatives of meter vs. grammar will inevitably influence the construction and general form of the text. One does not write rhyme poetry the way one would write a prose short story, or a theatre dialogue. Consequently, one singular story would not be told in the same way if it were told in a verse sonnet, or a prose theatre-like *scène*, or a *calligramme*.

While we knew the workshop was not long enough to explore the history and theory behind different text formats, we wished to inspire the participants to try their hands at text formats rarely seen in the academic context.⁴ We provided them with a third reader, tentatively titled *Text Types: A Catalogue of Examples*, as a source of inspiration and concrete examples. This reader was supposed to encourage them to test a few of these formats at any point during the week. Why not, during the character-building session, write a description of your story's villain in the form of a theatre-like dialogue?

⁴ We refer to them as 'formats' and 'types' to distinguish them from 'genres' such as crime fiction or fantasy.

Exchange and Communications

Exploring different aspects of storytelling over four days and encouraging experimentation with different text formats were the cornerstones of our workshop concept. However, in keeping with the goals formulated above, we wanted to create the necessary platforms for constructive and in-depth peer-to-peer discussions. While the bilingual nature of the entire event imposed certain limitations upon us, the goal was to enable the participants to interact with all their peers, to read aloud or show what they had produced during the writing sessions, to ask for and give constructive feedback, to ask follow-up questions. We had envisioned two types of interactions to do just that: they were always placed at the end of a writing block, and either taking place in smaller, separate groups or in moderated discussions in plenum. Practically speaking, in our online setting, this meant either conducting a discussion in a video conference with more than twenty people or creating separate virtual rooms inside which the different groups could gather. In the end, we planned for seven such discussion rounds to take place, four in plenum and three in smaller groups, the composition of which we made sure would change each time so as to enable participants to exchange more closely with as many other participants as possible – with the exception of the francophone participants, who we thought would appreciate the opportunity to gather in a virtual room with other francophones.

Final Thoughts

An Online Workshop inside a *Symposium Bilingue*?

An online writing workshop for scholars (most of them advanced master's and PhD students) spanning four days and spread over three time zones (GMT, CET, and IST) is a challenging event to organize. The virtual nature of our gathering was a considerable hurdle, one which already impacted the first symposium week. Spending time writing *next to* other people, sharing a common experience at the same moment, is one of the main attractions and benefits of a writing workshop. Spending time in front of one's computer, facing a screen where other people are doing the very same, each one of them a tiny presence on the collage-like arrangement of tiles shown on the screen, is a different thing altogether. One year into a global pandemic which reshaped many people's working environments and pushed many more, in academia and otherwise, towards digital work habits, we feared that a writing workshop's traditional assets would be outweighed by its virtual format.

The biggest challenge, however, was one we both anticipated and underestimated. Commonplace assertions about the pandemic's effect on people's work are only mundane in places where people's work was actually impacted. In others, the "economy of privilege" (McCann and Matenga 162) means that many countries,

while implementing certain mitigating measures such as those leading to changes in the workplace, grappled with the rise of compounding problems (Basedau and Deutsch 29-30), which rendered a comprehensive pandemic response even more arduous. To put it plainly, while the workshop's participants located in the Global North were used to video conferences and sat in front of functioning computers with a decent internet connection, many others located in the Global South did not. While we had taken some internal steps to bridge this gap and lessen the additional pressure put on the participants in question, this very tangible disparity remained a reality throughout the workshop. In practice, it meant finding alternate channels of communication, e.g. text messaging, when connectivity problems arose or providing a written copy of all oral instructions to those who had missed them.

If we wanted our symposium to be a forum for global voices, we realized we needed to go beyond an exclusively English-speaking event. While English certainly has become the Global North's *lingua franca*, unequivocally stating that it is the international idiom is wrong. Indeed, French is still something of a common tongue among many countries of the Global South, particularly in secondary and higher education – its presence, like that of English around the world, is the legacy of centuries-long colonization. In our case, being global meant designing the symposium and its writing workshop as a functioning, bilingual affair. It meant providing all relevant information in both English and French and/or following up in person to ensure communications ran smoothly. During the symposium itself, it also meant providing a near-simultaneous written French translation of all English proceedings via an integrated chat function, something we pursued during the writing workshop as well. An oral French translation was also provided, particularly regarding the specific writing prompts given during the workshop and plenary discussions, to enable communication between the anglophone and francophone participants.⁵

Feedback and Reflection

At the end of our workshop, the participants were asked to fill out a standardized evaluation form. Comprised of multiple choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions, this survey covered questions about the didactic and practical design, aspects of digital interaction, international and transcultural exchange, questions about virtual vs. on-site teaching, as well as constructive criticism and suggestions for future iterations of the workshop. Looking at the answers, the overarching theme was one of (re)discovered enthusiasm for writing, creatively and/or academically: the symposium's second week "provided new perspectives on academic writing", was an occasion to "discove[r] creative approaches to academic writing with a

⁵ Aside from the many student assistants who made the written part of our translation efforts possible, a professional translator and interpreter was also hired to provide us with simultaneous translation where needed. Our thanks go to all who made this bilingual workshop possible, in particular Zoe McNamee and Camille Lavoix.

diverse and international group of peers”, to “learn newer ways to enmesh academic and creative writing”, and was full of “des moments de découverte, d’apprentissage et de pratique de l’écriture créative et interactive”.⁶ While generally seen as necessary and important to foster true global exchange, the near-simultaneous French translations were also seen as “tedious” at times, an important feedback which demands that we reconsider the intersection of inclusivity, voice diversity, and practicability to better our response to these questions in the future.

Being online was both seen as positive – “the opportunity for many of us from distant parts of the world to join the sessions from the comfort of our homes/offices” – and as negative lacking the opportunity to “chat informally” with others, to engage in “personal face-to-face interaction (especially the casual coffee break chats)” and falling short of the “feel of the multicultural environment”.

Planning this workshop was an exciting and challenging adventure. While certain questions remain somewhat unanswered, or at the very least, open – *how can we make such a multilingual, transcultural event truly inclusive for all? how can we harness the potential of virtual encounters without sacrificing the benefits of in-person interaction?* –, others were met with unexpected, bottom-up solutions when unforeseen challenges arose. In retrospect, our participants’ willingness to make do with the limitations of a virtual format, their understanding when faced with the real-life hiccups of gathering twenty-two people on three continents in one video conference, and the creativity of both their writing endeavors and discussions, were the best part of this project and – we hope – its most enduring legacy.

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⁶ “The sessions of the second week of the symposium were for me moments of discovery and learning, and of practicing creative and interactive writing.”

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GENRE



I'm Scared¹

Ridhi Chaturvedi

I'm scared probably more
than I can write about²--
and everyone keeps
telling³ that it's okay,
and that it happens--
and that it'll go away--
and that-all-be-okay.
And I nod⁴,
like my mind needs
an earthquake,
a good jerk⁵,
to resettle-
and people⁶ on
it⁷ have made

-
- ¹ Before you read the poem with the footnotes, I would request that you read it without the associated remarks and develop a personal relationship with the poem. [Content Warning: Explicit contemplation of suicide and gender-based violence.] Truly, the author dies after the text is born, and I would request that you help this little child-like poem to grow with your own experiences and understandings. Talking of the child, I also want to mention that I never give titles to my poems because I feel that the poem is much like a person and defining its characteristics with a name is not fair (not fair to humans either, in my opinion), and so I would really appreciate if you the reader, as a guardian of the poem, could come up with a better suggestion for identifying it.
 - ² The poem was written with the idea of suicide in mind. One of the overwhelming problems suffered by those experiencing suicidal thoughts is the urge to talk about suicidal ideation and the inability to verbalize it. Insensitive assurances that suicidal thoughts are just a 'phase', and everything gets 'better', make the problem cumulative and fatal. As Kay Redfield Jamison writes in "To Know Suicide", "[s]uicidal depression is a state of cold, agitated horror and relentless despair" (par. 6).
 - ³ I have intentionally refrained from using any definite object of the predicate here like 'me', or 'her' and from focusing on a singular experience, because as we know these are common comments that invalidate mental health issues. As isolating as it feels, a collective 'us' seemed inappropriate as well. I want you, the reader, to remember or imagine being told off yourself.
 - ⁴ Nodding has been used as an image for the violent movement the head makes while hanging.
 - ⁵ The idea of nodding continues but this time as a desperate attempt to distract from the continuous negative stream of thoughts. One often tries to distract oneself from deep, engulfing thoughts by shaking or nodding the head.
 - ⁶ Thoughts are as effective as the physical presence of humans. Experiences and trauma can persist like permanent stains left on the mind.
 - ⁷ As you may have observed in the next few lines ("Ridhi, have mercy"), I wanted to separate myself from my brain, almost like some God figure objectively seeing the world. I wanted to have that authority that can bring an earthquake on my own brain to unsettle the memories of the people.

illegal settlements,
 that need to be thrown down
 and then, they would say
 “Nature is so furious
 Ridhi, have mercy!”--
 and so I nod
 thinking that
 this is how
 it is made okay--
 and made to go away.

But they resettle,
 for they need to survive
 at my cost⁸.

The roots under the
 land give up⁹,
 and there is a gush of
 red river¹⁰
 overflowing, flooding-
 and retreating, with it
 all settlements.
 The land is drought now--
 and with one stroke of
 a burning wood
 will be made to ash--
 ash head, ash rest¹¹.

⁸ Thoughts can be parasitic in nature and can consume the mind that produces them.

⁹ Compare the image of the veins under the skull with that of the roots under the ground.

¹⁰ Just as deforestation eventually results in floods, the rupturing of the veins in the process of dying by hanging then washes away the settlements of thoughts.

¹¹ In Hindu funeral rites, a dead body is cremated by touching the burning wood onto the head and then the rest of the body is put on fire, so as to ensure that all the memories and the relationships of the present life are burnt away and the soul starts afresh with a new body and a new life. One could compare the line with the following epitaph quoted in Simon Critchley's *Notes on Suicide* (2015):

Without a name, for ever silent, dumb;
 Dust, Ashes, Nought else is within this Tomb;
 Where we were born or bred it matters not,
 Who were our parents, or hath us begot . . . (23)

And my dad¹² will
 weep and ask why did I
 nod so much?
 And some Godly written
 confession¹³ will be read
 to calm the men on
 the land of his mind-
 that she nodded
 because the men
 within her mind
 danced like devils,
 and the lands corroded
 and she chose to die--
 blooming than
 to stink barren¹⁴.
 Now my dad is scared,
 and consoling zombies¹⁵
 tell him it's okay--
 it happens--
 it'll get better,
 but he knows
 none of it is true,-

¹² On an autobiographical note, I am extremely close to my father. However, as part of my research, I am working on how women die in different ways because the patriarchal society (in the figure of the father) forces them to live like what Achille Mbembe, writing in a completely different context in "Necropolitics", calls "living dead" (40). Women do not have the right to choose (even death) and become answerable for every action. Women are not allowed on the funeral ground unless they are the dead body. Therefore, all the rites are performed by the nearest male family member, showing how life as well as death puts restrictions on the female body.

¹³ Suicide note. Note that in the previous lines the 'people' beg for 'mercy' from the one who is jerking her head and bring a divine calamity like an 'earthquake'. The popular belief is that only God decides about life and death. It has been proven statistically that men are more prone to suicide, and hence, women's dying by suicide is seen as a deviance from expected feminine roles (Canetto 261). In such a case, to rebel and exercise choice is a challenge to both patriarchy and the masculine God himself. I do not encourage suicide, although I do recognize suicide as a choice. As Simon Critchley writes, "[f]or as long as we are in possession of the powers of reflection and basic motility skills, we own the weapon with which we can assert our freedom and end our days, should we wish for such a consummation. But this does not entail that we should use that weapon" (73).

¹⁴ Kurt Cobain's final note ends with "and so remember, it's better to burn out than to fade away" (par. 7).

¹⁵ "People" have been replaced by "zombies" to emphasize how insensitive assurances continue to the point of inhumanity.

for it's not okay--
to die nodding,--
and it doesn't happen
very often,--
and he will never stop weeping.
So now he becomes the God-
and writes some confession--
and nods to fetch me back.¹⁶

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¹⁶ While my idea while writing was that the father is grieving the death of the daughter so much that he follows her to death, one can also read these lines as an observation that the patriarchy does not allow women to escape and ensures that even in their death, they remain answerable.

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Still Looking for the Sublime: Science, Arts, and Spirituality in the Era of Emotionally Overwhelming Environmental Disruption

David Lombard

Men say they know many things;
But lo! they have taken wings,—
The arts and sciences,
And a thousand appliances;
The wind that blows
Is all that any body knows.

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or Life in the Woods* (230)

Picking up the Pieces

After more than seven years, Thoreau's poem still resonates strongly with me and my research. In my monograph *Techno-Thoreau* (2019), for example, I dare to analyze Thoreau's philosophy in *Walden* as proto-ecological and to argue that he developed a multi-sensorial approach to nature, which bridges gaps between empirical and transcendental poles of knowledge (Lombard 7). The poem used as an epigraph for this short creative essay suggests such an epistemological shift while criticizing humans' inability to consider nature as a source of valuable knowledge. First, the poem sheds light on humans' hubris or lack of humility inasmuch as they pretend to know more than what already lies in nature. Second, it juxtaposes the "arts," "sciences," and technology ("appliances") as the means humans have so far used to acquire such knowledge, while the only relevant information is accessed through the empirical experience of the environment ("The wind that blows / Is all that any body knows"). Thoreau's spelling of 'anybody' as "any body" also alludes to a bodily experience, which involves sensory systems (e.g., hearing the wind or sensing its touch) that may or may not be human. In his influential *Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1962), Leo Marx emphasizes that *Walden* "has a strong contrapuntal theme" since Thoreau, "assuming that natural facts properly perceived and accurately transcribed must yield truth, . . . adopts the tone of a hard-headed empiricist" (243). Yet, Thoreau's use of the metaphor of the blowing wind implies that poetic language and even imagination may play important roles in helping us figure out the mysteries of the world. This is probably clarified in a passage from the same famous memoir, in which Thoreau does not give up on imagination or idealism in his quest for 'truth':

Men esteem truth remote, in the outskirts of the system, behind the farthest star, before Adam and after the last man. In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime. But all these times and places and occasions are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages. And we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us. (276)

Building on the tradition of the sublime, Thoreau juggles ambiguous notions of “truth,” “eternity,” “divine,” and “reality” (Thoreau 276). The sublime, he claims, is found in eternity, itself encountered, along with God or the divine, in daily experiences of reality, or of “the present moment” (276). While empiricism serves to understand our environment, such notions draw from the sublime by alluding to something transcendental, which is difficulty expressed through language. The sublime therefore becomes a gateway to representations of the ineffable – an aesthetic and rhetorical strategy to account for inexpressible affects, emotions, or feelings. In this particular extract, Thoreau seems essentially inspired by the traditional ‘natural’ sublime since he associates the divine with a nature that seems somehow superior to, or at least separated from, the human realm. However, the passage also offers significant revisions which move away from traditional theories of the sublime.

In the influential Burkean sublime moment, literary critic Philip Shaw explains that “[t]he self may delight in sublime terror so long as actual danger is kept at bay,” while Kant’s notions of “mathematical” and “dynamical” sublimities offer a “source of delight” which can only be felt when “contemplated from afar” (54-82). Such theories represent the human observer in a fraught relationship with an overpowering nature that is inevitably beheld from a safe distance. Thoreau revises this traditional propensity by evoking a necessity for bodily *contact* (“instilling and drenching”) with “the [divine or sublime] reality that surrounds us” (276), thus suggesting that visual observation might not be sufficient to grasp the sublime. Thoreau, however, does not stop there. As I also argue in *Techno-Thoreau*, he oscillates between considerations of nature, humans, and technology, occasionally bringing them together to showcase an aesthetic shift from the strictly natural sublime to a variation of the technological sublime insofar as he includes technology *within* a natural landscape that had been so far, at least in American nature writing (e.g., in William Bartram’s *Travels* [1791]), romanticized as “pristine,” “untouched,” or “untrammeled” (qtd. in Lombard 21).

The ‘technological sublime’ and ‘toxic sublime,’ the latter coined by Peeples, are two helpful examples to analyze Thoreau’s sublime, which I examine more extensively in *Techno-Thoreau*. These revisions of the sublime do not shy away from including technology, viewing it as “awe-inspiring,” and from identifying and criticizing the impacts it might have on our environments. These two notions, among others even more recent such as the “haptic” (McNee) and “poetic apocalyptic” (Salmoise) sublimities, also shed light on the importance of combining artistic expression with scientific knowledge *and*, possibly, spirituality. In other words, literary

descriptions of the sublime bring us closer to what science has not (yet) and perhaps never will unveil, or cannot suitably represent or express, thus giving visibility and meaning to the abstract and unknown. In that way, the sublime “can help reenchant our sense of dwelling within the earth” (Meillon 208) and help us find beauty and meaning in our physical reality, be it natural, human, or technological. To some extent, the sublime also echoes Terry Tempest Williams’ notions of “terrible beauty” and “beautiful catastrophe” (70, 387). Indeed, the title of Williams’ memoir, *Finding Beauty in a Broken World* (2008), speaks for itself inasmuch as it is an invitation to see beauty and the sublime in places where Longinus, Burke, or Kant would never have bothered to search. Wastelands, ruins, rubbles, and prairie dogs can bear marks of the beautiful and/or of the sublime. Finding the sublime takes a significant amount of time, as the several pages dedicated to watching prairie dogs in Williams’ book suggest. Likewise, unravelling what the sublime means takes time, interest, and devotion: only after hours of observation does Williams write about the ecological teachings of prairie dogs such as “resiliency” and “what it means to live in community” (139). Such a view of the non-human encourages us not to see *any* species as “pests” (even mosquitoes) or expendable “rodents” but, rather, to value all species as members of our precious ecosystems (71). With that in mind, Williams goes back to Thoreau, claiming that “[s]ilence alone is worthy to be heard” (90, emphasis mine). She also describes her beloved Utah as “big, broken country born of faults, tilts, and thrusts, and a history of weathering” (90). “For all its stillness and the vast expanse of *silence*,” she claims, Utah “is a tortured terrain” (90, emphasis mine). In order to reenchant such a “tortured terrain,” one has to listen to the *silence*, the invisible, as well as to what humans have themselves *silenced*. According to Williams, humans need to pay attention to what has been neglected or, in other words, to look for the sublime in the places, objects, and beings that may still be tinged with its (re)enchanting potential.

But How Does It Really *Feel*?

Focusing on affects, feelings, and emotions could help redefine our relationship with the sublime. Although there are various approaches to affects, I refer to Heather Houser’s definition: “body-based feelings that arise in response to elicitors as varied as interpersonal and institutional relations, aesthetic experience, ideas, sensations, and material conditions in one’s environment” (*Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction* 3). Such affects can also be “narrative” inasmuch as they “are attached to formal dimensions of texts such as metaphor, plot structure, and character relations,” which is particularly relevant to the literary sublime (3). As for “emotions” and “feelings,” they are often considered synonyms, but the American Psychological Association (APA) notes an interesting nuance: emotions have “an overt or implicit engagement with the world,” while feelings are “purely mental” (APA Dictionary of Psychology). In that sense, “affects,” according to Houser’s interpretation, are variations of feelings which are “body-based” and may not be exclusively mental.

The new materialist turn as well as affect theories and cognitive sciences also emphasize the importance of affects, emotions, and feelings. What are the emotions and feelings that have been customarily (and more recently) associated with the sublime? What are the neurological processes and sensory systems involved in (and responsible for) their production? How can they be interpreted; or, in other words, what do they say about our relationship with environments and the non-human? Such questions are decisive in any attempt to apprehend the contemporary sublime, and their responses will establish the lasting relevance, affordances, and/or limits of the sublime as a concept in the Environmental Humanities.

While tracing the origins of emotions in the face of the sublime, art historian John Onians explains that “[n]euroscience teaches us that the resources that sustain vision also sustain the imagination, which is why, as Burke reminds us, we are so intimidated by the greatest thing imaginable” such as God’s overwhelming power: “God’s superlative greatness gives him superlative power, and that fills us with dread and respect” (96). More specifically, Onians comments on what happens in the body when negative sublime-related emotions are created:

It increases the heart rate, triggers the release of glucose from energy stores, and improves muscle readiness. And these are particularly telling manifestations because they help us understand one of the most intriguing aspects of our strong negative emotional response to a life-threatening situation: the sense that we can seem to enjoy it. (97)

Burke’s “delightful horror” (67) comes to mind here, which hints at our possible ability to transform presumably negative emotions, such as horror, into a positive, pleasant emotion. Onians then adds that “indeterminate or confused object[s]” produce “mental movement,” whereas “clear positive associations” are just “essentially restful and positive” (100). What Onians indirectly evokes are the ineffable and inexpressible features of the sublime. As Jedediah Purdy argues, both the Anthropocene and the sublime are customarily linked to senses of excess, overwhelm, and disorientation, which leave us confused and possibly troubled (421). Onians suggests, however, that these negative affects are somehow malleable; that they can be transformed into more positive emotions and feelings of delight or joy, or that they can simply be experienced differently because of a series of parameters such as the framework, the environment observed, or personal background. A compelling example Onians provides to demonstrate how the sublime can be manipulated or provoked by human-made objects is the impact of architecture on acoustics. Richard Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries” (1870), for example, may not have the same sublime effect if it is performed in a church – which both bears signs of religious symbolism and offers an awe-inspiring, human-made reverberation – or in the middle of a secular, public space such as a busy street. What I would like to suggest now is that, in the same way architecture, or materiality more broadly, may support the sublime, the sublime *could* support materiality.

In the course of my research for my current project on the rhetorics and narratologies of the sublime in contemporary American environmental literature, for instance, I have come across various imaginative ways of deploying the rhetoric of the

literary sublime. As early as Burke's treaty, literary descriptions were referred to as the optimal way of accounting for the sublime. In contemporary American literature, I have noticed, in works such as Jon Krakauer's mountaineering memoirs, Wendell Berry's novels, or Kristin Kimball's memoirs, that sublime moments may be described by means of uncommon confluences of pain, tedium, and suffering with satisfaction, relief, and joy. In these literary works, the sublime is a rewarding and revelatory moment, which results in an enriched sense of environmental awareness. The experience is also described as profoundly *participatory*, and not as an unengaging contemplation of a remote landscape. Any experience of Thoreau's 'present moment,' these works suggest, requires a creative engagement with the environment, and thus the active involvement of the body, the senses, *and* the imagination.

Although my current research project exclusively deals with American literature, I have so far only been to the United States once – America, the country where the concepts of wilderness and frontier have remained evocative of vast spaces and boundless possibilities. I remember the sight of the Grand Canyon while waiting for the well-known breathtaking sunset, and the whole scene looking like a painting. The national parks contain series of picturesque sceneries, as Alison Byerly argues, namely "object[s] of artistic consumption" (53), which may no longer echo this awe-inspiring sublime landscape that is evoked in the words of Thoreau and John Muir. However, I remember the smell of the graceful mountain hemlocks before the pervasive odors of the tourists' lunch, blue jays' calls before the noisy engines of their cars, and the rough feel of the sequoia's bark before the minutes of rest spent on one of the park's benches. I wonder whether there might be a hierarchy of emotions and feelings which would organize a certain hierarchy of memories. In any case, there has certainly been a hierarchy of the senses, as if what could be seen and heard had been more important or meaningful than what could be touched, tasted, and smelled, simply because the "lower" senses of touch, taste, and smell have been, in Western history, "dedicated to manual labor and the basic feeding and care of the body" (Howes and Classen 67).

While I was standing in front of the scene, I also became aware of the unavoidable contrast between tourists and the so-called overpowering nature. But one needs to be there to *feel* it. Landscape photography tends to exclude humans from the scene, contributing to the imaginary of the natural sublime. What could be termed the 'realistic sublime' exists at the intersection of what is perceptibly experienced by means of all our senses, not just sight and hearing, and of what is imagined. I choose to remember the rivers, forests, and mountains, but one may 'choose' (or is compelled to choose?) to remember the cars, crowds, and signs. In Sequoia National Park, one sign in particular said "the world John Muir knew is no longer," and visitors now have to deal with the humming noises of engines and the invisible plumes formed by their gas. This technological intrusion echoes Leo Marx's notion of the "interrupted idyll," a pastoral moment that can no longer exist because of the constant disturbing "noise" of humans and technology (260, 16). Yet, while contemporary activism points fingers, people want to see and live the American sublime.

At the end of my trip, I spent a few days in Los Angeles, which displayed a different sunset than what I saw in west coast national parks. The conflation of the toxic smog with sunlight creates a spectacle that leaves no one indifferent. While Muir speaks of nature's "Range of Light" (130) as a metaphor for the Sierra Nevada's varied and overwhelming beauty, Los Angeles' artificial "blood-red" (Solnit 86) sunset causes a scene to which ekphrasis does no justice. Such spectacle is deeply artificial or 'unnatural,' and yet, as Rebecca Solnit probably unwillingly acknowledges, they draw attention in the same way Williams' category of 'terrible beauty' does. This event reminds me that, probably like many people, I used to be tempted to disregard some landscapes, knowing so little about ecosystem stability. Like so many people, I tended to view wastelands and abandoned shipping containers as dumps, knowing so little about the power of transformation. Revising the sublime connects the dots, gathers the emotions that have marked unviable dichotomies between nature and culture, humans and non-humans, and humans and technology. Where Burke experienced "delightful horror" (67) when contemplating nature, others have more recently felt awed and/or overwhelmed when crossing the Golden Gate Bridge. While Kant urged readers to behold the sublime visually, from a safe distance, climbers put their heart and muscles to work to touch on a haptic sublime, an embodied experience reminiscent of Stacy Alaimo's concept of 'trans-corporeality' inasmuch as it fosters *contact* and "material *interconnections*" with landscapes and the non-human (Alaimo 2, emphasis mine). Such concepts of 'terrible beauty' or 'trans-corporeality' appeal, like the sublime, to both science and imagination. They exemplify one of the "principle[s] of the sublime," namely the "exercisable *potential* for change," which theoretical chemist Roald Hoffman also identifies in chemistry and science (153, emphasis original). "How easy is true change for matter," Hoffman writes, "[h]ow difficult it is for us," "which is why people will always be ambivalent about chemistry" since "[i]n our mind, change is viewed more ambiguously than it is in the laboratory" (153). 'Terrible beauty,' 'trans-corporeality,' and the sublime are projects that will probably require collaboration between science, art and, to a certain degree, spirituality.

The sublime, more precisely, represents the limits of our rational or cognitive understanding. In his analysis of "The Aesthetics of the Sublime in David Bohm's Philosophy of Physics," Ian Greig argues that "any experience of reality in which the human is to be regarded as a part of the whole can only be mounted in mystical terms, or what Einstein referred to as 'cosmic religious feeling' – or, in other words, the feeling of the sublime" (122). This "transcendent order of being" (124) is somehow part of our reality too, inasmuch as it symbolizes the limits of our knowledge. Art historian James Elkins, in his provocative essay "Against the Sublime," further stokes this debate by claiming that "the sublime cannot be fully excavated from its crypto-religious contexts" and is therefore a "poor," "weak," and "irresponsible" concept in critical thought (86-87). But what if the sublime did not have to, or could not be completely separated from its history, be it religious or somehow spiritual? Contrary to Elkins's assertions, Onians, Hoffman, and Greig suggest the possibility for science, art, and religion to co-exist, if not to depend on each other. Neuro-

scientist Jaak Panksepp brilliantly summarizes this relationship in his essay “Affective Foundations of Creativity, Language, Music, and Mental Life”:

Our desire to know the world drives science. The search for beauty energizes the arts. Both are fertilized by the ancient affective energies that motivate human creativity. The pain and sadness of life, joy also, drive poets, musicians, all artists, to become much more than the physical organisms that they are. . . . In arts as in life, affects motivate cognitive richness like torches illuminate the darkness. Consciousness is colored and integrated by the ancient emotional systems of our brains. (21-22)

While the potential of art and science for producing positive sublime affects, emotions, and feelings is underlined in this extract, Panksepp also acknowledges and accepts the existence of the soul: “I believe that among those ancient reaches of the brain we will eventually find the human soul” and it “should not be all that different from the souls of kindred animals” because humans share with them “seeking systems” that give them access to new knowledge (36-40). According to Panksepp, the religious notion of the “soul” is “fundamentally affective” (40), and accessible through science and art. The sublime may provide information about current environmental crises insofar as it conveys scientific data through artistic media that rely on a different form from strictly scientific output. In addition, Panksepp’s idea of the soul, which verges on religious traditions, fosters equality between humans and non-humans because of commonalities that exist between our sensory and cognitive processes. Understanding the affects, emotions, and feelings of the sublime will require “entangled epistemologies” combining studies in, for example, neuroscience and cognitive science with others in the Environmental Humanities and arts, and thus exploring beyond the dominant trend of “positivist epistemology” (Houser, *Infowhelm* 2-5, emphasis original). However, such an approach will probably have to welcome what French musician and composer Karol Beffa, who is not particularly religious, has come to call “a sense of the sacred” (Beffa and Villani 136) – which is reminiscent of the sublime – to refer to the unknown and mysterious powers of music that keeps it so intriguing and enlightening. There might never be any satisfying or universal response to the question ‘how does the sublime really feel?’, but bringing together all the ontological and epistemological ‘clans’ – science, the humanities, arts, and religion – will help get there.

From Going to Church to Going to *the* Church

For quite some time, I have considered scientists to be the only ones with access to some form of ‘truth.’ I also feel like I have been ping-ponging between faith and scientific knowledge, or between what one could refer to as the ineffable and the explainable for quite a while. I attended Catholic elementary school as an occasional altar boy but was never quite the angel. Later on, in Catholic high school, I became fascinated by biology and physics, but was never quite successful. Like a majority of people, I suppose, this contrast between science and religion has been at the back

of my mind for a while. The opposition always reminds me of Thomas the Apostle – Doubting Thomas – who, so I was told at school, only believed in what he could see with his human eyes. There is, however, so little that can meet the human eye. Again, Thoreau comes to mind, as he wrote about so much more than what he experienced through his senses. Writing is such a powerful way of turning empirical data into some form of access to the unknown, to the doors that the “high priests of progress,” to quote from Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac* (107), have so far left unlocked.

A phrase I remember from high school exemplifies such an attitude, which does not directly reject any of the above-mentioned ‘clans,’ including religion. I remember when my English teacher explained the grammatical rules of using the definite article, and more specifically the difference between saying that when people ‘go to hospital’ it means that they are patients while ‘going to *the* hospital’ means that they are just visitors. The same rule applies to the church; as she claimed, ‘going to church’ implies going to the institution to attend a service, and thus possibly to pray. ‘Going to *the* church,’ on the other hand, means going to the building, probably to visit, and a certain interest in what this building emblemizes without necessarily being Christian or any kind of believer. In ‘going to *the* church,’ I see an approach that does not inevitably shun forms of spirituality, or a willingness to lend people who have a relationship with faith an ear and to respect their choices. As a researcher or scientist, if ‘I go to *the* church,’ I suggest that religion, spirituality, or faith may not be the evil twin of science, and may have something interesting to bring to the table after all. ‘Going to *the* church’ may be acknowledging a certain “sense of the sacred” (Beffa and Villani 136) in Karol Beffa’s understanding of the term.

While Elkins does have a point when he affirms that religious meaning is still embedded in the sublime, I would like to argue that this religious or spiritual meaning needs to be accounted for and understood. Practically speaking, sublime moments that are described as overly spiritual may not serve the new materialist project of entanglement between humans and non-humans theorized by scholars such as Jane Bennett or Stacy Alaimo. Although he does not explicitly refer to the notion of the sublime, David Abram, for example, explains that the Jewish and Christian systems of beliefs in an “otherworldly God” have been nurturing an “intellectual distance from the nonhuman environment,” from the sensuous and visible entities of our physical environment (63-64). However, he distinguishes “ancient Hebraic culture” from Jewish and Christian traditions, arguing that “ancient Hebraic religiosity was far more corporeal, and far more responsive to the sensuous earth, than we commonly assume” (144). Hebrews were concerned with both the “invisible” (e.g., the soul, “wind,” and “breath”) and “visible” (e.g., the “moon,” animals) aspects and entities of the natural world, thus not presenting any transcendent being as fundamentally superior to humans or non-humans (144). Abram’s approach is one example among many that illustrates what the approach of ‘going to *the* church’ has to offer. What is more, Abram’s interest in a wide variety of religious traditions as well as in magic and in Indigenous spiritualities, highlights

that spirituality should not be interpreted as referring solely to Western traditions, but also to other practices and beliefs such as animism and shamanism.

From the international online symposium *Climate | Changes | Global Perspectives*, I retain that there should be “a spirit of experimentation” (Bergthaller et al. 273) in the Environmental Humanities in order to respond to the challenges brought about by the Anthropocene and environmental disruption. Hannes Bergthaller, one of the symposium’s discussion group leaders, provided a convincing personal example of this practice: he explained that Taiwanese people rely on Western medicine to deal with certain health issues and on traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) for other diseases and conditions against which the former had proven ineffective. The ‘spirit of experimentation’ echoes the approach of ‘going to *the church*.’ What is more, ‘experimentation’ suggests collaboration with different scientific fields and areas, but also artistic or creative explorations. To conclude my own short creative engagement with this thought-provoking symposium, I will not be as radical as Thoreau by asserting that “[t]he wind that blows / Is all that any body knows” but will, rather, call for rediscoveries or redefinitions of what humans have claimed to know or fully understand. Any attempt to find satisfying responses to the current crises of representation will probably require the investigation of all of the epistemological and ontological ‘clans.’ The sublime is everywhere, one needs to stop just looking *at* and start looking actively *for* it.

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What My Grandmother Talked about When She Talked about Life

Sonakshi Srivastava

Honey. *Shehed. Madhu. Pushpa Rasa, Makshika, Kusuma Sava.*

Grandmother. *Nani. Nanimaa. Bibi. Amma.*

Two words and their varying synonyms that encapsulate my world. For as far as my memory stretches and permits me, I want to believe that my Nani is as old as honey, or rather, honey is as old as Nani, which is my very certain way of stating that Nani refuses to age in my memory.

Named “Usha”, after the Hindu term for the very first rays of the dawning sun, the siblings who followed her were also named for the Hindu terms of flora and fauna – her family a fecund garden radiating forth.

Nani is my mother’s mother, and true to her name she was the first ray of sunshine in my life. Warm. Floozy. Snug. Comfortable. Glowing.

Like all women of her generation, and the generation before her, she was my window to the world, to the intricacies and the obvious elements of life. And, like all grandchildren of my generation, and the generations before, I grew up on a steady diet of food and fables fed to me by my Nani. To think of her is to think of abundance, to remember her is to remember plenitude.

This piece is a personal essay, a reflection on how intertwined our lives are with the lives of the bees. It is also a reflection of how deeply informed my Nani’s insights on life were, and how this wisdom passes on. Interspersed with recipes, the essay in its hybrid form conveys the essence of what it is to be alive, to live, and to co-exist – feasting, praying, loving, living in these challenging times.

On Childhood, Rituals, and Nurture

*Uchchishtam shivanirmalyam vamanam chaiva mrutha karpatam
Kakavishta samudhbhootham pancha poothani Bharatha.*

Every summer, I made a mad scamper to my Nani’s place. A home so well-lit and always golden, it held the promise of unwarranted childish delights and where,

under the benign supervision of Nani, I was always at liberty to flit from one place to another.

Nani had a unique way of expressing her love – she would cook, and cook, and cook. She could dish out anyone’s favourite edible delight in the span of an eyeblink, and never seemed to grow tired of it. Feeding her loved ones kept the fire in her burning.

If feeding was her language of love, honey was the vocabulary. Nani and her pot of honey were inseparable. Her store may run out of the curry masalas and sugar, but her pot of honey overflowed. It was indispensable.

Over the years, I too, have come to appreciate the gastrotherapeutic attributes of honey. It was my Nani’s panacea to all things that went rogue within and without the body – colds, coughs, teething troubles, cuts. It was my Nani’s substitute for sugar.

However, this reverence for honey is not peculiar to my Nani alone. Honey pots and jars are ubiquitous in most Indian households. Regarded as one of the *panchamrits* (five elixirs), honey in Hindu tradition is believed to be the first edible product that was tasted by Lord Indra, the king of the Heavens and the gods. Consecrated thus, honey figures as one of the essential food items that is fed to a newborn on their *annaprashan*, an important ritual where the baby is fed solid food for the first time.

Food perpetuates life and living. One cannot conjure life without food. The semblance between honey as the first nurturing food, and food as the sustaining life force, is evoked in Hymn 187 of the Rig Veda (Sen 41), a fragment of which runs as follows:

Now I shall praise food, the support and power of the great . . .
O sweet food, honeyed food, we have chosen you: for us be a helper.

.....
On you, food, is the mind of the great gods set.

Blanketed under the care and warmth of Nani, along with the comforting promise of honey, my childhood seems no less mystical now. For each dish that passed down from Nani to me, I secured recipes that are more than just plain inventories but lessons in sustaining life and promising selfless love.

A recipe for *Shrikhand* (sweetened yoghurt) from the trove of my Nani:

INGREDIENTS:

2 cups fresh curds

½ cup dried rose petals

½ cup nuts (almonds + pistachios)

2 to 3 tbsp honey

½ tsp cardamom powder

Almond, pistachio slivers, and dried rose petals for garnishing

METHOD:

Place curds in a muslin cloth and hang it overnight or for 6-7 hours to drain out the whey from the curds.

Place it inside the refrigerator to avoid the curds going sour.

Blend dried rose petals and nuts to a coarse powder.

Transfer the hung curds to a mixing bowl, add rose petals, nut powder, honey, and cardamom powder and blend using a hand blender.

Refrigerate and serve chilled, garnished with dried rose petals and almond and pistachio slivers.

On Love, Adoration, and Sensual Love

Hearing this and all that the embittered Radhika had to say, the slayer of Mura addressed her respectfully, ‘O lady! A slave’s mistake should be forgiven without remonstrance.’ Saying so, the Lord who wears peacock feathers on his head, and bowed at her lotus-like feet like a swarm of buzzing bees . . .

(qtd. in Muddupalani 149)

Nani married her lover – my grandfather – in the spring of 1967. The course of love did not run smooth for them. Belonging to strictly traditional families, where love marriages were an alien concept, it was their relentless perseverance that eventually softened the waxed hearts of their respective parents.

During my bedtime, Nani would oscillate between stories of fantastical creatures and nuggets of her personal life. I became privy to the machinations of her heart, and the unadulterated affection it held for my grandfather. Till my Nani’s death in the year 2000, their love stood the material test of time.

Despite their extraordinary love story, their love was quite prosaic with its own share of quarrels, mollifications, and the other regular dealings between married Indian couples.

I am, however, never exhausted by the sheer intensity with which epiphanies strike me whenever I reflect on their love story and attempt to integrate it with Nani's mythic tales that usually had a bee for its actor.

In classical Indian Literature, Sangam and Sanskrit, references abound of bees as symbols of fertility and erotic energy. It is in the regenerative season of Spring that the world is washed anew, and the bees invigorated. Inspired by everything and everyone springing to life, classical poets Bhamaha and Kalidasa composed extensive verses on bees "embracing the mango blossom" (qtd. in Subhashitavali 71) with a thrill similar to that of a new lover meeting his beloved.

The regenerative and voluptuous energy of the bee is such that it also features as a character, Madhukarika, in Kalidasa's play, *Abhijnanasakuntalam* (The Recognition of Shakuntala), and is partially responsible for precipitating the play into action. A bee attacks Shakuntala – mistaking her to be a flower (a narrative trope commonly employed), and while she attempts to drive the poor bee away, King Dushyant, who is hidden from Shakuntala's view, expresses dismay. He is jealous of the "blessed" "honey-foraging thief" who gets to "touch" and "taste her ripe lower lip" (Kalidasa 179) while he awaits his chance to embrace Shakuntala. The abundant use of bees in Shakuntala also seem to pronounce the ruling Rasa, the essence of the play – the *Shringar Rasa* (erotic), and the corresponding *bhava* (emotion) – *Rati* or love.

It is perhaps no coincidence that bees are affiliated with an erotic pulse since Kamadeva, the Hindu God of Love, carries a bow with its string composed of bees. In one of his verses, Kalidasa envisions Kamadeva as a "stalwart soldier" who appears during springtime. The stanza runs as follows:

A stalwart soldier comes, the spring,
Who bears the bow of Love;
And on that bow, the lustrous string
Is made of bees . . . (Bhamaha 71)

He too mentions Kamadeva activated in Spring:

This hum is not a swarm of bees,
from inebriety its sweet note born:
it is the sound of Kama's bow,
in this season being drawn. (Bhamaha 71)

In Sanskrit, while the season of Spring is known as *Madhusamaya* (the time of sweetness), Kalidasa went a notch higher by tagging the bees as *kusumashayani* (the one who sleeps on a bed of flowers), thereby presenting a sprightly picture of being inebriated in love.

A honey-based aphrodisiac recipe for those in love:

INGREDIENTS:

1 kilo fresh unpasteurized forest honey

3 litres water

2.5 gm honey mead and floral wine yeast

2-3 gm yeast nutrient must be added as honey is very low in proteins and fermentation takes very long

5 tsp lime juice

Whole spices to taste

METHOD:

Step 1: Open the jar of honey and dilute it. Honey on its own is too concentrated for any microbes to survive. However, the moment it is diluted, it starts fermenting. I would recommend one part honey with three parts water (by volume). Remember honey is denser, so if we are adding by weight, then 500 gm of honey per litre (or kg) of water is ideal.

Step 2: This is the most important part. Do remember that honey does not dissolve easily in water, so it needs to be constantly stirred in warm water (not boiling). Be careful about undissolved syrup sticking at the bottom and being caramelized. A mild constant stirring will help reduce any burnt flavours, heating in a water-bath will be the best.

Step 3: Take some lukewarm water, add honey, and keep stirring. Bring it to a boil to sterilize and then cool it.

Step 4: Cool down the honey water to about 25-27°C before adding yeast. Keep the boiling vessel in the kitchen sink and fill it with ice to make an ice bath.

Step 5: Add some yeast (about 0.6-1 gm of dry yeast per litre) as boiling would have killed all the wild microbes. Also, adding some yeast nutrients (0.4 gm per litre) would help yeast to multiply faster as honey on its own does not have enough nutrients. Adding some lemon juice/citric acid will create the acidic medium that will prevent the mould and other infection to develop. Make sure to hydrate the yeast for a good 15-30 minutes before adding to honey water. This will make these yeasty workers strong enough to make our beautiful beverage and can fend off any wild microbe invasion.

Step 6: Put it under an airlock in an airtight container and wait for 2 weeks for the fermentation to complete. A cool dry place away from sunlight is best. Some recipes call for 24 hours of primary fermentation without the airlock. This helps yeast to access the oxygen and creates a more vigorous fermentation.

Step 7: After the bubbling has stopped, please siphon/strain the mead into a second vessel/bottle for secondary fermentation. We also get rid of the yeast sediment in the process. Please wait for another month for the mead to clear to serve. Keeping in the refrigerator will help clear the wine faster.

On Devotion, Adoration, and Spiritual Love

*Dhadhane dinebhyah shriyam anisham ashaanusadhrusim
Amandham soundarya-prakara-makarandham vikirathi |
Tav'asmin mandara-sthabhaka-subhage yatu charane
Nimajjan majjivah karana-charanah sat-charanathaam ||*

(Sridevi! Your lotus feet be ever-giving wealth to the helpless, in proportion to their desire. They strongly radiate the nectar with abundant beauty and auspiciousness. To attain your lotus feet which are like hibiscus flowers, may I become six-limbed like a bee!)

If love pervaded my Nani's being, how could devotion be far behind? She was very regular in offering her salutations to the various gods and goddesses in the house, and along with her, I too, used to frequent the Shiva temple near her house. A thing that stood out to me in each visit was the perpetual presence of a fat black bee hovering around the Shivalinga. To quench my curiosity, I turned to my grandmother, who had a story for this phenomenon.

According to Hindu mythology, the goddess of the bees, Brahmari Devi, is an incarnation of Goddess Parvati, the wife-consort of Lord Shiva. She assumed this form to fight the demon Arunasura. She is worshipped in her apian form along with Lord Shiva at the Mallikarjun temple in Andhra Pradesh. The presence of the bee around the Shivalinga was a symbolic recognition of the inseparable couple assuming non-human form on Earth. Moreover, if one were to assume more logical ground in reasoning, the saccharine offerings made to Lord Shiva attracted the bees. The *abhisheka* (anointment) of the Shivalinga is done with honey because of its exalted divine status.

The divine status is also accorded to honey in Buddhism. Buddhists observe *Madhu Purnima*, also known as the Honey Full Moon Festival, to mark the occasion when Buddha retreated into the forests to unify his quarrelling disciples. During his stay in the forest, a monkey offered him a honeycomb and this selfless act bore him fruit for he was reborn in the heavenly realms. Buddha is also believed to have delivered a sermon "Like the Bee and the Flower" which finds a mention in "The Dhammapada". The fragment runs as follows:

Like the Bee and the Flower
Let the wise man live
in the flower of his village,
like the bee, gently taking flowers' honey,
but not harming the blossom
and it's colour and scent.

Years later, when a grandson was born to her, Nani named him “Madhava”, after Krishna. With the trademark fecundity refusing to let go of the family, the addition of Madhava to the family also fuelled my knowledge about the sacred attributes of the bees.

Apart from ministering to erotic love, bees also symbolize spiritual devotion and adoration. If one were to have a close look at a picture of Krishna rendered accurately in all his splendour, one would spot a few bees hovering near his face, attracted to its sweetness (hence the name Madhava, like honey). The reason is summed up in a prayer by the ISKCON – it is only at the lotus feet of Lord Krishna that one may attain transcendental honey. Thus, the mind of the devotees wander to His feet like a bee is attracted to lotus.

During lockdown, when I actively turned to Yoga for my well-being, I got to know about “Brahmari Prayanam” which entails producing a buzzing sound from within. The relevance of the buzz is congruent to that of Shiva’s “Om” – these vibrations and sounds heralded the beginning of the Universe, and thus, were emulated in Vedic chants. The memory of my visits to the Shiva temple with Nani were refreshed, and I began to understand the due order and connections of things and between things.

A recipe that celebrates the adoration and love for all things spiritual:

INGREDIENTS:

200 gm sesame seeds
150 gm peanuts
100 gm jaggery
2 tbsp honey
2 tbsp ghee

METHOD:

Dry roast sesame seeds and peanuts separately till golden and set aside. Coarsely crush the peanuts.

In a pan heat jaggery and ghee.

Keep mixing till it forms a smooth gooey mixture and add honey.

Mix well and add sesame and crushed roasted peanuts.

Keep mixing till everything comes together well. Cook and keep mixing for 2 mins on medium heat.

Turn off the heat.

Grease a plate with some ghee and spread the mixture on the plate.

While it is hot you square cut with knife. Grease the knife with ghee as the mixture will keep sticking to the knife.

Cool under a fan for 2-3 hours.

When nice and hard, crack and enjoy the healthy *chikki*.

On Sustainability, Work, and Death

*rātrirgamiṣhyati bhaviṣhyati suprabhātaṁ
bhāsvānudveṣhyati hasiṣhyati pañkajaśhrīḥ
evaṁ vichintayati koṣha gate dvirephe
hā hanta hanta nalinīm gaja ujjahāra ||*

The aforementioned verse was oft-quoted by my Nani during her satsangs, her monthly prayer meets that attracted not only her old friends but also the kids from the colony. Nani took to hosting satsangs quite regularly as she crossed her 50th birthday. Roughly translated, the verse is the parable of the bee. A bee once got so engrossed while sucking nectar from a lotus flower that it failed to leave before dusk. Upon realizing that it was way past dusk and the flower would not open before dawn, the bee stayed in the flower, refusing to extract itself in the fear of damaging it. While the bee was thinking so, an elephant came and trampled upon the lotus, crushing and killing both the flower and the bee. The parable of the bee was her lesson on practising restraint from unnecessary indulgences.

Everything about her house sparked joy because of her astute eye for detail and declutter. I picked up a few of her hacks as well. In case there were rotis and rice leftover from previous meals, Nani would simply pour honey and metamorphose them from sad leftovers to brilliant, sweet dishes. There is truly nothing that honey cannot do.

Apart from honey, Nani extensively used beeswax as a moisturizing agent. Creams and lotions were not much of a rage during her time, and Nani had gone organic before it became a fad. She switched to manufactured creams and lotions only after she had moved into the city, leaving behind her idyllic and very organic lifestyle back in her village.

Nani not only introduced me to the beauty of the world but also taught me to fully appreciate it. She taught me to be like the bee – to take in nectar in the form of beauty and to return it manifold in the way of good deeds like honey.

Towards the waning of her life, Nani took to spending time reading scriptures. She let my mother take over the charge of the household while she immersed herself in bhakti to eventually leave to be with her Krishna.

Nani led a life well-lived, and here is her evergreen recipe for preventing rice and roti from going to waste:

INGREDIENTS:

Leftover rice/chappati

Honey

Ghee

METHOD:

Warm up the rice/chappati on a pan by generously smattering it with ghee. Heat until it assumes a golden colour.

Pour honey over the golden fried rice or chappati and serve it with some whipped cream.

Conclusion

“Honey, where are the bees?” (Sinha and Ram)

There is so much that I learnt about the bees from Nani and continue to do so.

Despite their size, or perhaps a lesson here as well, bees are exemplars of life and how to live one. Diligent and dedicated workers, they teach us how to stay true to our task and lend a lesson on peaceful cooperation, implying the interconnectedness and importance of everyone.

This interconnectedness is also extended to their honey – from birth to death, honey permeates through all the life stages in Hinduism, its anti-decay and mystical element pronounced.

From their role as erotic agents to divine assistants, bees are microcosmic models of the human world so much so that honeycombs are often described to be in the shape of a human heart.

I also know that bees can teach one a lot about temper – there is a colloquial saying *“madhumakhi ke chatthe mein haath daalna”* that finds an English equivalent in “to stir the hornet’s nest”. Whenever Nani used to get upset, my mother would caution me against her temper with this saying, and better sense would prevail. The case of the bees makes for a good case in anger management. Bound to die after they sting their victims, their fate allows one to reflect on the ills and implications of being hot-tempered.

Sometime in March 2021, the Karnataka government planted ‘fences of honey’ to prevent elephants from foraging into human territories. I was amused when I read this and could not help but wonder how entangled our existences are!

A recipe from the heart of Indian kitchens for rejuvenating our spirits. The dish *ghewar* actually resembles a honeycomb and is believed to calm the body and mind:

INGREDIENTS:

1 cup refined flour
1/8 cup ghee
1 tsp lemon juice
1/8 cup milk
2 cups water
Sugar syrup
Pistachio and almond slivers

METHOD:

For the batter:

Take ghee with 2-3 ice cubes in a mixing bowl.

Whisk until the texture becomes smooth and creamy. Once done, discard ice cubes. Add flour with water in parts slowly and mix softly until it becomes nice and fluffy in texture.

To fry ghewar:

Take a pan with 3-4-inch depth and flat base. Use a cookie mould with 2-3-inch height.

Fill it halfway with oil or ghee. Heat on medium flame.

Once oil is optimally hot, pour a spoonful of batter in the middle of the vessel in a thin stream. Take caution as oil will splatter.

Wait for a few seconds until bubbles settle, and then pour the second spoonful.

Use a skewer to make a hole in the centre.

Fry until golden brown on medium flame. The sides will be slightly more golden.

Once it is properly fried, remove carefully by inserting that thin skewer in the middle of the disc and lift the whole ghewar with it. You may perfect the technique in few attempts.

Allow the ghewar to rest on a cooling rack or on a bowl that is smaller than the ghewar disc – this will ensure the removal of any excess oil.

Brush the ghewar with sugar syrup.

Garnish the ghewar with dry fruits and cream.

Cocooned in the softness of honey, and luxuriating in the presence of my Nani's life lessons, who would have thought that an edible item could be of such import?

While I continue to appreciate bees, it is also important that I take into consideration the fact that the population of bees is fast on the brink of decline. If our sticky co-existence will not save them, it will not save us, either. Nani's wisdom continues to unveil the workings of the universe at large, and the bees in particular. Her wisdom is the recipe to save the world. We all need to be like bees – resilient, sharp, rejuvenating – staunchly against the decay and collapse of the world and our love, as regenerative and sticky as honey.

We need more bees.

We need more pollination.

We need more forests.

We need more regeneration.

We need more empathy.

We need Life.

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Arrival: A Distillation¹

From the Diary of Christopher Columbus, September 17 - November 16, 1492²

Hannah Nelson-Teutsch

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- 1 “*You might as well act as if objects had the colors*, the Encyclopedia says. — Well, it is as you please. But what would it look like to act otherwise?” – Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*, par. 51, emphasis original.

To act as if color is the property of the object is to posit a material world of being rather than becoming. To act otherwise would be to emancipate color from a bounded form and in doing so “to unsettle our basic assumptions regarding nature as a ‘place’ separate from the human realm and to posit it instead as natural-cultural processes continually occurring *all around, through, and in us*” (Sullivan 80, emphasis original). The prospect of colors that continually materialize *all around, through, and in us* is suggestive for those like Astrida Neimanis and Rachel Loewen Walker who seek “to understand climate change and human bodies as partaking in a common space, a conjoined time, a mutual worlding” (560).

Conceiving of color as rich with the potential for mutual worlding makes space for what Wai Chee Dimock describes as a “deep time journey” – a textual intervention that moves along “a criss-crossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures” (3). Traveling through deep time in order to unsettle dominant conceptions of climate change requires a trip back to the fifteenth century and the Columbian arrival, which must be acknowledged as critical to the origins of the multiple, entangled, and overlapping climate crises of the twenty-first century (Yusoff; Koch et al.; Davis and Todd; Lewis and Maslin). By developing a Columbian ecology of colors through processes of poetic distillation, this “critical fabulation” (Hartman 11) quietly allows subjects, actions, and objects to fade from the record until only the colors remain. To linger in this Columbian ecology of colors is to come to know climate change as a “nonchronological durationality” that houses past, present, and future in “a common space, a conjoined time” (Neimanis and Loewen Walker 561, 560); and, in so doing, to consider whether fabulations such as this one – what Jane Bennett describes as new “regimes of perception” (108) – can “re-shape our own human practices and awareness – our very perception of the world and not just our understandings of it” (Sullivan 90, emphasis original)? Could this be what it looks like to act otherwise?

- 2 The Columbian diary is itself “storied matter” (Iovino and Oppermann 1) – a canonical source that is at once elusive and revelatory, deceptive and transparent, decrepit, recombinant, malleable, and resistant. The record of “all that [Columbus] would do and see and experience” (Columbus 21) is neither the diary that was kept aboard ship, nor the copy of the original made for Columbus before he departed on his second voyage; those texts have vanished, leaving behind what can best be considered a secondary source: “seventy-six large-sized paper folios written on both sides in a small, cursive hand, forty to fifty lines on the page” (5) – a curious amalgam of quotation, summary, and exposition. “The manuscript is,” according to Dunn and Kelly, “obviously a working draft, for it includes many passages of canceled text (both single words and phrases) and insertions, sometimes interlinear, sometimes marginal” (qtd. in Columbus 5). To distill from this text an ecology of colors is to manipulate and mediate what is already a highly mediated and thoroughly manipulated text.

very green

white

white

white

white

green

very green

red

blackblackwhitewhiteredblack

gold

gold

gold

very green, so green

gold

green

gold gold

red

green

gold

very green

gold gold

red

gold gold

very green

blues yellows reds

gold

gold

very green

so green

goldgoldgold

green

very green

green

gold

gold gold

red black

gold

gold gold

gold

green green

gold gold

gold

silversilver

gold

gold gold

gold

gold

gold

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On the Eve of All Saints' Day

Tening Diouf

Chapter I: Our Cruise

November used to be very cold here in New York. But I'm hot. My sheet is wet, I have sweated all night. Has the climate changed during the night? No, it hasn't. It's the climate in my room that has changed. Now that I think of the climate, it reminds me of the dream I had this night. I think it is the dream that made me sweat a lot. Anyway, I must get up now before Louise comes here and shouts at me for being not yet ready for our cruise. My friends and I are going to California today for two weeks. It was really fantastic last year. We enjoyed Virginia. We had visited many places and had much fun. This year, we have decided to change locations. I do like travelling and enjoying life.

It sounds like somebody is ringing at the door. It must be Lou. She is always on time when we are going on a cruise. Let's see – who is it? It takes about a minute to get up. I woke up two hours ago, but my body is still heavy. The person is still ringing at the door. I can hear Milo barking. Milo is the name I gave to my dog. I bought Milo last year to keep me company when I go out. I have a driver, but I prefer to walk sometimes.

How are you, beautiful lady?, she says, smiling; I am fine, Lou, I answer her. Sorry for making you wait so long. Don't worry, she replies. We call her Lou, but her name is Louise. She is fifty-seven years old, two years older than me. She is a white, big, tall, and comic lady. She always makes everybody laugh. She is dressed all in black making her blue eyes more visible. Her husband died five years ago, and her children live in New Jersey. Her grandson pays her a visit each year. As far as I am concerned, my husband died six years ago. We were married in Nigeria in 1980, our native village. It was a beautiful day for me. Eddy and I wore traditional clothes sewn by my grandmother. It had taken her two weeks to finish them. The wedding had taken place in the public square. At 7 pm, I had joined a group of fifty-, sixty-, and seventy-year-old women who would teach me how a married woman must behave. The teaching was accompanied by a dance ritual with songs and tom tom that were being beaten by two women. We spent the whole night in a room. I was sleepy and tired but wasn't allowed to sleep. A man didn't have the right to attend this initiation ritual as a woman didn't have the right to attend a man's initiation ritual. Old women were chosen because of their experience in conjugal life and in life in general. It was a secret for those who were not yet married. After ten years, Eddy and I left the village and moved to New York where Eddy got two jobs. He was studying for a degree in accounting at the same time. I was working in a restaurant at that time. I was the manager. Angelique, our eldest daughter, was studying at

university. She got married in December 2000; now she is living with her husband in Brazil. They have been living there for ten years. My two sons have gotten jobs and have moved with their wives because of their job obligations. All my children were born in New York, except Angelique, who was born in Nigeria. Like my friend Louise, my little children pay me a visit each year.

At the beginning, Eddy's death was traumatic for me. He died in 2004. I felt lonely when my children had left for their respective houses after the funeral. I missed Eddy's humor. He used to listen to blues music and always made me laugh. Sometimes, he would come to me and tell me: "Would you like, beautiful girl, to dance with me?" He would come and take me in his arms. Even when he was tired, he would always find a way to make me laugh. But after six years of mourning, I have learned to live without him. I have new friends now. They are all white people, and I am black, but we don't mind our difference of skin. I can afford what they can. Eddy and I had become rich, and before he died, he left me with our fortune. Our children have already succeeded in their lives.

Louise

Milo now recognizes me. He no longer barks seeing me. Jane has a big and very nice house. I go into her kitchen as I used to. To save time, I prepare the breakfast for the four of us. Thereze and Rose are coming soon, and I am sure they haven't taken their breakfast at home. We must leave at twelve and it is already ten o'clock. So, we have only two hours left. I am going to prepare eggs and sauce with salad and tomatoes. It's easier and faster to prepare. I feel like dancing. I like the music Jane was listening to. It is about love and the artist is a white man from New York.

I am sure those who are ringing at the door are Thereze and Rose. They are widows. Thereze is forty-five years old and Rose is forty-eight. We are not young, but we don't consider ourselves old people. We like enjoying life as long as we have money and time. Hee!! Hello ladies, you are so beautiful! I say to them. Ohhh! Thank you, Lou, they say. Come in and enjoy the food I have prepared for all of us. Ohhh! With pleasure Lou, Thereze says. While I am in the kitchen, they are sitting in the living room watching TV. Jane is in her bathroom.

Now that everyone is here, we can eat. We are ready now to leave for our cruise. Two weeks of happiness! Waww!!! We are all excited apart from Jane, who is a little bit anxious. She is not usually anxious; sometimes, she is more excited than us when we are travelling. But today she is a little bit sad. I will ask her when we are alone.

Thereze

Louise is very good at preparing food. We really enjoyed the food. Now that everybody is ready, we are leaving for our cruise. Every one of us has at least four bags

full of clothes and shoes. We want to visit many places, and we must be well-dressed. Jane's driver is taking us to the wharf.

There are a lot of people on the wharf today. Everybody is in a hurry; some people are even running; I wonder what is happening. They must be going somewhere. All of them are well dressed, even the children. Maybe I must ask somebody. Yes, I will ask the old man who is walking in front of me. Good morning sir; yes good morning, he answers me with hurry. I just would like to know what is happening here at the wharf today? It is the first time I have seen so many people, old, young, and even children; everybody is in a hurry, what is happening? I ask him. Tomorrow is All Saints' Day. All these people are going to their villages to commemorate their deceased and stay a few days with their families, he answers me; it is a kind of reconnection with families and ancestors. Ancestors musn't be forgotten or they can get angry and block your life. Those who are living in the village are our parents and relatives; and we musn't forget them. It is also the occasion for us to visit some traditional places and bathe in the rivers that are blessed by the ancestors. I think I have answered your question; I am afraid I have to go now before missing the boat; and it is the only one left; all the others have already left, he says. Ok, thank you so much, I say to him, but I wonder if he hears me, he is nearly running despite his old age.

Jane and Louise are buying something; I don't know what, but they told me they were coming soon. Ohh!! They are coming, it's high time. We have seen you talking with an old man, what were you talking about? Jane asks me. I was asking him why there are so many people at the wharf; he told me it's because of All Saints' Day tomorrow. It's to commemorate dead ancestors because they musn't be forgotten. He even said that the ancestors could block your life if you forget them. I really don't understand how a dead person can block somebody's life and . . . Ok, Jane replies, stopping me. Now, can we go, she asks. Ohh yesss, let's go. Our boat is here now.

Rose

We are all tired, but we like the travel, and we like our hotel. It is the most luxurious in California. Each one of us has her own bed with white sheets. We can go outside for food or eat at the hotel, it depends on what we want. The hotel is expensive, but they offer a good service. We just need to rest a little bit, and then we will start visiting the town. Every one of us is on her bed. I can hear Thereze snoring. Lou is talking to somebody on the phone, and I just lie on my bed thinking about how wonderful our journey will be. Jane is sleeping already. She told us her sleep had been disturbed last night because of a dream she had. We would have liked her to explain it to us, but she preferred not to. Maybe it was frightening and she would just like to forget it.

I can see Louise getting up in a hurry and running to Jane. What happened? I get up and run to them. Jane is sweating a lot. She is speaking words we don't understand; it is as if she is talking to somebody we cannot see. Louise and I are calling

her name to wake her, but she keeps on talking and sweating. So, we wait for some minutes. Thereze is still snoring. She sleeps so profoundly that she cannot hear us. Jane is still sweating and talking. What can we possibly do? Call a doctor or wait some more minutes? While we are sitting next to her and looking at her, we can see that she starts waking up. She stops talking and even sweating. She has opened her eyes now and she is so pale. It is as though she didn't eat food for many days. We don't understand what has just happened. She gets up and sits on the bed. We ask her if she needs a doctor, but she says she doesn't. She goes in the bathroom and some minutes later she comes back. We give her food, but she says no, shaking her head. I start doubting our journey. Will we really enjoy it considering Jane's actual condition?

Chapter II: My Grandmother

I start bothering my friends with my condition and silence. But how can I explain to them what is happening to me? Will they be able to understand me? No, they will not. They will take me for a fool. So, I prefer silence. Louise has asked me about my dream, but I said nothing. I am sure they won't understand it. So, I must try my best to not disturb our journey. I take the food and start eating, but as soon as I finish, I feel like throwing up. I run into the bathroom and throw up all the food I have eaten. I start losing my energy. But I have to gather all the energy that remains to me and go with my friends. We have planned to go to the restaurant in two hours.

We are outside now. Louise wanted us to take a car because of my condition but I told her I could walk. The restaurant we are going to is not far from the hotel. We can see shops and parked cars. I get closer to a car and start looking at the glass. At the hotel, I didn't want to look in the mirror for fear that my pale face would discourage me. Now, I would like to see what it looks like. In the glass of the parked car, I see not only my face, but also the face of an old woman looking at me. I quickly turn around, but I don't see anybody. My heart starts jumping, jumping, and jumping. She is the same old woman I saw in my dream. This old woman is my dead grandmother. But she is dead, so how come she came back in my dream? Last night, she was calling me back to our village. She told me to follow her, and she was saying it in the manner she used to when I was a little girl. My mother and father have named me after her. We were living in Lagos, but my parents used to take me to the village where my maternal grandmother was living during the summer when school had closed. My grandmother and I used to go to the fields and grow rice. We used to visit trees and rivers. She used to say that trees and rivers are memory. And we also used to visit the cemeteries where my great grandparents are buried. She would say that we mustn't forget the ancestors, that they are not really dead although we cannot see them. It used to frighten me to know that dead people are among us. But she told me they are guiding us and would not harm us. So, this morning when Thereze told me what the old man had said, it reminded me of what my grandmother used to tell me. It made me more anxious.

The name of my grandmother was Gnilane. She was a strong woman and used to get dressed in black, with a flat hat on top of her head. Everybody in the village loved her. She used to heal people with herbs and powders that she mixed with water and bathed them with. She told me that healing was transmitted to her by her mother and that her mother had received it from her mother. My mother died in 1982, two years after I got married; my father died before her. When my mother died, my grandmother told me that she would transmit her traditional healing knowledge to me.

When we first moved to New York, Eddy and I used to go to the village and pay my grandmother a visit. But once Eddy had so many jobs, we didn't have time to visit where our parents – Eddy's parents and my parents – are buried. My grandmother died six years before Eddy died. We had gone to her funeral – Eddy, and I, and all our children. She was buried in one of the same cemeteries she and I were visiting when I was a child. Now, is she haunting my sleep because I stopped visiting her? Or is it because she wants me to go back to the village? In my dream she was calling me back to the village. I refused and she engaged in a fight with me. She was stronger than me. She grabbed my wrist with both her hands and started walking in a direction I didn't know. I was struggling to escape from her hands, and I started crying. She released my hand and told me to follow her, but I started running, running, and running very fast, and it was then that I woke up. I was sweating so much. This morning, I didn't want to come here, but I said to myself that it would help me change my mind. I would like to forget the dream and that's why I don't want to talk about it. But, it is as if I cannot get rid of it. I have just seen the same woman, or should I say my grandmother, in the glass of the car. What can I do? Where must I go? To whom can I talk? What will I say? Oh my God help me, save me!

We are in the restaurant, but I cannot enjoy anything. I am looking at the glass that is in front of my chair expecting to see her in the glass, but I don't see her. So, I start eating, but my strange feeling has come back. My stomach cannot – or refuses to – take in food. I run into the toilet and start throwing up. I start being really sick. I lift my head to look at the glass that is in front of me in the toilet, and she is there in the glass, my grandmother is in the glass. I turn around, but I don't see her, I look back at the glass, but she disappeared. Oh my God, what is happening? I come outside and sit down and look at the glass that is in front of my chair, and she is there, looking at me and smiling, and dressed the same way she dressed in the dream. Louise takes my hand, my God, I nearly jump up thinking it is her, my phantom – yes, she is a phantom who wants me to go back to my village. What is the problem? Louise asks me. I think I must go back home, Louise, I am really sick. Aren't there hospitals here, Jane? I can take you to the hospital. I am really sorry, Louise, but I prefer to go back home, I answer her and get up. She also gets up. Thereze and Rose are dancing, they don't see us, and I don't want to disturb them. So, I go outside and Louise follows me. She takes me to the hotel and sits down looking at me while I am wearing my clothes. I just take one suitcase and ask Louise to bring me the other suitcases when they come back. I thank her for her kindness, and she takes my suitcase, and we go downstairs. I take a car and wave at her, she waves back sadly.

It has been nearly an hour that I have been at the wharf, but I don't see any boats. It is about 7 pm. I know that I may spend the night here, but I will wait, or ask somebody. It's really a long and heavy day for me. I see a man coming, his dress is white, even his hair. Good evening, Sir! Good evening, he replies; is it possible to have a boat going to New York? I ask him; I cannot get a plane today and I must go back home. No, all the boats have left, but I rent a boat for my employees, we are leaving in an hour. But we are not going to New York, we are going to our village for All Saints' Day that is tomorrow; he answers me kindly. Where is your village? I ask him. Ogidi, a Nigerian village, he answers me. I nearly faint when I hear him pronounce this name. It's my native village. So, they are people of my native village. They don't know me, and I don't know them, but we have the same origins. It is the only possibility you have if you don't want to spend the night here on the wharf, he tells me. The day after tomorrow, you may have a car going from our village to the Nigerian airport; once there, you will have a plane going to New York. So, I invite you to my village, I am sure you will enjoy being there. It's a wonderful place he says, smiling at me kindly. I feel like I have known him for years. Come with us, you will not regret it, he says. I say yes, shaking my head and wondering if I really said yes. But I go with them to their boat. I go with them to my village. My grandmother has succeeded in some way.

There are old people in the boat, old men and women. They are greeting me as if they have known me for years, just like the old man who invited me did an hour ago. I greet them back. An old woman, surely the oldest one in the boat, comes to me and asks me my name. I answer my name is Jane. I nearly say Gnilane, yes Gnilane is the name of my grandmother whom I am named after. In the village, people were calling me Gnilane. Jane is my Christian name. It was when we moved to New York, Eddy and I, that I started telling people my name was Jane. The old woman looks at me as if she is reading my thoughts. Do you need help? She asks me; no, I just need to sleep if that is possible, I say. She brings me a sheet and lays it near her. I lay down and close my eyes. I can feel she is looking at me. But I keep my eyes closed. I feel like sleeping.

When I wake up, I remember a dream I had while I was sleeping. In the dream, there was a boat full of black people, young men and women. They were chained like animals. They were hungry and tired. Many of them died. Those who didn't die were brought to another land where they were enslaved. But some of them managed to escape. They were running towards a river and those people who had enslaved them were chasing them. Once at the river, those black people walked on the water. I asked one of those enslaved: where are they going? Won't they die in the river? No, they won't die; they are going back to Africa, our homeland, and we too, must go back there one day, but with your help! We need your help! He said to me. I woke up just after the dream. Now I am wondering what this dream means. How can I help those I don't know?

After seven hours, we have arrived. I follow the old man who invited me to his house. He introduces me to his family, and his wife takes me to a room, prepares the bed for me, and goes outside. Some minutes later, she comes back with food. I

am hungry, although my stomach doesn't allow me to eat. But I accept the food just to be polite. I start eating, telling myself I will be sick again, but much to my surprise the strange feeling in my stomach has disappeared. I still cannot believe it. I keep on eating, but it is as if nothing had ever happened to me. What does it mean? Even my fatigue has disappeared. I don't understand anything, but I enjoy the food.

Chapter III: The Dance Ritual

A few minutes later, the old man who brought me to the village comes into the room. I am happy to see him again. How are you, Jane? He asks me. I am fine, thank you, I answer him. We are having a dance ritual in honor of our dead ancestors. We organize it each year on the eve of All Saints' Day. There are many tribes, and each tribe has its own dance. Would you like to come with me? He asks, smiling. I say yes with words, not with the head, and I smile back at him.

The dance has started. After five tribes have danced, it is the turn of the tribe of the man who invited me. He jumps as if he is a young boy, he starts dancing and others of his tribe follow him. I have even seen the old woman who gave me a sheet in the boat. She is dancing. She must belong to the same tribe as the old man. After them, another tribe starts dancing. I feel like dancing. The more they dance, the more I feel like dancing. So, I get up and start dancing with them. I forget that I have been sick all day, I have even forgotten that I didn't plan to come here. Lou will worry having no news of me. I have forgotten my mobile phone at the hotel.

After the dance ritual is over, the old man asks me where I am really from. I am from this village, I answer him. My grandmother's name was Gnilane and I am named after her. Oh my God! The old man says. Do you know the name of the tribe you were dancing with? Yes, I answer, it is the Igbo tribe, my grandmother used to take me with her when there was a dance ritual. She told me that we belong to the Igbo tribe. After I have danced with them, all this memory comes back to my mind. I was really alienated, but now I am reconnected with my origins and culture. Tomorrow I will go to her grave and to those of my parents. He smiles and takes me in his arms like a lost child who has just been found by his father after many years of absence.

I spent the rest of the night in the old man's house.

This morning, everybody is at the cemeteries. The men are removing the grass that has grown in the cemeteries, the women are sweeping it. I am with the women. After sweeping the cemeteries, each one goes to the grave of their deceased. It is a time of silence and prayers. Total silence apart from the noise of the leaves that fall from the trees; the dry wind blowing, and sometimes the noise of animals. At the beginning, I didn't recognize the graves of my parents and grandmother, but after the sweeping I have recognized them. So, I go there and start apologizing for forgetting them, for not coming back to the village after their deaths. I feel really happy; I have peace that I haven't had in a long time, despite my journeys. I promise to stay in the village. I will stay here and rebuild my grandmother's house that had been

deserted after her death. It will become a house of vacation for my children and grandchildren. I will demand them to come here on the eve of All Saints' Day no matter how busy they might be. I will share with them what my grandmother taught me: our culture and knowledge. I know that is the reason why I am here.

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VOICE



Empathy for Everything: Why the Portrayal of the More-Than-Human in Literature Matters

Andrea Färber

All cows do is walk up and down the meadow and treat themselves to lush grass and wildflowers without a care in the world. They rest when they feel like it, either wallowing in sunlight or seeking solace under cool shadows. They lazily watch hikers pass by. When it is time to leave the alpine pasture, as the days get shorter and the temperatures colder, they trudge along to their winter dwelling, guided by human hands. Cows in alpine pastures only follow the guidance of farmers, and yet humans point their fingers at cows to shift the blame of the cause for climate change onto them while continuing to burn fossil fuels.

The lines above came into being during the second week of an international online symposium hosted by the University of Würzburg with the title *Climate | Changes | Global Perspectives*. Participants were encouraged to try out new and creative ways to engage with their dissertations, such as mapping them out as an island or engaging with them from a personal point of view, deviating from the strict path of academic writing that typically leaves out the person behind the work. I specialize in the representation of the more-than-human in climate change literature, more specifically the relationships and interactions between the more-than-human and the human. When I wrote about the cows, it was one of those days when I could not really concentrate on my dissertation. Instead of working on the prompt that had been given to us in the workshop, my thoughts drifted to an article on the Austrian news website ORF.at that I had read a couple days prior and could not stop thinking about. I used the time that had been given us to write the text above, trying to figure out what exactly bothered me so much about the article that I kept pondering it even days later. The article, titled “Klimakrise: Methanreduktion als ‘größte Chance’” (“Climate Crisis: Reduction of Methane as ‘Biggest Chance,’” my translation) was talking about methane in connection with the climate crisis, but what struck me as odd – and what has stuck with me since – was the picture that accompanied the article: seven cows are lined up in the photograph. The article references a different article by *The Guardian* with the headline “Reduce methane or face climate catastrophe, scientists warn.” Just like ORF.at, *The Guardian* also features a picture of a cow, a close up of the animal with its tongue cheekily touching its nostril. However, neither the words ‘cow’ nor ‘cattle’ can be found in either of the articles.



Image 1: The image used in the article from ORF. Image from Karoline Thalhofer, *Kuhherde auf einer Weide im Unterallgäu – Bayern*.

According to Saunio et al. in collaboration with the Global Carbon Project, methane is, after CO₂, the most prominent human-influenced greenhouse gas that contributes to anthropogenic climate change. Methane constitutes a serious problem in that this greenhouse gas “is a stronger absorber of Earth’s emitted thermal infrared radiation than carbon dioxide (CO₂)” (1564). However, unlike CO₂, which is predicted to stay in the atmosphere anywhere from several hundred to one thousand years, methane is estimated to stay in the atmosphere for approximately nine years, making it a reasonable target of efforts to counteract climate change.

About 30% of methane in the atmosphere comes from natural causes, such as wetlands that, due to their moist nature, metabolize soil and plants and thus lead to methane production, while 30% is produced through man-made actions such as burning fossil fuels. The remaining 40% is attributed to agriculture, such as rice production and the cultivation of livestock, which produce methane as the grass they have eaten breaks down (Borunda). So, while it is true that cows are partially responsible for the high levels of methane in our atmosphere, portraying cows as the culprits responsible for climate change is not only a misrepresentation of global responsibility for methane emissions, but also a distortion of the fact that humans are the ones keeping cows and thus just as responsible for the methane produced.

When I explain my dissertation topic to anyone who is not involved in literary studies, I am generally met with blank stares. “I didn’t know that’s something that can be studied,” is one of the favored replies, often followed by “but why are you studying this?” My answer is that I believe, as Richard Kerridge does, in an ecocritical approach to literature:

The basic hope is that environmental criteria will become an expected part of debate about all kinds of new artistic work, and that this will be a sign of a general shift in cultural values and – most importantly – everyday behavior. Ecocritics hope to influence readers and writers, so that works concerned with environmental values will become more popular, and new works will emerge to inspire change. (361)

Theoretical approaches in ecocritical literary studies such as cultural ecology of literature concern themselves with the ways in which climate change literature can affect the general public in order to combat the threat of global warming. Cultural ecology, a term coined by Julian H. Steward, “differs from human and social ecology in seeking to explain the origin of particular cultural features and patterns which characterize different areas rather than to derive general principles applicable to any cultural-environmental situation” (36). The concept operates on the principal that specific local features require specific solutions that influence the development of cultural adaptation and social patterns differently (38-39). A literary adaptation of cultural ecology can be used as a transdisciplinary approach to texts that focuses on the “interaction and mutual interdependence between culture and nature” such that the relationship of culture and nature is analyzed without reducing one to the other (Zapf, *Literature as Cultural Ecology* 3).

Climate change literature differentiates itself from other genres because it typically has an environmental agenda: it wants to bring climate change and its implications to the attention of a broad audience in hopes to encourage the desire to protect our environment in its readership. Literature is easily accessible, unlike scholarly articles, which tend to go unseen by the general public. However, just like scientists at this point in time can only predict the possible outcomes of climate change to the best of their abilities, climate change literature can at best respond to an existing crisis and at worst portray ways of adapting to apocalyptic riskscapes. Its forte, however, is the ability to reflect on contemporary political conditions and provide insight into current ethical and social ramifications (Mehnert 4). As Zapf points out, the reconnection of consciousness to the unconscious and external to internal ecosystems is a significant function of literature that allows “for a fully developed capacity of human societies for self-representation, self-reflection, and self-renewal” (“Literature and/as Cultural Ecology” 55). Given the ability of literature to allow humans to reflect on themselves, in these troubling times, literature provides a creative outlet through which we can analyze where our ancestors went wrong in the past, where we are still lacking in the present, and how we can try to counteract the unprecedented challenges that will be the future repercussions of our current neglect.

Climate change literature exhibits a number of unique characteristics (Mehnert; Löschnigg and Braunegger; Trexler), one of them being that the more-than-human oftentimes takes on a bigger role than in other genres, developing its own distinctive agency. As Amitav Ghosh puts it,

the uncanny and improbable events that are beating at our doors seem to have stirred a sense of recognition, an awareness that humans were never alone, that we have always been surrounded by beings of all sorts who share elements of that which we had thought to be most distinctively our own: the capacities of will, thought, and consciousness. (31)

The term ‘more-than-human,’ coined by American ecologist and philosopher David Abram, suggests that humankind is only one species in the large net of earthly life. In contrast to the narrative of a nature/culture divide that humanity tends to use to

differentiate itself from other species, the concept of the more-than-human suggests that humans and their cultures exist within a net of earthly life, thereby erasing the nature/culture dichotomy. According to Abram, “we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human” (23). The more-than-human approach challenges the notion of hierarchy and encourages engagement with knowledges that have been displaced by modernity, which estranged humanity from nature:

We may acknowledge, intellectually, our body’s reliance upon those plants and animals that we consume as nourishment, yet the civilized mind still feels itself somehow separate, autonomous, independent of the body and of bodily nature in general. Only as we begin to notice and to experience, once again, our immersion in the invisible air do we start to recall what it is to be fully a part of this world. (154)

Representation of the More-Than-Human in Literature

Traditionally, the more-than-human in literature functions to help the human main character advance. In the context of literary history, the more-than-human has developed from being used as a negative example against which humanity is asserted to become an active participant in different genres of literary productions. Sketching the history of animal representation in literature, Susan McHugh points out that “literary animal studies can contribute to a broader understanding of porous species forms and can help model knowledges and responsibilities attendant to life in the twenty-first century” (492).

Inspired by Ursula Le Guin, Donna J. Haraway introduces the carrier bag theory of storytelling and of natural/cultural history in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016). This theory aims to change the narrative. From an Anthropocene point of view, everything but the hero is no more than a prop or prey that needs to be overcome. However, the hero is dependent on trivial things such as pots or bottles for survival. Haraway uses the example of the hero drinking water out of a curved shell to show how the hero is becoming-with natural/cultural multispecies beings and that the more-than-human encountered on the way is not just a prop but a being with a purpose (39-40).

While I side with Haraway in the belief that the Anthropocene – a term coined by Paul J. Crutzen in 2002 that suggests that we have entered a new geological age in which the climate and the environment are dominantly influenced by human activity (23) – is a troublesome term that shifts humans back into focus when in these trying times ‘becoming-with’ is the right approach, it must be acknowledged that literature remains a uniquely human tool and thus will always be influenced by the *anthropos*. As Ghosh points out, “it was in exactly the period in which human activity was changing the earth’s atmosphere that the literary imagination became radically centered on the human” (66).

Although the more-than-human will always be written about from a human perspective, the portrayal of different more-than-human agents in literature can

have an enormous influence on how the general public perceives them in the real world. I am using the term 'real world' here to differentiate between reality and the world within a literary text through the concept of transportation developed by Richard Gerrig to account for the cognitive processes that give substance to literary worlds.

Scientists can only make predictions about the severity of the extent of climate change as we are likely heading towards the environmental tipping point sooner rather than later (Lenton et al.). The true magnitude of the crisis will only become visible at a later stage due to the nature of its 'slow violence' (Nixon). Unlike vague scientific predictions, literature can flesh out and explore detailed fictional scenarios and the ways in which humanity can adapt to them. Literature can also provide scientific data in a way that makes it understandable for the reader and offer suggestions as to how an individual can combat the crisis. Some novels even offer survival tips, such as Jenny Offill's *Weather* (2020), which teaches the reader how to transform a can of tuna in oil into a candle. So then why, when we are supposedly already headed towards our own demise, is it especially important to focus not only on human characters, but also on the more-than-human ones? The answer is: to create empathy for the other that we need to cooperate with in order to survive on this planet.

According to Gunkle, the term 'empathy' was coined by Edward Titchener and is a direct translation of the German word *Einführung* (15). Empathy is described by Gunkle as

the process by which an individual attributes aspects of his own personality to an external object, animate or inanimate. In the former sense – the attribution of aspects of one's personality to an external, *animate* object – the meaning comes close to what is now generally called "psychological projection"; in the latter case – the attribution of aspects of one's personality to an external, *inanimate* object – a kind of anthropomorphism seems to be outlined. (16)

With regard to the question of how empathy shapes society, Helen Riess explains that if humans were going to live by the principal of 'survival of the fittest,' we would not be capable of responding to the suffering of fellow human beings and our species would go extinct; humanity survives because of mutual aid that, when provided to someone suffering, reduces our own distress (74-75). According to Riess, empathy "requires cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and moral capacities to understand and respond to the suffering of others" (76) and leads to compassion. If we assume that it is empathy that guarantees the survival of our species, would it not make sense to get people to emphasize with the more-than-human that we depend on for our future survival? After all, we need trees for oxygen, insects for pollination, and water for survival, among many more-than-human others. Literature that provokes empathy for the more-than-human and its distress provokes humanity to respond to that distress and take better care of its surroundings.

For Hoffman, the key requirement for an empathic response is "the involvement of psychological processes that make a person have feelings that are more congruent with another's situation than with his own situation" (30). This empathic distress

then triggers prosocial moral actions to relieve the distress of the one involved, whether that be pain, danger, or other forms of discomfort. I suggest that Hoffman's mode of role-taking is a necessary starting point for understanding in which ways we as readers can start to feel empathy for the more-than-human, especially when portrayed in literature. This cognitively demanding process requires the observer to imagine himself or herself in the place of someone for whom the experience is not new. Thus, they get to experience a concept that is foreign to them through the eyes of someone who is already familiar with it. Similarly, the concept of 'simulation' (Hogan) suggests that, due to a cognitive process in which the mirror neuron system both fires when a person does an action as well as when a person sees someone else or reads about someone doing that action, writers can deliberately steer their readers' emotions towards a specific outcome.

Writers dealing with the topic of climate change can use these concepts to their advantage to both convey new knowledge about and establish meaningful relationships with the more-than-human world by crafting characters that live in harmony with the more-than-human. Through these characters and the processes of role-taking and simulation, the reader can form a connection with the more-than-human actant that can translate from paper into the real world and affect personal dealings with the nature that surrounds us. Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018) is a powerful example of how climate change literature focusing on more-than-human actants operates to this advantage.

Trees in Distress

When I was little, my grandparents often took me on hikes. Whenever I felt exhausted on our way up the mountains, my grandfather told me to rest my back against a beech, as beeches would recharge my energy. Only minutes later, I would feel refreshed again and we could resume our journey. Why my grandfather always attributed energy to beeches, no one knows. He passed away shortly after I started primary school, but even after two decades I still remember him whenever I encounter a beech. It was my grandpa who made me aware of beeches. And it was reading *The Overstory* that expanded this awareness to include an uncountable number of other species of trees. Every now and again, we will encounter books that possess the ability to genuinely reconfigure the way we see the world, and I dare say that this novel is one of them.

Centered around nine human protagonists and a multitude of more-than-human characters, *The Overstory* tells the (hi)story of trees and how they can shape and influence human lives. It depicts the fight between humans who stand against deforestation, and humans who argue that their life depends on cutting down trees. It further highlights interconnectedness, both between the human characters, the more-than-human characters, and the human and more-than-human characters. But more than anything, Powers' novel manages to portray trees in a way that – without anthropomorphizing them – manages to connect them with the reader through the

experiences of the nine main characters. The novel provides scientific data as to why trees are important to our planet, but it also illustrates the ways in which trees function that show that they are indeed as alive as humans. Trees can communicate with each other and with the critters that live on or near them. They can travel. They provide for each other and protect their own. What we might have thought of as independent entities, the novel reveals to be a fascinatingly complex and interdependent system. Entire ecosystems can develop on a single treetop. Even more so, the novel makes its readers aware that humans share a significant amount of genes with trees, their ancient lives branching out to interconnect with ours. As Powers repeatedly emphasizes, humanity cannot exist on this planet without trees. We live in a symbiosis that we are largely unaware of.

The Overstory is an example of climate change fiction that directs the reader's attention to an ongoing issue in our world through the eyes of its characters. It depicts both sides of the current political and cultural attitude towards deforestation in the United States. This novel is a prime example of Zapf's concept of cultural ecology and how literature allows the reader to reflect on the state of the country and how it came to be in the first place. It tells the story of migration to the United States while showing how the forests of the country at the same time started to diminish. The novel allows for self-reflection and the opportunity for self-renewal.

Towards the end of the novel, dendrologist Patricia Westerford is invited to talk at a conference about the role that trees might play in a sustainable human future. Her talk skillfully ties together all that the reader has learned about trees throughout the novel, especially focusing on the relationships between trees:

It turns out that a tree can give away more than its food and medicines. The rain forest canopy is thick, and wind-borne seeds never land very far from their parent. *Tachigali's* once-in-a-lifetime offspring germinate right away, in the shadow of giants who have the sun locked up. They're doomed, unless an old tree falls. The dying mother opens a hole in the canopy, and its rotting trunk enriches the soil for new seedlings. Call it the ultimate parental sacrifice. The common name for *Tachigali versicolor* is the suicide tree. (455)

At the end of her talk, Patricia cycles back to the original question that the conference poses: What is the single best thing a person can do for tomorrow's world? She toasts to *Tachigali versicolor* and drinks an extract from the poisonous plant in front of the audience. Patricia's act in the book is termed an unsuicide. In an interview with Everett Hamner for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Powers reflects on the meaning of the term, stating that Americans' current politics can be referred to as a collective suicide. Listing several actions as examples, such as the backing out of climate agreements, the revoking of protection of air, land and water, and the stunting of the solar power industry, Powers accuses American politics of speeding up processes of self-destruction. As he explains, Patricia's suicide is "the gesture behind the entire novel: the active, even violent effort to oppose a way of life that would gladly bring itself and all else down with it, rather than capitulate to even the mildest forms of reconciliation to the rest of the living world" (Hamner, par. 50). Patricia's empathy for trees has led her to this conclusion, and her talk, followed by

her action, leaves behind a lasting impression. What Powers manages to do is make the human readers feel empathy for trees by sharing information about them that is mostly unknown. Although our actions do not need to be as drastic as Patricia's, the novel encourages readers to commit their own unsuicide by working against the collective suicide of the current politics.

Conclusion: New Ways to Engage with the Planet

Recently, the term 'climate change' has started to develop into something more sinister: 'climate crisis.' This expression suggests that things are no longer simply changing, but that the magnitude of the changes has reached a point at which they are profoundly detrimental. Humans are still trying to find more-than-human scapegoats – such as the cows in the news article that focused on an entirely different topic – to blame the crisis on, even though humans are the main perpetrators. Ignoring the problem seems easier than facing it, because facing it would mean that we would have to accept the inevitable: that we stand before a new challenge of unknown proportions. However, we cannot look away forever, because sooner rather than later our current (in-)actions will catch up with everyone – human and more-than-human.

Grappling with where our ancestors went wrong and what is yet to come, climate change literature tries to envision our futures, the good as well as the bad outcomes; and it makes us especially aware that we as humans are not the only species affected by climate change. The entire net of life will suffer just as much as we will, and when the net of life suffers, we in turn will suffer even more. Daniel, a climatologist in the play *Between Two Waves*, explains it as follows:

The carbon dioxide traps in the heat. When the temperature rises two degrees we lose the Arctic sea ice, then West Antarctica, then the Greenland ice sheet. Without the ice the Earth is less white so it can't reflect the sun. The darker oceans absorb more heat and so the melting increases again, until the permafrost goes too, releasing all the other gases that it's frozen safe for millions of years. And so sea levels rise again, flooding billions of people, the people least able to deal with it who caused the least amount of the emissions to begin with. The warmer water makes bigger storms and makes them more often so severe flooding and landslides hit some places, whilst drought strikes others, like the Amazon, which will keep drying out until it stops absorbing any more carbon dioxide and starts *releasing* it in bushfires instead. Malaria and dengue fever become pandemics because breeding areas for viruses and mosquitoes multiply, while half the other species on the planet run out of habitat until they're extinct. (66)

But in order to change the current problem, it is necessary to change the way we think. We need to start empathizing with our environment as much as we empathize with other human beings. This is precisely where literature can make a difference. We walk on our planet mostly unaware of all the wonders that surround us.

Literature, however, has the ability to spoon-feed us these wonders in bite-sized bits, slowly increasing our awareness and making us understand that there is more to the world than we can ever perceive with our naked eyes. Richard Powers' *The Overstory* shows just how this task can be rightly accomplished. By including scientific facts about trees that the average human would never come across, the winner of the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction can evoke empathy for the distress of the trees that would usually not be apprehended by us. As has been shown, empathy elicits the wish to respond to the distress of someone else, and thus it will provoke human action to counteract that distress. Giving center stage to the more-than-human in literature is thus an effective way for humanity to start to raise awareness for more-than-human life and engage with the world in new ways. To make for a smooth transition from our anthropocentric worldview to one that puts nature and culture on the same level, human characters offer themselves as facilitators between the human and the more-than-human world. This is why research into the portrayal of the more-than-human in climate change literature is an important investigation at the present. Our thoughts are shaped by what we perceive, and the way the more-than-human is depicted in literature and other popular culture will have a considerable impact on how humanity will deal with the climate crisis that is yet to fully unfold.

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Petite Conspiration entre Baobabs

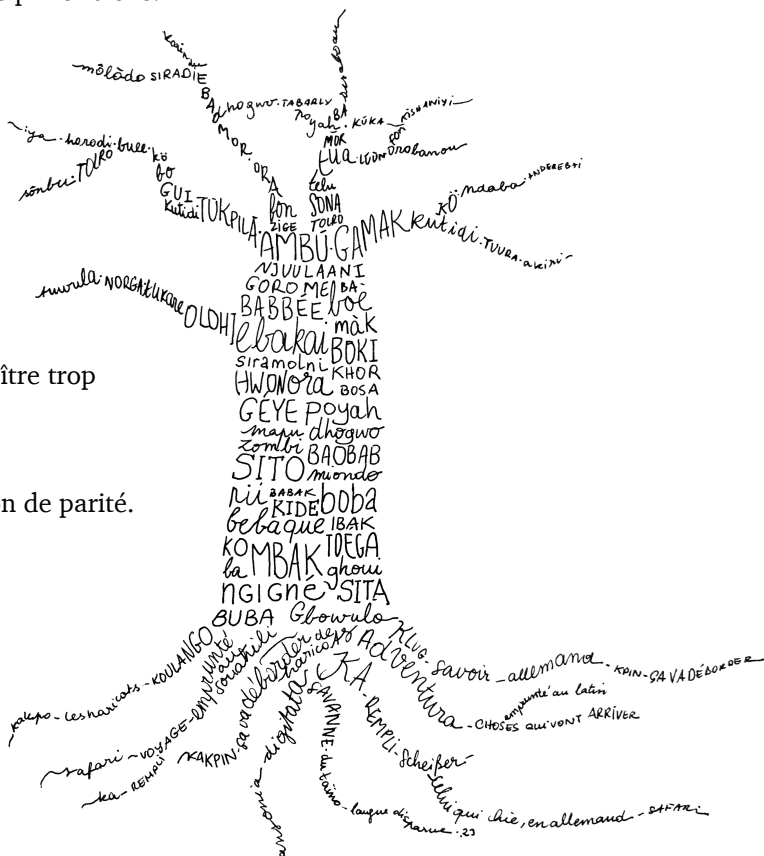
Camille Lavoix avec des illustrations de Raphaëlle Jung

Le Baobab d'Hokakpin



Je suis un baobab qui vous parle,
Misé misé, je vais vous raconter une histoire,
La mienne, celle d'un baobab fixé dans la racine des mots.
Je vais aussi vous parler d'elle.

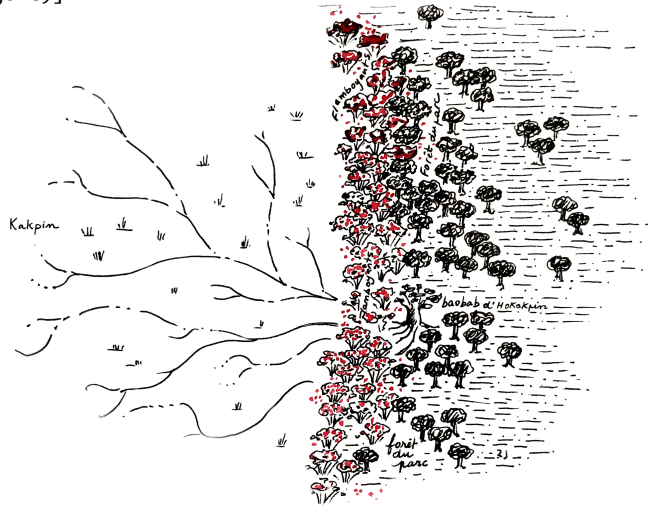
Pour ne pas paraître trop
Autocentré,
Botanocentré,
Africanocentré,
Pour une question de parité.



Elle arriva vers dix-huit heures alors que le soleil se couchait.
 Elle passa devant moi sans me voir.
 Qui se souvient encore de moi ?
 Ceux qui savent ne pensent guère à me présenter.
 Pensent-ils qu'il vaut mieux laisser le limon de l'histoire se tasser ?
 Pensent-ils que les jeunes et les étrangers ne comprendraient pas ?
 Dans tous les cas, nous ne fûmes pas présentés.

Misé misé, je vais vous raconter une histoire,
 Les baobabs, avant de grandir, ça commence par être petit.
 C'est le Petit Prince qui l'a dit.
 Je suis né de deux démenagements,
 Un brin bouleversants,
 Les champs des populations humaines de Bradou débordaient de kakpo.
 [kakpo, les haricots, koulango]
 Les populations se déplacèrent – quelques kilomètres tout au plus –
 Et créèrent Hokakpin,
 [Hokakpin, ça va déborder de haricots]
 Mais ce n'est pas la fin.
 D'autres humains avaient délimité sur un papier un parc qu'ils appelèrent naturel.
 Hokakpin fut détruit, et déplacé à quelques pas – quelques très petits pas –

Le village déraciné fut rebaptisé Kakpin.
 [ka, rempli]
 [kpin ça va déborder (de gens)]



Finis les haricots, oubliés les baobabs.

On m'a laissé planté là,
Assez près
du nouveau village pour que mes racines les plus éloignées puissent en suivre les
moindres mouvements,

Assez loin
pour en devenir invisible,
Caché derrière la fatidique barrière du parc naturel,

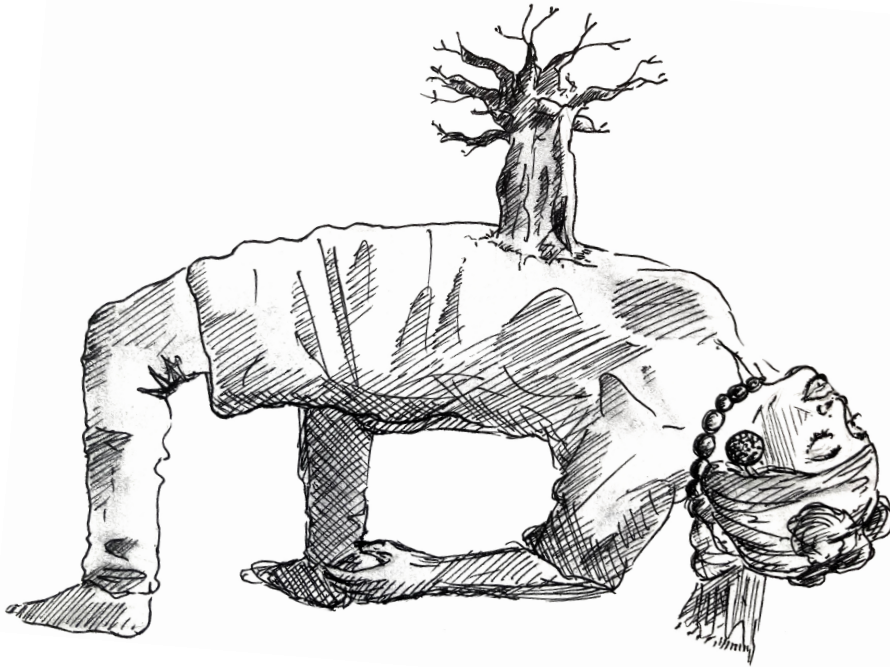
Moi qu'on avait planté là.



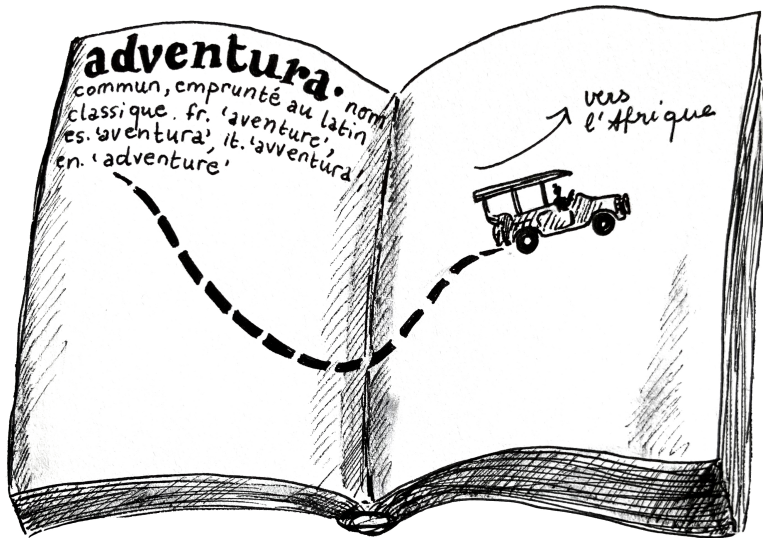
Les flamboyants – et je ne leur en tiens pas rigueur – ont achevé le travail,
Déployant leurs banderoles rouges entre mon tronc et le nouveau village,
D'une telle densité que mon illusion de toucher le ciel s'est effondrée.

Non, je ne dépasse pas du couvert forestier, j'y suis englouti.
Je n'ai l'air grand qu'entouré de maisons.
Entre vous et moi, je pense que tout c'beau monde perd mon souvenir ;
Sans doute une envie folle d'oublier leur propre dégarpissement.

Je suis une cicatrice qui vous parle.



Elle était jeune et étrangère.
 Elle passa à la hauteur de mon écorce dans un 4x4,
 Filant sur quelques fragments de bitume éclatés,
 Filant sur l'humus qui vibrait jusque dans mes nerfs sensibles.
 Je savais très bien ce qu'elle pensait, je le sentais dans mon écorce.
 Pardonnez-moi la généralisation mais
 Toutes les populations blanches se sont à peu près dit la même chose.
 « Je pénètre dans le bout du monde, quelle aventure ! »
 [*adventura*, choses qui vont arriver, emprunt au latin classique]
 D'habitude, elles sont en habits de safari, très sophistiqués
 Chaque centimètre de peau couvert contre l'assaut d'éventuels
 Lions, crocodiles, mouches tsé-tsé.
 Mais celle-ci était vêtue d'une salopette ! Affublée de tongs ! Un paréo pour seul
 bagage !
 Une illuminée ? Peut-être qu'elle n'allait pas me gratter l'écorce de manière conde-
 scendante Mais procéder à quelque folle onction,
 M'embarquer comme un océan.



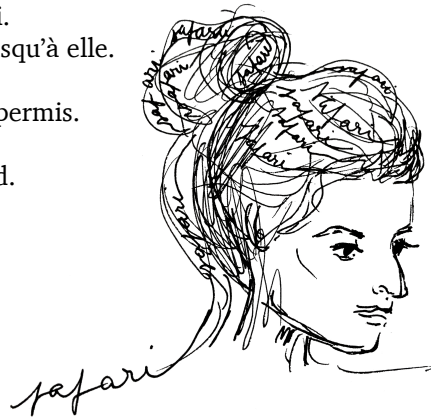
Le bout du monde.
 Combien de fois je l'ai entendue cette phrase, murmurée par ses congénères,
 Et rebondir sur mon tronc ventru,
 Et glisser sur mon ventre luisant.
 Kakpin, centre du monde,
 Baobab, centre de Kakpin,
 Voilà ce que j'écrirais sur le panneau d'entrée
 Si j'étais de doigts doté.

Je ne sais pas si c'est l'absurdité de son paréo flottant dans la savane mais
 Je ne lui en tenais pas rigueur,
 Cela faisait bien longtemps que l'Afrique avait été inventée par leurs missionnaires,
 leurs cinémas, leurs télévisions, leurs zoos, leurs publicités, leurs explorateurs.
 C'est le Baobab Fou qui m'a expliqué tout cela, un féru de philosophie.
 Et je le crois quand je la vois ouvrir la fenêtre du 4x4,
 Passer une main et sa petite tête à l'extérieur, les yeux mi-clos,
 Un sourire béat à la vue des Patas.
 Leur tête rouge, leur cri de bébé et leur rapidité lui envoient une décharge d'adré-
 naline.
 Le chant du bulbul la fait planer.

Quelque part dans sa tête, jaillit le safari.
 Il transpire, il coule, il infuse et arrive jusqu'à elle.
 [safari, voyage, emprunt au Souahili]
 Tant le safari que le voyage ne me sont permis.

Le premier implique forcément le second.
 Les humains d'ici chassent,
 Ceux d'ailleurs safarisent,
 Et moi, je ne bouge pas.

Par contre, je conspire.
 Une conspiration de baobabs,
 Ceux des livres et ceux des villages,
 Les abandonnés,
 Déchus,
 Détrônés.



Le Baobab Fou



Nous allons sortir du bois.
 Le Baobab d'Hokakpin a beau me traiter de *Klugscheißer*,
 Enfermé que je suis dans une très littéraire trilogie.
 Il ne s'en est pas moins remis à mon avis.
 [klug, savoir, en allemand]
 [scheißer, celui qui chie]
 Il n'a que ce mot à la bouche,
 Il l'a entendu à la station de recherche allemande qui s'est installée près de lui.
 Ceci dit, les propos rapportés par ses feuilles lobées confirment mes craintes.
 Nous nous asséchons.
 Nous nous faisons piler, retourner, repiler,
 Par un mortier invisible,
 Par un souffle brûlant,
 Et ce ne sont ni nos hilaires ni nos dabas qui font fuir la pluie et chauffent les terres.

Nos populations prennent bien quelques-unes de nos fibres pour s'en faire des Huiles, savons, engrais, fourrages, cordages, médicaments, chapeaux, Ce n'est pas ce chapardage qui vide nos troncs de leurs eaux.

Trop de gourmandise, voilà le problème, la trahison.

Et ne vous méprenez pas.

Nos feuilles sont infinies pour le ndour qui arrose le couscous de mil, Notre jus est intarissable pour les gorges des enfants qui grimpent décrocher nos fruits.

Bonbons, beignets,

Gula sans autre punition que celles des fourmis.

De mes quelques branches,

Jusqu'au bout de mes folioles,

J'ai toujours tout offert,

Mon bois a invariablement été tendre,

Mes fruits pleins d'une farine moelleuse.

Et pourtant, loin, au bout du monde,

La terre toute entière craque, hurle, chauffe,

L'onde de feu arrive jusqu'à notre centre,

La voracité des pays des sapins

Flambe nos plus solides colosses.

Si claire,

L'eau se tarit sous le chemin de sable,

Mes racines peinent à l'aspirer,

La pulpe qui enveloppe mes graines s'amaigrit,

Ma chair se craquèle,

Mes coques se brisent,

Le jus de bouye se tarit sur le chemin de sable,

Aigre-doux.

Que pouvons-nous faire, hélas !

Hormis leur envoyer nos baobabs de papier ?

Le Baobab d'Hokakpin m'a envoyé son énergomène à paréo,

M'assurant que d'autres suivront,

Qu'il s'agissait là de son grand plan.

Biberonnées par les Grimm et autres Charles Perrault, elles sont ainsi programmées à suivre

Cailloux blancs, morceaux de pain,

Lentilles, pois, millet,

Qu'ingurgitent aussitôt alouettes et autres pigeons ramiers.

Il semblerait que certaines d'entre elles suivent également les histoires,
Se laissent ensorceler, attraper dans notre système racinaire,
Qu'il soit de fibre ou de papier.

Essayons donc avec elle ;
Que pleuvent les histoires de nos larges couronnes à ses petites oreilles !
Que resurgissent des entrailles chaudes de nos terreaux
Ceux et celles qui nous ont racontés !
Qu'elles reviennent donc hanter les veillées,
Renforcer encore la puissance de nos Ken Bugul !
Remplumer les encriers collectifs,
Et que l'encre coule jusqu'à toutes ces âmes qui nous brûlent,
Invariablement, sans savoir que nous sommes nés.

Au cœur de nos fruits cucurbiformes, de notre pain de singe,
Il s'agirait de laisser tomber au sol comme des fruits mûrs
Des rectangles de papier imbibés de nos histoires,
Des livres détremvés de nos cris, de nos râles, de notre désespoir,
Des livres gorgés de notre magie, de notre beauté, de notre espoir,
Pour celles qui s'animeront en lisant les affres de notre extinction,
Pour celles qui s'émouvront en lisant la grâce de notre condition.

Il ne s'agit pas là de notre première tentative.
Les baobabs murmurent depuis bien longtemps aux oreilles
Des espèces à bouche, à plume, à encre,
S'infiltrèrent et s'arrangent pour être racontés, imprimés, dessinés.

Des Grecs aux Phéniciens,
Des manuscrits perdus en erreurs de traduction,
Cela en a pris du temps.
Puisque seuls papyrus, crayons et parchemins semblent compter,
Alors qu'ici on nous connaît depuis que nous sommes nés,
Cela en a pris du temps.

Michel Adanson s'est enfin penché sur mes terres,
Avec l'illusion d'être le premier.
Adansonia nous a-t-il baptisés.
Je n'ai rien contre le latin, mais j'y vois clairement la main,
Les pétales blancs de mes aïeux qui, sentant le danger venir,
Ont fait éclore notre existence aux yeux des scientifiques humains.

Les botanistes ont eu beau s'égosiller,
Effectuer des voyages sans retour,
Ce latinisme manquait de sentiments, de pourpre, d'éclat.

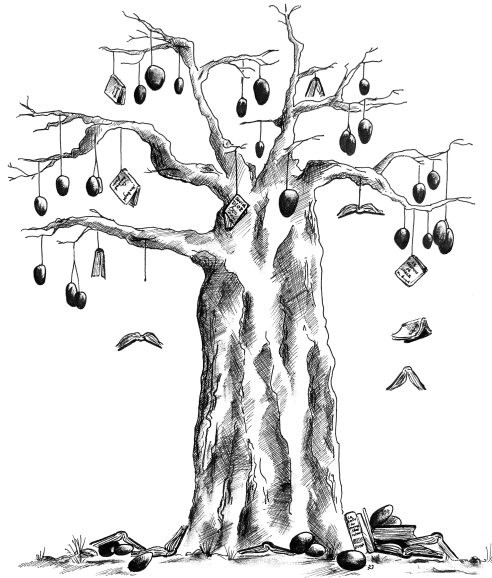
J'ai dû prendre la suite des aïeuls et faire germer chez David Diop
Une piqûre de rappel.
Ne leur raconte pas juste notre flamboyante existence,
Plante-nous une belle histoire d'amour, hérissé-nous les pétales d'émotion,
Lui ai-je murmuré.
Nos parfums doivent attirer des paratonnerres,
Nous protéger de la tempête qui a commencé,
Il ne suffit plus que boivent notre nectar les chauves-souris,
Nous devons polliniser les esprits,
Ceux d'ailleurs et ceux d'ici.

A partir d'aujourd'hui, nous ne produirons plus de fruits,
Uniquement des histoires
Qui tomberont à la saison sèche comme à la saison des pluies,
Des livres s'ouvriront, des pages virevolteront
Devant les yeux humains, poussées par le souffle de l'Harmattan.

Nos craquements seront-ils entendus ?
Elle, elle a attrapé le premier livre que le Baobab d'Hokakpin a enfanté,
L'a enveloppé dans son paréo et l'a dévoré,
Adossée sous son ombre.
Cela l'a menée jusqu'à moi, jusqu'à d'autres,
Cela, semble-t-il, l'a touchée.
Souris heureuse de notre laboratoire.

Nous allons répliquer l'expérience sur ses semblables,
Les bombardant de nos maux,
Les enlisant de nos mots.
Remplissant leurs têtes comme des calebasses
De nos moutons qui côtoient les hyènes,
De nos haricots, ignames, millet,
Bouillies, foutous, galettes pilées,
De nos rois, de nos reines,
De nos savanes, de nos bosquets.
[savane, emprunt au taïno, langue disparue]

Dérisoire conspiration,
Ultime adaptation.
Avant de partir en fumée,
Que poussent et tombent à mes pieds,
Nos humbles messagers,
Ces baobabs de papier.



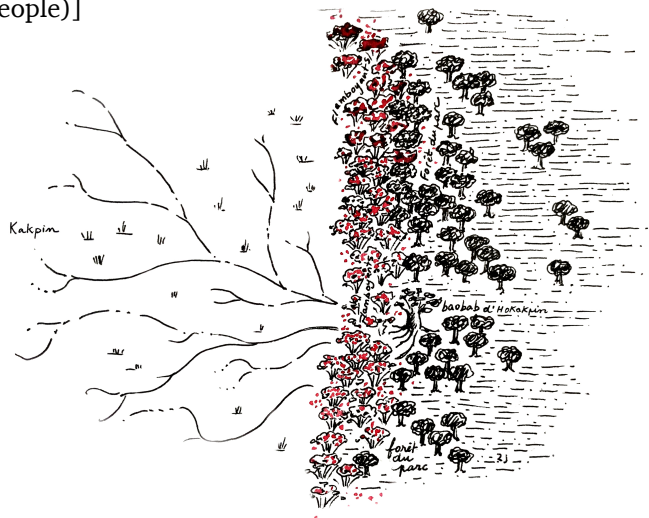
Camille Lavoix est doctorante en études américaines et romanes à l'Université de Würzburg, en Allemagne.

Raphaëlle Jung est doctorante en études romanes et collaboratrice scientifique à l'Université de Würzburg, en Allemagne.

She arrived near six, as the sun was setting.
 She passed in front, but didn't see.
 Who still remembers me?
 Those who know tend to skip the greeting.
 Do they think it best to let pile the sands of time?
 Do they think that youth and foreigners can't take it in?
 In any case, we had no meeting.

Misé, misé, I will tell you a story.
 Baobabs start small, grow inch by inch
 So says the Little Prince.
 I was born of two displacements,
 Two great replacements.
 The fields of Bradou were bursting with kakpo.
 [*kakpo*: beans, koulango]
 The population moved – a few miles at most –
 And created Hokakpin,
 [*Hokakpin*: it will burst with beans]
 But it was no time to give in.
 Other humans had marked onto paper a park which they called natural.
 Hokakpin was destroyed, and moved a step or so – a very small step or so –

The uprooted village was rechristened Kakpin.
 [*ka*: filled]
 [*kpin*: it will burst (with people)]



Finished, the beans; forgotten, the baobabs.

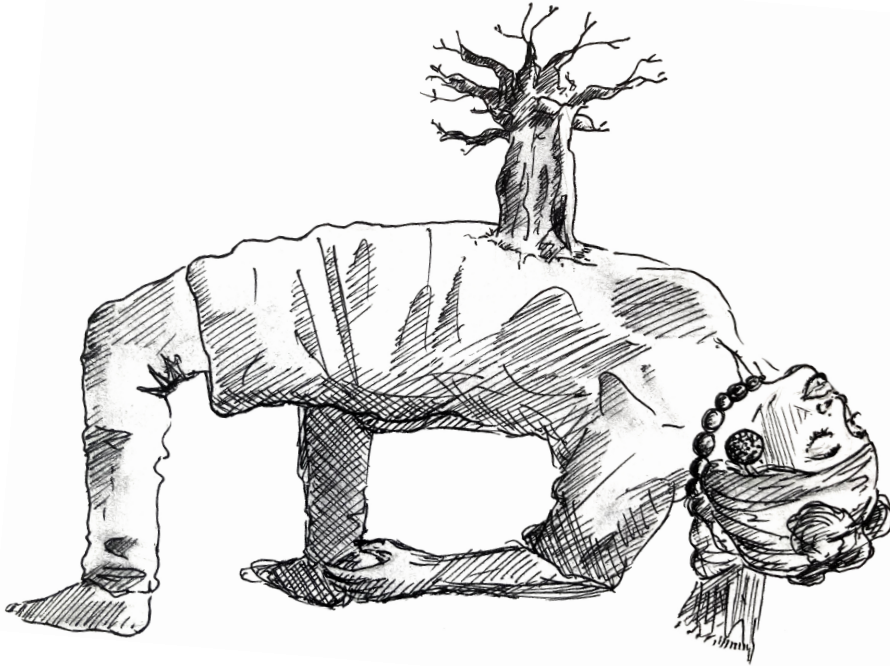
They left me planted there,
Close enough
to the new village for my furthest roots to survey their every move,
Far enough
to become invisible,
Secreted behind the phoney barrier of the natural park,
I, whom they had planted there.



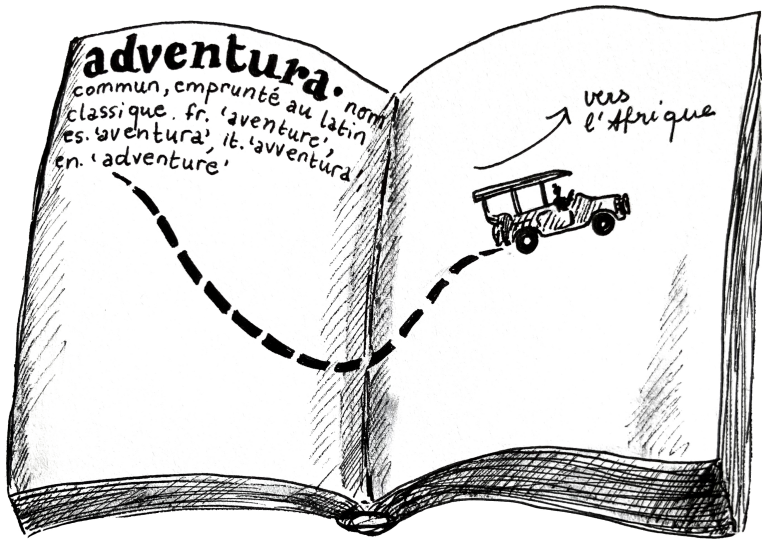
The flamboyants – and I can't blame them – finished the job,
Stretching their red banderols between my trunk and the new village
So densely that I no longer seemed to touch the sky.

No, I do not surpass the forest canopy, I am lost within.
I only seem great when surrounded by houses.
Between us, I think the whole wide world's forgotten me;
Doubtless desperate to lose sight of their own uprooting.

I am a scar speaking to you.



She was young, a foreigner.
 She passed me by in a 4x4,
 Rumbling over chunks of bitumen,
 Rumbling over the humus, jarring my sensitive nerves.
 I knew what she was thinking, could feel it in my rings.
 Forgive the generalisation, but
 All the white people here say much the same things:
 "I've reached world's end, what an adventure!"
 [*adventura*: that which is to come, borrowed from Latin]
 Usually they're in safari gear, the very best style
 Every inch protected
 From tsetse fly, lion, crocodile,
 But that one wore dungarees! Flip flops! Her only luggage a sarong!
 A visionary? One who wouldn't scratch my bark with condescension,
 But offer me extremest unction,
 Carry me off like an ocean?



At world's end.
 How often have I heard that phrase murmured by her kind,
 Bouncing on my bloated trunk
 Slipping over my shining belly.
 Kakpin, centre of the world,
 Baobab, centre of Kakpin,
 That's what I'd write on the entry sign
 If I had fingers of my own.

I don't know if it was the absurdity of her sarong flapping in the savanna, but
 That I'd skim over,
 So long had Africa been invented by their missionaries, their movies, their TVs, their
 zoos, their ads, their explorers.
 The *Baobab Fou* explained that to me: a self-taught sage.
 And I believe it, when she rolls down the window of the 4x4,
 Pokes hand and little head outside, her eyes half-closed,
 A goofy smile when she sees the Patas.
 Their red head, babies' cry and speed shoot her with adrenaline.
 The bulbul's song transports her

A burst of safari, somewhere in her skull.
 It seeps, runs, infuses, and reaches her.
 [safari: journey, borrowed from Swahili]

No safari or voyage are permitted me
 (The former implies the latter, you see).
 The humans of this place hunt,
 The outsiders safari,
 And I do not move anywhere.

But still I conspire.
 A baobab conspiracy,
 Between those of books and of villages,
 Abandoned
 Deposed
 Dethroned.



The Crazy Boabab

We'll be out of the woods soon.
 The Hokakpin Baobab might call me *Klugscheißer*,
 Locked like this in so literary a trilogy.
 But she's come around to my way of seeing.
 [Klug: knowledge, in German]
 [Scheißer: one who shits]
 That's all she can say,
 She picked that up at the German research station nearby.
 Still, her lobed leaves' reports confirmed my fears.
 We are drying out.
 We are being pulped, turned, pulped again
 By an unseen pestle
 By a burning wind
 And it's not our *hilaires* or our *dabas* which chase the rain and heat the land.

Our own populations might take a fibre or two for
Oils, soaps, fertilisers, feeds, cords, medicines, hats for hot days –
It's not their mischief that takes our water away.
Too much gluttony: that's the problem, the treachery.
And don't misunderstand.
Our leaves are infinite for *ndour* poured over a couscous of millet,
Our juice fast-flowing for the throats of climbing children.
Sweets, doughnuts
And *gula* with no price but ants.

From my sparse branches
To my leaf tips,
I have always been generous,
My wood invariably tender,
My fruits heavy with soft flour.

Yet far away, at world's end,
The ground cracks, cries, cooks,
The wave of fire touches our centre,
The voracity of the pine lands
Torches our strongest colossi.

So clear,
The water dries below the path of sand,
My roots struggle to suck it in,
The pulp around my seeds gets thin,
My flesh fissures,
My shells smash,
The bouye juice dries on the path of sand,
Sweet and sour.

What can we do, alas,
But send them our baobabs of paper?

The Hokakpin Baobab sent me her sarong-clad firebrand
Promising that others would follow,
That this was part of her grand plan.

Raised on Grimm and Charles Perrault, her kind have been programmed to follow
White pebbles, breadcrumbs,
Lentils, peas, and millet,
So soon swallowed by pigeons and doves.

It seems that others follow the stories too.
Let themselves be bewitched, captured in our root system,
Be it of fibre or paper.

So let us start with her:
May tales pour from our canopies into her little ears!
May the hot entrails of our soil bring forth once more
Those who have spoken of us!
May our storytellers haunt your vigils
Reinforce the power of our Ken Buguls!
Let them fill our common inkwells,
And may the words reach the souls who burn us
Still, never knowing that we exist.

In the heart of our oval fruit, our monkey bread,
Let us throw ripely to the ground
Squares of paper soaked with our stories,
Books bathed in our cries, our groans, our despair,
Books gorged with our magic, our beauty, our prayers,
For those who will take action when they read of our extinction,
For those who will be moved by the grace of our condition.

This is not our first attempt.
How long have the baobabs murmured into the ears
Of animals of nib, feather, ink,
Sneakily arranging to be told, printed, drawn.

From Greeks to Phoenicians,
From manuscripts lost to errors in translation,
It's taken an age.
As only papyrus, pen, parchment seem to have worth,
Although round here we've been known since birth,
It's taken an age.

Then at last Michel Adanson stepped onto my land,
With the illusion of being the first,
Adansonia we were baptised.
I've nothing against Latin, but there I see the hand,
The white petals of my elders who, feeling the danger near,
Made our existence bloom before the eyes of human scientists.

Much as the botanists shouted and brayed,
Taking all those trips one-way,
This Latinism lacked feeling, colour, flair.

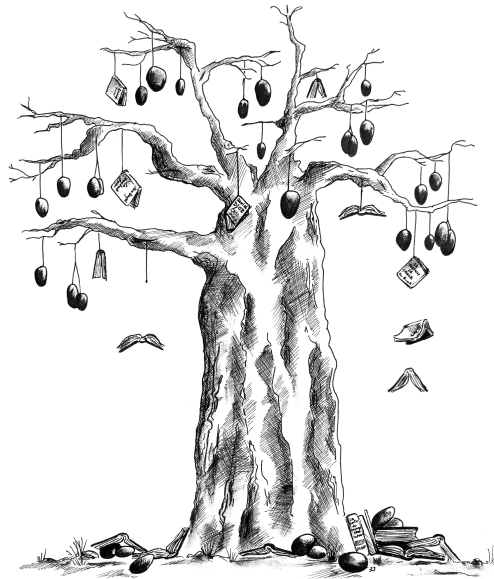
I had to take our elders' lead and plant in David Diop
 A seed of memory.
 Don't tell them just of our flamboyant existence,
 Plant us in a love story, make our petals shiver with emotion,
 I whispered in his ear.
 Have our perfumes draw your lightning-rods
 To protect us from the storm that's begun,
 Not just for bats our nectar now,
 Minds, too, must be pollinized,
 Those abroad and those at home.

From today, we will grow no more fruit,
 But only stories
 Which will fall through dry and rainy seasons.
 Books will open, pages will dance
 Before human eyes, blown by *l'Harmattan*.

Will our creaks and cracks be heard?
 That girl, she wrapped the Hokakpin Baobab's first-born tale
 In her sarong, then consumed it whole
 Resting in their shadow.
 That was what led her to me and mine,
 Touched by us, it seemed:
 Gay white mouse of our laboratory.

Now we'll take the test to those like her,
 Bombarding them with our pain,
 Burying them with our words
 Filling their heads like gourds
 With our sheep and their hyena neighbours,
 With our beans, yams, millet,
 Soups, *foutous*, oven cakes,
 With our kings, with our queens,
 With our savannas, with our woods.
 [*savanna*: borrowed from Taíno, extinct language]

Conspiracy in action,
 Or final adaptation.
 Before in smoke we disappear
 Let them grow and fall around me here,
 Our most humble messengers,
 These baobabs of paper.



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Environmental Violence and Oil Extraction Culture in Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit*

Marija Krstic

The Underground Reservation by Terry Wilson, which was written in 1986, is considered one of the first reliable accounts of Osage oil history. In the preface of his book, Wilson explains that “every Osage has had to face a life on the reservation continually marked by lawlessness and corruption, and occasionally violence” (xi). The violence Wilson refers to is physical violence, i.e., “sensational murders” that “made newspaper headlines nationwide and across the Atlantic” (xi). More recent criticism of Osage oil history has shown that environmental violence must also be added to the account of Osage oil history as an important factor in the process of the tribal cultural disintegration. However, as Rob Nixon notices, environmental degradation is usually not discussed in terms of violence; as a consequence, he offers the term ‘slow violence’ to describe processes of environmental degradation that have serious long-term consequences. Environmental damage due to oil extraction is one of the central issues in Linda Hogan’s 1990 novel *Mean Spirit*. The novel focuses on the oil boom in Oklahoma in the 1920s and reveals the slow violence that is entailed in the processes that accompany oil extraction, such as deforestation, river damming, and other forms of nature degradation. *Mean Spirit* creates specific places and exposes the realities of a subjugated group of people whose lives and experiences are directly affected by the material culture of extraction. The Osage approach to nature stresses the unity of human and non-human life inhabiting the same land, which is an integral part of Osage identity, religion, and cultural heritage. Therefore, the destruction of landscapes inevitably endangers the traditional Osage way of life, creates a sense of uncertainty and loss, and challenges the individual and collective sense of belonging. In this paper, I will apply Rob Nixon’s concepts of an official and a vernacular landscape to analyze how landscape transformation due to oil extraction leads to what he calls “the displacement in place” (Nixon 17), but also to the cultural and literal displacement of the Osage tribe in *Mean Spirit*.

Native American studies frequently draw attention to literary responses to the land. In his study *Listening to the Land: Native American Literary Responses to the Landscape* (2008), Lee Schweningen examines several Native American authors, including Linda Hogan and Gerald Vizenor, focusing on how their literature treats the ethical connection with the earth. He also takes into consideration how different authors respond to the stereotypes of Native Americans as outspoken environmentalists and nature lovers. Joy Porter, in her book *Land and Spirit in Native America* (2012), elaborates on Native American approaches to the environment and the centrality of place in fictional and non-fictional texts. Similarly, criticism of *Mean*

Spirit has often focused on land representation and the relationship that the characters develop with it. This interest in the land stems from the long tradition that teaches Native Americans to see the land “as themselves” in contrast to the “whites who are taught (by the Bible, for one, which gives man ‘dominion’ over the earth) to see the land as separate from themselves” (Brice 127). Jennifer Brice relates this to the origin of the respective literary traditions, i.e., “while European literary tradition springs from the white European history of colonization, Native American writing arises from the experience of dispossession” (127). Indeed, ever since the colonial period, Native Americans have systematically been deprived of their land as “the doctrine of conquest legitimated, in European eyes, seizure of Indian lands peacefully or militarily for ‘just’ cause according to Christian ‘civilized’ criteria” (Porter 46). Such doctrines are not interested in the spiritual value that specific places have for indigenous communities. The rich Native American oral tradition is a testimony to the importance of “a sense of the interconnectedness and relationship with all things, between animals, land, peoples and their language, and a requirement to seek individual, communal, and environmental balance . . . which is linked to the survival of community within specific landscapes” (43). In oral traditions, “place, self and community are so intimately linked that loss of territory is a deprivation of psychic strength” (43).

In literature, whether informed by oral tradition or not, land often has an important place in the narrative. In *Mean Spirit*, land is central to the cultural disintegration of the Osage tribe. Scholarship about *Mean Spirit* is often concerned with the land and questions of dispossession, rootedness, displacement, and belonging. Elizabeth Blair is interested in the politics of place and “how the characters struggle to define ‘home’ and ‘place’ while attempting to live in a borrowed and broken land” (16). Alix Casteel analyzes how “Euroamericans view oil-rich Osage as a form of natural resource akin to the oil itself” (49). In Sylvia Mayer’s innovative approach to the novel as risk narrative, she explores how “the Osage people and their land are put at risk in terms of their bodily and spiritual well-being and in terms of being able to maintain their life-sustaining culture” (3). Eric Gary Anderson is interested in removal and survival with relation to the land because the “Indian country and its inhabitants sometimes achieve a highly valued and spirited connectedness to each other, a rootedness” (56). Dispossession, displacement, difficulty to define one’s place and home, and thus losing a sense of belonging, can all be directly related to the rise of oil extraction culture on Osage land in Oklahoma in the 1920s. Processes that can be characterized as slow violence and that pave the way for deforestation, river damming, and contamination of the fertile land transform what Rob Nixon has called a “vernacular landscape” into “an official landscape” (17).

Nixon defines slow violence as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). Because “violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility,” many forms of environmental damage would not be characterized as violence

using these criteria (2). Nixon suggests that common perceptions of violence need to change in order to account for and understand slowly developing but increasingly urgent environmental changes. He suggests that “we need . . . to engage with a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (2). What Nixon identifies as problematic about slow violence is its “relative invisibility” that creates “representational, narrative and strategic challenges” (2). For Nixon, the main challenge among these is representational, i.e., “how to devise arresting stories, images and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects” (3). *Mean Spirit*, which is usually categorized as a historical or mystery novel, is a suspenseful narrative about a series of mysterious murders of oil-rich Native Americans. While these events set the tone for the novel, one of the main sources of the characters’ struggles is the gradual loss of the land that is not only a source of food, but also a reservoir of cultural and spiritual sustenance. For Nixon, slow violence operates as “a major threat multiplier; it can fuel long-term, proliferating conflicts in situations where the conditions for sustaining life becomes increasingly but gradually degraded” (3). In *Mean Spirit*, slow violence can be detected in the transformation of the vernacular into an official landscape, increasing the mistrust and tension between white Americans and Osages, two cultures of contrasting ideals. The slow environmental changes due to oil extraction lead to different forms of displacement – cultural, literal, and the displacement in place of the Osage tribe.

In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Nixon explains that “a vernacular landscape is shaped by the affective, historically textured maps that communities have devised over generations, maps replete with names and routes, maps alive to significant ecological and surface geological features” (17). Such a landscape is “integral to the socioenvironmental dynamics of community rather than being wholly externalized – treated as out there, as a separate nonrenewable resource” (17). Furthermore, Nixon adds a spiritual dimension to the materiality of the vernacular landscape that is characterized by “webs of accumulated cultural meanings” (17). This spiritual aspect is easily destroyed by the official landscapes “that typically discount spiritualized vernacular landscapes” and treat them as “if [t]hey were uninhabited by the living, the unborn and the animate deceased” (17). An official landscape can be “governmental, NGO, corporate, or some combination of those” and it “writes the land in a bureaucratic, externalizing, and extraction driven manner” (17). Importantly, the transformation of a vernacular landscape into an official one is characterized by “the clash of temporal perspectives” between those who inhabit the vernacular landscape and those who impose the official one. Nixon refers to the latter as “short-termers who arrive to extract, despoil, and depart” (17). The former refers to “long-termers who must live inside the ecological aftermath and must therefore weigh wealth differently in time’s scales” (17). This landscape transformation often leads to environmental protests, involuntary movement, or to the “displacement in place” that Nixon regards as a “more radical notion of displacement” (19) because the land that is exploited and destroyed by the official landscape

becomes deprived of its capacity to sustain the life of the population that inhabits it. Nixon's ideas offer a productive lens through which different forms of Osage displacement and land exploitation in *Mean Spirit* can be analyzed.

In *Mean Spirit*, the vernacular landscape is transformed into an official landscape as the oil-extracting technology is imposed on the land, thus diminishing "its life-sustaining features" (Nixon 19). This transformation cannot be analyzed in isolation, i.e., without considering the historical background that has given way to such a course of events. Linda Hogan is historically precise and makes use of the 1887 Dawes Act, discriminatory legislation that is pertinent to the understanding of the Osage predicament depicted in the novel and to the rise of the oil extraction culture on their territory. Native American scholars interpret the Dawes Act as a systematic attempt to disinherit Native Americans of their land and to "assimilate them into Anglo-European culture" (Huang 49). The Dawes Act is accurately and concisely described early in the novel:

[I]n the early 1900s each Indian had been given their choice of any parcel of land not already claimed by the white Americans. Those pieces of land were called allotments. They consisted of 160 acres a person to farm, sell, or use in any way they desired. The act that offered allotments to the Indians, the Dawes Act, seemed generous at first glance so only a very few people realized how much they were being tricked, since numerous tracts of unclaimed land became open property for white settlers, homesteaders, and ranchers. (Hogan 8)

Peter I-min Huang draws on Native American scholar Joy Porter who explains that the allotments could not bring much profit and financial security in the long run as they were too small (qtd. in Huang 49). Hogan makes sure to include this detail in her fictional account: "Every quarter, when Indians were paid their oil royalties, most found themselves still in debt . . . That meant they'd sell off a few more acres of land" (54). The Dawes Act thus exemplifies how official landscapes are sometimes gradually imposed through governmental pressure. The transformation of the vernacular landscape in this novel creates conditions for the radical form of displacement that does not refer to relocation through movement, forced or voluntary; it "refers rather to the loss of the land and the resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that have made it inhabitable" (Nixon 19). Early in the novel, the "Indian Territory" is mapped with regard to the sites where the oil extracting machines should be installed: "A geologist had mapped out the underground for Hale and a few other men. The maps pictured locations of oil pools" (Hogan 54). Some characters understand the arrival of oil businessmen as a land theft and describe it as the usual land theft from Indians (52). The vernacular landscape in *Mean Spirit* thus becomes the official landscape of the oil industry and the "oil barons" (5).

In *Mean Spirit*, the transformation of the vernacular landscape leads to a displacement in place as the landscape is treated as a resource by both long- and short-termers, to use Nixon's terms. Whereas the former want to sustain it, the latter leave it depleted and destroy the spiritual connectedness that the Osage people have

developed with it over time. The arrival of oil moguls puts “the Indian world . . . on a collision course with the white world” (Hogan 13). However, what creates the great sense of uncertainty is not only the cultural tension between these two groups of people, but also the risk of losing the land. One character expresses this fear by stating that “[i]t’s more than a race war. They are waging a war with earth. Our forests and cornfields are burned by them” (14). Members of the Osage tribe have a “special place in both the human world and in the world of spirits” (5). They understand the language of nature, of rivers, screech owls, and bats. They are connected to non-human life and “[t]hey still remembered the older ways of animals” (38). They “[l]ive gently with the land” as “one with the land” (361). One of the characters nicely summarizes this spiritual connectedness: “We are part of everything in the world, part of the roundness and cycles of life. The world does not belong to us. We belong to the world. And all life is sacred” (361-62). They listen to their environment carefully and believe they understand the messages it conveys. Early in the novel, the river prophet Lila interprets the prophesy of the Blue River according to which “the white world is going to infringe on the peaceful Hill People” (6). The landscape depicted in the novel is infused with spiritual and cultural meanings, and it is an active agent in the socioenvironmental dynamics of the Osage society. However, the oil extraction processes turn it into an uninhabitable environment:

Up the road from Grace’s sunburned roses, was an enormous crater a gas well blowout had made in the earth. It was fifty feet deep and five hundred feet across. This gouge in the earth, just a year earlier, had swallowed five workmen and ten mules. The water was gone from that land forever, the trees dead, and the grass, once long and rich, was burned black. The cars passed by this ugly sight, and not far from there, they passed another oil field where pumps, fueled by diesel, worked day and night. These bruised fields were noisy and dark. The earth had turned oily black. Blue flames rose up and roared like torches of burning gas. The earth bled oil. (Hogan 53-54)

What happens when the natural habitat of the screech owls is destroyed by the bureaucratic, externalizing, and extraction-driven logic of the official landscape that does not care about the vernacular landscape? What happens when the river is dammed “by the army engineers and the surveyors with their red flags” and when the “forests and cornfields are burned” (Hogan 14) and the trees cut to make space for the derricks and oil pumps? What does this environmental degradation mean for the characters who have developed this sense of unity with their land? One part of the answer is that the destruction of the vernacular landscape negatively impacts both human and non-human life that is part of it. As the novel shows, the characters become displaced in place as the life-sustaining spiritual connectedness to the land is destroyed for good. The Osage community is thus suffering from “spiritual malnutrition” (54) at the sight of the bruised fields and earth bleeding oil.

Due to the rapid changes in their immediate environment and subsequently to their everyday life, the Osage tribe in *Mean Spirit* is susceptible to cultural displacement. Ironically, the oil boom in Oklahoma is “sometimes misidentified as an example of the Roaring Twenties, the Jazz Age, with Osage flappers and

philosophers driving brand new roadsters and partying till dawn” (Anderson 62). Even though the Osage people did financially benefit from the discovery of oil, critics agree that the loss they suffered has had significant ramifications. The Osage are “resource-cursed” (70), to use another of Nixon’s terms. Reflecting on “the repercussions of having mineral belongings that literally undermine a community or society’s capacity to belong,” Nixon tries to understand what it is that turns natural resources into “evil powers that alienate people from the very elements that have sustained them, environmentally and culturally” (69). In *Mean Spirit*, oil, but also money and power that come with it, obtain evil powers that hasten cultural disintegration and deepen distrust between the Whites and the Osage Nation. The extravagant lifestyles that some Osage people start practicing, and the assimilation through marriages to the whites who benefit financially by marrying rich Osage women, mirror the destruction and the disintegration of the land. The novel’s narrator reveals that “[n]ot only were people turning away from one another, but there were other splittings, mind from heart, body from spirit” (Hogan 170). The land that used to be the place of belonging gradually becomes defined by the very material substance it contains in a way that diminishes its spiritual value and its power to unite – “the smell of the blue-black oil that seeped out of the earth had smelled like death” (29). Therefore, “[the Osage people] had no choice themselves but to become meat-eaters with sharp teeth, devouring their own land and themselves in the process” (54). As one of the characters explains, “I am tired of those landmen coming around to tap the earth for oil. . . . We have so much pain, it’s in our faces and in our eyes. It’s in the clothes we wear” (75). Anderson argues that during such rapidly changing times not only things but also people “get dislodged,” and he notices that many Osage characters find it increasingly difficult to answer the questions of “Who am I?” and “How do I know who I am?” (60).

Mean Spirit ends with literal displacement. The materialism and the profit-oriented logic of the oil extraction culture, and capitalism more generally, are not interested in the living conditions that environmental devastation leaves behind, its cultural implications, or other human and non-human costs. Even though “[c]hange is a cultural constant” (Nixon 17), the life conditions that it creates are not the same for all. While Nixon argues that the “rise of the indigenous resource rebellions across the globe” (17) happens when the official landscape is forced onto the vernacular one, in *Mean Spirit* the Osage Nation does not have the strength to resist the oil extraction culture in the way that can be categorized as a rebellion. Instead, “[b]ent under their losses, no longer a part of their land, no longer in their lives,” many characters in *Mean Spirit* abandon their land “like a lost and hungry trail of ants” (Hogan 342). Symbolically, the fictional setting of the novel, Watona, a name that, in English, means “The Gathering Place” (53), becomes the site of departure and displacement. Therefore, in its realistic treatment of the slow violence entailed in the processes of oil extraction, *Mean Spirit* makes an important contribution to the discourse of both the energy humanities and environmental justice; it shows how deforestation, land exploitation, and degradation lead to involuntary movement – literal and cultural displacement of the Osage Nation – whose land is turned into an

exploitable commodity by profit-oriented White Americans. The accounts of the discovery of oil in the Osage Nation and the subsequent social upheaval often overlook the environmental aftermath of the oil industry. In his account of Osage oil history, Wilson shows how the discovery of oil in 1897 affected the Osage people “economically, socially, culturally, politically, and psychologically” (xi). Wilson also shows “that the modern history of the Osage people cannot be separated from that of their land” (xiii). In Hogan’s fictional account of the oil boom, the loss of land and different forms of violence lead to the loss of identity, cultural heritage, and a sense of belonging.

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Le Désir de l'Éléphant de Taï

Samuel Logbo

Sur la terre des racines

Profondes de l'Amazonie détruite

Des semences de l'aurore des peuples

Polluées par les activités des invertébrés

Les plus sobres aux vertébrés les moins disciplinés,

L'Éléphant de Taï a supplié les Envahisseurs, les Infidèles,

Les Industriels, les Colons et les Multinationales,

En vain . . . les Amérindiens, Indiens, écartés ; biotopes transformés en pot de vin

Catastrophe ? . . . Volontaire . . . Provoquée . . . De fait . . .

La voix végétale africaine, étouffée et éteinte par

L'eau tend et l'eau nue

La chinoise et la japonaise souffrent également et respirent amèrement

Sur des terres gorgées des simulacres des opposants à la verdure

La voix mécanique et industrielle rejette

La voix végétale indigène d'autrefois

Le crépuscule des plantes et des arbres

Décapités, épuisés de réclamer justice

À un Roi à la bouche pleine d'os d'écologistes.

Les Abeilles de Korhogo et de M'bahiakro, les plus pures, délicieuses et sages

Se baladent et luttent contre les poubelles géantes et les mouches infectées.

Cette ère en air inspira l'Éléphant de Taï, ami du perroquet, du calao et du margouillat, après son retour en Côte d'Ivoire :

Sur le chemin des savoirs inachevés,

Sur le champ des sachants chevronnés,

Un thésard néophyte des temps modernes,

Explore la forêt agressée.

Hier, les sujets de migration, de colonisation, d'altérité, d'imagologie avec ces approches les plus légitimes et à légitimer afin d'éclairer nos sociétés et la scientifique communauté,

Une réadaptation de la recherche scientifique s'impose.

Aujourd'hui, la question environnementale est de plus en plus

D'actualité,

Recentrée,

Réclamée

Et mise au centre des préoccupations

De la psyché

Des peuples et des chercheurs

L'ayant sévèrement négligée.

Et dans cet essaim biotopique bafoué

Où l'environnement n'enchanté que depuis peu la recherche en littérature,

L'écosystème forestier se meurt dans nos cœurs,

Nos consciences,

Nos espaces culturels,

Nos zones rituelles.

Cette épine environnementale

Ce mythe de Sisyphe écologique

Ce défi forestier à relever

Au pays de Bernard Dadié,

Zadi Zaourou,

Séry Bailly,

Didier Drogba,

Allah Thérèse

Amédée Pierre,

Gnahoré Djimi

Séry Simplicie,

Frédéric Bruly Bouabré . . .

Fouillons dans les éruditions, les imaginaires, les œuvres théoriques et pratiques des scientifiques, des écrivains, des musiciens, des peintres et des journalistes

malgré les vents impétueux

Des Démons de l'ignorance,

Considérons la forêt comme un espace écologique et mythique à prioriser dans nos prises de décision culturelles, scientifiques, politiques et didactiques.

Là réside tout le sens de l'engouement actuel de sa réhabilitation,

Sa réparation et

Sa restauration

Suscitées, en partie,

Par le thésard initié des temps modernes

Attaché à la promotion et à la protection du patrimoine écologique de la planète,

En général, et,

Du pays de Félix Houphouët-Boigny,

En particulier.

Vive, la forêt priorisée !

Vive, la forêt revêtue !

Vive, la forêt soignée et pansée dans les pensées !

Vive, la forêt restaurée pour les générations actuelles et futures.

L'Éléphant de Taï a parlé.

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The Tai Elephant's Wish

Samuel Logbo

Translated by Zoe McNamee

Through the Earth the deep

Roots of Amazonia destroyed

Seeds from the dawn of peoples

Polluted by vertebrate activity –

From the least sober to the least disciplined –

The Tai Elephant begged the Invaders, the Infidels,

The Industrialists, the Colonists, and the Multinationals,

In vain . . . Pushed aside were they, the Amerindians, the Indians; biotopes became bribes

A catastrophe? . . . Voluntary . . . Provoked . . . Fait accompli . . .

Verdant voice of Africa, smothered and snuffed out by

Nay Toe and You In

Those of China and Japan suffer too, breathing bitterly

Upon lands steeped in the deceit of vegetation's enemies

The mechanical and industrial voice rejects

The ancient voice of native forests

The sun sets on plants and trees

Decapitated, spent from pleading justice

Before a King whose mouth is filled with ecologists' bones.

The Bees of Korhogo and M'bahiakro, so pure, charming and wise

Bumble, resisting rubbish tips and infected flies.

This era drew an air from the Tai Elephant, friend of the parakeet, hornbill andagama, upon his return to Ivory Coast:

On the path of incomplete knowledge,

In the field of respected sages,

A greenhorn scholar of modern times,

Explores the assaulted forest.

For yesterday: the subjects of migration, colonisation, alterity, imagology, approached in the most legitimate, legitimisable way in order to enlighten our societies and the scientific community –

It's time for a scientific research readjustment.

For today: the environmental question is ever more

Current

Defined

Desired

And placed at the centre

Of the psyche

Of the nations and scholars

Who've neglected it severely.

And within this embattled biotopical swarm

While the environmental enchantment of literary research has barely begun,

The forest ecotope is dying in our hearts,

Our conscience,

Our cultural spaces,

Our ritual zones.

This environmental thorn

This ecological Sisyphus myth

This forest quest

In the land of Bernard Dadié,

Zadi Zaourou,

Séry Bailly,

Didier Drogba,

Allah Thérèse,

Amédée Pierre,

Gnahoré Djimi,

Séry Simplicite,

Frédéric Bruly Bouabré . . .

Stowed within the erudition, imagination, theory and practice of scientists, writers, musicians, painters, and journalists – despite the impetuous blasts

Of the Demons of Ignorance,

Let us see the forest as an ecological, mythical space to be prioritised in our cultural, scientific, political, and didactic decisions.

Therein lies the reason of today's rage for its rehabilitation,

Its reparation and

Its restoration

Raised, in part,

By the enlightened scholar of modern times

Promised to promote and protect the ecological patrimony of the planet

In general, and

Of the land of Félix Houphouët-Boigny

In particular.

Long live the forest cherished!

Long live the forest transformed!

Long live the forest cared for and healed in our minds!

Long live the forest restored for current and future generations.

The Taï Elephant has spoken.

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A Short Commentary on Scale and Perspective

Lena Pfeifer

My mind wanders off – I am holding an atlas, breathing in its very peculiar smell. I am gazing at maps, graphs, and satellite imagery, in awe and bewilderment at once. A flashy red dot, framed by a red square, is supposed to point to Berlin. The river Rhine winds through and crosses the pages as a thin, azure-blue line. I wonder: How many living beings are the waters of this river home to? What is their environment like (I think of images of fish and tadpoles and slippery stones covered in moss, all looking very mystical, though utterly irrespective of any underwater struggle for survival)? What role has the river played for people living nearby, or people visiting, people working with, on, or underneath the waters? Which toxic substances have been dumped into the river when the call for environmental protection was still barely audible? What changed once protection measures came to the fore? My mind zooms out – from the tadpoles and the moss-covered stones to a mental map of Europe. How far do I have to zoom out for the river to leave my field of vision? I flip the atlas' pages, from a map of Germany to a map of Europe to the globe and its position within the planetary system. Flipping one more page brings me to Southern America, the next flip to the African continent.

Cartographic scale implies the performance of a “calculable shift of resolution on the same area or features” (Clark, *Ecocriticism* 71). *I eye the different scales given – 1:100,000; 1:150,000 – numbers excessively large, numbers meant to help me imagine the real-life measures of that which lies tiny and abstracted in front of my eyes. The inverted zoom, however, is an act my imagination has to initiate; at a scale of 100,000:1, I envision moss-covered stones, tadpoles, and fish. As a “relationship between the small and the large” (Tsing 507) within human and physical geography, cartographic scale is the representational expression of a mathematical relation between phenomena on smaller and on larger scales. In business and economics, scale signifies a neatly replicable system for the production of efficiencies through ever-accelerating growth. Economies of scale are dependent on mass production and tailored towards an increase in production and productivity, thereby continuously reinforcing the neoliberal and capitalist logics of perfectibility.*

Both cartographic and economic notions of scale are concerned with balance, a connotation reinforced by the work of the scale as an instrument for measuring weight. When scaling up and down, we “change the size of (a system or device) while keeping its parts in constant proportion” (OED), depicting miniature maps of countries and cities, and increasing production in an exponential manner. Neatness, orderliness, predictability. The process of scaling up signals the relevance of scale as

a system of representation. Scaling not only arranges objects in a specific assemblage, but it also, and even more critically, decides which events or objects come into view.

Objects, images, and moments enter the back of my mind: plastic bags and cups littering the streets on my way home; vast arrays of land, formed by the mechanical hands of machines; endless piles of products being shipped across this planet's oceans; the fragility of systems; our dependence on their interconnectedness; birds whose stomachs are filled with trash; the absurdity of flying to the moon for fun – the megalomania of humankind, condensed into one futuristic machine; landfills that are not in sight of my home; smoke erupting from factory chimneys; the list is endless. The Anthropocene – the age of humankind, scientists say. The age of megalomania and absurdities, critics say. The age of victory and technical advancement, some say. Doom and gloom, the end of everything, others say.

In the Anthropocene, traditional systems of representation meet their limits. While geology and other natural sciences are home to both cartographic notions of scale and the concept of the Anthropocene, the Anthropocene still calls into question the understanding of scale as a precise instrument of measurement and system of representation. As the future becomes increasingly unforeseeable and the past no longer suffices to adequately explain the present, representing the world becomes an endeavor of its own kind. While cartography creates a shifting continuum that ranges from a map of the entire country to a specific region and even a single house in a particular village, the Anthropocene demands a map “whose scale includes the whole Earth” (Clark, *Ecocriticism* 71). The rise in global surface temperatures due to the burning of fossil fuels, for instance, illustrates the extent to which environmental transformations impact the planet at large and highlights the inadequacy of focusing on a particular region in bringing solutions to protect the atmosphere as a global common good. However, Clark argues that “when it comes to relating the threat [of carbon emissions] to daily questions of politics, ethics or specific interpretations of history, culture, literature or other areas,” maps of the entire earth are “often almost mockingly useless” (71). The smooth process of zooming in and out gets replaced by an array of “jumps and discontinuities” (Clark, “Scale” 149) when the accumulation of phenomena at a large scale (such as global carbon emissions) stops serving as an explanation for the relevance of an individual act (say, driving one’s car to work every morning).

What can I do? What role do I play? Thinking about this makes me feel dizzy.

The choice of a specific scale as a system of representation has a decisive bearing on what we perceive and, in consequence, what we can value. The Oxford English Dictionary describes perception as a process, a process “of becoming aware or conscious of a thing or things in general” by the use of the senses. Shifting scales is accompanied by a shift in perception that determines (be the shift deliberate or

brought about by accident) which phenomena are given priority and which ones are left – or intentionally moved – out of sight. *Scale framing* – the act of selecting a specific scale as the framework of representation – is essentially an ethical practice. Derived from environmental politics and neighboring branches of political science, scale framing traditionally works as a tool for presenting complex ideas in a way that is “more amenable to thought or overview” (Clark, *Ecocriticism* 74). In the Anthropocene, framing events on a particular scale does not always happen deliberately and as planned. Instead, as a result of the increasing number of cumulative effects elicited through the workings of *anthropos*, the Anthropocene produces emergent phenomena (emergence being the sudden and unexpected occurrence of characteristics of a system which cannot be explained through the individual elements of the system and their particular characteristics) that push at the bounds of the human imagination (Horn and Bergthaller 193). The Anthropocene, when understood as an “emergent ‘scale effect’” (Clark, *Ecocriticism* 72), works at a range of boundaries and thresholds, which, once crossed, let “numerous human actions, insignificant in themselves . . . come together *to form a new, imponderable physical event*, altering the basic ecological cycles of the planet” (71; emphasis mine). It is the novelty of humanity as the driving force of such emergent physical events that fundamentally unsettles all forms of humanist(ic) self-conception.

My mind wanders off . . .

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CHARACTER



Reading and *Listening to* as a Decolonial, Feminist, and Anti-Racist Approach

Nina De Bettin Padolin

This text is both a personal and academic approach to reading and writing. While it moves chronologically through time and space, it is informed by my academic training as a literary scholar and as a Ph.D. student. As I argue here from my own positionality, reading can be a viable tool for helping young adults make sense of the world and envision more inclusive world systems; but more importantly, it is a tool that can inspire action.

Some of us might never stop visualizing a utopia – a no place or good place – without injustices. As a teenage girl, the question of why I had to do more than, be less than, better than, quieter than boys followed me much like the gaze of adult men; bullying, existential questions, and doubts about gender and sexuality were constant companions. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) opened up a world to me that I had never encountered before. Once I opened this thick book, I began to make sense of the questions I had been asking myself my entire life; it gave me access to new ideas – new questions – and presented a life beyond the gender binary. It elucidated the instances of heteropatriarchy that had been harmful to me as a girl. More importantly, *The Second Sex* introduced me to a world of feminism that offered security and safety as well as answers. So many more feminists followed: Judith Butler, Gloria Anzaldúa, Betty Friedan, Angela Y. Davis, Roxane Gay, Audre Lorde, and Kimberlé Crenshaw.

“From that time on, the world was hers for the reading. . . . Books became her friends and there was one for every mood. . . . On that day when she first knew she could read, she made a vow to read one book a day as long as she lived.”

(Betty Smith, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* 164-65)

Reading deep into the night as a teenager was indescribably helpful for me in finding my place in the world. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943) by Betty Smith has been a constant companion since I first opened it. As a little girl in a working-class, second-generation family in New York City in the early twentieth century, Francie's life is compared to that of the Tree of Heaven; despite being continually cut down and despised by those around it, the tree grows and prospers in the harsh city. With the help of books, Francie dreams about what would later become her life and escapes her tenement neighborhood, which is riddled with crime, alcoholism, and injustice.

Against all the odds, she ‘makes it out.’ Poverty is referenced as a place where one has to dig out an exit for oneself. In a capitalist system, poverty is an endless spiral that is continuously reproduced to increase wealth for the wealthy, engendering ever more poverty for the poor. Access to education, health care, employment, safety, and housing on a planetary scale are frequently restricted to certain economic and social strata.

Due to historical, cultural, and patriarchal injustices, a “majority of the world’s poor” are women, because “[w]orldwide, women have less access than men to resources such as land, credit, agricultural inputs, decision-making structures, technology, training, and extension services that would enhance their capacity to adapt to climate change” (Osman-Elasha; IPCC Report SPM-12, SPM-35). Osman-Elasha further states that out of 1.3 billion people living in poverty, 71% are women and among the poorest urban households, 40% are “headed by women” (par. 3). Double burdens weigh heavily on women, 50-80% of global food production falls to women, who typically have “more time-consuming and labor-intensive tasks that are carried out manually or with the use of simple tools” (par. 4). Women own only 10% of land globally while having to “shoulder the major responsibility for household water supply and energy for cooking and heating, as well as food security,” making them “highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood, particularly in rural areas” (par. 4). According to UNICEF, education is frequently less accessible for women whose literacy levels are globally lower than men’s, especially on the African continent. “Worldwide, nearly 1 in 4 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are neither employed nor in education or training – compared to 1 in 10 boys” (UNICEF, par. 4), which makes girls and women more vulnerable to exploitation. Statistically, “1 in 20 girls between . . . 15 and 19 . . . have experienced forced sex in their lifetimes” (par. 8). A pattern of inequality is clearly visible. These are the numbers. As I will illustrate, the climate crisis only worsens these situations of abject poverty and injustice.

The socio-political structures in place reproduce gendered divisions of power, access to education and safety, and labor within the family and institutional spaces such as schools. Through intersectional processes, those most marginalized are further silenced. Thus, storytelling is a powerful tool, especially in times of crisis. Akin to *listening to*, representation must be practiced, and a diverse body of voices needs to be heard.¹ Too often those who suffer the most are silenced, as represented in the following play.

¹ The focus on prepositions is inspired by Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh’s *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (2018). First and foremost, I want to emphasize the importance of words and how even a tiny word or action can make a huge difference.

“Indigenous representation in various genres has always been questionable in regards to who has a voice, and content that is culturally sensitive and appropriate.”
(Lyn Trudeau, “Pig Girl” 49)

The play *Pig Girl* (2013) by Colleen Murphy shows the close tie between gender, colonialization, and marginalization, as it visualizes sexual(ized) violence against Indigenous women. Murphy draws on the events of the Pickton case (2007) and stages the untold story of one of the thirty-three victims by creating a production of the last hours of a character named Dying Woman on the killer’s pig farm.² The audience witnesses the dehumanizing murder of Dying Woman, while Sister tirelessly fights to bring attention to a case that is not prioritized by the police force. Dying Woman incessantly begs Killer, whose voice is also given a platform, for her life and shouts for help while being hung on a meat hook. However, some forms of representation are counter-productive because support means much more than merely writing *about*.

The Indigenous Canadian scholar Lyn Trudeau critiques this play due to its colonial re-inscription and the colonial legacy of appropriating survivors’ and victims’ stories. For Trudeau, the playwright speaks *about*, not *with*, the missing Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit people. In her words,

[t]he Indigenous communities’ frustration regarding the stalled (or non-existent) inquiry [in the Pickton case of 33 murdered Indigenous women] coupled with the lack of collaboration in the making of *Pig Girl* undoubtedly aggravated their dissatisfaction with the play. . . . The title was demeaning and humiliating as it inferred that Indigenous women are actually held in less regard, because in this narrative it is public knowledge that Robert Pickton’s victims eventually were fed to his pigs, thus ending all traces of the women’s existence. Also, in Western society, being called “a pig” is a pejorative term that generally implies uncleanness. Moreover, the title also equates an Indigenous woman as being a girl, which therefore equates her as being infantile, immature, and not fully capable of taking care of herself. . . . Simply put, the hanging of an Indigenous woman on a hook conjures historical, barbarous acts of racism and oppressive behaviours and mentality. (52-55)

Trudeau cites the traumas caused by the ongoing reality of coloniality (Dunbar-Ortiz 1-78). The concise report from Abby Abinanti et al. establishes that the problem of “missing and murdered Indigenous women & girls and two spirit people (MMIWG2)” (6) is deeply rooted in coloniality and the centuries-long history and contemporary reality of colonialism. Colonial conquests and genocides terrorized

² The serial killer Robert Pickton murdered women “in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver . . . in the 1990s and early 2000s” (Bellringer 16). The women “shared the experience of one or more disadvantaging social and economic factors” (17). The fact that “the police and Crown failed to adequately investigate the disappearances of . . . 67 women” within these years caused repeated outcries from Indigenous communities, as “a third of [the women] were Aboriginal” (15-17).

those who were Indigenous and/or not European. These historical processes are deeply embedded in our (post-)colonial reality, and resistance against coloniality by Indigenous feminists raises awareness of the precarious situations that women, girls, and Two Spirit people suffer from. With the ongoing historical and cultural oppression and discrimination against their lives and beings, they suffer from “contemporary and intergenerational traumas” (qtd. in Abinanti et al. 11-12), which lead to “hopelessness in . . . tribal communit[ies]” (Abinanti et al. 33) and many other symptoms of trauma.

Looking at the US-American statistics, a disturbing pattern can be found. “Indigenous women and girls on some reservations are murdered at a rate of more than 10 times the national average” (Joseph 1). The violence permeates the entirety of the stolen lands. “[O]ver 80% of Indigenous people have experienced violence in their lifetime” (1).

Eighty percent.

Skyler Joseph further argues that “those of Indigenous ethnicity are 2.5 times as likely to experience violent crime and at least 2 times more likely to experience rape or sexual assault than people of other races in the United States” (1). “Despite their vibrant presence in the lives of their loved ones as daughters, mothers, sisters, cousins, aunties, and grandmothers, MMIWG2 are cast by the media and the criminal justice system alike as ‘disposable women’ who are targeted as ‘receptacles of violence’ for perpetrators” (qtd. in Abinanti et al. 12). In their concise report, Abinanti et al. further show that the police force has not been decolonized. Bodies keep disappearing and cases are frequently not given priority. Victims, families, and survivors seldomly receive the justice they deserve.

This miscarriage of justice is exacerbated by the near invisibility of this crisis . . . , whether in media coverage . . . or in the eyes of law enforcement and the criminal justice system more broadly . . . Most MMIWG2 cases remain unsolved despite their families’ best efforts in reporting and memorializing their missing and murdered loved ones . . . (Abinanti et al. 2)

As shown above, there is no denying the “systemic inequities targeting Indigenous people, including historical trauma and its multigenerational implications, poverty, incarceration, high rates of gender and sexual violence, foster care and child removal, and a general lack of support services, especially for mental health” (Abinanti et al. 51). The effects of “generations of abuse, including massacres . . . and the removal of Indigenous children for slavery and forced schooling . . . , [and] traumas further exacerbated by the subsequent generations of substance use, sexual violence and trauma that resulted” (52) are tangible in the pages of the report.

Colonized justice systems, frequent violence against Indigenous communities, and the consistent “[d]isempowerment of [f]amilies & [s]urvivors” (Abinanti et al. 78) reinforce a system that begets further abuse and murder. This production of “bare life” (Agamben 7) is institutionalized in various countries around the globe

and deeply ingrained in Indigenous peoples' lives.³ To quote an Indigenous woman who contributed to the report about missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit people by Abinanti et al., "[t]here's not one of us out there that hasn't been hurt," and another Indigenous woman declared that "we don't feel like we are cared about" (91).

Resistance is present and loud. Survivors, families, and Indigenous communities fight tirelessly to locate those missing, resist coloniality, and form groups to raise awareness of the issues, such as the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, REDress, Faceless Dolls, Families of Sisters in Spirit, Mending the Sacred Hoop, Moose Hide Campaign, and many more.

"There is really nothing more to say – except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how."

(Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 6)

In the face of gendered and racialized violence, representation through storytelling is essential. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Toni Morrison tells the story of an 11-year-old African American girl named Pecola who receives no love in a world that is filled with racism and violence. Living through and surviving racism, sexualized violence, and abuse leads her to wish for white skin and blue eyes – exterior markers that align with the beauty standards established by her oppressive environment. As a little girl, Pecola sees that beauty is equated with love; and for her, white features seem to promise the love she craves so bitterly. At the end of the novel, Pecola's mental health declines and she believes her wish to be granted; she sees herself with the bluest eyes reflected in the mirror. "At least on the edge of . . . town, among the garbage and the sunflowers of . . . town, it's much, much, much too late" (Morrison 221) for little Pecola. The constant abuse and the toxic environment had broken her. The intersection between race, gender, (dis-)ability, age, poverty, mental health, and beauty standards are vividly portrayed in the repetitive acts of abuse against Pecola.

Like the abuses perpetrated against the protagonist of *The Bluest Eye* and the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, the climate crisis is inherently racialized and gendered. Two Black Lives Matter movement members, Patrisse Cullors and Nyeusi Nguvu, state that "[r]acism is endemic to global inequality. This means that those most affected – and killed – by climate change are Black and poor people" (qtd. in Thomas and Haynes, par. 5).

The last two years have pinpointed the magnitude of suffering that is engendered during times of crisis for those who are marginalized. However, the systemic and

³ Giorgio Agamben's bare life is embedded in the biopolitics of the "modern State," where the distinction between power-bearers and "bare life" (also homo sacer) is made; the latter "remains included in politics in the form of the exception, that is, as something that is included solely through an exclusion" (6, 11).

structural discrimination behind the suffering is oftentimes not highlighted in the news. The 2022 IPCC Report outlines that “[v]ulnerability at different spatial levels is exacerbated by inequity and marginalization linked to gender, ethnicity, low income or combinations thereof (high confidence), especially for many Indigenous Peoples and local communities” (SPM-12).

I learned from reading that everything is interconnected. Everything is rhizomic in its existence.⁴ The material realities of Western exceptionalism, imperial and colonial expansionism, and capitalist accumulation have created a myriad of crises, one of them being climate change. Historically, a system of coloniality spread a Eurocentric worldview throughout the continents by brutally murdering millions of people (Dunbar-Ortiz 1-96; Mcfarland Dias), while simultaneously depleting natural resources and contributing to the extinction of species by creating an industrialized economy based on extractivism.

Today, extreme heat affects mostly poor urban neighborhoods. Alexandra Witze shows in her article “The Deadly Impact of Urban Heat” published by *Nature* that “heat takes a disproportionate toll on people of colour and those in lower-income communities. Racist urban policies, particularly in the United States [but also in many other countries], have left communities of colour at higher risk of heat-related illness or death than their white neighbours” (349), due to housing segregation, racist institutionalization (such as redlining), and racist urban planning which “deliberate[ly] neglect[s] . . . the most vulnerable residents” (350). These racist structures create a system in which “disproportionate percentages of people of colour live in places that are polluted with toxic waste, leading to negative health effects such as cancer, asthma, degraded cardiac function and high blood pressure” (Thomas and Haynes). Scientifically, “the urban heat-island effect, in which the materials that make up streets and buildings cause the air to heat up more than in leafier areas” (Witze 350), is the cause of extremer heat waves in cities, and especially in the more industrialized parts of big cities.

Climate racism further generates gender inequity, as “human rights, political and economic status, land ownership, housing conditions, exposure to violence, education and health” (Osman-Elasha; IPCC Report 2022 SPM-19, 1-45, 2-23) become less accessible in times of crisis. These vulnerabilities will be further heightened by catastrophes that put those who are most susceptible at risk.

Historically, race and ethnicity – more so than poverty – have determined how polluted a neighborhood is (Thomas and Haynes). In 97% of cities in the United States, “communities of colour [are] exposed to temperatures a full degree celsius higher, on average, than communities composed mostly of non-Hispanic white people” (Witze 350).

⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari coined the concept of the rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1998). The rhizome “can be connected to anything other and must be,” as it ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (7). Like the rhizome in nature, the concept always exists as a middle, characterized by its in-betweenness.

A connection can be made between environmental injustice and the suffering of billions of people. Historically, contributions to global greenhouse gas emissions from marginalized communities and non-Western countries are minuscule in comparison to industry and wealthy White communities. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Dr. Katharine K. Wilkinson – a co-editor of the climate anthology *All We Can Save* – argues that

[w]e talk so much in climate about solutions at scale, which we need. We need regenerative agriculture around the world. We need a 100 percent clean electricity system, we need means of mobility that don't rely on fossil fuels. We need all of that, of course. But I think sometimes we overlook the values. Because we're not just trying to build a zero-emissions future, right? We're trying to build a future also in which we can thrive together. (qtd. in Jackson, par. 65)

To think about climate change solutions, the web of colonial structures created in the last centuries, which benefits a small percentage of people and is detrimental to what is still often called the Global South, has to be untangled. Capitalism thrives on human rights abuses and brings with it the destruction of the planet and its inhabitants by a few, causing the loss and disruption of the lives of many. The connections between injustices and the climate crisis are a material reality.

It is our responsibility as humans, wherever we may be located, to tackle the problems at their roots to create a planet that thrives on the happiness of all. Theater scholar Theresa May posits that “[c]ertain events call us – all humanity – to the same table” (6). Because our fight against the climate crisis runs the risk of reinscribing capitalism and imperialism in the solutions we design, we have to simultaneously untangle ourselves from and deconstruct these systems.

One of the many examples of these risks can be seen in Germany's energy policies. In the article “How the EU Green Deal Perpetuates Climate Colonialism,” Serag Heiba argues that while Germany “banned domestic hard coal production in 2018,” the coal which is also called ‘blood coal’ in Colombia is still imported from so-called developing countries, where the extraction causes “human rights abuses and contract killing carried out by paramilitaries on behalf of international coal suppliers” (pars. 9, 10).⁵ Indigenous peoples suffer structural violence as they are removed from their ancestral lands to make more space for the extraction of coal. This form of “climate colonialism” allows “already-developed and industrialised nations to live at the ecological expense of other countries” (par. 12).

How can we tackle these issues?

We should never forget the power of stories and words. While governmental regulations, political and activist leaderships, data, and scientific studies are of the utmost importance to understanding and working against this planetary crisis, literature and the arts also have a vital place in the solution-building process. I am

⁵ I would briefly point out the colonial implications of the terms ‘developing’ vs. ‘developed’ country. Words matter and how they are used influences the way we, as humans, perceive the world.

deeply convinced that books and stories can be a changing factor in finding solutions to the climate crisis.

Neal McLeod is a Cree scholar, poet, and visual artist, who asserts that the “process of storytelling within Cree traditions requires storytellers to remember the ancient stories that made their ancestors ‘the people they were,’ [and that] this requires a remembering of language” (qtd. in Simpson 33). Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson similarly argues that storytelling creates a “social space” that envisions a colonial process “of remembering, visioning and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both Nishnaabeg and peoples [and offers a] way out of cognitive imperialism [to] . . . escape the gaze and the cage of the Empire, even if it is just for a few minutes” (33).

“I think that there is a gap between those who are heard and those who speak.”

(Anna Deavere Smith, *Fires in the Mirror* xli)

One text that I have to mention in the discussion of storytelling is Anna Deavere Smith’s play *Fires in The Mirror* (premiered 1992), which stuck with me because it just baffled me the first time I read it. It portrays the conflict between the Jewish and African American communities in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York “after a Black boy was killed by a car in a rabbi’s motorcade and a Jewish student was slain by Blacks in retaliation” (Deavere Smith Cover copy). The play is composed of interviews by those who were present at or affected by the events. As a young bachelor’s student, I did not understand why this play was indeed antiracist and anti-discriminatory.

Foolishly, I thought “anyone could do that, right?”

It was a book that I had to swallow whole, let it gnaw at my bones until I was ready to digest it; I revisited it a few years later while pondering what I had been missing. As is the case with so many of my questions, the answers had been hiding in plain sight, I just needed to accumulate more theoretical knowledge and life experience to make sense of the answers.

I realized that Deavere Smith gives agency to a generation of unheard voices, especially in a generic form that had been dominated by white dramaturgs and actors for a long time. She creates an audience for those who have something to say. After generations of trauma, genocides, and persecutions telling one’s story is powerful. The play lets those who experienced the trauma speak their subjective truths. It is effective in the sense that it works with those affected and audience members listen to the stories told.

Sometimes, one needs more reflection, more time to think beyond one’s own privileged worldview, and understand that art is a reflection; this can be helpful in understanding what exists outside of one’s narrow spheres. Theorizing is important. But so is *listening to*. Storytelling is essential, and in that spirit, I would like to turn to my last literary example, which is one of my favorite plays.

“THE DENE SEER (voiceover): ‘Can you read the air? The face of the water? Can you look through time and see the future? Can you hear through the walls of the world? Maybe we are all talking at the same time because we are answering each other over time and space. Like a wave that washes over everything and doesn’t care how long it takes to get through because it always ends up on the same shore.’”

(Marie Clements, *Burning Vision* 72)

Listening to and representation are utilized in Marie Clements’ play *Burning Vision* (premiered 2002), in which the past, present, and future are tightly entangled as the journey of uranium mining is performed. In the late nineteenth century, a Dene medicine man predicts the atomic bomb: “This burning vision [. . . which] will come a long time in the future. It will come burning inside” (Clements 116). The audience “witness[es] the effects of indigenous timekeeping systems displaced by linear time” (Whittaker 138). The implementation of Indigenous ecological knowledge, non-Western perceptions of time, and accumulative injustices experienced by those most vulnerable, allow this play to transport the critical moments of material reality onto the stage and depict the interrelations between past, present, and future. Clements creates a performance of how our actions in the past have created the reality of climate change. The play goes even further – it deconstructs the linearity of past-present-future and introduces these three temporal spheres as inherently interconnected. May states that “[t]he play’s logic is . . . indigenous. . . . The indigenous viewpoint from which the play is written, and which it enacts, allows for simultaneity of past, present and future, in which the spirit world co-exists with the embodied world, in which nothing is inanimate” (7). Everything in the play, from the smallest stone to the “cherry tree: everything is spirit-filled, alive with presence” (7). The close connection to the environment around and within them can be seen as the Dene Widow muses, “[w]e used to be able to tell where we were by the seasons, the way the sun placed itself or didn’t, the migration patterns of the caribou. Time. . . . By the way we dressed, or how we dressed, or undressed the ones we loved. Time” (Clements 41).

This play is deeply decolonial. It questions concepts that may seem self-evident to a Eurocentric audience. Clements offers a glance at the rhizomic connections between temporal spheres as well as what it means to be human. As humans we are a collective – we are always connected. The action of one always causes a reaction, in the most positive and negative ways. By *listening to* and working with Indigenous ecological knowledge, a solution-building process can begin that might create a planetary thought that involves everyone. In academia, it is our responsibility to work holistically *with*.

Books have taught me to read between the lines; I firmly believe that doing nothing – living in passivity –, means contributing to an inherently discriminatory system. Inaction is still an action. However, after asking myself questions about

inequalities my entire life and not finding all the answers in the books I devoured, I had to come to realize that books alone are not enough. Every single person on this planet has to act. We have to theorize, concretize, understand, and spread awareness. We, as humans, have to tackle challenges head-on with the strengths, capabilities, and ideas that are unique to us, and that we have acquired throughout our lives. While the first step is reading, asking questions, and acquiring knowledge, we have to now take our unanswered questions and work together to answer them. I would like to end with a sentiment that I hope to have conveyed throughout this article. The decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo reasons that “[t]here cannot be revolutionary praxis without theory. Praxis without theory is blind; theory without praxis is sequestered. Both join forces in that long-lasting horizon we can call vision and, in this case, decolonial vision” (Mignolo and Walsh 138). Books have always informed my meaning-making processes and they have consistently inspired me to translate my learned knowledge into real-world action. Although my engagement with books has changed over the course of my life – as I acquired tools and approaches that helped me make political and social interconnections –, the texts I read as a young adult affect me personally and academically to this day because reading has always been a powerful tool for me that is capable of driving change.

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Climate Change and its Effects on Displacement to Urban Areas: A Socio-Economic and Environmental Reading of Willa Cather's *O'Pioneers!*

Emmanuel Ngor Ndiaye

Introduction

O' Pioneers! (1913), as the title implies, is historical fiction written by American novelist Willa Cather, who explores the living and working conditions of farmers in the Divide, commonly known as the fictional town of Hanover. Although the novel outlines the determination, creativity, and success of its protagonist, Alexandra Bergson, most of the characters find it difficult to succeed in farming, hence their displacement to urban areas where, it appears, life is easier. The difficulty of farming, as portrayed in *O' Pioneers!*, is caused by phenomena related to climate change including desertification, the infertility of the land, and droughts.

This situation, as discussed in the novel, is what induced some immigrant farmers to sell their land with the hope of finding better opportunities in cities: "We will sell the place for whatever we can get, and auction the stock. We haven't enough to ship. I am going to learn engraving with a German engraver there, and then try to get work in Chicago . . . Father was never meant for a farmer, you know that. And I hate it" (Cather 37-38). Cather describes a scene where Carl Linstrum, Alexandra's boyfriend, informs her that his family is planning to move to Chicago due to the failure they have experienced, and which, in the long run, resulted in an inability to achieve their goals in the farming business.

The story of Carl's family thus resembles that of many other immigrant families who, regardless of their hope or the incentives that brought them to the Divide, consider farming a primitive activity that no longer provides good crops as it used to. With regard to the problem of the land, it should be pointed out that some farmers were compelled to migrate to find opportunities in cities, whereas Alexandra, described as the most creative character, has managed not only to make the land cultivable but even more a livable land. Through her protagonist, Willa Cather sheds light on themes such as creativity, the love for the land, the sense of place, entrepreneurial spirit, and many other topics that exemplify Alexandra's environmental awareness along with her sense of responsibility.

The relationship between farming and displacement to urban areas is an issue that occupies a central position in Cather's writing, mostly in the novels of the Great Plains Trilogy which are *O'Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and *My Ántonia* (1918). In fact, what should be concluded from this displacement is that farmers, in particular immigrants, often encounter hardships that prevent them from

making headway in agriculture simply because of their unfamiliarity with the sector. On the contrary, those who are creative, meaning capable of adapting to climate change, often find ways to achieve their set goals in the agricultural sector as is the case for Cather's female protagonists *Ántonia*, in *My Ántonia*, and *Alexandra*, in *O'Pioneers!*, for example.

Ántonia and *Alexandra* embody the love for the land, another central theme in Cather's explorations of the American frontier. Cather investigates the wilderness of the American west and how pioneers were determined to venture in this region in order to make it a livable place. As such, while some farmers complain about the harshness and the failure they go through, characters such as *Ántonia* and *Alexandra* have learned to transform the land in order to take advantage of its resources.

Building upon a socio-economic and environmental approach, this study aims to explore the impact of climate change on displacement to urban areas. The first section provides information on the difficult living and working conditions of farmers. The second section explores the sense of place and the love for the land, which is how farmers nourish a connection with their land and environment to better benefit from them. The final section focuses on the attractiveness of urban regions at the expense of rural areas.

Living and Working Conditions in the Agricultural Sector

To investigate the hard living and working conditions of farmers in *O' Pioneers!*, it is necessary to go back to history to better address the issue from both a socio-economic and an environmental standpoint. *O' Pioneers!* is one of Willa Cather's novels of the Great Plains trilogy, as indicated above, and Cather, similar to other environmental writers, argues that humans should preserve and protect nature given that they are part and parcel of it. In *O' Pioneers!*, some characters seem to be disappointed by nature, in particular the land which, they claim, is difficult to work. This situation, as a result, hardens their lives to the point of leading some of them to relocate to urban areas where, in spite of their hopes and aspirations, life may seem tougher than it was in the countryside.

As noted previously, farmers – namely immigrants – are more often than not pursuers of the American Dream and this is, evidently, what causes their displacement from rural to urban areas where they hope to achieve their Dream. In other words, their living and working conditions in the agricultural sector are always synonyms for the hardships of those who have never practiced farming. To this point, Cather writes that “their neighbors, certainly, knew even less about farming than he did. Many of them had never worked on a farm until they took up their homesteads. They had been hand workers at home, tailors, locksmiths, joiners, cigar-makers, etc. Bergson himself had worked in a shipyard” (15-16). Cather's farmers face tough living and working conditions due to obstacles including lack of experience and means, and for some lack of will linked to the repetitive failures.

To the above-mentioned obstacles, what should also be listed is the difficulty adapting to a new environment. Adaptation is very important, and, according to Henry David Thoreau in his groundbreaking narrative *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854), “[m]an is an animal who more than any other can adapt himself to all climates and circumstances” (47). Thoreau’s declaration with respect to adaptation is very telling; however, when referring to some farmers in *O’Pioneers!*, one should note that they do not meet Thoreau’s perspective on adaptation owing to their inability to adapt to their rural and agricultural environment, symbolized in the book by the Divide.

This analysis regarding the inability to adapt is what David Laird, in “Willa Cather’s Women: Gender, Place, and Narrativity in *O’Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*,” expresses in these words: “[t]he few inhabitants, when they do finally appear, are strangely out of place, threatened, and for the most part, no match for the forces with which they must contend” (244). Laird’s argumentation exemplifies the predicament that farmers and those who live in rural areas encounter on account of the obstacles they face. Those inhabitants are often victims of changes that might pertain to climate. Such changes result in their displacement or migration to other places in pursuit of better living and working conditions.

Additionally, on the economic level, it is true that farmers experience several problems resulting from the failure of their production which, in fact, is partly caused by the degradation of the land. As regards this degradation and crop failure, Cather observes:

The failure of the corn crop made labor cheap. Lou and Oscar hired two men and put in bigger crops than ever before. They lost everything they spent. The whole country was discouraged. Farmers who were already in debt had to give up their land. A few foreclosures demoralized the country. The settlers sat about on the wooden sidewalks in the little town and told each other that the country was never meant for men to live in; the thing to do was to get back to Iowa, to Illinois, to any place that had been proved habitable. (19)

Consistent with this assertion, Cather evidences the disappointment of farmers whose only alternative is to abandon their land and move to cities where they hope to start new lives. Nevertheless, one must be aware that their displacement to cities may have other consequences: “But off there in cities there are thousands of rolling stones like me. We are all alike; we have no ties, we know nobody, we own nothing . . . We live in the streets, in the parks, in the theatres. We sit in restaurants and concert halls and look about at the hundreds of our kind and shudder” (92).

Although it is true that the working conditions are hard in the agricultural sector, it is worth noting that there are farmers who do not like working the land while pretending that they are not meant for such an activity. Regarding their mindset and attitude, it is important to recognize that the latter do not intimately nourish a connection with the land by contrast to Cather’s protagonist, whose sense of place and love for the land is the focus of the next section.

The Sense of Place and the Love for the Land

The sense of place is a recurrent theme in most of Willa Cather's novels where the reader comes across characters that are too often unfamiliar with their geographical area. While Cather's protagonists find it hard to evolve in other places, particularly in towns, other characters, by contrast, are compelled to leave their environment, which they commonly conceive of as hostile. Through this dichotomy, Cather brings to light the ways in which her protagonists are emotionally attached to their environment and more specifically to their land. An attachment to the land reflects their love for it but also the sense of place and, as such, suggests that by developing a connection with the land one will be able to better know and, in turn, benefit from it.

This perspective can be justified by the example of Alexandra, who, in addition to expressing her love for the land, "tr[ies] to break a little more land every year; sod corn is good for folder" (20), has managed to preserve and enrich it, whereas other farmers have failed to do so. Questions about Alexandra's sense of place and love for the land have drawn the attention of some critics and researchers who, like Cather, have acknowledged the role that the land plays in Alexandra's life. Douglass W. Werden centers his analysis on Alexandra's sense of responsibility in his 2002 study "She Had Never Humbled Herself: Alexandra Bergson and Marie Shabata as the 'Real' Pioneers of 'O'Pioneers!.'" In his words:

As a woman farmer, Alexandra Bergson is a superior manager of her land, money, workers, and extended family. Alexandra's movement in the novel is from an initial rejection of traditional women's roles to an exploration of how she can be a woman in a dominant position and a family woman simultaneously. (199)

Werden's assessment, like that of this paper, is that the love of the land has brought Alexandra success not only as a farmer, but also – and more importantly – as a speculator and manager. As a manager, Alexandra expresses her love for the land, but also for people living around her, in other words, her extended family. Alexandra takes care of old Ivar, "the kitchen girls" (36), as the three young Swedish girls are known, and her brothers Lou and Oscar, who are also planning to move to town on account of their lack of interest in farming.

Lou and Oscar, by contrast to their older sister Alexandra, are undeniably inspired by the movement from rural to urban areas in the search of better living and working conditions. Their attitude is similar to that of many rural inhabitants who are victims of events or obstacles that urge them to relocate to other places. Only individuals who are animated by the sense of place want to stay and perform agricultural activities. Those who stay in rural areas have a connection to the land that inspires them to remain in their environment whatever the obstacles and challenges.

In *Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology, and the Environment* (2003), issues of displacement and the sense of place are addressed by Glen A. Love who, by quoting Robert David Sack, offers a clear account of the importance of place:

We cannot live without places . . . A geographical awareness helps reveal how the segments of our lives fit together. It shows how we are cultural and natural, autonomous and independent. Most important, it focuses our will on our common purpose as geographic agents – transforming the earth and making it into a home. (92)

To a certain extent, the love and the attachment to place are what make the difference between people who stay and those who want to leave. In *O' Pioneers!*, Cather showcases how her protagonist differs from the rest of the characters who want to live in a different geographical place. Alexandra is admittedly aware of her environment and that is indeed what makes her a successful farmer who, instead of abandoning or selling her land, has learned to transform it:

It was Alexandra who read the papers and followed the markets, and who learned by the mistakes of their neighbors. It was Alexandra who could always tell about what it had cost to fatten each steer, and who could guess the weight of a hog before it went on the scales closer than John Bergson himself. Lou and Oscar were industrious, but he could never teach them to use their heads about their work. (9)

The sense of place is a theme that Cather has chronicled in most of her writings, and her own personal experiences of displacement can be identified in some of her characters like Jim Burden in *My Ántonia*. During her childhood, Cather's parents move from Virginia to Nebraska and this situation made her uncomfortable with her new environment, as is the case with some of her characters. Janis P. Stout, author of *Willa Cather: The Writer and her World* (2000), considers this migration and its impact on Cather's writing:

When Cather was ten, her family moved from the mountains of Virginia to the flat Nebraska prairie where they lived a few years before moving to the town of Red Cloud, where they lived until Cather left for college. Most of Cather's characters experience a strong attachment to a place which is disrupted in some way during their youth . . . Their stories focus on their initial departure as child, and more on their later attempts to reconcile their loyalties to place with their artistic, intellectual or even economic goals which usually require them to abandon their home once more. (19)

Stout's comment with regard to the attachment to place experienced by Cather's characters mirrors our perspective on the sense of place, which makes some characters, in particular protagonists, unable to leave their homes for other places. As already discussed, the protagonists Ántonia and Alexandra are emotionally and culturally attached to their environments in that they find it difficult to live in places different from where they have been raised. By contrast to them, other characters are for the most part inspired by a life in the cities.

The Attractiveness of Urban Areas at the Expense of Rural Ones

Displacement from rural to urban areas, history suggests, has long been a topical issue that has garnered the attention of many experts around the world. This displacement is the result of complex cultural, environmental, political, and socio-economic problems. On the socio-economic level, for instance, it has been noted that inhabitants of rural areas are victims of events that are most specifically connected to climate change:

The failure of the corn crop made labor cheap. Lou and Oscar hired two men and put in bigger crops than ever before. They lost everything they spent. The whole country was discouraged. Farmers who were already in debt had to give up their land. A few foreclosures demoralized the country. The settlers sat about on the wooden sidewalks in the little town and told each other that the country was never meant for men to live in; the thing to do was to get back to Iowa, to Illinois, to any place that had been proved habitable. (19)

From a literary approach, Cather addresses the issue by revealing the predicament of farmers, some of whom have left the countryside in order to settle in cities, like Jim's family and Lena Lingard in *My Ántonia*, and the Swedish immigrants in *O' Pioneers!*.

Migration in Cather's works is always motivated by the quest for a bright future. Dalia Kandiyoti, in *Migrant Sites: America, Place, and Diaspora Literatures* (2009), argues that "Willa Cather's pioneers transplant Europe into the prairie" (38). Although Cather's characters first settle in rural areas, that is to say in the prairie, where they perform agricultural activities, many of them are going to continue their adventure in cities, and this urban/rural divide generates a symbolic dichotomy between notions of modernity and past.

Modernity is here symbolized by urban areas whereas the past is embodied by those who live in rural areas. To better explore such a dichotomy between modernity and past as representations of urban and rural areas in Cather's works, it is interesting to refer to the study *The American Midwest: Essays on Regional History* (2001), where Cayton and Gray argue that "Cather and Garland were also transitional writers because they interpreted the pioneer world of their youth to the literary, urban, and 'modern' world they entered. The opposition between these two 'worlds,' the rural past and the urban modern, became a dominant narrative explaining modernity" (44).

Through their portrayal of the opposition between modernity and past, an issue that is recurrent in Cather's novels, Cayton and Gray underscore a phenomenon that can be culturally or socio-economically explained. From a cultural stance, one should bear in mind the fact that urban areas represent civilization, whereas rural ones are, in literary terms, perceived as less civilized. In this regard, Dalia Kandiyoti quotes Melissa Ryan who analyzes the presence of confinement and civilization in *O' Pioneers!* as follows: "*O' Pioneers!* shows the theoretical relationship between civilization and enclosure" (83). Examining Ryan's insightful analysis, we may come

to the conclusion that throughout the novel, civilization can be identified with urban areas, while enclosure is associated with rural zones where inhabitants are emotionally tied to their land.

The spatial dichotomy established in the division between civilization and enclosure is reflected in the emotional experiences of the characters. Civilized characters are those who leave rural environments for the cities, whereas those who stay in the countryside – protagonists in this context –, are seen as enclosed simply because of their attachment to place. In *O' Pioneers!*, Alexandra Bergson is the person who expresses a great connection with the land, an idea which Joseph R. Urgo, in *Willa Cather and the Myth of American Migration* (1995), retraces in these terms: “by following the Old-World belief that land, in itself, is desirable. Whereas Alexandra is thus rooted in Old World ideas and practices, however, she is simultaneously adapting to the demands of New World conditions” (45). She is, in this way, different from her younger brothers, Lou and Oscar, who want to leave the countryside, and Emil, who continues his university studies.

Lou and Oscar do not want to stay home while their younger brother Emil is studying at university, and they realize that there are landowners who reside in cities while employing other farmers on their homesteads. Despite their lack of interest in farming, Alexandra draws their attention to her project and succeeds in making them successful farmers who, in the future, will employ others to work in their farms as do some former farmers who have relocated in cities:

You poor boy, you won't have to work it. The men in town who are buying up other people's land don't try to farm it. They are the men to watch, in a new country. Let's try to do like the shrewd ones, and not like these stupid fellows. I don't want you boys always to have to work like this. I want you to be independent, and Emil to go to school. (52)

Although Lou and Oscar can be regarded as embodying modernity, it is worth pointing out that Emil is the best representation of modernity and this can be justified by his studies at university. Nevertheless, despite her attachment to the land and farming, Alexandra wants her brothers to hold other positions once they succeed in farming.

Conclusion

The study of climate change and its effect on displacement to urban areas remains a topical issue. Based on our analysis of *O' Pioneers!*, it should be stated that climate change has various consequences both in rural and urban areas. In rural areas, obstacles such as drought and the failure of the crop caused by the infertility of the land are experiences that push farmers to abandon their land. As farmers are displaced to urban areas, it is obvious that some migrants will have trouble in meeting their expectations for economic advancement.

Climate change not only creates migration within a country, which is referred to as internal displacement, but also cross-border migration, referred to as inter-

national displacement, which is a phenomenon that has become a topic of worldwide controversy. This, in turn, is what has given birth to the term 'climate displacement,' which is used by UNESCO to describe individuals who are involuntarily displaced as a result of climate change. From a socio-economic viewpoint, displacement, either national or international, is too often the result of hard living conditions in some areas where success seems to be impossible for certain persons who lack financial resources or even are victims of events or obstacles they cannot cope with.

Through Cather's work, notably the Great Plains Trilogy, one discovers characters who are victims of climate change in that they are forced to migrate to places where some end up achieving their goals, while others will find success more elusive or nonexistent than ever. Taking into account the various obstacles and challenges that people have to overcome, either in rural or urban regions, one may contend that climate change has innumerable consequences that keep increasing.

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Myth, Migration, and Memory: Unfolding the Anthropocene in Contemporary Asian Fiction

Sunu Rose Joseph

Introduction

The continent of Asia, with its long history of human civilizations – the rise and fall of nomadic empires, the beginning and expansion of the practice of agriculture, medieval commerce, and most recently proto-industrialization and urbanization – has run a unique historical and cultural course that has also shaped the approach of its social communities towards the environment, the elements of nature, and the universe as a whole, including the unseen and unexplored. Nature has been central to traditional practices since the early days of evolution, and despite the sweeping cultural changes imparted by modernity, the traits and symbols of ancient traditions are still part and parcel of many communities. With more than half of the world's population as inhabitants of Asia, and a significant share of them living in settings vulnerable to the perils of climate change, Asia is uniquely situated with regard to human-nature relation, which calls for a deeper understanding of its cultures and their transitions and transformations.

The randomness of climatic events poses a huge challenge for the planet and all of its inhabitant species, including humans, who have all devised particular sets of practices for survival, sustenance, and progress based on culturally amassed learning and wisdom. The rule books of living that had been followed in the past seem less and less relevant today. Amitav Ghosh remarks that “in the era of global warming, nothing is really far away; there is no place where the orderly expectations of bourgeois life hold unchallenged sway . . . It is certain in any case that these are not ordinary times: the events that mark them are not easily accommodated in the deliberately prosaic world of serious prose fiction” (*The Great Derangement* 35).

Narratives are capable of redefining the patterns of life on the planet to craft new cultural responses to the environmental challenges posed in this century. Stories about the environment influence our behavior and attitude, and the scholarly community argues that the kind of stories that were disseminated in the past few decades only furthered the desires of an ego-centric human mind. Val Plumwood cites a “dominant narrative of reason” that culminates in “global economic regimes that threaten the biosphere” (5-6) as the primary cause of modern environmental crises. Ursula Heise notes that ecocritical analysis has “often tended to assess creative works most centrally in terms of whether they portray the realities of social oppression and environmental devastation accurately, and what ideological

perspectives they imply” (258). In addition to addressing the social, economic, and political situation, Heise presses “the question of the aesthetic” in novels and poems, which has greater power in “reshaping the individual and collective eco-social imaginary” (258).

This article is an attempt to analyze the narration of climate fictions from two different regions of twenty-first-century Asia that exhibit a mutual intelligibility in expounding the deterioration of their immediate surroundings while simultaneously employing special narrative tropes to render their realities. The two works under consideration are *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh (Bengal, India, 2019) and *The Man with the Compound Eyes* by Wu Ming-Yi (Taiwan, 2013).

Myth and Migration in *Gun Island*

From time immemorial, there have been myths and mythological characters that are part of specific communities and their cultural histories. Some of them are intermingled with nature and the ecosystem and directly or indirectly interact with or represent the harmonious coexistence of the living and non-living entities. They shine a light upon an imaginary world that can never be explored but nonetheless exists in our unconscious psyche as a collective memory. Myths concoct a mesmerizing glimpse of the innumerable manifestations of the natural world according to traditional stories and beliefs that emerged from specific cultural traditions and ways of relating to nature.

According to Roland Barthes, myth appears natural or universal in its signification and carries an order of cultural signification where semiotic code is perceived as fact (131), thereby assuming a degree of power and authority. Thus, myth maintains an influential power by appearing self-evident. Barthes’ considerations of myth originated with the idea of myths as stories that are false – or at least unverifiable – and that tend to construct a world-view and explain certain practices or the nature of social institutions (109-59).

Over the 288 pages of the fictional work *Gun Island*, Ghosh untangles diverse threads of ecological disaster, refugee movements, and cross-border migrations of both humans and animals, held together by a modern retelling of the seventeenth-century Bengali folk epic of *Bonduki Sadagar*, which could be translated as *The Gun Merchant*. The eponymous protagonist of the folk epic, in fear of divine rage, wanders the globe to escape the wrath of Manasa Devi, the goddess of snakes. The novelist’s intention is not to render a didactic re-telling of the old tale, but to interpret the pressing issues of eco-degradation and migration by way of a modern retelling of the ancient myth. As alarming incidents of climate change take hold of the entire globe, defying contemporary scientific predictions, it is worth pondering Ghosh’s claim that “life is not guided by reason” (*The Great Derangement* 72).

The protagonist unveiling the epic of the Gun Merchant is Dinanath Dutta aka Deen, an antiquarian book dealer in Brooklyn, who, during an annual visit to his birthplace Kolkata, accidentally winds up in the shrine to Manasa Devi in the

Sundarbans, where the Gun Merchant finally ended his travels. In the shrine with Tipu, an Americanized young man, and Rafi, the last of a family of Muslims taking care of the shrine, Deen finds on the facade ciphered images of the feud between the Gun Merchant and Manasa Devi, forming traces of the puzzle around the Merchant's myth. The visit ends with an extraordinary incident when Tipu is struck by a cobra, after which he experiences strange premonitions establishing connections between the ancient and the modern world that make sense of the events in the human and non-human world. The entire episode turns out to be completely shattering for Deen, who finds himself drawn into a primeval world of the Merchant, goddess, and other venomous creatures.

Though they part ways and are sent on separate journeys, Deen and his young companions find themselves, most often involuntarily, chasing the myth of the Merchant and eventually reaching Venice. The more Deen tries to ignore the legendary tale of the unrelenting feud between the Merchant, representing *culture*, and the goddess, representing *nature*, the closer he gets to the Merchant. As an academician, rational in his thoughts, the similarities between his life and the Merchant's odyssey appear at first to be coincidences, but ultimately Deen succumbs to the smack of superstition and concedes that "the world of today presents all the symptoms of demonic possession" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 216). When myths re-appear in contemporary times, they are a way of explaining the present through the past that suggests history cannot be suppressed.

The beautiful landscape in the Ganges Delta, the Sundarbans, presents a remote island exposed to intensifying storms, declining biodiversity, and eroding coasts where its young men are eager to leave. Yearning for a better life, Tipu and Rafi set out on a journey to Italy. Dinanath, Tipu, and Rafi ultimately converge in Venice after a perilous journey through the same places – weighed down by similar environmental catastrophes – that the Merchant experienced centuries ago in the times referred to as the 'Little Ice Age' by the scientists. A detailed reading of the novel and the interpretation of the Bonduki myth reveals similar instances of climate-induced migrations unfolding in the seventeenth century and the present day. In the novel, Ghosh negotiates the global phenomenon of climate change, expanding the scope of his novel by using the Gun Merchant myth as a focal point.

Crucial scenes occur in various climate-ravaged places throughout the world, linking the globe through the Bonduki myth. The novel also establishes a link to climate-induced migration and displacement that equally affects humans and animals. Uncommon happenings in the world of non-humans are scattered throughout the novel, including the introduction of endangered species, stranded marine animals, the beaching of a pod of Irrawaddy dolphins, encounters with poisonous spiders and snakes venturing into new regions as temperatures rise, and voracious shipworms hollowing out wooden structures on the shores of Venice. After losing his wealth and family in the tussle with Manasa Devi, the Merchant eventually learns to limit human desires and to create a harmony between the diverse living beings of the world.

Towards the end of the novel, the human and non-human world converge in the throes of migration as species in air and water are crossing the path of a ferry carrying illegal migrants and an array of ships lined up on the Italian coast to stop them from entering Europe, while a few vessels – including that of the protagonists – are queued up to save or support the refugees, including Tipu and Rafi. The “miraculous spectacle” of migrant birds and marine creatures, along with a few migrating humans, as described by Piya (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 284), culminates with the vessel carrying Tipu and Rafi arriving safely on the Italian coast as a result of the spectacular and divine sight. The event is plotted against the Gun Merchant’s experience in the seas when his ship gets attacked by pirates and appears as a *déjà-vu* moment from the myth of Manasa Devi. An element of magic pervades the Bengali myth where the Merchant is inexplicably saved by the goddess and gets back his fortunes and lost son. Deen too, after being challenged in unexpected ways throughout his journey from Sundarbans to Brooklyn, California to Venice, finally witnesses the great miracle and the culmination of the migration event. The entire episode juxtaposes the pre-modern myth and contemporary climate-forced migrations, rethinking the shared species history dotted with human and animal migrations: “And then there they were, millions of birds, circling above us, while below, in the waters around Blue Boat, schools of dolphins somersaulted and whales slapped their tails on the waves” (281). To his astonishment, Deen finds that the myth of the Gun Merchant is still alive and feels the unfolding of the event as a manifestation of the supreme power of the goddess. It all converges to the undercurrent of the originating force of humanity: “Remember these words, *caro*, think of them whenever you despair of the future: *Unde origo inde salus* – ‘From the origin salvation comes’” (224, emphasis original). The origin, the primordial force that pervades and sustains is nature, an endless mystery that is impossible to unravel.

Living in the Anthropocene, humans have ignored the effect of non-human interlocutors in the formation of history and thought. Manasa Devi, the interlocutor of the voice and voiceless world, reminds men when they go astray, negating nature and the entities. As Ghosh writes, “[s]he was in effect a negotiator, a translator – or better still a portavoce – as the Italians say, ‘a voice-carrier’ between two species that had no language in common and no shared means of communication. Without her mediation there could be no relationship between animal and human except hatred and aggression” (*Gun Island* 152-53).

Ghosh firmly believes that traditional myths teach us a lot about the unpredictability and global effects of climate change – “Fiction allows us to look at the world in a different way” (Shapiro, par. 3). The indigenous communities of Sundarbans have a repository of folktales featuring the three main categories of gods, humans, and animals. The entire narrative of *Gun Island* has the Bengali myth playing out at its center, holding its sway from the marshy, flood-prone mangrove islands at the border of India and Bangladesh to the canals of Venice, Italy. Covering a vast geographical trajectory with sharp leaps in time, the novel connects contemporary climate ferments to the changes that occurred three centuries ago, which have been termed the ‘Little Ice Age.’ Through the folktale, Ghosh weaves together the local,

the global, and the intermediary, illuminating the deep interconnectedness of environmental crises on a range of scales, from the regional to the planetary. The novelist has attempted a modern retelling of the myth, making it evident that old legends, and often medieval literature, resonate with incidents that play out in the present natural world.

Memories in *The Man with the Compound Eyes*

Climate change manifests itself in contemporary culture through real and imagined stories within science fiction's sub-genre of dystopian fiction (Ben 25). While addressing climate change, *The Man with the Compound Eyes* explores memory as a trope, making the narrative psychological and ontological, while keeping it within the contemporary climatology framework. The work portrays a hypothetical calamity that occurs when a floating garbage vortex hits the East coast of Taiwan as mankind lives on precariously, altered by the apocalyptic experience. The story unfolds mostly through memories, leading up to and following the consequences of the collision of the Great Pacific Trash Vortex into Taiwan. Alice and Atile'i, the main characters, traverse the aftermath of the devastation that threatens to consume the east coast of Taiwan inundating all matter and lives in Haven, where Alice lives. The narrative is a tale of love and loss amidst the perils of climatic and environmental change. Through recollections of the past, Wu Ming-Yi details the cultural approaches and living patterns that have shaped the ecosystem and the recuperating mechanisms peculiar to local and regional culture.

Set against the scenic locales of a semi-real Taiwan and the mythical island of Wayo Wayo, the story alternates between the troubled memories of Alice Shih, who has lost her husband Thom and son Toto, and the semi-magical tales of Atile'i, a fifteen-year-old boy expelled from the island as a sacrifice to the Sea God. Ever since Thom and Toto went missing, Alice is rooted in sorrow and memory, and she contemplates suicide. She is the central character of the story, a link to the disparate threads of the fiction, though she creates her world partially through the figments of her imagination. Driving through Haven, Alice is struck by the realization that the place is no longer the land of gorges and villages that had once attracted her and had made the land a refuge separate from the overdeveloped West. Reflecting that the island had belonged to the coastal aboriginal villagers, like Dahu and Hafay, but was later occupied by the Japanese, the Han people, and then tourists, she felt that the artificial environment had wreaked havoc upon the pristine natural landscapes. The native population of Taiwan grieves for the lost landscape and ecosystem that had been a part of their lives.

She remembered her first year in Haven: then the bush and the vegetation came quite close on either side, as if neither the terrain nor the wild animals feared the sight of man. Now the new highway had pushed nature far away . . . After the highway went through, the seashore and the hills were soon covered with exotic edifices, not one of them authentic, pretty much as if a

global village theme park had been built there as a joke. There were fallow fields and empty houses everywhere. (Ming-Yi 17)

The gradual sea level rise and the varying high tide patterns are brought to the attention of the readers as Alice unfolds her memory from the time of occupying the Sea House and the birth of her son, Toto. A year after the Sea House was built there was a series of strong typhoons, and in a short span of time the sea had become a part of the house. Alice, though frustrated at the turn of the events, gathered her courage and made up her mind to fight back and die when it was time. Sometimes she hated the sea for all the pains and memories it gave her, while at other times, out of helplessness, she trusted and depended on the sea. Life had not been normal in Taiwan ever since the Great Flood had struck, and there were unsettling arguments about how much of the land would be underwater in another ten years.

In no time it had arrived on her doorstep, and since Christmas last year, she'd been forced to give up on getting in through the front door at high tide. Twice a day, Alice was put under temporary house arrest before being released a couple of hours later. At high tide, the sea would skirt the drainage ditch, encircling the house . . . The next day at low tide Alice would open the door and have to step over various dead things before she could step out of the house. (Ming-Yi 54)

Another major character, Atile'i, like every second son on the mythical island Wayo Wayo is sent to the sea, never to return due to limited resources. Atile'i leaves his island, but finds himself washed ashore on the giant garbage vortex. Changes happen at an improbable scale incomprehensible to human reason, like the garbage patch itself, which Atile'i calls *Gesi Gesi*, meaning something that is elusive in the native language of Wayo Wayo. The collision of this artificial landmass with the coast of Taiwan denotes a clash between opposing entities – capitalism and civilization; it is also a collision between the worlds of Alice and Atile'i, their uncertainties and memories. Atile'i represents *the other*, washed ashore along with the multifarious items too inseparable to be knowable. He hails from an idealized world, untainted by the clutches of capitalism that presents a different worldview to the mound of waste with which he is thrown onto the coast. As Boes and Marshall observe, this epoch is “something that is actively shaped and created through acts of human inscription: through topographical alterations, changes in the geologic and climatological records of our planet, and so on” (64). The trash island personifies an act of human inscription, the guilty conscience of the capitalist, consumerist culture, culminating in an extraordinary ecological loss. Its constitution of indistinguishable items is symbolic of the uncertainties experienced by the people inhabiting the story.

Ming-Yi presents a fictional manifestation of climate catastrophe and offers a collective response to environmental degradation through an engagement with the internal states of the characters and the external environment. Atile'i and Alice bear the emotional toll of ecological loss and survive in a world of wounds, struggling emotionally with irreplaceable loss and the prospect of an uncertain future; despite different geographical and cultural contexts, they exhibit a great degree of com-

monality in their suffering in the face of “ecological grief” (Cunsolo and Ellis 275). They mourn the loss of self-identity when the land upon which it is based disappears because of situations they have no control over. It is in the recognition of the feelings of loss that Alice and Atile’i build a mutual bond of trust and friendship: “I like to tell my stories and to hear Alice tell hers” (Ming-Yi 165). The distinct and disparate memories they treasure and the nostalgia of the personal losses infuse their unrelated individual lives into a larger whole. The humanization of the obscure, cumulative, and ongoing effects of climate change is the remedial means to alleviate the trauma of the lost memories. A reinforced sense of belonging and commitment evolve out of the collective experience of ecological grief that rejuvenates and sustains the affected community. Ming-Yi augments the story with the perspectives of other inhabitants on the island, Hafay and Dahu, as well as the European scientists Detlef and Sara, with flashbacks to memories of the past and nested stories within the main narrative. Readers are urged to re-frame and re-contextualize the narrative within the global ecological framework through their individual narratives of memory.

The stories rendered through memories evolve into a universal tale, knitting together the human and the environment with the appearance of the mysterious, magical man with the compound eyes. Atile’i encounters the enigmatic creature while guiding Alice in search of Thom and Toto through the sheer wilderness of the Alpine forests to a steep mountain wall in the center. The man with the compound eyes symbolizes an all-encompassing nature – the subjectivity of nature as a whole – a context for all human activities more like a technologically mediated vision of nature (Sterk 188). The immensity and totality of nature is represented through the gleaming insect-like compound eyes, each tiny ommatidia representing an ecological instance. The world as rendered through his eyes is an interconnected whole, every person and every element is part of a collective narrative, an instance of a collective memory of nature and not an individual island. *The Man with the Compound Eyes* is a multivocal narrative, a story about stories themselves: stories as memories, stories as entertainment, stories as their own, very alive, organisms (Terrell). The montage represented in the ommatidia denotes a collective ecological sublime.

It comes as a shocking surprise when, later in the novel, it is revealed that Toto was dead and only Alice’s memories transformed into writing had kept him alive to the readers in the beginning. Alice reconstructed her endeared world through writing: kept a diary, did all the things that her son would have done, bought and read the things he would have found interesting. The people around her had accepted her memories and gone along out of consideration for her and as a way of protecting her sanity. It was the stories that kept Alice and Atile’i moving on in their life amidst the tragic losses imposed upon them. When Atile’i enquired of her consistent diary entries she replied: “I am writing a story to save a life” (Ming-Yi 164).

Even though only human beings can imaginatively reconstruct a world in writing, Ming-Yi conveys through the mysterious man with the compound eyes that humans are indifferent to the memories of other creatures, the root cause of all

environmental degradation. The settlers, represented by Alice, and the indigenous, characterized by Atile'i, Dafu, and Hafay, present different ways of looking at the changing world through memories. Nature is at the core of the episodic memories of humans, and hence deconstructing anthropocentrism and extending agency as well as bringing all living and nonliving things within the sphere of subjectivity is inevitable for a symbiotic existence on the planet. In the Anthropocene, when *Homo sapiens* assume the stewardship of the ecosystem, Wu's work is crafted within nature, with nature as the supreme context. The speed and scale at which extreme events happen in the novel – the unforeseen loss of home for humans and animals – invests nature with a power that can at times be detrimental to humanity. "Human existence involves the willful destruction of the existential memories of other creatures and of your own memories as well. No life can survive without other lives, without the ecological memories other living creatures have, memories of the environments in which they live. People don't realise they need to rely on the memories of other organisms to survive" (Ming-Yi 281).

The memory that exists and sustains the lives of human beings is highly anthropocentric, as exemplified by *The Man with the Compound Eyes*. The presence of the compound-eyed man is reminiscent of the existence of a multidirectional memory of nature, in which all entities – human and non-human – are connected and interactive. When *anthropos* are caught in the nexus of modernity and suffer dislocation due to depleted resources and changing environments, only multi-dimensional memories can create new forms of unity and justice that foreground a non-anthropocentric stance. Ecological vulnerability must be perceived as interconnected.

Conclusion

Writing the Anthropocene, especially amidst the heterogeneity of Asia, is a challenging task that calls for a rethinking of myth, migration, and the memories that transgress human boundaries. Both *Gun Island* and *The Man with the Compound Eyes* narrate disruptions in the Global South but reveal universal human emotions with the help of particular rhetorical strategies. The narrative tropes of myth, migration, and memory form a trinity that enables the reader to understand the veiled historical and present-day entanglements of climate, capitalism, and colonialism in the social, cultural, and political milieu of the twenty-first century.

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Narrativity and Agency of the More-Than-Human: Reading Ecopoetry in the Light of Transgeneric Narratology

Veronika Arutyunyan

“Poetry is the rhythmic, inevitably narrative, movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision.” – Dylan Thomas

From its inception, ecocriticism has contested inherited modes of anthropocentric thinking in an exploration of its effects and consequences on the natural environment. In recent decades, this perspective has further evolved in the work of the leading proponents of the material turn that has greatly affected the trajectory of ecocriticism. In their manifesto essays on the material turn in the humanities, Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann acknowledge the viability of posthumanism and material ecocriticism to “introduce changes in the way materiality, agency, and nature are conceived” (24). In their article “Material Ecocriticism: Materiality, Agency, and Models of Narrativity,” they offer the following defense of material ecocriticism:

Reconceiving materiality as the field of encounter and mutual realization of human and nonhuman agencies is the essential step toward a posthuman vision that will liberate us from oppressive and dualistic visions, starting with those between active minds and so-called inert matters and natures. (88)

Posthumanism “situates the human subject in a relational ontology . . . with the nonhuman” (Iovino, “Material Ecocriticism” 227), accentuating the entanglements of the human with the more-than-human in dynamic and co-constitutive relations. Such an erosion of the untenable human/non-human dualism folds into the discourse of material ecocriticism that, stimulated by the so-called material turn that emphasizes “the material constitution of nature” (Iovino, “Matter” 51), heeds the “full recognition of non-human agency as crucial in human affairs, stressing the fragility and inadequacy of old distinctions between the natural and the cultural” (Clark, *Value* 112). In her seminal work *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Jane Bennett, another key thinker in the material turn reworks the position of the human in its indelible connection to the non-human, perceptive to the “vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans” (viii). Drawing on Bruno Latour’s concept of ‘actant,’ she develops a vocabulary for the material reality and its agency to highlight the agentic contributions of non-human powers. What comes to the fore is her reinstatement of matter as an actant defined as “that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events” (Latour qtd. in Bennett viii).

Bennett's emphasis on the non-human as an *actant* resonates with the feminist physicist Karen Barad's principle of 'intra-action,' which, while it embraces non-human agency, also points out the dynamic entanglements of a diversity of agencies not limited to the human scale of time and space. Material ecocriticism assimilates these notions in its perception of agency as no longer restricted to human beings "cut loose from its traditional humanist orbit" (Barad 177). As "an enactment, not something that someone or something has," agency "is not aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity" (144) but is a force that occurs across the interacting and intra-acting relations of human and non-human beings. Aligning myself with these notions of agency distributed across entwined ecosystems, I see a tension arising from the human and non-human power dynamics that mutually influence each other. What characterizes material ecocriticism is its distinctive interest in redefining the human and non-human through a reassertion of power relations between the Western liberal subject and the recognized agency of material entities. The human dependency on matter and human vulnerability and exposure to potentially destructive forces of material phenomena is fundamental to material ecocriticism, which promotes an ethics of non-mastery and a departure from the notion of human exceptionalism.

In many respects, the core tenet of material ecocriticism – its reconsideration of materiality as an active agent – is aligned with eco-poetic concerns that engage with the challenge of conjuring other-than-human perspectives through the human tool of language. Stimulated by the rejection of nature's inferiority, eco-poetic attempts at horizontalized ontology integrate agentic narratives of the more-than-human and, via form, sound, and diction, expand towards conceptualizations of non-human lives. Contemporary poetry of what Lynn Keller has aptly termed "the self-conscious Anthropocene" (12) negotiates this stance in a twofold mission: it registers the effects of anthropogenic activity while highlighting and negotiating the entanglements of human and non-human beings through an innovative use of poetic devices. In so doing, it faces the challenge of how to speak for, with, and to the more-than-human in a reach beyond the human perspective in its endeavor to formulate an attunement to the dynamic processes of ecological relationships. Eco-poetic attempts to open up to a wider scope of the non-human foreground the narrative agency of the more-than-human by differentiating between the human and non-human agents or actants within a poetic text.

How eco-poetry tackles this representation of agency and the diversification of perspectives can be richly illustrated using the methods proposed by transgeneric narratology, a developing discipline in post-classical narratology that examines the effect of "the application of narratological concepts to genres and media which are not primarily regarded as narrative but do possess narrative aspects" (Du Plooy 2). One of the major objectives of this discipline is the examination of narrative aspects in lyric poetry, a form of literature that, in contrast to the prosaic development of a narrative, appears to draw its meaning from the aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language as well as its innovative treatment of syntax structures. In addition to providing a more systematic framework for the analysis of poems, the examination

of narratological aspects in lyric verse can open up essential aspects of the poem that convey its meaning. As key researchers in the discipline, scholars Peter Hühn and Roy Sommer argue that lyric poems, like prose narratives, can “instantiate the two fundamental constituents of the narrative process, temporal sequentiality and mediation” (229). Grounded in the developments in transgeneric narratology of the late twentieth century, Hühn’s work of the past two decades widened the scope of this discipline in its adaptation of narrative categories in lyric poetry, suggesting that temporal sequentiality and mediation contribute to the construction of a poem’s dynamic dimension. The pursuit of the ‘eventfulness’ in a poetic composition calls into question the view of lyric poetry as static and thus lacking the development of plot featured in narrative texts. The sequence of events occurring on the discourse level has the capacity to animate a certain degree of narrativity in poetry. As Hühn and Sommer argue, a narratological approach to poetry can provide “a specific method of analyzing the sequential structure as well as a more precise instrument for differentiating the levels and modes of mediation in lyric poems” (229). These techniques, when embedded within the field of material ecocriticism, reveal a poem’s sensitivity to the agency of the non-human through a redistribution of poetic authority. A sequential reading of the poem’s meaning, through which different degrees of perceptibility emerge, marginalizes the human subject. The different levels of mediation reveal the presence of perspectives on, and experiences of, events other than that of the human speaker, which calls into question the conventional Romantic identification of the lyrical speaker with the author. It is notable, then, that Romanticism is an artistic movement whose treatment of the natural environment material ecocriticism contests.

Although mediated from the point of view of the human subject, the events within the poetic text emerge from centering the agency of the more-than-human in diction, form, and sound of the lyric verse. Narratological strategies adapted to poetic texts challenge the anthropocentric premise of human domination over the natural environment in making visible the narrative agency of the more-than-human. It is through the use of narratological strategies that the poem’s images of matter’s agency emerge.

A Note on Methodology

Drawing on Hühn’s premise that lyric poems feature a certain degree of narrativity, this essay aims to analyze ecopoetry using narratological strategies to show how poems develop the agency of the more-than-human and in so doing call into question a conception of the more-than-human as the passive and victimized other. The affective relations between human and non-human subjects emerge in ecopoetry through the forms and functions of narratology whose presence and effects I will trace in several illustrative examples of twenty-first-century ecopoetry, focusing in particular on the examination of the dimension of sequentiality and mediation. Although distinct from their form in prose fiction, ecopoetic adaptations of these

aspects of narratology signal how lyric poetry can challenge the longstanding nature/culture dualism inherent in humanist thinking, which material ecocriticism aims to dismantle. Material ecocriticism displaces the traditional Cartesian division of mind and body in a development of an ecocritical framework of inclusivity that extends traditional humanism's advocacy for human civil rights towards the non-human and erases the divisive binaries of mind/matter, subject/object, and culture/nature. Material ecocriticism's focus on the non-human is aligned with post-humanism's redistribution of agency in a "shift away from the conjectural singularity of the human agency," which is by no means a "wholesale rejection of humanism (or the human)," but an extension thereof to include the parallel hierarchy of non-human and marginalized humans (Oppermann, *Handbook* 375). In an effort to circumvent the shortcomings of inherited anthropocentric cultural models, Serenella Iovino formulates a new form of posthuman humanism that turns towards "a sphere of existence which does not belong solely to humans" ("Ecocriticism" 38). Such humanism, she explains, is "no longer based on the assumption that concepts such as 'dignity' and 'value' are exclusively to be related to the human species" (48). Iovino traces this notion in *interspecies literature* that engages a non-anthropocentric perspective by opening up to what she terms "linguistic horizontality" that accords the natural environment "visibility and value" (44). Pursuing this notion of "linguistic horizontality," material ecocriticism embeds non-anthropocentric humanism in a post-humanist paradigm of entangled interconnections. As a result, it resists the anthropocentric presumption of human domination on the basis of the assumption of humanity as the sole possessor of agency, which has led to the premise of human exceptionalism. Non-anthropocentric humanism's horizontality and post-humanism's positioning of the human subject as part of the non-human, whose agency material ecocriticism promotes, inform an ecopoetic analysis that relies on the methods of transgeneric narratology to manifest the narrative agency of the more-than-human. This is the starting point for my considerations.

Exploration of the Poetic Plot: Presentation Events and Isotopic Relations

Naturally, the narrative strategies of sequentiality and mediacy acquire a different form in lyric poetry. As Hühn elaborates, in a poetic composition, the sequential progress – the poetic plot – is "constituted by mental or psychological incidents such as perceptions, imaginations, desires, anxieties, recollections or emotions and their emergence and development" ("Plotting the Lyric" 149). These experiences are perceived through the consciousness of a human speaker, who clearly situates the text in a distinctly anthropogenic perspective. However, even though the experience is relayed from the point of view of a human narrator, upon an examination of isotopic relations within the textual structure, the poem can reveal agentic involvement of the more-than-human. Isotopies – "semantic features or aspects ('semes') recurring in a number of lexical units throughout a poem" (Hühn 150) – have a

twofold function in the analysis of ecopoetry. In addition to their capacity to advance the development of the poetic plot, they might also relate a perspective beyond that of the human. In the progression of a poetic plot, the changing isotopic relations alert the reader to the presence and even agency of the non-human and thus yield a meaningful practice of writing for the more-than-human from the human perspective.

In addition to isotopic relations, the eventfulness of a poetic composition advances the progression of the plot, marking a “degree of deviation from the expected continuation of the sequence pattern activated by the text” (Hühn 151). In an analysis of narrative aspects in genres traditionally seen as non-narrative – in particular lyric poetry and drama – Hühn and Sommer describe the term ‘presentation event,’ which is “located at the discourse level with the speaker/narrator as agent enacting a ‘story of narration’” (“Narration” 234). As will be shown below in two instructive examples, the combination of the ‘presentation event’ and isotopic relations within the poem transfigure the poem’s initial standpoint to reveal a concatenation of perceptions and experiences not necessarily tied to the perspective of the human narrator.

Ellen Bass’ poem “Birdsong from My Patio” shifts the focus from the human to the non-human as it innovatively employs sequentiality. Although not parted into stanzas, the poem shapes its plot by grouping together thematic segments that build its narrative. Highly reminiscent of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in its progression from a scene of thriving nature to the destruction thereof, the first segment immerses the reader in a rich soundscape of birdsong:

I’ve never heard this much song,
trills pure as crystal bells,
but not like bells: alive, small rushes
of air from tiny plush lungs
of birds tucked in among the stiff
leaves of the olive and almond,
the lemon with its hard green studs. (Bass 36)

From the very outset, the poem is imbued with the voices of birds, who, although out of the speaker’s sight, make themselves visible through their singing. Although mediated through the speaker, the voice of the more-than-human enters the poem. What should be recognized here is the fact that the speaker’s discourse is contingent upon the birds’ active participation in the setting via their singing. A direct relation is developed between the human creative construct (the poem) and the non-human practice of communication.

The verse draws its dynamics from balancing between two motifs: non-human lives on the one hand and the ramifications of the Anthropocene on the other by entwining together contrasting isotopies that, as Hühn proposes, enable “creating new connections within [the] text and conferring additional layers of meaning on its sequence” (“Plotting the Lyric” 150). The isotopic relations in the poem occur in descriptions of the non-human in contrasting culture and nature. The speaker instantly withdraws her initial comparison of birds’ voices to “crystal bells” by

contradicting the statement with an adversative “but” and a contrasting image of the non-human that conveys the birds’ aliveness (albeit still asserted through a genuinely human perspective) – “small rushes / of air from the tiny plush lungs / of birds” (Bass 36). This opposition grows more pronounced in the comparison of the birds’ “glittering voices” to “bits of twirling aluminum” in a foreshadowing of the poem’s first perspectival shift that registers a turning point in the poem’s progression marked by the first presentation event. The poem reminds us that the birds and their offspring are not unaffected by anthropogenic activity, quite the contrary, its intertwining of nature-related semes with semes denoting the effects of anthropogenic activity relates how susceptible the environment is to the effects of the Anthropocene:

I picture their wrinkled feet
 curled around thin branches,
 absorbing pesticide.
 I see them preening, tainted
 feathers sliding through their glossy
 beaks, over their leathery tongues.
 They’re feeding on contaminated insects,
 wild seeds glistening with acid rain. (Bass 36)

The speaker’s mental image of the birds’ existence conjured through the pairing of figures of nature with those of nature’s despoliation – “the wrinkled feet” of the birds “absorbing pesticide,” “wild seeds” contaminated with “acid rain” – mediates to us the human-material entanglements that the poem commits to making visible. The animals’ lives emerge as entangled with the effects of the Anthropocene as the poem’s diction grows “polluted” with the traces of human activity. Accounting for the interconnections of the human and more-than-human, the poem turns into a lament:

Everything
 is drenched with loss:
 the wood thrush and starling,
 the unripe fruit of the lemon tree. (Bass 36)

Yet, this grief is contravened by the poem’s recognition of the agency of the more-than-human performed through the second turning point in the poetic plot that reframes the view of nature as the victimized other.

With all that’s been ruined
 these songs impale the air
 with their sharp, insistent needles. (Bass 37)

The pleasant birdsong of the opening scene – “trills pure as crystal bells” – morphs into “sharp, insistent needles”; yet, their voices persist despite the dissolution of the imaginary idyll the poem opens with. With the metamorphosis of “crystal bells” into the troubling “sharp, insistent needles,” the poem veers away from the Romantic conception of the speaker as observer of nature to an acknowledgement of agentic capacity of the more-than-human that persists in affirming its presence. This second

presentation event redirects the reader from the initial lyrical 'I' towards the more-than-human gaining control of the poetic space. A persistent speaker-singer of this poem-birdsong emerges, thus negating the preceding section that sees nature only as the victimized other. The force of the final image contrasts sharply with what ostensibly began as pastoral idyll. Through the thematic segmentation that gradually develops the text's meaning, the poem renegotiates old concepts connected with nature poetry, embedding them within material ecocriticism in its acknowledgement of the presence and agency of the non-human in its emphasis on the natural environment that preceded the Anthropocene.

My second example registers a distinctly human experience within the realm of the non-human. The title poem of Camille T. Dungy's collection *Trophic Cascade*, whose development derives its dynamic force from the retrospective act of narration that culminates in a dramatic twist, merges the more-than-human realm with the human experience of motherhood. The poem records the rebirth of an ecosystem after the reintroduction of gray wolves to Yellowstone National Park from the point of view of the omniscient narrator cataloguing in the past tense the return of numerous species after the deliberate culling of the overpopulated deer. The heavily enjambed lines of the free verse forge a poetic narrative of the self-sufficient co-existence of numerous animal and plant species within an ecosystem:

After the reintroduction of gray wolves
to Yellowstone and, as anticipated, their culling
of deer, trees grew beyond the deer stunt
of the mid century. In their up reach
songbirds nested, who scattered
seed for underbrush, and in that cover
warrened snowshoe hare. . . .
(Dungy 16)

Trophic cascade is characterized as "an ecological phenomenon triggered by the addition or removal of top predators and involving reciprocal changes in the relative populations of predator and prey through a food chain which often results in dramatic changes in ecosystem structure and nutrient cycling" (Carpenter, par. 1). The retrospective narration, whose function often is, according to Hühn, "negotiating a critical transition of self-clarification" ("Plotting the Lyric" 158), is used here to build momentum towards the peak that brings about the speaker's personal realization. Through the perspectival shift from the speaker's relaying of the rippling effect of changes on the landscape to that of the speaker's experience of change due to motherhood, the poem performs a revealing parallel by stringing together textual elements that build the poem's syntagmatic coherence. Poetic sequentiality can develop the dynamic dimension of lyric texts, and Hühn draws attention to the value of applying narratological concepts to a poetic text for their capacity to trace the techniques employed by poetic texts "for connecting the elements into a causal, temporal, or otherwise 'motivated' string" ("Transgeneric Narratology" 142). The string of elements is what shapes a poetic plot usually "constituted by mental or psychological incidents such as perceptions, imaginations, desires, anxieties,

recollections or emotions and their emergence, development, and decisive change” (142-43). Here, the string that brings the narrative together is the linguistic mirroring of the rippling effect of the changes within the ecosystem; as each animal and plant species causes the appearance of another, so too does the syntax structure heavily rely on the preceding words. Dungy’s text echoes these reciprocal changes within the ecosystem:

. . . Berries
 brought bear, while undergrowth and willows, growing
 now right down to the river, brought beavers,
 who dam. Muskrats came to the dams and tadpoles.
 Came, too, the night song of the fathers
 of tadpoles. . . .
 (Dungy 16)

The repetition conveyed in the reoccurrence of animal and plant species and their acts (“berries,” “bear,” “scattered seed”), strengthened by alliteration (“berries brought bear”) and assonance (“undergrowth and willows, growing”) replicates the rippling succession of rejuvenation in the ecosystem, reflecting the reciprocal relations indicated by the poem’s title. The acoustic dimensions of the poem underscore the material vitality of the numerous animal and plant species. The poem reflects the literal material development of an ecosystem through a figurative accretion of nature imagery in a powerful parallel of the material and the discursive; the text shaped as the tropic cascade progression. Ultimately, the poem’s alignment to the right margin – “shifting from the normal way of seeing a poem” (Aalto 247) – attests to its commitment to breaking away from conventional anthropocentric modes.

Towards the poem’s end, the narrator abruptly shifts the focus from the ecosystem’s rebirth to her personal experience. The juxtaposition is achieved through the formal structure of the poem that dedicates most of its space to the more-than-human before ultimately creating a parallel between human birth and the rebirth of nature that reinforces the poem’s entwining of the human and more-than-human experience.

. . . Don’t
 you tell me this is not the same as my story. All this
 life born from one hungry animal, this whole,
 new landscape, the course of the river changed,
 I know this. I reintroduced myself to myself, this time
 a mother. After which, nothing was ever the same.
 (Dungy 16)

The two realms conflate in the phrase “one hungry animal,” the speaker’s reference both to the gray wolf and to herself as a mother, a coalescence carried over into the next line with the literal and metaphorical use of natural lexicon: “new landscape,” “the course of the river changed.” This comparison does not diminish the more-than-human; on the contrary, the parallel is a reminder of our shared characteristics. What accentuates this perspective is the inversion of the rhetorical

device of personification, which, instead of projecting human attributes onto non-human beings, characterizes the mother as a predator and by extension implies the need to protect the ecosystem as the mother protects her progeny. Supporting this reading is the assimilation of the metaphorical meanings of the literal descriptions of the natural – “new landscape, the course of the river changed” – that serve as a vehicle for the narrator – the new mother – to comprehend her own new state of being. The speaker’s assertion of herself as a “hungry animal” grounds the poem’s sense of the embodied experience humans share with other animals, establishing a non-binary relation. Mending the split between nature-culture binaries, the “hungry animal” as the essence of motherhood does not aim to humanize nature but instead signals interconnectedness by erasing in language the distinction between human and non-human. While the poem does not abandon the notion of a distinctly human self, it seeks to affirm continuities between humans and their environment through shared bodily experience. In sum, there is a clear link between the poem’s attention to the vitality of natural ecosystems and the stance of material ecocriticism that presupposes the physical dynamics of the environment as entangled with the imaginative power of discursive practice.

Envisioning Non-Human Perspectives Through Mediation and Anthropomorphism

What follows is a discussion of mediation as the second dimension of narratology, which is particularly fertile for the analysis of ecopoetry in that it challenges conventional assumptions about lyric poetry’s “supposedly unmediated quality – direct, unfiltered communication of experiences by an author identified with a speaker as the subject of this experience” (Hühn and Sommer, “Narration” 230). Since ecopoetry develops language and perspectives not necessarily tied to human social meanings, the following analysis is an inquiry into forms and levels of poetic mediacy taking as its starting point Hühn’s distinction between “*agents and levels of mediation*” and “*types of perspective*” (Hühn, “Transgeneric Narratology” 147, emphasis original). In particular, my analysis explores the potential of ecopoetry to reach beyond transgeneric narratology’s prevalent identification of the speaker with the protagonist (149). Similarly, a poem’s adaptation of narratological types of perspective – voice and focalization – can enrich a poetic text with a higher degree of perceptibility.

Ecopoetry’s attunement to the agencies of the non-human devises a perspective that rejects the claims of poetic immediacy. Ecopoetry’s vision here is at odds with a frequent coincidence of the speaker and protagonist – as well as the voice and focalization – in numerous Romantic and modernist poems (Hühn, “Transgeneric Narratology” 149) as a way of lending credibility and authenticity to the speaker “thus dramatizing the act of articulation” (149). In opposition to the identification of the speaker with the protagonist and unification of voice and focalization, ecopoetry veers towards “the opposite end of the scale” with “diverse instances of divided

than-human's intrusion into the text. From the first line on, the wind (the protagonist of the poem) acts as an external force that refuses to be subdued by the poem's form as it pours out of standard forms governed by syntax; the line breaks conveying a disharmonious relation between the natural and the human. This forceful structure permits the reader to observe how the poem formulates the existence of the non-human through its effect upon the human subject as the speaker confesses to uncertainty about her own physical sensations.

Gradually, through Graham's use of anthropomorphism and personification, the wind enters the poem's discourse. The anthropomorphized wind "interjects in the narrator's reflection on the right to privacy to refute the claim that we are unaware of our participation in worldly phenomena" (Griffiths, *New Poetics* 165) in joining the speaker's concerns about climate change first relayed by the human narrator:

consider your affliction says the
wind, do not plead ignorance, & farther and farther
away leaks the
past, much farther than it used to go, beating against the shutters I
have now fastened again

(Graham 4)

These lines instantiate the entanglement of the human and the natural: while the ampersand suggests the shift back to the first-person human speaker's narration, the wind's voice returns in the ambiguous positioning of the "I" of the fourth line that suggests the wind taking over the first-person narration – "beating against the shutters I" – as well as the human speaker's "I / have now fastened again." This enactment of the wind's narrative agency through the ambiguity of the form is stressed by the speaker's literal struggle to protect herself against the wind. Graham's diction that puts spatial ("farther and farther") and temporal ("past") markers together with a peculiar description of the past as leaking suggests a scale of natural phenomena inaccessible by way of human perception. Yet, the next line articulates the wind's return from a spatial and temporal distance, as signaled by the remotely positioned word "past," to become part of the human realm and the constructions that protect humans against such natural forces. The narratological aspect of character formation here adopts a poetic approach, which, as Hühn observes, no longer identifies "through name and description" and instead establishes human characters "through their perspective, their interiority, and their personal narrative" (152). As a counterpart to the human, the figure of the wind emerges through the act of narration intruding on the poetic 'I' that destabilizes the poem's sense of a clearly demarcated human subject.

The blurring of perspectives of the human speaker and the fully personified wind culminates in the concluding lines of the poem that enact a reversal of apostrophe – the wind addressing the human subject:

me further says this new wind, &
 according to thy
 judgement, &

I am inclining my heart towards the end,
 I cannot fail, this Saturday, early pm, hurling myself,
 wiry furies riding my many backs, against your foundations and your
 best young
 tree, which you have come outside to stake again, & the loose stones in the sill.

(Graham 5)

This deliberate ambiguity of the lyrical ‘I’ acknowledges the agency of the more-than-human in the Anthropocene that visually and figuratively enters the narrative of the poem, decentering the human subject. This is accomplished through the poem’s entanglement of the narrative strategies of voice and focalization, blurring the distinction between the human and the natural protagonist. In this poem, Graham succeeds in wresting the ancient devices of anthropomorphism and personification out of their uses as “a means of taking hold of things which appear startlingly uncontrollable and independent” (Webster qtd. in *New Princeton Encyclopedia*). Instead, Graham’s use of these devices destabilizes the humanist notion of human superiority, acknowledging the agency and autonomy of the more-than-human as an intrusive and dominant force taking control of the poetic text. This is achieved through the poet’s blurring of perspectives; the human speaker becomes entangled with her protagonist whose double role as a protagonist and speaker becomes gradually more pronounced. What enforces the erosion of the human/non-human binary is the formal technique that refuses the domination of the text by human narrative and instead gives way to an exchange of utterances. From this non-dichotomous horizontal framework, the wind becomes an autonomous non-human actant in Latour’s sense as the concluding scene visualizes its perspective. Hurling itself against the human’s “best young / tree,” it exposes the formidable efficacy of its full force both in content and form. Ultimately, a reverse of pathetic fallacy takes place – it is not the sympathizing nature voicing human narratives but the human speaker and the product of human creation – the poetic text – through which the natural phenomenon speaks.

This non-conformity towards conventional devices of nature poetry in eco-poetry’s defense of more-than-human agencies echoes through Rebecca Dunham’s documentary lyrics in the collection *Cold Pastoral*. Dunham’s eco-poetics incorporate material ecocritical visions by tracing the environmental entanglements and the harmful implications of environmental injustice for the human and non-human alike. The poem’s sequence on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, entitled “Elegy, Wind-whipped,” strongly undermines the premise of human superiority over nature. As a poet inspired by the documentary style of Muriel Rukeyser, Dunham draws the reader into the experience more directly by marking the sequence with a specific temporal and spatial setting – May 23, 2011, Joplin, Missouri. Its subject matter and the post-apocalyptic tone engage in a disrupted landscape that exposes the environmental implication of the harmful relations between humans and the earth. The title

of the first poem in the sequence, “Refuse,” initially suggests the poem’s thematic focus is the detritus left behind by the hurricane as the poem lingers on a toy doll hanging in a tree branch:

Doll hair—brown yarn—
 loops round a hickory’s jagged
 limb and she dances

the wind like a human body

clinched above
 the gallows. (Dunham 7)

The forceful image that emerges from equating the doll to a human being conveys the disastrous effect of the hurricane on humans while also skillfully diminishing the agency of humans in the face of natural disasters. The poem’s title then refers to both the wreck left behind by the hurricane – the doll’s hanging body – and indicates that human lives can easily become wasted away. A strong tone of vengeance enters the poem as the subsequent lines reveal the speaker to be the hurricane itself: “batting / or flesh, still you will / hang, emptied by my breath” (7). The line break and the full stop accentuate the capacity of natural disasters to terminate human existence. The human subject in the poem, positioned as the reader/receiver of the admonition, is compared to an innocuous toy object powerless against natural forces. Here, anthropomorphism does not serve to subdue the non-human, but to convey the weakness of the human subject projected here onto an inanimate object – a child’s toy – developing a subtle parallel between the anthropogenic destruction of nature and nature’s ability to destroy humanity. The anthropomorphized force turns out to be the speaker addressing the human subject – the reader – who, as the poem implies in the last lines by using the modal verb “could” to indicate possibility, becomes a protagonist in nature’s admonishment of the human species: “She could be dead. Easily / she could be your daughter” (7).

The poem leverages the move from the present-tense description of the hurricane’s aftermath towards the potential for the future endangerment of humanity – a shift conveyed through the modals “will” and “could.” This prospective glance reasserts the hurricane’s warning to the human species about the ramifications of natural destruction, extending the poem’s temporal frame from the present record towards a proleptic view in an anticipation of injuries to occur as much contemporary ecopoetry endeavors to do.

Conclusion

In pursuit of ecocritical practices that foreground the agency of the more-than-human, the examination of the intersection of narrative strategies and poetry reveals aspects of poetry confluent with the material ecocritical framework. The application and adaptation of the narratological categories of sequentiality and mediacy in lyric

poetry highlights their affinity to material ecocritical recognition of matter as a narrative agent. The analyses conducted above exhibit the multifaceted possibilities for narratological readings that attest to “the performative aspects of storytelling” in poetic practice (Hühn and Sommer, “Narration” 230) and suggest that “the ways we understand and interact with nature are in need of a commensurate updating” (Coole and Frost 5). Poems can activate sequentiality either through a progression of mental events presented by the speaker’s account or through a development of textual relations between the poem’s segments. The examination of mediation leads to a recognition that the poet’s deliberate blurring of boundaries between the conventional first-person human speaker and the anthropomorphized natural phenomena forges distinct perspectives entangled in the compositional structure. Subsequently, such a dissociation of the lyrical ‘I’ from the human speaker gives voice and agency to the non-human subject. Narratological categories of sequentiality and mediacy in poetic analysis thus intensify those aspects of the poem that foreground its resistance to the premise of human exceptionalism. In combination with the more traditional analysis of poetry that is attentive to rhetorical and sound devices, the poem’s formal structure, diction, prosody, and imagery, the practice of transgeneric narratology opens up new ways for poetry to address in form and theme the spectrum of the agencies of the more-than-human and to do justice to these agencies when rendering the experience of the non-human.

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Le Pollueur de la Lagune Zalou

Eldad Sangare

L'on se réveilla avec une odeur nauséabonde et suffocante, ce matin du 10 octobre 1988 à cinq heures. Le quartier paisible de Dadel est embaumé ce jour par une forte puanteur. D'où pouvaient provenir ces effluves diaboliques ? Qui pourrait être derrière cette manœuvre funeste dans le quartier botanique et fluvial de Dan ? Dadel s'interrogea avec beaucoup d'amertume et de consternation. Fils natal du quartier qu'il connaît depuis sa tendre enfance, il se souvient encore de ses sorties en pleine brousse avec les animaux de toutes espèces. La lagune dégageait un parfum féérique et authentique qui ne laissait pas les touristes indifférents, quelle que soit leur nationalité. Il connaissait le nom de chaque plante, animal, insecte et lagune, surtout la lagune Zalou, sa préférée, son amie. Et d'ailleurs, toute cette faune, cette flore et ces lagunes le connaissaient également. C'était l'amour parfait entre Dadel, les végétaux, les animaux, les insectes et la lagune Zalou. Et, ce n'est pas son voisin Zana qui dira le contraire. Comme son ami Dadel, il aimait la nature et l'eau. Et celles-ci l'aimaient également.

En écoutant la radio, les deux amis apprennent que leur lagune adorée a été violée, bafouée et assassinée par des déchets toxiques déversés incognito. C'est au réveil, comme tout le monde, que Dadel et Zana se sont rendu compte que la lagune Zalou a été victime d'une attaque écologique et industrielle. Il s'agissait donc de déchets toxiques déversés dans la belle et paisible lagune du quartier Dan. De là venaient ces exhalations fétides ! L'information se diffusant, la panique s'empara des riverains. Dadel était sous le choc et en pleurs. Choqué par la violence des industriels sur sa lagune, celle qui l'a bercé depuis sa tendre enfance. Il n'avait pas la force de se mouvoir et faillit même perdre connaissance. Il fallut la présence de Zana pour retenir son souffle et le reconforter. Peu de temps après, une troupe d'agents de protection des espaces liquides du quartier Dan, accompagnée de la brigade de protection animale, débarquèrent sur les lieux du crime au grand soulagement de Dadel et de la population.

Les auteurs de troubles, dans leur fuite, avaient laissé un sachet portant le nom d'une des buvettes de la localité. C'était le seul indice rassemblé par les agents de protection des espaces liquides et la brigade de protection animale, trouvé immédiatement sur le lieu du crime. Mais, la désolation était déjà manifeste à Dan. Les dégâts étaient énormes. Soudain, la lagune se couvrait d'une mousse verdâtre due au poison qui y a été déversé. L'on apercevait même des corps de crustacés flottant sur la rive. Non seulement il y eut l'apparition de nombreux symptômes cliniques sur les habitants dans les jours et les mois qui suivirent le déversement de ces déchets toxiques mais l'on dénombra également la mort de plusieurs espèces aquatiques. La plupart des habitants de Dan connurent des troubles respiratoires.

D'autres avaient le corps couvert de pustules. Certains moururent d'AVC. Beaucoup furent traumatisés. Les femmes enceintes payèrent le plus lourd tribut. Car, à leurs accouchements, les enfants avaient soit des malformations soit des troubles respiratoires.

Sidéré et révolté par ce crime odieux, le détective Abybe de la brigade de police écologique de Dan, saisi de la situation, ouvrit une enquête pour tracer, traquer, retrouver et condamner les criminels. Dadel et Zana furent les premiers à être interrogés. Le chef du quartier n'échappa pas à l'interrogatoire ainsi que toute la population de Dan. Dadel mit tout son espoir sur la diligence du détective afin de retrouver et punir ces assassins de l'écologie marine. Car, ils avaient aussi tué les poissons, les crustacés, les algues et tout être aquatique vivant dans la lagune Zalou.

Grâce à l'enquête menée suite à la découverte du sachet sur les lieux du crime, la police écologique parvient à retrouver la buvette qui y était mentionnée. Elle interrogea le responsable de ladite buvette ainsi que sa clientèle. Il était difficile d'incriminer un responsable car, son activité était plutôt nutritive que nocive. Jamais l'on n'y avait signalé un antécédent d'empoisonnement ou d'intoxication d'un quelconque client. C'était une buvette reconnue pour sa qualité hygiénique. Prenant à cœur ce geste écocide dont la lagune Zalou fut victime, le détective Abybe décida de se faire l'un des clients réguliers de la buvette. Lors d'un de ses moments de déjeuner, sur une table assez proche de la sienne, il surprit deux clients planifiant d'évacuer des produits nocifs dans un autre cours d'eau non loin de la lagune Zalou. A leur insu, le détective enregistra leur conversation. Il utilisa donc cette autre preuve pour mettre la main sur ces criminels de la nature. Suite à un interrogatoire très poussé, et aidé par la police scientifique, le détective parvient à démasquer le directeur Zouzou, chef du service technique de la compagnie pétrolière dénommée Oulai. En effet, il avait un mode opératoire ; celui de laisser des indices assez difficiles à rapprocher de sa compagnie. Ce patron de la compagnie pétrolière Oulai, pour évacuer ses déchets nocifs n'hésita pas à polluer la lagune Zalou sans le consentement de la population Dan. A la surprise générale, l'on se rendit compte que Pablo, le chef du quartier de Dan et Bilé le gardien l'y ont aidé, en échange d'une forte somme d'argent. Ils déversèrent ces déchets toxiques entre trois heures et quatre heures du matin sous le regard joyeux et la supervision du gardien de la lagune Zalou. Mais, à la joie des populations, ces auteurs de troubles furent traduits devant les tribunaux grâce à la houlette de la police judiciaire écologique afin de répondre de leurs actes écocides. Ce qui rendit Dadel et Zana très heureux, au-delà de ce dénouement, c'est qu'une équipe de dépollution arriva un matin de l'année 1993 afin de donner un nouveau souffle à la lagune Zalou.

D'ailleurs, toute cette histoire avait changé les mentalités. Lors du procès des criminels, le procureur de la cour pénal en charge du dossier de pollution de la lagune Zalou en profita pour sensibiliser les uns et les autres à l'écologie. Il n'hésita pas à présenter les risques liés à la multiplication des gestes anti-écologiques au sein du quartier. Chacun ressorti du procès avec une grande détermination, celle de veiller à la sauvegarde de l'écosphère pour un monde meilleur. Le Directeur Zouzou fut contraint de verser une amende de quatre milliards de francs CFA aux habitants

de Dan pour y réparer son patrimoine écologique. Le procureur insista également sur le fait que les agences de protection des écosystèmes marins doivent s'investir dans le processus de sauvegarde du milieu aquatique avec plus de rigueur et de probité.

Le détective Abybe fut primé pour sa bravoure, son honnêteté et son professionnalisme dans la façon dont il avait mené les enquêtes dans cette affaire de la pollution de la lagune Zalou. Grâce à lui, la police écologique a obtenu une subvention complémentaire de la part du gouvernement dans le but d'être plus efficace. Dan, riche en ressource halieutique, faunique et floristique, continuait d'attirer les touristes qui reprenaient du service sur la lagune Zalou, faisant la fierté de Dadel et Zana. Les animaux, les insectes, les lagunes et les végétaux sont maintenant en sécurité car Zana se proposa d'être le nouveau gardien de la lagune Zalou. Ce nouvel agent était l'homme qu'il fallait à ce poste car, incorruptible. Le chef Pablo et le gardien Bilé purgeant leur peine en prison furent atteints d'un cancer du poumon dû au produit toxique qu'ils avaient eux-mêmes déversé dans la lagune Zalou sans aucune mesure de protection. Le Directeur Zouzou, l'acteur principal de la pollution fut encore interpellé et condamné à verser une forte somme à la brigade de protection pour les soins de ses deux complices pollueurs. Quelques années après son incarcération, il mourut tragiquement d'une crise cardiaque causée également par les effets nocifs de son acte écocide.

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The Polluter of the Zalou Lagoon

Eldad Sangare

Translated by Zoe McNamee

At 5 o'clock that morning, 10 October 1988, they awaken to a sickening, suffocating smell. Dadel's peaceful neighbourhood starts the day submerged in stink. Where can this diabolical reek have come from? Who, in the leafy, waterside district of Dan, could be behind this grim turn of events? Dadel poses these questions with bitterness and consternation. Native son of these streets, which he has known since his tender years, he still remembers his childhood forays into the bush with animals of every species. The otherworldly, yet authentic, scent of the lagoon left no tourist indifferent, whatever their nationality. Dadel knew the name of every plant, animal, insect, and inlet, especially the Zalou lagoon – his favourite, his friend. The fauna, flora, and lagoons knew him too. There existed a perfect love between Dadel, the plants, animals, insects, and the Zalou lagoon. His neighbour, Zana, was of the same mind. Like his friend Dadel, Zana adored nature and water. And they loved him back.

Listening to the radio, the two friends learn that their beloved lagoon has been violated, defiled, and murdered by an anonymous spillage of toxic waste. Upon waking, like everyone else, Dadel and Zana discover that the Zalou lagoon has fallen victim to an ecological and industrial attack. Toxic waste has been poured into the Dan neighbourhood's beautiful, peaceful lagoon. This is the source of those fetid exhalations! As word spreads, panic overtakes the locals. Dadel is shocked and tearful – stunned by the industrialists' violence against his lagoon, cradle of his childhood. He hasn't the strength to move and almost loses consciousness. Only Zana's presence can calm his breathing and comfort him. Shortly afterwards – and to the great relief of Dadel and the residents – a troop of agents from Dan's water protection agency, accompanied by colleagues from the animal protection brigade, arrive at the crime scene.

The wrongdoers, in their flight, had dropped a bag bearing the name of a local café. The only clue collected at the crime scene by the agents of the water protection agency and animal protection brigade, it was found immediately. But the desolation of Dan was already obvious. The damage was immense. The water was soon covered in a greenish scum resulting from the poison poured into the lagoon. One could even spot the shells of crustaceans floating on its banks. And as numerous clinical symptoms appeared among the locals in the days and months following the unloading of the toxic waste, several aquatic species were wiped out altogether. Most of Dan's inhabitants experienced respiratory difficulties. Others became covered in pustules. Some died of strokes. Many were traumatised. Pregnant women paid the highest price. Their newborns entered the world with malformations or breathing problems.

Stunned and revolted by this odious crime, the Dan environmental police's Detective Abybe, assigned to the case, launches an enquiry to trace, track down, and convict the criminals. Dadel and Zana are the first to be interrogated. The local chief doesn't escape a police interview; the rest of Dan's population follows. Dadel pins his hopes on the detective's diligence in finding and punishing these assassins of marine ecology. They had killed every fish, crustacean, and aquatic plant – every underwater species living in the Zalou lagoon.

After focussing their enquiries on the evidence found at the crime scene, the environmental police successfully locate the café advertised on the plastic bag. They interrogate the owner of the establishment, then his clientele. Identifying a culprit here is difficult, as the business's activities prove far more wholesome than harmful. No customer had ever been reported poisoned or intoxicated. The place was famed for its high standards of hygiene. Mindful of the ecocidal act to which the Zalou lagoon had fallen victim, Detective Abybe decided to become a regular patron. One lunchtime, he overheard two clients at a neighbouring table planning to empty toxic products into another body of water not far from the Zalou lagoon. The detective discreetly taped their conversation. He would use this evidence to collar these criminals against nature. Following an in-depth interrogation, and with the help of the scientific police, the detective finally unmasked Director Zouzou, head technician of the oil firm Oulai. His MO had been to maximise profits by skipping out on recycling fees for toxic waste. Oulai's head honcho had no qualms about polluting the Zalou lagoon, obviously without a word of consent from Dan's unsuspecting population. All were surprised to learn that neighbourhood chief Pablo and watchman Bilé had helped, in exchange for a considerable sum of money. They had unloaded the toxic slurry between 3am and 4am under the complicit eye of the Zalou lagoon's own guardian. But to the joy of the populace, the police's tireless pursuit ensured that these miscreants were made to answer for their ecocidal acts in court. Then, one morning in 1993, long after this resolution, Dadel and Zana were thrilled to witness the arrival of a decontamination team. Their mission: to breathe new life into the Zalou lagoon.

This whole sorry tale changed people's mentalities. During the trial, the criminal prosecutor charged with the Zalou pollution case used it as a teaching opportunity. He didn't hesitate to set out the dangers of anti-ecological habits, which had been multiplying within the community. Every citizen came out of the affair determined to protect the ecosphere in order to create a better world. Director Zouzou was forced to pay four billion CFA francs to Dan's inhabitants – the cost of repairing their ecological inheritance. The prosecutor also insisted that the agencies tasked with protecting marine ecosystems had to apply themselves to the task with greater rigour and probity.

Detective Abybe was rewarded for the bravery, honesty, and professionalism of his leadership of the investigation into the Zalou lagoon affair. Thanks to him, the environmental police secured additional government funding aimed at making them more efficient. Dan, rich in fish, fauna, and flora, continued to attract tourists, who returned to the Zalou lagoon, making Dadel and Zana proud. The animals, insects,

water, and plants are safe now; Zana volunteered to be their new guardian. This latest recruit proved just the man for the job: he was incorruptible. Neighbourhood chief Pablo and watchman Bilé were serving their prison sentences when both were diagnosed with lung cancer – the price for pouring toxic products into the Zalou lagoon without precautions. Director Zouzou, the main culprit behind the pollution, was detained and charged a hefty sum by the protection brigade to cover the cost of his accomplices' care. A few years after his incarceration, he would die tragically: from a heart attack, another harmful effect of his ecocidal act.

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WORLD



CHALLENGES OF MODERNITY I

Climate Changes Global Perspectives

brings together creative approaches to representing environmental crises in a globalized world, which originated in an eponymous symposium hosted virtually by the University of Würzburg in August of 2021. This volume, and the unruly texts that claim space here, are written not only to question and challenge standardized patterns of representation, but also to contribute to undisciplining the genres and practices of traditional academic writing by exploring alternative representational form(at)s.

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