

Expanding the Walk

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Abstract

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The poetic walk, the process at which the action of walking is connected to the poetic process of creating, experiencing, and explicating a poem, becomes more than just a place of metaphorical contact between the poet and the environment. A.R. Ammons asks us to consider how poems and walks are similar, but the colonial trappings of separating the human from the living environment haunts the understanding of how poetry serves as another connecting point of embodiment with the environment. Decolonizing the walk begins with consulting how indigenous poetics center on relationality over hierarchy. Poets such as Natalie Diaz, Tommy Pico, Simon Ortiz, and Carter Revard highlight and interrogate connections to the environment and complicate the ideas of the human and the environment. The erosion of assimilation begins with the connections to place. A walk serves as a point of connection beyond the agency of the human.

Expanding The Walk

It is 10 in the morning, and frost is crusting my cranky Honda Accord. It rattles in the way cars do when they gravely need oil, but I couldn't remember if I had given it to the car or not. Regardless, I drive to Lexi's place, my oldest friend whose bones are not freshly broken. We are going bird watching, and while the winter doesn't have much to offer in exotic visitors from Mexico, the geese team in number, and my friend needs to up their monthly bird score. The wind chills us, but Lexi leisurely waddles over to the Columbia River bank path, where geese and ducks fight like drunks at a crowded bar. They lift their binoculars and grumble about finding the one rare bird that had been spotted earlier that morning. Lexi has been my field guide in many things, birds and conservation being the most recent. The walk rattles me into thought with each step. I look, I listen, and I weave myself inside the environment.

Whether extracurricular, entertainment, or concerned with the internal health of the walker, a walk is often considered an intentional engagement of the environment. You go for a walk. The paths vary, but the event of 'a walk' is differentiated from all the usual movement able-bodied people do to function in the day-to-day. Most would consider my walk with my friend as a nature walk, where the intent is to actively engage with the outdoors, experience the weather, and maybe even see a unique being outside of what shows up on a normal jaunt to the office. The assumption that one needs to be in nature in order to meaningfully engage with it haunts our relationship with it. Our effects on the environment do not end when the walk ends.

To begin investigating how those complex relationships of movement fit inside my own poetics, first we must continue the walk and notice what is in the surroundings. As my friend observes and counts hundreds of geese, plugging the numbers into their app, I notice the paved

asphalt flush against dead grass. In the summer, snakes will crawl onto the path and get pancaked by bikes, but for now, they sleep in their burrows. We move past the path and slide down the bank to level our view with the river. The Columbia's name snags like a casting line tangled among branches. The Yakima tribe, among various tribes indigenous to the middle Columbia region, called it Nch'i-Wàna. The Big River. I didn't know this until recently, though I was born in the town of Wenathee, whose entirety is split down the middle by Nch'i-Wàna. For most of my life, I have walked the bank of this river over and over, and only now that I am concerned with the colonial impacts of the Spanish on my ancestry do I begin to question the names overlaid on the relationships I have with the environment. Colonial thought asks us to split cultural significance from the environment, to categorize for the sake of knowledge. Colonial science values a created objectivity and serves as the severance point from the subject. Still, it is a process I am keen to interrupt.

I keep walking and consider how the dead otter we stumble across will feed the microbes and small fish in the spring. Bugs will make a meal of its marrow, and yet I am left thinking about how colonization has heavily shaped me in language and ways of thinking.

My grandparents on my father's side are products of mestizaje, a process in which the Spanish attempted to culturally erase the indigenous peoples of Mexico and encouraged the rhetoric that mixing of blood would eventually lead to the full assimilation and annihilation of the indigenous peoples. Spanish blood would clean the 'other' eventually from the family tree. My grandparents' ancestry is that of the Pure Pecha, though only bits and pieces of their cultural practices remain. It was never presented to me as anything other than how things were done on El Rancho, in the pueblos I've visited and watched my family make food, wash clothes by hand, and build houses out of mud. I never understood until recently that the way they lived was more

than Mexican culture. The foods they made and the practices they used for gardening were a specific kind of knowledge being passed down.

Colonial erasure haunts me, and as a queer poet who is both white and mixed, I take on the responsibility to enter spaces of indigenous knowledge systems with the understanding that I am still actively in a colonial nation. These knowledge systems are not a monolith with all of the magical answers to live and think apart from colonialism. The colonial projects of America and Mexico are ongoing, though wildly different in approach. Both have endeavored to eliminate and assimilate the people who were here long before any boats claimed to discover it. Reconnecting and decolonizing my relationship with language and my ancestry is a continual practice. Poetry is another place where I seek to complicate the relationships of language, land, and ways of knowing.

What place does poetry offer in the care for and the relationship between the human and the environment? What role do elements of the human achieve in ecological work?

To start toward an understanding, our walk will stroll through A.R. Ammons and his ideas around craft. I begin with Ammons because his influence on my poetic concerns is part of the lineage of my poetry. I do not aim to center a white voice in a conversation of the indigenous poets, but to better understand the lineages of my own poetic practice. We begin with Ammons because he is part of the walk. I am interested in exploring how poems embody the act of walking as A.R. Ammons posits, not as a benchmark for some kind of poetic authority, but to build a relationship entangling the different schools of thought.

His poetry opened my understanding of what I was so fitfully trying to stumble towards, which is the beginning of the dissolution of binary. Ammons asks us to consider how the poem creates a situation that disrupts the dichotomy of concrete and abstract. In “A Poem is a Walk,”

Ammons begins by describing poetry as an act that is “capable of bridging the duality [of physical and abstract] and of bringing us the experience of a ‘real’ world that is also a reconciled, a unified, real world” (*Set in Motion* 13); the experience itself being the act of the poem, reading it and allowing for the poem to build this real world as we read it. The reaching, the movement of poetry itself, as you scale the meanings and sense on the page, creates its own sense. We can understand this through looking at some of Ammon's poetry.

In Ammon’s book-length poem *Garbage*, the cyclical, holistic experience of existence is negotiated through what is left behind, waste. Ammons returns to the anxieties of existence and relies on the connection of fragments to build towards a more stable plurality. Not stable in the sense of static being, but in the acceptance of plurality. The poem creates a path forging forward, and we begin to notice what Ammons has chosen to accompany us in the journey through *Garbage*. As we wade through image and line, meaning begins to pile up, and Ammons challenges us to consider what is truly important in the short fragment of existence. The motion of the poetic walk shows this expansion. As Ammons frames it, “externalization of an interior seeking” (*Set in Motion* 16). The walking motion of poetry is a place of search and a process we experience through the act itself. To satisfy our questions, our blurred sense of what is, we go outward and entangle the external with the internal. Part seven of *Garbage* continues Ammons' idea of poetic movement as it begins:

is it all going to be like this: you wake up
In the mornings and there is that: the next

morning, it’s something else, and none of it
makes much sense: and then one day the weight (45)

There is a constant unsettling of the speaker’s grasp on time. The assertion, which is really a question of whether the self can distinguish each segment of day and night. The words

“going”, “morning,” and “something” create a rhythm of forward momentum. Being is the crux of the weight, but to get there, one must parse through the ways the lines link and break and link again. The unit of the couplets is the line's control over the piece as the poem seems to fall apart at uncertainty and finds itself again in “the next / morning”.

The form of Ammon's *Garbage* centers wholeness is an experiential whole in connection to the constant destabilization of self as the poem lists, and links through the colon. The never-ending couplets build and require the reader to maintain the building of self and sense, which is impossible to maintain completely throughout the whole book-length poem, but the poem encourages the endeavor. The poem does not promote extraction or division but a plentiful multitude of beings. The lines become the environment for meaning.

Like the act of walking, each section of the piece becomes part of the poem's environment of the self. Through experience, we enter the poem/environment, but also our being inside the environment/poem allows us to create an experience through observation of the poem/environment. We never leave the environment, just experience more of it. This is mirrored in Ammons couplets. As we step into each line, insights attach to the reader through the speaker's guidance. Each intake of meaning brings the environment of the poem inside, not separate from the universal self, but rather a living connection to the whole of the poem/environment.

Listing is useful in gathering the sense of being alongside the unstable sense of connection being granted to us. We can see this in the later segments of the seventh section:

remedies, regimens, and rehabs; another
pathology interrupts following on pathology:

terrible descriptions of outcomes appear here
and there, and outcomes, around which, though,

humor glints or boundless guffaws roll combers:
we're plenty trash, plenty wondrous: should I want (*Garbage* 46)

Through each listing, the poem walks us through and interrupts the path with more paths. Paired with the way Ammons pivots our reading around the comma rather than the more dominant colon, he creates a micro interruption within the larger segment.

This interruption is especially noticeable through the way sound functions in this section. Ammons echoes sounds through alliteration, but also with a reinforcement of sound through assonance. The vowels of “remedies, regimens, and rehabs” (*Garbage* 46) create a sonic density that one almost struggles through. The specificity connects the tediousness of the tasks through the tongue, trying to stumble through it cleanly. The shift to the next segment simply spaces out the echoes. What the reader expects is another branching, or breaking away from the previous listing. Instead, we experience another kind of listing that is emphasized by the assonance of a and o in “another pathology”.

The sound also serves as a point of memory. In the path of the poem, if the words serve as the scenery or the various beings living along the trail, then the sounds are what linger in the subconscious as we pass them by. The remedies begin the associative leap to pathologies, but the presence of the assonance of a and o takes the shape of “outcomes appear” and “outcomes, around” in the following segment. Though we are kept in the abstract of what medical adversities are imagined, the sound offers a point of contact. It rewards the journey through each segment. We expect to step out of each segment, but the fragments of what was following us as if the words themselves are pieces of trash breaking down or piling up.

Ammons' concerns throughout *Garbage* shift our understanding and relationship to the ideas of waste and existence. In many ways, it seeks to dismantle what we understand as waste,

excess, through the unending cycle of the poem. That the path walked lingers, and we never truly escape from it. The sentiment that “isness itself is just the name of a segment / of flow” (*Garbage* 46) fleshes out much of what I write toward. However, our isness is more complicated, especially in the areas of decolonizing ecological poetry.

Ammons states, “the motion occurs only in the body of the walker or in the body of the words...there is only one way to know it, and that is to enter into it” (18), when connecting the ways in which walking and poetry are similar in execution. While not untrue, it is only a fragment of the actuality of the walk and thus a fragment of the poem. From an ecological poetics perspective, the walk is not only felt in the body but in the environment as well. The walk is a point of connection and further exploration beyond the self and into the way the self inhabits the environment.

While I agree that poetry functions as a fruitful blurring of this lived duality, it comes with this sense that the poet (the walker) reaches this blurring and then exits it through finishing the poem (leaving the walking trail). It assumes that the walker/poet and the environment/poem are these firmly separate pieces that only shift through meeting. That the craft of the poem exists only as we read it, but once we exit the page the mutual shifting ends once we leave the page. However, there are two issues with this assumption. One: the walker may change trails, but the environment is constant. Two: the environment is not a passive place waiting to be changed by the poet, but instead the larger dynamic frame that shapes our ability and agency. The walk as a poetic process offers us more than an explanation of embodiment in the moment, but a continuous experience that folds past and present between the poet and the poem, human and environment.

Anxieties of the environment predictably show up as Lexi and me walk our usual trail. It's winter break, and with it comes a different kind of river. As we stumble down to the Great River's edge, I see chunks of trees floating down sluggishly. The river has climbed up past the normal height for winter, more reminiscent of the gush of spring. The water is a dulled brown, and I can see bits of debris cloud each lapping wave along the river rocks. An atmospheric river is washing away everything west of the Cascade mountains, and some of it is emptying into our waterways. Houses submerged, roads collapsed, and people navigated their drowning towns on boats and paddleboards. Lexi is looking downriver, counting the hooded mergansers, chirping about a great blue heron soaking up the sun on a log along the bank. The body of the river otter from our previous visit is gone, probably swallowed by the rising waterline, but I happen to be looking out and catch the bobbing head of another otter. It's weaving around the thick tree soup, and I wonder if, under the water's edge, there is even more wood. Whole trees suspended by swirling currents—an underwater forest. The environment has again crossed the invisible barrier between human and nature, and I again wonder how we can seek guidance from it.

Before my first literature class in grad school, my understanding of what a field guide is was vague. A book that contained a list of local flora and fauna, with pictures of said beings. I had never picked one up or really felt the need to understand the natural world in that way. Birds were birds, fish were fish, and as long as you minded the snakes on the trail, nature would sit in the background. I was much more concerned with how hard the hiking trail was for my pudgy teen body, or if the water was plentiful enough to swim in. This separated, colonial mindset of human and nature is perhaps the symptom of a much-needed field guide. It wasn't until I encountered *Cascadia Field Guide* that I began to question a little further the relationship of guidance, poetry, and environment.

Cascadia Field Guide mixes poetry, art, and ecology in order to guide people unfamiliar or disconnected from the Cascadia bioregion through Western and indigenous ways of connecting with the land. This guide becomes a site of negotiation of scientific western knowledge with stories and Indigenous people's knowledge connected to place, plants, and other beings. With one of the guide's goals described as a way to "ethically engage the heart" (Bradfield 16), the reader becomes more aware of the human entanglements of place. Where a western field guide might only offer scientific names and basic information, *Cascadia Field Guide* offers poems to guide your feelings and stories to guide your understanding of place. It seeks to resist the Western division of arts and sciences as something that should be the dominant way of caring for and disseminating information about the environment, which includes the peoples of the land.

This, of course, is not a new way of knowing or understanding the environments we find ourselves in. Indigenous frameworks and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) embrace the natural environment not only as something that houses us, feeds us, and grants us materials, but understanding that there is a complex relationship of energy and cultivation beyond human practice. Understanding the environment through scientific observation, but also through how poetry, song, and story guide us too. Poetry offers us a state of being, knowing, and unknowing.

In *Native Voices: Indigenous American Poetry, Craft and Conversations*, the introduction states, "Indigenous Poetry is not just a *field of subject matter*, but a way of being in the world" (Fuhrman and Rader xxv), which somewhat echoes Ammons' ideas about embodiment, but expands beyond the singular instance of a poem. The actuality of poetry and craft in Indigenous Poetry cannot be separated from the lived realities. The stakes of the poems are in direct connection to the individual who wrote them. The diverse and complicated relationships that

indigenous poetry and knowledge systems operate under cannot be distilled into simple pieces of knowledge to be extracted and applied separately from their contexts.

The cultural and colonial contexts of my poetics still operate inside of ecological concerns because the land is more than just a setting. It is closely woven into how issues of assimilation are tied to colonial exploitations of the environment. Language is a part of the way I live and exist, it's a point of connection, and poetry itself is one of the conduits to complicate all of the threads running between the human inside the environment.

One of the main pieces of indigenous poetics I will be engaging with and applying to ecological poetic analysis is Simon Ortiz of the Acoma Pueblo peoples, and his ideas around expression and perception. Negotiating with the English language is part of the work of many indigenous peoples' poetics beyond how English functions in poetry. English is my first language and the one I excel at, with Spanish hobbling behind. The native language of the Pure Pecha, my grandmother's people, is a visiting bird whose music I'm still trying to find. The two languages of empire dominate the way my language is processed and utilized, and what Ortiz explores in "Song, Poetry, and Language—Expression and Perception: A statement on Poetics and Language" is how our Western understanding of breaking apart language conflicts with the indigenous understanding of language as act and expression. English as a place of analysis, both in poetry and out, engages with language as a dissecting, divisive action. From syllables to words to sentences, thinking in parts is second nature. This mirrors some of the colonial need to categorize and separate things into pieces. To resist this, Ortiz offers insight into how he thinks of song and, by extension, poetry.

Ortiz brings the act of song as the point of focus for it highlights the fact that song is enacted, and experienced not in separate capacities but in the same breath. Ortiz states that song,

“is an opening from inside of yourself to outside and from outside of yourself to inside... a joining and opening” (38), which establishes a holistic understanding of what a poem seeks to do. A joining of the self with the external, not in competition but in a movement toward becoming. The self exits the body and incorporates into the environment through sound. The environment, through observation and being, becomes part of the internal, the same as water, food, and earth, building the body. His acknowledgment of this belonging and active participation in the environment ties back to the idea of indigenous poetry as a way of being.

Poetry as a useful way of challenging colonial ideas of land ownership and extraction can especially be seen through Natalie Diaz’s “The First Water is the Body.” This poem challenges our perception of form just as it challenges our perception of what can be called a river. The long sentences that serve as each stanza overflow across the page as if the form itself is also embodying the river that is its core concern. The speaker begins, “The Colorado River is the most endangered river in the United States—also, it is a part of my body // I carry a river. It is who I am: ‘Aha Makav. This is not metaphor” (Diaz lines 1-2). The declarative mode reinforces the statements of each line.

Similar to Ammons' branching through the connective tissue of the colon, these longer lines rely heavily on how the syntax extends the meaning beyond the punctuation. The first line links the two statements with an em dash, and at first glance, this seems like a connected interruption, but the em dash embodies the way the two statements build on each other. The Colorado River is endangered and also a part of the speaker's body. This linkage shows the reader that the damage cannot be divorced from the lived reality of the speaker. Instead of the usual line breaks to extend meaning, the refusal to break the line further shows the seriousness of

each stanza and the initial line. The line runs in complete sentences and turns and connects along the page in ways that are both the river and the language the speaker is using.

Diaz's poem "The First Water is the Body" further becomes an example of how what happens to the environment happens to the body and vice versa, through how the body and river shift throughout the pieces. History, language, and translation become the site where the speaker attempts to portray the inseparability of the body from the flow of water.

The second section of the piece begins with "The Spanish called us, *Mojave. Colorado*, the name they gave our river because it was silt-red-thick" (line 6), which introduces the colonial attempt to translate a relationship through its own framework. Each moment of italics is a point of translation. Visually on the page, it disrupts, but it is also a visual language that asks us to sit with the imperfection of language and translation. The violence of colonial translation is heavy with the thick red image of the river. The italics also ask us to read further into where it appears, as with "Natives have been called *red* forever" (Diaz line 7). The slant asks us to read it slanted, both as a translation and to have us question the legitimacy of the act. This is reinforced further by the next section as the speaker states, "This is a poor translation, like all translations." (Diaz line 11).

As these statements become part of the reading, the building of meaning expands further. It becomes apparent that all of the statements don't operate just on a linear logic, but each sentence begins to apply to every other sentence. Especially with "This is not metaphor" (Line 2) and "This is a poor translation, like all translations" (line 11), where the living memory of the reader begins to apply these to the past lines as well as the ones that come after. The poem increasingly pushes the reader to encounter each segment within the context of the whole. You cannot have the river without the body; you cannot have translation without some form of harm.

You cannot step into a landscape and ignore the histories of the place, including the people of said place. The risks of the poem are lived and embodied, not theoretical.

Ammons encourages the struggle of language, the struggle of concrete and abstract. Diaz and Ortiz encourage us to stop divorcing everything from the act, that the act itself is a kind of knowing and a site of translation and connection. It is not an either-or. Embodiment houses both. The environment is everything. We are part and whole. What is felt and what is thought happens in the same space.

The anxieties in poetry of the dissociation of sensibility still haunts us today. T. S. Eliot argues we are too comfortable divorcing thoughts and feelings. Our inability to enact “the same essential quality of transmuting ideas into sensations, of transforming an observation into a state of mind” (Eliot 375). Eliot’s idea of a dissociated sensibility, the felt and the thought, the experience and what becomes part of the page, is similar to how Ammons tackles the space between binaries. However, in relation to environmental poetics, or poetics that enact the environment, it is still a site of separation. The obsession of human thought and feelings as the core concern of the poem, as something to “force...language into his meaning,” (Eliot 375) is what indigenous poetics challenges. An idea of reciprocity with what is given and what is felt. The jar becomes part of the landscape, and the landscape becomes the jar. Not as some false equivalence or hierarchy but as a point of contact that carries risks and outcomes that affect the whole.

The dissociation of sensibility is partly due to our need to distinguish ourselves from everything else, even within ourselves, and the separation causes more than just bad poetry. Laceration of the self often begins from our place in the environment around us. Walls symbolize

isolation rather than an addition to the structure of our community. Each word is useless without every other single formation of syllables. What is a word without a sentence, what is a sentence outside the collective? What is a human outside of every other human working together to keep each other fed?

This dissociation of sensibility is not just unique to poetry but a symptom of colonization and Western expansion. The need to define against an imagined 'other' begins to split the self from itself. The difference becomes the site of focus rather than the relationship. It's only recently that the urban environment has been recognized as still having relationships to the interlocking ecosystems of the human-built environment and every other environment that is considered natural.

I look to Tommy Pico to complicate this idea of the natural and relationships to our lived environments. Especially with the stereotypical ideas about what a relationship to land looks like and the mythologizing of indigenous peoples. In an excerpt from *Nature Poem*, Pico creates a landscape that explores the different ways colonial thought overwrites the agency of indigenous peoples. The poem is downright confrontational and invigorates the reader as the speaker states, "I can't write a nature poem/ bc it's fodder for the noble savage/ narrative. I wd slap a tree across the face, I say to my audience" (Pico 1- 4). Of course, the immediate reading is hostile, but the line breaks and text-like speech offer a few points where Pico creates tension beyond the initial reading. The speaker establishes the risks of the poem while the line lingers and breaks. The first line emphasizes the position of the poem, and the second breaks and carries the remainder of the sentence to the third line. This creates tension around the acts of connection as ones of myth and stereotype. However, the breaking of the second line also reframes the one who is the noble savage, which is assumed to be the derogatory rhetoric used against indigenous people, but the

syntax actually positions the ones who would fuel the narrative—the non-indigenous colonizers—as the actual noble savages. The line breaks create this tongue-in-cheek tone that plays with our expectations.

The tone shifts from the almost confessional framing of the first line to the antagonistic image of slapping a tree, but it also includes humor. The personified tree is the target of the ire rather than just nature itself. The idea of what the expected nature poem entails is the point of conflict. The text-speak also subverts what one thinks of when considering what a nature poem looks like. The classic romantic nature poem would shiver at the idea of using the almost teenager-esque voice. The first stanza expertly embodies the complicated realities of the lived experience of the speaker and how the idea of the nature poem cannot be approached simply, free of violence, history, and white expectations.

This self-awareness and careful control of the framing of the poem is felt even further in the second stanza:

Let's say I'm at a pizza parlor
Let's say I'm having a slice at the bar this man walks in to pick up his to-go order
Let's say his order isn't ready yet and he's chatty
Let's say I'm in Portland bc ppl don't tawk to me in NYC (lines 5-8)

The anaphora of “Let’s say” reminds the reader explicitly that this is a narrative being built as it is read. It also builds a slipperiness of experience. Is this a completely fictional moment, a moment of narrative, or is it pulled from the lived experience of the speaker? The stanza, and by extension the rest of the poem, becomes a place of performance and experience.

At the same time, Pico is able to build a lived environment inside the poem through images. The pizza parlor is an environment, and we are given the details of the relationships that unfold with each line. It's not the scene of what most might consider a natural environment, but it's the touchstone and image allowed to the reader first, after the striking of the tree. When

encountering the man in the pizza parlor, the environment is also given human features in describing it: “He puts his hands on the ribs of my chair ” (Pico 18). The face of the tree now becomes the ribs, and with it a level of threat and vulnerability.

Risk and connection are still very much part of the surroundings, though the relationship of humans among themselves gets reframed as part of nature that the speaker is interested in writing about:

Let’s say I literally hate all men bc literally men are animals–

This is a kind of nature I would write a poem about. (Pico 19-20)

The tone and hyperbole contribute to the blurriness of being as multiple statements are made within the same space of text. The messiness of the human experience and the speaker's negative relationship with the concept of nature spills onto the relationship with the human. Human nature is the point of interest, but even in walking through the hypothetical of the pizza place and the married man, the speaker still reaches toward the animal. How the speaker defines and uses language to specify the relationships they have to the human-built environment is still rooted in language used to describe the natural. In trying to rebel and perpetuate the human vs. natural, the binary instead gets disrupted and reveals the complex ways in which the larger environments and other-than-human beings are baked into the very language attempting to define that boundary.

Thinking of embodiment as something only felt and lived through the body ignores the ways in which the external flows through the internal. Biosemiotics renders the point of contact

as a point of communication. Instead of a live cell being a unit of containment, it is a place of translation. The very act of being is a weaving of our intake of stimulus alongside our physical presence, being its own stimulus. Trees can sense when we walk above their roots. Crows scavenge and sort through our dumpsters. Our very skin is an ecosystem of bacteria, single-cell organisms, and bugs. Just because the observation does not come from or register with us does not mean those perspectives are completely detached from our actions.

The entanglement of the human and environment in poetry is often a site of colonial tension. Carter Revard's essay "Herbs of Healing: American Values in American Indian Literature" deftly tackles how indigenous poets respond to the ecological and colonial entanglements of the "canon" poets. Revard critiques the position of nature in Wallace Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar" as art conquering nature, that the poem flattens the violence of empire into a single act of the speaker placing down the jar (10-11).

Revard juxtaposes this "Empire of Abstract Ideas" against the poem "Speaking," by Simon Ortiz, which privileges communal acts of communication and decenters human thought as the center of the environment. Instead, the investment is made in the human relationship with other beings. Revard writes, "Ortiz acts Intercessor for his son, speaking 'for' the infant to the powerful, ancient, and enduring beings whom this poem calls to our awareness," which is handled through the list in the poem of the insects present, which transform through listing into "the millions of years / are watching us" (12-13). The very act of speaking connects the speaker of the poem to the environment and highlights the wisdom found in insects, which are often underprivileged in human thought. Elevating ants to the level of worth speaking to and also being important beings to converse with echoes the importance of approaching the environment with specific detail given to its agency.

The particular knowledge systems I operate from are a blend of Western and Indigenous thought. I was raised alongside both of those contexts and continue to study and learn from both. Decolonizing is a continual process that might never be done, but destabilizing the dominance of Western thought is how I aim to move forward.

Stuart Cooke's article "Indigenous Poetics and Transcultural Ecologies" considers how approaching other ways of understanding, through indigenous knowledge systems, is not an attempt to bury modern thought with a mysticized extraction of indigenous knowledge. Instead, Cooke describes it as "an alternative, syncretic understanding of the contemporary, in which past is partner to the present in the formation of future possibility" (1). A fruitful blending of understanding that no longer privileges Western thought above other knowledge systems. Environmental concerns and knowledge are deeply steeped in colonial perspectives. How we are even allowed to approach different types of environments is entrenched in the colonial structures of the US. The very act of conservation is not inherently anti-colonial but, in fact, can harm indigenous relationships to land. The prominent idea of hands-off ecological intervention ignores the knowledge and relationships of stewardship. Healing indigenous landscapes, which much of my poetry is concerned with, begins with centering indigenous voices. This is why the importance of including indigenous voices and poetics is imperative when discussing the ecological and poetic concerns of modern day.

In *Fresh Banana Leaves*, Zapotec and Maya Ch'orti environmental scientist Jessica Hernandez connects and critiques the foundations of environmental science and conservation through experiences and ways of knowing as an indigenous scientist. Hernandez questions

Western ideas of conservation and how the field has continuously ignored indigenous knowledge systems of the environment, to the detriment of both indigenous peoples and the environment. Challenging Western ideas of care and centering indigenous ways of knowing and care is not only a form of resistance to ecocolonialism but also another way to guide our understanding of our relationship with the environment. This can be and should be a piece of examination when it comes to considering ecopoetry.

My poetics serve as more than just a well-crafted acknowledgement of the past, but a symbiotic point of reciprocity between the environment and the people who have lived here since long before colonizers took the land from them.

Through reading Natalie Diaz and Tommy Pico, I have begun to notice more the purposeful move to direct statement that is meant to complicate ideas of metaphor. That something is, rather than is like, is a huge shift in argument toward knowing and yet does not sacrifice the blurring of the human v.s environment. Instead, the speaker in so many poems complicates the roles and position of the human in the environment, urban or otherwise. Counter to the Western colonial sensibility that any form of absolute knowledge grants a level of superiority over all else, this knowing instead invites us to destabilize our grip on control (which is always fleeting and might truly never be real) and instead struggle inside and enjoy the richness of being. And this is done without defanging the risk inherent in these poems.

The risk of romanticising the environment and our connection to it as poets is another way to assert dominance and human agency over it. However, acknowledging the ways in which we embody the relationship to the environment can be a point of respect and reciprocity. To seriously highlight the connection between humans and the environment also means to take up the risk and the consequences our actions have on the environment. To say a body is a river, the

river is the body, takes on the harm to both. The connection will always be a point of vulnerability and strength, which has always been true. The risk of flattening the complexities of the relationship and our being is always the risk taken up by a poem, but to have a human in an environmental poem, an ecological poem, does not always have to be another place of violence.

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