Resisting Nature Poetry in the Anthropocene:

On the Ecopoetics of Brian Teare and Juliana Spahr

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Abstract

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This paper attends to the ecologically committed work of Brian Teare and Juliana Spahr, two poets whose ecopoems respond to the nature poem, a genre of poetry that often supplants ecological specificity with a generalized nature, ultimately fetishizing a nonexistent agrarian ideal and alienating readers' experiences of place. By performing close readings of these poets' work and situating their poems alongside contemporary philosophies of the Anthropocene, I examine not only how Teare and Spahr attempt to reproduce the fragmented experience of living in the Anthropocene but also how their poems encourage the mobilization of reading publics by combatting anthropocentrism and imagining potential futures, futures predicated on livability and equity across species.

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Fraught Inheritance: Nature Poetry and the Pastoral Mode

In "Long After Hopkins," a poem from Brian Teare's 2009 collection *Sight Map*, the speaker interrogates a series of fraught relationships: the poet's own connection to the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins, the tenuous linkages between the pastoral mode and contemporary nature poetry, and the tension between embodied experience and epistemological limitations of such experience. Uniting these inquiries is an interrogation of the poet's ability to compose an accurate, comprehensive portrayal of the natural world—or, more precisely, what remains of the natural world. In other words, does the postmodern imagination possess the capacity to translate pastoral spaces into pastoral poems, and what is lost, or transfigured, in the process of composition?

The form of "Long After Hopkins," along with the poet's deployment of white space, advances the unstable relationships explored by the speaker. The poem's lines alternate between two margins, a conventional left margin and a second, indented margin beginning at the page's approximated mid-point. Visually, this use of space produces conflicting effects: "Long After Hopkins" appears to be a poem that is tearing at its seams, but the formal pattern also forces Teare's reader to traverse the full width of the page before returning to the left margin, creating a sense of cohesion—a prosaic reading experience within a fragmented poem. Part prayer, part site-specific meditation, part epistemological tug of war, the poem relies on its form to embody (for Teare's reading public) the imbalance felt by the speaker. How does one confront the ethical impossibility of deploying language to reanimate an observed landscape?

The poem's syntax also expresses this imbalance, as Teare's usage of colons interrupts normative syntax, constructing complicated grammatical relationships and imitating the quick

shifts of a mind struggling to process and organize the many aspects of a dynamic space. While the poem weaves between margins, the clauses blend into each other:

> . . . The field kneels
> under white pines, umbra the edge
> to whom this is addressed :
> a mind part fern, part birch :
> two turkeys slowly S-ing their necks
> through inflorescence, arrangement
> more precise than what light leaves
> fields (Teare, *Sight Map* 44)

The syntactical collisions produced by these colons, as well as the poem's often enjambed lines, complicate the relationship between the speaker and the addressed. Although the title positions the poem as allusive to Hopkins's body of work, the syntax compounds the number of addresses and creates the illusion of equivalency between images. Hopkins becomes inseparable from the speaker, the speaker overlaps with the anthropomorphized kneeling field, and all are entangled with "a mind part fern, part birch" (Teare, *Sight Map* 44) and the "two turkeys slowly S-ing their necks" (Teare, *Sight Map* 44). In other words, the slipperiness of the poem's syntax, amplified by enjambment, effects one of Teare's images: it "umbra[s] the edge / to whom this is addressed" (Teare, *Sight Map* 44), obscuring—and through that very obscurity, making fluid—the identities of the poem's addressee. Perhaps this fluidity explains the speaker's anthropomorphizing of the space (something that Teare's later work approaches more cautiously), as the poem describes not a literal space but the poet's attempt to make meaning from the space—to make the landscape productive.

At the heart of "Long After Hopkins" is the inherent disjunction between landscape and composition. The speaker attends to what is visible, but this attention quickly descends into a meditation on the artificial:

> . . . painterly flowers more color
> than picture, more words for color
> than tint : *alizarin* or *violet*, you could
> write *goldenrod*, write *cornflower*,
> but Queen Anne's lace still hems
> the low horizon. (Teare, *Sight Map* 44)

The speaker carefully distinguishes image (that which resides in the imagination) from observation (that which the poet experiences but remains separate from the poet), underscoring the poet's inability to transform material realities, as writing cornflower will not populate the field with a flourish of cornflowers: "Ask artifice. Ask ornament. / Go ahead and ask : what principle / animates the natural" (Teare, *Sight Map* 44). This question serves both as an admission of the speaker's inability to ascribe interiority to animals and objects and an expression of the futility of attempting to understand the site holistically, as the poem—the poet's attempt at understanding, at attributing *significance* to the space—only obscures the material realities of the site.

"[I]s it only what's visible that's knowable" (Teare, *Sight Map* 45). One may read Teare's question, of course, as an implicit argument for precise description rather than anthropomorphism—of which the speaker is guilty. But for Teare's speaker, even description proves insufficient. The problem, ultimately, with the placeless nature poem is that it appropriates the pastoral mode to present an unreal, depoliticized space as something to be desired: "what's left of pastoral / but unreality" (Teare, *Sight Map* 44). It generalizes nature to

forward the artificial and so continually reproduces the artificial, alienating poets and readers from the natural world. Above all else, this dilemma serves as the engine of "Long After Hopkins," a distinctly postmodern pastoral *about* artifice, about "writing to supply / scaffolds to hold up scenery, nothing / but queries and plywood" (Teare, *Sight Map* 45). Teare's intentional enjambment here underscores the absence of reality, the "nothing" out of which the poem's scenery springs.

By treating the process of composition as his subject rather than teasing a false epiphany from the landscape, the speaker also foregrounds the poem as the result of scrupulous framing. Through his struggle to *interpret* the landscape, he admits his own complicity in the act; however, by foregrounding his complicity and the inherent artifice of appropriating the site for poetic production, Teare's speaker makes a clear distinction between the real and the made. Such a distinction gives the former, which typically would exist outside of the poem's frame, the final utterance: "It's too late to see a third turkey / left headless, wreck of feathers / the owl scared, scattered in grass—" (Teare, *Sight Map* 45). Although the poem ends here, the em dash disallows absolute closure, forcing the reader to occupy the discomfort of the disturbance and destruction wrought on the landscape. Another species speaks last—through image, and through the poet, of course—and it speaks forebodingly.

Although Teare's problematization of the nature poem is urgent, one of his speaker's questions—"what's left of pastoral / but unreality" (Teare, *Sight Map* 44)—is by no means a new one. William Carlos Williams confronted the pastoral mode's alienation from the lived conditions of subjects in rural and proto-suburban spaces in his 1917 collection *Al Que Quiere!*. "Pastoral (When I was younger)"—one of a series of poems that share the provocatively direct title "Pastoral"—effectively flips the mode on its head, animating "the houses / of the very poor"

(64). Replete with chicken wire and "furniture gone wrong," Williams's poem exposes the fetishization of *types* of rural spaces by presenting a more realistic portrait of a specific site. In doing so, Williams writes what Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* refers to as "counter-pastorals," or poems that react against the enameled version of nature often included in pastoral poetry for political or economic reasons (22). These counter-pastorals respond not to politically-inclined pastorals, such as Virgil's *Eclogues*, but to poems that appropriate the mode to offer a generalization of nature, one that deprives local ecologies of biological and regional specificity and fetishizes the rural working class: Williams's counter-pastorals primarily reproach a market-driven, sentimental strain of poetry that emerges from pastoralism.

A closer look at Williams's oeuvre reveals a sustained interrogation of this brand of pastoralism in the American poetic tradition. "The Farmer," published in *Spring and All*, foregrounds the inherent contradiction between "the artist figure of / the farmer" (186) and the working-class American farmer whose fields are blank, whose orchards are decaying. "To Elsie"—also from *Spring and All*—explores a proto-suburban space that reality can only penetrate in "isolate flecks" due to the collective imagination's preoccupation with straining "after deer / going by fields of goldenrod" (218). These poems witness and respond to a strategic flattening of landscapes and silencing of those who inhabit them.

Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Williams occupies a unique position in a lineage of poets engaging with environmental collapse. I do not mean to obscure the specific politics animating Williams's counter-pastorals, however, by situating him in the ecopoetic tradition. Williams was primarily preoccupied with how the introduction of non-farming economies into rural and soon-to-be suburban spaces utilized pastoral mythologies—effectively marketing Edenic fantasies to the bourgeois middle class—and in doing so concealed the

histories of those spaces and silenced the rural working class. Nonetheless, his counter-pastorals engage with the consequences of a nature-that-is-not, a constructed *Nature* that ignores ecological complexity and instead positions rural spaces as subservient to human imagination, for the pastoral mode or the infringement of capital[1].

I mention Williams's counter-pastorals simply to expand the frame of this essay. Just as Williams was not the only poet pre-century-twenty-one to engage (if only obliquely) with environmental shifts, the contemporary poets whose work I engage with in this space are not representative of all currents in contemporary ecopoetics. Engagement with the conflict of a generalized nature and the specificity of local ecologies is neither new nor uniform in its expression. By invoking Williams, I hope to underscore the latter of those two points and echo a claim Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz make in *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History, and Us*: the popularity of contemporary ecopoetics (popularity, that is, within the field) should not be misconstrued as an awakening: "The opposition between a blind past and a clear-sighted present, besides being historically false, depoliticizes the long history of the Anthropocene" (xiii). To reject the ecological interventions in Williams's early poems is to reject that poets and their poems have been aware of metaphor's ability to alienate the experience of the poem from that of the real for well over one hundred years now.

Ignoring this sustained interaction reduces by reconfiguration the complicity of human actors in the on-going destruction of the planet and elevates those whose poems explicitly respond to the Anthropocene to a vanguardist position. Such myopia risks underlining anthro-, presenting the prefix as solution before scrutinizing it as cause. This is not to say that

1 For more on Williams's counter-pastoral poems, see "Modernist Versions of Pastoral: Poetic Inspiration, Scientific Expertise, and the 'Degenerate' Farmer" by Maria Farland, "'Thinking/Of the Freezing Poor': The Suburban Counter-Pastoral in William Carlos Williams's Early Poetry" by John Marsh, and "In the American Grid: Modern Poetry and the Suburbs" by Peter Monacell.

contemporary ecopoets are not publishing exciting and urgent work. I simply wish to situate their work within an enduring lineage of poets, one that interrogates the consequences and affordances of a generalized nature and explores how such a conceptions of nature shapes encounters with diverse "natural" spaces.

How then are contemporary ecopoets engaging various ecological ruins rendered common by the Anthropocene, be it contaminated local ecosystems or the shared (though unequally distributed) consequences of global capitalism, global warming, and ecological collapse? What are these poets to do with the nature poem, a form that has historically supplanted ecological specificity with the fetishization of a nonexistent agrarian ideal? I do not wish to pursue these lines of inquiry in order to proclaim a uniform poetics of the Anthropocene. Instead, I present these questions as a frame for examining the distinct work of two politically committed poets, Brian Teare and Juliana Spahr. Ultimately, this essay is interested in how these poets' micro-level craft decisions can be deployed not only to reproduce the experience of living in the Anthropocene but also to mobilize reading publics to reimagine potential futures in collaboration with various ecologies rather than in control of them. As this essay devotes itself to exploring craft-level concerns, I also briefly consider Teare and Spahr's work in relation to my own.

Attending to the Real: Network-Building in Brian Teare's "Clear Water Renga"

The "Anthropocene is patchy because it is composed of varied assemblages of livability. It exists only in and through those patches" (Tsing 4), anthropologist and critical theorist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing writes in "Earth Stalked by Man." Tsing's work belongs in any conversation about the Anthropocene, but it is especially pertinent when discussing Brian Teare's 2019

Doomstead Days, an ecofeminist collection of poems dedicated to exploring how bodies perform the Anthropocene and locating the Anthropocene's queer erotic by "acknowledging embodiment as relational and in relation to *everything's body*, not just the bodies included within the human political" (Teare, Interview by June Shanahan). An excerpt from Tsing's 2015 book *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* serves as one of *Doomstead Days*'s four epigraphs, and Tsing's influence is especially apparent in "Clear Water Renga," the book's first poem, as Teare's speaker examines ruined sites and ultimately uses the poem to imagine improved interspecies relationships.

Also worth considering in concert with Teare's collection is the work of philosopher Timothy Morton, who, in *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, argues that the Anthropocene is an object of such incomprehensible spatial and temporal dimensions that "the idea of the possibility of a metalanguage that could account for things while remaining uncontaminated by them" is eliminated (2). Whereas Tsing directs her public to closely examine potential nodal spaces, Morton's theory presents an epistemological conundrum for poets to parse.

From this critical conversation, another question from Teare's "Long After Hopkins" resurfaces: "Is it only what's visible that's knowable[?]" (Teare, *Sight Map* 45). To simplify and combine Tsing and Morton's theories: yes and no. Anthropogenic processes and their effects can be better understood through deep historical research, and heightened attention to disrupted ecologies, but the patches through which the Anthropocene can be "seen," various as they are, are inherently incapable of providing a complete picture of the crisis' scale, and human observers of these phenomena, being interpolated into and constructed by these processes, cannot produce

an unsullied metalanguage to describe the global crisis. There is no outside, but there are edges embedded in the mess, and those edges warrant a closer look.

In "Clear Water Renga," Teare—like Tsing—attends to the Anthropocene's patchiness, attempting to make visible its global impact through local pockets. Beginning with the Cosco Busan oil spill, the poem considers landscapes affected by anthropogenic processes, such as the Summit Fire and the Lockheed Fire in the Santa Cruz mountains and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Deploying the renga, a form predicated on syllabic and stanzaic regularities (alternating three-line and two-line stanzas) and inter-poet assemblage, thematic cohesion and associative leaps, "Clear Water Renga" traverses contaminated landscapes, imbricating separate spaces of ruin and complicating the poem's orientation to time. Two factors bind the sites of concern: ecological disaster and each disaster's proximity to the poem's speaker. Emphasizing the local, Teare limits the poem's scope to spaces within walking distance and in doing so, also places "Clear Water Renga" in conversation with a long tradition of peripatetic composition, ranging from the rambling practices of Romantic poets to the situationist *derives*.

Such a decision foregrounds the human body's centrality to the compositional process, as the poem documents its involvement, and the form reflects its movement:

> it was the first disaster
> I could walk to, look
>
> at until it ceased to seem
> exceptional, no matter
>
> the panic I felt
>
> (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 2)

For Teare, embodied contact with—and documentation of—distinct localities renders a sense of globality more accessible. Although, for Morton, the scale of the Anthropocene is

incomprehensible, Teare's poem attempts to express the ineffable through a vast network of descriptive elements. Every image and figure serve as "an attachment to events" that the speaker "neither forget[s] nor understand[s]" (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 4). Attachment, here, serves as the operative word, as it appeals to the speaker's physical connection with these sites and references the same speaker's inevitable participation in the processes that create and recreate these unnatural spaces. In this way, the speaker's frequent appeals to "fact," the "real," and "how the real absorbs a fact" (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 1) or perhaps more appropriately, "how the real [can't] refuse" to absorb one (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 3) are not simple retorts to denialism; instead, their accumulation expresses the futility of seeking an outside of the real, forcing the speaker—and Teare's public—to reckon with it and search for possible reparative practices:

> the local
>
> real made me begin
> to experience the mind
> as a form porous
>
> as mile after mile of trees
> accepting fire, to begin
>
> to see aftermath
> as the start of thought (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 6)

Throughout the poem, Teare's speaker adopts a relatively low diction, trusting monosyllabic words, such as "real" and "fact," to carry a variety of urgencies as they appear and reappear across the poem's many contexts, but the simplicity of the language neither precludes epiphany nor diminishes Teare's attention to the ways in which the line can create units of experience, amplifying and elevating even the most common parlance. Combined with the renga's short, frequently enjambed lines, the speaker's accessible diction facilitates one of the poem's many ambitions: to portray "the mind / as a form porous" (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 6), willing to

confront not the serene image of innumerable trees but the reality of that image "accepting fire" (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 6).

The poem enacts its orientation to the real by constructing a network of facts—facts ranging from statistics capturing immediate environmental impact to projections of how these events will displace species and disrupt local ecologies, and from personal anecdotes to deep histories of land use and U.S. imperialism. Teare's poetics recounts, editorializes, and animates specific environments, not a generic Nature, by means of attention and accumulation. "Clear Water Renga" balances descriptions of embodied encounters with third-party sources not only to provide Teare's reader with multiple, complimentary methods of knowledge-building but also to demonstrate that not every type of information produces the same affective response for the poem's speaker:

> . . . each day
> a weird hot wind left
>
> evidence of how crisis
> becomes most real through firsthand
>
> fact (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 6)

For Teare, "fact" accommodates subjective, firsthand experience, as embodied witnessing proves essential to one's comprehension of the Anthropocene's manifold threats.

While "Clear Water Renga" moves with the poet, it also moves across the physical page, as the speaker's intimate awareness of the spaces incorporated into the poem informs the poem's use of white space. Interested in the instability and potential rehabilitation of landscapes that are continually reconstituted through anthropogenic processes, "Clear Water Renga" attends to the poem's ability to create an alternative space—one that both confronts the immediate realities of these sites and imagines their potential futures—through the physicality of the page. Thus, the

poem's stanzas, which wind back and forth between margins, are not only mimetic of the poet's movement but also the instability, or shiftiness, of disaster-stricken sites. Ultimately, this deployment of white space situates Teare's anthropogenic poem as a rhizomatic one, simultaneously invested in the documentation of each space's reality and the potential revision, or undoing, of the processes that create and recreate the instability of each space. Such an approach to the page enacts Tsing's emphasis on the potentiality of edges, as the poem becomes a space in which rehabilitation and restoration may begin.

Although Teare's reliance on the renga establishes an ordering principle—or, if not order, pattern—the syntax of "Clear Water Renga" further complicates the relationality between clauses, as even grammatically, the poem emphasizes continuity over closure, convergence over compartmentalization. The poem eschews conventional punctuation, instead separating each clause with two colons. Beyond serving as an homage to both A.R. Ammons's frequent use of the single colon in *Garbage* and Alice Fulton's deployment of the "bride sign" (==), these double colons "decenter subjects and allow the complex relations between multiple actors and actions to become visible as a sort of network" (Teare, Interview by June Shanahan). Mimetic of the always already entangled and uncanny experience of living in the Anthropocene, Teare's syntax and punctuation complicates both grammatical constructions and naturalized hierarchies of interspecies relationships:

> I can't forget how we've made
> a poison nature's
>
> second nature, how the real
> seems dependent on this fact ::
>
> everywhere we live
> we destroy life (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 13-14)

The meaning of natural, here, is unsettled by the poem's syntax, the speaker's colloquial diction, and the frequently enjambed lines. Have we (humankind) made a poison nature's second *nature,* or have we made a poison nature's *second nature*? Although the distinction between these emphases is slight, the interpretive difference is anything but trivial. While the former reading situates Teare's public in a post-nature world, replacing the pristine, unsullied nature of the Romantics with poison, the latter speaks to the commonality and pervasiveness of environmental collapse. Of course, Teare's reader does not have to choose between these two interpretations: the poem's craft affords and necessitates their coexistence.

Teare's anthropogenic lyric underscores shared (albeit not equally shared) culpability, framing human intervention as cause and not solution. Neither the poet nor the poem can exist outside of the realities Teare observes: "I want to live there, // the precise site the mind stops / its blameless languaging job" (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 8), but such a site does not exist. The poem, for Teare, cannot be separated from the disaster surrounding the poet, "as if there the real / stops burning, oil its gush from the uncapped well :: no" (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 9). This idea aligns with the aftermath to which Teare refers, which is also the beginning of a new thought.

The admission of complicity is essential to the argument of "Clear Water Renga," be it the acknowledgement of centuries of destructive human intervention—"how we've made / a poison nature's / second nature" (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 13)—or, on a smaller scale, the poet's own inescapable contributions to ecological ruination. The poem uses these confessions, however, as the basis of rehabilitative practices. Although "Clear Water Renga" devotes space to mourning "how sunlight creates photo- / toxic conditions / crippling embryonic fish" (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 5) and "how herring won't return to / seasonal breeding / grounds polluted by the spill" (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 5), it transgresses simple elegy in its commitment to pursuing

improved relationships between humans and specific environments, humans and other species, and humans and the act of composition.

How then can poets deploy the poem to explore alternative, more sustainable futures? How should the anthropogenic poem navigate the impasse between the impossibility of ethicality and the necessity for radical intervention? Can craft decisions be adapted to reimagine—to borrow Tsing's subtitle—the possibility of life in these capitalist ruins? Teare's speaker provides, at the very least, the beginning of a response to these lines of inquiry.

Ultimately, "Clear Water Renga" examines the complicated ethics of appropriating subjective observation as a poetic image in the Anthropocene. For Teare, resituating the real in a poem—that is, indulging the mind's penchant for metaphor-making to assign meaning to an experience—is a dubious task. The poem ends with the speaker watching an elk step

> into the image
>
> of an elk who steps forward
> from the sedge & bends its head
>
> to drink from my mouth ::
> & bends & from my mouth drinks
> clear water :: (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 20)

Here Teare's speaker pulls back the proverbial curtain, conceding that the poem—or perhaps more accurately, the poet—is the means through which the elk becomes not-elk, depriving the animal, to a certain extent, of its lived biological and ecological complexities. Even if the image originates in the poet's experience, the original is refracted through the poem's means of argumentation, turning it into something else: metaphor. However, as the poem argues, that process does not interfere with the reality of the not-elk:

> each image that replaces
>
> consciousness *is*

the real, as temporary
as any desire

to do no harm here (Teare, *Doomstead Days* 19)

This function of the imagination is not new, but in "Clear Water Renga," the careful treatment of the alienating process through which the elk as observed becomes an image underscores yet another one of the poem's political projects: to negotiate the problematics of image construction and interrogate the intentionality behind appropriating images from one's environment. "Clear Water Renga" aspires to speak with the elk (and with the sites it considers) rather than for it. The final image then—that of the elk drinking from the speaker's mouth—offers an example of ethical anthropomorphism, one that underscores co-dependence and collaboration.

Although it navigates apocalyptic processes, "Clear Water Renga" does not concede as inevitable the end of human existence. The elk is animated within its original context as a method of imagining improved and sustainable interspecies relations, relations that contribute to the continued livability of the spaces inhabited by the poem rather than the destruction documented by it.

Teare's influence pervades my manuscript, as his attention to (and critiques of) American poetic traditions, from American Transcendentalism to Language poetry, informs the ways in which I respond to my poetic lineage. Perhaps most pertinent to the scope of this paper is "Splittings," a poem that critiques "the unsettling seam / Between what was called the imagination / And its capacity to reanimate, alienate." This critique, which Teare takes up at the end of "Clear Water Renga" also surfaces, though less explicitly, in "The End of Property," a companion poem to "Splittings": "A couch, weather-beaten, swollen with bees / is only that. An eclipse, / one mass in front of another." Furthermore, poems such as "At the Duwamish River Basin" and "The Vaquita" undertake various approaches to site-specific composition, while

"Anthropogenic Whitman" and "Second Wing" explore the consequences of trafficking in a placeless, generalized nature in the Anthropocene.

Decentering the Human: Juliana Spahr's "Calling You Here"

As Dianne Chisholm argues in "On the house that ecopoetics builds: Juliana Spahr's '"eco" frame'," Juliana Spahr's ecopoetic project also responds to pernicious generalizations of nature. Her poems often attempt to break the conventional frame of a nature poetry that shows, in Spahr's words, "the beautiful bird but not so often the bulldozer off to the side that was destroying the bird's habitat" (qtd. in Chisholm 633). Instead, Spahr "mixes ecologies and politics with mounting chaos and complexity" (Chisholm 633). In "Calling You Here," a poem from her 2015 collection *That Winter the Wolf Came*, chaos and complexity result from the poem's emphasis on interspecies collaboration.

Like Teare's "Clear Water Renga," Spahr's "Calling You Here," foregrounds issues of visibility, sustained livability, and the improvement of interspecies relationships. However, whereas "Clear Water Renga" progresses through factual accumulation and embodied encounters with an established network of nodal sites, the functional ambiguity of Spahr's poem serves as its engine. Yes, "Calling You Here" invokes copious specific animal species—from snowy plovers to pygmy scaly-tailed flying squirrels—but central to Spahr's ecopoetic project is the decentering of the poet as conduit to natural spaces, preferring instead to construct various unstable contingents that are complicated through their repetition.

Although many of the poems from *That Winter the Wolf Came* deploy an autobiographical, completely embodied "I," the "I" in "Calling You Here" remains intentionally obscure, as the poem's specificity belongs exclusively to the species invoked by the speaker.

Published by Commune Editions, a press for poetry that emerges from a commitment to promoting organization inspired by communist and anarchist thought, "Calling You Here" reads as a ballad for a world that simultaneously does and does not exist—an invocation for a world that, as the result of radical organizing, could come to be.

Spahr, like Teare, turns to interspecies collaboration to combat the inherent precarity of the Anthropocene. However, Spahr's poem does not superimpose an imagined animal over the observed animal; instead, her poem situates the potentiality of revolution—or at the very least, the possibility of an alternative to standing together in the "extremely wide tidal zone / shallow near shore waters," asking if we "can stand it" (40)—in the very literal, observed actions of animals. In the first stanza of Spahr's ballad, the speaker addresses an indeterminate "you," offering ambiguous statements of relation between said "you" and various bird species:

> if you were a snowy plover, you'd be surface feeding
> if you were a northern pintail, you'd be continually whistling
> if you were a magnificent frigate, you'd be flamboyantly displaying
> you'd know what you'd need
> if you were a laughing gull
> or a red-breasted merganser
> if you were this moment, this world (39)

Immediately, a pattern predicated on Spahr's use of anaphora and identical syntactical structure emerges. Despite the poem's dependence on conditional phrases (and the instability carried by that conditional), this pattern and the speaker's appeals to behavioral habits establish an authoritative tone. The poem uses this sense of security to subtly complicate the relationality between the reader and these animals, as the stanza's final line juxtaposes the specificity of the previous lines with an indeterminate temporality ("this moment") and an object of incomprehensible scale ("this world"). In essence, Spahr uses the space created by the stanza to produce an imitation of comfort, only to enact the unsettling of comfortability.

Ultimately, “Calling You Here” stands in opposition to stasis in the face of the end of the world. Gesturing toward the dichotomy between ambivalent human response and ostensibly predetermined animal behaviors, the speaker situates an effective response to human-caused environmental collapse in the animal world. This claim surfaces at the level of the poem’s diction, as most of the action verbs belong to animals, and culminates in the poem’s final stanza, when the ambiguous collective imitates animalistic methods of resistance alongside human-made ones: “if we were a pygmy scaly-tailed flying squirrel, we’d swing down and bite them / if we were an oryx, we’d use our horns against them / if we were an explosive, we’d explode alongside them” (40). Spahr’s poem both subtly and overtly encourages a collective response, as human-made explosives enter the frame before the speaker explicitly calls for a unified occupation of natural spaces—“if we came together and laid down in a farm land / if we came together and occupied a grassland” (40)—constructing a fluid contingent situated against an ambiguous they-who-are-not-us. Spahr’s poem transfers the onus for action from an individual to a collective, interspecies body and in doing so, the poem avoids self-containment. It constructs relationalities in order to imagine their constraints and gauge the potential for collaboration:

> If we came together our reasons be spreading
> our waters, our lands
> we’d be calling
> we’d be calling you here (40)

“Calling you here” then, depending on where Spahr’s reader places the you, becomes a call to action and an invocation for improved conditions, an invocation for another, at the moment unimaginable, world. The anaphoric “if we were” carries with it an implicit response: *but we are not these things in which action is situated*. What then am I, are you, are we to do—and are you with us or them?

Noticeably absent from Spahr's poem is an admission of the speaker's complicity in the matter. Perhaps this omission results from the poem's commitment to universalisms—the universal, indeterminate "you" and "we." That is to say, the ambiguity of the poem's pronouns encompasses the speaker, making the "I" and the "you" almost interchangeable. Or perhaps Spahr's implication of the reader (rather than the poet) is a by-product of the poem's claim on urgency. I do not wish to suggest that poets should absolve themselves from critiquing their positionalities and inevitable contribution to anthropogenic processes. This work remains important. However, it seems that the ambitions of Spahr's poem align more with unsettling a static "you" than interrogating an always partially culpable "I".

This decision introduces important questions into the literary landscape of contemporary ecopoetry. Do poets, in occupying an increasingly less inhabitable planet, no longer enjoy the luxury of subtlety? Should poets turn to recognizable, accessible genres, such as the ballad, to inspire action in "this moment, this world" (39) amongst a broader reading public? In other words, how can an event bound to the physical page best lead to meaningful material interventions beyond the page? For both Teare and Spahr, the answers to these lines of inquiry begin by deploying the space created by the poem to revisit, rethink, and reconstitute relations, be it the relationship between embodied experience and image construction or the relationship between human and non-human actors.

"Air Milk," another poem from my manuscript, begins to evaluate the position of human actors and human-made objects in relation to a global anthropogenic event. In this way, the poem—like "Calling You Here—attempts to combat anthropocentrism. "Air Milk," however, does not focus on building contingents across species. Instead, the poem positions human actors in the background of an ecological phenomenon of global scale and situates anthropogenic

processes as inseparable from the continual extraction from and reshaping of ecologies promoted by global capitalism. As such, the poem positions market-driven solutions as not only insufficient but incompatible with the scale of the apocalyptic event.

In the Anthropocene, nothing is clean. Poets, like other actors subsumed into the flow of global capital, occupy positions of always already compromised ethicality. The question, for the poets and poems I have discussed over the course of this essay, is not how poets can restore their relationship to the natural world—because that relationship, as it is portrayed in the nature poetry Teare and Spahr attack, never existed. Instead, these poets seek a poetics that does not further alienate a reader from the lived realities of the Anthropocene, a poetics that immerses the reader in the precarity of this geological epoch while it pursues more ethical modes of composition and interaction.

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