

When April's green no longer endures: Climate change and ecopoetry in the Anthropocene

by

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my Nonni, Susan Rosamilia Glickman, and my Grandma, Sharon Hockmuth Glickman. I know you would be proud of me.

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the way climate change has informed and impacted the genre of poetry about nature, leading to a new genre: ecopoetry. Using Wallace Stevens's nature poetry as a proxy for the Western poetic canon, I establish the Modernist and Transcendentalist modes of experiencing and describing nature. I place him, and other poets of his time, in context with their historical moment. I track the historical moment from Stevens's time to the present, looking specifically at poetic and environmental history. Then, I use Juliana Spahr as a representative example of the ecopoetic movement through an interview I conducted and close reading analysis of her poetry. Specifically, I examine three ecopoetic strategies present in her work: pronoun use, poetic locality, and repetitious form. These strategies make her poetry, and ecopoetry as a whole, more embodied, meaning that readers can experience the existential threat of climate change in a more understandable and tangible way through the precise language of ecopoetry. This produces an understanding more rooted in the emotional, experiential, and personal than traditional ways of knowing about climate change, like graphs and lists. With Spahr as a part of the new "ecopoetic canon," I introduce a more contemporary poet, Craig Santos Perez, and look at his 2020 poetry collection, *Habitat Threshold*. Through a close reading comparison of Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" and Santos Perez's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Glacier," I show that knowledge of anthropogenic climate change has made poetry more self-aware and more political. I show that poetry can make the Anthropocene and the experience of living in it more legible and embodied for the readers.

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Introduction

In his early 20th century poem “Sunday Morning,” Wallace Stevens writes, “Death is the mother of beauty.” He is talking about the way ephemerality — of the seasons, of nature — lends a sheen of beauty to the world. But what happens when death is no longer cyclical, but permanent? In Stevens’s poem, “April’s green endures” because no matter how hot or yellow the summer, come next year it will be a green April again. Two decades into the twenty-first century — and despite a half-century of Earth Days¹ — a green April is no longer guaranteed. Thanks to climate change, maybe April will already be hot and humid, or will still be languishing in the grayness of February and March. Mortality, which once birthed beauty to Stevens, now can mean something much more permanent: many species going extinct, for example, means the end of cyclicity, and is not just a point on a circle of life, death, and rebirth. Although Stevens would have been familiar with the concept of extinction from Charles Darwin’s seminal *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859, premature extinction — not due to natural selection or a natural disaster, but to artificial human intervention — was not a widespread idea. Despite the fact that Americans were aware of the ways overhunting and the Industrial Revolution changed the environment, premature extinction at the hands of humanity as a whole was not nearly as prevalent as it is today. The death of a species due to natural selection, according to Darwin, was just as natural as the creation of a new species. While beautiful, the nature poetry of Wallace Stevens’ time and the ideas about nature it espouses — as something eternal, ever-changing and yet never-changing, in tune with a higher natural power, and somewhat separate from the human world — no longer holds up. “Nature poetry” is somewhat of an intentionally vague term, but in

¹ The first Earth Day was April 22, 1970.

this thesis it generally encompasses poetry on the topic of the natural world or that adopts an ecological perspective or persona.

Two decades into the 21st century, a new vanguard of poets lead the way in a genre emerging out of traditional nature poetry, but with a more political and self-aware slant: ecopoetry. The political aspect of ecopoetry is undeniable, though it requires a more expansive definition of the term “political” than the narrow, governance-oriented definition most often used. This narrow definition, exemplified in Merriam-Webster’s entry for “political,” emphasizes the party apparatus and governing: “of or relating to government, a government, or the conduct of government; of, relating to, or concerned with the making as distinguished from the administration of governmental policy; of, relating to, involving, or involved in politics and especially party politics.” My working definition of “political” in this thesis recognizes the fact that governmental policy and party platforms have indelible impacts on citizens’ everyday lives, and therefore “the political” encompasses much of our lives, even when these aspects would not be considered explicitly political in the governmental sense. For example, in terms of ecopoetry, one’s experience interacting with endangered species is political, because political decisions concerning zoning laws that contribute to deforestation or destruction of that species’ habitat have direct impacts on that experience and that species’ continued existence. Even the choice to have a child — something the poet Santos Perez explores in his work, which I analyze in chapter four — is a political one, because it entails bringing a child into a world that may look very different than the one the parent grew up in due to the effects of climate change, and requires adding a child’s consumption of resources and therefore their carbon footprint to the planet. These effects, in turn, are directly impacted by emissions restrictions, deforestation, and investment in the fossil fuel industry, among others.

Ecopoetry is also self-aware, or perhaps a better term would be species-aware, specifically of the anthropogenic effects of climate change perpetuated by individuals. It recognizes the inescapable fact that human activity has a significant impact on the natural world, and in fact that the “natural” and “human” worlds are not separate at all, but are part of a larger whole. Ecopoets grapple with their humanity in relation to this whole, and with their mortality and modes of living that are inextricably tied to the mortality of the planet. Ecopoetry asserted itself as an “official” genre of poetry in 2001, only a year after the term “Anthropocene” was coined.² The term “Anthropocene” refers to the geologic age in which human activity has a significant impact on the Earth.

In this thesis, I investigate how poetry can convey an understanding of climate change and its relation to mortality and environmental breakdown in a uniquely embodied way in order to help my reader make sense of such a vast existential threat through the art-form of poetry. When we are faced with the incomprehensible enormity of climate change, the ecopoet puts the unspeakable into words. The unknowable becomes knowable again — or at least more within our grasp. I focus on Wallace Stevens as my pre-Anthropocene³ poet, showing how poetry has always used nature as a way to understand mortality, but also how pre-Anthropocene mortality in nature is vastly different from post-Anthropocene mortality in its permanence. Juliana Spahr and Craig Santos Perez represent part of the “ecopoetic canon” as poets who write with knowledge of the Anthropocene.

² Jonathan Skinner coined the term “ecopoetics” in his journal *ecopoetics*; Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer coined the term “Anthropocene” in 2000, in a chapter in the book *The Future of Nature*. Definitions for key terms can be found in the Glossary. I will discuss these terms and their applications further throughout the thesis.

³ By “pre-Anthropocene,” I really mean before general public *awareness* of the Anthropocene, since Stevens was arguably writing after the Anthropocene had geologically begun, even if he did not know it.

My methodology is interdisciplinary, including mainly the field of English literature but also anthropology and history. Using Stevens's "Sunday Morning" as a starting point, I rely on close reading and literary analysis of poetry by using certain authors and poems as carefully chosen "proxies" for the genre or movement. I also provide historical, cultural, and anthropological context for climate change as it relates to general public perception and to ecopoetry. By doing this, I aim to establish a connection with readers' familiar knowledge of climate change while introducing specific examples and the way climate change manifests in ecopoetry via my own literary analysis.

I use several sources to contextualize my argument within the larger study of ecopoetry. I use Matthew Griffiths' *The New Poetics of Climate Change: Modernist Aesthetics for a Warming World* (2017), in which he argues that re-examining Modernist poetry within the context of climate change can offer insights into how we deal with this complex phenomenon. He acknowledges the emergence of poetry that specifically and explicitly deals with the topic of climate change, but worries that it becomes too intensely self-conscious of its own implications. He is interested in the relationship between natural phenomena and their representation in language, and how poets grapple with and/or use that relationship to make a point about agency of the self and the environment. This source is important in re-examining Stevens's work in light of climate change, and as a starting point for my argument that pushes back against the idea that self-awareness in ecopoetry is negative.

I also use Margaret Ronda's *Remainders: American Poetry at Nature's End* to trace the route from Wallace Stevens to the contemporary poets I will use in my thesis. Ronda examines the way ecological poetry has evolved from the advent of the atomic bomb to today. She begins in the 1940s and '50s with poets who are reckoning with the existential threat of the atomic

bomb and its possible enormous impact on nature, then moves on to the way environmental concern began to seep into general consciousness in the mid-'60s with an understanding that toxic sludge and air pollution was harmful. She covers the '70s-era poetry exemplifying a utopic and anti-capitalist "Revolutionary Pastoral"⁴ style, and then finally moves into the modern age by presenting the idea of "the end of nature" and analyzing destructive creation, the feeling that it is "too late," and the concept of reversibility vs. irreversibility in contemporary ecopoetry.

I use Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* in my discussion of Craig Santos Perez's treatment of the glacier in the last chapter, employing his concept of the "hyperobject." I also use William Cronon's 1995 article *The Trouble With Wilderness* to understand and articulate the development of American interaction with the environment, particularly with undeveloped land.

Several other sources inform my investigation of ecopoetry, including Forrest Gander's *The Future of the Past: The Carboniferous & Eco-poetics* (2011), which points to the gap that results between authorial representation of ecological concepts (through syntax, shape, form, rhythm, rhyme, etc.) and how those representations are perceived by the reader. I adapt some of the five common ecopoetic strategies he lists, like self-reflexivity and dispersal of the agency of "I," to analyze key poems. I will use Scott Knickerbocker's *Ecopoetics: The Language of Nature, the Nature of Language* (2012) to discuss Stevens with an ecopoetic lens. Although not directly quoted, I use some ideas in Thomas Pughe's *Pastoral and/as the 'Ecological Work' of Language* in my discussions of mortality, as he says that grappling with mortality reminds people that they are part of nature; in other words, that nature and death aren't external concepts but something innate to being human. John Shoptaw's *Why Ecopoetry?* aids in defining the genre,

⁴ Poems in the "Revolutionary Pastoral" style "create a distinctive friction between tumult and ease" by "holding images of total environmental catastrophe alongside visions of possible simplicity, renewal, and light living on the earth" (Ronda 67).

and Libby Robin's *Environmental Humanities and Climate Change: Understanding Humans Geologically and Other Life Forms Ethically* helps situate ecopoetry in the broader field of ecological humanities.

The following thesis will comprise four chapters. In the first chapter, I will track the development of climate change knowledge to the general public and the evolution of ecopoetry out of nature poetry. This will set the stage for discussion of Wallace Stevens's impact on the genealogy of ecopoetry as well as providing context for the poetry of the contemporary authors I analyze in later chapters.

In the second chapter, I discuss the poetry of Wallace Stevens, focusing mainly on his poem "Sunday Morning." I examine how he conceptualizes nature and its relation to mortality and the body and self — namely, how he sees nature as an ever-renewing phenomenon and avers that change is life. I contextualize his work in the historical period and with the poetry of the time by briefly comparing his conception of nature to a previous generation's poet, Walt Whitman, in "This Compost." I confront Stevens's relationship to ecopoetry and reestablish what I mean by "the poetic canon."

In my second chapter, I examine the poetry of Juliana Spahr, using both her poetry and an interview I conducted with her about her work to show the relation of nature and the self in her work. Using Forrest Gander's five ecopoetic strategies as a starting point, I put forth my own three main ecopoetic strategies: locality, the self through pronouns, and emphasis through repetition. These strategies guide my analysis of her poetry and I connect them to the work they do towards elucidating Spahr's aim of more tangible and approachable, and therefore more embodied and understandable, ecological awareness.

In my third chapter, I examine the poetry of Craig Santos Perez, whose work is the most recent I examine in my thesis (his collection *Habitat Threshold* is from 2020). I analyze the way the self and the political are inextricable, and are in fact a part of the environment, as well as how mortality asserts itself throughout these poems. I use an article written by Santos Perez to examine his personal relationship to ecopoetry, as I did with Spahr's interview. I circle back to Stevens by doing a close reading of Santos Perez's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Glacier" in comparison to Stevens' original "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," which offers insights on how poetry has (and must) become more explicitly politically environmental in the current historical period.

In my conclusion, I discuss my own inspiration for this thesis and emphasize the importance of having a personal understanding and awareness of climate change that extends beyond knowing that it exists and wanting to stop it. I argue that being able to connect your own mortality to that of the planet through the medium of poetry is integral to a deeper understanding of climate change and, ultimately, to stopping and trying to reverse the damage done.

This is where poetry becomes life and death. Poetry, through its unique ability to make its readers feel something deeply with language, has the power to create an understanding of climate change rooted in the body and the self in order to apply that understanding to the larger world. Instead of relying on purely fact-based mediums to understand climate change, poetry offers a way to know, sense, and perceive the external ecological world in a way that is personal and relies on emotion and experience. Ecopoetry is driven not only by a love for the world but also by a desperate need to save it by preserving the functioning of its basic systems and multi-species populations — or, more aptly, to make humanity care about saving it. Here in the second decade of the 21st century, you and I are inundated by devastating climate news: a flood,

a chemical spill, polluted groundwater, dying species. Every day brings a new atrocity. But at the same time, every day brings a new impossibly blue sky, or flurry of snowflakes, or the feeling of sunshine on your bare skin. How can a dying world be so beautiful? The ecopoet strives not to answer this unanswerable question, but to explore it in every possible way. Nature has inspired poets for centuries, but only recently has that inspiration been so fraught. The paper on which I write ecopoems comes from a torn-down tree, contributing to deforestation and habitat loss. The pen I use to write it came from Amazon, shipped in a box that was much too large and arrived much too quickly, spewing carbon dioxide into the earth's atmosphere all the while. Even ecopoetry, which is by definition self-conscious of its place in the cycle of adding to climate change, cannot escape culpability. But the only thing worse than deeply feeling this pain for the damage we cause to the planet would be to not feel it at all. Sometimes, when I see a graph of rising temperatures or a photo of a newly extinct animal, I have to close off the part of myself that feels — the very part of myself that I read poetry with — in order to continue with my day. It seems like there is danger in feeling, because the emotion is too big to be contained in my body. The grief and despair — what some call “climate doom”⁵ — feels like it could swallow me whole. But ecopoetry grasps at that unthinkably enormous emotion and whittles it down to something that can fit in my hands. This is what ecopoetry does for us, as people living in an age of climate doom — it embodies the emotion, makes it tangible, able to be felt in a way that goes beyond amorphous despair. Humans have long used art to comprehend their world, and ecopoetry is just the newest iteration of that tradition. When we are faced with an unthinkable reality, art allows us to confront it.

⁵ The feeling that the climate has gone past its tipping point and that it is “too late” to do anything to save or improve the planet, and that therefore it is easier to give up or become apathetic.

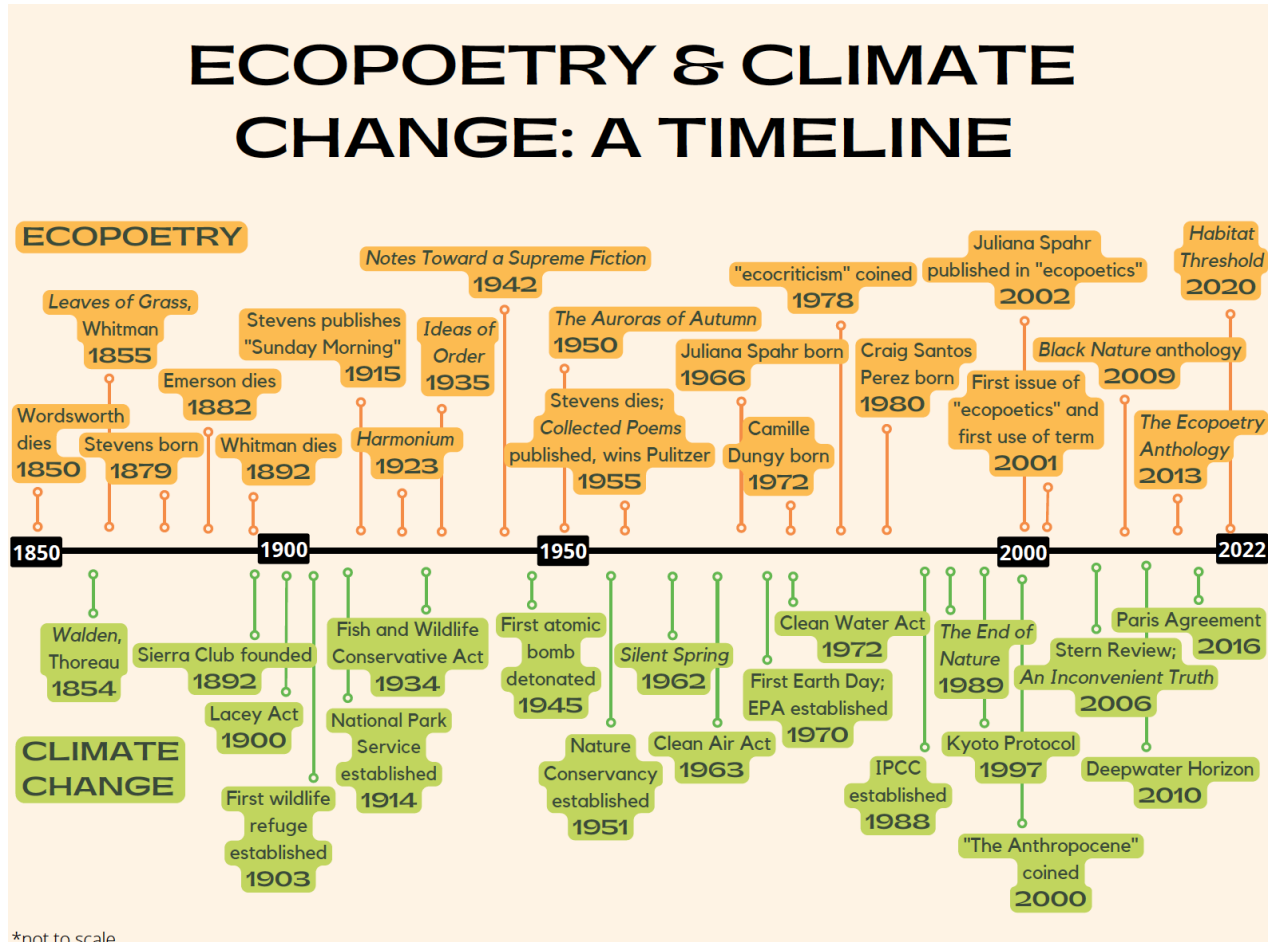


Figure 1. Climate change and eco-poetry timeline by Emilia Ferrante

In order to understand contemporary poetry and what makes it unique to the current time period and how it raises awareness of climate issues, we must return to nature poetry of the 19th and 20th century. Above, I have offered a brief timeline of poetry and climate change; obviously, it stretches back much further than the first date I have here in the late 19th century, but this was when the first conservation efforts began in earnest and therefore when the environment began to occupy a more definite space as an abstract concept in American consciousness. As Figure 1 makes clear, nature poetry is a genre with a long and storied history before “climate change” entered into the public consciousness. But in order to trace the way nature poetry gave rise to eco-poetry, and the way vague notions of preserving natural landscapes gave way to a populace

familiar with the notion of climate change, I found it necessary to map out the process visually. Each thing unfurled into the next, and my understanding of it refused to conform to the linearity of time as it stretched from the mid-19th century to today. On the top of the timeline, in orange, is the advancement of ecopoetry as it evolved from the tail end of Romanticism to the present day. On the bottom of the timeline, in green, is the progression of general knowledge of the environment and, eventually, of climate change.

Notably, the bottom part of the timeline does not track climate science itself; it does not offer information about sea level rises, temperature increases, or major weather events exacerbated by climate change. While these more scientific aspects of climate change are of course important, and ultimately inform the public conversation about and knowledge of climate change, they in themselves are not as important to my thesis as the events that mark public awareness of the environment. What I am calling events include pertinent works that gained popular appeal, government statements and legislation, international agreements, and major environmental events. For example, Thoreau's *Walden* from 1854 — one of the most famous Transcendentalist works, sharing literary space with much poetry, including Stevens's — remains firmly on the bottom part of the timeline, because his work had a more significant impact on readers' awareness of their environment than on the poetry in ecopoetry's lineage. This logic, too, goes for Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962; although the environmental exposé used literary techniques, its ramifications were far wider in the realm of public awareness of environmental issues than in the literary world. Including major environmental events like the detonation and resulting destruction of the atomic bomb and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill⁶ contextualizes the other points on the timeline, both poetic and environmental, with an awareness

⁶ The Deepwater Horizon oil spill was an industrial disaster that occurred on April 20, 2010 in which an oil rig owned by BP spilled millions of barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. Eleven workers were killed and marine wildlife was severely affected.

of what was in the news at the time environmentally. To very different degrees, both the atomic bomb and Deepwater Horizon offered the public a glimpse of the havoc human influence could wreak on the natural world.

I also include the important births and deaths of key figures — the death of Wordsworth for a rough end of Romanticism; Emerson and Whitman's death as the deceleration of Transcendentalism; Spahr and Santos Perez's births as the beginning of the era of the new vanguard of eco-poets. Placing their births allows the reader to make note of the way certain events on the timeline would have affected the society they grew up in — and perhaps allows the reader, too, to imagine situating their own birth on the timeline and repeating a similar exercise.

Chapter 1

I. From *Harmonium* to ecopoetics, from conservationism to climate action

Wallace Stevens's career represents a particularly interesting period in poetic and climatic history. He was born in Pennsylvania near the end of the 19th century, in 1879; Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, both noted nature poets and writers in the Transcendentalist movement, both died within the first fifteen years of Stevens's life. The Transcendentalists were nature writers who believed in the transcendental — hence the name — power of the natural world, and in its application to the human experience. Perhaps the most famous Transcendental works were Emerson's *Nature*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (which I mention in Chapter 2), and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, which as essays, poetry, and prose respectively interrogated the relation of the self to its environment. Stevens was most certainly influenced by this literary movement as he entered the poetry community. At the same time, Stevens was a noted part of the more loosely-defined Modernist movement of the early 20th century, and his ties to Modernism situate him in time and place with his contemporary poets but is peripheral to my analysis of his poetry.

While the end of the 19th century marked the waning of the Transcendentalist movement, it represented more of a warm-up period (no pun intended) for early environmentalist movements. As the US frontier began to “close,” or meet its westward limit at the Pacific, and was no longer imagined as a wide-open space of pure opportunity (ignoring, of course, the Indigenous people who populated it), “wilderness came to embody the frontier myth, standing for the wild freedom of America's past and seeming to represent a highly attractive natural alternative to the ugly artificiality of modern civilization” and therefore suddenly became the

subject of conservation efforts (Cronon)⁷. This included the founding of the Sierra Club in 1892, an ecologically-minded nonprofit, and the establishment of the first wildlife refuge in 1903 at Pelican Island by President Theodore Roosevelt that aimed to protect migratory birds (see Figure 1). These are apt examples for the time period; nature was still seen as something wild and rugged, something that needed to be protected by environmental stewards who would keep it at arm's length (and make it available to wealthy hunters).⁸ Ironically, these preservation efforts came at the expense of the indigenous people who had long inhabited the land, who were “rounded up and moved onto reservations so that tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing their nation in its pristine, original state” (Cronon). The fact that preservation relied on appropriation of land and removal of people exposes the conception of nature as an uninhabited wilderness as a delusion of the settler colonial imagination; nonetheless, it persisted as a common conception. As wilderness, nature, then, was something separate from the self; it was something to be admired from afar, and something that could be experienced for one's own personal betterment. Humans (in this case, meaning white males) observed nature, but participated in it only superficially and recreationally. Hunting, fishing, and hiking were popular, but they were an accessory for the wealthy: “Ever since the 19th century, celebrating wilderness has been an activity mainly for well-to-do city folks. Country people generally know far too much about working the land to regard unworked land as their ideal” (Cronon). It was in the context of this general conception of nature, that Stevens began writing his own poetry on the subject.

⁷ Cronon published “The Problem With Wilderness” in the New York Times in 1995, meaning it was probably widely read and disseminated, unlike other more academic texts.

⁸ The National Park Service differentiates between conservation and preservation as such: “conservation seeks the proper use of nature, while preservation seeks protection of nature from use.” See Glossary on page 66.

A year after the National Park Service was established in 1914, Stevens published the poem around which the part of my thesis pertaining to the pre-Anthropocenic revolves: namely, “Sunday Morning.” In this poem, Stevens details a woman who, on a Sunday morning, is not at church but instead is contemplating the nature of ephemerality, beauty, life, and death. It is his ideas about these things — namely his idea that “Death is the mother of beauty” — that will serve as my counterpoint to later contemporary eco-poetic reimaginings of these same concepts.

I will return to the intricacies of “Sunday Morning” later; for now, we only need to register that it was republished in a revised form in Stevens’s first book of poetry, *Harmonium*, in 1923. In his mid-forties, and a successful insurance executive in Hartford, Connecticut, Stevens’s first book of poetry entered a literary marketplace dominated by the Modernist movement and other literary greats like T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. By the time of his death in 1955, he was distinguished enough for his *Collected Poems* to win the Pulitzer Prize, and he lived just long enough to see the world changed forever when the first atomic bomb was detonated in 1945. Because of his historical situation and poetic attention to a natural perspective in some of his work, Stevens represents a good starting point of comparison for contemporary eco-poetry. I will diverge here to a brief history of poetry and public knowledge of environmental issues in the intervening decades between Stevens’s death and the contemporary works of Spahr and Santos Perez that I focus on.

The atomic bomb had a profound effect on the world in many ways that are all important but are not all relevant to this thesis. The two most pertinent effects for my purposes are the environmental destruction it caused and the way it made widespread mortality eminently evident. Complete and near-instantaneous destruction on such an enormous scale was essentially brand new. Other disasters, like tornadoes, flash floods, or previous bomb warfare, could not come

close to the sheer immediacy and scale of the atomic bomb's destructive power. In his study of the cultural effects of the atomic bomb, Paul Boyer wrote, "The nuclear era was different. It burst upon the world with terrifying suddenness" (Boyer 4). Timothy Morton, author of *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, which I discuss further in the final chapter, writes that "the world also ended in 1945, in Trinity, New Mexico, where the Manhattan Project tested the Gadget, the first of the atom bombs, and later that year when two nuclear bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki" (Morton 7). To Morton — and I am sure Boyer would agree — the atomic bomb was one of the events that demonstrated "the logarithmic increase in the actions of humans as a geophysical force" (Morton 7). While most agree the outlook post-atomic bomb was bleak, Boyer argues that its effect was so complete that it became difficult to talk about directly: "In the absence of extended or systematic discussion by either specialists or laypersons, one must turn to other kinds of evidence: allusions in poetry and fiction" (Boyer 276). Using Boyer's concept of "nuclear consciousness," along with Morton's idea of the atomic bomb as a point of rupture, as a starting point for more pressing overall environmental consciousness makes the atomic bomb a reasonable starting point for when the Anthropocene's effects begin to be felt in earnest.

As the United States moved into the 1950s and 1960s in the aftermath of the atomic bomb, environmental consciousness began shifting away from a concept of pure wilderness and towards an awareness of the more general commingling of nature and human — and with that came the idea of the pervasiveness of pollution and toxicity. With groundbreaking exposés of toxicity like *Silent Spring*, the country as a whole became more aware of the ways polluting actions were not spatially isolated and in fact could affect far-reaching areas. The most important aspects of nature that we took for granted — air and water — were suddenly revealed to be

vulnerable beyond a scope originally imagined. Legislative action, like the passage of the Clean Air Act in 1963, both legitimated and fueled these conceptions — government actions confirmed the viability of these environmental concerns about pollution, and their passage brought more awareness to the problem in the first place. At this point in time, the U.S. was entering the “age of environmentalism,” which was “a period, beginning in the mid-1960s, where public discussion of various forms of environmental crisis in the United States grew pervasive, leading to a wide range of grassroots campaigns, governmental legislation, and extensive media coverage of various environmental issues” (Ronda 45).

By 1970, people celebrated the first official Earth Day, which became a tradition of raising awareness for environmental concerns that has lasted for more than five decades. Ronda refers to the first Earth Day as a watershed moment in environmental history, as “the moment where a generalized definition of ecological crisis, connecting pollution, overpopulation, atomic energy, and industrialized chemicals as shared factors, entered the American mainstream” (Ronda 45). In this year, too, the Environmental Protection Agency was established, signaling further acknowledgement of environmental issues. Poetry at this time reflected a general awareness of environmental vulnerability through various forms, including a wry reimagining of the pastoral form that made explicit the irony of writing pastorally in an environmentally degraded world.

Ecological awareness, at this point, still rested on an understanding of tangible aspects of one’s environment. But after the ozone layer crisis⁹ in the 1980s, public consciousness of environmental issues reached further than to air and water on or near the earth’s surface; this was

⁹ In highly simplified terms, a “hole” in the ozone layer was discovered by scientists in May of 1985. Ozone protects the Earth’s surface from harmful ultraviolet rays. The hole was caused mainly by chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, which were found in common aerosol sprays and refrigerants. These compounds were banned by the Montreal Protocol in 1987.

a problem that stretched into an unseen atmospheric layer, becoming more and more conceptual and abstract rather than grounded in a reality people could physically experience. Now, environmental issues were exiting the realm of the tangible — smog in the air, litter in the water — and becoming not only global but abstract. The ozone layer wasn't something one could see or touch. Thus, as the problem became less real — as in, less able to be directly experienced — the problem also became much more serious. Griffiths writes that “poems begin to take up climate change as a distinctive topic in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in the wake of the first ‘greenhouse¹⁰ summer’ in 1988,” signaling a significant shift in the focus of poetry about nature towards a more explicitly global, abstract, and political poetics (Griffiths 154). While the 1987 Montreal Protocol offered a solution to the ozone problem, the cat was out of the bag when it came to the overall looming climate crisis. Action began to take place on the global scale as the world inched towards a new millennium, with the formation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)¹¹ in 1988 and the signing of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, an international treaty aimed at decreasing carbon dioxide emissions.

In a well-timed, albeit grim, opening to the 21st century, climate scientists Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer coined the term “Anthropocene” to refer to the geologic age in which human activity has a significant impact on the Earth. These impacts include melting glaciers, declining biodiversity, mass species extinction, more severe weather disasters, displacement of people (“climate refugees”), rising sea levels, increased health risks, crop failures, hotter temperatures, ocean acidification, coastal erosion, and many, many more. While the current

¹⁰ This nickname comes from the widely-circulated conception of the ozone layer’s function in the “greenhouse effect,” which imagines Earth’s atmosphere as a greenhouse that can trap or release heat from the Sun.

¹¹ IPCC Working Group II Co-Chair Hans-Otto Pörtner said in a press report about the 2022 IPCC report (the most recent report at time of writing), “The scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human wellbeing and the health of the planet. Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future.”

official geologic age is still the Holocene,¹² Crutzen and Stoermer suggested the new term, Anthropocene, as a way to “emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology” (Crutzen and Stoermer 484). Expert opinions vary on the start of the Anthropocene, ranging from the advent of farming to the Industrial Revolution to the first atomic bomb explosion. Morton writes that “The end of the world has already occurred. We can be uncannily precise about the date on which the world ended . . . It was April 1784, when James Watt patented the steam engine, an act that commenced the depositing of carbon in Earth’s crust — namely, the inception of humanity as a geophysical force on a planetary scale” (Morton 7). Others place the beginning of the Anthropocene not at the start of the Industrial Revolution, but at the start of the Great Acceleration¹³ in the 1940s. While there is no general consensus, one thing is clear: regardless of when the Anthropocene started, we are in it now. For the purposes of my thesis, I am focusing on general awareness of the Anthropocene to determine its impact on poetry, not its actual start date, so Crutzen and Stoermer’s paper that coins the term “Anthropocene” will count as the start date — not of the Anthropocene itself, but of the public’s awareness of it. Not the “end of the world,” as Morton would put it, but the public knowledge that that end existed. I recognize that not every climate scientist or geologist ascribes to the concept of the Anthropocene, but for the purposes of my thesis, I will assume its existence, as well as the existence of human-created climate change.

Ecopoetry asserted itself as an official genre of poetry in 2001, only a year after the term “Anthropocene” was coined. The poetry journal *ecopoetics*, started by Jonathan Skinner, published its first edition in 2001 and went defunct in the late 2000s; by then, ecopoetry was an established genre and accepted topic of literary ecocriticism. *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, edited by Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street, came out in 2013 as a seminal text of the genre — in

¹² The current geologic epoch, which began after the last major ice age roughly 11,700 years ago.

¹³ The dramatic escalation of human activity capable of affecting the climate starting in the mid-20th century.

fact, Santos Perez specifically mentions in an article for *The Georgia Review* that he uses this anthology in his ecopoetry classes. *The Ecopoetry Anthology* paved the way for the publication of other collections with more specific aims. For example, *Ghost Fishing: An Eco-justice Poetry Anthology* edited by Melissa Tuckey in 2018 focused on uplifting marginalized voices calling for environmental equity, and *Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California* edited by Lucille Day and Ruth Nolan in the same year highlighted the diverse ecopoetic output of Californian poetry. Importantly, unlike the conception of nature as untouched (white) wilderness in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that informed Stevens's work, the idea of nature was being opened to new conceptions that were previously tamped down by louder, more privileged voices. For example, noted ecopoet Camille Dungy edited the anthology *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* in 2009 (another anthology Santos Perez specifically mentions as a teaching aid), which reclaimed nature as a part of the Black experience by offering an alternative story of nature through the eyes of Black poets. In the flurry of ecopoetic activity in the first few decades of the new millennium, the contemporary poets I focus on as representative of the genre, Spahr and Santos Perez, published their notable works, including the poems I will analyze for this thesis.

But what exactly is ecopoetry? Because of the newness of the genre and its inherent malleability as climate conditions continue to shift, a definition is not as simple as it might sound. In *Ecopoetics: The Nature of Language, the Language of Nature*, ecopoetry is “the foregrounding of poetic artifice as a manifestation of our interrelation with the rest of nature” (Knickerbocker 159). According to *Why Ecopoetry?*, ecopoetry is “nature poetry that has designs on us, that imagines changing the ways we think, feel about, and live and act in the world” or, put more simply, poetry that is both environmental — about nature — and environmentalist —

having an explicitly political aim (Shoptaw 408). Ecopoetry also “investigates — both thematically and formally — the relationship between nature and culture, language and perception” in a definition opposed to nature poetry, which is just poetry “where nature features as theme” (Gander 216). The original *ecopoetics* literary journal said it was dedicated to “exploring creative-critical edges between writing (with an emphasis on poetry) and ecology (the theory and praxis of deliberate earthlings)” (Skinner 2). Every scholar may define it differently, but every definition includes the same basic components: nature as the primary topic and a political emphasis on the implications of human interaction with the environment. For the purposes of this thesis, then, ecopoetry is explicitly political poetry about the environment that examines interactions between humans and nature.

If I have answered the question of what is ecopoetry, it may be necessary, too, to answer the related question: why ecopoetry? Why give a new name to a subgenre of nature poetry now, to set it apart from others in the larger genre? The answer to this concern lies in the way both politics surrounding the environment and the stakes of the environment itself shifted. As stated above, U.S. poetry was always concerned with the environment, in ways that largely reflected the time period that poetry was written in. For example, Romanticist poetry embraced associations of nature with morality, virtue, and freedom; the natural environment was something to be admired and described, but was not necessarily something integral to the whole of the poet’s being. Transcendentalist poetry interrogated what communing with and trying to understand nature could create both experientially and poetically for the writer, as it began to see nature as a sort of teacher both morally and spiritually. Pastoralism relied on the idyllic, seeing the environment as a phenomenon to be described. I believe, then, that ecopoetry deserves its own place as a recognized subgenre of the venerated type that is nature poetry. Much like how

Crutzen and Stoermer thought it necessary to create a new name for the current geologic epoch, so too did poets and scholars think it necessary to give a name to the form of poetry that sprung up in the Anthropocene's wake.

Chapter 2

II. Wallace Stevens and “that happy time” before poets knew about climate change

Wallace Stevens was a prolific poet throughout the first half of the 20th century (see Figure 1). The key to understanding his poetry in a larger environmental context is to situate it in history. Stevens was not the stereotype of a typical 20th-century nature poet as we would think of one today, with the quintessential image of a simple cabin near Walden Pond and a poet enraptured by the bounty of nature around him (of course, Thoreau did not even fully fit this stereotype himself). Knickerbocker describes Stevens as “an effete, urbane, hedonistic, well-dressed dandy who delighted in exotic treasures and sweet treats” (Knickerbocker 20). His poetry, though, often contains thoughtful and complex meditations on life, death, nature, and everything in between. My goal in this chapter is not to offer a broad overview of Stevens’s poetry, nor to examine it in concert with his identity. As one of the most famous poets of the 20th century, scholarship has traversed this realm extensively. Scholars like Cary Wolfe, Helen Vendler, Paul Mariani, and Harold Bloom among many, many others have written in depth analyses of his work and life. Instead, I want to use Stevens as a sort of canonical model of 20th-century poetry about the natural world and the conditions of the United States at that time. While Stevens is not, I am aware, a traditional nature poet (in the way Robert Frost is, for example) since he definitely tends toward the Modernist and philosophical realms, I focus on the areas of his poetry that explicitly involve nature as a central lens through which to see the world.

While Stevens illustrates a pre-Anthropocene attitude of nature poetry, and his poetry is certainly part of the Western literary canon, I acknowledge this canon is problematic, as it privileges straight white male voices and tends to erase historically marginalized voices. Using

“the canon” to represent an entire genre or time period not only oversimplifies but also excludes; it remakes history into a place populated only by privileged white people. Black and Indigenous writers are working to break down the canon and build back up a history that includes marginalized writers, with works like the *Black Nature* anthology edited by Camille Dungy and *Indigenous Literatures from Micronesia* with series editor Craig Santos Perez, the latter of whose work in contemporary ecopoetry I will examine in the fourth chapter. Using Stevens as a historical counterpoint to these contemporary poets is a choice intended to highlight the fact that the fast-growing “ecopoetic canon” is much more diverse in the voices it contains, including especially women, Black people, and Indigenous people, than the nature poetry canon of the late 19th and early 20th century. Stevens is not necessarily the undisputed best poet of the pre-Anthropocene time period, but rather he represents a dominant tradition. I also chose Stevens for a selfish reason: because I love his poetry and wanted to write about it more. Alongside acknowledging Stevens’s privilege, I can also acknowledge his talent and resounding impact on poetry and on myself as a poet, writer, and person. His line in “Sunday Morning,” “Death is the mother of beauty,” was one of the driving inspirations behind writing this thesis.

In many ways, Wallace Stevens was somewhat of a blueprint for the contemporary ecopoetic movement. Scholars generally agree that ecopoetry is borne directly out of nature poetry, especially Modernist nature poetry, the latter a category into which Stevens fairly neatly fits. Stevens, as a Transcendentalist and Modernist nature poet, descends from the Romantic poetic tradition, in which poets were committed to the ideals of representing the external world through descriptive language and examining their own place as an observer, often to religious and spiritual ends.

One of the most famous English Romantic poets, Wordsworth, is known for his impressive language and long meditations on the natural world. However, even Wordsworth engaged in an early form of ecopoetic consciousness, as he became aware of his own impact on the world around him. For example, in his poem “Nutting,”¹⁴ Wordsworth describes how “the hazels rose / Tall and erect, with tempting clusters hung, / A virgin scene!” but later how he “dragged to earth both branch and bough, with crash / And merciless ravage,” leaving in his wake a scene “Deformed and sullied.” And the lesson he learns and imparts at the end of the poem is to “move along these shades / In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand / Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods.” Even before awareness of the permanence of climate change, poets were using writing to understand the changes humans wrought on the natural world around them — in Wordsworth’s time, that would have been the Industrial Revolution fundamentally changing his English landscape. So, like Stevens several decades and ecopoets many decades later, Wordsworth was engaged in the fundamental struggle of the nature poet to understand the natural world and its changes through language. But if this poetic aim crops up in some way within each generation of poetry movements, it becomes more and more meta and self-analytical as we approach the present.

Stevens, as a late Transcendentalist and early Modernist, “proposes that our perception of the world is always coloured by our conception of it” (Griffiths 66). The epistemological notion that conception affects perception can map onto one’s relationship to nature — the poet can perceive nature as either a separate entity or as a part of a whole of which they themselves are also a part. Stevens, like ecopoets, has a conception of nature in which he is a participant and observer in nature and therefore is part of nature. This colors his perception, and so he writes as one part of a whole observing another part. While this attitude towards the world may be more of

¹⁴ I am using the version of this poem that appears on the Poetry Foundation website.

a result of his epistemological belief that conceptions affect perceptions, the end result of a more observant, self-critical poetic narrator still emerges. He acknowledges and explores the fact that his own perceptual biases change the way he sees the world. Stevens does this in a playful and abstract way, while contemporary ecopoets (understandably) place more weight on the consequences of their individual actions as well as their actions as a part of the human collective.

“Sunday Morning” was first published in heavily revised form in 1915 in *Poetry Magazine*, and was published in its original restored form (which I will be using) in 1923. The poem describes a woman’s Sunday morning spent not in church but still (or, perhaps, instead) in spiritual and philosophical reflection. She compares the natural world — the one she lives in — to the realm of heaven. The poem’s speaker, who eventually elides with the woman herself, asks: “Shall she not find in comforts of the sun, / In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else / In any balm or beauty of the earth, / Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?”¹⁵ She meditates on the divinity of the world she currently lives in, all which we two decades into the 21st century can relate to:

Divinity must live within herself:
 Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
 Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
 Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
 Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
 All pleasures and all pains, remembering
 The bough of summer and the winter branch.

¹⁵ I am using the version of this poem that appears on page 71 in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens: The Corrected Edition* published in August of 2015.

These are the measures destined for her soul.

Stevens eloquently ties human emotion to natural phenomena. Succinctly, he captures the melancholy feelings that can arise simply with the changing of the weather. Importantly, the natural world this woman lives in is familiar to our own. Rain, snow, the forest blooming, autumn nights — these are all aspects of the world that seem just the same in Stevens’s early 20th century writing as they do today. It echoes a similar refrain to other Modernist and Transcendentalist nature poetry, too, as it emphasizes nature as a conduit for the human. Nature is viewed purely through the lens of how it affects human emotion. Divinity notably comes not from nature but from “within herself”: not the rain, but the “passions of rain,” not the snow, but the “moods in falling snow.” Nature is not in itself divine, but the emotions it can engender in a person are, thus making it a medium through which humans can experience divinity and whose perishable aspects lead humans to create divinity. This treatment of nature is in line with Stevens’s other work, which “expresses an awareness that we cannot separate ourselves from the world to regard it objectively, and recognizes that perception is always entangled with conception” (Griffiths 59). The natural phenomena are “not inherently good or evil” but are “perceived and constructed as such depending on human subjectivity, which is itself in flux” — the human subjectivity being the emotions that arise from nature (Griffiths 59). Those emotions and the nature that spurs them are inseparable because they coexist in the speaker’s perception of the world.

But how, then, does the woman in the poem conceive of nature as its own phenomenon? In stanza IV, Stevens writes that there is no religious idea or icon “that has endured / As April’s green endures.” The entire pull of religion — its lastingness in the face of ephemerality and of

the sweeping eraser that is history — is challenged by the fact that nature is even more lasting. No “haunt of prophecy,” or organized and didactic religion, can measure up to the divinity and sense of meaning found in nature, or “her remembrance of awakened birds, / Or her desire for June and evening.” More than that, nature is divine because of its never-ending ability to renew — as Stevens writes in the next stanza, “Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her, / Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams / And our desires.” In nature, death is beautiful, because it offers opportunity for rebirth; in religion, death is something to be feared with prophetic “haunts” and a “chimera of the grave” and “spirits.” In his comparison to organized religion, Stevens makes his ultimate point about meaning one can find in the natural world — that change and the resulting renewal is infinite. While the poem “accentuate[s] the flux and impermanence of autumn and what autumn conventionally symbolizes: impending human mortality” because it is framed through a woman’s search for divine meaning on a Sunday morning, Stevens views death itself not as something necessarily negative, but just something that *is* (Knickerbocker 41). In Stevens’s conception, death is as enduring as the life which it engenders, and both are equally beautiful.

Because this is an analysis of Stevens through an eco-poetic lens rather than a religious or philosophical one, though, I will not focus on his concepts of heaven or the afterlife, and will only consider “natural” death (due to old age) in his concept of death. Looking at the poem this way will allow for human mortality to be considered part of nature’s mortality, rather than separating the two entirely — affirming that “humans are distinct yet inseparable from the rest of nature” (Knickerbocker 4). Stevens acknowledges the very human desire for “some imperishable bliss,” but actually posits death as an answer to that desire, writing that from death “Alone, shall

come fulfillment to our dreams / And our desires.” When he makes the comparison between a changing earth and a changeless heaven, the way he views death is more fully fleshed out.

Is there no change of death in paradise?
 Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
 Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
 Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
 With rivers like our own that seek for seas
 They never find, the same receding shores
 That never touch with inarticulate pang?

If “death is the mother of beauty” was confusing to readers, Stevens here ensures that he gets his point across. He asserts his own specific meaning of death when he uses the phrase “change of death” — death is change, and change is necessary for life and beauty. He lists all the things that would not happen without change: ripe fruit falling, rivers spilling into seas, waves reaching shores. In all these examples, change is equivalent to movement and fulfillment. The logic of this poem is relatively simple: Death is change, change is movement, movement is life, life is beauty. Therefore, death equals beauty. But accepting this final proposition requires that we as readers agree with each logical step Stevens makes. In the early 20th century, it makes sense. Why should Stevens or his readers think otherwise about nature? Conservation was relatively new at the time and ideas about humans affecting nature in a more permanent way (see Figure 1) were not prevalent yet in mainstream schools of thought in the United States. Darwin’s concept of extinction and natural selection was well known, of course, but was viewed as part of the natural

process of evolution. Cyclicity was a given in nature: Seasons came and went, it rained and then it was dry, flowers bloomed and died and bloomed again. Readers can follow Stevens's logic without a hitch.

But looking at this work through an ecopoetic lens, it is not yet having to confront a crucial aspect that contemporary ecopoetry is constantly grappling with — namely, that death in nature actually can be permanent and devastating. Ecopoets list endangered and extinct species, they remark on frosts that prematurely kill flowers that bloomed in a string of too-warm early spring days. Death in nature is imbued with a sense of being terminal and irreversible in the age of climate change, and therefore the cycle “Sunday Morning” worships is stopped short. “Stevens lived in that happy time before we became aware of climate change,” after all (Miller 83). His nature could be endlessly cyclical, because he had no reason to know otherwise.

Before there was a broad and general knowledge of climate change in the populace, death (as Stevens conceptualizes it in his poem) in nature was not permanent and cycles went on without end, because there was no unnatural (read: human) influence that altered those cycles. Stevens was coming from a long poetic and societal tradition that viewed nature in much the same way. For example, the idea of cyclicity can be seen clearly in Walt Whitman's “This Compost,”¹⁶ which was first published in 1860 and eventually published in its current form in 1881, about three decades before Stevens first published “Sunday Morning.” In “This Compost,” Whitman sees the subject of his poem “as an element in nature's renewing and transformative powers and, paradoxically, as a promise of universal immortality” (Aspiz). Whitman marvels “That all is clean forever and forever, / That the cool drink from the well tastes so good, / That blackberries are so flavorful and juicy” and that the earth “turns harmless and stainless on its axis, with such endless successions of diseases' d corpses” and “renews with such unwitting looks

¹⁶ I am using the online version of this poem from Poets.org from their Poem-A-Day archive.

its prodigal, annual, sumptuous crops.” Stevens’s conception of the earth as a locus of massive and beautiful change is not one that sprang out of nowhere, but rather one that had a history in other nature poetry that came before. Stevens, like Whitman, lived and wrote before the atomic bomb became the first “huge threat” that would potentially actually “end the world” in 1945 (Ronda 34); before Rachel Carson brought environmental toxicity into the public eye with *Silent Spring* in 1962; before Bill McKibben wrote about *The End of Nature* in 1989; before Al Gore released the film *An Inconvenient Truth* in 2006. In short, he lived before climate change was realized by scientists and before the general human populace learned of its existence. He was writing at a time when nature really was constant in its ability to change and renew — for better or for worse, as the cycle of nature’s renewal was unphased even by the “endless successions of diseases’ d corpses” he saw.

So how can we use Stevens’s “Sunday Morning” as a comparison point for 21st century ecopoetry if the fundamental thing that makes ecopoetry different from nature poetry — the poet’s knowledge of climate change — does not apply? Because Stevens wrote in a Modernist mode and acknowledged the way an author’s perception affects the world and reality we see, even though the styles and time periods are different, Stevens is a great example of a self-conscious poet aware of his own subjectivity writing about the way humans and non-human nature interact. Contemporary ecopoets are self-consciously aware of their own subjectivity and write about humans and non-human nature interacting, too — they just do it with the added wrinkle of climate change awareness. Stevens offers a point of comparison for the way poets in the Western canon thought and wrote about nature in the early- to mid-20th century. My analysis of his work is intentionally more general and broad than my analysis will be in following

chapters, because I am focusing on the principles that guide his conception of nature poetry rather than the details that elucidate those principles.

In the next chapter, I will be using three main formal techniques to identify and compare ecopoetry — use of pronouns, spatial and temporal grounding, and repetition or listing. These are not just arbitrary techniques, but are tied to the essence of ecopoetry's very existence: pronouns are tied to the sense of self, spatial and temporal grounding to privileging locality over generality, and repetition and listing to the need to catalog death for awareness of what goes unseen. These techniques have the effect of turning the existential threat of climate change into an embodied experience that the reader can grasp in the form of the precise language and imagery of poetry. In the case of "Sunday Morning," however, the speaker is unknown, as is the female subject that becomes the voice of the poem; the poem is grand and sweeping in its place and unable to be pinned down in its time; repetition and listing are not particularly noteworthy or more prevalent than other poetic strategies.

Stevens's presence in this thesis is not as an example of ecopoetry, but as a precursor to it — a way to show its relation to its roots in Modernist nature poetry, and those roots' respective roots in earlier poetic traditions like Romanticism. Some scholars believe ecopoetry can be retrospective — that we as contemporary readers can project ecopoetic readings onto texts that predate climate change. Miller encourages that we perform "anachronistic reading" in which the reader "takes possession of the old work for present uses and in a new context" (Miller 76). In the case of Stevens, Griffiths claims that "Stevens's poems enact the failure of language to master or contain the world, and deal both implicitly and explicitly with the climate's evasion of and resistance to our intentionality" (Griffiths 60). Or, larger, one can recontextualize Stevens's literary movement: "Writing before anthropogenic climate change is recognized, the Modernists

do not have the ideological baggage that comes with that term, and the insights they offer into human-environmental relations expose tendencies, processes and relations in a world that is warming up to be ours” (Griffiths 42). While it can be generative and interesting to examine Stevens’s poetry through an ecopoetic lens, because a defining characteristic of ecopoetry in my working definition is the author’s awareness of climate change, Stevens’s work necessarily cannot be ecopoetry. However, writing as he does with the idea that “phenomenal nature is not identical with a ‘rational distortion’ that we have made of it — our imposition on the world, fitting its processes to our sense of order,” Stevens is a useful predecessor and analytical comparison for ecopoetry (Griffiths 86). We can also imagine that, if Stevens had access to the information contemporary ecopoets have, he too might have been an ecopoet, considering that he was a poet who cared deeply about the language used to describe and indeed create, in the literary sense, the natural world. But he never had to deal with knowledge of the Anthropocene, “whose precise scope remains uncertain while its reality is verified beyond question” (Morton 7). The natural world was, to Stevens, always within reach, or at least within theoretical tangibility. For nature poets of the 21st century, that uncertainty coupled with unquestionable reality comes to inform ecopoetry in both topic and form.

Chapter 3

III. Pronouns, grounding, and patterns in Juliana Spahr's ecopoetry

One of the most important figures in ecopoetic history of the 21st century is Juliana Spahr. Spahr has written several books of poetry, most recently *The Winter the Wolf Came* in 2016, but has been publishing poetry since the 1990s. Her poem “Gentle Now, Don’t Add to the Heartache” has been on multiple syllabi of English classes I have taken. Two of her poems populate the “Poetry and the Environment” collection of the Poetry Foundation website, and she is included in its official definition of “ecopoetics.”¹⁷ And her status within the genre is justified — her poem “Unnamed Dragonfly Species” (which I write about later in this chapter) was published in the second-ever issue of Jonathan Skinner’s *ecopoetics* journal, which was in some ways the genesis of the term’s official use. However, her relationship with the term is complicated. In her collection *Well Then There Now*, which was published in 2011, she writes, “Shortly after I moved to Hawai’i I began to loudly and hubristically proclaim whenever I could that nature poetry was immoral,” which she elaborates on several sentences later by writing, “I was more suspicious of nature poetry because even when it got the birds and the plants and the animals right it tended to show the beautiful bird but not so often the bulldozer off to the side that was destroying the bird’s habitat” (Spahr 2011 69). This statement is ostensibly about nature poetry, but considering ecopoetry’s close history with nature poetry (and the way it often gets lumped in with nature poetry), her reservations are relevant. She is not necessarily concerned about the fact that nature poetry is being written; instead, it’s about the way these poems are written and who is writing them, namely that they exclude the human encroachment that is both

¹⁷ In the glossary entry for “Ecopoetics,” the Poetry Foundation writes, “The influential journal *Ecopoetics*, edited by Jonathan Skinner, publishes writing that explores ‘creative-critical edges between making and writing’ and features poets such as Jack Collom, Juliana Spahr, and Forrest Gander.”

necessary to their creation and responsible for the degradation of what they write about. The Hawai'i nature poems she mentions in *Well Then There Now*, for example, are “written by those who vacation here” and are “often full of errors” — what Rob Wilson calls “747 poems,” a label that comments on these poets’ transitory, capitalist, and colonialist relationship to the island (Spahr 2011 69). Their partial view of nature — seeing only the bird and not the bulldozer — is amplified by their status as outsiders, people who, like the original colonizers¹⁸, exploit land and people in order to further a capitalist economy.

Her issue with the shallowness of nature poetry that doesn’t deal with systemic issues — like the deforestation and habitat destruction inherent in her “bulldozer off to the side” example — is stated more frankly in an interview with Jenna Goldsmith in 2016. Spahr said, “I kept going to conferences, and there would be an ecopoetics panel, and there would be a Marxist poetics panel, and they would never talk to each other... I am convinced we cannot understand anything about the crisis of capitalism without understanding environmental crisis.” As a result of this primary issue, along with general hesitation to identify with a specific label, Spahr said in the 2016 interview, “I would not say that I identify as an ecopoet.” Curious to hear if her ideas had shifted, in an interview I conducted over Zoom with Juliana Spahr on October 28, 2022¹⁹, I asked, “I’m wondering how you feel being positioned in this sort of scholarship as an ecopoet and what’s your relationship to that label now?” In her reply, she said, “I might not have to have this hesitancy anymore,” referring to the apparent division between Marxism and ecopoetry. The term has changed in the past two decades, too, in her view: “We’ve got an increasing awareness of climate crisis. I mean, people knew about it then [at the time that Jonathan Skinner coined the

¹⁸ Captain James Cook was the first European to reach the Hawai’ian Islands in 1778, and Christian missionaries first arrived in 1820. By 1853, the native population numbered only 30,000, down from 700,000 pre-colonization.

¹⁹ The interview transcript can be found in full in Appendix B.

term in 2001], but it was in a very, very obviously kind of different way. And so that term [ecopoetry] feels somewhat different.”

Despite her shifting relationship to the term itself, Spahr acknowledges her place in the scholarship of ecopoetry and the way she fits into its description, including her interest in its “formal techniques” (interview, 2022). As such, Spahr is a great introduction to modern ecopoetics. Forrest Gander states that the main ecopoetic strategies used by authors in the genre are:

1. A dispersal of ego-centered agency.
2. A stance of self-reflexivity (so that, for instance, it is said that the poem originates not within the self but within the landscape to which it is given back). ...
4. A rigorous attention to patterning.²⁰

While these are not definitive, they are a good guideline to use when outlining my own criteria for evaluating, analyzing, and comparing ecopoetry. Not every ecopoem uses all of these strategies; not every poem that uses all of these strategies is an ecopoem. Ecopoetry aims to meet nature where it is, and eco-poets do not view themselves as objective outsiders but rather as agents in a larger ecosystem, so strategies that are covered by this definition can be omitted for my purposes. However, they offer a useful framework. These strategies are broad, and helpfully so, because they can be stretched and reinterpreted to apply to many ecopoems. Most useful for my purposes will be the above listed strategies — relating to Spahr’s pronoun use, poetic locality, and repetitious form, respectively.

²⁰ This passage can be found on page 2 of his 2011 paper *The future of the past: the carboniferous & ecopoetics*.

Further, I am using Gander's strategies as a way to begin thinking about modes of comparison between different eco-poets who have different styles and different perspectives, so I will adapt them to better fit my definition of eco-poetry and the goals of this analysis. Gander's concept of "A dispersal of ego-centered agency" will become a broader analysis of pronoun use as it relates to agency and distance, "a stance of self-reflexivity" will refer to locality and the importance of temporal and spatial grounding, and "a rigorous attention to patterning" will refer to formal techniques like repetition, listing, and use of white space on the page. The effect of these strategies is to create a more embodied understanding of the natural world and the issues of climate change by crystallizing abstract topics and feelings into precise and careful language that makes existential dread easier to grasp.

For the first point, in the case of Juliana Spahr, the collectivity of agency can be seen in her use of pronouns, specifically the persona of the "I" and the collectivity of the pronouns "we" and "they." This is a constant in her poems, from her early work in the 2000s to her most recent work in the late 2010s. For example, "November 30, 2002," which is from her collection *This Connection of Everyone With Lungs* (2005), begins:

Beloveds, we wake up in the morning to darkness and watch it
turn into lightness with hope.

Each morning we wait in our bed listening for the parrots and
their chattering. (Spahr 2005 15).

In the first stanza, the “we” seems to be general — perhaps a meditation on the commonality of everyone waking up and the universality of the sunrise. But the next stanza shrinks this “we” to contain only those in “our bed,” a significantly more exclusive meaning of the pronoun than is possibly in the interpretation from the first stanza. While the first stanza invites the reader to join in the “we” as an inclusive “we,” the second stanza becomes an exclusive “we” that specifically denies the reader access to the group the pronoun refers to. In the white space between the first and second stanza, Spahr closes the “we,” making it smaller. She zooms in on a specific moment, a specific bed in the morning with a certain set of people in it that includes herself and notably does not include the reader. Excluding the reader makes the reader an outsider peering in on a moment rather than an actor within the poem. Perhaps the reader can breathe a sigh of relief, knowing that they will not be included in the main conflict of the poem; maybe the reader feels disappointed, knowing that they will not get to share fully in the joys of the “hope” Spahr mentions. Either way, the reader is distanced from the collective pronoun “we” and will assume they will not share the culpability or the specific joy of the speaker(s). In that distance is a comfort of sorts — a comfort that whatever strong emotion will be provoked in this poem, it will be one experienced at arm’s length. Any absolution of responsibility for conflict the reader might gain by being excluded, though, is tempered by the fact that the reader loses access to hope and joy in the same stroke. To love deeply, to access the “hope” Spahr’s speaker experiences with her “Beloveds,” the reader must be willing also to accept the “darkness” that accompanies it.

Further complicating theclusivity of this poem, the fourth stanza reads “When I speak of the parrots I speak of all that we wake to this / morning, the Dow slipping yet still ending in a positive mood / yesterday, Mission Control, the stalled railcar in space”. Now, when Spahr writes “all that we wake to this morning,” who, exactly, is the “we” — is it inclusive, or exclusive? The

reader is no longer sure whether they are included in the collective pronoun. By offering both an inclusive and exclusive “we” before this stanza, the reader is left in a space of limbo, the narrow sliver where the circles of inclusivity and exclusivity meet. With this fourth stanza, Spahr opens up that sliver and makes it more expansive by incorporating timely historical events (similar to the way she grounds her poems in space and time, as we will see later). Her “we” includes not only herself and the people in the bed but also every American who woke up that morning. She blurs the lines between the self and others, creating a collective that is both personal and universal.

Another way Spahr exemplifies ecopoetry in relation to Gander’s criteria is in the way she grounds her poems in place and time, which can be seen as a “stance of self-reflexivity.” The way Gander explains self-reflexivity is that it means “the poem originates not within the self but within the landscape to which it is given back” (Gander 2). Spahr undoubtedly adheres to this construct, as she firmly grounds her work both spatially and temporally. For example, in *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*, Spahr does not title her poems but rather gives them specific dates (“December 1, 2002,” for example). Thus we are offered no context for her poem other than the day it was written, containing the poem in the locality and intimacy of a single day. The dates are not really for us, the reader, nor are they entirely for Spahr herself; instead, they serve to place the poem firmly in a temporal location as a sort of snapshot of time.

Returning to the poem “November 30, 2002,” Spahr references actual events, like the stalling²¹ of a space station railcar that occurred on November 29, 2002. The railcar was unsnagged²² and returned to normal on December 1, meaning the news cycle reporting on it was

²¹ See “Space Station Rail Car Stalls on Tracks” by Marcia Dunn published Nov. 29, 2002 in *The Edwardsville Intelligencer*.

²² See “Spacewalker unsnags stalled railcar” by The Associated Press published Dec 1, 2002 in the *Herald-Tribune*.

roughly 24-48 hours. Unlike larger historical events, the railcar in space was barely even a drop in the bucket in terms of memorable news. I asked my parents, who are only four years younger than Spahr and also live in the United States, if they remember the railcar incident 20 years later; my mother said “Not even slightly.” While I concede that this is, of course, a very small sample size, it helps in the sense that Spahr was not attempting, by bringing in details like this, to be instantly and universally relatable. In fact, she was perhaps commenting on the ephemerality of things that the media deems important for only 24 hours. Compare the relative insignificance of the railcar in space to the parrots and “love and their green colors, love and their squawks” from the third stanza; one is remote with no actual bearing on the speaker’s life, the other is bursting with intimacy and immediacy. Thus, with the parrots and the railcar, Spahr places herself in the temporality of the larger interplanetary world and also in the temporality of her personal world. The railcar and the parrot sit side by side, far and near, mediated and observed, both taking up space in the same poem. The speaker’s temporality is just as important as the world’s. Spahr says this explicitly later in the poem, when she writes “Today I still speak of the fourteen that are dead in Kenya [...] as I speak of the parrots” and then “as I speak of parrots I speak of the day’s weather here, / the slight breeze and the blanket I pull over myself this morning”. The “fourteen that are dead in Kenya” most likely refers to the bombing attacks²³ at the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa, which occurred on November 28, two days before the poem’s date. This massive tragic event hundreds of miles away on an entirely different continent from Spahr sits closely, even in the same stanza and sentence, with the parrots that are right outside her window. The parrots bring her to the hyperlocal weather, the breeze that is touching her specifically, which brings her into her body through the blanket she uses. The hyperlocal weather then brings her

²³ See “TERROR IN AFRICA: ATTACKS IN MOMBASA; KENYANS HUNTING CLUES TO BOMBING; TOLL RISES TO 13” by Dexter Filkins, published Nov. 30, 2002 in *The New York Times*.

back to the local weather “in the subtropics,” from which point she moves back to the global, immediately writing “and then I speak also of East Africa, those / detained for questioning, porous borders, the easy availability of / fraudulent passports.” Spahr rapidly oscillates between the large scale and small scale, between global and local, between universal and personal. She puts these dichotomies side by side, forcing them to share lines and stanzas and therefore to commune with one another. The parrots speak to the attacks, the breeze speaks to the fraudulent passports. The reader must place the local and the global next to each other in imaginative space. Spahr guides the reader between two seeming extremes, zooming in and out, until they stop feeling so strange sitting next to one another. She places that which can be felt and immediately experienced alongside that which is abstract and distant.

A more pointed version of this — using a historical marker that will be universally recognized by her readers — is in the poem “poem written after september 11 / 2001,” also from *This Connection of Everyone With Lungs*. Instead of highlighting the ephemerality of global events in the media cycle with a list of events or effects from events, Spahr focuses on one event in which to ground her poem and zeroes in on the emotional aftermath of a single event. This poem, which starts the entire collection, cleverly uses a title that is both a date and an event, as the attacks on the World Trade Center are referred to by their date, 9/11. By doing so, and especially by doing so at the beginning of the whole collection, Spahr sets up dates to be synonymous with events — a day *is* an event, in and of itself. Thus “poem written after september 11 / 2001” sets up the system of naming that will be used throughout the rest of the collection, at the same time that it affirms the grounding of poems in space and time. Following and subverting this convention, the poem “December 1, 2002,” is situated on a specific day and located in many places around the world, the effects of what happens in those places as a mass

being more important than any individual event. Spahr lists many events: “AIDs and the history of attacks in Kenya,” “toxic fumes given off by plastic flooring in a burning nightclub in Caracas,” “one hundred and fifty people sheltering at the Catholic Mission in the city of Man,” “a diverted Ethiopian airliner, US attacks on Iraqi air defense sites, and warnings not to visit Yemen.” The listing has its own effect, which I discuss below; but in terms of spatiality, we are located throughout the world, jumping from place to place, never dwelling on one event for too long but rather creating an overwhelming atmosphere with the cumulative listed events.

Spahr also employs repetition and lists in her poetry as her main formal techniques and patterns. Listing is one of the most prevalent formal aspects of Spahr’s poetry, and she uses it throughout her works. When I asked her about her use of these techniques, she said, “I’m rhythmically interested in repetition and lists. I’ve never been super that interested in conventional things, like meter and rhyme, in the tradition, but I’m really interested in the forms that arise out of pre-literate poetics” (interview, 2022). One example of her using lists in her poetry is in “Unnamed Dragonfly Species,” a portion of which was published in the second issue of the *ecopoetics* journal as well as in full in *Well Then There Now* starting on page 75, which employs the listing technique by interspersing the bolded names of species throughout a poem. For instance, this is what the first stanza of “Unnamed Dragonfly Species” looks like:

The city of Rotterdam sent over daffodils. **A Noctuid Moth** The
daffodils bloomed in the first weeks of April. **Allegheny Woodrat**
They were everywhere. **American Bittern** They were yellow.
American Burying Beetle It was April and then the temperature
was 90 degrees and all the daffodils died immediately. **Arogos**

Skipper All at the same time. **Atlantic Hawksbill Sea Turtle** This happened right where they were living. **Atlantic Ridley Sea Turtle** It was early April. **Bald Eagle**

The original text of the poem is beginning to make its own commentary on climate change, in the line “It was April and then the temperature was 90 degrees and all the daffodils died immediately” (a clear example of “April’s green no longer endur[ing]”). However, the list of species makes its own commentary as it interrupts the speaker’s thoughts and punctuates every sentence. Reading the poem is stressful and disjointed; I found myself scrambling to look up every species and having to brace myself for the result of typing in their name and “endangered?”, because the answer would often be “Critically Endangered.” Sometimes, the answer would be “Least Concern” and “population stable,” and I would breathe a sigh of relief. Still, just one sentence later, another species name pops up and the reader is once again on unsure footing. My experience reading is an example of the way Spahr’s poetry makes the abstract embodied; instead of merely thinking about species extinction, I was experiencing the terror and grief of it through the medium of the poem. The effect of Spahr’s patterning here is to bring the scientific and factual into the realm of the emotional in a coherent way that does not devalue either aspect but rather uses them to strengthen each other.

The species names themselves are consistent in their patterning, both in their formatting and placement. Each name is placed directly after a full sentence, and is formatted either in bold type (in *Well Then There Now*) or in all capitals (in *ecopoetics*, issue 2), which sets them apart from the rest of the text of the poem. Their aesthetic appearance on the page in combination with the fact that they are in alphabetical order (from “Brook Floater Buffalo Pebble” to “Cerulean

Warbler,” for example, ending with “Yellow-breasted Chat”) give them a scientific, bureaucratic feel — like an official conservation status list, for instance. Spahr employs scientific rhetoric to communicate the real-world implications of her poem while also appealing to her readers’ presumed familiarity with fact-based text. But by including her own commentary and placing the list within a poetic form, Spahr subverts the expected coldness and impartiality of scientific language and imbues it with personal, narrative meaning. She therefore lends the emotionality of poetry to the abstract, detached list of names, allowing the danger of extinction to these species to be felt rather than merely read in the scientific mode.

About her lists of ecological subjects in poems like “Unnamed Dragonfly Species,” Spahr said “I’m interested in poems that hold large-scale things...I’m sort of interested in the information that poetry can hold. The list comes from that same tradition of listing or inventorying the animals and plants that matter” (interview, 2022). Oral traditions in poetry have long relied on repetition and lists as a way to retain large amounts of text in the memory of orators. Spahr does not shy away from length, either — “Unnamed Dragonfly Species” is many pages long — but she says, “By default, they have to be long, if you’re interested in [what kinds of ecosystems these lists create] — Do I include all the suburban animals? Do I include the microbes?” (interview, 2022). Applying Spahr’s own philosophy, exclusion is just as important as inclusion — what does not make the list says nearly as much as what does. It also means that the specific language of writing “Unnamed Dragonfly Species” in the “U” section of the poem, surrounded by alphabetized proper names like “Tomah mayfly” and “Upland sandpiper,” instead of an actual, named dragonfly species, is significant because it highlights the sheer unknown that exists in the numerous gaps she creates in the poem. Spahr’s list, then, is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. If this poem can go on for pages and pages and only mention a few species

per letter of the alphabet, when the poem feels long, the sheer scale of what is going unlisted begins to come into focus. Every time the poem jumps to a new letter, the species clamoring in the periphery become a little clearer, until the reader realizes that this whole time, they have been looking at only a tiny fraction of the bigger picture. By exhaustively listing, Spahr forces the reader to not only recognize what is there, but also to notice what is not. Like the dread and anxiety created by not knowing if the species were extinct or not, the feeling of endlessness of a long poem communicates through its form that the issue of extinction itself feels endless.

Spahr carries on the tradition that Stevens, too, was a part of — poets attempting to understand and describe their environment through language. Her formal techniques are not meant to be legible only to ecocriticism scholars; they are felt and experienced by the reader first and foremost, before any close reading or analysis. This ability to connect to the reader in an embodied way is integral to the efficacy of poetry about climate change. It transforms an abstract, faraway concept into a feeling tied to concrete details and language. The slippery feeling of loss and despair is crystallized onto a few pages, an atmospheric feeling concentrated into language.

Chapter 4

IV. The blackbird and the glacier: Craig Santos Perez and contemporary ecopoetry

If Juliana Spahr broke new ground in the contemporary realm of ecopoetics, other poets have taken up the mantle and continued to expand the genre. Since ecopoetics is strongly intertwined with politics, and politics often negatively impact marginalized groups more often and more strongly, the diversity of the contemporary ecopoetry canon is unsurprising. The contemporary ecopoet I focus on, Craig Santos Perez, is Chamoru Indigenous, from the island of Guam. In American society, this is an identity that has historically been marginalized and continues to face disparities and inequalities today due to colonization. Santos Perez speaks about the way his indigenous experience impacts his worldview in an article for *The Georgia Review*, in which he writes, “We [Santos Perez and his cousins] were taught, by our grandma mostly, to always act respectfully in nature, because that is where the spirits of our ancestors dwelled.” But Guam is currently occupied as a territory of the United States, so Santos Perez realized where his experience diverged from that of his colonizers: “But as I became a teenager, I witnessed how not everyone treats the environment as a sacred place.” Santos Perez defines ecopoetry as poetry “about ecology, ecosystems, environmental injustice, animals, agriculture, climate change, water, and even food. It emerged in the 1990s as poets questioned the naturalness of ‘nature poetry,’ especially since nature itself was rapidly changing due to global warming and environmental destruction.” Like other ecopoets, his poetry is inextricably linked to his politics.

In support of my assertion that both Santos Perez and Spahr are part of the ecopoetic canon, he claims that he teaches Spahr’s poem “Gentle Now, Don’t Add to the Heartache” in his

ecopoetry classes. Santos Perez writes, “The poem is about how the environment has been degraded and how many species have gone extinct. The students read the poem aloud and can hear the heartache and mourning of the speaker. They can feel the overwhelming loss embodied in the long lists of extinct and endangered species.” This places him in direct lineage with Spahr and cements Spahr’s legacy within ecopoetry. Santos Perez says that Spahr’s and others’ ecopoetry “can communicate environmental issues through creative language and expressive form” and “can put a human face and emotional experience on abstract natural disaster and climate crises”; I argue that he does the same thing in his own poetry, and even goes further by simultaneously thematizing and making tangible the felt and embodied realities of climate change. I analyze his writing using ecocritical close readings similar to those I performed on Stevens and Spahr, combining ecological and poetic knowledge with my own literary analysis.

In his most recent poetry collection *Habitat Threshold*, published in 2020, Craig Santos Perez employs poetry as a way to critique climate change and the political consequences that both contribute to and result from it — racism, bigotry, capitalism, and corporate greed, among others.²⁴ Santos Perez’s poetry often contemplates raising a child in a world blighted by climate change, writing about his struggles with his complicity in the systems that contribute to climate change. What does it mean to bring a child into the world, Santos Perez asks, when that world is being destroyed by the very actions one must take to live a modern life? “I don’t want our daughter to know / that Hawai’i is the bird extinction capital / of the world,” Santos Perez writes in “The Last Safe Habitat,” expressing his despair that his child will someday understand that the world in which she lives is harmful to the animals she sees. Thus, Santos Perez is caught in the

²⁴ Some small parts of this chapter come from an article previously written and published by myself in *The Michigan Daily* on June 21, 2022. <https://www.michigandaily.com/arts/books/climate-change-needs-poetry-not-apathy-so-read-habitat-threshold/>

most classic struggle that eco-poets grapple with: balancing an appreciation and love for the natural world with an awareness that it is in danger and acknowledging that that danger comes in small part from the poet themselves and in large part from the humanity to which they belong.

Introducing a child into the equation only further complicates the dilemma between love for nature and fear for its destruction. As Spahr would say, the bird and the bulldozer destroying the bird's habitat becomes that much more difficult to witness alongside a child. With a future so unsure, and a planet being harmed by human activity, is it responsible to bring another human life into the world? But with a world so beautiful, too, is it fair to deprive a child of the wonders of nature that have inspired generations? And where, exactly, does a parent have to draw the line and tell their child that their beautiful world is in danger? Of course, parents have always had to do some calculus about the danger of the world into which their child will be born. But the burgeoning genre of eco-poetry is filled with poets that have lived half, if not more, of their lives in the Anthropocene-aware 21st century, with no signposts to tell them how to live or raise their children. Santos Perez does not answer the questions he implicitly poses in his work, but he offers a poetic framework through which one can examine and, perhaps most importantly, feel their way through these issues.

The introduction of children and parenthood into the complex concerns of eco-poetry serve to magnify those concerns, compounding the anxiety and love of a parent towards their child with the anxiety and love a human feels for the natural world. The existential questions, too, are magnified. In "Age of Plastic," Santos Perez writes,

*...Will plastic make
life impossible? Our daughter falls*

asleep in a plastic crib, and I dream
 that she's composed of plastic,
 so that she, too, will survive
 our wasteful hands.

He recognizes the harm his child's crib does to the environment as a plastic product because of its lastingness, and yet yearns for his child to have the same survivability. The endurance of plastic represents, in this line, at the same time a tragedy and a fervent, desperate, unachievable hope. At the same time, though, these parts most effectively counter the hopelessness of climate change — his daughter represents love and innocence in a world of hate and ignorance. Santos Perez also uses form here to emphasize his point — while his verse seems to “fade,” because it is written in gray, the word “plastic” remains in black. The vividness of the word “plastic” not only makes it stand out throughout the poem, offering the reader the experience of the ubiquity of plastic in both the poem and in daily life, it also has the sense that plastic is the only thing that will survive in the poem itself. The gray text fades into the background, and could be worn away, but the stark black of the word “plastic,” repeated over and over again, will remain.

The poems of *Habitat Threshold* don't shy away from the practical realities of climate change, or the ways it is intimately felt in daily life; in fact, they embrace it. In the poem “Halloween in the Anthropocene,” Santos Perez writes:

Darkness spills across the sky like an oil plume.
 The moon reflects bleached coral. Tonight, let us
 praise the sacrificed. Praise the souls of black

boys, enslaved by supply chains, who haul bags
of cacao under west African heat.

In these two opening lines, Santos Perez simultaneously condemns and poeticizes oil spills and coral bleaching. As a poet, he finds the natural world inspiring and begging to be described in verse; as an ecopoet, he acknowledges the harm inherent in what he describes. But as a person, he realizes that the distinction between inspiration and harm is not a binary, but rather a point from which further reflection can spring. Therein lies the fundamental struggle of the ecopoet: How do you make your poem beautiful enough to make the reader care, but not so beautiful that you fail to make the direness of the situation clear? The beauty is monitory, making it all the more poignant in its ability to balance on the edge of two kinds of beauty — straddled between pure pleasure and exquisite pain. Santos Perez answers this question by mentioning other real, specific causes and/or results of climate change in the Anthropocene, like the “black boys, enslaved by supply chains.” In this line, Santos Perez exposes the irony of post-industrial globalist capitalism by exploiting the double meaning of “enslaved by supply chains,” which alludes to both the historical physical enslavement of Africans as well as the more metaphorical — but no less real — enslavement of Africans to supporting Western consumerism through resource impoverishment and exploitation.²⁵ Like Spahr, Santos Perez is unafraid to overtly point the blame at capitalism: later in the poem, he writes about “fire (that) unthreads sweatshops into charred flesh” and “open-pit uranium mines.” He also masterfully weaves in other, less overt contributors to climate change, like the racism inherent in “kids masquerading as cowboys and

²⁵ See “How 'modern-day slavery' in the Congo powers the rechargeable battery economy” published Feb. 1, 2023 on NPR for an example. See “Atlantic Slavery and the Rise of the Capitalist Global Economy” by Joseph E. Inikori for more information on how historical enslavement has led to current conditions of modern-day slavery.

Indians” and the corporate greed of companies like Disney,²⁶ which gets its own special shoutout in the form of “a girl dressed as a Disney princess.” In the litany of causes and effects of climate change, Santos Perez exposes the inescapability of the Anthropocene in our daily lives. It surrounds and informs the livable world, seeping into every crevice of “normality” one might have left — even an innocent holiday like Halloween.

Santos Perez’s poetry doesn’t merely allude to the science of climate change, though — it makes this science central to his poetry. Throughout his collection, there are graphs that are reminiscent of those of rising sea levels, rates of species extinction, and rising global temperatures that often accompany climate change education. Santos Perez’s graphs, created in collaboration with Donovan Kuhio Colleps and dubbed “Poetry-graphs,” however, combine the statistical reality of the climate crisis with the poetic power of figurative language. Graphs and data can feel cold and remote; poetry, at its best, feels like an understanding that is deeply human. Santos Perez melds statistical representations with poetic language to comment on the ways these seemingly antithetical forms can work together to communicate the severity of the climate crisis.

²⁶ See “Documentary Critical of Disney, From the Disney Family” published Jan. 23, 2022 by Brooks Barnes in *The New York Times* for more on corporate greed. See “The Problematic History of Disney” published Nov. 30, 2020 by Julia Esposito in *34th Street Magazine* for more on Disney’s history of racism.

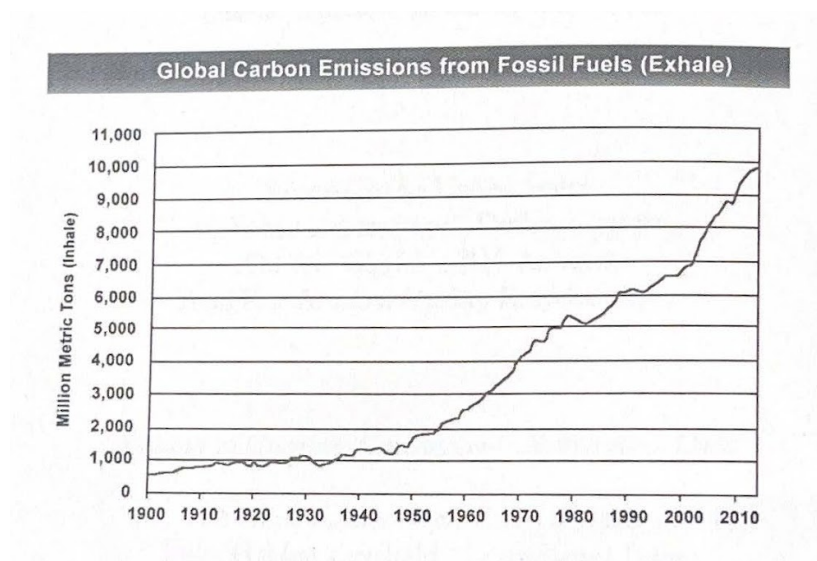


Figure 2. Global Carbon Emissions from Fossil Fuels (Exhale). Located opposite the Web of Contents in *Habitat Threshold* by Craig Santos Perez. No page number.

Figure 2 is placed at the very beginning of *Habitat Threshold*; it comes directly after the copyright page and precedes the “Web of Contents” and the collection’s epigraph from Donna J. Haraway. Because of its placement in the book, Santos Perez encourages the reader to view the entire collection through the lens of the big picture this graph represents. Literally and figuratively, he ensures his readers are on the same page before the book even begins — to read the book, the reader must look at the graph, and must accept its premise before continuing. At the same time, he encourages the reader to incorporate poetry and poetic thinking into their understanding of the “hard science” presented in the graph. The y-axis offers both the scale and units — “Million Metric Tons” — and a metaphorical way of thinking about those same numbers — “Inhale”. The title similarly situates the graph in relation to poetry and to the self. The abstract and numerical, “Global Carbon Emissions from Fossil Fuels,” is placed in conversation with the word in parentheses following it, “Exhale.” Santos Perez anthropomorphizes the

inscrutable data, likening it to breathing. In true eco-poetic fashion, he humanizes the abstract and the scientific.

Santos Perez also capitalizes on the ubiquity of certain climate change graphs, like the one poeticized below:

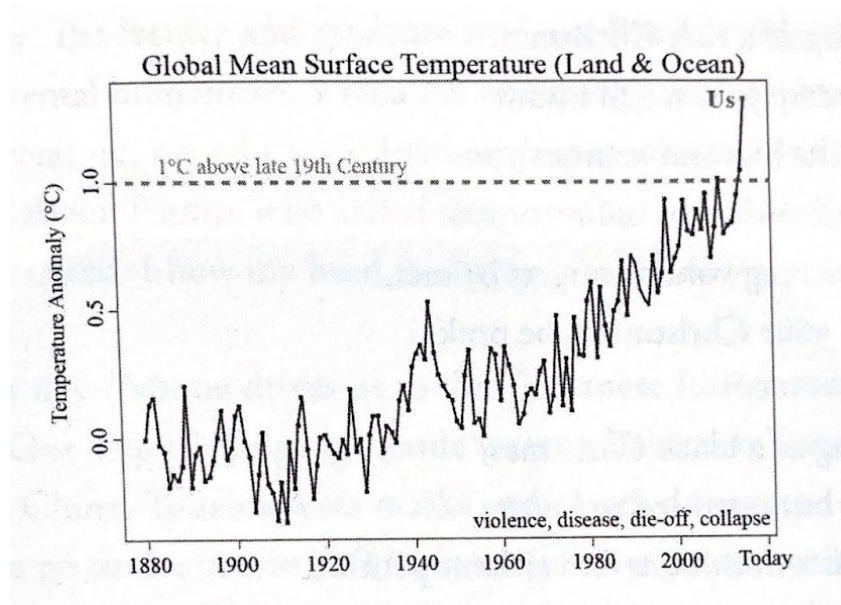


Figure 3. Global Mean Surface Temperature (Land & Ocean), *Habitat Threshold*, page 47.

If this graph looks familiar, that is because it is widely used in discussions and literature about climate change. Here is a similar graph, also demonstrating rising temperature anomaly over time, in Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects*:

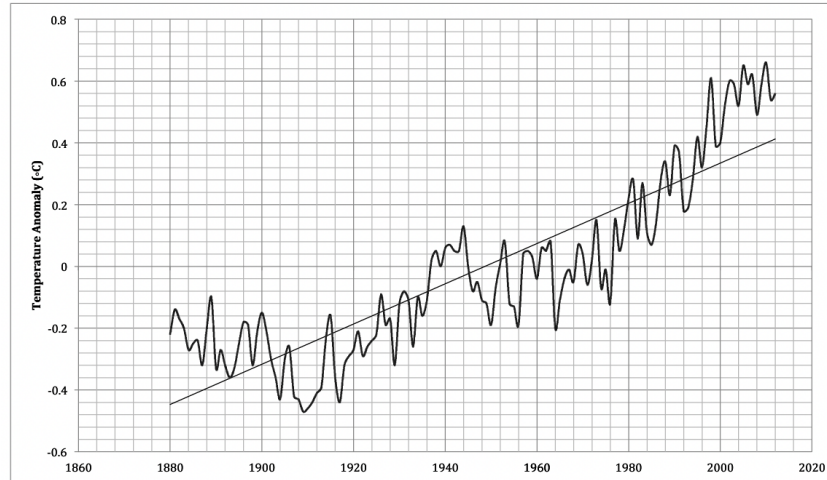


Figure 4. Temperature Anomaly ($^{\circ}\text{C}$) over time, *Hyperobjects*, Timothy Morton, page 3. According to Morton's caption, the data is from NASA's Godard Institute for Space Studies, and the graph is by Larry Butz.

Morton writes underneath his version of the graph, "Global warming cannot be directly seen, but it can be thought and computed, as this graph demonstrates." Santos Perez, and ecopoetry as a whole, acknowledges the issue that is the inability to directly see climate change. But, with the poetry-graphs, he tries to combine one way of "seeing" climate change, a graph, with another way of "seeing" climate change, poetry. And much like in "Global Carbon Emissions from Fossil Fuels (Exhale)," he anthropomorphizes the unimaginably abstract, by placing the word "Us" next to the point at the far right corner of the graph. He reminds the reader that this graph, and what it represents, does not exist in a vacuum; he personalizes it and reminds the reader that it is something that can be felt and experienced, not only studied in graphs.

Santos Perez experiments with form not only through visuals, like with the different shades in "Age of Plastic," but also through necropastorals²⁷, haikus, sonnets, and prose poetry.

²⁷ The term "necropastoral" was coined by Joyelle McSweeney in her book *The Necropastoral: Poetry, Media, Occults* (2014). She defines the "necropastoral" as the "political-aesthetic zone in which the fact of mankind's depredations cannot be separated from an experience of 'nature' which is poisoned, mutated, aberrant, spectacular, full of ill effects and affects." Santos Perez refers to the necropastoral as "my favorite kind of pastoral" (*The Georgia Review*).

Perhaps most notably, he employs “mimic poetry” (also known as “after poems”), which uses the form of a pre-existing poem to create a new work that comments on new topics. Santos Perez draws on well-known authors and their famous works, including Allen Ginsberg’s “America” and Maggie Smith’s “Good Bones,” and alters them to speak to ecological themes. Instead of writing the traditional “after Pablo Neruda,” for example, under his new poem’s title in reference to the original “Sonnet XVII,” he writes “recycling Pablo Neruda.”

By retaining original, often familiar poetry formatting (other examples of his “recyclings” include Irving Berlin’s “White Christmas” and Dr. Seuss’s “One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish”) and juxtaposing it with jarring images of climate disaster, Perez forces the reader out of complicity and into a contemplation of the way our environment affects every aspect of our lives — even those aspects that feel so routine. William Carlos Williams’s original “This Is Just To Say” is a sweet, intimate, and often-parodied poem reminiscent of a note left on a kitchen table in which the speaker is apologizing to an unknown other for eating their plums. Instead of plums, Santos Perez’s speaker has eaten the “‘meats’ / that were in / the lab” and asks for forgiveness because they were “‘impossible™.’”²⁸ In a tongue-in-cheek manner, Santos Perez pokes fun at lab-grown meat substitutes. Tellingly, he replaces an unequivocally “natural” food, plums, with a wholly processed, man-made food. Even in doing our best to do what is right for the Earth — in this case, eschewing the animal-based meat industry — we cannot escape, he points out, the artificiality of the world we live in. Notably to the topic of this thesis, he also “recycles” Wallace Stevens’s “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” with “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Glacier.” I will now return to Wallace Stevens by doing an analysis of these two poems side-by-side²⁹.

²⁸ “Impossible™” here refers to the brand of plant-based meat substitute Impossible Foods.

²⁹ See Appendix A for the full poems next to each other with relevant highlights.

Stevens' original poem in many ways embodies the Transcendental/Modernist version of poetry about nature. It views a part of the natural world as dynamic and able to hold a multitude of meanings at once. It relies on description of nature and the way it interacts with the speaker of the poem. "I know, too, / That the blackbird is involved / In what I know," Stevens writes in stanza VIII, recognizing the way his life and the life of the natural world are inextricably linked. If the melding of self and nature — and indeed seeing the self as part of nature — sounds like ecopoetry, Santos Perez agrees; this is one of the lines he retains almost exactly in his "recycled" version of the poem, simply replacing "blackbird" with "glacier." The places where Santos Perez's version and Stevens's version — the ecopoetry and Modernist nature poetry versions, respectively — retain the most similarities show the overlap between the poetic cycles to which these authors belong. The fact that Stevens's poem's form translates so well to the contemporary message Santos Perez espouses in his 2020 version demonstrates the way the nature poetry of Stevens's time period was an earlier iteration of a similar conception of nature — but that that conception now has stakes that have been irrevocably heightened by awareness of the Anthropocene and the effects of climate change, stakes which set ecopoetry apart. Still, had Stevens been alive in the 21st century to have awareness of the Anthropocene, he too might have written about glaciers instead of blackbirds.

The central symbol of the respective poems, too, remarks on the way nature poetry has been forced to evolve with growing knowledge of anthropogenic climate change. Stevens chooses the blackbird as an enigmatic yet omnipresent representation of nature. He takes something generally unremarkable — a common bird — and meditates on it for thirteen consecutive stanzas, endeavoring to understand it as fully as possible. The blackbird is integrated into everyday life, but Stevens attempts to remove it from its mundanity and make it central to an

understanding of nature. “But I know, too, / That the blackbird is involved / In what I know,” writes Stevens in the eighth stanza. In his recycled version, Santos Perez copies him word for word, writing “But I know, too, / That the glacier is involved / In what I know.” In Stevens’s version, the little bird that exists at the edge of our attention is important — perhaps even crucial — to an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the world. The blackbird represents the small and large ways in which humans can commune with nature and thus understand it and themselves better as a more unified whole. Santos Perez’s glacier, on the other hand, is everything the blackbird is not: enormous, incomprehensible, rarely seen, not at all mundane. The glacier is a common motif in climate change rhetoric because of the implications of glaciers melting due to rising global temperatures. However, it is also something Timothy Morton would refer to as a “hyperobject”: “things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans” (Morton 1). A hyperobject defies understanding or explanation; it contains many ideas and is not confined to a single locality or instance. This goes beyond Santos Perez simply using a nonspecific noun, because Stevens uses a nonspecific noun as well. Instead, it means that this noun — the glacier — has come to mean something much more than its physical form or even symbolic value. It is instead a hyperobject associated with climate change, which “cannot be directly seen, but [] can be thought and computed” (Morton 3). A hyperobject represents dispersed data where there are sensors that mediate the information for us, showing the difficulty of making climate knowledge feel real because the effects are so dispersed and mediated by high-tech devices.

While a glacier is a material thing — it is real and is responding to the elements — I argue that its use in Santos Perez’s poem still fits Morton’s definition of a hyperobject. For one, Santos Perez is not writing about a specific glacier, nor is he describing something he interacts

with daily; he is “born and raised on the western Pacific island of Guam” and lives and works in Hawai’i (Santos Perez, *The Georgia Review*). Therefore, his lived experience as a poet with glaciers is, presumably, similar to mine: perhaps he has visited an area where they exist, but for the most part, he interacts with glaciers purely as a symbolic representation of climate change. This reading is supported by the fact that the opening line is “Among starving polar bears,” evoking another classic image for climate change. The starving polar bears and the glacier are both images that have taken on a metonymic association with climate change — they are single material instances that stand for an entire concept. The way Santos Perez talks about and engages with the glacier is as a symbol of climate change — an already-mediated object — and not something he is encountering firsthand or has interacted with specifically. In other poems, it is clear when the object central to a poem is something he has interacted with personally, even if that object is a symbol, like the plastic crib in “Age of Plastic.” He is engaging with the glacier as more than a material object, and more than a symbolic object — it is an icon for the amalgamation of data and lived experience that encompasses climate change and the Anthropocene.

In comparison to the blackbird, the glacier represents the ways human beings are forced to exist within a nature too grand and all-encompassing to understand fully. The blackbird can be viewed from thirteen angles, and the mystery that remains is subtle and nuanced; when the glacier is viewed from thirteen angles, the result is a sense that the still-unknown is dangerous and lethal. If the blackbird is a pre-Anthropocene way of conceiving nature as a tangible thing that the poet can render philosophical, the glacier is a post-Anthropocene way of conceiving an entirely non-tangible thing that the poet must confront. The blackbird’s size and way of being can be compared to a human’s while the glacier’s cannot — the glacier is remote, abstract, and

utterly unhuman to those like Santos Perez (and myself) who do not regularly interact with them in real life, and yet we must behold it the same way Stevens once beheld the blackbird, because Santos Perez has positioned us that way.

In a way, Santos Perez's use of the hyperobject, a glacier, in place of Stevens's traditional natural object, the blackbird, speaks to a defining characteristic of ecopoetry that is a more specific and political poetic practice than that of pre-Anthropocene nature poets. While this is apparent throughout Santos Perez's "recycling" of Stevens, it is especially present in stanza IX. Stevens's stanza reads:

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
 It marked the edge
 Of one of many circles.

While Santos Perez's reads:

When the glacial terminus broke,
 It marked the beginning
 Of one of many waves.

Santos Perez's commitment to precisely copying form is evident in this stanza — the beginning of each line is the same ("When the," "It marked the," "Of one of many"). By retaining the same form and syntax of these lines, the differences are made all the more apparent by their comparison. In a way, these three lines compared are a microcosm of the difference between

Stevens-era nature poetry and Santos Perez-era ecopoetry. Santos Perez expands the reach of the poem and of the environmental world the speaker experiences by creating different, wider scales than the ones that exist in Stevens's poem. First, he asks the reader to imagine not the glacier disappearing from sight but literally ceasing to exist at all. Stevens's blackbird encourages the reader to meditate on the metaphysicality of a thing: If the blackbird flies "out of sight," does it still exist? Stevens would say yes, because there are many fields of perception ("circles") and the blackbird is simply leaving the speaker's (hence the "edge"). The blackbird's sense of being in the world through the eyes of the speaker, though, is still contingent on its perception by others — on its being available in "one of many circles."

But Santos Perez is not asking the reader to ponder whether the glacier still exists if we cannot see it. He in fact assumes that we cannot see it, because most people never do. As a hyperobject, the glacier is not pinned down to locality, even if you are one of the relatively few people in the world who regularly see a glacier in real life. Instead, the glacier is omnipresent as a concept of climate change, always there as an abstract idea but never really there in a tangible sense. Santos Perez's glacier is unlike the blackbird, then, in that it cannot leave our sight and allow us to ponder if it still exists. Instead, Santos Perez manipulates the glacier in a much less metaphysical and much more tangible way: He tells the reader to imagine not a mere disappearance from sight, but a breaking. Like the ecopoetic sense that April's green cannot and will not endure, or that death is not the mother of beauty because death in the Anthropocene is much more permanent, the object of stanza IX is not simply changing in relation to the speaker but is changing in a much more fundamental way. And that breaking was not the "edge of one of many circles" but is instead "the beginning of one of many waves." An edge implies an outer boundary; a beginning implies an eternity to come. While pre-Anthropocene poetry finds eternity

in the cyclicity of nature and the way death forever begets rebirth, post-Anthropocene poetry finds eternity in the unprecedented horrors to come.

In the second to last stanza, stanza XII, Stevens writes, “The river is moving. / The blackbird must be flying.” He refers to the way nature is in a constant state of movement, and that that movement is what defines it. Recall the poem “Sunday Morning,” in which he writes:

Is there no change of death in paradise?
 Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
 Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
 Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
 With rivers like our own that seek for seas
 They never find, the same receding shores
 That never touch with inarticulate pang?

To Stevens, change — specifically the “change of death” — is what defines earthly nature (hence the earlier line “Death is the mother of beauty”). This conception of nature is a consistent one for Stevens, because his blackbird aligns with that same idea. Because the river is in motion, nature is functioning as it should, and so, logically, the blackbird is flying. Death is not just death but movement. All of it, life and death, are encompassed by change and movement. But this is the pre-Anthropocene period; change and movement are just parts of a larger cycle that will come around again. Santos Perez’s post-Anthropocene sees movement begetting movement, too: “The sea is rising. / The glacier must be retreating.” However, these changes are not signs of a healthy natural cycle but rather of a destruction that increasingly seems irreparable. Movement leads to

movement, change leads to change, but the emotional tenor is deeply different because the movement is not part of a cycle, but instead is its end.

Santos Perez uses the last stanza of the poem to drive his point home with strict binaries and oppositions. The original stanza from Stevens's poem reads:

It was evening all afternoon.

It was snowing

And it was going to snow.

The blackbird sat

In the cedar-limbs.

In Santos Perez's version, the stanza reads:

It was summer all winter.

It was melting

And it was going to melt.

The glacier fits

In our warm-hands.

Stevens's poem's original binary, evening/afternoon, takes place over the course of one day, much like how "Sunday Morning" begins in the morning with "late coffee and oranges in a sunny chair" and ends in the evening with "casual flocks of pigeons [making] / Ambiguous undulations as they sink, / Downward to darkness, on extended wings." Santos Perez's binary, in

keeping with the grander and more pressing scale of his ecopoetry, takes place over a season: summer/winter. While Stevens's binary deals with light levels and time, Santos Perez's deals with temperature, in an unsubtle nod to one of climate change's central issues of warming global temperatures. Santos Perez's seasonal binary also emphasizes the direness of the situation; it is not merely a day that is at stake (a gloomy afternoon that feels like an evening), but an entire way of living (a supposedly snowy season turned hot and humid).

In the second line, instead of setting up an analogy — evening : afternoon :: summer : winter — Santos Perez uses opposites to highlight the chasm of situational differences between his poem and Stevens's. Stevens's poem uses "to snow," so Santos Perez uses "to melt." Not only is it a perfect opposite, as melting is exactly what 'undoes' snow, but it also correlates cleanly to the material subject of the poem (the glacier) and the metaphorical subject of the poem (climate change). While snowing is an action that creates and causes accumulation, melting causes disappearance as snow becomes water and evaporates into unseen vapor. Therefore, much like the glacial terminus breaking in stanza IX as opposed to the blackbird leaving the speaker's field of perception, Santos Perez's rewriting of Stevens's poem from "snowing" to "melting" turns change into a more permanent and less positive action.

Finally, the last two lines of both poems encapsulate their respective speakers' attitudes towards the natural world. In Stevens's poem, the speaker observes the blackbird and feels connected to it because they are describing it and because they know "the blackbird is involved in what [they] know." By the poem's own logic, observing the blackbird in the cedar-limbs and thus having it within the "edge" of the speaker's "circle" of perception is enough to make the speaker feel intimately connected to the blackbird. Santos Perez's ending is notably different. The glacier is no longer remote and untouchable: it has become suddenly tangible as it "fits / In

our warm-hands.” Santos Perez intensely localizes the hyperobject of the glacier when he makes it tangible and able to be handled by the speaker. It is not enough to feel connected by observation — the speaker must physically hold the subject of the poem in their hands, experience it and be a part of its existence. Santos Perez scales down an enormous emotion into one that can be held, much like a book of poetry can be held but an amorphous feeling of climate doom cannot. More than that, the speaker is directly impacting the glacier, because those “warm-hands” are making it melt faster. Santos Perez’s speaker is not just observing the glacier but is experiencing it and, by experiencing it, is contributing to its demise — and yet, that demise is exactly what allows the glacier to be held. This conundrum is one that eco-poets often face as they attempt to live in the natural world with the understanding that their presence as human beings during the Anthropocene is actively destroying it. The glacier, whether it is literally or metaphorically in our hands, is our responsibility not only as readers but as contemporary humans, and we are contributing to its apocalyptic situation. Even now, just writing about the glacier on a computer, or reading about it on paper, we are melting it further.

Conclusion

The idea for this thesis first began germinating on a dock on Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire in the spring of 2021. It was there that I read Wallace Stevens's "Sunday Morning" for the first time. Just a few weeks before, I had lost my beloved grandmother, Nonni, to a long battle with ALS. Surrounded by the picturesque lake, but churning with grief inside, I felt almost angry at Stevens — how could he say death was the mother of beauty? In fact, how dare he say that, when death felt like it was sucking the beauty out of everything around me? And yet, the poem was beautiful — and it was about death. But with a personal loss weighing so heavily on me, it didn't feel like there was a natural cycle to any of this.

Before my Nonni died, I had never really experienced the death of a close loved one. It might be one of those things that one cannot truly understand until it happens. As many people do, I turned to poetry to try to understand my feelings. But as I grappled with the growing abyss of grief inside of me, I began to recognize echoes of the same feeling not just in the poetry explicitly about death, but in contemporary nature poetry, too (what I would later identify by name as "ecopoetry"). The all-encompassing black hole that was loss started to map onto the natural world, onto the way I felt about coastlines receding and animals going extinct. When I thought about how my Nonni would never see my college graduation, I thought too about how entire islands will be swallowed up by the sea so that in a generation or two from now it will be as if they never existed. When I thought about how she will never see my little brother drive a car for the first time, I also thought about the Mountain Mist Frog, an amphibian that was declared extinct in late 2022.

There it was: nature was no longer a place of reprieve from permanent loss. Things die, but they do so as part of a cycle that does not start with birth and end with death but is endlessly circling back on itself — death begetting life, and life begetting death. But in the case of climate change, we now know that cycle can be interrupted not just by natural mass extinctions, but also by human activity. We know that the actions of humans can shatter these comforting conceptions of nature by rupturing the cycle beyond repair. When Stevens wrote about death and beauty, he knew about game hunting and extinction; but he did not know about the ways humans are complicit in disrupting ecological processes so completely.

I grew up doing units on climate change in elementary school. Like many others of my generation, I have lived with the knowledge that our presence on Earth can be harmful and that the beautiful world we know is temporary and slipping away. For a young kid, that felt like too much of a burden to bear, too big of a concept to grasp. As a young adult, I still feel the same way. I feel angry at the earlier generations for leaving us this mess to clean up. I feel helpless in the face of something so cataclysmically huge. And I still feel like I cannot quite wrap my head around the enormous existential threat that has settled into my brain and tendriled itself insidiously into the way I view the world. Life tinged with loss. Beauty tinged with death. So again, I turned to poetry, and found that poets are grappling with the same issues. In their poetry, I found if not a way to reconcile death and beauty in the Anthropocene, then at least a way to live with the dissonance. In contemporary ecopoetry, I found a way of making ecological loss personal, of relating it back to that abyssal loss that lived inside me. I found that I could finally feel ecological loss, and grieve for it, instead of letting the darkly comforting climate doom shut me off from having to actually feel my emotions.

This thesis has been a project of trying to show how eco-poets accurately capture the existential dread of climate change while still maintaining a connection to the embodied and tangible in this world. I investigate the very question that started it all — how can death be the mother of beauty, to Stevens? Craig Santos Perez and Juliana Spahr capture in verse the nebulous reality of climate change, and that reality includes both beauty and pain. Eco-poetry holds two truths about human perception of nature, side by side: that of its magnificence and of its sorrow. Stevens captures those truths, too, just without the knowledge of climate change. Poetry, both pre- and post- knowledge of the Anthropocene, has the ability to crystallize an amorphous emotion and turn it into language and tactile imagery. When it comes to an idea as abstract as climate change, this ability is invaluable.

Poetry will (probably) not save the world — we will need science and human kindness to do that. But there is a reason why poetry is the medium humans turn to when other ways of understanding seem to fail us. There is a reason why poetry is read at weddings and funerals, why poetry about war circulates and recirculates. It pulls out an emotion, and clarifies an idea, that we could not (or could not bear to) articulate and manifests it. It gives us something to hold on to. And once we are holding on to it — once we have the glacier in our warm hands — we must do something about it.

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Glossary

Term	Definition	Page # (first appearance)
nature poetry	generally encompasses poetry on the topic of the natural world or that adopts an ecological perspective or persona	1
ecopoetry	ecopoetry is explicitly political poetry about the environment that examines interactions between humans and nature	2
political	recognizes the fact that governmental policy and party platforms have indelible impacts on citizens' everyday lives, and therefore encompasses much of our lives, even when these aspects would not be considered explicitly political in the governmental sense	2
Anthropocene	the geologic age in which human activity has a significant impact on the Earth, coined in 2000	3
anthropogenic	originating with human activity	3
ecological awareness	an understanding of aspects both tangible and abstract of one's natural environment	6
climate doom	The feeling that the climate has gone past its tipping point and that it is "too late" to do anything to save or improve the planet, and that therefore it is easier to give up or become apathetic.	8
conservation	seeks the proper use of nature	9
Romanticism	early 19th century European artistic and literary movement that emphasized inspiration and the individual	10
Transcendentalism	a movement in the late 19th century that emphasized the power of the natural world and its application to the human experience	10

Modernism	early 20th century literary movement that rejected traditional techniques in favor of experimentalism	12
preservation	seeks protection of nature from use	13
ecocriticism	interdisciplinary study of literature through an environmental lens	18
ecopoetic canon	the works that define or exemplify ecopoetry as a genre	22
entropic fluctuations	chaotic or disorderly rhetorical movement within a poem	34
mimic poetry	poems which use the form of a pre-existing poem to create a new work that comments on new topics	51
glacial terminus	the end or “tip” of a glacier, which appears immobile but is actually always either advancing or retreating; it can also break off during glacial melt	55

Appendix A

Key:

Yellow highlight: Exactly the same

Blue highlight: Pronoun/numerical change

Green highlight: "blackbird" is replaced with "glacier"

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Glacier (after
Wallace Stevens)
Craig Santos Perez

I
Among starving polar bears,
The only moving thing
Was the edge of a glacier.

II
We are of one ecology
Like a planet
In which there are 200,000 glaciers.

III
The glacier absorbed greenhouse gases.
We are a large part of the biosphere.

IV
Humans and animals
Are kin.
Humans and animals and glaciers
Are kin.

V
We do not know which to fear more,
The terror of change
Or the terror of uncertainty,
The glacier calving
Or just after.

VI
Icebergs fill the vast Ocean
With titanic wrecks.
The mass of the glacier
Disappears, to and fro.
The threat
Hidden in the crevasse

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird
Wallace Stevens

I
Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II
I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III
The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV
A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V
I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI
Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow

An unavoidable cause.

VII

O vulnerable humans,
Why do you engineer sea walls?
Do you not see how the glacier
Already floods the streets
Of the cities around you?

VIII

I know king tides,
And lurid, inescapable storms;
But I know, too,
That the glacier is involved
In what I know.

IX

When the glacial terminus broke,
It marked the beginning
Of one of many waves.

X

At the rumble of a glacier
Losing its equilibrium,
Every tourist in the new Arctic
chased ice quickly.

XI

They explored the poles
for offshore drilling.
Once, we blocked them,
In that we understood
The risk of an oil spill
For a glacier.

XII

The sea is rising.
The glacier must be retreating.

XIII

It was summer all winter.
It was melting
And it was going to melt.
The glacier fits
In our warm-hands.

An indecipherable cause.

VII

O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII

I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X

At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

XI

He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII

The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

Appendix B

Interview with Juliana Spahr

Fri, Oct 28, 2022

Included with permission from Juliana Spahr.

Emilia Ferrante [00:00:43] First, what is the importance to you of listing and naming and repeating as you do? And I mean, I could give you examples from your work.

Juliana Spahr [00:00:59] Yeah, what moment are you talking about?

EF [00:01:01] I'm kind of talking about specifically in *This Collection of Everyone with Lungs*, you take the same sentence and add a little bit on to it every time. And, then in other [poems] you repeat phrases and stuff like that and I'm wondering about that. And then I'm also wondering, in a slightly separate question, what you think the importance of naming is — like you name specific species in "Gentle Now," for example.

JS [00:01:42] I mean, I think in part to answer both of them with one answer that covers both of them is that I'm rhythmically interested in repetition and lists. I've never been super that interested in conventional things, like meter and rhyme, in the tradition, but I'm really interested in the forms that arise out of pre-literate poetries, or poetries that are written during moments when literacy is arriving, or coming or going, which is a lot of what we get — [poems are] written down because literacy has sort of come to town. Some of the conventions of oral forms, because they're often memorized — they have a memorization history before they have this written-down history — they use a lot of those developmental terms and mark themselves in the epic [form] or [by] using a lot of lists. I'm interested in oral poetries. I'm interested in poems that hold large-scale things — which is what often happens before very established literary traditions, right, these poems are long, and they have a lot of information in them, and I'm sort of interested in the information that poetry can hold. At the same time, that list comes from that same tradition of listing or inventorying the animals and plants that matter, in some sense, so that's part of it.

I'm also kind of interested in, not really in a dogmatic way necessarily, in what kinds of ecosystems those lists create. By default, [the lists] have to be long, if you're interested in that kind of question — Do I include all the suburban animals? Do I include the microbes? These [are the] kinds of questions I'm interested in. In nature poetry to ecopoetry as a whole, this whole long tradition from preliterate oral traditions to the contemporary, what kind of ecosystem would those animals and plants create? What do you see in those kinds of moments? And so a number of poems are kind of like — when I was in Hawai'i (I write about Hawai'i a lot) I was really interested in [the] plants that had existed on the island before humans arrived. And then with the Kānaka Maoli,³⁰ or Hawai'ians, arrived, they brought with them these things that are called the canoe plants.³¹ And I think there's like 12 or 15 of them that were really essential to making the islands a human-sustaining ecosystem that were brought over. And then there's the plants that

³⁰ Indigenous peoples of Hawai'i; descendants of the original Polynesian settlers of Hawai'i.

³¹ Plants foundational to Hawai'ian agriculture brought over by the Kānaka Maoli, which include "noni for medicine, kukui for light, [and] kamani for wood," according to Hawai'i Public Radio.

everyone knows that come after contact, which is the vast majority of them. And I was kind of interested in those layers of plants or those layers of ecosystems and what they do.

EF [00:04:58] Yeah, that's really interesting. And also in a sense, I heard you kind of talking about inclusion versus exclusion on the list. Like it's just sort of as important what you decide not to put on the list as what you do decide to put on the list.

JS [00:05:14] Yeah.

EF [00:05:16] Speaking of the environmental factual record, I'm also interested in the way that your poems are rooted in time and place. So like in *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*, the poems are separated by date. And then in *Well Then There Now* they're sort of separated by geographic coordinates, and that includes maps. So I'm wondering how you see the connection between place and your poetry and time and your poetry.

JS [00:05:54] Huh. I've never really thought of it. If on the one hand I'm interested in the epic, or the [poem] that establishes the entire culture, like the Kumulipo³² or like any of these things, it would feel pretentious to kind of claim that that was what I'm trying to do. [Those kinds of poems are] just kind of like the heroes in that kind of mythos of the poetry ecosystem that I might be trying to think with and through in some form. But I think that I think of, like, geography in particular as [part of] what it means to write very local poems. And so, you know what? I was coming out of a localism of Hawai'i or the very specific ecosystems that developed in Hawai'i. And trying to think about that, like what it means to present, to be attentive to a location in some sense. But representing that rather than writing that generic nature poem where the goose flies overhead and, you know, you could be anywhere, essentially. But it still was kind of like a natural epiphany-based poem. And I think, like, the time thing is probably a kind of version of that, which is kind of like rather than making a kind of a claim to be writing for an eternity, or a hundred years, or in some way what it means to think about writing to the day or to the local, which is what that poem, *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* was trying to kind of think through. I was trying to think about, you know, what parts of this poem will carry forward and what points would be illegible in ten years.

EF [00:07:42] Yeah, that was very interesting to read for me because I was born in 2001. So separating the events of like 2004 [or] 2005 into specific days is interesting for me because everything from that time period sort of gets clumped together a little bit. Like when I learn about it, even though I was technically alive, I wasn't sentient, really. So, yeah, that's very interesting. And I wonder when you talk about place, I know that like in *The Transformation* you talk a lot about how you felt strange in Hawai'i as someone who disagreed with colonialism and was fighting against it, but was also sort of participating in it. So that's kind of an intersection between your poetry, place, time and then your identity in relation to those things. So I'm interested in that as well.

JS [00:09:01] Is that a question?

EF [00:09:03] Only if you have anything to expand on?

³² The Kumulipo is the creation chant of the indigenous Hawai'ian religion.

JS [00:09:07] Yeah, I don't really have anything for that.

EF [00:09:10] I'm also wondering about your use of pronouns. So first I'm wondering how much the "I" is a persona or a speaker, and how much the "I" feels like yourself. And then also [I have] questions about the collective. For example, I've noticed that you sometimes will use "we" when grammatically one would expect to find the word "us," like "some of we" instead of "some of us." And that comes up a lot in *The Transformation*, too. So I'm wondering about both your personal first person pronoun and that collective pronoun.

JS [00:09:56] The collective pronoun. I'm interested in the collective — our world, like "we as one" that counters the individualism of a kind literary tradition. Right? Like, what does it mean to write not as an individual, but to write as a kind of member of a collective in some sense? So that was kind of what was interesting to me. And *The Transformation* in which I use "they," I think now reads very weirdly, because now "they" is a pronoun that people use if they don't feel they want to use the two [or for when] they're looking for something other than you know, these two genders [male and female] in some sense. And at the time [of writing *The Transformation*], "they" wasn't really used that way. People were using "ze" that way more. And so now it feels like it reads about something about sexuality or gender and the overlap between them in some way, which it really wasn't intended to be at all. It was intended to think about what it meant to be like a colonial subject in Hawai'i or what it meant to be "they," as in not part of the "we" that is Hawai'i, right.

Or Kānaka Maoli again and then the "I" that question you ask about like how true it is. I mean on the one hand, poetry is kind of a genre that has really close ties to nonfiction, even though it doesn't really admit itself to be nonfiction. But most of what I read, for instance, in a poetry workshop, is the "I's [are] just 90% of the time someone that you would presume would be the author, or it's presumed to be the author in some sense. And people that don't want to do that, [they] normally move themselves very far away from [the first person pronoun]. But I mean, when I use the "I," it feels like it's partially something that I have a relationship with, [and] something partially that I don't necessarily. And things have gotten so much more rigid around this idea of the "I" like in the last ten years than they were. When I'm writing stuff often I feel like some of the things that happen around the work is that people presume that it's presenting a kind of a position that I want to put forward as a politics where it's quite often exploring the opposite and an ability to maintain a political cohesion in some sense. And there's often these moments where people are very confused by that in some sense, or like there's a reading of the poem that presumes that what I want to put forward is that this confused person is the right position to be [in] or the heroic position to be [in], which is kind of counter to what I'm trying to do often.

EF [00:12:43] Right. Yeah. Yeah, I am interested about that also because I've seen in another interview, the Fieldwork interview with Jenna Goldsmith. You talk about being an ecopoet, or really not — you said, "I would not say that I identify as an ecopoet, mainly because I'm always hesitant to identify as most things," and then "I prefer to understand the term as an alternative to nature poetry." So I'm wondering how you feel being positioned in this sort of scholarship as an ecopoet and like, what's your relationship to that label now?

JS [00:13:35] Um, yeah, that's a funny question. The things that people associate with ecopoetics I'm really interested in as formal techniques like right. I'm interested in that idea that you would present a systemic view, that you would not present nature in isolation, that you would be writing something that, you know, that had the had trees and had the destruction of the trees or... you know what I mean? ... It's not just bucolic, or it's not just looking at a very beautiful nature scene like that. I like that a lot about what ecopoetics is doing. I totally feel like when that term first kind of came out, it felt to me like very much that it was like a term that Jonathan Skinner was trying to work on to try to think about like what it meant to use Modernist writing in the Modernist tradition (which again, I would probably place myself within that), and turn that attention from urban areas, which is what Modernism had been so obsessively concerned with, to other types of areas including the natural environment in some way. And then in the like, I don't know, is it ten years, 20 years since that term? You know, like we've got an increasing awareness of [the] climate crisis. I mean, people knew about it then [in the early 2000s], but it was like in a very, very obviously kind of different way. And so that term ["ecopoetry"] feels kind of like somewhat, I guess, I don't know, kind of different.

The other thing, the other hesitancy around [calling myself an ecopoet] that I had for a long time — I can't tell. I mean, I might not have to have this hesitancy anymore, which I think might be the story that I'm talking about. Like I may not need to hold onto hesitancy in the same way, which is that for a long time it felt like you could go to these poetry conferences and there'd be the capitalism panel, and then there'd be the eco panel and they didn't overlap. And I felt very much like you can't have an ecopoetics without a kind of attention to, like, the role of capitalism, right? Like if you're going to look at what systemically shapes this environment or ecosystem in some way. Capitalism is like the major thing that does that. But I'm not even sure that that's true anymore. Like, I feel like some of [those] kinds of things have changed.

EF [00:16:10] Yeah, I think definitely in the scholarship — I mean, there's not like one sort of resounding definition of ecopoetry that I've found. But I think a lot of what I've sort of cobbled together as a definition from a lot of different places, is that it, yes, it is distinct from nature poetry and sort of was born in like the early 2000s as like a way to incorporate politics and capitalism and all these things into poetry without it just being, you know, like you said, a poem about a tree. Yeah. So I do also want to ask about Jonathan Skinner and the *ecopoetics* journal and sort of the first time that you sort of heard the term ecopoetics, ecopoetry and sort of what it was like being a poet at that time.

JS [00:17:10] Like in the early 2000s. When is the first issue, do you remember?

EF [00:17:15] 2001, and I think you were published in the second issue.

JS [00:17:22] I'm pretty sure that the first time I became aware of ["ecopoetry"] as a meaningful term is through that *ecopoetics* journal. And there wasn't a lot — it wasn't being used a lot then, at the time. And so that was, so that was kind of that was kind of interesting. Like, I guess even [in the] early 2000s — I guess it's like a long time ago now — I think I was thinking about those divides. Like, it was like poetry still felt very divided. Like there was an experimentalism and then there was a conventionalism...or mainstream-ness or, just the way poetry should be written if you were a fan of it. Like there was very little crosstalk and you know, like different reading series.

I went, you know, I've said this before, like I went to graduate school at SUNY Buffalo, which had all this language [and] poetry stuff in it. And I got out of that program and ... no one even talked about, like, this other stuff. And so I felt like at that moment, if I had to go and begin to educate myself to understand, like, what's going on in these other parts [of poetry and language spheres]. And the thing about *ecopoetics* is that it felt like it was the sign of what has since arrived, which is like [that] those divisions are no longer as strict or as meaningful to people. ... Like there was a kind of moment where somebody they thought was more on the conservative side or the conventional side, you know, was using experimental techniques. And they would be like, "[the conventional poet] [was] stealing them!" Like those are the kind of dumb things that people were saying at that moment. And so that's kind of really changed.

And then I mean, Hawai'i, moving there was the other moment where those divisions were no longer meaningful. And at the same time, what Hawai'i kind of like added to that mix, or as an example, was that you didn't have to listen to [those divisions] or think about them or even notice them, and so you could write kind of whatever. [In] all these different techniques at various moments was also a sense that poetry is not the calling, the meaning of reason. I don't know quite what the word is for poetry [that] was not necessarily formal experimentation or even if that is writing and, you know, traditional sort of forms in some way that it actually had a whole other life in the community. Right. [Poetry] had a political role to play and it was a place for discussion around concepts of sovereignty and all those kinds of things. And that was really helpful as an example.

EF [00:20:32] Yeah, definitely. I'm thinking about both that answer and the way that you use dates in *This Connection*. What you see as the main turning points in poetic [and] ecological history? And that can also include personal turning points. Like I imagine, you know, Jonathan Skinner's journal was one and moving to Hawai'i was probably another. But I'm interested to think what you sort of identify as those turning points.

JS [00:21:26] Like that reshape the way I think about poetry. Is that kind of what you're asking?

EF [00:21:30] Yeah. And the way that you sort of see the environment.

JS [00:21:44] I mean, would it make sense to answer it through, like, when I think about things that really helped me rethink something like what *ecopoetics* is or could be? If I really like example works — like one would be [the] *Kumulipo*, that Hawai'ian epic, and [another] one would be Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*.³³ Would that be one way to answer it?

EF [00:22:08] Yeah, definitely.

JS [00:22:09] That does really reframe, too, what's possible in the poem and what it can do. And for me, as other than what I have been trained in, in graduate school or I had gotten from reading *The New Yorker*. Which were those two oppositional traditions again.

³³ Aimé Césaire's book of poetry, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, originally published in French in 1939.

EF [00:22:30] Right. So do you think that this is a very general question, so I apologize, but feel free to answer it however you want. So do you think that poetry or art in general can have an impact on the way that we understand climate change as individuals and/or as a society?

JS [00:23:01] Probably as individuals, yes, right, how could you not? I just gave you an example of Césaire and the Kumulipo like it really changed my life as an individual [and] allowed me to have more robust thoughts in my brain through their example. You know, society as a whole is more complicated. On the one hand, not many people read poetry. So, like, that would be one of the limitations for it being a potent force for change. But it is the genre of, when social movements turn to literature, they tend to turn to poetry. So it does play a role in that. In general, my feeling is that poetry is too kind of liberal to actually provoke the kind of changes that we would need to see. Like, it basically exists in a kind of rarefied sphere and, you know, [it would] probably take something more populist [to make change]. On the other hand, right, it's a really nice counter to the kind of climate apocalypse images that you get from Hollywood that feel both really unhelpful and seem to imply that we shouldn't do anything or whatever it is that's overwhelming and, you know, like poetry seems to try to be thinking about what kinds of things, what do you get when you notice these other things or something like that? So I'm never convinced that poetry is a great political space, but I often think that it has a lot of political content within it, um, which is kind of, I don't know if it's contradictory or not. I haven't seen a chance for it to kind of change anything majorly.

EF [00:25:12] Yeah. Yeah. That's definitely something I struggle with as, both an English major and someone who's also studying poetry — it feels so big to *me*. And then I realized that there are people who are like, “The last poem I read was for high school English” and you're like, okay.

JS [00:25:36] Right. Yeah, yeah.

EF [00:25:39] Yeah. But I think one of the things that I'm looking at is also something that you mentioned, like that sort of climate doomism, which I think is something that my generation is definitely having trouble with because we sort of don't have we don't know anything else besides crisis and crisis all the time, both ecologically and societally. We've grown up in this sort of all encompassing crisis, so it's hard to imagine that the end of the world isn't imminent, like how Hollywood shows it. So I'm asking, how do you deal with that as an individual? And also how do you deal with that as a poet?

JS [00:26:41] Climate doom?

EF [00:26:42] Yeah.

JS [00:27:02] I mean, I'm just trying to think about it. There is that, I was just reading earlier this morning that *New York Times* article that just came out that was like “Things aren't bad! They're getting better.”³⁴ But I was kind of looking at that and thinking, I wonder how much of this will

³⁴ The article “Beyond Catastrophe: A New Climate Reality Is Coming Into View” by David Wallace-Wells was published in *The New York Times* on Oct. 26, 2022, two days prior to this interview.

feel true in, like five years? Like, I mean, in part because it was a lot about, like — the images were [of] mosquitoes, sterile mosquitoes that would make the other mosquitoes sterile.³⁵ They were doing that kind of classic thing that almost always goes awry ... So a lot of it was having that moment of like, you know, like generally that story tends to go badly and you know what happens. We have endless examples of it going badly — at the same time there are these examples of it kind of not going badly, you know, canoe plants would be one for instance. Right. But. So I don't know whether I mean this is one way, or that I could say it is that the contradiction interests me, that what interests me is this moment about how we tend to have this very deep connection with the natural world and yet it is constantly disappearing or something. And so like our love and devotion exists in this very moment [that] is this very bereft kind of, you know, environment that we find ourselves in. And that is ... a problem. And that because it feels to me sometimes that you can drop us into five degrees [of] global warming. The crisis of that. And there are still going to be poets that are still going to be writing songs about how beautiful things are or something like that. There's a human ability to find pleasure in things that allows us to accept the things that are disappearing or something like that. And that contradiction just might be one that kind of interests me. I don't really know what you can do in it or what to do with it, finally, except for that, it'd be too easy to say, "Don't write poetry about this," right, or about beautiful things. That seems like too trite or simplistic of an understanding and yet, you know, like it there is that kind of human reaction or something. I guess it's just something you have to just try to figure out. But in general, that division that you were talking about is one that interests me. Like, I'm always interested in when things get kind of contradictory.

EF [00:29:57] Yeah, I think the the thing is sort of the relation between existentialism and realism and then also sort of having to have hope, but hope that also feels kind of — you don't want to feel like you're ignoring things so that you can have hope, which is usually where I find myself. And I think that that's one of the times when I turn to poetry to help understand that sort of feeling and that conflict, which is part of also what I'm studying: the way that not only poetry reacted to climate change, but then the way that reading poetry can help us understand climate change in a more embodied way and as less of an abstract, distant, doomed sort of thing that's happening sometime in the future.

JS [00:30:59] Yeah, yeah. It's a very good way to think about it.

EF [00:31:06] Just a little bit about the way that I got to this topic is actually through Wallace Stevens. I know it's kind of funny, but I was reading "Sunday Morning" and had this whole poetry class on it and we were talking about the way that that nature is seen as something that endures in its ephemerality, that it it because it's so regenerative that it's sort of something that will last forever and that things dying in the autumn, in the winter is its own kind of beautiful because we know that they're going to come back in the spring. So that being written in the early 1900s and now we're in this moment where he talks about April's green enduring and it's like, well, yes, but, you know, April might come two weeks early or April might be totally hot and

³⁵ In reference to a breed of *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, engineered by biotechnology company Oxitec, that "produce only viable male offspring, which are nonbiting. These mosquitoes are intended to mate with wild populations and lead, ultimately, to the collapse of those populations," according to the previously referenced article. Its pilot project launched in 2021 with the release of four million mosquitos in the Florida Keys.

and we might jump right into summer, which is sometimes what happens. And we're no longer in those sort of predictable ways of looking at the environment, and things don't feel as guaranteed. So that's where I'm coming from in my perspective on Stevens's work. But I'm just wondering if you have any thoughts on Stevens or just on poetry from before people were super aware of the climate crisis.

JS [00:33:03] I don't have much on Stevens. I mean, I've always been interested as a poet, but I don't really have a big take on him. I mean, if I had to think about where, that moment that you're talking about, where you're like reading something like, "Oh, there's a really interesting something that's being said about the environment here that has just been kind of like overlooked for a long time," which I think you find when reading stuff all the time. It's kind of interesting to go back and rethink, like, think about like what's showing up or how things are showing up. But they're often quite complicated and kind of interesting. But the place where I would look for that the most, I think, is — in part because of my interest in colonial history or something like that or big historical scales — is in the anti-colonial history of poetries of the 1950s that are coming out of those independence movements. I think they're often doing something really interesting in part because again, like the return to localism is seen as like one of the ways that you can counter colonialism, right? That you can get yourself underneath, you know, you can reinvigorate the kind of artistic conventions or, you know, ecosystems that existed prior to the moment of colonialism in some senses. I mean, so that's where Césaire becomes really interesting to me. But, you know, not just Césaire, like a lot of that work I think is really, I don't know. It just kind of has an interesting perspective on it.

EF [00:34:47] Yeah, definitely. Definitely interesting to think about, like the historical moment people were writing in and what sort of information was available and their conceptions of what nature and what the environment meant at that time versus now. Especially, like, I'm using Wallace Stevens as sort of my pre-knowledge of the Anthropocene poet, and then I'm looking at you, Camille Dungy, and Craig Santos Perez, as current people in the ecopoetry scene. And part of that is intentional, to use a very canonical poet who's kind of just like a rich white dude, and to sort of compare him to the, like, more diverse, poetic moment that we're in right now.

JS [00:35:44] Yeah. Yeah, that's interesting. I mean, when you were talking when I was thinking about ... I'm reading a lot of local histories since I live now in California. I've been reading a lot of California histories or books about California as a hobby. But, you know, a lot of them, it really shows up a lot in this book *Tending the Wild*,³⁶ which is a contemporary book, which is about the kind of descriptions of California prior to contact ... Like, in the unlikely event that we had a moment where we were like, "We want to return as close as we can to a pre-contact ecosystem," which is an extreme version of the "Let's go kill all the invasive plants that are in this area." Right. Put some native plants in this four foot square area or something like that. But if you were to do that, like it seems like those are those texts, you'd have to go back to those texts. And again, just to think about like, how would you get, you know, a large amount of quail to reestablish? Which is nice to think about — that that knowledge is there. That might be one answer to that question that you were asking about, like, what's the good of poetry in some

³⁶ *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources* by M. Kat Anderson was first published in 2005 and was republished in 2013.

sense? Like, you know, it can maybe inventory, knowledge for someone who wants it for some reason.

EF [00:37:35] Mm hmm. Yeah. Definitely. I really appreciate you talking to me. I don't want to take up too much of your time today, but I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to me. I really admire your work, so it was amazing to get to talk to you.

JS [00:38:05] Thank you. I mean, it's very nice of you to be reading. Thanks for wanting to talk.

EF [00:38:12] Yeah, of course. Thank you so much. Goodbye.