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What Kind of Environmental Writing?

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Ecology is a matter of human experience.[1]

Environmental Writing Goes to University

For several years now, new majors have been developing at American and European universities to train future writers, poets, playwrights, critics and journalists practicing environmental writing, nature writing, or the writing of place in the wider culture. In the programs of such universities as Santa Barbara, Iowa State MFA, Oregon State University, the University of Utah, Western Colorado University, Princeton, Palo Alto, Montana, New York, Toronto, Stockholm, Oslo, Munich, Warwick and many others, degree programs combining environmental education with creative writing courses and art projects have been established. At the same time, from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences to arts there are new thematic areas of courses and workshops recurring in the

1 Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 12.

curricula of other universities as well, tailored both to the interests of the students and to the new writing practices emerging at the forefront of publications in various types of academic and commercial publishers. The most capacious name for these practices is "green studies."[2]

Descriptions of these thematic areas revolve around such phenomena as environmental disasters, the effects of climate change, global warming, endemic environmental dysfunction, collapse of biodiversity, place, and the broader sense of the term "vital," and so on. These are accompanied by new types and genres of apocalyptic, dystopian and utopian narratives that combine the fate of the natural and human world into a multi-threaded, fragmented, often assemblage-type story about the socio-environmental future. Nonfiction texts, images, and videos about ecology, the environment, nature, wilderness, and sustainability are thus analyzed in detail. The new majors offer students the opportunity to develop their writing skills and interests in ways that promote and demonstrate environmental concerns, awareness, and sensitivities. It is worth noting, however, that the skill of writing texts is often accompanied by the refinement of combining linguistic expressions with other narrative forms such as films and photo-reportages.

The results of these studies are primarily thesis projects as either a book in progress, prototypes for books, or a series of related nonfiction creative works. In a further turn, however, they are also works of environmental literature, both as creators and as critics. The subject of research and study, and in many cases also the result thereof, become works of fiction, essays, memoirs, literary journalism, science fiction, poetry, and film interrogating the human relationship with nature, wilderness, climate change, and racial justice. Students can choose to write analytical or creative texts, resulting from the exploration of how people imagine and write about the natural world and a greener future for our culture. They may analyze the consequences of such writing as well. All universities promise the possibility of publishing the resulting work in both student journals and university publications. The boundaries between scientific knowledge, journalism, literature and other types of art are consciously blurred here, although it is typical of these studies to pay attention to the relationship between fiction and nonfiction narratives. The repeated distinction between fiction and nonfiction in the analyses by ecofiction researchers is generally reduced to the statement that "a primary distinction between nonfiction and fiction is the degree to which imagination is invoked."[3]

2 Laurence Coupe, ed., *The Green Studies Reader. From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2000).

3 Jim Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are: A Field Guide to Ecofiction* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2010), 7.

The problem is that imagination, along with responsibility and conservation, is also one of the basic terms used in works on ecology written by the representatives of various sciences and publicists. Particular importance is attributed to it by Jedediah Purdy, for example, who calls for the creation of a contemporary intellectual history of the natural world from ideas and practices. "The concept that unifies these themes is environmental imagination. […] It is an implicit, everyday metaphysics, the bold speculations buried in our ordinary lives."[4] Purdy also lists four versions of environmental imagination, which are described at the center of *After Nature*, that is, providential version, Romantic vision, utilitarian picture, and an ecological view of the world.[5] This division can be debated, but it is above all the seemingly chronological arrangement within the versions mentioned that deserves attention. For in the public consciousness, the formation of which is supposed to be the task of environmental writing, they function today in parallel. The term "imagination" can, therefore, refer to both fiction and nonfiction narratives, fostering an academic understanding of environmental writing. This major mixes liberal arts with environmental crunchiness and combines the cultural with the natural to develop understanding of how humans continue to conceive, construct, and fulfill their relationships with the natural world. The following section of the paper will consider the ambiguous role of the term "imagination" as a criterion used to distinguish between various types of environmental writing.

Terms used repeatedly in published study curricula are environmental imagination, environmental humanities, "green teaching," environmental communication, cultural and natural landscape and environmental fieldwork experience. The last of these will be given special attention later in this text. The main idea of the studies is very well presented by the motto of the Undergraduate Certificate in Environmental Writing at the University of Illinois: "turning data into narrative." This means combining learning about the latest scientific research on the environment with knowledge of how to communicate this research effectively to the public. The written stories find their structure in geology and geography, in biology and chemistry, and in the complex and rapidly changing transdisciplinary research. The certificate is a joint venture of the Institute for Sustainability, Energy, and Environment, the School for Earth, Society, and Environment, and the English Department. It is easy to find more examples of similar cooperation.

4 Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature. A Politics for the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 6–7.

5 Ibid., 8.

Particularly noteworthy is the practice of inviting prominent representatives of environmental writing – who are not difficult to find, especially in the USA – to teach courses, as well as artists (especially photographers) representing environmental art. The competencies of future graduates cover a wide range of issues, from environmental law and environmental humanities, to a variety of environmentally focused careers in business, education, government, industry, advertising, public policy, community planning, nature therapy, or the non-profit sector.

The simplest definition of the field covered by the new majors is: "environmental writing is writing that focuses on environmental topics." The subject matter of the texts being produced or selected for the analysis, therefore, rather than specific writing styles and genres of expression, determines the scope of environmental writing. It is also assumed that these are texts aimed at different types of audiences, both those interested in ecology and environmental studies and those encountering such content by chance in the products of popular culture or in direct experience resulting from everyday life. Environmental writers also practice a particular type of writing, such as news articles, magazine articles, or press releases, which form a regular repertoire of journals published around the world. Recently in Poland, it has become difficult to imagine an issue of a good weekly magazine without an up-to-date commentary on some aspect of environmental events. The range of topics covered also remains undefined, bringing together researchers who are interested in the wilderness or wildlife with proponents of green or blue architecture and design into a large family seeking changes in the understanding of the meaning of technology, economics and politics in the world threatened by global warming.

It is difficult to draw a line between environmental writing, nature writing and writing of place, although writers such as Rick Bass and Anne LaBastille are mentioned as representatives of nature writing. Wallace Stegner, Annie Dillard, and Edward Abbey, on the other hand, would open the list of writers identified with environmental writing. To a reader of books published by these authors, however, it is difficult to resist the impression that the line has been drawn not so much intuitively as arbitrarily and could well have been sketched differently. This is probably because in all these areas, the authors are able to cultivate writing closely linked to scientific research, disseminate scientific results and create nonfiction accounts of travelling or living in special places (primarily linked to wilderness exploration). They combine descriptions of the natural world with fiction, photographic reportage, poetic descriptions of nature, and reconstruction of animal myths, bringing to the fore personal experience of the phenomena and places described.

Immediate Environmental Experience Matters

It is not surprising, then, that the traditions of this scriptural production seem to encompass the whole of world literature, beginning with the myths and stories of Native Americans, Australian Aboriginal, Pagan, Celtic, Taoist and many other cosmologies and their associated oral and written literature and philosophy.[6] Clearly rooted in traditional pastoralism and transcendentalism, environmentally oriented literature, from Homer's *Odyssey* to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* to Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*, and so on, provides inspiration for environmental writing today. Every national literature could be rewritten by showing how the authors of novels, poetry, dramas, and other works include lengthy descriptions of nature, reflections on nature, or plots involving environmental issues. In recent years, there has been no shortage of such attempts, going back mainly to Romanticism and the nineteenth century, with a particular appreciation, irrespective of the region of the world and era, of literary travelogues. Immediate experience, for which journeys – whether further beyond the boundaries of the immediate environment or not – are an intrinsic condition, derives from immersion in new naturecultures. They authenticate literary and journalistic accounts, linking them to the material world in a way that cannot be fully replicated in the reading experience. They might, however, be reproduced and verified personally. This is the beginning of a profound collective environmental experience.

Contemporary readings of travelogues published in the second half of the nineteenth century by Hippolyte Taine are an excellent example of this.[7] Today anachronistic-sounding attempts to link landscape, climate and nature with the differences between, for example, Italian and Dutch painting, do not take away the value of the descriptions of landscapes in the countries visited by Taine. This is all the more so because his concept of the *milieu* as a complex socio-natural-aesthetic structure was, after all, an attempt to deal philosophically and critically with the naturecultural relationships he had encountered during his journeys. The personal experience of places is of great importance here. In the field of environmental writing, it is precisely this experience that is successfully combined and interwoven with the knowledge of data concerning the state of the environment described. However, it is not necessary to reach for experiences so distant in time and extensive accounts of foreign journeys. In *The Ecological Thought*, Timothy Morton writes:

6 Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are*, 9.

7 Hippolyte Taine, *Voyage aux Pyrénées* (Pau: Monhelios Edition, 2002); Hippolyte Taine, *Voyage en Allemagne, (1870)* (Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2017); Hippolyte Taine, *Voyages en Italie* (Paris: Bartillat, 2018).

> Before I went to Tibet, I wondered whether indigenous people actually did an "authentic," non-Western experience of place. I returned less sure than ever. When you camp in Tibet, as I did for about two weeks, you sleep under outer space – as directly below it as you can without flying.[8]

Of course, Morton has more than once misled readers by suggesting a personal, direct engagement with the landscape and then dismissed it by showing how easy it is to create such literary constructs.[9] The boundary between fiction and nonfiction lends itself so easily to narrative strategies that there is always a shadow of uncertainty as to which side of actual reality the author is on and which side the reader is on. He did not correct this passage, however, and so we can conclude that immediate experience became the canvas for his reflections on the differences in the apprehension and understanding of space in Western culture and in the culture of Tibetans living in constant proximity to outer space.

If one were to rewrite the history of the world's literatures according to the key provided by environmental writing projects, a new worldview would emerge in which space – not time – determines the construction of stories. Just as Edward Hall distinguished between high- context cultures and low-context cultures,[10] all the same, referring to Morton, we could distinguish space-based cultures from time-based cultures. Polish culture (literature) would probably belong to the latter realm, just as Tibetan culture could be called a space culture rather than a time culture. Immediate experience of space and places is, to a large extent, repeatable (Morton encourages this). Immediate experience of past time is impossible. Of course, this "otherness" of cultures is in line with the radical deep ecology that regards the Earth as the supreme value, which often leads to a nature-centric attitude, as opposed to the anthropocentric attitudes underpinning literary stories, which regard the human subject – including its temporality – as the supreme value. Although environmental writing does not demand to reverse any anthropocentric order, it gives the actions of human subjects a limited role in forming images of the world. A storyteller, along with their non-human and human characters, belongs to a space of which they are a part, not just a commentator. It is often a local space, an ecological niche, a fragment of a fragment of global nature. Roger Scruton is therefore wrong when he accuses the radical environmental

8 Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 26.

9 Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature, Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 29.

10 Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1976), 111.

movement of "neglect of *Heimatlichkeit* in the environmentalist literature,"[11] but he correctly reads the neglected concern with time (mostly past) in ecological manifestos.

Scruton's accusation certainly cannot be applied to environmental writing, which, by giving special importance to personal experience, forces one to select the material gathered, to choose the voices of co-narrators, to define the places and environments of the events described. More often than not, these are precisely the places best known to the authors: their cities and the animals that inhabit them, mountain ranges, forests, parks, urban wastelands, and mountain valleys. The relationship between personal and collective experience is established both in the reading of the texts and in the events and phenomena that precede it. For climate change, in the popular imagination, is a phenomenon that affects the existence of individual human and non-human subjects, but crosses the boundary of individual experience. Linking these scales – the local and the global, the individual and the social – is, therefore, considered the most important task of environmental writing. Hence, it is not the originality of experiences that is at stake here, but their connectivity, the initiation of encounters between them, for it is the course of these encounters that determines the value of environmentally oriented literature.

The experience that appears most frequently in both environmental writing and eco fiction in a narrow sense is the experience of loss. The loss of smells of plants that disappear from the immediate environment as a result of climate change, the loss of voices of birds that used to hover over fields and gardens, the loss of rustling of leaves in cleared avenues, and so on, bring to life nostalgic poems and rebellious manifestos on the borderline between science, art and environmental activism. It is also the experience of sadness, which could be described as the sadness manifested by inhabitants of disappearing environments: disappearing lakes, drying up, poisoned rivers, uprooted forests, ploughed-up balks and dirt roads. Finally, the fear, felt with varying intensity but increasingly egalitarian, of losing the known world, any world, demands new forms of expression, including new narrative forms. Arguably, the sense of loss, sadness, fear would be more aptly called affects, but their materialization in specific environments and facts leads to the crystallization of a collective experience demanding to be uttered. The experience of loss is thus accompanied by a specific linguistic experience: the need to name anew the wounded and dying environments, to preserve and understand the

11 Roger Scruton, *Zielona filozofia. Jak poważnie myśleć o naszej planecie* [Green philosophy: How to think seriously about the planet], trans. Justyna Grzegorczyk and Rafał P. Wierzchosławski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, 2017), 225.

names of extinct species that are no longer applicable to the description of direct experience. The museum of disappearing nature relentlessly proliferates both in the languages becoming extinct with the inhabitants of endangered environments who use them and in the expansive languages of global communication. The effort to collect, explain and make public this linguistic, conservationist "exhibition" is far from the "neglect of *Heimatlichkeit*" of which Scruton wrote.

It is not without reason that, in the context of environmental change, the need to take into account the extended spatial scale of the climate disaster unfolding before our eyes is pointed out. Anthropocene researchers focus on the global, planetary pole, using data collected over centuries in different regions of the world and placing them on maps. In writing about the Anthropocene, Timothy Clark shows why it is necessary to move between a perspective based on individual actions and one built from those practices that can only be observed on a planetary scale. If even climate change can be primarily manifested as "innumerable possible hairline cracks in an individual life,"[12] environmental writing aims to collect and produce accounts that are understandable on the basis of the common, not only human world, but that refer to individual experiences. "Natural sciences only deliver raw facts," while narrative formulations can foreground climate change as a social phenomenon.[13] This binary approach is questioned by many environmental writing researchers and authors, such as Le Guin.[14] The examples that will appear in this article will sustain the main arguments cited in this critique. The fundamental issue then becomes the dissimilarity of recounted experiences, which is obscured by the neoliberal discourse on climate change. The differences in experiencing, for example, the sixth great extinction of species, conditioned by the geographical location, colonial history, gender, wealth, and so on, of its observers, mean that both scientific research and environmental writing oscillate constantly between the concrete and the abstract, the highly voluminous and the limited, the local and the global, the generalizing and the specific. Thus, the Anthropocene becomes both a very appealing and a difficult subject to grasp for eco fiction, environmental writing in the broadest sense, and scientific publications.

12 Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 13.

13 Annika Arnold, *Climate Change and Storytelling: Narratives and Cultural Meaning in Environmental Communication* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 38.

14 Ursula K. Le Guin, "Deep in Admiration," in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, ed. Anna Tsing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 16.

What Is Included in Environmental Writing and What Is Left Behind?

Two issues deserve to be highlighted in this context: 1. the spatiality of the environ-mental experience (and local naturecultures that emerge from it); 2. the materiality of the environmental experience entangled with the corporeal materiality of the experiencing subjects. It is difficult to imagine today an alternative poetics and literary theory focusing on multi-vectoral spatial relations. How would we study narrative if we assumed its adjacency, first to landscapes and places, and second only to sequences of events? How would the construction of the narrator radically change in relation to the world presented by the dispersed – human and non-human – subjectivities? Are we ready to accept an account of their (the abstract subject's) bodily location? If we talk today about the importance and distinctiveness of situated knowledge requiring the researcher to give an account of his or her own socio-cultural-spatial belonging, then the transfer of the same expectations to the author/narrator/speaking subject in eco fiction raises concerns and objections. From the assumptions made in this text, it follows that, while eco fiction is a branch of literature, it can also be located in the wider context created by environmental writing. Its multifaceted nature and long history are part of not only the curricula of new studies, but also the search for the most effective attempts to penetrate the natural world through the social infrastructures of language and text production. In this way, both eco fiction and other kinds of texts fall within the scope of interest of environmental humanities. It is not without reason, however, that the search continues for new forms of environmental writing that transcend the limitations of eco fiction.

Are there any conditions that might allow for the creation of coherent naturecultural worlds constructed from stories and arranged in a comprehensible literary-worldview structure? How can one collect, store and sustain the meanings of these stories corrected by the knowledge provided by environmental studies, ecology, and so on? These are simple questions not so much about the possibility of creating "different" literature and "different" writing than the one we know, but about the rejection of internalized and institutionalized expectations of writing and language by science and education. Some of these questions have found their way into the repertoire of the environmental literary criticism movement that has been developing since the 1960s. If we agree that "environmental critics explore how nature and the natural world are imagined through literary text,"[15] however, we are not explicitly asking how theoretical reflection on literature is changing. Nor are we asking about the ontology of worlds – experienced and imagined. Instead,

15 Ken Hiltner "General Introduction," in *Ecocriticism. The Essential Reader*, ed. Ken Hiltner (London: Routledge, 2015), xiii.

we remain in the area delimited by theories of imagination, representation, influences (e.g. the influence of Thoreau's *Walden* on Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*), perception (e.g. forests and mountains), and "drawing attention to the worsening condition of the earth."[16] As a consequence, description dominates as the most essential writing method.

To a large extent, this can be seen as a consequence of the formulations in William Rueckert's foundational essay on ecocriticism, published in 1978 and containing a very general program for his proposed critical activity, in which issues of experimentation and relevance came to the fore. Rueckert wrote:

> Specifically, I am going to experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for a human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live in of anything that I have studied in recent years.[17]

Literary criticism's adoption of concepts from the natural sciences is, of course, possible (and applied), but they only function on the surface of the emerging texts, without intervening more deeply in the writing practices themselves. Making them into original critical tools would require a more complex process of adaptation and cooperation between the two disciplines. Rueckert, however, did not envisage this, and the role of experimentation, in which we would have pined our's hopes, was supposed to be very limited.[18] It is much easier, then, for critics, pointing to the spatiality and materiality of environmental experiences, to reach for examples of analyses of environmental activism, often linked to artistic activities, as is easily seen in the practice of eco-critics.[19]

Analyzing the new forms of environmental writing, Timothy C. Baker attempts to address the relationship between a text and the world by looking at current practices in the context of three possible strategies: fragmenting,

16 Hiltner, "General Introduction," xvi.

17 William Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (London: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 107.

18 It is described by Bedika Bhattacharjee, "The Environmental Turn in Literary Theory and Criticism and the 'Truth of Ecology': Understanding Ecocriticism," in *Sambalpur Studies in Literatures and Cultures* (Sambalpur: Sambalpur University, 2019), 124.

19 "The most commonly understood meaning or synonym for ecocriticism has been 'nature,' and ecocriticism involves a good amount of commitment in its way to protect the environment or nature taking the field of study from critical analysis to activism." Bhattacharjee, "The Environmental Turn," 128.

gleaning and assembling.[20] The first derives from the observation that, for most authors, what remain available are fragments of the natural world. We do not experience the world as a whole, but its scattered, incidentally revealing parts, which results in a limitation of the narrative and forces changes in its structure. The fragment is both an object of experience and a form of storytelling. Both the storyteller and the world to which he or she refers, therefore, remain mostly covered and unknown. This applies to eco fiction as much as to academic works and essays. Awareness of this diffuse, gap-filled multidisciplinary perspective accompanies writers and readers, which Baker links to immediate experience, to immersion in the immediate environment, to participation in processes and phenomena that are exposed to everyday observation. In the study of urban environments, no one needs to be convinced of this. Research schools take their names from the cities in which they work and which are the subject of their analyses (e.g. Chicago School, New York School, Baltimore School). However, their impact transcends the geographical and administrative boundaries of the cities mentioned, which raises many epistemological questions. Nevertheless, if "an encounter with the text cannot be separated from an encounter with the environment,"[21] a fragment is transformed into an aesthetic and writing category, whose long tradition Baker recalls. For, as in the writings of Walter Benjamin, the fragment "handles" the allegory of ruin well – except that in environmental writing it is transferred to the natural world.

Fragmentary storytelling consequently refers to two further strategies for dealing with the incomplete, provisional as a sketch and refined as a collection (archive) of details of the ecological disaster image. Baker's original proposal consists in gleaning, which he favors over assembling. "Gleaning is a process of collecting what has been abandoned, repurposing it, as a way of turning attention to the momentary encounter between self and world."[22] Understood in this way, it stands at the opposite pole of the archive also constructed from fragments and often reflecting individual attitudes to the world. The difference between the archive and the catalogue on the one hand and gleaning on the other consists in the possibility (or lack thereof) of creating constellations originating in the movement and experiences of material subjects, human and non-human. Environmental experience, standing at its origin, guarantees the perception of the natural world not as abstraction, but as a subject with

20 Timothy C. Baker, *New Forms of Environmental Writing. Gleaning and Fragmentation* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

21 Ibid., 24.

22 Ibid., XV.

and about which the writer is in dialogue. Gleaning, therefore, aims not so much to conserve fragments of the world found (its natural ruins), but to learn how to navigate a complex naturecultural reality. In this way, it refer not only to the past, as a reference to Benjamin's concept of ruins would suggest, but also to the future. This property makes it useful for environmental writing, which, in its academic and journalistic version, combines romantic environmental imagination with the ecological view of the world that Purdy wrote about. It encourages the creation of dystopia and utopia at the same time.

Baker proposes cultivating fragmentary narratives and the accompanying strategy of gleaning as a form of resistance to the official language of archive and catalogue.[23] The world seen and experienced as constellations composed of fragments is a counter-proposal to the systemic analyses provided by Anthropocene scholars using a planetary perspective. It also makes it possible, as Baker writes, to see climate change not as something external that happens to us, but as something that directs attention to our immediate environment in which we are immersed. "Storytelling as gleaning, as a way of looking at the peripheral and the fragmentary, provides a path to recognizing our entanglement with the world, and creating company."[24] Baker cites numerous examples that situate a narrative in relation to the natural world, in this way using the resources of his home library. Indeed, the moment when he wrote *New Forms*… was a special one. Cut off by the COVID-19 pandemic from the libraries and collections assembled in his university office, he could only rely on those pieces of the vast literature on the subject that he had selected in advance and collected in his home. Gleaning was, therefore, an accessible strategy that he used when writing his own book.

Perhaps this is also why he treated the assemblage concepts of Gilles Deleuze and Rosi Braidotti very inaccurately and briefly by concentrating on the multiple relations between acting actors and textual glosses. What he did not see in assemblage was a form that bursts the narrative binding between immediate experience and the world. Recalling Deleuze's concept, he only used his *Dialogues II*, written with Claire Parnet,[25] while overlooking what distinguishes this proposal from many other assembling concepts developed in the twenty-first century,[26] that is, its causal, active mechanistic character.

23 Ibid., 191–192.

24 Ibid., 193.

25 Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjan (London: Continuum, 2002).

26 Latour (ANT, reassembling), McFarlane (learning assemblage), agency (Deleuze, Guattari), DeLanda (assemblage theory), Hardt and Negri (assembling of multiple voices), etc.

Assembling not only distinguishes parts of reality and establishes relations between them, as Deleuze wrote, but above all, it acts. At the simplest level, we can see it as an attempt to build a new type of archive based on assemblage documentation of minority histories using excerpts from documentaries, film essays and radio interviews. In the background, there is a surprising cartography on whose basis dominant political geographies can be revised. This means, above all, experimenting with new accounts that create "emancipatory assemblages,"[27] on which "assemblage geographies" are founded.[28] Academic environmental writing programs are closer to such approaches than to the nostalgic concept of Baker's gleaning, showing this strategy as the main way to deal with the complexity of phenomena grounded in immediate environmental experience.

Settling Environmental Writing in the New Humanities

From the 1970s, environmental writing became a practice characteristic of the new humanities. Originally called ecological humanities, and nowadays rather environmental humanities, the new discipline "early began to cultivate new ways of understanding humanity's linkages to nature."[29] Its inspirations are wide-ranging, reaching back to the Western humanities of the preceding decades, postcolonial studies, indigenous studies, history, cultural geography, gender studies, anthropology and the broad spectrum of the natural sciences. The trigger for this international, spontaneous movement combining research and critical attitudes was, as with environmental writing, global warming. The progression of the new discipline entering more universities resembles the explosion of environmental writing as a new direction in university curricula, described at the beginning of this text. The same universities and regions of the world are often mentioned as the sites of these pioneering practices. The key terms with which the discussion surrounding environmental writing and environmental humanities takes place are in principle not much different. They contain the following notions: place, wilderness, sustainable cities, radical environmentalism, biodiversity, the Anthropocene, dark visions of planetary collapse, apocalyptic narratives, imagination, and so on. Emmett

27 Steve Hinchliffe, *Geographies of Nature: Societies, Environments, Ecologies* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2007).

28 Paul Robbins and Brian Marks, "Assemblage Geographies," in *The Sage Handbook of Social Geographies*, ed. S. J. Smith, Rachel Pain, J. P. Jones and Sallie Marston (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2009), 176-194.

29 Robert S. Emmett and David E. Nye, *The Environmental Humanities. A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 175.

and Nye's *A Critical Introduction*, in which they reconstruct the main themes developed in environmental humanities, reiterates key intuitions that had already emerged in an anthology of texts entitled *The New Humanities Reader*, edited by Richard E. Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer and published in 2012. One part of this anthology, entitled "The Future of the Environment,"[30] gathered texts written from a variety of disciplinary perspectives (human geography, human psychology, archaeology, etc.), relating more or less directly to the links between the natural environment and cultural change. *The Environmental Humanities*, however, makes an important clarification in the rather incoherent field of research of the new discipline.

> Transdisciplinary projects in the environmental humanities have involved storytelling, semi-structured interviews, and visual ethnography to develop usable models for directing energy development, agricultural practices, land use, and water management. [...] Initiatives in the environmental humanities are often inspired by artists, filmmakers, playwrights, and specialists in digital media.[31]

The prevailing assumption, however, is that environmental humanities primarily provide interpretations for selected data drawn from science-based research and produce environmental solutions.

This is just one way of integrating humanities involved in transforming the relationship between an individual and his or her natural environment, cultural changes and climate change. Nevertheless, environmental writing, whose inherent dimension is environmental humanities, also encompasses other projects, including those whose intrinsic element is the immediate environmental experience anchored in the professional practices of authors dealing practically with issues of environmental change influenced by global warming and new forms of cultural activity. More significantly, works from this area have not always been written by representatives of the humanities. Their authors include biologists, landscape architects, geographers, and sociologists, who have chosen ways of writing about the naturocultural world that are innovative for their disciplines. The combination of specialist knowledge concerning, for example, urban wastelands with the use of narrative forms that characterize the humanities locates their publications on the intersection of science, practice, literature and educational activity. In this way, environmental humanities – and this is the thesis of this article – are the result of

30 *The New Humanities Reader*, ed. Richard E. Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer (International Edition: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012), 110.

31 Emmett and Nye, *The Environmental Humanities*, 7.

writing practices moving in two directions: from humanities to environmental studies and from sciences to humanities. This latter direction, which is extremely interesting, is still poorly recognized. Meanwhile, a very significant expansion of the meaning of the term "humanities" is taking place here by including new, often difficult to classify, forms of environmental writing.

I would like to give a few examples for consideration which legitimize this statement. I will bring two manifestos to the fore: *The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* by Donna Haraway,[32] and *Manifeste du Tiers Paysage* by Gilles Clément.[33] There are several significant similarities and equally significant differences between them. The first one was written by a researcher who combines an evolutionary biology perspective with feminist theory. It should be read in the context of *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway's first manifesto, published in 1985, and her concept of situated knowledges. For in this one, Haraway declares that *The Companion Species Manifesto* is a personal document, a scholarly foray into half-known territories inhabited by dogs, and other companion species, peoples, cyborgs, and texts. The immediate environment of the author's manifesto is reminiscent of Taine's *milieu* rather than the natural environment described by environmentalists. Immediate environmental experience, therefore, according to Haraway's well-known terminological proposal, has a naturecultural character. "I offer dog-eaten props and half-trained arguments to reshape some stories I care about a great deal, as a scholar and as a person in my time and place,"[34] Haraway writes. She chooses the form of manifesto because, although the concept of companion species is a record of conversations with dog owners and texts about dogs, cyborgs and other companion species, it is primarily a political act. Like any manifesto, it was written as a proclamation, a plea to rethink the relationship between the dogs, humans and cyborgs that make up our immediate environment.

Clément's primary activity, as a botanist and entomologist, is garden design. His concepts of "moving garden" and "planetary garden" in particular have brought him wide recognition. Clément designs gardens and, at the same time, writes books about gardens that go far beyond the workshop of a biologist. In recent years, however, his concept of the third landscape developed in the form of a manifesto has become the most popular, also in Poland. Its direct source was observation of the Limousin region. "What the bird perceives – what our gaze embraces from a summit – is a carpet woven of dark rough

32 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

33 Gilles Clément, *Manifeste du Tiers Paysage* (Rennes: Editions du commun, 2020).

34 Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 5.

forms: the forests; and well-defined light surfaces: the pastures,"[35] Clément writes. In his manifesto, however, he demands that we turn our gaze away from this industrial landscape and see other spaces, seemingly devoid of economic and political functions and located on the fringes of what is planned and exploited. He looks for places seemingly abandoned by culture – wastelands – which he sees as an opposition to organized areas. Such places, dispersed and marginal, form what he calls the third landscape. He finds them everywhere – in rural spaces and cities, whose development is marked by a process of abandoning what is already economically and socially non-functional. This third landscape becomes, in contrast to agricultural and garden monocultures, a habitat for diversity. Therefore, he writes, the preservation of the third landscape is a challenge for both the collective environmental consciousness that is taking shape today and concrete social practices. The defense of biological diversity takes on a political character in this manifesto. The manifesto concludes with specific demands directed at Western culture, which should turn to other cultures to renew its understanding of the relationship between man and nature. It takes the form of an assemblage made up of descriptions, demands, sketches and the accompanying legend.

Both manifestos have a very fruitful impact on the contemporary environmental writing developed in Poland. The former, for example, is at the core of *ZOEpolis. Budując wspólnotę ludzko-nie-ludzką* [ZOEpolis. Building human and non-human community], a book that is innovative on many levels and whose "threads were woven together" by Małgorzata Gurowska, Monika Rosińska and Agata Szydłowska. The publication was preceded by exhibitions extending companion species to incorporate other animal and plant species. "Non-human inhabitants, such as the porcellio scaber and the common pigeon, were invited to co-design, far outnumbering the human team."[36] The editors of the Krakow-based *Self-Portrait* devoted the entire issue 3 (2019) to wasteland, starting with a translation of Clément's *Manifeste du Tiers Paysage*. The program of the Fourth Congress of the Polish Cultural Studies Society included a session on wilderness, the core of which were papers on wasteland exploring the implications of the assumptions formulated in Clément's manifesto. Many more examples could be cited. Environmental humanities are losing their disciplinary clarity as a consequence of this movement, but

35 Gilles Clément, *Manifesto of the Third Landscape*, trans. Michele Bee and Raphaël Fèvre (Trans Europe Halle, the.net), 5.

36 *ZOEpolis. Budując wspólnotę ludzko-nie-ludzką* [ZOEpolis. Building human and non-human community]; the threads were woven by Małgorzata Gurowska, Monika Rosińska and Agata Szydlowska (Warszawa: Fundacja Bęc Zmiana, 2020), 8.

are undoubtedly becoming an area of experimentation and multidisciplinary collaboration.

I would like to present two more instances to exemplify the formation of such a non-obvious experimental-critical-research community, this time choosing forms of writing other than a manifesto. The first example comes from Peter S. Alagona's book *The Accidental Ecosystem*, written under the influence of research published in recent years by American urban ecologists. Alagona is a professor of environmental studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, specializing in nature-culture geography, but his book resembles a mythology of charismatic urban wildlife rather than a scientific argument. It can be regarded as an intriguing example of environmental writing arguing that cities are increasingly filled with wildlife. Urban wildlife mythology consists of tales of coyotes, black bears, grey squirrels, deer, bald eagles, pumas, skunks, sea lions, possums and other vertebrate wildlife that, driven out of their natural habitats by expansive agriculture and logging, migrate to cities.[37] In social terms, they can be described as unexpected immigrants spontaneously infiltrating the urban fabric and sharing many problems with human climate refugees in the world constructed by humans, but not for all living beings. They encounter indigenous species in cities, with which they come into conflict (the white-tailed eagle devours small street kittens in front of onlookers watching its nest) and their behavior stimulates interspecies xenophobia and interspecies solidarity simultaneously.

Alagona focuses on a few American cities, but one can imagine a global mythology of charismatic wild animals entering (and returning to) cities more and more boldly, mainly their suburbs, parks and campuses, cemeteries, urban forests, botanical gardens in search of better or simply more tolerable living conditions. Under these new conditions, they form multispecies ecological communities, enriching and transforming the perception of urban ecosystems gaining biodiversity as a result of species migration. They are distinguished by their high degree of adaptation and their mediality – they are fast becoming inhabitants of the mass imagination, media darlings. The history of the American philosophy of wilderness, which was constituted in the nineteenth century, was based primarily on literature (Thoreau, John Muir). Alagona's main focus is on film and media coverage, which not only accompanies wild animals in the city, traces them, and provokes reactions from the inhabitants, but also plays a role difficult to overestimate in facilitating or hindering their settlement in urban spaces.

37 Peter S. Alagona, *The Accidental Ecosystem. People and Wildlife in American Cities* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).

This cultural shift from literature and philosophy to popular culture has been very well represented by the history and reception of the film *Bambi*, produced by Disney and screened in 1942, opening the door, as Alagona writes, to the success of a new genre of films with animals as their subjects. They transformed not only America's founding wilderness myths, but also the consciousness of suburban dwellers. They changed the ideas associated with wilderness. While they took away its mystical dimension, they also equipped it with attributes of the human world. Alagona describes what urban dwellers perceive in their immediate surroundings, but he cultivates a kind of persuasion that is alien to manifestos. He refers to the collective immediate experience.

The last example of environmental writing I want to mention is the books by Peter Wohlleben, which have also recently been published in Poland. The author is a forester who uses the latest research and his own experience of interacting with nature to encourage readers to reject the barriers between humans and nature erected by Western philosophy and natural science. He argues that the human and non-human worlds are not only subject to the same rules, but above all are inseparable. *Das geheime Band zwischen Mensch und Natur* is a praise of the immediate environmental experience and the precognitive abilities of humans that go far beyond cognitive perception. The first-person narrative, incorporating themes and events from the author's life into the story and depicting his actions (e.g. the creation of the first cemetery forests in Germany to protect beech forests), is full of emotion (e.g. I thought my heart would burst). Constructed from fragments, multi-thematic and multi-threaded, it meanders around the relationship between human and non-human sensory cognition relating to the immediate environment and the policies of nature that he rejects and proposes to replace with others.

Describing the spiritual life of animals, the secret life of trees, the unknown bonds of nature, he does so by explaining and arguing for his vision of a naturecultural world. This vision is neither utopian nor dystopian – it attempts to collect answers to the most common questions about nature formulated by those who, unexpectedly also to themselves, open their eyes and discover the touch and smells of nature. On a first impulse, this type of writing can be called popular science, but its starting point is not scientific discoveries, but the author's personal discoveries. On a second impulse, one may be repulsed by the undisguised didacticism of this writing, but it is not based on any particular ethics other than interspecies understanding. On a third impulse, one may wonder whether the pleasure of reading does not come at the cost of infantilization of the reader, but he gives very professional answers to simply formulated questions. Baker would regard

Wohlleben's books as examples of fragmentary storytelling exposing personal immediate experience.

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All the examples, doubts and remarks formulated in this article represent only a fragment of the growing field of environmental writing. Any classifications I have found that attempt to capture it as a whole generate more objections than recognition. Perhaps it is too early to reach mature conclusions, but it seems more likely that thematic, genre and narrative dispersion are inherent features of this writing activity. After all, its mission is to build a picture of the human-nature relationship from scratch, to integrate existing stories into a new network of connections and reading needs. The relationships between environmental writing, eco fiction, eco criticism, environmental humanities and new humanities are no less convoluted. Their exact reconstruction exceeds the limits of this text.

Abstract

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What Kind of Environmental Writing?

The starting point for this paper is the growing popularity of environmental writing as a scholarly, journalistic, literary practice. Four issues are analyzed: 1) the presence of environmental writing in university curricula and the problems of establishing its subject matter; 2) the rationale for the popularity of fragmentary storytelling and its two accompanying strategies: gleaning and assembling; 3) the role that environmental writing has played in recent years in the new humanities; 4) the expansion of the notion of environmental humanities by narrative forms introduced by authors professionally engaged in practices in the field of natural-cultural geography. In this way, environmental humanities are the product of writing practices running in two directions: from humanities to environmental studies and from sciences to humanities, which is the thesis of this paper.

Keywords

environmental writing, fragmentary storytelling, gleaming, assembling, new humanities