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Voicing the Terrestrial: Theory of the Lyric and the Pressures of the Anthropocene

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Abstract: In the present essay, I argue that lyric ecopoetry is particularly suited to alter our worldview in favor of a more ecologically-aware stance. In itself this position has been announced by numerous ecocritics, with some doubts as to its adequacy expressed by Timothy Clark in his *Ecocriticism on the Edge*. Partly in response to his critique, it is here argued that poems do offer a viable way of altering human modes of thinking not by what or how they evoke but by the way in which they register in the reader's consciousness. To this effect, I depart from the theories of the lyric advanced in the last two decades by the likes of Jonathan Culler, Derek Attridge and the poet Don Patterson, all of whom argue that lyric poetry differs from any other form of linguistic expression in being itself the event it evokes rather than a representation of an event. This is because by dint of being performed by readers, lyric poems compel one to embrace the voices that comprise them as one's own, as a result helping one interiorize an experience of ultimate otherness. It is this modus of poetry's existence that makes it a particularly apt literary form for impelling one to appreciate the complexity of and one's imbrication in the networks of planetary ecosystems. In this way, as I claim further on, poetry may be conceived of as a vehicle for instilling a form of thinking that Bruno Latour has recently theorized as Terrestrial. For him, the Terrestrial is characterized by what he calls the system of engendering, a way of dwelling in the interrelated systems of the Earth that is reciprocally beneficial for human and non-humans. After an overview of Latour's idea, which is put forward as a potential political platform, and its relation to the extant theories of environmental humanities that emphasize poetry's role in conjuring the awareness of the intricacy of natural processes, I suggest that lyric poetry offers not only a means of linguistic expression of the interdependence of all elements in any given ecosystem but also constitutes a language capable of swaying human modes of thinking in favor of the Terrestrial.

Keywords: Ecopoetics, Bruno Latour, Jonathan Culler, the Terrestrial, theory of lyric poetry

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In his overview of the contemporary debates in ecocriticism, Timothy Clark commends recent experimental ecocentric poetry, particularly from the US and Canada, for its ability »to represent in new or revised forms of poetic practice« the actual »complexity of environmental issues«, their »multiplicity, and even contradiction and indeterminacy« (Clark 2019, 59). Rather than relying on the trope of nostalgia or anthropocentric renditions of nature's sublime beauty, Clark's poets of choice, Brenda Hillman, Juliana Spahr and Evelyn Reilly, become explorers of the human enmeshment in the networks of material environments. Through their attention to the operations of form, the three poets, as well as numerous others encourage readers, as Lynn Keller points out in relation to Spahr's 2011 collection *Well Then There Now*, »to examine their own perhaps near-paralyzing dilemmas in the presence of dramatically discrepant scales of global events and personal comprehension or agency« (2017, 47). For Clark, those »discrepant scales of global events« create what he calls the Anthropocene disorder: »a kind of psychic disorder, inherent in the mismatch between familiar day-to-day perception and the sneering voice of even a minimal ecological understanding or awareness of scale effects« (Clark 2015, 140). Because of its counterintuitive nature, ecological understanding resists neat taxonomization, demanding instead the consideration not only of the data but also of the tools employed for the collection of the data. In this respect, experimental ecopoetry and criticism thereof, given their self-reflexivity and the questioning of the language apparatus, prove useful for unpacking the intricacies of the disorienting scales of planetary systems.

However, Clark goes on to observe that the risk inherent in the formally innovative poetry, with its continuous pushing of the boundaries of expression through experiments with language and form, is that it may overstrain »the boundaries of accessibility, relevance and even readability« (2019, 75). The trap of radical experimentalism is that the bolder the poetic innovativeness gets the smaller their appeal could turn out to be. In effect, the challenge of obscurity »must be worrying for any ambition that ecopoetry can be a significant kind of environmental activism, given that even classes on traditional poetry can already too easily become a kind of crossword puzzle-solving exercise« (ibid.), which is attractive to academics but not so much to the general reading public. The challenge is not easily dismissed, for what Clark identifies is a catch-22: either poems oversimplify nature and the problematics of our largely deleterious impact thereon or they risk alienating all but the best-informed and tenacious readers, the preponderance of whom will have already come round to the idea that the world about is a hyper-object whose scalar complexity is too befuddling to be fully grasped. If ecopoetry's »primary task is to help readers imagine […] different ways of living on earth« and »foster an ethos of ›respecting the earth‹« (Hume/Osborne 2018, 10), one might argue that its social function is diminished in direct proportion to its astuteness in treating issues of ecology.

Still, Clark's tacit charge against the more conventional lyric ecopoetry as failing to give credit to scalar complexity of the planetary ecosystems may be met through the lens of the theory of the lyric poem as it has developed over the past two decades. Based on the work of such theoreticians of the lyric as Jonathan Culler, Derek Attridge, Peter Robinson and the poet Don Paterson, as well as ecocritical discussions of poetry from Scott Knickerbocker to Lynn Keller, lyric ecopoetry is here understood as embodying three features: 1. a complex enunciative apparatus usually featuring a discernible source, or sources, of the utterance, 2. formal organization of the utterance into rhythmical units (lines and stanzas) and 3. address of various aspects of the »world of accelerated environmental change« (Reilly 2022). Throughout the present essay, these are taken to be relevant to Western verse (again following Culler's tacit suggestion that lyric poetry has retained a number of its core structures since the times of ancient Greece), so that whenever a reference is made to lyric poetry or ecopoetry, it is its Western tradition that is meant. While the former two features, as I will show in more detail later, are generally agreed on not only by the above-mentioned theoreticians but the preponderance of critics working on lyric poetry, the last one is a broad idea that remains intrinsic to most discussions of lyric ecopoems. With these three in mind, the idea of lyric ecopoetry as used here denotes any poem, written in any language and in any period, conforming to the formal principles (Culler, as to a lesser degree do Attridge and Paterson, shows the validity of his claims in relation to poems from various periods and linguistics traditions) and preoccupied with problems of environmental crises.

And yet, recourse to theoreticians working in classically-understood poetics may seem counterproductive, for the textualist approach such as theirs has come under a fair share of criticism over the past two decades. Recently, David Farrier has argued that the Anthropocene necessitates a revision of the way in which lyric poetry is conceptualized, specifically in respect to »the two principal characteristics of the lyric poem – the stability of the lyric ›I‹ and what Jonathan Culler calls ›the special ›now‹‹ of lyric articulation« (2019, 5). It is true that »the Anthropocene puts pressure on the conventional claims of lyric poetry to be governed by a singular and therefore stable (if mobile) perspective« (ibid., 5 sq.) but, as I will argue here, it is an oversimplification to suggest that the contemporary theory of the lyric, from Robinson through Culler and Attridge to Paterson, endorses the ideas of a stable speaker or a lyrical present moment. Indeed, when Culler refers to Jane Bennett's vibrant materialism and Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (what Culler seems to mean is Latour's work that predates his later engagement with issues of ecology), he approves of their attempt to distribute the agency beyond the human subject but highlights that »poets […] were here first«, for »the testing of ideological limits through the multiplication of the figures who are urged to act, to listen, or to respond is part of the work of lyric« (2017, 242). Thus, in Culler's view, the lyric

poem constitutes a mode of expression best suited to embody what Bennett has called distributed or »confederate agency« (ibid., 33).

Admittedly, while neither Culler nor any of the other theoreticians mentioned here directly address any of the issues relevant to ecology, their work can nevertheless be recuperated for a revision of the place of lyric poetry in the Anthropocene, since what they offer is a nuanced articulation of how lyric poems penetrate individual consciousness and contribute to changes in our worldview. Though in a slightly different manner and with emphases laid on different aspects of the writerly practice, each of them regards poetry as being different from other literary genres, indeed from other art forms, in that it is itself the event it evokes. Rather than mimetically representing life, poems embody events, which are summoned into existence in each act of reading. If therefore novels convey to us stories of, for example, natural degradation and its concomitant dangers, poems impel us to interiorize the insights they thematize and to assimilate the particular effects the poem conjures, in all its semantic, rhythmical and tonal intricacy. This distinction, moreover, is not a matter of the interpretation of the work being the effect of the joint effort of the reader and the text, as Wolfgang Iser would suggest (see Iser 1980, 21 sq.). Instead, Culler's claim is more radical in that for him (with Paterson and Attridge seconding his idea), the text of the poem doesn't induce the reader to interpret its various meanings but rather at each perusal or oral delivery the lyric poem becomes the reader's own linguistic act and thus an event in the world.

I will argue that it is this nature of poetry as a performative event that makes it particularly suited to alter or complicate our worldview in favor of what Latour has recently termed the Terrestrial: a network of interweaving actors of various ilk, human and non-human but also animate and inanimate. After first expounding on the recent theories of the lyric and Latour's delineation of the idea of the Terrestrial, I go on to suggest that lyric ecopoetry is most adequately understood as constituting a form of discourse that is both expressive of and enabled by Terrestrial thinking in all its anti-systematic interconnectedness. As a result, by virtue of articulating the Terrestrial, poems embody one way in which the voice of what Latour calls the new actor of present times can be heard.

Poetry as Event

Culler suggests that throughout the history of Western lyric poetry (his samples go back to ancient Greek poetry and range all the way to the most recent work, mainly in English and French), five features have persisted: 1. a complexity of the enunciative apparatus; 2. the hyperbolic character of the invocation; 3. allusion to

a context of ritual; 4. optative nature of the address and 5. suggestion of a presence, here and now, of the invoked content (see Culler 2017, 16). He proceeds to elaborate on these five features, deriving from them four topical structures of the lyric. Firstly, the poem's complex enunciation precludes its reduction to the voice of a speaker (which Culler regards as a remnant of the New Critical doctrine). Instead, he posits the idea of voicing that comprises such aspects of form as »the echoing of rhyme, assonance, or alliteration, and rhythmic patterning« (ibid., 35). Secondly, by dint of belonging »to real enunciation or statement, nonmimetic and nonfictive« (ibid., 105), the lyric becomes »itself an event rather than a representation of an event« (ibid., 35). Thirdly, »the formal dimensions of lyrics«, which add up to the intricate nature of the address as suggested in the previous point, »contribute to their ritualistic as opposed to fictional aspect, making them texts composed for *re*performance«, for in many Western lyrics across centuries, it has seemed »important that the reader be not just a listener or an audience but also a performer of the lines – that he or she come to occupy, at least temporarily, the position of the speaker and audibly or inaudibly voice the language of the poem« (ibid., 37, emphasis in original). Finally, the lyric's insistence on the importance of its invocation, regardless of how mundane its topic should be, stems from the hyperbolic nature of the address (ibid., 37 sq.) that invests its object with extraordinary significance.

Culler's four-element theory of the lyric is largely corroborated by Don Paterson, even though his often idiosyncratic ideas of how poems constitute meaning are less amenable to a synthetic summary than Culler's. For Paterson, among the unique features of the poem (he never limits his field to lyric poetry but virtually all of his examples come from that subgenre) is the fact that »poet and reader enter a bizarre cultural contract where they *agree* to create the poem through the investment of an excess of imaginative energy« (2019, 4, emphasis in original). Later he adds that because »poems are half-said things, full of deliberate elisions no normal conversation would countenance«, the reader is impelled to enter this space and effectively co-author the meaning of the text (ibid., 280). This notion of co-authorship, which is central to Culler's view as well, has been corroborated at length by another poet *cum* occasional theoretician, Paul Muldoon, who refers to poetic composition as »stunt-writing«, whereby the reader is »shadowing [the writer] in that first process of determining, from word to word and from line to line, the impact of those words and those lines« (Muldoon 2006, 218). In this sense, the lyric poem (despite their use of the term »poem«, both Paterson and Muldoon, given the sort of verse they discuss and themselves write, appear to mean lyric poetry) exists solely in the act of being performed and reperformed, and thereby internalized as their own utterance, by readers at the invitation of the poet.

More so than Muldoon, Paterson pays particular attention to the sound pattern as constitutive of the lyric poem in the first place, suggesting that the hyperbolic

quality mentioned by Culler stems from the »exaggerated prominence« accorded to the vowels, which creates an effect of salience of the address (Paterson 2019, 64). This dual structure of the poem as a semantic-sonic utterance, which Paterson rather clemently calls »a horizontal structure with vertical depth« (ibid., 347), makes it an especially intricate use of the language that can't be reduced to a single consciousness or a single voice. Although Paterson never references Culler, the latter's notion of voicing is germane to Paterson's extensive (occasionally overly deterministic) conception of how poems' meanings are brought forth. Finally, Paterson subscribes to the idea that rather than representations, lyric poems are real-time events: »just as the memory of the poem is the poem, so poems are the epiphany, not its documentary evidence. (Robert Lowell: ›poetry is not the record of an event: it is an event‹). They show the writer in the process of making their discovery, so that the reader can re-enact and reactivate it – not merely feel its after-effect, or learn the poet's wise conclusions« (ibid., 100).[1]

Culler's and Paterson's definitions of the lyric as an event that is reperformed by the reader, who thereby colludes in the production of the meaning(s), offer crucial insights into the way verse can and does impact the social sphere. Insofar as they exist as events enacted by readers, lyric poems infiltrate the field of linguistic praxis, becoming what Peter Robinson, adopting John Searle's terminology, calls informal institutional facts. In contrast to formal facts, which are »codified into explicit laws« (Robinson 2005, 2), informal institutional facts resemble the structure of informal promises in that they »make things happen by engaging in a form of promissory behavior – with *ad hoc* participants who take part in the process by reading and writing within the shaping cultural patterns for how these techniques are learned and practiced, submitting themselves in whatever degree to the accustomed requirements« (ibid., 5). This engagement constitutes another form of reperformance, as Robinson suggests, referring to Wittgenstein,[2] that »poems work by being re-read, by being lived with« (ibid., 6) in a continuous act of setting their complex »horizontal structure with vertical depth« against the largely reified daily use of language. In this sense, lyric poems as events test our ability to face up to how complicated the world is by opening up avenues of comprehension which our language has hitherto been incapable of approaching. But because they gain their authority not from the accuracy of representation but from being institutional facts by virtue of reperformance, poems don't just induce us to experience a manifestation of otherness, but they impel us to interiorize this otherness, to make it part of our linguistic praxis and so part of how we see the world and ourselves in it.

1 Paterson misquotes Lowell, who said in one of his classes that the poem »is an event, not the record of an event« (Lowell 1991, 304).

2 Robinson employs Wittgenstein's analysis of poetry in *Zettel* (see Wittgenstein 1981, 26 sq.).

Given its complexity and singularity, the conception of lyric poetry as a re-performed event of voicing stands to shift one's thinking not only by the force of its argument but by dint of the fact that, for the duration of the perusal or declamation, one accepts the text as an embodiment of one's own worldview. In regard to lyric ecopoetry, which invokes a complicated perception of nature and the dangers it faces, the shift is likely to result in one adopting, even if for a brief moment, a more ecologically-aware stance. Crucially enough, though, this is not solely a matter of personal realization of the pressing nature of environmental crises, for the existence of poems as informal institutional facts creates conditions for an altered ethic of environmental responsibility. And as Robinson shows, the emergence of such informal institutional facts can offer a more effective incentive to a wide social change than various attempts at institutionalized alternations of the public mindset. It is in this sense that lyric ecopoetry, the informal institutional facts that take hold in the popular imagination through reenactment and internalization – Muldoonian »stunt-writing«, can serve to allay Clark's skepticism as to the effectiveness of verse in both doing justice to the intricacy of natural processes and retaining an appeal to the larger audience.

Toward the Terrestrial

Among the features of poetry in general is its continuous reinvention of language by dint of the exposure of the semantics to the pressures of form, which results in a destabilization of linguistic norms. On this view, poetry is best suited to challenge the reification of received modes of thinking. What is here understood as the distinction between normative and destabilized languages is derived from Deleuze and Guattari, who observe that »a rule of grammar is a power marker before it is a syntactical marker« (2005, 84) so that »forming grammatically correct sentences is for the normal individual the prerequisite for any submission to social laws« (ibid., 112). Standard language use is thus a mechanism of social integration whereby one becomes a subject, not only in the grammatical sense but also as a subject to laws and norms. But also becoming a subject necessitates accepting the ossified hierarchies of the social structure, which Deleuze and Guattari identify as the crucial step to the reification of the self, which loses its rhizomatic multiplicity that could connect it to the larger networks of both animate and inanimate life. Whereas grammatical correctness represents the means of reification, atypical expression is how this state is challenged, for »it is [...] the atypical expression that produces the placing-in-variation of the correct forms, uprooting them from their state as constants. The atypical expression constitutes a cutting edge of deterritorialization

of language, it plays the role of *tensor*; in other words, it causes language to tend toward the limit of its elements, forms, or notions, toward a near side or a beyond of language« (ibid., 110, emphasis in original).

In contrast to linguists who cling to the notion that proper language use is rooted in its deep structure (Deleuze and Guattari oppose their idea of language to Chomsky's generative grammar), Deleuze and Guattari endorse atypical, singular language of the individual speech act comprised of variables, which »effectuate the machine in unison, in the sum of their relations. There is therefore no basis for a distinction between a constant and collective language, and variable and individual speech acts« (ibid., 111). This leads them to reject the »primacy of the individual; there is instead an indissolubility of a singular Abstract and a collective Concrete« (ibid.). This view of language as a space of tensions between existent linguistic norms and their constant undermining, a space where the subject is deterritorialized and becomes one actor among many in the network of meaning-making agents, is central to ecopoetry, lyric as well as experimental, which emphasizes non-anthropocentric viewpoints and distributed agency. Because lyric ecopoetry, as has been argued above, conduces to one's internalization at each performance of the text of those deterritorialized motions of language, one is effectively plunged into the network of signifying processes that corresponds to Latour's idea of the Terrestrial.

In his essay on the New Climate Regime published in English as *Down to Earth*, Latour argues that in order to meet the challenges that lie ahead, we must reorient the vector of our thinking from the fruitless vacillation between aggressive globalization advocated by the political Right and the commitment to the local championed by the Left (Latour's understanding of the political terms goes beyond classic distinctions but this aspect of his writing lies beyond the scope of my present interest; for a detailed account see Latour 2018, 26–28) toward what he calls the »third Attractor«: the Terrestrial. Continuing his attempt to reconsider the idea of the world in terms of conjoined systems of mutual influence, which is given its first theoretical elaboration in *Facing Gaia*, Latour observes that globalization has resulted in the destruction of multiplicity in favor of a constrained idea of how progress must look. Ever increasing consumption as the basis for a healthy economy and profitability as the sole economic principle represent two examples of what he calls globalization-minus, whereby ideas incommensurate with the capitalist dogma are either forcefully abandoned or revised so they fit in the extant paradigm. By the same token, the proponents of commitment to the local fail to appreciate that the challenges we must contend with cannot be addressed by isolated actions: »the planet is *much too narrow and limited* for the globe of globalization; at the same time, it is *too big*, infinitely too large, too active, too complex, to remain within the narrow and limited borders of an locality whatsoever« (ibid., 16, emphasis in

original). What this imprisonment in the binary vector precludes us from seeing is that a new actor has emerged: the Terrestrial. An extension of his revision of James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, the Terrestrial denotes the non-holistic, anti-systematic collection of agents, which, like Gaia, »is not only external but also internal; it is not universal, but local; it is neither overanimated nor deanimated« (Latour 2017, 183). There is no comprehending the Terrestrial from the outside, for »it is rather that we have to slip into, envelop ourselves within, a large number of loops, so that, gradually, step by step, knowledge of the place in which we live and of the requirement of our atmospheric condition can gain greater pertinence and be experienced as urgent« (ibid., 139). To be agentive, we need knowledge of the place in which we live but this knowledge is only obtainable, Latour suggests, through immersion in the earthly (and earthy) system comprised of an infinite number of other agents. In consequence, we no longer own and control our habitats but rather the idea of belonging to a particular territory »designates the agency that possesses the possessor« (Latour 2018, 42).

For Latour, the reorientation of the vector of our thinking toward the Terrestrial entails a rejection of the discrete ideas of »nature«, »human kind« or »society«, all of which stem from an outdated worldview that fails to acknowledge the diversity of agentive forces constitutive of the earth. This entails the jettisoning of the optics focused on what Latour calls the system of production and shifting attention to the system of engendering that »is not interested in producing goods, for humans, on the basis of resources, but in engendering terrestrials – not just humans, but all terrestrials. It is based on the idea of cultivating attachments, operations that are all the more difficult because animate beings are not limited by frontiers and are constantly overlapping, embedding themselves within one another« (ibid., 83). This, Latour goes on to argue, can be achieved, on the one hand, through »*generat*[*ing*] *new descriptions*« (ibid., 94, emphasis in original) and, on the other, through a redefinition of »a dwelling place as *that on which a terrestrial depends for its survival*, while asking *what other terrestrials also depend on it?*« (ibid., 95, emphasis in original). The former postulate is the familiar version of a typical ecocritical claim whereby »to consider and appreciate work in literature, criticism and the arts that helps articulate this shift towards a new kind of eco-cosmopolitanism capable of uniting people across the world without erasing important cultural and political differences« (Clark 2015, 17). By contrast, Latour's latter suggestion points to the importance of Gaian thinking in terms of anti-systematic networks of ever-multiplying agents. In this sense, his work builds on the insights of various ecothinkers, for whom the human self is more adequately perceived as »increasingly fluid in a sea of distributed agency« (Oppermann 2016, 278).

Latour ends his lectures by proffering an example of such a revision of the descriptive vocabulary but while his narrative is a fine instance of Terrestrial

thinking, it remains committed to the view that language can describe an alternate version of the world and bring people round to its vision by purely rhetorical flair. Clark would likely be skeptical. And yet, it is in the context of Terrestrial thinking that lyric poetry helps us to adopt, and adapt to, the system of engendering. Because lyric poems are not textual evocations external to the human subject but function as events reperformed by that subject, they necessitate a shift in thinking from an objective analysis to an embodied insight: reading or declaiming a poem, one undergoes an experience of otherness, which is interiorized but, due to the fact that poems are horizontal structures with vertical depth, never fully accommodated. If then lyric poems are inherently equipped to get one to modify one's mindset, they also offer the sort of linguistic arrangement that is conducive to reconsidering one's being in the world in terms of engendering rather than producing. That is because the meaning-making processes that poetry initiates are both enabled by and expressive of the transition to the system of engendering.

Poetry as Engendering

Concentrated on how to reorient the present political debates, Latour lists three principles in which the systems of production and engendering differ: first there is the contrast between freedom and dependency, second comes the shift in the perception of human authority and third is the view of all manner of entities as agentive. It is by redirecting the vectors of our debates from notions of anthropocentric freedom toward the idea of a multiplicity of heterogeneous, interdependent actors that the path opens to a politics capable of responding to the environmental challenges we are facing.

According to Latour, whereas in the system of production, it is individual freedom that is emphasized as the basic condition of existence, the system of engendering recognizes layers upon layers of dependencies between various actors (2018, 82 sq.). The illusion that we are a privileged life form because of our ability to control nature leads to a falsified idea of emancipation that stresses the narrow-minded and short-sighted view of humans as entitled to anything that the planet has to offer. This, in turn, leads to the second principle, whereby »the central place of the human« is called into question by the New Climatic Regime (ibid., 85). Rather than conceive of humanity as the overlord of the planet or, as per the stewardship thesis, as shepherds of the soil granted unto them by one sort of divinity or another (in Christianity, the thesis is derived from Genesis 1:24; see Curry 2011, 34 sq.), people join the ranks of terrestrials, which Latour observes is in line with the etymology of the word human as »humus and [...] compost« (2018,

86). By including humans in the vast system of planetary dependencies, Latour radicalizes his actor-network theory to embrace all life forms on earth, both animate and inanimate (in *Facing Gaia*, the notion of the Terrestrial is implied in his idea of the Earthbound; see Latour 2017, 248–53). Hence the third principle posits »the possibility of multiplying the actors without at the same time naturalizing their behaviors. To become materialists is no longer to reduce the world to objects, but to extend the list of movements that must be taken into account« (2018, 86 sq.). This last point builds on Bennett's idea of vibrant matter (which she partly derives from Latour's earlier writings), which she explains as »the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans, but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own« (2010, viii). Latour's view of the Terrestrial as creating a new vector of attraction gives Bennett's emphasis on »trajectories, propensities, or tendencies« a political slant directed against globalization-minus and too myopic a commitment to the local. His insights, however, prove relevant not only to revisions of the political sphere but also offer fertile ground for situating lyric poetry at the core of ecological thinking.

Whether lyric or experimental, ecopoetry shares in the rejection of dualistic conceptions of the relation between the human and the environment, invoking instead complex ways in which people are enmeshed in the world. In this sense, its central assumption goes back to Lawrence Buell's claim that »human history is implicated in natural history« and that the environment is »a process rather than a constant given«, both of which are inherent in ecocentric writings from the Romantic period all the way to the present (Buell 1995, 7 sq.). More recently, Knickerbocker has suggested that poetry (like Paterson and Muldoon, he uses poetry as shorthand for what seems largely to be lyric poetry, as his examples range from Emily Dickinson to Sylvia Plath), specifically given its heightened awareness of form, is characterized by a »sensuous poesis«, which he defines as an engagement of the human with the environment that »enact[s] through formal devices such as sound effects the speaker's experience of the complexity, mystery, and beauty of nature« (2012, 13). In her treatment of lyric poetry from the point of view of cognitivism, Sharon Lattig extends Knickerbocker's idea by suggesting that »what is consistently *lyrical*, and thus ecopoetic, about the poem […] is precisely what transcends cultural specificity: the species-level dynamic of cognitive emergence transpiring at the interface of organism and environment« (2021, 8, emphasis in original). Poems may be expressions of human embeddedness in an environment but through the mediation of form, from stanzaic arrangement through lineation to sound effects, they offer a voicing out, to use Culler's term, of what Morton calls »ecological mesh« (Morton 2012, 28). As Wendy Wheeler observes, because »poetic meaning does not obey a linear logic but emerges from a recursive growth of pattern and metaphor

[…], [p]oetry *is* nature in us humans; or perhaps we should say that nature in us *is* poetic thinking« (2016, 37, emphasis in original). This poetic thinking that Wheeler posits as intrinsic to the operations of ecosystems as well as poems embodies the discontinuous, many-agent process of engendering.

Therefore, calling for a shift of the vector of our thinking to take into consideration the Terrestrial, Latour adopts the insights of ecopoetics to the language of political action without naming what seems to be the crucial agent of this shift – ecopoetry itself. And yet, the importance of lyric ecopoems lies not only in their capacity to »find new ways of rendering, recalibrating and mutating the complex relationships between human organisms and the environments that their behaviours and technologies have shaped« (Solnick 2017, 15) or to compel us to face up to such »unsettling topics« as »where our toilet waste goes and how we regularly drink recycled waste water« (Keller 2017, 14); more than that, those poems prove key for the revision of thinking by dint of how they impel one to interiorize, through the reperformance of the text, the Terrestrial point of view. As an event that exists in being reenacted, the lyric ecopoem is thus a synecdoche of the system of engendering, but at the same time, in being itself a miniscule organism, what Angus Fletcher has called an »environmental form« (2006, 6), rather than a representation of an organism or its umwelt, its very operativity is only viable within that system.

The system of production, intrinsic to globalization-minus, is based on a teleological view of all human activity. The existent resources are turned into marketable products and the more conducive to this teleology the social structure of a society is the more effective the system of production becomes. It is, however, precisely this teleology that is most at odds with lyric ecopoetry, for poems don't translate authorial imaginative and intellectual resources into verbal value-bearing products. Instead, ecopoetry embodies a dynamic set into motion, on the one hand, by the pressure exerted by the figuration of otherness on an individual consciousness embedded in the world and, on the other, by the reader's reenactment of the text.

The former case is usefully illuminated by Derek Attridge, who glosses the suggestion that writing is the invention of the other insofar as the phrase denotes the act of bringing forth of otherness but also of being created by the other. The figure of the other »implies a wholly new existent that cannot be apprehended by the old modes of understanding, and could not have been predicted by means of them; its singularity, even if it is produced by nothing more than a slight recasting of the familiar and thus of the general, is irreducible« (Attridge 2017, 39). What this encounter with otherness implies is that »I am always, in a way, other to myself. It is this instability and inconsistency, these internal and external pressures and blind spots, this self-dividedness, that constitutes the conditions for the emergence of the other« (ibid., 34). Although Attridge claims that all literature is the invention of the other, it is poets who most often draw on a related notion, with perhaps the closest

formulation to that of Attridge put forward by Muldoon. He has repeatedly insisted that poems are »written through [one]« (Donaghy 1985, 82), that in composing one »give[s] oneself over to [...] language« (Wilson 2004, 78). Such a view of writing – shared by a great many poets, from conventional lyricists like Paterson all the way to radical experimentalists like J. H. Prynne (see Prynne 2010, 597 sq.) or Maurice Scully (see Fryatt 2005, 140) – underscores Culler's idea of voicing as the outcome of an act of mutual engendering between the writer or reader (Muldoonian »stunt-writer«) and something extrinsic to them. What such an act of engendering yields is the poetic texts, an outcome of one's encounter with otherness that exists in a perpetual reperformance of this encounter.

Conclusion

Since the reperformance of the poetic text, as Culler shows, is an act of assuming the effects of its voicing as one's own, performers become participants in the process of engendering. And granted that the repetitive reperformance endows lyric poems with the significance of what Robinson calls informal institutional facts, the Terrestrial enters into the public domain not by a political decree of popular fiat but by slow, albeit inevitable, interiorization. In this sense, lyric ecopoetry is not just another form of discourse that can serve to inculcate ecological thinking into people but, because it is the embodiment of the system of engendering – both expressive of it and made possible by it – it is the most intimate way of experiencing the Terrestrial.

What Latour strives to articulate is that »the Terrestrial is not yet an *institution*, but it is an actor whose role is clearly different from the political role attributed to ›nature‹ by the Moderns« (2018, 89, emphasis in original). Here a question arises as to how it is that we can hear this actor speak; how do we learn of its perspective without forcing on it the reductionism of anthropomorphic terminology like agenda, viewpoint, goal? The response that I have tried to suggest here is that due to its sonic-semantic construction and the non-anthropocentric, voicing-oriented employment of language, lyric ecopoetry offers a way for the Terrestrial to articulate itself.

And so, to return one last time to Clark's no-nonsense charge against poetry's viability in effecting a change in the current modes of thinking, I would argue that his view is valid for what Latour describes as the Moderns' lens on issues of ecology, climate and human involvement therein. By recognizing the Terrestrial as an actor, a shift in perspective is necessitated – a shift that compels one to revise one's thinking so that one can start to listen to voices that have hitherto been too elusive to

even begin to grasp. One source from which those voices are heard is lyric ecopoetry. Heidegger suggested that in poems the call of Being can be discerned, with Latour's guidance one could do away with such insistent anthropocentrism and witness poetry as the call of the Terrestrial, a call that issues from, among others, people's own throats.

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