

# poems: the new is here again

## Working Notes

**Arpine Konyalian Grenier**

**277 Words: Part Eco/ Part Me**

Innovative writing carries elements of the experimental, hence shines with the new and the modern as new ways of being in and of the world are experienced. In a vortex like system the creative mind swirls, filters and layers dichotomous, parallel, temporal, and God knows what issues, breathing *gyan* (soul) into the *mélange* and *voila* - poetry. Unlike the vortex, however, nothing stays centrifuged sediment here; rather, magical masterpieces are sculpted with words & phrases creeping along the sidelines of rhetoric, careful sound and sense do not overtake themselves or one another.

Perhaps the (female) principles of inclusion and process rather than rejection or criticism better address and deal with life issues, whether personal, regional or global. Poetry and politics are most effective when they utilize these principles. And that may be the only kinship thereof, as (unlike fiction or critical discourse), poetry has nothing to say (art bitten by poetry longs to be freed from reason, said Maritain). With that, the impact of poetry is deeper and more intense (often the desire to utilize it, co-opt it seeping in, corrupting it).

In *Gatekeeper, we unthemed* (which came about because of an email from Kate Fagan, over a year ago), longing to connect – a human/ personal need - merges with longing to connect to save the planet from global warming. This poem is from a new manuscript titled, *Part, Part, Euphrates*, through which I

am attempting at regional, personal and global issues with an eternal lack of selfhood that is reflected by that of my ancestry. No other agendas are here, no intention based poetics, except for Euphrates running the framework of the outer for the inner.

## **Ann Fisher-Wirth**

### **Working Notes for “Dream Cabinet”:**

In 2002-2003 I taught American environmental literature on a Fulbright at Uppsala University. That year saw the build-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. It was almost impossible to believe—especially since, living outside the States and therefore having decent access to information, my husband and I could so clearly see the magnitude of world opposition and the depth of the Bush administration’s villainy and folly. A sense of dread and doom now fills the days. The Bush administration could hardly be worse. And for many years the United States has led in the destruction of the biosphere.

Yet my private life is full of happiness and love, and my lifelong study of yoga gives me a great sense of peace. “Dream Cabinet” grew out of this conflict between various senses of the self and its experience, various ways of knowing the human and more-than-human world. “Dream Cabinet” came into being in June 2006, on a tiny island called Fogdö in the Stockholm Archipelago, when my husband and I were staying with our young friend Frida and her two small children.

I am fascinated by poems in sections, that show the coming-into-being of consciousness over time. Poems whose authority is not that of the dominant, domineering “I.” Whose power is the power of dream, memory, and immersion in everyday experience. Poems that share the *chi* of trees and water.

**Kathleen Miller**

**Working Statement**

“In Considering the Wild[er]ness, She, of Parking Structures,” grew out of a desire to use my poetic practice as a means for exploring particular spaces in the urban environment where the urban and the natural collide, and to consider the linguistic possibilities generated between these urban-natural collisions and issues of gender. More specifically, I chose to take on the subject of parking structures, and their relationship to weeds, because I felt that the parking structure was a familiar and aggressive urban site which contained a certain amount of unexplored potential as a concept. The parking structure is a site that has become so common in cities and suburbs that it has become a ‘natural’ part of the landscape, a site of urban ‘wilderness.’ Once one begins to think of the parking structure in this way, connections between the form and function of the parking structure and the form and function of the ‘weed’ are found to be rich and varied. In this piece, the linguistic possibilities manifest themselves as textual slippages between content that deals with the urban (parking structures), the natural (weeds), and the relationship of this space to gender through the use of the pronoun “she.” The pronoun “she” (always followed by a preposition), becomes an agent which resists being read as a grammatically correct subject, and instead attaches to different aspects of this landscape, avoiding one particular type of relation in terms of content, and disappearing and reappearing throughout the text. The form of this piece grows out of my interest in the relationship between the poem and the essay. While the main body of the pages (the space that, in an essay, might occupy the body of the work) is utilized by the parking structure-weed-she language, the bottoms of these pages become a kind of a ‘reference’ space, where bits of text from

writers who have written previously about issues of nature and the individual (Sappho, Dickinson, Wordsworth, and Smithson, to name a few) are gathered and manipulated to provide the reader with a sense of the historical poetic tradition from which my work grows out of and is informed by. In the middle of these highly structured sections, another sort of form begins to emerge and take over. The landscape of the poem begins to break into its own kind of expansive, textual wild[er]ness through the literal joining of parking structure imagery and the proper names of weeds. I imagine this piece to be one chapter in a much larger body of work dealing with these issues of the relationship between the urban, the natural, and the pronoun “she.”

## **Melanie Neilson**

### **Working Notes**

In my artmaking atmosphere and constitution are prioritized over ersatz plastic composition. Not only exploding metronomically but also ticking faucet rock knocks sock awkward coaxing the here and now of letting be impersonal processes of evolution and geological time. Writing the world imperative and freedom repossesses imagination.

## **Frances Presley**

### **Stone settings: eco-poetics and women writers**

Linguistic and spatial innovation in poetry are important ways of engaging with the landscapes that I care about. I find that writing on site is associated

with a kind of improvisational writing, which allows me to respond to the influence of the landscape, and to a simultaneous inner language and gesture. I have made use of spatial innovation in a variety of ways. Most recently it has been connected with the strange geometry of the Neolithic stone settings on Exmoor. Their enigmatic and puzzling configurations have been reflected in playful rearrangements of archaeological texts. The improvisational work I do in the landscape can also be sketches or 'blind' drawing (without looking at the page), or even just the way the act of writing is interrupted by the physical conditions.

I am aware in doing this that I am working alongside other experimental women writers and artists, and drawing on and responding to their texts/ art. They include Tilla Brading, Kathleen Fraser, Susan Howe, Susan Johanknecht and Harriet Tarlo. 'Stone settings' itself has been a collaborative project with Tilla Brading, who lives and works in the West Country.

Like most feminists I feel very uneasy about the identification of women with nature, in some essentialist manner. Too often it has led to the objectification of women, as well as their idealisation, as it did, for instance, in the surrealist movement. At the same time, I want to emphasise the role that women have played in environmental politics and poetry. In 'Stone settings' I have made particular use of the writings of a local amateur archaeologist, Hazel Eardley-Wilmot, and exploited the significance of a female voice in the world of archaeology.

It seems unsurprising that Jonathan Bate, whose ecopoetics and ecocriticism are implied here, should be proposing, rather with the fervour once held by socialists, that ecocriticism should in some way replace the emphasis on race or gender in our critical approach. Similarly, the use of 'ecopoetics', in which eco derives from the Greek oikos, traditionally the 'household's domestic space, seen as woman's domain', should occur in a book which is almost entirely devoted to male poets. He takes us back to

the principles of Romanticism in which the feminine male can speak for both genders.

I have always had a strong involvement in politics, particularly through community development, and anti-racism initiatives. My interest in ecology has developed more in recent years, although it dates back to my rural childhood. I would find it impossible to ignore political issues, and the way they shape the landscape. In 'Stone settings' there are poems about the July bombings, and the war in Afghanistan, and these events relate to the military origins of some ancient and more recent monuments, in, for example, the celebration of chieftains in longstones.

Militarism is also a feature, perhaps even more significantly, of archaeology itself and its methods, something which is analysed from a feminist perspective, in Rosemary A Joyce's 'The Languages of Archaeology'. She emphasises the 'polyphony of voices' which should exist in archaeology, and there is a similar emphasis in the collaborative poetics of 'Stone settings'.

May 2007

**Evelyn Reilly**

**Working Notes**

"Broken Water" is one of a number of pieces from a manuscript called "Reverse Landscapes," through which I've been pondering the relationship between language and the way we humans interact, rather disastrously, with the rest of the living world. This particular poem interweaves different strands of language related to nature (taken/mis-taken as aesthetic object), human social behavior, female biological experience (menstruation/childbirth), and bodies of water (as human and animal habitat, used/abused in legend, as

imperiled resource). In searching for my own definition of “ecopoetics,” I’ve become convinced that it’s not primarily about the expansion of natural description to include landfills and industrial depredations (even though, in fact, I done that in “Broken Water”), but needs to be a matter of finding strategies that effect a larger paradigm shift, that finally abolish the aesthetic use of nature as mirror for human narcissism. It’s not so much a call for reform of so-called “nature poetry,” as a redefinition of all poetry as nature poetry — a recognition of our role as poets in a world in a continuum of crisis with no boundaries between the urban, suburban, country, and so-called “wild.”