

Swarthmore College

Works

English Literature Faculty Works

English Literature

Spring 2024

Before We Say Farewell: An Anthology Of Ecopoetry

Suhyun Kim , '24

Peter Schmidt

Swarthmore College, pschmid1@swarthmore.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-english-lit>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Let us know how access to these works benefits you

Recommended Citation

Suhyun Kim , '24 and Peter Schmidt. (2024). "Before We Say Farewell: An Anthology Of Ecopoetry".
<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-english-lit/410>

An [accessible version](#) of this publication has been made available courtesy of Swarthmore College Libraries. For further accessibility assistance, please contact openaccess@swarthmore.edu with the title or URL of any relevant works.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#)

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Literature Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

Before We Say Farewell
An Anthology of Ecopoetry

with commentary and a teacher's guide to the poems

By Suhyun Kim
Swarthmore College
Spring 2024

a final project created for English 71E/ENVS 041,
"Ecopoetry and the Climate Crisis"
in consultation with Prof. Peter Schmidt
Department of English Literature

Table of Contents

	page
Introduction	3
Charles Simic, "Stone"	4
Wendell Berry, "The Peace of Wild Things"	6
W. S. Merwin, "After the Dragonflies"	8
William Butler Yeats, "The Stare's Nest By My Window"	10
Jimmy Santiago Baca, "Black Mesa"	12
Emily Dickinson, "To Make a Prairie"	17
Sylvia Plath, "Mushrooms"	19
Audre Lorde, "Coal"	22
Kobayashi Issa, haiku ("O snail")	24
Works Cited	26

Introduction:

When faced with the climate crisis, we humans have responded with varying levels of distress. Most of us swing between despair, when we fall into grief at our own stupidity and possible doom, and hope, that a solution is right around the corner. There is a middle ground of apathy, for those who've lost all hope and/or become paralyzed by the sheer magnitude of the climate crisis. Regardless of where we are, life under the climate crisis is not easy, and we all need to be reminded that it's worth going on from time to time. Ironically, many of us have found solace in nature, the very thing we humans are destroying with our own hands. Such an impulse is difficult to rationalize, though we can get closest to understanding *why* through one medium: poetry. Ecopoetry, to be more precise. Ecopoetry navigates the human's relationship to nature, through the hope, the despair, and the apathy that we all feel; nature poems guide us through our grief, and eventually, help us rediscover our hope and our humanity amidst the destruction we've dealt our home. And maybe, just find it in ourselves to repair what we've broken: give back to nature, in handfuls, by our puny human hands. Hands that we must remember are capable of much more than we sometimes care to think. This anthology hopes to distill this process and guide the reader through it, hopefully to encourage, and maybe empathize.

Selected Poems:

“Stone” by Charles Simic

Listen to the poem online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XODm-0K9TK4>.

from *Dismantling the Silence*
New York: George Braziller, 1971.

Charles Simic (1938–2023) was a Yugoslavia-born American poet, whose work—he has published his poetry in books and magazines—was greatly influenced by his life in Belgrade (present-day Serbia) before immigrating to the US (2). His poetry has been noted for rich explorations with—and using—ordinary inanimate objects (2). Simic’s “Stone” is one such poem, inviting us to wonder about the nature of, well, a stone. The poet expresses desire to “go inside a stone”, and is fascinated by its interiority and exteriority. He observes how the stone totally obscures—guards—what is inside it (“from the outside the stone is a riddle”), musing that it may be filled with “star-charts” and a “moon shining”—an almost fantastical inner world.

A rock is probably one of the most commonplace and unassuming things in nature, yet this poet daydreams of it as a mystery far greater than its appearance suggests. With hills, a “moon”, and stars, he imagines an entire world hidden away in this little piece of nature. This hidden inner world is completely protected from the outside world, “unperturbed” by whatever happens to its stone shell. I think the poet’s fantasy speaks to a very human attraction to the mystery that nature presents, away from the ‘known’, or human civilization: an urge to seek disconnection from the pressures of society. Even the smallest things in nature can provoke this impulse, as “Stone” shows. Using fantasy to transport oneself to a distant and near-magical world, that is at once “strange” and comforting, is just one way in which a human may find solace in nature. With the advent and worsening of the climate crisis, I imagine that the desire to escape the outside world, or reality, would be greater still.

Other Publications:

“The White Room” (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/55188/the-white-room>)

“Fork” (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42950/fork>)

Study Questions:

- 1.) “Stone” is arranged into three stanzas; how does this shape your experience reading the poem—are there shifts that occur between stanzas?
 - 2.) What is the significance of the tiger and the dove references—how does their inclusion inform your understanding of the way the poet views the stone?
 - 3.) What kind of conclusion to the poem does the final stanza offer?
-

“The Peace of Wild Things” by Wendell Berry

Read the poem online: <https://pwrites.princeton.edu/poem/a-poem-for-you-the-peace-of-wild-things-by-wendell-berry/>.

Listen to the poem online: <https://onbeing.org/poetry/the-peace-of-wild-things/>.

from *Collected Poems: 1957–1982*
San Francisco, CA: North Point Press, 1985.

Wendell Berry is an American poet known for his mastery of a variety of styles and genres—including essays and fiction-writing (17). Berry is an advocate of traditional agriculture, in its importance to human society and the environment, which informs his works (17). Such influence can be seen in his “The Peace of Wild Things”, a poem that explores the sublime peace and pleasure that comes with immersion in nature. If “Stone” is about a poet fantasizing escaping into nature, “The Peace of Wild Things” catches its poet carrying out the act of escape. We are introduced to the poet as he expresses his worries about the state of the world, and the uncertainties it holds for the future—for his children. In order to escape these realities, he finds comfort in the simplicity and pureness of nature. In nature, the poet leaves behind the “forethought of grief”, and “[resting] in the grace of the world, [he] is free”.

In this poem, the impulse to escape from the human world into nature has become stronger, the need more immediate: the poet is driven by “fear” and “despair for the world”. These feelings appear to overwhelm him to the point of needing to physically transport himself to another world—simply fantasizing, as Simic’s poet had done—is not enough. In the context of modern day, many feel increasing distress, depression, and even apathy at the rapidity of climate change. It has become something that is impossible to look away from, and looms over us with the sheer magnitude of its implications. Thus, people may feel all the more desperate to get away from human civilization, which is crammed full of others in varying states of denial or panic. In nature, one can be alone and take respite from the reality that is about to crash upon our heads. Nature is one of the greatest sources of healing for a human, which we must remember as we run from the very thing that threatens to destroy it. “The Peace of Wild Things” shows us just how precious and vital nature is to our beings—we will likely sooner die than be parted from it forever.

Other Publications:

“Anger Against Beasts”

(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=32056>)

“September 2”

(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=31552>)

Study Questions:

- 1.) What do you think the poet has become “free” from, at the end of the poem?
 - 2.) How (if at all) does the shortness of the poem—its lines and general length—contribute to your experience as a reader, in the emotions the poem evokes?
 - 3.) Consider the length of the sentences that make up the poem; what do you think is the effect of structuring the poem in this manner?
-

“After the Dragonflies” by W.S. Merwin

Read the poem online: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/07/24/magazine/ws-merwin-after-the-dragonflies.html>.

from *Garden Time*

Hexham, UK: Bloodaxe Books, 2016.

Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2016.

William Stanley Merwin (1927–2019) was an American poet noted for his great many accolades and varying style throughout his writing career (16). He was very prolific, publishing over 50 books—containing both his poetry and essays. A Buddhist in life and an environmental activist, many of his poems had nature as their backdrop, and explored themes of environmentalism in conjunction with humanity (16). Merwin’s “After the Dragonflies” is an extinction poem, speaking about the dwindling dragonfly population as a sign of the greater trend of mass extinction, in the wake of human environmental degradation. This poet gives readers a brief glimpse into the perspective of the dragonflies, “when we appeared in their eyes / we were strangers”; thus attempting to shine a light on the perspective of these dragonflies—metaphorically giving them voice—within the space of his poem, so that the humans reading might finally listen.

In the world of “After the Dragonflies”, the dragonflies appear to have gone extinct, as there are “there are grown-ups hurrying / who never saw one”. Humans are thus unaware of the loss that the world has suffered (“do not know what they / are not seeing / the veins in a dragonfly’s wings / were made of light”), and moreover, are unaware of how alike that we and the dragonflies truly were. As we humans “hurry” about, the dragonflies too had once “[hovered] in their own days / backward forward and sideways”, and looked at us as “strangers”, just as we might have once curiously peered at them. Our similarities do not end there: as they have disappeared, we will eventually be erased as well, neither of us leaving any trace behind (“they took their light with them when they went / there will be no one to remember us”). Dragonflies here are a stand-in for nature, and their fate for all those that will go extinct. By intertwining, and paralleling, humans with dragonflies, we are forced to realize that we humans will also share this fate. This is the future the poem foreshadows, but the present it depicts darkly reflects our own—a growing disconnect from nature, in part due to an inability to access it, because of the destruction we’ve wrought with our own hands. And still, some remain unaware.

Other Publications:

“The River of Bees” (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43122/the-river-of-bees>)

“Bread” (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43120/bread-56d221cf7272a>)

Study Questions:

- 1.) Some words (such as those relating to light) recur over the poem; why do you think this is/what is the function of this?
 - 2.) There is no punctuation in this poem—how does this affect your reading?
-

“The Stare’s Nest By My Window” by W.B. Yeats

The bees build in the crevices
Of loosening masonry, and there
The mother birds bring grubs and flies.
My wall is loosening, honey bees
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We are closed in, and the key is turned
On our uncertainty; somewhere
A man is killed, or a house burned,
Yet no clear fact to be discerned:
Come build in the empty house of the stare

A barricade of stone or of wood;
Some fourteen days of civil war;
Last night they trundled down the road
That dead young soldier in his blood:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart’s grown brutal from the fare,
More substance in our enmities
Than in our love; oh, honey-bees
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

from *The Cat and The Moon and Certain Poems*
Dublin, Ireland: Cuala Press, 1924.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) was an Irish poet who is one of the most famous literary figures of the twentieth century—chiefly known for his poems and plays (18). An Irish nationalist, he was very dedicated to his heritage and Irish Culture, which featured prominently in his works—as such, he also contributed greatly to the Irish Literary Revival (18). “The Stare’s Nest By My Window” is written with the backdrop of the Irish Civil War, telling of the destruction left in its wake: people killed, homes destroyed, and spirits that have become inhospitable (15). The titular stare’s empty nest (“empty house”) seems to represent Ireland’s—the country, individual people—condition due to the war. A place that had once been called home has been abandoned, its inhabitants dead or long gone, no longer able to sustain life. The “empty house of the stare” is referenced four times in the poem, at the end of each stanza, seeming to punctuate the different ways (i.e.: “dead young soldier in his blood”; heart’s grown

brutal”) Ireland has been damaged by the civil war. Perhaps the worst way the people have been hurt is in the immaterial, in their minds and souls, left with “more substance in our enmities”.

Yet, amidst the destruction and misery, I can’t help but sense a thread of hope through the poem. From the very beginning of the first stanza, “bees build in the crevices / Of loosening masonry” and “mother birds bring grubs and flies”: new life is growing in the remains of a destroyed “home” (civilization). Bees, in particular, are sources of life; they will pollinate crops, which will bear fruit and feed countless animals. There is a hope for a fresh start that will restoratively lead into a future. At the end of the poem, sandwiching the horror of the middle two stanzas, the poet again invites “honey-bees” to “come build in the empty house of the stare”. Perhaps the sweetness of the honey the bees produce will override the legacy of a heart grown “brutal” from being “fed on fantasies”. With this new, sweet, and life-overflowing materiality of the new reality built by the bees, perhaps the ravaged land will recover. I can’t help but think that Yeats’ poem reflects many of our present realities as well. Soon our civilizations, cities, and homes may too, become “empty”, but maybe there is the hope that life will go on afterwards. There is hope that we will be able to rebuild in the things we’ve broken and make them hospitable once more.

Other Publications:

“The Fish” (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57304/the-fish-56d23aaebc118>)

“He and She”

(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=20681>)

Study Questions:

- 1.) What is the significance of the creature called a “stare” (please research), and why do you think it featured so prominently in this poem?
- 2.) “Come build in the empty house of the stare” is this song’s refrain and repeats four times—what is the effect of this? Furthermore, the poet uses the word “house” instead of “nest” in these four lines; why do you think that is?
- 3.) On your first reading of this poem, before having context of the war and Yeats, did you come to the same conclusions as after?

“Black Mesa” by Jimmy Santiago Baca

from *Black Mesa Poems*

New York: New Directions Publishing, 1989.

Jimmy Santiago Baca is an American poet. He was incarcerated as a young man and began writing poetry while in prison (7). His work—he’s written many books of prose and poetry, most autobiographical to varying degrees—bears the influence of his life in the American Southwest, as the landscapes often serve as backdrops or overlays in his poems (and other writings), and his cultural heritage (7). Baca’s poem, “Black Mesa” encapsulates both these aspects of his writing. In “Black Mesa”, the poet ruminates on the history of the landform and its link to his present. Black Mesa was bulldozed to build the I-25 highway and those who protested were suppressed, some killed: “Rito was murdered here / by sheriffs”. The land still bears scars—“Etched on slabs” and in “lava cracks”—from this violence, and so do the homes of nearby (vulnerable) humans—“dynamite blasts cracked porches, foundations, and walls”; Rito’s very blood has seeped into the ground. However, it is upon coming face-to-face with this destruction that the poet is able to find a “narrative of love”. The land still teems with life: vegetation still grows around Black Mesa’s scars—“fuzzed / with chaparral, cacti and weeds”—and animals still bound across its slabs of stone. Even Rito’s blood has become part of the land, something that “crossbeds minerals”, and is reborn as “red crystals”.

Baca’s poet sees the trauma the land has gone through, and the ways that it has recovered. From this, he finds a similar way of healing, to “reimagine himself” with a “different view / of life and death”. He has found a way to embrace the ephemerality of existence (“shortness of my life”), with the reassurance that life will go on (“into darkness, into / another year of living”). In the very evidence of pain—both caused by and inflicted on humans—on the natural landscape, the poet finds a mirror to his own past suffering. In the very same landscape, he also finds solace, so that the “dark shadow[s]” in his life “lighten slowly to twilight”. His grief met, Baca’s poet is able to move on, just as Black Mesa has.

The hope for healing permeates this poem, which is something sorely needed in today’s society. While we grieve for what we’ve done to the land (to Earth), and the pain this has caused us, we must come to terms with it. Only then will we be able to see the possibility of a future where life continues. It is rather appropriate then, that Baca’s poet decides to “lay on a slab stone / and nap in sunlight / unafraid of snakes”, as Wendell’s had laid upon the waterside in “The Peace of Wild Things”: one had once been driven, sleepless, to nature in attempt to escape the weight of human destruction—now, another returns to nature to face human destruction, and is able to sleep soundly at last.

Other Publications:

“I Am Offering this Poem” (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/53092/i-am-offering-this-poem>)

“There Are Black” (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49564/there-are-black>)

Study Questions:

- 1.) What do you make of the short dialogue near the end of the poem—what does it signify?
 - 2.) This poem has many shifts—in temporality, consciousness, location—what is the effect of these and why do you think they occur?
-

“To make a prairie” by Emily Dickinson

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
One clover, and a bee.
And revery.
The revery alone will do,
If bees are few.

Read the poem online: <https://poets.org/poem/make-prairie-1755>.

from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*
Cambridge: Belknap / Harvard University Press, 1955.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) was an American poet, who is renowned for her experimental and innovative styles of writing, which have been extensively studied since her death (4). She published little within her lifetime, but her works have been met with posthumous success and praise (4,5). Dickinson is also known for the letters she wrote to her friends, with whom she was very close, sharing her thoughts and writings with them (4).

“To make a prairie” is a very short poem, but nonetheless loaded with meaning. In fact, it seems as though the poem’s smallness enhances the meaning carried in the verse: this poem appears to cherish the way in which the littlest things can have an unexpectedly large impact. A single bee is indeed enough to pollinate “one clover”, kickstarting reproduction; over and over, until there’s enough clover to make up a whole field of them. In other words, a prairie. In this way, “To make a prairie” is reminiscent of Simic’s “Stone”, as both call attention to an unexpected power, or ‘greatness’, contained within seemingly unassuming, insignificant things.

But then, it doesn’t seem that bees and clover are necessary for the making of a prairie after all—in fact, nothing material is needed at all. Simply “reverie”, dreaming, imagining, is enough to generate one. Perhaps this is true in the sense that it is at nature’s whim—if we are to personify nature—that prairies (or anything in nature, really) are created. Whatever nature conceives of will come into being. This applies to the case of humans as well, as only with imagination does the possibility of creation come forth. Such is true for any aspect of human life, but the most telling example is how we have built up a civilization: we saw things in nature, then thought up ways to use (take, reconfigure) them to our advantage. It’s well within our ability to think up ways to give back to nature now—give back forests, coral reefs, and prairies—with all

our science, techniques, and philosophies. Think up ways to give back what is owed, something that can help nature can restore itself.

Other Publications:

“In this short Life that only lasts an hour”

(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56456/in-this-short-life-that-only-lasts-an-hour-1292>)

“The Soul has Bandaged moments”

(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56453/the-soul-has-bandaged-moments-360>)

Study Questions:

- 1.) Is the “prairie” that Dickinson writes of truly a literal prairie? What do you think Dickinson’s “prairie” could be?
- 2.) Some of the lines in this poem are very short—ex: “And revery”—how does this affect your interpretation or reading of the poem?

“Mushrooms” by Sylvia Plath

Read the poem online: <https://allpoetry.com/poem/8498359-Mushrooms-by-Sylvia-Plath>

from *The Colossus and Other Poems*
New York: Vintage Press, 1960.

Sylvia Plath (1932–1963) an American poet; she was born in the New England region and lived much of her life there, as well as in London, UK (13). Her writing took many forms—short stories, essays, poems, novels—but usually shared the trait of being explorations of self-conflict (13). Plath’s writing often delves into her psychological suffering and the discordance she felt with American society (13). “Mushrooms” is one of her more optimistic poems, as it celebrates the unlikely triumph of an underdog: the titular mushrooms. Plath’s mushrooms are small, delicate (“soft”, “meek”), seemingly powerless (“earless and eyeless”, “perfectly voiceless”) things. Yet, there is a quiet strength to them, as they “insist on / Heaving the needles”, and “widen the crannies / Shoulder through holes”. As the mushrooms themselves state: “We are [...] Nudgers and shovers / In spite of ourselves” and nothing is able to stop the silent march of the mushrooms (“Nobody sees us, / Stops us, betrays us;”). Though it should be next to impossible, these small and helpless organisms forcibly make space for themselves to exist.

All of nature is like Plath’s mushrooms, in this respect; plants, animals, everything in between, all appear powerless in the face of human advance (encroachment), but they are *resilient*. Decimated populations of wolves have managed to come back in full force, while tree roots pierce through cement and brick. Perhaps we should consider that nature has already begun soundlessly gathering its power, as we humans stand unaware on Earth’s surface.

Or perhaps we should consider being like the mushrooms. We already are in some aspects, though it might not be readily apparent to us. Individually, humans are weak and ineffective, which is why we band together as united fronts—this is why we have civilizations, after all. Thus, individually, it is only natural that we humans feel powerless, but it is dangerous to become mired in this feeling. There are countless others like each of us, all around us, and we must all become cognizant of these existences. So that we can unite, and enact our will upon the world together, making change that we know to be necessary (like Plath’s mushrooms: “Our kind multiplies: / We shall by morning / Inherit the earth”). This is true for any human movement, and it is (and will continue to be) true for us to answer to the climate crisis. We’ve already united many times before—sometimes with nature too: as with the wolves’

reintroduction to Yellowstone, to which we lent a helping hand—and must do so again in time, lest we lose the chance forever.

Other Publications:

“Tulips” (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49013/tulips-56d22ab68fdd0>)

The Bell Jar

Study Questions:

- 1.) What is another way that this poem can be interpreted—that is, what is another thing the mushrooms may stand for?
 - 2.) “Mushrooms” has a lot of repetition—in word sounds, the structuring of the lines, placement of punctuation, specific phrases—what is the effect of this on the poem’s meaning or your reading?
-

“Coal” by Audre Lorde

Read the poem online: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42577/coal>

from *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*
New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.

Audre Lorde (1934–1992) was an American poet whose work—a wide array of books, poems, essays, and more—has been extremely influential to racial, queer, and feminist studies and theory (1). Lorde’s experiences as a queer Black woman shaped her poetry and informed her intersectional—across lines of race and gender—activism (1). Lorde’s “Coal” is an expression and lauding of her Black identity; by likening herself to coal, a rock that is formed in “the earth’s inside”, the poet speaks of her resilience through enduring oppression and injuries from American racism. Coal formation occurs under layers of earth, through years of sedimentation and cementation; this reflects the tenacity of Lorde’s poet, the ability to withstand and take shape under a lifetime of pressure. Rather, the ability to become something beautiful, like a “jewel”; a black diamond, if you will.

“Coal” also emphasizes the power borne in Black people’s voices (“Take my word for jewel in your open light”), through which they can express their lived experiences. These voiced experiences are akin to a “diamond”, a crystallization of genuine power and strength. When suppressed voices are finally expressed, everyone is forced to hear and listen, and finally see all the ways in which their society is ill. Knowledge is power—as more and more become conscious of the realities of others, and how they connect to their own, enough people will eventually take the steps—together—to heal those ills. This process will be an uphill battle, likely to be met with violence and suppression, always more suppression. Yet, like the titular coal, we humans must also endure under layers and layers of opposition, because only then will something come out the other side—transformed, but precious and alive.

Other Publications:

“Afterimages” (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42582/afterimages>)

“The Black Unicorn” (<https://www.americanpoems.com/poets/audre-lorde/the-black-unicorn/>)

Study Questions:

- 1.) Lorde includes both “coal” and “diamond” in her poem; why do you think this is?
 - 2.) How do you understand the recurring motif of speech in connection with that of the minerals/stones—i.e.: “coal”, “diamond”, “jewel”?
 - 3.) What is the function or significance of starting the poem with a line solely composed of the word, “I”?
-

Unnamed haiku by Kobayashi Issa

Read the poem online: <https://allpoetry.com/Oh-snail>.

Japan, publication date unknown. Translated by R. H. Blyth.

Kobayashi Issa (1763–1828) was a Japanese poet, Buddhist, and traveler of the Edo period (9). He was a prolific writer, known to have written works of prose, and over 20,000 haiku, most of which center on small animals and nature (9, 10). Buddhist influence is also prevalent in his writing, owing to his dedicated faith (9, 10). Though Issa published some of his poetry in his lifetime (such as *Tabishūi*, “Travel Gleanings”), complete collections and anthologies of his poems (such as *Issa hokku shū*, “Issa Hokku Collection”) were published posthumously (6, 8).

This poem, in my interpretation, is a rather joyful one. Though the snail’s task to “climb Mt. Fuji” seems impossible, the poet is assured in its capabilities and encourages it to do so. Albeit, at the snail’s own pace (“but slowly, slowly”). In other words, a lofty goal is attainable, given enough time, so one should go at their own pace towards achieving it. This celebratory mood suits the ending of this anthology quite nicely: through the poems, we have fantasized, anguished, grieved, moved on, and endured in the face of encroaching disaster. Climate Crisis. In poetry, we saw ways of coming to terms with the destruction we, humanity, have wrought upon ourselves; and then, we saw what we must then do, in the wake of this acceptance.

Now, we have arrived here—at this point, perhaps you are tired. We are likely all tired. Is it not a balm, then, to be reassured of an eventual success? A confirmation that the path we’ve taken thus far is in the right direction? We are not snails, and our task is not to scale Mt. Fuji—we are humans, who may be just as puny in the scale of this universe, but is the haiku not just as applicable to us? In all our great experiments that we’ve engaged in throughout our history, our *natural* history, that were exponentially bigger than ourselves? We are merely another piece of nature that follows the same pattern of life as every other thing that nature produced—the pattern encapsulated by this snail’s implausible perseverance. We humans, in all our smallness, now must tackle the climate crisis, the latest in a great history of insurmountable obstacles. This poem is small, as small as the snail, yet it encapsulates this truth which is as grand as Mt. Fuji.

Perhaps this obstacle will prove to be a ‘meteor’, and we will go the way of the dinosaurs; at any rate, our current existence and struggle here may be a promise that life will go on.

Other Publications:

“[goes out comes back]” (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52354/goes-out-comes-back>)

“On a branch ...” (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48702/on-a-branch->)

Study Questions:

- 1.) There is a great juxtaposition between the main subjects of the poem; how does the significance attached to snails and Mt. Fuji (please research) in Japanese contexts aid/change/affect your understanding of this haiku?
 - 2.) How does the form of the haiku aid in the message of the poem itself?
-

Works Cited

1. "Audre Lorde." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://poetryfoundation.org/poets/audre-lorde>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
2. "Charles Simic." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/charles-simic>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
3. "Coal." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42577/coal>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
4. "Emily Dickinson." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://poetryfoundation.org/poets/emily-dickinson>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
5. "Emily Dickinson." *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emily_Dickinson. Accessed 20 May 2024.
6. "Issa." *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Issa-Japanese-poet>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
7. "Jimmy Santiago Baca." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/jimmy-santiago-baca>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
8. "Kobayashi Issa." *Haikupedia*, <https://haikupedia.org/article-haikupedia/kobayashi-issa/>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
9. "Kobayashi Issa." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/kobayashi-issa>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
10. "Kobayashi Issa." *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kobayashi_Issa. Accessed 20 May 2024.
11. "Mushrooms." *All Poetry*, <https://allpoetry.com/poem/8498359-Mushrooms-by-Sylvia-Plath>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
12. "Oh Snail." *All Poetry*, <https://allpoetry.com/Oh-snail>. Accessed 20 May 2024.

13. "Sylvia Plath." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://poetryfoundation.org/poets/sylvia-plath>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
14. "To make a prairie (1755)." *Poets.org*, <https://poets.org/poem/make-prairie-1755>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
15. "VI—The Stare's Nest By My Window." *Poets.org*, <https://poets.org/poem/vi-stares-nest-my-window>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
16. "W. S. Merwin." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/w-s-merwin>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
17. "Wendell Berry." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/wendell-berry>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
18. "William Butler Yeats." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-butler-yeats>. Accessed 20 May 2024.