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Peter Reading's Poetic Ecology of Catastrophe

English poet Peter Reading (1946-2011) was one of Britain's most innovative and controversial poetic voices, and one of the first of his generation to engage in what we now call ecopoetics. Marked by a strange mix of pessimism and irony, Reading's work is, above all, focused on representing anthropogenic climate change and mass-species extinction in their awful, matter-of-fact actuality. This interest in the multifaceted nature of the current ecological crisis is foregrounded in his poetry through the fusion of different narratives and stylistically through changing registers, the use of different poetic forms, textual fragments, and heterogeneous voices. Although much has been written on Reading's thematic concerns, little scholarly attention has been paid to his poetry's formal qualities and innovative aspects. In this paper, I offer a critical review of Peter Reading's experimental ecopoetics by examining his better-known book-length poem on global warming -273.15 [absolute zero] (2005) as a case study. To do so, I will initially open my analysis with an overview of ecopoetry, a term that was first introduced in the late twentieth century to describe a new type of writing with a strong ecological emphasis. I will posit that Reading's works align well with this genre, which offers a lens through which to understand his unique poetics of ecological catastrophe. Following these theoretical foundations, the rest of the article will focus on the interaction between textual ecology and the real-world ecologies described in the poem. In particular, my analysis will also concentrate on Reading's use of experimental stylistic and linguistic techniques, which, I argue, open up new interesting ways of navigating the extreme complexity, uncertainty, and vast metanarrative scope of the current environmental crisis.

Keywords: Peter Reading; ecopoetry; climate change; catastrophe; eco-criticism

Often described as “poetry’s millennial prophet of doom,” Peter Reading (1946-2011) was one of Britain’s most innovative and controversial poets of the twentieth century and one of the first of his generation to engage in what we now call ecopoetics (Astley 104). Marked by a strange mix of pessimism and irony, most of his literary output is devoted to exploring and denouncing phenomena of environmental degradation and fiercely rebuking humankind’s destructive habits towards the more-than-human world. This interest in the multifaceted nature of the current environmental crisis is foregrounded in his writing thematically through the fusion of different narratives and stylistically through shifting registers, the use of different poetic forms, textual fragments, and heterogeneous voices. Although much has been written on Reading’s thematic concerns, little scholarly attention has been paid to his poetry’s formal qualities and innovative aspects. In this paper, I offer a critical review of Peter Reading’s experimental ecopoetics by examining his better-known book-length poem on global warming -273.15 [absolute zero], published in 2005, as a case study. In order to do so, I will initially open my analysis with an overview of ecopoetry, a term that was first introduced in the late twentieth century to describe a new type of writing characterised by strong ecological emphasis. I will posit that Reading’s works align well with this genre, which offers a lens through which to understand his unique poetics of ecological catastrophe. Following these theoretical foundations, the rest of the article will focus on the interaction between textual ecology and the real-world ecologies described in the poem. In particular, my analysis will also concentrate on Reading’s use of experimental stylistic and linguistic techniques, which, I argue, open up new interesting ways of navigating the extreme complexity, uncertainty and vast metanarrative scope of the current environmental crisis.

1. Ecopoetry: A New Poetics for the Anthropocene

Formed by the prefix eco- (from the Greek *oikos* meaning ‘home’ or ‘place of dwelling’) and the noun poetry (from the Greek *poiesis*, ‘to make’), ecopoetry is a subfield of ecocriticism that emerged in response to escalating environmental concerns and crises. The term was first coined by literary critic Joseph Meeker in the 1970s but only entered the poetic sphere at the turn of the millennium with the publication of Jonathan Bate’s book *The Song of the Earth* (2000) and Jonathan Skinner’s foundation of the journal *Ecopoetics* (2001). In these seminal texts, eco-

poetry is described as a new form of poetic expression that departs from the long-standing traditions of bucolic, pastoral, and romantic nature poetry to offer more reflexive and critical ways to engage imaginatively with the biophysical world in a time of unprecedented ecological crisis. As Bate points out in his book *The Song of the Earth*, “[e]copoetry is not a description of living with the earth, not a disengaged thought about it, but an experience of it” (42). The interest of this new poetic genre is not to present a static and enchanting view of nature but rather to portray it as a complex and dynamic entity intricately woven into the fabric of human life. In this sense ecopoetry closely mirrors recent shifts in ecocriticism, moving from a focus on celebrating nature in literature (the so-called ‘first wave’ of ecocriticism) to examining how nature is interwoven with social and cultural aspects (‘second wave’ of ecocriticism), and global perspectives (‘third wave’ of ecocriticism). What we call “ecopoetry,” literary critic John Shoptaw observes in his 2016 essay “Why Ecopoetry?”, is thus to be seen as a new type of versification that is not only deliberately “environmental” (its thematic focus is on the non-human natural world) but also markedly “environmentalist” (its aim is to elicit new forms of attention and responsibility) (395). Successful ecopoems, Shoptaw argues, quoting the American poet Forrest Gander, are urgent and active and aim to stir readers to reflect on the complex “relationship between nature and culture, language and perception” (395). They must, he continues, enact a systematic analysis of our representations of environments not only at the thematic level (traditionally seen as the only plane on which poetry can enter into dialogue with ecology), but also on a formal level (they elicit critical questions about the *nature* of writing about *Nature*) (395). It is only with such interrelation between natural and textual environment, Shoptaw concludes, that ecopoetry can give rise to a new ecologically aware poetics “that has designs on us, that imagines changing the ways we think, feel about, and live and act in the world” (408). The subsequent section will provide an in-depth exploration of these thematic and formal aspects that characterise ecopoetry. This examination will illuminate how these elements are intricately woven together, forming a genre that not only mirrors but actively contributes to an enhanced ecological awareness.

1.1. The Thematical Level: Environmental Complexity and Ecological Crisis

Ecopoetry differs from the broader genre of nature poetry in its focus on the complexity of the environment and the many crises and threats it faces. Its task, as we have seen, is not simply to offer a romanticised and objectified vision of nature typical of pastoral and romantic traditions, but rather to reimagine new embodied and engaged ways of relating to the ecosphere. As literary scholars Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street point out in *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (2013), ecopoetry is a new type of ecocritical discourse that “addresses contemporary problems and issues in ways that are ecocentric and respect the integrity of the other-than-human world” (xxvii). It is a poetics, they add, that

challenges the belief that we are meant to have dominion over nature and [which] is sceptical of a hyperrationality that would separate mind from body – and earth and its creatures from human beings – and that would give pre-eminence to fantasies of control. (xxviii)

Unlike previous forms of pastoral, romantic, and transcendentalist nature writing, ecopoetry does not consider human interests as the only legitimate concern and the ultimate subject of poetic expression. On the contrary, it aims to display a holistic and relational understanding of the natural world, inviting us to reflect on the equal existential dignity of all living and non-living beings. This particular emphasis on what philosopher Timothy Morton calls “coexistentialism” allows ecopoetry to propose new imaginaries and integrated understandings of the ecosystems we inhabit and highlights their importance for our existence as part of this supersystem (Morton 47).

Questions of nature's structural complexity and dynamism also represent a crucial aspect of this newly emerged genre. As the literary critic Leonard M. Scigaj states in his anthology *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets* (1999), ecopoetry can be defined above all as “poetry that persistently stresses human cooperation with nature conceived as a dynamic, interrelated series of cyclic feedback systems” (37). Ecopoetry's main goal, Scigaj observes, is not to offer a static and unchanging view of nature as a ‘benign’ backdrop to human progress but rather to highlight its active, unpredictable and constantly evolving aspects (37). A similar point is also made by literary scholar Margaret Ronda, who posits that “[e]copoetics might be seen as a nascent poetry of the Anthropocene, interested in [...] drawing attention to the complex dependencies of planetary life at

various scales” as well as “highlight[ing] the claims held on us by the non-human world” (105). Ecopoetry, the author notes, introduces a form of discourse that pays attention to the changing or divergent scales of environmental phenomena. It introduces a multiscalar way of thinking that simultaneously considers various spatial levels (from molecular to planetary) and temporal levels (from deep time to the future) in an attempt to present a more complex view of the biophysical realities that surround us and to bring to light new phenomena that would remain equally invisible at the normal level of perception (105). In this sense, then, ecopoetry actively seeks to change our perception of the world and make us reflect on the small and large-scale implications in the ‘supersystem’ that is our home but also part of our very being.

As Tim Cresswell, geographer and ecopoet, points out in his article “Writing (New) Worlds: Poetry and Place in a Time of Emergency” (2022) ecopoetry is first and foremost a poetical practice which is focused “on the ways we make the house of earth into a home, and all the ways we do that badly” (376). The main concern of this new poetic genre, Cresswell argues, is not only to offer a new appreciation of the complex environmental systems that surround us but also, above all, to bring attention to the mutation and mutilations these realities undergo due to human activities (379). Ecopoetry heralds a distinctive form of proactive discourse, recognising the degree to which such transformations have interrogated and redefined traditional definitions of nature. It seeks to augment and sophisticate our conceptualisation of nature and engagement with it, thus challenging the orthodox dichotomies between nature and culture, rural and urban landscapes, and wild and domestic environments. Underlying this new form of poetic expression is a desire to confront current material realities, to record them not only in their ideal aspects but also in their more realistic and disturbing features. Ecopoetry, argues American poet Juliana Spahr in her 2011 collection of poems, *Well Then There Now*, introduces a new sensibility to the environment, capable of “show[ing] the beautiful bird” while also drawing our attention to the “bulldozer that is destroying [that] bird’s habitat” (69).

1.2. The Formal Level: A Poetics of Complex Realism

Beyond its specific ecological themes, ecopoetics is also distinguished from other forms of nature-oriented poetics by its adoption of self-aware and innovative formal strategies. According to Kate Rigby, the aim of

ecopoetry is no longer to present a 'true' and 'pure' image of nature but rather to provide new literary practices that direct the reader's attention to the inevitable artificial creative effort involved in the production of such images (80). Ecopoetic writing, she notes, "discloses its own inadequacy as a form of representation, or mode of response, in order to resist the logic of substitution: the illusion, that is, that the text can stand in for something else, whether embodied experience, empirical knowledge, or ethico-political action" (80). This genre introduces a critical approach to poetry, questioning our inherently anthropocentric perception of reality and adopting experimental forms of versification "better suited to confront contemporary eco-social contingencies, particularly anthropogenic climate change, which makes any attempted realignment with 'nature's rhythms and cycles' anachronistic" (81). Among these experimental forms, Rigby notes, ecopoets, in particular, tend to favour the formal devices of repetition, parataxis, enjambment and the modernist techniques of fragmentation and collage – linguistic devices whose hermeticism forces an attitude of detachment on the nature described. They also prefer open, rhizomatic textual structures and integrate multiple voices and perspectives, thus avoiding fallacies of poetic solipsism and eco-sentimentalism (81). Or they use rhetorical figures such as apostrophes and prosopopoeia to give voice to other non-human entities and thus configure human beings' obligations to the natural world (81). At the basis of this particular mode of ecological writing is thus a high degree of literary self-consciousness, or what John Retallack calls a 'poetics of complex realism,' a form of poetic composition in which "the active processes of mutability and multiplicity are valued over the simpler, more stable illusions of expressive clarity" (219). Ecopoetry does not seek illusory mimesis with the landscapes it describes but rather a cognitive distance. This detachment is not an end in itself but a strategic device that serves as a tool for critical reflection, allowing readers to question their own perceptions and relationships with the natural world. Through its inventive formal methods, ecopoetry effectively creates a gap between our language and the natural world, fostering respect for the particular eco-logics of these non-verbal realities.

Ecopoetry's desire for a more self-reflexive stance is also visible in the ways this genre engages with the ongoing issues of environmental decline and destruction. As pointed out by Shoptaw in his article on ecopoetics, the genre finds its specificity primarily in the development of urgent and cogent forms of discourse that seek to awaken readers to the gravity and imminence of current ecological crisis, or as he puts it, the

realisation that “there is no planet B” (406). In particular, literary critic Lynn Keller observes in her anthology *Recomposing Ecopoetics: North American Poetry of the Self-Conscious Anthropocene* (2018) that one of the main concerns of ecopoetry is to find modes of discourse that can present a compelling vision of the reality of environmental disaster while avoiding what she calls “apocalypse fatigue,” namely the emotional and cognitive exhaustion of readers with respect to these overwhelming catastrophic realities (28). To cope with this weariness and psychological pressure, ecopoetry develops a new rhetoric that counterbalances the desperate and tragic visions with unexpected ironic and satirical modes (28). These lighter humorous approaches, Keller notes, do not necessarily lead to comic relief but “make [the] anticipation of catastrophe momentarily more bearable [...] [and] support a reinvestment in environmental well-being” (105). Notably, such rhetorical modes also prompt critical self-reflection as they create a discrepancy between the seriousness of the subject matter and its mode of representation (105–106). Once again, therefore, the idea at the centre of this new genre is not to present nostalgic and romantic visions of nature but, on the contrary, to provide more self-aware and thought-provoking modes of expression that eschew the pathetic fallacies of traditional romantic or transcendentalist environmental writing.

2. -273.15: Peter Reading’s Poetic Ecology of Catastrophe

Environmental concerns have always been a cornerstone of Reading’s poetic oeuvre. Starting with his first poem, *Water and Waste* (1970), and continuing with further collections such as *For the Municipality’s Elderly* (1974), *Nothing for Anyone* (1977), *Diplopic* (1983), *Faunal* (2002), -273.15 (2005), and *Vendage Tardive* (2010), most of his work has focused on the depiction of issues of mass-species extinction and anthropocentric climate change, long before these became core public concerns. A keen naturalist and ornithologist, Reading was acutely aware of the necessity to find ways of bringing to attention the wondrous variety but also increasing vulnerability of the Earth’s ecosystems, and avoid what he called “a peremptory adieu to biodiversicals” (Reading [30]).¹ In his poetry he frequently employs innovative stylistic techniques to express these

¹ Peter Reading’s -273.15 is unpaginated and contains numerous collages. For ease of citation and to avoid confusion, the poems quoted in this article are numbered from the first page of the collection.

concerns and reflect on the role of poetry in addressing these issues. A good example of this complex poetics of catastrophe is Reading's penultimate collection of poetry, *-273.15*. Titled in reference to the absolute zero, the temperature on the Celsius thermodynamic scale where all molecular motion stops, *-273.15* is a mournful and bitter diatribe against our unresponsiveness to realities of anthropogenic climate change and biodiversity loss. In the poem, such an eschatological scenario is constructed through a blend of poetic sequences and collage, featuring a mix of untitled notes, media reports, and scientific research data. This amalgamation results in a text that is both multi-layered and polyphonic, compelling the reader to engage in a thorough and detailed analysis. Integral to the poem's narrative structure, and initiating its discourse, is the ongoing dialogue between two characters: 'Noye' (a middle-English parodic rendering of the biblical 'Noah,' here playing the part of sea captain), and an unnamed and learned eco-activist who urges the tetchy ship-master to welcome a large catalogue of endangered species aboard his Ark:

Noye, Noye,
 Could you handle,
 Atop t'others,
 337 species of *Pheidole*
 New to Science
 And recently charted
 By Edward O. Wilson?

*

'Chuck 'em aboard;
 Chuck 'em aboard me bucko mate
 An' let's heave aweigh' (Reading [3])

As pointed out by Alexander Schlutz, the flood narrative in which *-273.15* participates allows Reading to reflect on issues of speciesism and, by extension, problematic dialectics between human and non-human concerns (Schlutz 802). In the role of eco-saviour, the poem's implied persona uses scientific data to highlight the threat posed by human activities to our environment. His detailed taxonomies of Earth's creatures evoke a complex vision of our biosphere, in which every species plays a key role in the future survival of others. Conscious of the importance of preserving these symbiotic relationships, the anonymous poetic voice's goal becomes that of expanding the non-exhaustive biblical shipload of "clean and unclean beasts" (King James' Version, Gen. 7.2) with a more nuanced sampling of our planet's lifeforms (Schlutz 802). His revised 'boarding

list' not only changes typical classification schemes, ordering insignificant-seeming organisms such as '337 species of *Pheidole*' (a recently discovered genus of ants) to be housed first on the ark but also solicits ample space and appreciation for several non-charismatic microfaunae:

Cap'n Noye!, Cap'n Noye!,
 [...]
 The *rickettsiae*,
 Parasitic microorganisms
 Intermediate in structure between bacteria and viruses
 That live in the tissue of ticks
 And other arthropods
 And cause disease when transmitted to man.

*

'A pox on all an' sundry!
 We got vermin a-plenty below decks!' (Reading [33])

This process of careful naming gives the poetic voice the necessary burden of proof to convince Noye, the real decision-maker of this rescue mission, to consider this unexpected cargo. Indeed, as Schlutz also notes in his article, Reading's version of the Biblical Noah hardly seems the right figure for such an important task (802). Less environmentally conscious than his interlocutor, he seems only eager to get on with the embarkation process and to set sail, regardless of how much biodiversity may be left behind (Schlutz 802). If he initially welcomes extra loads of endangered species with an indifferent "Chuck'em aboard, Messmate" (Reading [19]), his patience wanes under the poetic voice's increasingly onerous demands and the looming threat of the deluge: "Piss off;/ We got more than enough, more than enough" (Reading [28]). Throughout the poem, Noye focuses predominantly on his own survival, unlike the poetic voice who is willing to risk personal safety for the sake of other life forms. Reading signals an intellectual divide that also runs through the linguistic register he associates with this character. In contrast to the eco-conscious poetic persona who speaks mainly in a lyrical yet scientific language, with catalogues of animal species organised in a paratactic manner and according to figures of sound, thus bringing attention to the inherent poetic qualities of our lifeforms, Noye expresses himself in a hasty pseudo-vernacular that, in its vulgarity and bluntness, demonstrates limited knowledge and appreciation of the surrounding environment.

The complexity and diversity of the debates around the issue of climate change are a central element of -273.15. Reading explores this wide

range of visceral responses to our current environmental crisis not only through the confrontation between Noye and the anonymous lyrical voice but also through a collage of other documents and found materials that he weaves into his parodic 'retelling' of the flood narrative. The result is a polyphonic text that combines a wide variety of printed works, including, among others, excerpts from academic journals, newspaper articles, scientific data, field notes, media reports, and selected quotations from poems:

And didya read how a survey of all them Brit birds and butterflies shows there's some sorta population decline?, [Yes, in a series of censuses that combed about every square yard of England, Scotland and Wales over forty years, more than 20,000 volunteers managed to count each bird, native plant and butterfly they could find. They reported that the populations of all the species surveyed were in sharp decline – many extirpated completely.] and didya read how two surveys of 1,200 sumthin plants showed a decrease of 28% [yes, fragile planet undergoing its sixth great extinction – Cambrian, Devonian, Permian, Triassic, Cetaceous, Holocene].

(Reading [4])

In bringing these various ecologically-oriented discourses together, Reading draws our attention to the enormous vastness and multidimensionality of the current climate crisis: a phenomenon to which we are constantly exposed but struggle to conceive in our heads. As Reading's verbal and visual collage suggests, environmental change is not a simple story; it cannot be framed by a single vision or rendered by a single narrative. Making sense of the current situations of ecological degradation and global warming means confronting a confusing mass of information in which the useless, the false, and the futile risk becoming difficult to distinguish from what is authentic, factual, or scientific. Indeed, the fragmentary and chaotic nature of Reading's poetry constantly overwhelms and disorients the reader, who is forced to compare and evaluate different intertextual references and a poetic style characterised by generic, register, and discursive variations, thus creating a challenging reading experience both in terms of content and assimilation. Through this mechanism, Reading also emphasises that our inability to cope with the new phenomena of environmental change is mainly linked to our unwillingness to take the problem seriously, an aspect that he denounces several times in the poem in the form of an imaginary and comic interaction between a schoolmaster and his pupils:

And consider the 4% of the Artic ice cap melted per decade since about 1970, the decline of the North Atlantic's salinity reduced over the past forty years, the possible effects of this on the Great Atlantic Current, the cooling of much of Europe and the U.S. if the flow ceased, the droughts, the dust-bowls and the ashes... [You, at the back, should've sat up and fuckingwell paid attention]

(Reading [9])

[...]

The earth is threatened by its own pollution...
 Western Industrial Man is facing, *now*,
 Not just a challenge but a climacteric...
 (Those in the front seats should have paid attention.)

(Reading [29])

With this parodic appeal to the public, Reading laments our attitude of practical disavowal of the crisis and denounces the fact that no change is possible if both ordinary citizens, those sitting “in the back,” and policy-makers, “those in the front row,” continue to behave as if ecology had no lasting consequences on their daily lives (Reading [29]).

A large part of Reading's work is also dedicated to exploring the deep feelings of weariness and anguish that our species feels in the face of the scale and complexity of the environmental crisis. In *-273.15*, in fact, these emotional states of helplessness and foreboding not only manifest themselves in the progressive bleakness of the mobilised discourses but also in the very structure of the poem, which gradually becomes more fragmented and incomprehensible. As Reading's account of the global catastrophe draws to a close, the poetic text shatters before the reader's eyes, with an increasing number of incomplete texts and verbal collages whose line endings are chopped off and whose words are deliberately misspelt to the point of illegibility:

nk that major climate *nset* of an ice age, took *rs* to unfold. Now they know
ansitions can occur in less The probable trigger of abrupt *ges*, at least *i* the
 Northern *e*, is the shutdown of a huge ocean *he* Atlantic Ocean. The *cur* is
 dense, salty water that flows north *e* tropics and sinks in the North *At h*
 water is pumped into the *h* can occur. from *b* Atlantic. if *fres* northerly part
 of the current – will as, global warming melts Artic – its *salin* drops, mak-
 ing it less dense. (Reading [18], emphasis added)

Through these pieces of ‘disappearing text,’ which symbolise the melting of icebergs and the shifting Gulf Stream, Reading contemplates the relevance of poetry amidst the current climate emergency. He recognises the potential redundancy of his craft and occupation, especially in light of

growing insecurities about the future survival of our species. In this scenario, he suggests, poetic expression may not only be ineffective but even counterproductive. At a time when an abundance of discourse on the climate issue elicits more apathy than proactive measures, poetry might unwittingly risk reinforcing this paralysing narrative, thus deepening inertia. The idea that further dialogue on the climate emergency may fail to capture or motivate the audience is particularly evident in the poem's subsequent verbal collages. In these sections, Reading interrupts the listing of an endangered species to present readers with a chaotic and haphazard assemblage of quotes from the headlines of various newspapers and public scientific reports:

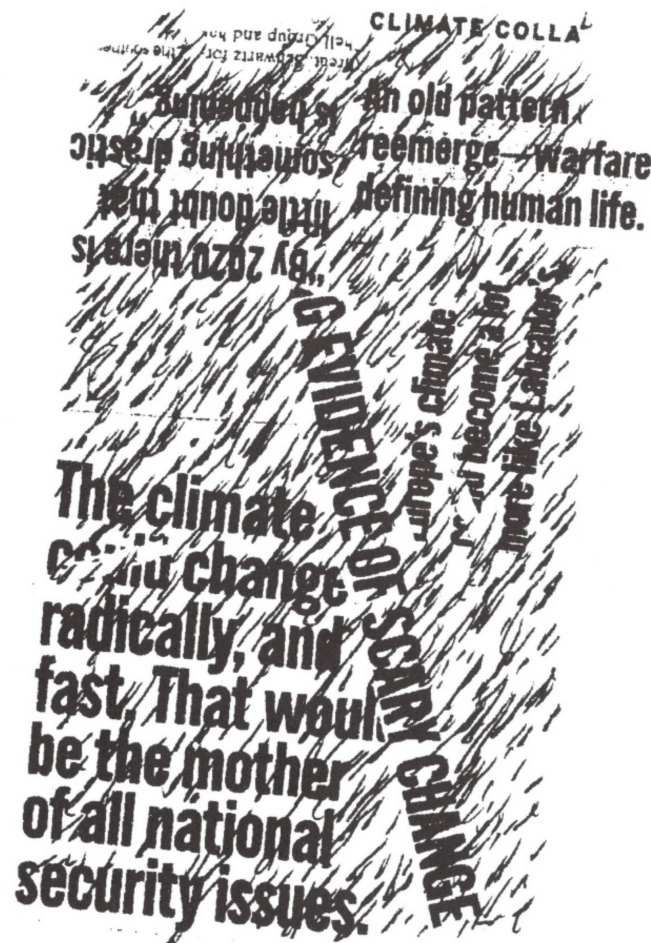


Figure 1. Poem 25 in Reading's collection -273,15²

² The two images from Peter Reading's -273.15 (Bloodaxe Books, 2005) are reproduced here by permission of Bloodaxe Books Ltd.

With these alarming headings and catchphrases – “The climate could change radically, and fast, That would be the mother of all national security issues”; “[...] evidence of scary change”; Europe’s climate could become a lot more like Labrador’s”; “By 2020 there is little doubt that something drastic is happening”; “an old pattern reemerge[s] – warfare defining human life” – Reading once again attempts to reproduce our daily encounter with the disturbing and paralysing realities of the climate crisis (Reading [25]). In particular, and as pointed out by literary critic Carrie Etter in her review of -273.15, “[t]hese descriptions mimic the lay reader’s anticipated experience of reading articles about global warming: only so much information is apprehended or retained, and only the patient, active reader will take anything away” (73). This feeling that public discourse is becoming less effective in motivating the public to confront such catastrophic visions finds its most significant expression on the last page of the poem. Here, Reading brings his parodic retelling of the biblical tale to its announced and inevitable apocalyptic conclusion by switching from typewritten text to hurriedly scribbled field notes:

Field note: Veracruz; torrential rain;
Johnston and I in a dengue-infected village;
Dumped truck-tyre-reservoirs of breeding mosquitoes;
Snail Kites (2 juvs. ^{one} ~~snail~~ female);
9 Yellow-headed Vultures. (Cathartes burrovianus)
stouched in unilluminated shacks,
those who have yielded to
the unequal struggle.

l.l. 10

insert
to increasingly
diminutive

dengue-infected microcosm
3 kites
9 vultures
of us
those/who are yielding to
the unequal struggle
torrential rain
torrential rain
torrential rain

l.l. 10
Stet ✓

-273.15
Kelvin

Figure 2. Poem 36 in Reading’s collection. -273,15

In these last manuscript and almost illegible lines, the poetic voice returns to the flood narrative, continuing the catalogue of species to be saved in Noah's Ark. Unlike the other times, however, the listing is abruptly cut short by the arrival of a "torrential rain" that puts an end to the embarkation process sealing the fate of all species that, as Reading notes, "yield to the unequal struggle" (Reading [38]). The catastrophe foreshadowed in the poem's title materialises and is amplified by Reading's transition to a hurried scrawl. This alteration strikingly depicts the sense of urgency and conflict of the poet, whose hand we can almost see racing across the page, writing the last lines before the imminent catastrophe. An entropic ending that is captured in the final line of the poem with a -273.15, an absolute zero, which Reading initially encircles, then crosses out, and ultimately endorses with a check and the notation 'stet' (a directive to keep the edited text). The series of editorial operations collectively heightens the sense of impending doom while also illustrating the poet's form of active resistance, who, even in the face of the inevitable ecological collapse, clings to a lingering 'impulse of hope,' the idea that the conversation initiated by this poem might evolve into new expressions beyond the final page.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, Reading's -273.15 is an innovative and insightful meditation on the intricate relationship between humanity and the ongoing climate crisis. Through a creative reimagining of Noah's Ark and its dual symbolism of catastrophe and conservation, Reading transforms this ancient narrative into a modern allegory for environmental activism and the critical imperative to safeguard our planet's delicate ecosystems against their impending peril. This parodic take on the flood myth not only presents a novel viewpoint on contemporary environmental challenges but also intertwines diverse tales of ecological catastrophes, contemplating the manner and logic of their transmission. Importantly, -273.15 undertakes significant 'ecological work' in its composition, leveraging various linguistic and stylistic approaches to investigate how language, particularly in its poetic form, can effectively capture and convey the essence of ecological crises. Reading's poetry beckons us to scrutinise the effectiveness of prevailing climate change dialogues and to seek out richer, more layered methods for confronting the environmental challenges before us. Poetry, Reading seems to indicate with -273.15, may indeed serve

as the medium capable of enriching the oft-simplified and all-too-familiar apocalyptic discourse in new and unconventional ways, prompting not merely an observation but a profound reassessment of our perception towards fresh recognitions of this existential challenge.

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