

# FROM ENVIRONMENTAL POETRY TO ECOPOETRY

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## W. S. MERWIN'S POETIC FOREST

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([Audio File of Dunning Reading her Article](#))

Ecocritic Leonard M. Scigaj outlines the differences between the umbrella category of nature poetry, nature poetry's subcategory of environmental poetry, and environmental poetry's even more restrictive subcategory of ecopoetry. While W. S. Merwin early in his career might have been categorized as an environmental poet, by the end of his career not only would he clearly be defined as an ecopoet, but I would argue that Merwin comes to epitomize both the poetic and life practices of the ideal ecopoet. Particularly notable in the shifts his work exhibits over the half century since he won his first major poetry award for *The Mask of Janus* is his poetry's shifting approach to representations of the environment. Beginning with a closer look at Scigaj's claims about environmental poetry and ecopoetry, this essay traces Merwin's ecopoetic development through his presentation of relationships with trees.<sup>1</sup> This tracing shows a clear movement from representing humans and nature as being distinct characters to melding humans and nature together into a representation that literally unifies them in origin, existence, and end. By the time Merwin writes *The Shadow of Sirius*, he has mastered the ability to present humans and nature simultaneously as markedly individual yet inextricably intertwined, without sacrificing either the distinctiveness or the unity inherent to the relationship. Part of Merwin's long-term significance is rooted in his simultaneously practical and beautiful approach to poetry, which is itself rooted in his poetic and personal relationship with trees.

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### Defining Nature Poetry, Environmental Poetry, and Ecopoetry

Understanding the difference between the categories that Scigaj outlines in *Sustainable Poetry*—which were used most recently in *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (2013)—proves useful because his categories, each of which ad-

dress “our connection to the natural world” in differing ways, are definitive enough to provide guidance about levels of poetic ecological engagement without subdividing to the point that the categories become so restrictive that they ultimately have no real meaning. According to Scigaj, nature poetry has complexity beyond treating nature “as a convenient background for human concerns . . . [acknowledging] that it sustains human, as well as non-human, life in ecosystems that have been deeply bruised by human exploitation and pollution.”<sup>2</sup> He cites Jay Parini’s definition from the introduction to *Poems for a Small Planet*, edited by Parini and Robert Pack, in which Parini inclusively categorizes nature poetry as “poems that in some way reflect a highly developed consciousness of the natural world” as an example of a definition too broad to do justice to the complexity of nature poetry. Scigaj explains that Parini’s contextualization of his definition, and Pack’s discussion in the afterword express the need for less anthropocentrism and, instead, some recognition of humans’ ethical obligations to a biocentric view that would acknowledge “that we need to return to the humility and the sense of human limits” traditionally expressed by nature poets. More specifically, Scigaj quotes the introduction to Robert Finch and John Elder’s *Norton Book of Nature Writing* to clarify that “nature writing asserts both the humane value of literature and the importance to a mature individual’s relationship with the world of understanding fundamental physical and biological processes.”<sup>3</sup> While Scigaj never gives his own precise definition, he sets up nature poetry as a broad but distinct category that sets the stage for the more explicitly ethics related subcategory of environmental poetry.

Within nature poetry’s more general discussions about the complex interconnections between humans and nature, environmental poetry takes a more active stance than nature poetry. To define environmental poetry, Scigaj turns to Lawrence Buell’s 1995 *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, a text written while ecocriticism as a field was still developing. Buell puts forward four factors that set environmental poetry apart from the umbrella term na-

ture poetry. First, Buell emphasizes the need for a biocentric approach in which humans and nature are inextricably linked from the beginning of any history that includes the two. The interconnectedness implied in Buell's first factor, Scigaj sees also in Buell's second, which explicitly recognizes the existing legitimacy of interests other than human interests in a way that ethically requires moving away from an anthropocentric approach by recognizing "nonhuman living things to have habitats and histories of their own."<sup>4</sup> The third factor is a sense of accountability stemming from environmental ethics present in the text. Finally, the fourth factor requires, at a minimum, some tacit understanding that the environment is a dynamic process rather than a static entity. Thus, environmental poetry requires a more elaborate understanding of the relationship—both present and historical—between humans and nature, seeing an explicitly ethical responsibility on the part of humans and a dynamic quality on the part of nature.

The growth of ecocriticism and ecopoetry in the years following Buell's text does not negate the relevance of environmental poetry as a category in Scigaj's eyes because the ecocritical views that develop with regard to poetry do not displace those concerning environmental poetry, but rather become part of a subfield of environmental poetry, and thus, also of nature poetry. Within environmental poetry, ecopoetry "has consciously been influenced by a sensitivity to ecological thinking, especially in the areas of energy flow/retention, cyclic renewal, bioregionalism, and the interdependency of all organisms within an ecosystem." The ecopoet's acutely conscious mindset about nature and its relationship with humans means that, for ecopoets, nature is "a separate and equal other."<sup>5</sup> Thus, more than environmental poetry, "one might define ecopoetry as poetry that persistently stresses human cooperation with nature conceived as a dynamic, interrelated series of cyclic feedback systems."<sup>6</sup> Three years after Scigaj first attempts to define ecopoetry, J. Scott Bryson builds on Scigaj and Buell's respective approaches (as well as Terry Gifford's), putting forward a tentative definition of ecopoetry as a nature poetry sub-category that both maintains and moves beyond

traditional romantic conventions in a way that more easily permits addressing the current nature-human relationship.<sup>7</sup> This definition gives ecopoetry three characteristics beyond the broader category of nature poetry: first, a considerably stronger focus on the ecocentric view of the world as ubiquitously interdependent; second, the necessity of “humility in relationships” with all aspects of nature; and third, an extremely cautious approach in light of “hyperrationality” and “an overtechnologized modern world,” as well as a strong emphasis on the proximity of potentially disastrous “ecological catastrophe.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, we see that Bryson’s definitions both clarify and function within the bounds of Scigaj’s preliminary categories, emphasizing, again, the usefulness of the categories’ flexibility.

A potentially critical difference between environmental poetry and ecopoetry is the desire to issue a “warning” of some kind. Buell’s definition of environmental poetry entails an awareness of the human-nature relationship and its potential problems, but it says nothing about working against those problems or finding solutions. Ecopoetry, on the other hand, is very much about the desire for creating change. Bryson cites Jonathon Bate’s *The Song of the Earth* as one of ecocriticism’s foundational texts and, for Bate, “The business of literature is to work upon consciousness.” Just as physical parks function as “re-creational space in which we can walk and breathe and play,” ecopoetic space should recreate the experience of being in nature, and “the true poet has to be simultaneously a geographer of the imagination and a historian of the alienations and desecrations that follow the march of ‘civilization’.” Ecopoetics is not only about ecology and poetry, but also about affecting change; the poem encompasses not only the present landscape of the human-nature relationship, but the potential future as well. Such change, according to Bate, requires “‘ecopoetic’ consciousness but not necessarily ‘ecopolitical’ commitment.” The distinction is critical in that it emphasizes the difference between desiring to achieve change by working on consciousness, and undermining the aesthetic integrity of the poetry by blatantly playing politics. “Ecopoetry is not synonymous

with writing that is pragmatically green,” clarifies Bate, since, “a manifesto for ecological correctness will not be poetic because its language is bound to be instrumental, to address questions of doing rather than to ‘present’ the experience of dwelling.”<sup>9</sup> In my view, understanding the implications of this statement allows for understanding how ecopoetry maintains to be both activist and aesthetic. Rather than thinking of “green” as a point on the colored political spectrum, as Bate suggests, I would argue that “green” functions like grass in this visual representation. That is, that ecopoetry seeks to inform the foundation of all politics rather than simply to be a singular point of colored political push. This goes hand in hand with Bate’s point that even though ecopoetry is meant to encourage “doing,” its language must achieve this through the re-creation of experience rather than any explicit political activism. It is only by authentically allowing the reader to “dwell” in nature—a term Bate defines by drawing on Rousseau, Burke, and Heidegger—that ecopoetry can work on consciousness and subsequently affect change.



### Merwin’s Movement from Environmental Poetry to Ecopoetry

Merwin’s realization about Bate’s concept of dwelling begins much earlier than any of the Merwin or Bate texts referenced thus far. Looking at some of Merwin’s earlier publications allows us to contextualize the major attitude shift that critics see between Merwin’s first four volumes of poetry and his 1963 collection *The Moving Target*. In her book *Understanding W. S. Merwin*, H. L. Hix references a passage from Merwin’s 1990 essay in the *Paris Review*, “The Wake of the Blackfish,” in which he talks about a critical shift that took place in his thinking. Merwin was a week away from having an article on the anti-nuclear movement published in *The New Yorker* (for the spring of 1962 issue) when the onset of the Cuban missile crisis caused *The New Yorker* to decide against publishing the piece at such an “inappropriate” time. Merwin explains that, “Living in downtown Manhattan, the reverberations of the Cuban missile crisis seemed to become part of the neglected architecture itself. On the street corners and in the bars I heard the usual louts and loud-mouths declar-

ing that ‘we should have dropped the bomb on them long ago.’” This extended moment of political tension led Merwin to confront a conflict in his own life. “I began to be pursued by the thought that if, in all this madhouse, someone were to ask me what I thought would be a *good way to live*, I would not have a very clear answer, and it seemed to me that it was time to try to find one.” Merwin viewed his farm in France as a haven and a blessing at a time like this, but realized also that he lacked the basic knowledge about how to grow food, which “all [his] peasant neighbors knew how to do.”<sup>10</sup> In the spring of 1963, Merwin returned to his farm in France, not going to New York again until the fall of 1966, marking a period of considerable transition for Merwin personally and poetically.

The significance of this period’s transition in thinking is evident in Merwin’s philosophy, shared in an interview, that a poet “writes poems hoping that it will make something happen.” The interviewer David L. Elliott asks Merwin about this pivotal period in the 1960s and about whether writing poetry stems out of the “Buddhist paradox [that] because something is impossible and because you acknowledge that it is impossible, you are thereby enabled to try to do it anyway.” Merwin responds that the impossibility is in part the motivation but that such motivation requires caution. Referencing green activism in Thoreau, Merwin observes, “I think it is possible to pay so much attention to how angry we are that we forget why we are angry; and if we are angry for any reason except because we want to save things that we love and can’t pay attention to the fact that we do love them, then we’ve helped to destroy ourselves at the root.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, the desires to be political and poetic are somewhat competing interests in Merwin’s eyes, in that the wrong kind of focus on the political can cloud the ability to express the poetic. More importantly, Thoreau’s mistake was not recognizing the extent to which he loved the green space available to him before it was taken away. An appreciation of what currently exists is necessary for maintaining that existence.

For Merwin, then, the political and the poetic, though competing in some ways, are inseparable in others, and the desire to “make something happen . . . is the part of you that’s writing propaganda.” The political desires that form the currents under the lines of poetry are integral. “Poetry isn’t so pure that it’s completely devoid of [propaganda],” explains Merwin, further arguing in line with my take on Bate that “pure poetry is an antimacassar . . . a decoration. . . . You do want something to happen, even if it is only to get somebody to move something.”<sup>12</sup> Maintaining the balance between an approach that seeks change and one that seeks to retain its poetic value is a fine line that many poets cannot write. Merwin, however, makes such a need a central part of his poetry from this moment on, though he does not necessarily know where he is going with his changes, knowing only that change must take place: “Having come to feel dissatisfied with a way of writing, you don’t simply say, ‘I’m going to give up A, because I would prefer B.’ At the point when you’re making this decision, B doesn’t exist, or at least you don’t know what B is. So in a sense, you simply say ‘I have to stop writing this way’.”<sup>13</sup> Merwin’s shift in style comes at the same time as his shift in perspective about the need for a clearer position on “a good way to live.” These simultaneous changes result in what I will show is a clear movement from the environmental poetry that appeared in his early collections like *Green with Beasts*, through the developing ecopoetic work that culminates in *The Shadow of Sirius* as a window into an ecopoetic life.



### Merwin’s Ecopoetic Forest

Tracking such a complex development is the work of a monograph rather than an essay, so in lieu of an all-encompassing consideration of Merwin’s ecopoetic trajectory from its roots through to its fruition, this essay focuses on the way this development manifests itself in Merwin’s use of trees in his poems from the beginning of his career up through *The Shadow of Sirius*. Trees have long played a crucial role in poetry and have more recently become a concern of society and scholarship. Robert Pogue Harrison’s *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* was perhaps the first

book-length philosophical exploration devoted to the study of trees. Harrison writes in his 1991 preface, “It is hard to believe that just six years ago, when the idea for such a book first came to me, there was very little talk about forests in the news. Since then the fate of the remaining forests on earth has become a major worldwide issue.”<sup>14</sup> His book tracks some of the complex literary and historical significance of trees and forests, showing the critical role they play in both realms and justifying the use of trees as the thread by which to consider Merwin’s movement from environmental poetry into ecopoetry. Considering some of the attitudes Harrison advocates contributes to a richer understanding of Merwin’s poetic relationship with trees.

Harrison, like Merwin, advocates a shifting of traditional attitudes towards the forest when he invokes Descartes’ metaphorical logic by which travelers lost in the woods should not wander helter-skelter but, instead, should walk in a straight line in one direction, even if that direction is arbitrary because, in such a way, “they will finally arrive at least somewhere where they probably will be better off than in the middle of a forest.”<sup>15</sup> In Descartes’ logic, since the geometric area of the forest cannot be infinite, then, mathematically speaking, a straight line—regardless of where it begins within the forest—must be finite. However, a line that does not move straight through the trees, but rather loops, curves, doubles back, circles, crosses, and otherwise wanders, may indeed be infinite. Descartes’ certainty in his exit strategy contrasts with other representations of forests, like “Dante’s dark forest, for example, where the ‘straight way’ is lost and cannot be pursued.”<sup>16</sup> Without a natural guide like the sun, moon, or stars—that is, without some attunement to the natural world—escape from the forest seems impossible. Harrison’s own view, as evidenced both in the whole of the book and in some of the introductory monologues for his radio program “Entitled Opinions,” is quite different than either Descartes or Dante, and in this way makes his willingness to lose the forest for the trees an appropriate basis for examining Merwin. While Descartes and Dante are both preoccupied with escaping the forest successfully or not, Harrison opens

the possibility that the proverbial end of the line is not outside the forest, but within the forest's means for stimulating exploration, thought, and art. I make the connection between Harrison and Merwin because Merwin, in a Harrisonian way, repeatedly finds the end of each of his lines within both the poetic forest and the physical Hawaiian forest he has spent the past three decades helping to rebuild. For Merwin, finding *a good way to live* does not mean escaping the forest, but rather finding a place within it.

Though Harrison does not wander through the forests of Merwin's poetry, had he done so, he would have found a rich diversity of trees, whose roots, and even branches as roots, work their way deep into the poems. Removing the trees would change the very essence of the Merwin's *oeuvre* as a whole. In Merwin's 1956 collection *Green with Beasts*, his poem "The Wilderness" provides an example of Merwin's early approach to nature, which, generally speaking, involves a complex representation of nature that recognizes and comments on the tensions between nature and humanity but maintains a stark divide between humans and nature.<sup>17</sup> The poem immediately opens with a sense of detachedness, as it declares that, "Remoteness is its own secret" by way of both connecting wilderness with being remote, and thus, detached from humans, and reserving the possibility that remoteness is self-contained and that wilderness has secrets beyond that of remoteness (line 1). The question of what constitutes remoteness is pivotal but ambiguous. The negative definitions typical of Merwin build up the complex wilderness that the poem's "us," as humans, must navigate. At the same time, the "us" of the first stanza does not exert agency to find "this place," but rather, something else has navigated the complex maze and bodies of water whose movement threatens drowning, and "has found us this place" (line 4). There is a momentary feeling of pause in the opening remoteness that the full stop part way through the first line causes. The gerund "avoiding" in the second line allows action without causing that action to punctuate the stillness brought on by the punctuation of the first line, and the preposition "at" in the fourth line implies a sense of

being “at” a destination rather than traveling towards one, in spite of the inherent motion of a “watercourse.”

The reader settles finally on “this place,” knowing that it is neither “holiness” nor “the huge spirit” that “has found us this place, / But merely surviving all that is not here” (lines 4–5). Ending line four with “this place” and line five with “here” gives a sense of being rooted, but the simultaneous reference to “all that is not here” creates an acute awareness of the limitations of the inhabited space, both in terms of that which exists elsewhere and that which seems entirely absent. This dually comparative and inherent absence, whose agency makes it sound suspiciously human, is “that” which “looks up, almost by change, and sees” (line 6). This sense of human perspective being disconnected from the human itself is only exacerbated by what “that” “sees” when it looks: not simply a fragmented human body, but a fragmented landscape as well, “Perhaps hand, feet, but not ourselves; a few stunted juniper trees / And the horizon’s virginity.” Our bodies and the trees are equally “stunted” and disconnected from the seeming impenetrability of the horizon, but this is not a new development: “We are where we always were,” on the edge of wilderness, of remoteness (lines 7–8). Thus, we clearly know where we are—we *are* where we *were*—but it is not as easy to say where we were. The human and the non-human seem to inhabit the same space and yet, for each, there is something about the other that brings the reader back to what is not here.

One of the major clues to discovering where we actually are is the juniper trees, which, though stunted, play a pivotal role in the wilderness of the poem. Juniper trees are part of the genus *Juniperus* and, depending on the source, there are between fifty and sixty different species of juniper trees located around the globe. Juniper is often viewed as symbolic of chastity, protection, and patience: juniper was used in some Renaissance portraits to indicate that a woman was chaste; in the bible, both Jesus’ parents with their infant and Elijah took shelter under juniper trees; and St. Juniper was known largely for his patience. The concept of protec-

tion stems also from the practical uses of juniper to protect livestock by carrying smoking juniper branches through the pasture and from using juniper in wooden chests to deter moths. One of the most famous stories featuring juniper trees comes from Grimm's *Fairy Tales*. In "The Juniper Tree," a mother, knowing she is going to die, asks to be buried under the juniper tree in the yard where she had been granted the wish of having her son. When the father eventually remarries, the stepmother is angry that the son will inherit everything and her daughter nothing. She kills the son, convincing the daughter that it was the daughter who killed her step-brother. The step-mother then agrees to hide the death from the father by telling him the son went to visit his uncle. A bird hatches in the tree and avenges the son's death by dropping a millstone on the stepmother. From the remains of the dead step-mother, the son returns unscathed, having had all along the protection of his mother.

The juniper's symbolic resonance offers an alternative perspective through which to understand the poem's "place." The wilderness would seem to be a space with many trees, pure and untouched by humans, a chaste space, like the horizon's virginity. Symbolically, however, the associations of the juniper tree become stunted as the poem's physical trees are stunted, emphasizing that the chastity is not in the present place, but is just off from where humans are, on the horizon of what we see. But each time we move closer, the horizon moves farther away, leaving us continually in a wilderness of our own making. We come to realize that it is inherently impossible for the human eye to see, or the human mind to conceptualize an entirely human free natural space. At the same time, though we are still in the midst of the wilderness, our proximity, while permeating the landscape, does not necessarily make understanding that landscape any more accessible to us, "The secret becomes no less itself for our presence / In the midst of it; as the lizard's gold-eyed / Mystery is no more lucid for being near" (lines 9–11). We are where we always were, in the wilderness that in spite of our presence retains its mystery and its patience. But we, like the wilderness, are frag-

mented and the Bishop-like moment with the lizard applies to our understanding of ourselves as well.

Closing the poem, “And famine is all about us, but not here; / For from the very hunger to look, we feed / Unawares, as at the beaks of ravens” seems again to be concerned with the physical space, but is instead feeding back into complexity brought in by the juniper tree’s symbolism (lines 12–14). The human desire to see remoteness, that is, to bring that which is remote into proximity, causes us to “feed / Unawares,” with “unawares” as either an adjective or an object. Reading “feed” as a transitive verb and “unawares” as an object underscores the potential anthropocentrism in “famine is all about us” in a more unexpected way than simply reading “unawares” as a descriptor of human action. Whether famine is physically surrounding or metaphorically concerning “us,” there is something about the poem’s space that removes the famine temporarily, but not in a way that promises any long term escape from the fragmented relationship represented in stanza two. However we read “unawares,” its prominent placement puts added pressure on it and the way it runs throughout the poem like a watercourse in which human agency has drowned. The ravens—scavengers and traditionally birds of ill omen—often feed off of human garbage, leading to an increase in their population that corresponds with human population increases. Humans feeding—unawares—the ravens, ultimately leads to the ravens returning as an agricultural nuisance. The ravens’ beaks also potentially reference the weapon that enabled killing the stepmother in “The Juniper Tree,” in addition to the ravens’ dual status as foragers of human garbage and scavengers of agricultural crops. Finally, this reference can be read as a comparison between humans and the beaks of ravens so that we then see humans as the scavenging nuisances in the wilderness rather than ravens as the nuisances in civilization. At the same time, “as *at* the beaks of ravens” emphasizes the distinct separation between humanity and nature that is maintained even as they are being compared.

“The Wilderness” clearly falls under the category of environmental poetry. It creates strong connections between humans and nature, going so far as to fragment the human body and the junipers, and to suggest potential interchangeability between them. As Scigaj emphasizes, human history and natural history are inextricably connected, as in the line, “We are where we always were”; and the poem’s focus is more biocentric than anthropocentric, in part because human agency is removed. This problematizes the moments of potential anthropocentrism through a subtle sense of environmental ethics, bringing forward the “habitats and histories” that Scicaj says eco poets must recognize “nonhuman living things” as having.<sup>18</sup> From this sense of ethical commitment there is also an emerging sense of accountability. Furthermore, the environment “as a process rather than as a constant” hovers in the lines that suggest adaptability, exploration, and movement.<sup>19</sup> In spite of having all of these factors, however, the poem has no feeling of activism and does not suggest an explicit course of action for humanity.

The poem in *Green with Beasts* that immediately follows “The Wilderness” creates a similar relationship between trees and the speaker. As with humans and the junipers, the speaker of “The Wakening” is both connected to nature and distinguishably distinct from it. In this poem, nature is personified as a naked woman bathing in a stream of light. The speaker is waking from a metaphorical dream to see her,

So that his sight was half-dimmed with its dazzling, he could see  
 Her standing naked in the day-shallows there,  
 Face turned away, hands lost in her bright hair;  
 And he saw then that her shadow was the tree. (CP 1:110)

Water, light, and body melt together in the speaker’s eyes, creating a more romantic view of nature than in the previous poem. This poem remains an environmental poem in spite of its romantic moments, partly because of the framing work the title does in suggesting realization on the speaker’s part, either as he is waking up on his own, or as some other impetus makes “to wake” a transitive verb, rousing the speaker. The

title, with its inherent inclusion of the noun “wake,” also sets the stage for the water-related language like “rode and lapped,” “day-shallows,” and “stream” which, blended with the light-related language, gives the poem the mystical atmosphere necessary for creating the speaker’s dreamlike state (lines 3, 6, 12). There are three characters in this poem: the “his/he” speaker, the “her/she” personified nature, and “her shadow” that “was the tree.” The speaker is clearly connected to nature through his vision, whatever the impetus for it may be. The woman is uniquely one with nature and distinct from it in a way that suggests, as with the fragmented body and landscape in “The Wilderness,” that Merwin suggests a fundamental connection between humans and nature, such that they are one and the same. However, in these early poems, the human and natural players still remain distinct from each other, rather than blurred.

Even the mythological figure of the woman is not quite fully dryad; it is her shadow that is the tree so that we see her first, then her shadow, in a way that makes us never really see nature directly, perhaps suggesting that we cannot have access to nature or that nature is constructed in such a way that we cannot ultimately see it because it does not actually exist the way we imagine it. Additionally, the tree is distinctly “the” tree, rather than ‘a’ tree: this simple article choice gives an intangible certainty and specificity to the final six lines of the poem, in which the shadow/tree becomes an independent player, “So that even as she stood there it must reach down.” The power that the shadow tree has over perception in the poem is significant, as, when it reaches “down,” it is, “Through not roots but branches with dark birdsong, into a stream / Of silence like a sky but deeper / Than this light or than any remembered heaven” (lines 11, 12–14). The tree’s branches, instead of roots, reach “down” into the sky in a “deeper” undermining of the reader’s expectations, as sky and ground become one, just as light and water became one, so that the stream that is the sky and the light that is the ground give the perception that everything in the poem is one and, within the oneness, there are the individual figures of the speaker, nature, and the

tree. Here and in “The Wilderness,” we get a clear sense of how Merwin builds relationships between trees and other figures in his early poems, as well as a sense of how this early work fits into the category of environmental poetry. There are important ethical considerations at play but there is not yet a clear solution to Merwin’s search.

A decade later, when Merwin publishes *The Lice* in 1967, he has just come out of the period of change discussed earlier. He is beginning to realize that, not only does he need to find a “clear answer” about “what [he] thought would be a good way to live,” but that his poetry needed to reflect that with the purpose of affecting change through it. The poem “The Last One,” which Merwin wrote in response to someone asking him to write a story, focuses on trees in a considerably different way than in either “The Wilderness” or “The Wakening.” The most notable difference is that there is no “we” in this poem. “They” are perhaps the main characters, and the trees are condensed down to “the last one.” Scigaj sees this poem as focusing clearly on extinction but he is wrong in that the poem never actually allows for the possibility of extinction.<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, the poem suggests that personified nature will allow destruction to a certain point before retaliating. Considering this in a non-personified way would reflect the ecological reality that humans would be unlikely to wipe out nature entirely. The dynamic flexibility of ecosystems has, for millennia, adapted to large scale changes and even disasters; the reality therefore, is that humans are likely to cause their own extinction before causing the extinction of nature as a whole.

In “The Last One” (*CP* 1:271–73), Merwin comments on more than an individual forest, and the poem’s personification takes a different turn than the mythological one in “The Wakening.” The poem begins with “They” deciding to be everywhere and to cut everything because they believe it all belongs to them. It appears at first that they have the power to do so, and only “the end of the day” causes them to leave “one left standing” (line 11). The coming of night is a pivotal moment of nature’s decision:

The night gathered in the last branches.  
 The shadow of the night gathered in the shadow on the water.  
 The night and the shadow put on the same head.  
 And it said Now. (lines 13–16)

First night gathers in the space of the living tree's branches; once there, its shadow reflected on the water then gathers in the shadow of the tree branches reflected on the water. In this way, the shadow of the tree takes on a similar autonomy as the shadow in "The Wakening" but without the mythological aspect. Instead, "the shadow," which is the shadow of the tree mixed with the shadow of the night, takes power as the clear controlling force in the poem. Even when "they cut the last one. / Like the others the last one fell into its shadow. / It fell into its shadow on the water," the tree is not actually gone (lines 17–19). Merwin's perpetual use of light and shadow emphasizes that nature is not simply made up of what is there but also of what is not there, like the shadow that is the light that is no longer there. "They took it away its shadow stayed on the water" (line 20). In this way, extinction is not achieved. The tree's shadow and presence is still part of nature and, at this moment of severe human impact, nature reacts. In the end, nature's reaction is so strong that it breaks the "they" into individuals, swallowing some while letting others escape with changed perspective. But there is always the sense henceforward that nature has control: "The ones that were left went away to live if it would let them. / They went as far as they could. / The lucky ones with their shadows" (lines 62–64). The implications of these lines, and of the poem as a whole, resonate throughout Merwin's subsequent work, including the final phrase "the lucky ones" reappearing in his 2005 poem "To My Teeth," another story poem. "The Last One" marks a turn in Merwin's work: he is eliminating the punctuation that he feels "nails the poem down on the page,"<sup>21</sup> and he is beginning a long poetic exploration of "a good way to live." For Merwin, this is when the shadow of the tree gathered in the shadow of his poetry. And it said Now.

Merwin's subsequent collection, *The Carrier of Ladders*, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1970, and he continued over the next two decades to hone his style and his philosophy. In 1988 he published *The Rain in the Trees*, which opens with a short series of poems written for his wife Paula. The second poem, "West Wall," introduces yet another type of relationship between human figures and trees in his poems. The poem begins, "In the unmade light I can see the world," setting a hazy scene without definition or visual content (*CP* 1:617). The haze begins to clear, "as the leaves brighten I see the air / the shadows melt and the apricots appear." Definition materializes as the trees emerge bearing fruit, "now that the branches vanish I see the apricots / from a thousand trees ripening in the air" (lines 2–3, 4–5). Merwin's ability to draw out, alternately, the light, the trees, and the apricots, creates a sense of fluidity between the individual parts of the poem so that describing "a thousand trees ripening in the air / . . . in the sun," the "apricots beyond number . . . ripening in the daylight," and the fruition of "the ripeness of the lucid air" run smoothly together in a sensual ripening of the scene (lines 5–6, 7, 12).

"West Wall," like "The Wakening," is about new realizations in light of familiar scenes; it is about seeing old sites through changed perspective. The final stanza of the poem, with its complete lack of punctuation now characteristic of Merwin's writing, seems to melt all of the aspects of the poem together, as if the words were watercolor paints with no forcedly delineated borders.

Whatever was there  
 I never saw those apricots swaying in the light  
 I might have stood in orchards forever  
 without beholding the day in the apricots  
 or knowing the ripeness of the lucid air  
 or touching the apricots in your skin  
 or tasting in your mouth the sun in the apricots (lines 9–15)

Previous ways of seeing are irrelevant, except as a contrast to the understanding now in relief by comparison. This new understanding does not have the same strict boundaries as the old understanding, allowing the light in which the apricots sway to become part of the apricots, so that there seems to exist an infinite loop between the apricots being in the sun that is in the apricots that are in the sun. Earlier nature was defined by shadow and lack of understanding but here we have a turning point at which the emphasis is on nature as that which is present rather than absent. Another pivotal moment is the entrance of “you,” at which point the apricots have become part of “your skin” through a sense of touch that can no longer distinguish between the softness of the apricots and the softness of skin, just as the sense of sight realized a new ability to distinguish, and yet blend, different aspects of the orchard. Taste, also, reaches a new, intimate understanding of the trees in the orchard and the person who is a part of the orchard. The human figures in the poem remain separate but there is a movement towards a less mystical and, perhaps, more realistically magical connection with nature; and it is important to note the grounding in the real world that this poem includes. Though the speaker reaches a more full understanding of the connection between nature and humans, he acknowledges that his realizations are not inevitable, and that he “might have stood in orchards forever” without seeing any connection beyond what was literally present. Acknowledging the underlying religious aspect of this line suggests that the speaker realizes how being eternally in or faced with paradise does not guarantee an appreciation of paradise. Something must happen or shift in order for the human presence to divine the true connection to nature. The non-mythological speaker’s ability to experience this revelation, perhaps as the result of love, provides hope that humanity has not completely lost its opportunity to see truly its connection with nature.

This line, amounting to poetic fine print, also introduces the idea that some people have the capacity or the willingness to understand these connections, while others do not. Perhaps the reader, standing in Merwin’s poetic orchard, is able to see his vision; but equally possible,

the reader could stand in these orchards forever and feel that Merwin is simply romanticizing. Two poems later, “Native Trees” explicitly confronts this conflict (*CP* 1:618–19). The poem’s speaker explains that, “Neither my father nor my mother knew / the names of the trees / where I was born” and though he asks, they “did not / hear they did not look where I pointed.” The speakers’ fingers, pointing towards the trees whose names he wants to know, connect him with those trees, but his parents neither understand his connection nor have their own. His parents do not see the living trees but, rather, only “surfaces of furniture held / the attention of their fingers” (lines 1–3, 6–7, 7–8). Their fingers hold no understanding of the nature-human relationship, no branch-like connection; only nature through artifice can hold their attention.

The speaker tries again with a new line of questioning, “Were there trees / where they were children / where I had not been” and again, “were there trees in those places / where my father and my mother were born” (lines 14–16, 18–19). The differences between the ways he phrases questions in each stanza reveal the ultimate relationships between trees and the speaker versus the speaker’s parents. In the first stanza, the question creates proximity between the speaker and the trees. The trees are where he was born; they are an integral and inherent part of his story of existence. Without knowing the names of the trees some piece of the story is missing but that does not render the trees any less significant for the speaker. When asking about his parents, however, he does not ask about where they were born. Instead, it is where they were children, where they experienced a younger version of being their adult selves. That is, instead, it is about “trees *in those places* / where my father and my mother were born” so that “those places” get between the trees and the speaker’s parents.

Pressing them for an answer, the speaker’s parents finally respond to the third question—“and in that time did / my father and my mother see them”—with a simple “yes,” which “meant / they did not remember” (lines 20–23). They claim that there had been trees, that they had seen

them; but they have no memory of it, which means that the response “yes” indicates less that there were trees and more that the parents, even in their disconnected state, hold the assumption that there were trees. The parents unconsciously function under the idea that nature is somehow inevitably present even if we do not notice it, even if we are not paying careful attention to it, even if we only see and continue on. At the same time, agreeing to have seen the trees is not the same as agreeing to have known them. The poem begins and ends with an ignorance of the synecdochal trees, and interwoven within this ignorance is the desire truly to know and understand; but the speaker’s parents cannot taste the light in the apricots. While the earlier poems explored the connection between humans and nature, the *Rain in the Trees* poems desire more from the reader, opening up possibilities for the reader to consider changing their attitude towards nature and the way we as humans interact with nature.

By the time Merwin publishes *Migration: New and Selected Poetry* and *Present Company* in 2005, the relationship between humans and trees has transformed even further. This is evidenced in “To Ashes,” which was published first as a preview to new work in *Migration* and then in *Present Company*. “To Ashes” remains initially ambiguous as to whether it refers to a particular type of tree, or whether it refers to ashes as burnt remains. The opening lines begin to clarify this:

All the green trees bring  
 their rings to you  
 the widening  
 circles of their years to you (*CP* 2:507)

The poem begins with the inevitability of dying that living trees face. As the tree rings widen, the tree comes ever closer to becoming ashes, either in a literal sense by burning, or in the figurative sense of death. These opening four lines create an important foundation for the later discussion of human mortality, one of the many symbolic associations of ashes. As the “you” of this poem, the word “ashes” conjures up not

just mortality, but also mourning, penitence, repentance, purification, and rebirth. In Norse mythology, the first man was created from an ash tree. Biblical contexts also contribute to many of these meanings, with sections of the books of Genesis, Ecclesiastes, Jonah, Job, Numbers, and Hebrews being common in culture, for example, in Genesis, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return” (3:19); Abraham, also in Genesis, saying, “I who am but dust and ashes” (18:27); or, in Ecclesiastes, “All go to one place; all are from dust, and all turn to dust again” (3:20). Additionally, the Hebrew word translated to “ashes” or “dust” is *adamah*, which means ground, land, or earth. So in returning to “dust” or “ashes,” one is returning to the ground or the earth. There is also the mythological significance of Phoenix ashes, which come from the death of the Phoenix and from which the new Phoenix is born, tying in also with seeds dependent on wildfires to initiate their growth, which literally takes place from the ashes. This particular symbolism becomes all the more relevant when accounting for the fact that, though “To Ashes” was published in 2005, *Migration* attributes Merwin to have written the poem on September 19, 2001—a pivotal moment for Americans’ understanding of themselves, their culture, and their connection to the world.

The significance of all of this symbolism ties into the relationship between trees and humans in this poem. Whereas, with the earlier poems, the trees and human figures were presented as distinctly individual though connected, the movement into *The Rain in the Trees* illustrated a stronger connection by allowing the trees and the human figures to blur together at certain moments, while also suggesting, as in the line “I might have stood in orchards forever,” that not everyone immediately sees the connections, but has the potential to see them under the right circumstances. By the time Merwin writes “To Ashes,” the slightly blurred relationship between trees and humans is brought into focus, explicitly revealing a truly ecopoetic view. As the poem progresses, the speaker begins to shift from the trees to humans by slowly incorporating human elements until “out of the spoken / names and the words be-

tween them / the mingled nights the hands / the hope the faces” emerges the ultimate realization. Concentrically paralleling the widening trees rings that eventually bring the tree back to ashes and the earth, are “those circling ages dancing” that will inevitably do the same to humans (lines 15–19).

In this way, trees and humans are in essence the same—in origin and in end. Not only do they both return to ashes, but they are both from or of ashes in the beginning. This means that the connection between trees and humans is significantly stronger and more foundational than humans realize. The poem opens the possibility that humans might have realized this at one point, or at least understood human make up—“you of whom once we were made”—more deeply, but the mere vague awareness that remains, if any awareness remains at all, is not equal to the understanding we had “before we knew ourselves // in this season of our own” (lines 26, 27–28). The difference is not that humans are no longer “made” of ash, but rather that they have forgotten, losing both the spiritual connection associated with the realization and the connection to the natural world that comes from recognizing that, even as distinct human beings, at the most basic level we are the same as nature. The first “O season of your own” references a season of death and subsequent rebirth essential to life on earth (line 10), but the later reference to “this season of our own” invokes a metaphorical death and the possibility of rebirth only if we realize what we lose in forgetting our fundamentally all-encompassing connection with nature.

“To Ashes,” erases any remaining doubt about whether Merwin has shifted fully into an eco-poetic mode, offering perhaps the ideal balance between Scigaj’s criteria, Bate’s desire for eco-poetry to “work on consciousness,” and Bate’s cautions about being overtly political. As Scigaj’s criteria require, the poem strongly implicates human history in natural history by showing that even their separate histories are the same, being born of, made of, and returning to the same essence. The ecocentric rings that open the poem ripple through and absorb the anthropocentric

rings that trigger the poem's criticism of human forgetfulness. Though humans have forgotten, the implication that such a state is a "season" requires future change. The cyclical symbolism of ashes is enough to convey that humans must eventually return to ashes, speaking not simply of death, but of a return to an understanding of that which ashes signifies. The fact that this poem was written so close to September 11, 2001—a fact explicitly revealed in *Migration*—only amplifies the imminent need for change. Just as the Cuban missile crisis affected Merwin's poetry in the 60s, so too do the crises of later eras. However, Merwin is careful that in incorporating the political, he never loses the poetical; hence, part of the reason for the critical decision to include little beyond the date provided to associate the poem with a specific political moment.

The other aspect of Merwin's writing that makes him the epitome of what an ecopoet should be is the way that his life has changed as a result of his poetry just as much as his poetry has changed as a result of his life. Living on his farm in France clearly influenced Merwin's writing during the 60s, and when he moved to Hawaii in the late 70s, the former pineapple plantation that became his home also became a major influence on and reflection of his poetic practice. On the former plantation devastated by poor farming practices, Merwin has spent more than thirty years reviving and cultivating first the land itself, and then various plant species. In *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, Bill McKibben describes Merwin's Hawaiian home:

When Merwin moved there decades ago, it was as barren as any of the other cut-over plantation lands on the Hawaiian Islands. But for many years he has divided his days between writing and planting, and in that time his acreage has become not a formal garden but a palm jungle, with species from around the world that he has grown from seed and transplanted along the small hollow that drops into a stream.<sup>22</sup>

The devastation that Merwin first encounters, as well as the rehabilitation process that followed is undeniably present in his writing, as evi-

denced by all three of the poems this paper considers that were written after Merwin had moved to Hawaii. According to Hix, “Merwin sees Hawaii as an illustration of the conceptual errors that underlie the ecological destructiveness at which he thinks America excels.”<sup>23</sup> Poetry was the outlet through which Merwin chose to explore how he wanted to live after his revelation in the 60s and, up through the present, it continues to be a space in which he explores his developing philosophies, perhaps in part as a way of better articulating what they are, both for readers and for himself. The ideal ecopoet is not simply someone who represents particular principles in writing, but is someone who also presents those principles in real life praxis, even if it is not possible for everyone to follow such principles to the same extent that Merwin does. Undeniably, however, Merwin proves the perfect example of a poet living the change that ecopoetry seeks to create, a reality clearly present in Merwin’s most recent collection, *The Shadow of Sirius*.

If earlier collections had begun grappling with the question of what is “a good way to live,” *The Shadow of Sirius*, which won the Pulitzer Prize and which Harold Bloom, a self-professed longtime reader of Merwin, called “wonderful throughout,” is a record of having found possible answers.<sup>24</sup> Sirius is the brightest star in the sky, so bright in fact that it is easily mistaken for a planet. The title *The Shadow of Sirius* must inherently have to do with questions of relationships because a shadow cannot create itself; it must be the result of a light source, in this case, the star Sirius, part of Canis Major (which gives Sirius the nickname “the Dog Star”), and some object blocking that light source, whether it be tree, poet, or poem. Choosing Sirius, rather than ‘our own’ star, the Sun, suggests an effort to again decenter the standard human perspective. Even in Merwin’s poems in which he disconnects the shadow from its source—as in “The Last One”—the purpose is to emphasize the interconnectedness by artificially creating disconnections in a situation in which such division is literally not possible, since anything touching the earth cannot be separate from its shadow. In this collection, just as the shadow cannot be detached from its source, neither can the poems be from the po-

et. A particularly personal collection in that it invokes intimate aspects of Merwin's life, like the section of poems "in memory of Muku, Makana, Koa" (CP 2:565), who were Merwin's dogs, as well as a deep, newfound sense of mortality brought on by the deaths of his parents, which happened within months of each other, it is clear that many of the shadows throughout the collection are Merwin's own.

Like Harrison's subtitle *The Shadow of Civilization*, Merwin's title *The Shadow of Sirius* suggests a lack of substance where we otherwise might have imagined permanence. Shadows of traditions, of ecofriendlier practices past, of generations, of family, and of self all shade this collection in some way, and though the emphasis of the book seems more focused on shadows, stars, and light, trees still play a pervasive role. In ninety-two poems, trees are mentioned twenty-two times; leaves, eighteen times; autumn, which is inherently tied to trees, seven times; woods, three times; and forests, roots, branches, and orchards, each once. The collection also specifies that some of the trees are oak, some walnut, some acacia, some apple, and some hickory. These counts do not include words whose primary meaning, in the poem's context, do not directly refer to trees but have trees as their shadow—for example, "palm," "drop-leaf tables," or the verb "to leave." These references keep the collection rooted in one of the threads Merwin has used to weave all of his collections together into a cohesive body of work. Not all of the references function as the main focus of the poem, but even in their supporting roles, they represent the same macro-perspective seen in poems like "The Old Trees on the Hill," in which trees seem to encapsulate the full depth of *The Shadow of Sirius* and of Merwin's larger poetic oeuvre (CP 601–2).

In "The Old Trees on the Hill" the speaker recalls time spent with the "you" of the poem, addressing the figure directly, "When you were living / and it was later than we knew / there was an old orchard" (lines 1–3). The "you" of the poem is a person but in these opening lines the reader could easily think of the destruction of trees that Harrison dis-

cusses and see, in the shadow of “you,” the trees that once were in the old orchard. The poem continues by associating the orchard’s “dark apple trees wrapped in moss” with memory: “cobwebs breathing between the branches / memory lingering in silence / the spring earth fragrant with other seasons” (lines 5, 7–8). The orchard is not a space for stagnant memories, but rather ones that still have life; though perhaps those living memories could not be seen from the “far up on the hill behind the house”—distance afforded while both the speaker and the “you” were living (line 4). Even the fragrant smell of other seasons may not have been enough at the time to trigger the realization of the overlapping lives, generations, and histories that now pervades the poem. The symbolic significance of each of the birds present in “those boughs” implicates the trees in their meanings through the birds’ being there (line 10). The birds’ stories and symbolism also become implicated in the life of the man who planted the trees and who was later buried and forgotten—except, of course, by the “you” of the poem, who has never been to the orchard but nonetheless feels connected even from a distance, and who passes the acquaintanceship on to the speaker, who then passes it on to the reader.

The convergence of the histories takes place in the trees. Though an orchard is a human constructed space, it requires intimate knowledge of nature and of the trees. The man who planted the trees in part represents the portion of humanity that is working to live harmoniously with nature; he is not someone who will be remembered because of what he has done but the orchard that grows will continue to affect future generations. Though others have forgotten “whoever had planted those trees” (line 16), the “you” of the poem still thinks about the person’s presence and shares knowledge of that person’s existence, which gives the “you” a similar function as the original planter who tended the orchard. Instead of tending the trees in a physical way, the “you” cultivates the memories that grow in, among, on, and even, at a distance from the trees. When the “you” is dead, the speaker takes up the task of remembering, and therefore dwells in the orchard where, likely, he too “had

never been”; but in another sense he has been there and is there, as is and was the “you” of the poem: “though it was a place where you / loved to watch the daylight changing / and we looked up and watched the daylight there” (lines 25, 26–28). In these final lines of the poem, the speaker affirms that physicality alone does not manifest presence. Though neither person has ever physically been in the orchard, they “watched the daylight *there*” not just in the sense of the daylight being “there,” but also in the sense of their actually being there in some way watching the daylight. The questions of remembrance are part of the value Helen Vendler sees in this collection’s poems:

The poems of *The Shadow of Sirius* are not, for the most part, fancy or fanciful; if they are to hold their own, it must be with their skeletal plainness of language. Their claims are those of insight rather than of display—or rather, their display is that of a cunning syntax curling the plain words into a Gordian knot. The paradoxes of living and remembering become ever more naked, more exposed.<sup>25</sup>

The simplicity of the narrative, the simplicity of the language, and the simplicity of the images that Vendler references are precisely what Merwin uses to create the complex relationships between trees and human figures, and consequently between the larger concepts of connection between humans and nature.

Though, in “The Old Trees on the Hill,” the trees and the human figures are not physically collapsed into each other, they are, as in “To Ashes,” implicated in origin, existence, and end. The trees were originally planted by a person and they exist in the orchard in conjunction with human memories, both as they are made and after those who helped make them are gone. After the “you” has died, the speaker’s memories of that person are planted and harvested in the orchard. There is, then, a reciprocal origin, a shared existence, and a potentially simultaneous end (as implied in the opening lines). These realizations are not mere poetic creations on Merwin’s part; they are the result of his own life and his own orchards. They are the culmination of more than half a century of poetic and personal exploration in which Merwin searched not only for

“a good way to live” but for a poetic way to share it. His later poems do not fall under the category of ecopoetry because he was trying to shape his writing to fit a particular critical definition, but quite the opposite—Merwin, as a poet and a person committed to living the ecological philosophy expressed in his writing, shaped a pivotal model for developing definitions of what ecopoetry is and should do. *The Shadow of Sirius* manifests in its leaves an achievement few ecopoets can claim because it is so much about Merwin’s life and ecological activism, and yet never crosses the line into the overtly political. As critics begin to explore fully Merwin’s most recent decade of writing, they will find in *The Shadow of Sirius* not only that Merwin continues to be an indispensable poet and ecopoet, but also Merwin’s inevitable truth that, in considering our own mortality, we are all like stars. We are all finite, as are the earth and the forests, and the life and histories implicated in them; we burn, we live, we continue, but we are always followed by the inevitable shadow that trails behind us like a faithful dog looking for nature’s tree under which to curl up together and take a nap.

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## Notes

1. While this essay introduces a number of poems in which Merwin explores relationships with trees, there are countless others. A small sample of those from *The Shadow of Sirius* include “The Song of the Trolleys,” “Far Along in the Story,” “Child Light,” “Traces,” “Unknown Age,” “Cold Spring Morning,” “Parts of a Tune,” “White Note,” and “A Single Autumn.” Merwin’s prose also incorporates relationships with trees, as in “Unchopping a Tree,” a short work from *The Book of Fables* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2007), 72–74.
2. Leonard Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1999), 7.
3. Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry*, 9, qtd. in 10.
4. Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry*, 10.

5. My philosophical approach to this relationship most closely aligns with that of Jean-Luc Nancy in his work *Being Singular Plural*, Trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000).
6. Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry*, 11, 37.
7. In *Green Voices*, Gifford explores "the difference between 'nature poetry' and poetry about nature" in the context of the emerging "green" movement of the early 1990s and the foundation that Jonathon Bate sets for ecocriticism in *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 1991). Gifford posits that the debates he presents "[illustrate] the need for a theoretical framework for the discussion of nature in poetry." See Terry Gifford, *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* (New York: Manchester Univ. Press, 1995), 2, 5.
8. J. Scott Bryson, "Introduction," in *Eco-poetry: A Critical Introduction*, ed. J. Scott Bryson (Salt Lake City: Univ. of Utah Press, 2002), 5–6.
9. Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000), 23, 64, 42.
10. W. S. Merwin, "The Wake of the Blackfish: A Memoir of George Kirstein," in *The Ends of the Earth: Essays* (Washington D.C.: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2004), 37, italics added. This essay discusses some poems indicative of Merwin's search for *a good way to live* but truly only presents the tip of the iceberg. Some other poems from *The Shadow of Sirius* related to this search include "Youth," "Calling a Distant Animal," "Another Dream of Burial," "My Hand," "No Shadow," "The Making of Amber," "Rain Light," and "The Laughing Thrush."
11. David Elliott and W. S. Merwin, "An Interview with W. S. Merwin," *Contemporary Literature* 29, no. 1 (1988): 7, 6, 7.
12. Eliot and Merwin, "An Interview," 7.
13. H. L. Hix, *Understanding W. S. Merwin* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1997), 14.
14. Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), xi.
15. Qtd. in Harrison, *Forests*, 110.

16. Harrison, *Forests*, 110.
17. W. S. Merwin, *The Collected Poems of W. S. Merwin*, ed. J. D. McClatchy, 2 vols. (New York: Library of America, 2013), 1:109; hereafter cited parenthetically as *CP*.
18. Scigaj, *Sustainable*, 8, 10.
19. Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996), 8.
20. Scigaj, *Sustainable*, 177.
21. Hix, *Understanding*, 15.
22. Bill McKibben, "W. S. Merwin," in *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, ed. Bill McKibben (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2008), 716.
23. Hix, *Understanding*, 131.
24. Harold Bloom, *Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2011), 323.
25. Helen Vendler, "Defender of the Earth," *New York Review of Books* 56, no. 5 (2009): 37.