**Handout 1.1: What is Eco Poetry?**

[Excerpts from “Why Ecopoetry?”, John Shoptaw, Poetry Foundation]

An ecopoem needs to be environmental and it needs to be environmentalist. By environmental, I mean first that an ecopoem needs to be about the nonhuman natural world – wholly or partly, in some way or other, but really and not just figuratively. In other words, an ecopoem is a kind of nature poem. But an ecopoem needs more than the vocabulary of nature.

**……**

  [An] ecopoem must be tethered to the natural world. The second way in which an ecopoem is environmental is that it is **eco-centric\***, not **anthropocentric\***. Human interests cannot be the be-all and end-all of an ecopoem.

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[The] environment of an ecopoem is, implicitly or explicitly, impacted by humans. As Ursula K. Heise puts it, ecopoetry is “related to the broader genre of nature poetry but can be distinguished from it by its portrayal of nature as threatened by human activities.”

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An ecopoem is environmentalist not only thematically, in that it represents environmental damage or risk, but rhetorically: it is urgent, it aims to unsettle.

**……**

The more immediate hazard for eco poetry, then, is didacticism. If a contemporary nature

poem risks being immoral, an ecopoem, whatever its effects, risks being moralistic. How can

an ecopoem usher us into a new environmental imagination without teaching us a tiresome

lesson?

**……**

Ecopoetry is nature poetry that has designs on us, that imagines changing the ways we think, feel about, and live and act in the world.

**……**

By showing us also that some things must go (dams, oil rigs, plastic bags, animal concentration camps, virtual disconnectedness), ecopoetry doesn’t supplant nature poetry but enlarges it.

**Handout 1.2: The unseen 'slow violence' that affects millions**

[Excerpts from “The unseen 'slow violence' that affects millions”, Richard Fisher, BBC]

Not all violence is fast. Hidden in plain sight across society, there is a kind of harm that happens too slowly to see.

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What is violence? At its most obvious, it is a bullet fired at flesh, a knee pushed into a neck, or a mob storming the Capitol. In law, it is criminal, domestic, sexual, alcohol-fuelled.

**……**

Yet there is another kind of violence that is nowhere near as visceral as the type described in news headlines and courtrooms. Called "slow violence", this is harm and damage that plays out over years or decades. The perpetrators may not be obvious, but the victims are. How, where and to whom does slow violence happen?

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Violence could be enacted by more than fists or weapons. Violence could also be "structural".

**……**

[Structural] violence happens when a society causes harm to its citizens and their property, often invisibly, through social or health inequalities, racism, sexism or another systemic means. The victims have foreshortened lives, and have suffered both bodily and psychologically. But while the impact is tangible, the blame is harder to pin down.

Personal violence shows … [while structural violence] is silent, it does not show – it is essentially static, it is the tranquil waters. In a static society, personal violence will be registered, whereas structural violence may be seen as about as natural as the air around us.

How does this violence remain unnoticed? One of the primary reasons is its pace. Slow violence is a kind of violence that was structural and could also be experienced over many years, possibly even generations. It occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.

Slow violence can be found embedded within the "slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes" of long-term pollution, climate change or nuclear fallout. But it can also describe many kinds of harm that affect individuals and communities at a pace too slow to assign blame.

Like fast violence, people still suffer or even die, but the protagonists of the act are diffuse and often outside the reach of prosecution. Some of the blame might lie with an entire industry subtly polluting an ecosystem legally and collectively, while some blame may lie with a government policy written in a distant capital years before. The point is that slow violence does not always have a clear perpetrator.

Slow violence provokes us to expand our imaginations of what constitutes harm. It insists we take seriously forms of violence that have, over time, become unmoored from their original causes.

Such harm is clear to see in "toxic geographies". These places might be a refugee camp, a village embedded on a landfill, industrial landscapes…

**……**

**Personal account from a resident living extremely close to such an industrial landscape, who observed changes to her community playing out over years:**

For seven decades she has witnessed the slow accumulation of pollution gradually impact the local area: the invasive chemical smells, the gossiped-accounts of elevated cancer rates, and the vegetation in her garden wilting where once it thrived. At times, she explained, ‘the air is so full with gas you can hardly breathe’.

She also said that "It was beautiful to live here before they started putting those tanks and things. It really was. It really was a nice place to live. Everything was all healthy."

**……**

A key point about this category of harm is that it is rooted in inequality. Such violence represented a curtailing of potential, where somebody is prevented from living a better life. The point is that it affects some, but not all, communities. Those with more privilege can escape it.

**……**

Slow violence might be too incremental to make headlines or provoke outrage, it is not hidden to everyone. It depends on who is looking.