

Chapter 4 Si Transken: Ecofeminist Community building and the politics of valuing “otherness”

Snow flakes agreeing in the zillions
to redisplay as mist, then magic, then snow flake again
are collectively reminding me about the finding of harmony.

(“Stupor”, <http://row.unbc.ca/v2n2/poetry/transken5.html>)

Ecofeminism, [is an] approach to feminist social [& literary] theory that focuses not only on the oppression of women but also on its correlation with the oppression of the ecosphere and all living things, and that often includes elements of environmentalism, antimilitarism, feminist spirituality, or anti-imperialism (or all these). (Sheila Ruth 26 *Issues in Feminism*)

I believe that, as long as man tortures and kills animals, he will torture and kill humans as well—and wars will be waged—for killing must be practiced and learned in a small scale, inwardly and outwardly. As long as animals are confined in cages, there will be prisons as well—for incarceration must be practiced and learned, in a small scale, inwardly and outwardly. As long as there are animal slaves, there will be human slaves as well—for slavery must be learned and practiced, on a small scale—inwardly and outwardly. —Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, author, vegan, and animal advocate who was imprisoned in the Dachau concentration camp from 1940 to 1945. (<http://www.masskilling.com/others.html>) date of access: Sept. 17th, 2003

In Issue # 42 of *The Capilano Review*, a special edition that focuses on “Northern Poets” in BC, George Stanley (himself a Northern BC poet), puts his finger on the pulse of the Northern writing scene. He begins his introduction by considering the value of *fellowship* for Northern poets and what this community means for writers. Particular to his argument is the idea that the poets themselves and the institutions in Northern BC support a kind of poetic communion. Stanley speaks of the community that published writers in Northern BC create: he focuses in on how supportive (both emotionally and in actuality) these writers are to a larger community of publishing. He notes how such institutions as the local colleges and universities in Prince George have come to create a Northern writing community. He also indicates how the bioregion and culture have impacted how and what these poets write:

The place where the writers live, the natural environment and the human communities—village, town and city—particularly as they have been

subjected to heedless and accelerated change by the changing priorities of economic exploitation, have been more than just a background refracted in the personal concerns of their poems; they have been the subject of the poems as lived experience. In a sense there is no background in the north.

All is figure, all is ground. (57 italics added)

“There is no background in the north” states Stanley boldly and I agree; there is no background—that is, no nature as mere backdrop. His notion of humanity and nature as inseparable is akin to Leslie Marmon Silko’s explication of landscapes. I believe Stanley means to say that humans and the landscape are one, are part and parcel of the big Northern BC picture; that they are inextricable. Silko eloquently states, in “Interior and Exterior Landscapes: The Pueblo Migration Stories”, that: “the term landscape, as it has entered the English language is misleading. ‘A portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view’ does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow outside or separate from the territory she or he surveys. Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on” (5).

These poets of Northern BC that Stanley speaks of, are indeed indivisible from their place, and are “as much part of the landscape” as the place they stand on. And place (in this instance Prince George) is what Si Transken speaks of and to in her political poems. Equally important, place has created a writerly community that Transken is supported by and overtly supports. Transken acknowledges how the literary community of Prince George is unique in her presentation at UNBC in 2006, “Prince George Writing: Creating Comfort & Community Differently”. She states: “My belief is that one

of the most special and vital aspects of northern writers writing is that we are teaching and learning; listening and hearing each other into a space of community” (1 *The Writing Way Up North: A Symposium on Northern BC Writing at UNBC*).

The concept of listening and hearing is a particularly important hinge for understanding community. The connotation of using the word *listening* includes the acknowledgement of the agency of the other. That is, someone else has something worth hearing/listening to. For Transken all other writers/speakers/existences are worth hearing.

Community making accesses both existent culture and emergent cultural norms. Writing has been both lauded and indicted in Northern BC: it provides a sense of identity *and* it skirts issues of practicality in a land where ignorance of the environment traditionally has not stood a person in good stead. The dialogue between existent and emergent writers is becoming one of respect and inclusion. These days the Northern BC poetic canon addresses the muting of certain voices. Published Northern BC literature has predominately been written by white Anglo-Saxon males. The current climate of cultural exchange listens better to other voices outside the literary canon; thus feminist writing, First Nations writing, and queer writing is now part of the dialogue, but is still not at the forefront of published Northern BC writing. This is being readdressed by such contemporary writers such as Transken and Rob Budde.

Transken speaks of such Prince George writers as Jackie Baldwin and Bridget Moran who publish[ed] locally and whose writing and readings are/were linked with social justice events such as December 6th ceremonies and International Women’s Day. Transken also imparts how important these events are for community building. She speaks of such poets as Ken Belford who has devoted his time and his poetry to

fundraising, stating: “his readings have usually brought him minimal material reward— but they contribute significantly to a sense of community being cultivated” (7).

Significantly, Transken also remarks on Prince George as “writerly terrain” that is shaped by Barry McKinnon and Rob Budde. These men are organizers of a writing community in their roles both as poets and as teachers. McKinnon teaches at The College of New Caledonia (35 years) and Budde (6 years) is the creative writing Professor at UNBC. As Transken puts it: “These authors and creative activists network with each other and hundreds of others through their emails, websites and blogs. They nourish community” (8).

Transken, herself, is very much part of the poets who “nourish community”. She is not only a poet, speaking of poverty and pain, and of the complexity of linked oppressions, but she is also a Professor of Social Work at UNBC. She is a social activist; working specifically in the fields of anti-poverty, anti-racism, and feminism. She is also a vegan who struggles with northern issues such as logging and hunting. She is an animal advocate and contributes her time and unparalleled energy to fundraisers, rallies, and readings. She has been the driving force behind seven creative writing anthologies; two of which she has edited and contributed to since coming to live in Prince George: *This Ain't Your Patriarch's Poetry Book* published in Prince George, BC by Transformative Collective Press in 2003 and *Making Noise, Northern Women*, (2007) Eds. Si Transken & Robert Budde from UNBC Press. She also has another upcoming anthology *Un/complicated Play/ers* which she is editing: writers will include Ken Belford and Rob Budde. She has also recently self-published her latest chapbook, *Don't Get Even Get Odd*, and published 8 poems in the Northern BC edition of *The Capilano Review* in 2004.

Transken is very much interested in social change. Akin to the poets in her aforementioned paper, she too, is “community oriented”, uses her art “to describe a world around them in which they wish for more social justice”, has a “commitment to other writers, to the next generation”, “publish[es] in alternate forums”, and most importantly has “aligned [herself] with vulnerable populations” (9). “Her writing explores issues such as justice, activism, women’s perspectives, poverty and creative healing in northern communities” (Monica Lamb-Yorski *The Daily News*). Transken plays with the rules of grammar and punctuation, in particular her use of the lower case *i* indicates a self-conscious positioning of her self as outside of the evaluative hierarchical norm of English grammar. Her name “Si Chava Transken” is one she created for herself, rising from the dust of an impossible childhood.

Si Transken was raised in northern Ontario and describes herself as “white bush-trash” in reclamation of the derogative (preface to *Don’t Get Even Get Odd*). Transken affiliates herself with those who are/have been oppressed. As a survivor of poverty, abuse, and childhood incest, Transken works tirelessly as a social justice activist and as a writer; her poetry is about her views and her experiences. She considers her writing *autoethnography*. She includes herself in her writing, and by revealing her stories/history seeking alliances with her readers. For Transken, lyric poetry is not just personal but is political as well. Transken deplores the globalist, capitalist, consumerist changes that are ongoing in the north. Stanley accurately assesses Transken’s northern writing, when he writes: “ Si Transken initially places herself beneath “civilized” notice, repudiating all social standing (“i am a base blot; a bit of snot/ on a dignified person’s sock”), and from this unassailable vantage delivers a detailed bill of particulars regarding the culture” (58).

This vantage point is, in a sense, unassailable. Transken as a visibly mainstream academic actually breaks many molds and expectations. She was raised in poverty and she is a human rights/animal rights activist who teaches social work not someone who lives in an ivory castle. She works tirelessly against the tide of misogyny and racism attending “Take Back the Night”, Dec 6th vigils, Women’s Day, and Aboriginal Day celebrations. In Prince George you will often find her wherever there is a scholarly, writerly, feminist, pro-animal anti-racism occasion. As a child of a mother who was adopted, Transken has long suspected that she is not entirely “white” and describes her mother as: “dark-eyed. dark haired. A mystery infant// in 1940”. As a child no one spoke of her mother’s heritage but as an adult she has seen her face and eyes mirrored in the First Nation’s women’s faces around her. In a creative writing course in Quesnel I heard Lee Maracle tell Transken that she recognized her face, could tell she was related to people she knew in Northern Ontario. So maybe Transken does get to tell “us” where we are off the mark and perhaps point to another way.

Transken’s indictment of rampant globalism, consumerism, patriarchy, and social systems is undeniable. That said, Transken leans toward the prevalent notions in ecocriticism: that nature is composed of positive attributes (the “all green is good” philosophy) and that culture is composed of negative attributes (as illustrated in John Elder’s expression “culture as decay” [227]). It is where the intersection of these two notions take place within her poetry that provides the most telling examples of her politics. Transken explores the liminal space, where culture and nature both clash and create community, which equally indicts humanity and celebrates the oppressed. This transgressive space is where her words become particularly evocative.

The following four poems have been collected from various sources and exemplify her politics of ecofeminism and her undeniable social activism that links oppressions.

Generica

from shores of British Columbia to anywhere Nova Scotia
to everywhere nowhere there's Canada's:
whiffs of American plastic,
exhaust, lilac, cut grass,
Chinese buffet lunches
& other familiars.
Tim Hortons, scabby pavement, food
that tastes vaguely like an imagined
long-ago original.
Just a Buck Stores.
a central street called:
Pine, Cedar, Birch, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, Prince, Queen, King or Central
street.
strip joint, strip mall, a scar
where resources were stripped, struck down, stolen.
First Nations men wearing defeat
on palms panhandling the hungry day.
bank box machines charging
service fees equally across the nation.
Value Village/ Sally Anne/ Salvation Army.
a bookstore clinging to a corner
trying to disclose options but
selling soft porn to pay the rent.
yards, ditches & sidewalk cracks
scattered
with the robust resilient smiles
of dandelions and daisies.
a local rag almost effectively
Resisting the *Globe and Mail's* reality.
Wal-Mart.
a call centre or an annoying cry to create one.
politicians' posters fading from fences
where they were posted during
an election—promises dissolved
under miscellaneous inevitables.
A scraggly park where single mom's share stories
of abuse, neglect, recipes for welfare soup.
at town's edge an SPCA where animals
await another chance or euthanasia.
a grungy railroad running through or near it all.
4 or 6 lane highway leading
to places which locals call
out, away, gone, or different somehow.
& those rudely handsome daisies

& dandelions incessantly
pressing forward
their irrepressible fluff & seeds.
(*The Capilano Review*, 93-94-- Series 2, No. 42: 88- 97., 2004)

What This Lake's Beavers Might say to an Interviewer from Outer Space:

We do not like them. Unfurred. Noisy. No slap-it tails.
Bluishiny pissers leaving colorskim on water stinging our eyes.
Without purpose they ripple air & fluid surfaces.

On that side of our lake there's been a family of them
since thirty water rises but we've coped. The minor mercy is
their wintersleeps are long;
they're quiet from snow-thickening till bud-eating time.

Their kind are disturbing. Duplicitous.
Smiling, complimenting us
as comradely symbol of earnest employment while also
implicitly forgetting how our beings
--five million in the first two generations—
were used to construct their nations
& they continue to 'harvest' or 'cull' us....

And we've never understood why they
ridiculously call their females'
kit-making space a "beaver"
or why they construct such big shelters
to contain so little mud.

Could you please trap them, take them to your planet,
eat them, or just poison them?
(*Passage*, UNBC's Summer Poetry Journal 2002)

Damned

the people sickened by mercury
from the flesh of fish;
the dog who bites the barking neighbour;
the woman stomped to death
by a charging bull moose;
the bear who killed the hunter;
the lion who ripped the poacher
limb from limb & then
recycled that yummy human protein;
the chickens, allegedly, causing societal flu;
the flocks of birds caught in plane engines
invoking a crash—
a Mona Lisa smile capturing my face, i applaud
miraculous tiny revenges.

today channel 9 educates us:
whooping cranes benefit from these unprecedented
global-warming-motivated hurricanes
(while audience members are switching into compassion
fatigue,
switching channels have witnessed
multiple crushes of landscape,
of urban life, of dreams lost for those arrays of running
two-legged stick figures).
whooping cranes, once almost extinct, have found
their wetlands restored.
rain & human absence is healing
their nesting grounds.

vegetarian for 20 years.
almost pristinely vegan for another 10.
never wearing fur;
refusing to own leather except in desperate
necessity
on my frail white-yellow-pale feet
in the forty below
bulked up in thick socks
& in the hug of those hurting boots
my old toes, nonetheless, twitch in shame, sulk
in remorse.
(Don't Get Even Get Odd)

Walking through Four Early-Evenings on a Port Edwards Bush Road

(UNBC Creative Writing Retreat, Pacific Cannery July 2002).

impossible mountains going impossibly
straight up massive-greenly.
ravens complaining against cultural weight; screeching,
shaking,
self-soothing – not circus dancing.
zenny waterfalls my-shoulders-wide,
stone flows beside& not apart from each other.
stumps as large around as an indigenous family
forming a hand-to-hand circle.
moss on everything that's neglected
to move since sunrise.
cow parsnips' stems as truthful
with themselves as i am becoming.
moody logs or lochness monsters
floating in this body of dark fluid
--these raspberries are more red today or has
the way of the light shifted?

(*Passage*, UNBC's Summer Poetry Journal 2002)

Si Transken's ecofeminism is an expression of an altered value system. The expression "altered value system" generally is attributed to an individual or group who maintains a belief and way of life that flies in the face of the prevailing socio-political, financial, and ethical values. The current socio-political climate in Northern BC tends toward acceptance of resource extraction and a belief in the inherent hierarchy which places human above animal concerns. What is unique to Transken is that her altered feminist value system, comprised of both anti-establishment and valuing the "other", includes depicting animals as having impact, presence, and *voice*. This valuing of the other, in Transken's poetry, provides telling examples of poverty, abuse, depression, endemic racism, and misogyny, but more importantly she also provides a way out of such conflicts; she does this by showing how we *can* make connections.

Her work provides us with telling examples of "relationships and communication between us humans and other species (including questions of who speaks for nature and who listens when nature "speaks" for itself)" (Carr 18). Within these poems I examine how Transken presents these relationships and communications between patriarchy and women, between women and animals, and between herself and nature in these selected poems. I consider her poems as a dialogue of engagement between human and non-human characters. Transken aligns herself with Morgan Gardner's seminal work on linked activism in *Linking Activism: Ecology, Social Justice, and Education for Social Change* wherein Gardner states: "If one lives in a dominant culture steeped in segmentation it is challenging to live holistically. Dominant Western paradigms constantly give us messages to live in fragmented ways. Patriarchy, colonialism,

capitalism, anthropocentrism, and other systems of domination disconnect us from others and ourselves” (5-6).

If a person believes that systems of domination (Western Civilization’s tradition of Judeo-Christianity and patriarchy, for example) truly “disconnect us from others and ourselves”, then what can be done? In order to participate in power-over hierarchies, those in positions of power must perceive those beneath them as somehow less-than deserving. Either by telling themselves that they are educationally, intellectually, physically, or morally superior- ergo they distance themselves by seeing those beneath them in the hierarchy as *other*. So, by uttering the intersections wherein we come together by choice or by similarities (acknowledging difference as a positive thing) we can break down these systems of domination.

For Transken, exploring and obliquely commenting on her Northern society means -- representing what is valued and what is *othered*: those who are fragmented and those who live holistically. For her this is a creative and a political act. Transken’s poetry is undeniably ecofeminist. Her animal characters’ voices are not just implied but are written as actual utterances that articulate their discomfit and celebrate their otherness. Her poem: “What This Lake’s Beavers” is a prime example of this articulation. Although a tad tongue in cheek, it is nonetheless a serious utterance of what animals *might* say, given voice. Her poem is akin to the declarations by Scholtmeijer (herself a Northern BC academic and writer) who states that “women’s acknowledgement of animals provides a double source of power: recognition of the degree to which women are victimized by androcentric culture, and realization of solidarity in defiance of cultural authority” (“The Power of Otherness” 233). Scholtmeijer insists that when women writers write

themselves into/as animal beings and utter their voices they are performing the “most anti-androcentric of acts”. This is an act of empowerment for both the writer and the animal. Transken empowers the unheard voices and liberates her readers from any misapprehension as to her solidarity.

“Generica”

The first poem of the four poems I have chosen to explore, (“Generica”), deploys a range of different theoretical frameworks that enable Transken’s exploration of significant rural/urban/suburban differences, as well as of nature/human relationships within contexts of gender and place. In *New Essays in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*, Glynis Carr discusses how, within ecofeminist criticism, masculine and feminine do not represent the only binary constructed by Euro-centric patriarchal society; she includes the dualisms of “colonizer/colonized, heterosexual/homosexual, adult/child, and human/animal”(17). Transken too, addresses these contemporary issues. However, Carr’s work does not address these contemporary issues as they play out within a Canadian/regional context. Going further than Carr, Transken considers land/animal as a crucial site of inquiry, one that hinges on an understanding and an investigation of regional difference. In particular, Transken investigates Northern BC difference and how this creates a different kind of writing community.

Although, in “Generica”, Transken initially implies that the poetic scene that she sets up could be anywhere in Canada—“from shores of British Columbia to anywhere Nova Scotia” (line 1): using her descriptors to imply there is little difference whether it is here (BC) or there [“anywhere” (1) and “everywhere nowhere” (2)]. She then builds her

“anywhere” Canada to American vapid consumerism and its detritus and makes the

Canadian nation-state culpable. Furthermore, she then negates this

“anywhere/everywhere/nowhere set-up farther along into the poem by becoming very

specific— she moves from “anywhere” to “everywhere nowhere”:

from shores of British Columbia to **anywhere** Nova Scotia

to **everywhere nowhere** there’s Canada’s:

whiffs of American plastic,

exhaust, lilac, cut grass,

Chinese buffet lunches

& other familiars. (lines 1-6 bold added)

to the very specific and particular: “scraggly park where single mom’s share stories” (line

36). What had been general—generic—complaints become possibly negative (but

ultimately changeable) specifics—in her city, Prince George.

In the introductory lines Transken plays with our manner of reading, (Canada’s:/ whiffs of American plastic, lines 2-3) does she mean “plastic” articles or does she mean “plastic” as in credit cards? How can we smell “plastic”? particularly when the ambiguous line “whiffs of plastic” is then followed by very odorous articles, like “exhaust”. Even the word “exhaust” becomes difficult to read; it is problematized by its placement and presence on the page next to positive fragrances such as “lilac” and “cut grass”. Even the “Chinese buffet lunches” suggest a conglomeration and hodge-podge of scents that are easily conjured by a reader. Is Canada merely following in American footsteps: thus somehow making Canadians less responsible for our consumerism? Is she linking American/Canadian consumerism to “lilac, cut grass” or “Chinese buffet lunches”? Granted, all are, in varying degrees, created/constructed by a culture of consumerism. Undeniably plastic is constructed and “lilacs and cut grass (lawns) are genetically engineered, and Chinese buffet lunches are created outside their culture of

origin, but so what? Does this mean all culture is “bad” for making and changing nature? Is all nature only good if left alone? Furthermore “exhaust” may mean that the speaker is as *exhausted* as the reader by all the uncertainty.

Ambiguity features largely in this poem. The line “& other familiars” is evocative but indefinite in meaning. Is the line “other familiars” meant to relay a readily conjured scent, easily retrieved from one’s olfactory memory bank or/and does the *familiar* mean something else entirely? Familiar may be construed as something imminently recognizable, it may be common-place, friendly or informal, pertaining to one’s family, or it may even be defined as: “Of animals: Accustomed to the company of men; domesticated, tame, on a domestic footing *with*.” (OED). A sub-listing (OED) includes a definition of a “familiar spirit” as “A familiar spirit, a demon or evil spirit supposed to attend at a call”.

What is familiar in this poem becomes un-familiar through Transken’s connections. Overtly this is a poem about “a conscious and continual resistance to consumerist ways of thinking” (Stanley 59). But the indistinctive word choices in this poem complicate her resistance to “consumerist ways of thinking” and become instead a subliminal resistance to words, to language, to all systems of oppression. Even the title of this poem gives it a jaunty ambiguity. “Generica”, as an adjective, (as in *generic*) can mean a couple things: 1) of or relating to a genus, 2) relating to or descriptive of an entire group or class; general, and 3) not having a trademark or brand name. Or, as a noun, it could mean the thing or article that has a non-proprietary name¹. Adding an *a* to the end of generic; gives the word a feminine ending. In Spanish the word for generic is *genérico*

¹ Like non-brand name generic medicine.

unless the article/person/thing it refers to is female; then it becomes *genèrica*. The very word *generic* becomes complicated and gendered and much more specific than anything truly generic.

Everything in the beginning of this poem is an implied generic. Canada is like America. The street names Transken lists: “Pine, Cedar, Birch, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, Prince, Queen,/ King or Central/ street” are just as she says: they are some “central street” anywhere in *any* town. And it is indeed as she writes: there are “strip joints”, “strip malls”, and “a scar” where resources are extracted pretty much everywhere in *any* small town in North America. But in particular, it is also very true that in Prince George the land, is: “stripped, struck down, stolen”. By giving voice to the scars and testifying to the rape of the landscape Transken is affiliating herself with an oppressed other (the land) but it is a vague other. All of these atrocities that she lists, the “strip joints” “strip mall” the “bookstore clinging”, the “First Nations men wearing defeat”, “Wal-Mart”, “politicians” and their “promises dissolved” are generic or at the very least they are non-specific.

Her description of “First Nations men wearing defeat” causes the reader to balk, hesitate, and consider just what she means by this, initially it appears that she stereotypes the First Nations men as “defeated”—but if a more careful reading is done, the First Nations men are actually *wearing* defeat and are not in fact *defeated*—they are not done in by their oppression. This is “wearing defeat” is a present state that Transken describes but it is not a finalized state. The implication is that this state will be temporary.

By poem end there exists some small bits of hope, a possibility of better things. Even the rampant enumerating of issues contains some bits of solace, the poem becomes a *specific* place where women “share stories” and animals may have “another chance”—

there is “a scraggly park where single moms share stories/ of abuse, neglect, recipes for welfare soup” (lines 36-37) and where “at town’s edge an SPCA where animals/ await another chance or euthanasia” (lines 38-39). Both the negative and the positive possibilities are explored. This poem undeniably yet subversively connects these same animals and women to the irrepressible daisies and dandelions that push up through “yards, ditches & sidewalk cracks/scattered” (line 24-25). Robust and resilient, they (the single moms, animals, weeds) will not be held down by rampant consumerism and bad social policy: they will press forward:

those rudely handsome daisies
& dandelions incessantly
pressing forward
their irrepressible fluff & seeds (line 44-47).

This “irrepressibility” is the undoing of conservative social policy (forcing single mother’s on social assistance to find work before their children are old enough to be in school, forcing many to find sub-standard childcare, it is the restriction of resources to women’s shelters, and shelters for the homeless, mental health care for the impoverished, the cutting down of green spaces to make way for chain stores, etc). The oppressed claim the values of resistance and resilience in Transken’s poem. Finding valour in “pressing forward” Transken denigrates such bad social, economic, and environmental policy and celebrates the cracking of sidewalks and the growth and bloom of daisies, dandelions, animals, and single moms.

“What This Lake’s Beavers Might say to an Interviewer from Outer Space”

Trasken’s politics become even more obvious in her next two poems: “What This Lake’s Beavers Might say to an Interviewer from Outer Space” and “Damned”.

“What This Lake’s Beavers” is an articulation of Beaver perspectives on humanity—a nicely done anti-anthropocentric inversion of humanity’s take on nature that leaves little doubt about Trasken’s views on animal rights, conservation, and patriarchal language². This is not about patriarchy: it is about a different way of knowing and living. Trasken could care less that traditionally: “Feminine closeness to nature has hardly been a compliment” (Plant *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* 19). She both reclaims the right to ally herself with nature and problematizes the labeling of nature as inferior. She explores the use of patriarchal language—calls it “ridiculous” (line 16) and incomprehensible: “we’ve never understood” (line 15). She comments on the commodification of the beaver (think of the nickel), and the role of the beaver in the founding of Canada as a nation: “five million in the first two generations—/were used to construct their nations” (lines 12-13). She directly indicts the use of such patriarchally constructed language like using the word “beaver” to refer to human female genitalia.

we’ve never understood why they
ridiculously call their females’
kit-making space a “*beaver*” (italics added)

Trasken is “concerned with both the interdependence of all life forms and with the role of women”, and she, as an ecofeminist, has “reminded their [her] listeners that domination of the earth and domination of women stem from a similar ideology -- an

² As Joan Dunayer articulates: “Applying images of denigrated non-human species to women labels women inferior and available for abuse; attaching images of the aggrandized human species to men designates them superior and entitled to exploit. Language is a powerful agent in assigning the imagery of animal vs. human” (“Sexist Words, Speciesist Roots”11).

androcentric view of both women and nature” (Barbara T. Gates “Toward Defining an Ecology of Ecofeminism: What is an Ecofeminist Text?”).

For the deep ecology³ activist/ecofeminist (which I suggest Transken is), representing animals means also defending their intrinsic interests. How such interests are understood, how such knowledge can be acquired, and how to communicate this becomes significant. Animals and the natural world do have a material existence in their own right, irrespective of how humans view them. Part of an ecofeminist/ deep ecologist agenda really means deciding whose side you are on. The mission statement of the Foundation for Deep Ecology (FDE) is “to support education and advocacy on behalf of *wild* Nature” (italics added). The split that occurs in their use of the word *wild* seems to specify that they wish to advocate only for *wild* nature thus leaving out domestic nature and encouraging a kind of hierarchy of wild/not wild that I find difficult. The FDE’s website addresses, in particular, four reasons why wild nature is in its current state: one, “the loss of traditional knowledge” and the assumption that humans are superior to nature, two, “the conversion of nature to commodity form”, three, “technology worship and an unlimited faith in the virtues of science”, and finally, overpopulation.

By no means does Transken ascribe to a hierarchy of wild/not wild but she does lean toward revering “traditional knowledge”, denigrates “the conversion of nature to commodity form”, has an aversion to “technology worship” and also has a resistance to “overpopulation”. While not all of these issues are obvious in “What this Lakes’s

³ “A form of environmentalism that advocates radical measures to protect the natural environment regardless of their effect on the welfare of people” (*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*) but the OED defines deep ecology as: “philosophy and movement which regards human life as merely one of many equal components of the global ecosystem, and seeks to counter anthropocentric attitudes and policies” which lends a more egalitarian tone to deep ecology including the interests of humans.

Beavers”, the disdain for the commodification of nature is obvious (think HBC and the nickel) as is her aversion to “technology” (the indictment of motorboats and jet skis: “Bluishiny pissers leaving colorskim on water stinging our eyes” in line 2).

Still, even when we know whose side Transken is on (the beavers), the question remains; how do non-androcentric activists/writers encourage other humans to consider these existences and these rights? Sometimes the answer is to put human words into their mouths. Because it is impossible, with words on a page, to create real living beings with real existences and rights, any writer must perforce use language as a tool in order to become a defender of their animal interests, as Transken understands those interests. As suggested by Judith Plant in *The New Catalyst*: “Today...ecology speaks for the earth, for the 'other' in human/environmental relationships, and feminism speaks for the 'other' in female/male relations. And ecofeminism, by speaking for both the original others, seeks to understand the interconnected roots of all domination, as well as ways to resist and change” (“Searching for Common Ground: Ecofeminism and Bioregionalism”). In this poem Transken speaks for the other, in a borrowed collective voice, in order to resist the dominion of humankind and in order to encourage change, she imagines what Beavers might say about us. The beavers’ words are pretty direct and they don’t mince words;

they do not like us, we are unpleasant others to them:

We do not like them. Unfurred. Noisy. No slap-it tails.
Bluishiny pissers leaving colorskim on water stinging our eyes.
Without purpose they ripple air & fluid surfaces. (lines 1-3)

Christopher Manes’ in his essay “Nature and Silence” states: “Nature is silent in our culture and (and in literate societies generally) in the sense that the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative” (15). Using

animal voices in literature is a difficult task, if an author does this, is it appropriation⁴? If an author does not use animals voices then is the implication that animals do not have something worthy to say? Traditionally, using animal voice has been relegated to children's literature⁵. As if only children are receptive to the notion of animals having "voice". Unfortunately in stories with talking animals the animals act out moral tales of instruction, indoctrinating children into an adult/cultural agenda (think *Aesop's Fables*). So, how does a writer avoid anthropomorphizing animals for their own purposes? Perhaps, as Don McKay suggests, we might approach a kind of "ontological applause", acknowledging the agenda, purpose, and beauty of such animal voice. Perhaps voicing what animals have to say is ultimately "unsayable".

Audre Lorde, in "Poetry is not a Luxury", transmits the necessity of poetry because it allows one to say the unsayable. She states: "And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it. Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before" (37). Even given the difficulties of appropriation this attempt at "bridging" by saying the unsayable may be worth the risks. Manes argues, in his essay "Nature and Silence" that by imposing silence on nature Western norms and beliefs can continue unabated. In turn, by voicing the innate expressiveness of nature Transken can articulate beaverly point of view, so that nature is not obscured by human indifference or ignorance.

⁴ "Crafting narratives that will give voice to animals and make humans care about them in appropriate ways is no easy task. We want to avoid anthropomorphizing animals even though that has proven itself an effective tactic for mobilizing public sympathy toward them" (Linda Vance "Beyond Just-So Stories: Narrative, Animals, and Ethics" 185).

⁵ Even Virginia Woolf's biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spaniel companion, *Flush*, which was written in 1933 is often dismissed as non-intellectual. See also Seaton's *Animals I Have Known*.

In this poetic addressal to some other race of beings (from some other more understanding alien planet than the one we humans live on) the voice of beaverkind is a collective family unit, speaking as one they verbalize their familiarity with a specific human family (one that lives across from them) and with humanity (especially Canadians). The language used is unique and attempts to draw a *beaverly* kind of attention to time and place. Note the adjectival word choices such as; “unfurred”, “no-slap-it-tails” and, “kit-making space”, these word choices place beaver point of view as the norm and human as the “un”-normal. The terms become idiomatic from beaver perspective: “snow-thickening till bud-eating time” focuses on seasonal time and uses the normative of beaver against the strangeness of humans.

On that side of our lake there's been a family of them
since thirty water rises but we've coped. The minor mercy is
their wintersleeps are long;

they're quiet from snow-thickening till bud-eating time (lines 4-7)

By positing this ecocritical poem from the beavers' point of view Transken counters the hegemonic anthropocentric metamessage that Western society is most often given concerning nature and she does this deliberately. These beavers are not defeated (even after all that trapping and iconism) but are concretized, affirmed, and empowered, and they are depicted, not as weak, but as honored *others*, much as Scholtmeijer proposes that “Women writers use fiction to concretize, affirm, and empower the state of being “other,” (“The Power of Otherness” 234). By “exposing” and “dismantling” the “unexamined belief structures that authorize violence against free beings” Transken has depicted beavers with a kind of heroic narrative which is juxtaposed by her depiction of historical and contemporary Canadian mainstream attitudes. Western dominant ideology is not let off lightly, in Transken's poem, we humans are denigrated for our “duplicitous”

nature, we become the *they/ the them/* the ones who are *other* when Transken elucidates
beaver perspective:

complimenting us
as comradely symbol of earnest employment while also
implicitly forgetting how our beings
--five million in the first two generations—
were used to construct their nations

Outside of pro-animal politics, humans are unlikely to welcome outrage on behalf of nonhuman animals. So it takes some temerity on Transken's part to express her views as forcefully as she does. What Transken reveals in her poetry is a surprisingly non-hierarchical concern for animals and their positions within human society. Her tongue in cheek ending to this poem, wherein the beaver's position is to obliterate humankind, is very much pro-animal and rather anti-human but with a humorous quality to it. As Transken states in her essay on Prince George writing and community building: "the PG writers.....have/ encourage a tragic absurdist sense of humor—a sense of humor that also propels us forward into resistance writing" (9-10).

"Damned"

Transken's third poem "Damned" also articulates her unique sense of humor combined with her ecofeminist politics. What is unique to Transken is that her ecofeminism is comprised of both anti-establishment and valuing the "other" in such a manner that it causes the reader to question the not just the status quo, but includes questioning her own complicity. The valuing of the other, in Transken's poetry, not only includes telling examples of poverty, abuse, endemic racism, and misogyny (the First Nations men, single mothers in ("Generica")), but it also depicts animals as having impact, presence, and voice

(the beavers in “This Earth’s Beavers”). The non-hierarchic position her poetic voice takes in “Damned” also causes her reader to ask “whose side are you on?” Not only do the lines in the poem (concerning disasters) cause discomfiture, triggering the reader to question how seriously the writer wants this poem to be taken, but also by poem’s end the writer (poetic voice indistinguishable from Transken’s own politics) suggests she herself is complicit in our global ecological disasters.

The poem lists a series of disastrous (for the humans involved) events that have been caused by human intervention in nature. The “dog who bites the barking neighbour;”, “the bear who killed the hunter;”, and “the lion who ripped the poacher” are all sufficiently generic examples that imply that if the humans were not overstepping their bounds then the animals would not have taken matters into their own *hands*. Far more difficult to find amusing are the innocent villagers who are “the people sickened by mercury// from the flesh of fish;” or the woman who is “stomped to death//by a charging bull moose”. The chickens and flocks of birds are caught up in their own disasters (the chickens, allegedly, causing societal flu;//the flocks of birds caught in plane engines// invoking a crash lines 10-12)—both humans and animals suffer.

How seriously are we meant to take the lines “i applaud// miraculous tiny revenges” (lines 13-14)? True, animal/nature’s acts of revenge are only disastrous to humans. Akin to Mane’s declaration “If fungus, one of the ‘lowliest’ of forms on a humanistic scale of values, were to go extinct tomorrow, the effect on the rest of the biosphere would be catastrophic. . . In contrast, if *Homo sapiens* disappeared, the event would go virtually unnoticed by the vast majority of Earth’s life forms” (24). While, by no means does Transken think that humans ought to be wiped off the planet, it is

important to consider how often (especially in mainstream Western Civilisation) we place humans at the top of the hierarchy. Children are still taught that humans are at the top of the food chain, when in reality, polar bears and tigers actually eat humans while we do not eat them. A small point perhaps, but we humans, while precious and valuable to ourselves, actually have limited usefulness to the planet as a whole.

It is the hierarchy of humans at the tip top that Transken unbalances. Transken subversively acknowledges that humans are not only superfluous to most of the natural world but often dangerous to it as well. This poem sits rather solidly within the “culture is decay” category of ecopoetics. This type of ecopoetry often over-romanticizes “nature” and holds “culture” as a solely negative influence but at the same time sounds an important alarm bell. This slightly didactic “warning bell” that Transken sounds is off-set by the sly tongue in cheek tone of the poem.

Humor plays a large and indefinite role in this poem. How seriously are we meant to take this poem? The first stanza in this poem finds humor about human pain in a kind of cosmic come-uppance. The poem articulates an almost macabre enjoyment of “natural” disasters that provide retribution and vengeance. Transken’s dialogue of engagement between non-human characters and their revenge on humans pushes some of the taboos of our Western society: indelibly placing animal welfare above human welfare.

Although this poem provides us with telling examples of “relationships and communication between humans and other species (including questions of who speaks for nature and who listens when nature “speaks” for itself)” (Carr 18) the negative effects humans have on nature and their subsequent retribution in the first stanza becomes more

holistic in the second stanza. The “Gaia hypothesis” believes that the entire earth is a living being that has a consciousness that can heal or attempt to balance itself⁶. The second stanza of this poem moves away from provocative finger pointing and humor to a far gentler and compassionate elucidation of restoration and balance created both by human mistakes (global warming) and by human absence:

whooping cranes, once almost extinct, have found
their wetlands restored.
rain & human absence is healing
their nesting grounds.

Transken stands very firmly as pro-animal. Carol Adams concludes that “Feminist commitments to end violence err if they stop at the species barrier. A commitment to stop violence can succeed only when all forms of oppression are included in our analysis, and all forms of violence exposed and then challenged” (“Introduction” *Animals & Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* 79). By no means does Transken’s commitments to end violence “stop at the species barrier”. Instead of the poem focussing solely on what other people do—*those* meat eaters, fish flesh eaters, wearers of fur-- Transken also holds *herself* culpable, even as she espouses her “vegetarian//vegan” ethics and refusal to “own leather except in desperate//necessity” (line 31-32). This avowal of “never wearing fur”(line 30) does not mitigate the wearing of leather which cause her “old toes, nonetheless, twitch in shame, sulk// in remorse” (37-38). She admits to participating

⁶ The Gaia hypothesis states that the temperature and composition of the Earth's surface are actively controlled by life on the planet. It suggests that if changes in the gas composition, temperature or oxidation state of the Earth are caused by extraterrestrial, biological, geological, or other disturbances, life responds to these changes by modifying the abiotic environment through growth and metabolism. In simpler terms, biological responses tend to *regulate* the state of the Earth's environment in their favor. (<http://www.physicalgeography.net/fundamentals/5d.html>)

as a human in the oppression of animals. Akin to the food taboos that constitute a considerable portion of the dialogue within J.M. Coetzee's book *The Lives of Animals*, Transken posits real world issues relating to the rights of animals in "Damnation". In Coetzee's book, food, or rather, what human cultures will or will not eat as food, is presented from various perspectives. How we create difference between ourselves (and our cultures) is exemplified by what we do or do not eat: Coetzee engages in postulations by way of differing opinions. His character, Norma, states: "the whole notion of cleanness versus uncleanness has a completely different function, namely, to enable certain groups to self define themselves, negatively, as elite, as elected. We are the people who abstain from *a* or *b* or *c*, and by that power of abstinence mark ourselves as superior" (42). Akin to the fictional Elizabeth Costello's (in Coetzee's novel) vegan ethics, Transken avows she is: "vegetarian for 20 years./ almost pristinely vegan for another 10./ never wearing fur" (lines 28-30). Transken abstains from animal flesh, fish, and animal products like eggs, milk, butter etc. or animal by-products like fur but she still finds herself culpable for the leather that in the frozen North winters she must wear.

"Damned" clearly blurs the "boundary between the human and the non-human" as the speaker aligns herself with the non-human. In John Simons' essay, "Transformation: the Human as Non-Human and Vice Versa" he states: "It is clear that the more closely identified with the non-human the fictive world becomes, then the more its representational strategies will tend towards the blurring or challenging of the boundary between the human and the non-human. Indeed, it might be said that in texts where this boundary is allowed to become porous there is a striving towards the

impossible task of actually reproducing what it is to be animal” (140). It is clear in Transken’s poem “Damned” that the speaker very closely identifies with the non-human, so clear in fact, that Transken dis-identifies with humans, “applaud[s]/ miraculous tiny revenges”. With acid humor, disappearing animals and their habitats—are made visible—humans cannot remain oblivious in Transken’s poem.

“Walking Through Four Early-Evenings on a Port Edwards’ Bush Road”

Although almost every poem that Transken writes plays with the rules of grammar and punctuation, in particular her last poem in this collection, “Walking Through Four Early-Evenings on a Port Edwards’ Bush Road” exemplifies her alternate use of punctuation and language⁷. The connections of spoken and written poetry are considered in Walter Ong’s book, *Orality and Literacy, The Technologizing of the Word*. Ong articulates the inseparable relationship between the spoken word and the written word. He asserts; “Written texts all have to be related somehow, directly or indirectly, to the world of sound, the natural habitat of language to yield their meanings. ‘Reading’ a text means converting it to sound, aloud or in the imagination [. . .] Writing can never dispense with orality” (8). Transken’s poetry naturally asserts itself as being both a written text and as orality. Poetry is written as an act meant to be *spoken* aloud, is conceived in the imagination, and is written on a page. Transken employs all of this in her poem, “Walking Through” in particular by her use of line enjambment. According to *The Harbrace Anthology of Poetry*, enjambment is: “The running over of meaning from one line to another unhindered by punctuation or syntactical pauses; the opposite of an end-

stopped line” (449). Transken employs this poetic device with great skill. Not only do the lines of the poem create enjambment but the poem itself functions in its entirety in the same way; meaning runs over from the poem into life. Because there are *no* capitals, although there is some end-line punctuation throughout the poem, this complicates its reading and complicates the search for meaning. I use the term “complicates” in a positive sense because the lack of capitals indicates an ambiguity as to where the sentences end and begin. The lines are not independent of each other, but merely separated by their space and allocation on the page. A capital “normally” (according to Western grammatical rules) signifies the beginning of a thought or description. By choosing not to use these markers, Transken subverts grammatical laws for her own purposes; in this case allowing independent meaning and connective meaning at the same time.

Transken uses enjambment to communicate inter-connectedness to the reader. By using this poetic technique, Transken at once, creates a sense of inclusion and a sense of dislocation. The reader is forced to question where she “stands” within the poem’s values. The lines of this poem, the meanings of this poem, the beings that inhabit it, all exist interdependent from one another. The two most obvious lines, that can be read as conjoined to its neighboring lines and/or may be read as an independent lines are as follows:

forming a hand-to-hand circle.
moss on everything that’s neglected
to move since sunrise. (lines 9-11)

“Moss on everything that’s neglected” —contains the impression that everything has been left alone for a long time (has been neglected) but when read through to the next

line this sense of neglect becomes complicated by the notion of “to move since sunrise”. What has been acted against (neglected) becomes actor in these lines (neglected to move).

The gentle humor that is contained in the enjambment of the following lines may be read as “cow parsnips’ stems as truthful with themselves as i am becoming” is a lovely lyric imagery but becomes humorous when read as an enjambed line: “i am becoming moody logs or lochness monsters”.

cow parsnips’ stems as truthful
with themselves as i am becoming.
moody logs or lochness monsters

Line enjambment performs a significant role in Transken’s poem allowing her to play with meaning. This forces the reader into a heightened awareness of the myriad possibilities for meaning both in the poem itself and a heightened awareness of the myriad of possibilities for reading. The brevity of language, the lack of obvious superfluous adjectives, and the lack of punctuation all indicate its openness to interpretation.

Language is not redundant, although punctuation *seems* to be. Verbs play a large role. Her emphasis on action approaches language from a (more) non-human point-of-view. Thus we have mountains “going” and “greenly” lines 1-2 and ravens are “complaining”, “screeching” “shaking”, and “self-soothing” (lines 3-5). Nature is active. Transken relies on verbs in the beginning of this poem to indicate tone. And the tone of this poem attempts to relay the other’s side; the side of mountain, the point of view of raven, of waterfalls, of stones, of stumps, of moss, of cow parsnips, of logs, and of raspberries are all articulated in such a fashion that they exist, not just for the poet and her

readers, but for themselves; these beings are “self-soothing—not circus dancing” (line 5). The implication, of course, is that animals trained like dancing bears (circus dancing) to provide entertainment for human amusement is not what is going on here—this nature does what it does regardless of human observation and it does what it does for itself. Nature does not perform for our benefit... it is just an extraneous reward.

“Walking Through” is an act, a speech act and a written act, which creates meaning and bears witness to Transken’s worldview⁸. As well, because Transken’s deployment of punctuation suggests speech more overtly than most formal written texts she furthers this poem as a personal dialogue. Within this poem the movement from nature to a kind of autoethnography complicates any us/them binary where nature and humans are concerned. Although her use of the personal “i” in the latter part of this poem is in lower case, this is not to be confused with any sort of ambiguity but instead reveals Transken’s non-hierarchical positioning in the poem. Her use of the lower case “i” indicates her non-anthropocentric views. She connects her self and her understanding with that of the natural denizens of this unique Northern BC place. She says: “cow parsnips’ stems as truthful// with themselves as i am becoming” (lines 12-13). To be near to achieving such truth is something to strive for in Transken’s worldview.

By giving voice to this poem and publishing it Transken is connecting a larger audience with her worldview; creating a bridge to cross the distance between theory, politics, and the personal. She will not be silent. In her essay, “Meaning Making and Methodological Explorations”, Transken writes about the power and significance of

⁸ Speech acts – in which language does something as well as means something – are part of praying and preaching, cursing and praising, bearing witness and giving evidence [. . .] They are part of saying “I will” or “no” or “I love you”, of repeating parables and proverbs, riddles and charms, and a wide range of code words and passwords and magic (J. Edward Chamberlin 125).

words in poetry. She readily acknowledges the transformative potential of words--linking it to speech and writing. Although, in this particular essay she is explaining the power of Lee Maracle's poetry, what she applies to Maracle's writing applies to her own poetry as well. Specifically, Transken's attention to the connected relationships between politics, social policy, ethics and the personal is readily visible in her own poetry. She discusses N.L. Holt's summarization of *autoethnography* "as a process of writing that complexly connects personal and cultural dynamics and phenomena. Holt discusses the way writers of this kind of material (who expose their inner thoughts and perceptions about the relationships that they are engaged with and observing) are open to criticism from academia" (*Cultural studies, Critical Methodologies* 4). Holt's observations that in academia there is a critical attitude toward autoethnography is, in fact, similar to some academic responses to lyric poetry. The OED offers this as a definition for lyric: "Now used as the name for short poems (whether or not intended to be sung), usually divided into stanzas or strophes, and directly expressing the poet's own thoughts and sentiments. Hence, applied to the poet who composes such poems". The "poet's own thoughts and sentiments" as expressed poetically can be seen as self-absorbed and too specific to be applied to wider audiences⁹. Social critique and personal narrative combine in lyric poetry (a tool many women poets use). Autoethnography is complex and uses experiential knowledge to expose wider issues. Most obviously, Transken is not the only woman to experience poverty and abuse, not the only Canadian to be of mixed race, and the lessons she learned and pain that she felt can expose greater social issues: such as endemic racism and misogyny.

⁹ Consider critical responses to Ann Sexton's "In Celebration of my Uterus" or Sylvia Plath's "Daddy".

The autoethnography in “Walking Through” is more subtle than in her poem “Damned” but, I argue more effective because of its subtlety. Transken’s non-didactic observations speak of a dawning awareness—exposing her “inner thoughts and perceptions about relationships” about how she is engaged with this nature—it is other *and* self. The water fall is “my-shoulders-wide” (line 6), the cow parsnips are “as truthful/with themselves as i am becoming” (lines 12-13), and the question she poses at poem end: “these raspberries are more red today or has// the way of the light shifted? (lines 16-17) leads the reader both into the writer’s perceptions and creates a dialogue that they must respond to. It is as if this place has changed the writer, rather than the writer/human changing the place.

Don McKay asks in *The Muskwa Assemblage*: “Can a person contemplate the reverse of paternalistic and colonial nomination? Is it possible to imagine being named by a place? And—were we to contemplate such a thing—how would we come to merit that honour?” (14). My answer is that it is only possible if we can be moved by place. If we readily acknowledge that we *can* be changed. That is, if we understand how significant place is to us and how we are of so little significance to place. This necessitates a kind of humility, to use an old-fashioned word.

Not only does Transken write autoethnography that “that complexly connects personal and cultural dynamics and phenomena” but she also uses line enjambment and lack of punctuation to make us rethink and question certain truths within the poem, like just what is “impossible” about these mountains she describes (line 1)? I suggest they appear impossible because of their grandeur and because of the poet’s diminutive stature in comparison.

Good poetry talks, it sounds its sibilance in our inner ears, it speaks to its readers with an interior language, because a poet engages in a dialogue when she/he writes, and at the very least attempts to tell a contextualized truth. Transken's words have power, they have the ability to effect change. Her words have "residue" to use Walter Ong's words, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* (11).¹⁰ This residue of words creates community which, in this sense, is the relationship formed between the writer, the reader, the poem, and the way the writer's story exists in connection with the stories of others.

Connection with others is a crucial aspect of poetry for both reader and writer. It is in realizing a personal provisional truth that both writer and reader are inextricably linked. In the words of Earle Birney,

A poem is a poet speaking to you out of the depth of himself [herself], out of his [her] own unique experience of life and in a tone of voice and habit of phrasing which is particularly his [her] own [. . .]. a good poem is the most genuine expression of the whole personality of the man or woman who made it, and for that reason alone it can bring extraordinary insights into a human mind and heart. Also, since the poet is generally speaking about those things most difficult to talk about, the complex emotions and feelings that well out of our subconsciousness, he [she] is speaking not only about himself [herself] but about the essential human things in all of us. (xv)

Transken is indeed speaking about something that is difficult to articulate: the "not-apart from each other" (line 7) of nature and humans. She is speaking a larger truth

about this experience. “Walking Through” intimates holistic connections to land, people, time, and place “forming a hand-to-hand circle” (line 9). She “is speaking not only about ... [herself] but about the essential human things in all of us” (Birney). Certainly “Walking Through” approaches nature and orality by its non-hierarchical use of language (no upper case I’s). Transken forces us to ask questions: “Is all culture decay” (like in “Generica”)? “Or is culture a necessary foil for writing about nature”? “Or do we, when we consider nature, see it only as we position ourselves around it”?

Transken succeeds in forcing the reader to face some unpleasant truths about resource extraction and globalism, in “Generica”, and gives readers a new perspective when she voices the other: creating animal voice and considering power relationships in “What This Lake’s Beavers” and “Damned”. Through enjambment and alternate verb use creates a nature that is not just metaphor but comes close to the literal.

Conclusion

Because Transken holds no acceptance towards absolutes she uses no simple binary oppositions, everything animal and human are complex and interconnected. Crucially, she finds human beings culpable for the state of society and for nature. Encoded in this text are strategies that politicize animal and human interactions. Blurring the lines between animal and human is a representational strategy that challenges the “otherness” of animals and one that she utilizes well.

It is equally clear that Transken employs her poetry as a device to say some serious things about linked oppressions, Transken is vegan, and like Elizabeth Costello in Cotzee’s text, she understands that concern for animals is linked to other concerns. In *The*

Lives of Animals, the main character espouses vegan and non-interference ethics, she responds to a question about Western universalism: “You are correct to link this history to the history of human rights, since concern for animals is, historically speaking, an offshoot of broader philanthropic concerns—for the lot of slaves and of children, among others” (61). By showing us how she aligns herself with such political concerns through her autoethnography, Transken is showing her explicitly ecofeminist position in her poetry. She includes herself in her writing, seeking alliances with her readers, hoping to share her understanding about how intrinsically connected all life is, and without being overtly didactic show this with a kind of wry humor.

Transken states in her essay in *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodology*: “Networking is a goal that we should have as scholars so that we may assist small communities and groups to find common struggles and links for enhancing their own empowerment” (9). Her politics lean toward inclusion and collaboration believing that other voices speak important truths and that sharing *with* is not speaking *for*. Transken elucidates “An ally does not speak for a vulnerable person or population; we try to speak with them” (14). Is it possible to speak *with* nature? Transken would say yes. Certainly these poems come close to speaking from within nature.

Alliances can be created and discovered within their particular situational and strategic needs. Poetry that posits the personal provides an emic understanding that creates a politics of inclusion. Humans share an underlying element of existence, often this intersects, for women, at sites of oppression. We are linked by our experiences, and this we share. We are by no means linked to every woman’s experience, as we have differing affiliations in regards to ethnicity, sex, class and ideology but we are linked

through a continuum of existence and of strategic affiliations. Lee Quinby states in her essay “Ecofeminism and the Politics of Resistance” that:

Ecofeminism as a politics of resistance operates against power understood, as Foucault puts it, as a “multiplicity of force relations,” decentered and continually “produced from one moment to the next.” Against such power, coherence in theory and centralization of practice make a social movement irrelevant or, worse, vulnerable, or-even more dangerous- participatory with forces of domination. (Quinby 123)

Within these frameworks of alliances and problematics is the fact that humans and nonhumans exist in this *particular* state of history; with its hierarchies, class distinctions, gender distinctions, nature/culture split. It is within this framework that we must seek answers and solutions as ecofeminists. A utopian ideal of integrated, lateral positioning for all beings is what Transken hopes for and works towards. But what is now, within our reach is the analysis and critiques of the existing structures and where they intersect. We do not yet live in a world where all beings are equal. Ynestra King states: “At this point in history, there is no way to unravel the matrix of oppressions within human society without at the same time liberating nature and reconciling that part of nature that is human with that part that is not” (109). Transken’s affiliative politics means voicing protest *and* voicing sympathy.

As a concrete example, the following selection from Transken’s poem “Hello Memo” clearly draws connections between using words to heal and words to hurt and between humans to create alliances and to destroy affiliations; it is within this conduit of humanity and words that Transken’s poetry exists.

a creative writing may be
the game of scrabble
that i play by my self,
a shuffling & rearranging
of feels behind words like
murder suicide anguish
take destroy, a way to trickster
& dance the meanings
of *joy, hope, thrill, release.*(lines 19-27)

Acknowledging that her writing process begins with self does not mean that it ends with self, like a good social worker Transken attempts to make a better language, better social policy where words like *joy, hope, thrill, release* can exist alongside words such as *murder suicide anguish// take destroy*. Where creative writing/poetry is a game (not to be taken lightly) of rearranging the letters to spell new words, show what *is*: both the negative and the positive. Her autoethnography, her poetry is indivisible from her poetics, is playful, is serious, shows us not just herself but *ourselves*.