Like the poet who discovers new forms of poetry through an attentiveness toward other animals, the beluga whale discovered a new way to manipulate his vestibular sacs. These forms enrich his repertoire of bodily *poiesis*. Minding the rhythms, cadences, and frequencies of human speech patterns became a catalyst for a beluga whale to extend the range of his vocalizations.

I infer, then, that prior to this study, beluga whales expanded the range of their vocalizations through an attentiveness to conspecifics and to other marine species including, perhaps, dolphins, humpback whales, and seals. The fact that beluga whales have also *minded humans* is bittersweet. Captivity is a high price for new songs of the sea. And while the captive whales extend the range of their vocalizations—thereby demonstrating to humans, yet again, the amazing capabilities of animals—beluga communities in the ocean face the coming extinction.

Notes

1. Shepard, *Thinking Animals*, 6–7, 249; see, for instance, Haraway, *Species*, 232.
2. Sam Ridgway et al., "Spontaneous Human Speech Mimicry by a Cetacean," *Current Biology* 22, no. 20 (2012): 860–61.

Chapter 4
"learning my steps": Zoopoetics and Mass Extinction in W. S. Merwin's Poetry

Henry David Thoreau certainly raised walking to another exponent as he suggests that the walk is nothing less than an art: "I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of Walking, that is, of taking walks, who had a genius, so to speak, for *sauntering*."[1] W. S. Merwin is one poet who had such a genius.

Merwin, like Cummings and Whitman before him, saw poetry as something much larger than words on a page. His statements on poetry and poetics reminds readers that poetry includes the printed page, but is not limited to it. In "On Open Form," Merwin sets forth a definition that preserves possibility: "A poetic form: the setting down of a way of hearing how poetry happens in words."[2] He does not define *the* poetic form, but rather, *a* poetic form, and his definition emphasizes the fact that poetry happens in other places than words, too. He also emphasizes that poetic form relates to one's ability to hear, and therefore to *listen*. Other senses permeate Merwin's *oeuvre* too, but *listening* becomes most crucial, for it directs readers to where the first stirrings of *poiesis* begin.

One of the reasons why Merwin stopped using punctuation midway through *The Moving Target* (1963) rarely to use it again in his published poems involves listening.[3] In the interview "'Fact Has Two Faces,'" Merwin discusses how the absence of punctuation encourages both the poet and the reader to listen more attentively:

> You have to pay attention to things. . . . Punctuation is there as a kind of manners in prose, articulating prose meaning, but it doesn't necessarily articulate the meaning of this kind of verse. I saw that if I could use the movement of the verse itself and the movement of the line—*the actual weight of the language as it moved*—to do the punctuation, I would both strengthen the texture of the experience of the poem and also make clear its distinction from other kinds of writing. One would be paying attention to it in those terms.[4]

The absence of punctuation pushes the reader to become less an observer and more of a participant in the poetic moment, for she or he must read more with the body, attentively *stretching toward* the language's weight. For Merwin, this weight is marked by "movement"—not unlike the bodies of humans and animals. Like Whitman, the body "re-appears" in some of Merwin's "best poems," experienced when the reader's body engages the physical heft of a line.[5] Later in the interview, Merwin discusses, at length, the need for a thorough wrestling with what, after all, a poetic line is. Merwin sees many emergent yet talented writers who still have a "very shaky sense of what a line is." In a workshop, he encouraged students to spend a moment to "figure out what a line of verse is." "After two hours," Merwin shares, "we hadn't got very far." He continues:

> We left it with my saying, "I think this is what you have to think about the next time you stop a line somewhere. At the risk of losing a great deal of spontaneity for awhile, you need to look closely, to figure out what in hell you think you're doing: why you stop it after three syllables, why you stop it after two beats, or why you stop it where you do—what are you doing? . . ." [We came] to realize that a line was a unit of something. What it was a unit of was something they couldn't agree on.[6]

Ed Folsom and Cary Nelson push Merwin further, asking if he thinks the line relates to [Olson's] theory of the breath. Merwin suggests it can, but that there is something more: "I think of stopping at a given point as a rhythmical gesture, and also as a gesture of meaning—because where you stop, if the rhythm is working, is going to have an effect on the meaning, particularly if you're not punctuating."[7] At the time of this interview (early 1980's), Merwin's understanding of a poetic line is inextricably bound up with the materiality of gestures. In a 2006 interview, Merwin emphasizes how the line is a "unit of energy" that "has to do, finally, with the *physical*."[8] Cummings' theory on gestures discussed in the third chapter provides explanatory power. A gesture of a line is inscrutable, in part, because it is like a prime number, and one cannot explain a prime number or a prime gesture without the noise of other numbers, gestures, or words. Though less extreme than Cummings and much more quiet than Whitman, Merwin cultivates a poetics of the body. As will be demonstrated, his "listening" is both an auditory and haptic event. Readers listen to the *weight of the language as it moves* with more than just the ears.

And as both poet and reader enter a posture of listening to the weight of a line, a line break, and a stanza break, Merwin cultivates an ecopoetics.[9] The listening to language can direct the reader to the place where poetry happens outside of words. In this way, Merwin descends from Whitman—but with much more silence and circumspection. Throughout Merwin's *oeuvre*, the stirrings of *poiesis* begin through listening to the elemental forces of the earth, the organic growth of plants, and the bodily *poiesis* of animals—as demonstrated by "The Cold Before the Moonrise" (from *The Lice*):

> It is too simple to turn to the sound
> Of frost stirring among its
> Stars like an animal asleep
> In the winter night
> And say I was born far from home
> If there is a place where this is the language may
> It be my country[10]

Merwin's speaker turns to the elemental force of frost "stirring" in the cold night before the moonrise. The emphasis on the frost's "stars" establishes the cold, cosmological scope of Merwin's poetic vision, something that the critic J. Scott Bryson calls a "space-consciousness." Instead of seeing space/place as opposites, Bryson suggests a "place-space synergy" in Merwin's poetics. "What is necessary," Bryson argues, "is a space-conscious 'awe' combined with and resulting from a place-centered commitment to the world itself."[11] The turn toward the stirring of the elemental force of crystallizing water cultivates a sense of place, but this occurs within vast cosmological distances.

As later sections of this chapter explore, Merwin listens to the motions and movements of many species. This fact informs his comparison of the stirring frost to the "animal asleep / in the winter night." As he turns to the elemental forces of the earth, he animates those stirrings with the bodily *poiesis* of a sleeping and perhaps dreaming animal. The scene of the stirring frost will become further intensified when the moon actually does rise, flooding the poem with moonlight and moon-shadows, but in the context of vast cosmological distances—and in the context of the darkness of *The Lice* in which the poem appears—the sense of place is fragile.

Readers who turn toward the poem and listen can hear the stirring of the language through the onomatopoetic *s's* in the first three lines and can therefore experience vestiges of the language of the earth and another place where poetry happens. It happens in the stirrings of frost, the stirrings of animals, the stirrings of human poetry, and in the stirrings of the organic growth of plants. Though "The Cold Before the Moonrise" contains no explicit mentions of the organic growth of plants, it is implicit. Merwin, who has planted innumerable trees over three decades on what was once a pineapple plantation in Hawaii, is, indeed, a poet-planter. As will be discussed later in this chapter, planting informs his poetic posture. "The Cold Before the Moonrise" is the planting of a *poem*, and it is part of the "journeywork of the stars" (*LG* 1855, 34). In the poem's final lines, Merwin's poetics of planting emerges. He plants the "seed" of a bioregional identity that usurps one's national identity: the "place" where the "language" of the earth becomes one's "country."

"The Cold Before the Moonrise" establishes some of the crucial aspects of Merwin's poetry and poetics. Merwin turns, listens, plants, and cultivates a "place-space synergy." In this chapter, I focus primarily upon his turning toward animals, and crucially, toward their absence. Like Whitman and Cummings be-

fore him, Merwin makes poetic breakthroughs through an attentiveness to another species' bodily *poiesis*; however, when Merwin turns toward the animals, they are often not there. Juxtaposing his earlier "Leviathan" (1956) with a few poems from *The Lice* (1967) demonstrates how an attentiveness to the absence of animals contributed, in part, to breakthroughs in form. However, Merwin's poetry after *The Lice* often cultivates a connection to animals who are still present, but the shadow of *The Lice* and the ongoing mass extinction infuses Merwin's zoopoetics with anguish and with a sense of fragility amidst such moments. Butterflies, insects, lizards, foxes, monkeys, snakes, mice, and many more species populate his poetry after *The Lice*, demonstrating Merwin's continual return toward that most crucial posture of zoopoetics: an attentiveness to the bodily *poiesis* of another species. Unlike Cummings, Merwin's poetic breakthroughs have much less to do with an iconicity where the poetic form plays with the bodily *poiesis* of a particular animal; however, his attentiveness to animals still shapes the form of the poem. In *The Vixen*, I argue that Merwin's attentiveness toward animals—pervasive throughout many of his books—comes to clear focus, shaping and sustaining the book's innovative form of a *saunter*.

Attentiveness Toward the Absence of Animals

Biological and linguistic extinction generate a feedback loop in Merwin's poetics—a dynamic established in *The Lice*. Its epigraph from Heraclitus cryptically introduces the coming extinction:

> All men are deceived by the appearances of things, even Homer himself, who was the wisest man in Greece; for he was deceived by boys catching lice: they said to him, "What we have caught and what we have killed we have left behind, but what has escaped us we bring with us." (*P* 1:265)

Jarold Ramsey interprets the epigraph in terms of the "continuity of the self." He sees the lice that escapes as Merwin's "unresolved alternatives, the frustrated purposes, the guilt, the missed chances, and unwritten poems of his discontinuous lives."[12] I respectfully suggest that focusing on the growth of the self eclipses the ecological import of the epigraph as it relates to *The Lice* and to Merwin's anguish over extinction. The epigraph encapsulates the state of the planet in 1967 and today. All the species that humans have caught and killed—all the whales humans have driven to extinction—are left behind; humans only bring with us species that escape domination and exploitation.

In "The Animals" which is the first poem of *The Lice*, Merwin's speaker turns to the animals in a Whitmanian moment, only to find their absence:[13]

> All these years behind windows
> With blind crosses sweeping the tables

> And myself tracking over empty ground
> Animals I never saw
>
> I with no voice
>
> Remembering names to invent for them
> Will any come back will one
>
> Saying yes
>
> Saying look carefully yes
> We will meet again (*P* 1:267)

Unlike Whitman, the poetic speaker has "no voice." His voice is as empty as the trackless ground. The "blind crosses" refer to the shadows cast by the window blinds, and suggest the "meaningless [and I add violent] crucifixions" of animals.[14] Animals no longer nurture Merwin's voice like they did for Whitman, and it is very difficult for the body of an animal to reappear in a poem if that animal does not exist.

To give this poem more weight, I turn to the arguments of Paul Shepard and David Abram. Both thinkers recognize the human indebtedness to animals regarding human imagination, intelligence, and culture. Shepard's driving thesis is that "human intelligence is bound to the presence of animals," and he discusses how this intelligence emerged: "Hunter and hunted are engaged in an upward, reciprocal spiral of consciousness with its constituents of stratagem and insight."[15] As prey and predators read each other's markings, scents, and bodily *poiesis* in order to survive, they become increasingly intelligent. Shepard argues that animals are essential to the human imagination. A lack of animals and of interspecies interactions depletes the human mind. Abram also argues that the increasing extinction of animals depletes language:

> As technological civilization diminishes the biotic diversity of the earth, language itself is diminished. As there are fewer and fewer songbirds in the air, due to the destruction of their forests and wetlands, human speech loses more and more of its evocative power. For when we no longer hear the voices of warbler and wren, our own speaking can no longer be nourished by their cadences. . . . as we drive more and more of the land's wild voices into the oblivion of extinction, our own languages become increasingly impoverished and weightless, progressively emptied of their earthly resonance.[16]

Provocatively, Abram uses the term *weightless* to describe this impoverished language. It is difficult to listen to the *weight of the language as it moves* if it has little material heft. As Merwin emphasizes, the loss of animals is a loss of language: "with the animals dying around us / . . . with the words going out like cells of a brain" (*P* 1:649).

Prior to both Shepard and Abram's arguments, Merwin recognized how a depletion of animals depletes the poetic voice. Rather than inventing a

form/architecture of a poem as part of the process of engaging an animal, the poetic speaker contemplates the alternative: "Remembering names to invent for them." Two poems readily expose Merwin's shift from naming animals to naming the absence of animals: "Leviathan" from *Green with Beasts* and "For a Coming Extinction" from *The Lice*. "Leviathan" is the first poem of part 1 in *Green with Beasts*, the "Physiologus: Chapters for a Bestiary." In part 1, Merwin gravitates toward a poetics interested in the physiological characteristics of a given animal, but this physiology is enmeshed within the rich tradition of myth—especially in "Leviathan." In light of zoopoetics, the weight of the whale's body moving through oceans emerges in the weight of the language is it moves through sonorous words and long sentences spanning several alliterative lines across the poetic page:

> This is the black sea-brute bulling through wave-wrack,
> Ancient as ocean's shifting hills, who in sea-toils
> Traveling, who furrowing the salt acres
> Heavily, his wake hoary behind him,
> Shoulders spouting, the fist of his forehead
> Over wastes gray-green crashing, among horses unbroken
> From bellowing fields, past bone-wreck of vessels,
> Tide-ruin, wash of lost bodies bobbing
> No longer sought for, and islands of ice gleaming,
> Who ravening the rank flood, wave-marshaling,
> Overmastering the dark sea-marches, finds home
> And harvest.

The heavy lines continue in later phrases such as "The hulk of him is like hills heaving" and "Like land's self by night black-looming, surf churning and trailing / Along his shores' rushing, shoal-water boding / About the dark of his jaws" (*P* 1:99). Later, the poem echoes Old Testament passages that similarly use a heavy language when writing about the Leviathan (*Genesis*, *Job*, *Jonah*), but Merwin's language seems heavier. Just as Whitman used many verb-ful, augmenting adjectives in his prose piece on the locust-song, so Merwin does here. Instead of a *whirring, emitting, droning* energy, however, Merwin's language heaves: *bulling, shifting, traveling, furrowing, spouting, crashing, bellowing*. To give further weight to the language, Merwin hyphenates many words (such as *sea-brute, wave-wrack, gray-green*). But one of Merwin's innovative moves occurs through hyphenating a descriptor to one of the verb-ful adjectives, such as *wave-marshaling, black-looming, wind-combed*. "Leviathan" rivals anything within the literary tradition of whale-writing, including Edmund Burke's treatise on the sublime and Melville's *Moby-Dick*,[17] for the poem epitomizes zoopoetics: the heaving of the poetic lines resonates with the whale's heavy motion through the seas. "Leviathan" is one of the more obvious moments of iconicity in Merwin's *oeuvre*.

Amidst the growing awareness of mass extinctions, though, there are fewer animals for Merwin to turn toward in *The Lice*. The zoopoetic dynamic shifts to an attentiveness toward the absence of animals. The highly anthologized and much discussed "For a Coming Extinction" epitomizes Merwin's poetic breakthroughs (in all their anguish) that emerge from an attentiveness toward absence. Unlike "Leviathan," the words and lines in "For a Coming Extinction" require little breath to read aloud:

> Gray whale
> Now that we are sending you to The End
> That great god
> Tell him
> That we who follow you invented forgiveness
> And forgive nothing
>
> I write as though you could understand
> And I could say it
> One must always pretend something
> Among the dying
> When you have left the seas nodding on their stalks
> Empty of you
> Tell him that we were made
> On another day
>
> The bewilderment will diminish like an echo
> Winding along your inner mountains
> Unheard by us
> And find its way out
> Leaving behind it the future
> Dead
> And ours
>
> When you will not see again
> The whale calves trying the light
> Consider what you will find in the black garden
> And its court
> The sea cows the Great Auks the gorillas
> The irreplaceable hosts ranged countless
> And foreordaining as stars
> Our sacrifices
>
> Join your word to theirs
> Tell him
> That it is we who are important (*P* 1:304–305)

Like "Leviathan," Merwin alludes to the Genesis myth of creation, but as he does so, he re-writes the myth.[18] The dominion of Genesis becomes the palimpsest upon which Merwin erases and writes anew.[19] The speaker imagines the gray whale telling the creator that the coming extinction is justified since humans "were made / On another day." The stanza break allows the reader to lin-

ger in the "justification" before learning that someone is utterly bewildered. Hank Lazer suggests that the whale is bewildered; however, his read does reconcile how the bewilderment "will"—that is, after the whale speaks to the great god—"diminish like an echo / Winding along [the whale's] inner mountains."[20] The whale *listens* to the bewilderment of someone else. Even though the whale could be bewildered by the coming extinction, he observes someone else's utter shock. And even though the tone of the poem is that of bewilderment, anguish, and angst, the bewilderment of line fifteen is "Unheard by us" humans. This leaves only one "person" left to be bewildered: the "great god."

In Merwin's myth, the impetus for the great god's bewilderment is the gray whale's message. Merwin enters into the creation myth to subvert it, suggesting that the great god is utterly perplexed why humans feel entitled to drive other species into extinction. The garden of Eden becomes the "black garden" full of extinct species or those near extinction: "The sea cows the Great Auks the gorillas."

Admittedly, the form of "For a Coming Extinction" is part of a much larger movement in Merwin's *oeuvre* toward sparseness, emptiness, and silence—a movement that gained much force in *The Moving Target* (1963) and continued through *The Lice* (1967) and beyond. An attentiveness toward the absence of animals contributed to the shift in form, though, which comes to fruition in "For a Coming Extinction." It is worth lingering in the aforementioned line—"The sea cows the Great Auks the gorillas"—as it demonstrates a specific breakthrough in form that emerges from an attentiveness toward the absence of an animal. The line exhibits palimpsest qualities, for vestiges of the alliterative verse from "Leviathan" return—but without the heaviness. The alliteration and assonance cross-stitches the animals together: the *s's* throughout; the *khh* in *cows* and *Auks*; the *ghh* in *Great* and *gorillas*; and the *ahh* in *cows, Auks, gorillas*. The weight of the line, though, emerges not from the subtle musicality that is present; rather, it comes from the caesuras, the absences. As one *listens to the weight of the language as it moves* through the line, the pauses between each animal in the list augment. At first, one may hear just a comma separating each species—"the sea cows, the Great Auks, the gorillas"—but the bewilderment at the coming extinction calls for something more: "the sea cows . . . the Great Auks . . . the gorillas. . . ." A greater bewilderment, anguish, and angst charges the absent ellipses following "the Great Auks" as the emblem gesture of capital letters emphasizes the finality of their extinction. And the gorillas are next. The innovative breakthroughs in poetic form push the reader to listen to the weight of absence, and of silence, and of the coming extinction as it moves in language, thereby cultivating a similar sense of bewilderment, anguish, and angst already established in the poem's earlier stanzas. And so the heavy alliterated lines from "Leviathan" are erased and written over with a much more subtle alliteration, and instead of engaging the heaving movement of a whale through language, the reader confronts the bewildering absence. The juxtaposition of "Leviathan" and "For a Coming Extinction" exposes the interrelationship between biological and linguistic extinction. The language of "Leviathan"—like the whales—faces extinction. Merwin preserves vestiges of that rich language in "For a Coming Extinction," but the heaviness of the alliterative line dissipates in an elegant but anguish-filled subtlety.

Biological and Linguistic Extinction

To further explore the interrelationship between biological and linguistic extinction, I return to Bryson's insight regarding the "place-space synergy" in Merwin's work, specifically his claim that an "ever-present space-consciousness" is "perhaps the most prominent characteristic of Merwin's *oeuvre*."[21] Both extinctions increase the "space-consciousness" of an increasing sense of emptiness and absence. For instance, the poem "Place" from *The Rain in the Trees* (1988) epitomizes how Merwin often cultivates a profound identification with nonhuman nature (place) in the context of an increasing extinction, exploitation, and deforestation (space). "Place" sits amongst several of the poems in *The Rain in the Trees* that explore biological and linguistic extinctions such as "Conqueror," "Native," "Witness, "Chord," "Losing a Language," and "The Lost Originals" (*P* 1:661, 662, 663, 664, 664–65, 666). It is already the last day of the world:

> On the last day of the world
> I would want to plant a tree
>
> what for
> not for the fruit
>
> the tree that bears the fruit
> is not the one that was planted
>
> I want the tree that stands
> in the earth for the first time
>
> with the sun already
> going down
>
> and the water
> touching its roots
>
> in the earth full of the dead
> and the clouds passing
>
> one by one
> over its leaves (*P* 1:663)

This poem captures Merwin's resolve to plant trees in Hawaii as he has since the 1970's, but it also captures his poetic disposition. Merwin is a planter-poet, for his poems cultivate a strong sense of identification with many of the dynamic

relationships within the ecosphere. "Place" directs attention to the simple but ineffable ecology of water, roots, earth, decomposition, clouds, leaves, sun, and a planter's hands. The shadow of *The Lice*, though, re-emerges in the phrase "earth full of the dead"—that is, the earth full of the completed extinctions.

The context of the surrounding poems from *The Rain in the Trees* further casts the sense of "place" as something fragile and tenuous. "Witness" confronts readers with how deforestation depletes language:

> I want to tell what the forests
> were like
>
> I will have to speak
> in a forgotten language (*P* 1:663)

Two pages later, Merwin laments "Losing a Language": "many of the things the words were about / no longer exist" (*P* 1:665). The immediate context coupled with the shadow of *The Lice* infuse "Place" with bewilderment, anguish, and a sense of hopelessness. The cultivation of "place" is inextricably bound up with, as Bryson suggests, a looming sense of space.

When Merwin turns toward the presence of animals, it is rarely outside the looming sense of space and the shadow of *The Lice.* This occurs even in *The Lice*, when, for instance, Merwin turns toward birds in "How We Are Spared":

> At midsummer before dawn an orange light returns to the mountains
> Like a great weight and the small birds cry out
> And bear it up (*P* 1:296)

Merwin infuses the midsummer dawn with anguish, the "great weight" of *The Lice*, and yet the birds "bear it up" through their song. A poem from *The Rain in the Trees* exhibits a similar dynamic. The title "After the Alphabets" casts a shadow over Merwin's celebration of the language of insects:

> I am trying to decipher the language of insects
> they are the tongues of the future
> their vocabularies describe buildings as food
> they can depict dark water and the veins of trees
> they can convey what they do not know
> and what is known at a distance
> and what nobody knows
> they have terms for making music with the legs
> they can recount changing in a sleep like death
> they can sing with wings
> the speakers are their own meaning in a grammar without horizons
> they are wholly articulate
> they are never important they are everything (*P* 1:652)

The title places the poem in the context of a post-human extinction. The insects will be the poets of the (human-less) future, undergoing the many facets of their bodily *poiesis.*

In his essay "The Winter Palace," Merwin recounts his journey to the Transvolcanic Range in Mexico where thousands of monarchs migrate. The essay places his identification with the butterflies in the context of the increasing challenges facing the monarch butterflies due to environmental devastation along the migration route as well as at the migration's ending place. Like his poetry, Merwin's prose refuses to separate an attentiveness toward animals from the coming extinction. He marvels at the sheer distance of the butterflies' migration (2,500 miles) and at their collective *poiesis* at the journey's end where they arrive at the oyamel firs in the Transvolcanic Range. The collective group undergoes the *poiesis* of the swarm:

> There are advantages to being part of a large assembly, and the first groups that settle into the oyamel firs obviously welcome still larger congregations: They have been seen above their trees in spiraling columns a thousand feet high, signaling to other groups, "Here is the place."

And at the essay's close, Merwin describes a continuity of languages between species: "we stood in the afternoon sunlight in the sound of them, a sound of words before words, a whisper of one syllable older than language, continuing like a pulse." However, such moments are, as mentioned, never isolated from the coming extinction: "If the reduction of the forest continues, the larger eastern population of the monarch species, at the end of its vast migrations, will be edged out of existence."[22]

The line quoted from "The Winter Palace"—"a whisper of one syllable older than language"—echoes a poem from *The Rain in the Trees*, "Utterance":

> Sitting over words
> very late I have heard a kind of whispered sighing
> not far
> like a night wind in pines or like the sea in the dark
> the echo of everything that has ever
> been spoken
> still spinning its one syllable
> between the earth and silence (*P* 1:647)

Merwin's work suggests that the "utterance" and the "spinning" of that "one syllable" includes the language of insects, the song of birds, the swarming spirals of butterflies, and the heavy motions of a whale who faces extinction. The poem reaches back to the elemental origins of language. It is an act of recovery in light of the extinctions underway, both biological and linguistic.

Finding the Islands and the Saunter of *The Vixen*

If Merwin only made occasional breakthroughs in poetic form through his attentiveness to animals and their absence, then zoopoetics could be seen merely as a minor (though no less important) dynamic in his *oeuvre*. Two books of poems after *The Lice*, however, further demonstrate how the continual turning toward existing animals initiated breakthroughs in poetic form: *Finding the Islands* (1982) and *The Vixen* (1996). *Finding the Islands* began as a discipline to distill the poetic moment into as brief a moment as possible. "I wanted to see what it was that made a poem complete as a small, if not the smallest, unit." Merwin continues, "It was a way of discovering what was the single thing that would stand by itself."[23] Throughout the duration of this exercise, Merwin wrote hundreds of haiku-esque tercets and compiled them into *Finding the Islands*. Even a cursory glance at *Finding the Islands* exposes the sheer abundance of animals: mice, a dove, a plover, owls, crows, mayflies, lizards, crickets, jays, tree toads, chipmunks, nuthatches, beetles, wasps, a horse, grasshoppers, swallows, a cat, bees, moths, a blackbird, and many more. Merwin, though, is not interested in merely describing these animals; rather, he turns toward them to better understand what makes a poem complete. One could see the animals as simply poetic material—something thematic —but I suggest that turning toward the bodily *poiesis* of many animals contributed, necessarily so, to the breakthroughs of that poetic exploration.

One of the breakthroughs involves a new way of listening:

> Rain on the tin roof
> lizard hands on the tin ceiling
> listening (*P* 1:545)

Though I can only surmise what counted as a success for Merwin, this poem seems to epitomize the exercise. The three lines stand by themselves, but they would not if they were a word shorter or if he timed the line breaks differently. The silence of the line breaks helps the reader listen along with the lizard. The first line establishes the image of rain on the tin roof; the lizard's hands emerge in the beginning of the second line. The image morphs in the latter half of the second line, for the hands are *inside* the structure, pressed up against the "tin ceiling" from below. The third line delivers the success of the poem: *listening*. The poem directs attention to a *listening* not through the ears, but through the haptic vibrations felt through the hands. An attentiveness to the lizard's way-of-being enhances Merwin's "setting down of a way of hearing how poetry happens in words."[24] The zoopoetic dynamic becomes complete as an attentiveness to this lizard's motionless engagement with the rain led to the line break that places "listening" by itself in all of its resonance. Merwin learns to listen through an attentiveness to the lizard's listening posture, and the reader learns to listen through an attentiveness to the *weight of the language as it moves* across the line breaks.

When Merwin experiments with a form, he often does so for the duration of an entire book. Such is the case with *Finding the Islands*, and such is the case in *The Vixen*. Like *Finding the Islands*, myriad animals populate *The Vixen*, and much of the content involves an habitual attentiveness toward animals. Many of the titles foreground liminal moments—"Gate"; "Threshold"; "Entry"; "In the Doorway"; "Emergence"—and the poems often crisscross the threshold between the speaker and other animals. Similar to Cummings' emphasis on the green bird looking at him, Merwin writes about a "green snake lying in the sunlight watching me" or the reciprocity of looking back and forth: "I looked up a bank straight into the small eyes / of a boar watching me and we stared at each other / in that silence before he turned and went on" (*P* 2:24, 8). Though the majority of the book cultivates an identification with animals in a rural, pastoral setting, the shadow of *The Lice* persists. "Green Fields" continues the urgency of *The Lice*, for the attentiveness toward animals occurs less and less in "this part of the century":

> By this part of the century few are left who believe
> in the animals *for they are not there* in the carved parts
> of them served on plates and the pleas from the slatted trucks
> are sounds of shadows that possess no future
> there is still game for the pleasure of killing
> and there are pets for the children but the lives that followed
> courses of their own other than ours and older
> have been migrating before us some are already
> far on the way . . . (*P* 2:41, italics added)

The poem suggests, then, that part of the vision of *The Vixen* is to reclaim a "belie[f] / in the animals" and to discover where "they are."

The zoopoetic dynamic in *The Vixen* differs from Whitman and Cummings before him. Vestiges of an animal's bodily *poiesis* do not readily resurface in an iconicity, and yet I suggest that the form has still been shaped by his attentiveness toward animals. The form, though, has much more to do with cultivating a posture necessary to look and look again at animals. To make this argument, I meander through a series of important observations.

The Vixen is a curious form. The lines are not iambic pentameter, though they often have five strong beats. The lines are all similar in length, spanning roughly ten to fifteen syllables with occasional exceptions. Merwin indents lines 2, 4, 6, and so forth throughout the duration of the book, giving a flow-and-ebb momentum to the progression of a poem. What is more, Merwin utilizes this form in his book-long, epic poem *The Folding Cliffs: A Narrative of 19th Century Hawaii* published in 1998, two years after *The Vixen*. In *The Vixen*, he seems to return to the longer, heavier line of "Leviathan" after many years of writing sparser lines as in "For a Coming Extinction." In the 1982 interview "Fact Has Two Faces," Merwin provides a valuable perspective regarding palimpsests and the poetic line—one that pertains to his accomplishment in *The Vixen*. He shares:

You know, meter is never something permanently absent. I think that line is related to the Middle English line of *Piers Plowman*, which to me is the basic line of English, overlaid—we talked about palimpsests—overlaid, as I said earlier, by the Italianate iambic pentameter. But the caesura in the iambic pentameter is like a ghost of the old Middle English line asserting itself all the time, saying I'm here all the time. I think it's there under what we hear in iambic pentameter. And as the iambic pentameter becomes harder and harder to hear or to stay awake through in contemporary poetry, I think the other, the deeper, older line is something one, with the slightest effort, might be able to hear again.[25]

Here, Merwin suggests that it may be possible to hear the "deeper, older line" again, even in contemporary poetry. I suggest that if one *listens to the weight of the language as it moves* through the lines of *The Vixen*, one hears that older line.

In the greater context of Merwin's work informed by "Witness" and "Place" discussed above, reinventing this older line fights against its extinction. The forgotten language awakens. Many of the titles in *The Vixen* point toward this older language, such as "Ancestral Voices"; "Old Sound"; "Old Question"; "Old Walls"; and "Oak Time." As Matthew Zapruder puts it, "centuries can go by in a few lines."[26] Merwin reaches back to an older language and an older line to reclaim one's connectedness to what is still present.

Poem after poem cultivates an identification with the speaker's environment and with the animals within that environment, and the form contributes to this identification. As the lines flow and ebb, they generate a rhythm of walking, of *sauntering*—to echo Thoreau.[27] The indented lines enhance the caesura of the line break, and the weight of the line shifts as if to the other foot. Each line reads complete up to the pause . . . but continues on the next. One step, a shift, then another step. Merwin, then, effectively places the reader in the posture of one whose attentiveness toward animals takes place while *sauntering* through the poems. The sauntering rhythm qualifies Jeanie Thompson's observation that "the construction" of the lines in *The Vixen* "teaches us how to be still and listen"; rather, they teach us how to listen through sauntering.[28] In *The Vixen*'s "Walkers," the speaker shares "Then I could walk for a whole day" (*P* 2:8). Readers reading *The Vixen* walk the whole day, too.

To demonstrate how the sauntering form coincides with an attentiveness toward animals, I cite three of the poems in full, beginning with "Ancestral Voices":

In the old dark the late dark the still deep shadow
    that had travelled silently along itself all night
while the small stars of spring were yet to be seen and the few
    lamps burned by themselves with no expectations
far down through the valley then suddenly the voice
    of the blackbird came believing in the habit
of the light until the torn shadows of the ridges
    that had gone out one behind the other into the darkness
began appearing again still asleep surfacing in their
    dream and the stars all at once were gone and instead the song
of the blackbird flashed through the unlit boughs and far
    out in the oaks a nightingale went on echoing
itself drawing out its own invisible starlight
    these voices were lifted here long before the first
of our kind had come to be able to listen
    and with the faint light in the dew of the infant
leaves goldfinches flew out from their nests in the brambles
    they had chosen their colors for the day and they sang
of themselves which was what they had wakened to remember (*P* 2:40)

The poem attentively traces the emergence of the voice of blackbirds, nightingales, and goldfinches. Characteristic of the entire book, the lines in this poem end on a word that completes a vivid image before turning to the next progression of the narrative. Exceptions include "few / lamps"; "their / dream"; and "far / out." In some lines, the end grants a sense of completion, but after the break, still contributes energy to the following line in a pseudo-enjambment: ". . . before the first / of our kind." The indented form intensifies the caesura of each line break, and it encourages the reader to attend to the fullness of each line. The indented form, that is to say, generates a different kind of energy than poems like "Leviathan" that use no indentation. They are a different prime gesture, to echo Cummings.

The line breaks in "Snake" also intensify the caesuras. This narrative poem directs attention toward a snake, but it leaves room for the ways in which the snake attentively observes the human:

When it seemed to me that whatever was holding
    me there pretending to let me go but then bringing
me back each time as though I had never been gone
    and knowing me knowing me unseen among those rocks
when it seemed to me that whatever that might be
    had not changed for all my absence and still was not changing
once in the middle of the day late in that time
    I stood up from the writings unfinished on the table
in the echoless stone room looking over the valley
    I opened the door and on the stone doorsill
where every so often through the years I had come
    upon a snake lying out in the sunlight I found
the empty skin like smoke on the stone with the day
    still moving in it and when I touched it and lifted
all of it the whole thing seemed lighter than a single
    breath and then I was gone and that time had changed and when
I came again many years had passed and I saw
    one day along the doorsill outside the same room
a green snake lying in the sunlight watching me
    even from the eyes the skin loosens leaving the colors
that have passed through it and the colors shine after it has gone (*P* 2:23–24)

Thompson acutely observes how "the syntax of 'The Snake' coils for nearly seven lines before the actual story begins," and she emphasizes the "coiled energy" of the poem.[29] Without using the word, her reading identifies a zoopoetic dynamic. Additionally, the poetic form requires patience to write and to read—but it is this patience that cultivates an attentiveness toward another species' bodily *poiesis.* Near the poem's end, Merwin breaks a line at the verb "saw," and he includes a complete line before one reaches the direct object: ". . . and I saw / one day along the doorsill outside the same room / a green snake. . . ." Merwin shapes the form of the poem around the moment of attentiveness, placing pressure on the word "saw" and on "a green snake" by separating the two with a line that generates suspense. The reader must wait to discover what she or he saw. The tempo of the line breaks coincides with the tempo of the encounter with the snake, which is a subtle form of temporal iconicity. An attentiveness toward the snake shapes the pacing of the poem as well as its "coiled energy," thereby demonstrating two facet of zoopoetics.

In "Threshold," the poem's speaker enters a new dwelling; moreover, the swallows and bats usher him into a creative space:

> Swallows streaking in and out through the row of broken
> panes over the front door went on with their conversations
> of afterthoughts whatever they had been settling
> about early summer and nests and the late daylight
> and the vacant dwellings of swallows in the beams
> let their dust filter down as I brought in my bed
> while the door stood open onto the stone sill smoothed to water
> by the feet of inhabitants never known to me
> and when I turned to look back I did not recognize a thing
> the sound of flying whirred past me a voice called far away
> the swallows grew still and bats came out light as breath
> around the stranger by himself in the echoes
> what did I have to do with anything I could remember
> all I did not know went on beginning around me
> I had thought it would come later but it had been waiting (*P* 2:6)

The form of the poem saunters through this space, giving the reader time to linger on each image of the narrative. Like the other poems discussed from *The Vixen*, the line breaks place the reader in an attentive posture; the swallows and the bats unexpectedly change the space of the dwelling into the strange and the unknown—the space of the initial stirrings of *poiesis.* And I cannot help but draw the similarity between this moment and the moment articulated in Cummings' "i'd think 'wonder'" (*CP* 354)—the moment when the sighting of a bat *opened a door* to "think things / which / where supposed to / be out of [his] / reach." In both cases, an encounter with a bat stirred the poets toward *poiesis.* Furthermore, Merwin's phrase "all I did not know went on beginning around me" resurfaces in a later publication of Merwin's: "The Nomad Flute" from *The Shadow of Sirius.* "The Nomad Flute" is the book's first poem, and it is an apostrophe to Merwin's muse. Rephrasing the title exposes how the poem revisits *sauntering*—"The Nomad Flute" is the song of the one who walks:

> You that sang to me once sing to me now
> let me hear your long lifted note
> survive with me
> the star is fading
> I can think farther than that but I forget
> do you hear me
>
> do you still hear me
> does your air
> remember you
> o breath of morning
> night song morning song
> I have with me
> all that I do not know
> I have lost none of it
>
> but I know better now
> than to ask you
> where you learned that music
> where any of it came from
> once there were lions in China
>
> I will listen until the flute stops
> and the light is old again (*P* 2:543)

Even here, animals impact the song and listening to the song. The line "once there were lions in China" epitomizes a musical flute with the complex constellation of *n's* and the *n* and an *s* (o*n*ce, lio*ns*, i*n*, Chi*n*a), long *i's* (l*i*ons, Ch*i*na), and internal rhyme of *lion* and *in*. The word "once" suggests again the past and carries with it the shadow of extinction from *The Lice.* And the line's surprise (for it almost seems like a *non sequitur*), points us toward *all that we do not know* and therefore that moment where *poiesis* can begin. In the second to last line of "Threshold," "all I did not know" also becomes the first stirrings of the poetic moment as it "went on beginning around" the speaker. It is the unexpected visitation of the swallows and the bats that ushers Merwin into that space.

The sauntering form of *The Vixen* encourages an attentiveness to bats, swallows, snakes, goldfinches, nightingales, blackbirds, and many more species, but an earlier poem helps illuminate what, precisely, is at stake concerning the *saunter*: "An Encampment at Morning" from *The Compass Flower* (1977). The short poem exhibits an attentiveness toward spiders, and the speaker of the poem is walking—that is, "learning [his] steps"—amongst another nomadic species, a "migrant tribe of spiders." If there is any "hope" in Merwin's poetry and poetics, it is found "not in the inscriptions of a settled people" but rather from the "words

on a journey"—the steps that are taken by the nomad, the one who migrates, the one who is willing to *learn new steps*:

> A migrant tribe of spiders
> spread tents at dusk in the rye stubble
> come day I see the color
> of the planet under their white-beaded tents
> where the spiders are bent
> by shade fires in damp September
> to their live instruments
> and I see the color of the planet
> when their tents go from above it
> as I come that way in a breath cloud
> learning my steps
> among the tents rising invisibly like the shapes of snowflakes
> we are words on a journey
> not the inscriptions of a settled people (*P* 1:476)

These are not the steps of Gerald Manley Hopkins' "Generations have trod, have trod, have trod."[30] In the context of Merwin's poetics of migration, walking, listening, and planting, *learning new steps* cultivates humility, and it is a humility that emerges out of the anguish of environmental devastation and mass extinction. The ambition of "learning my steps" comes to full fruition in *The Vixen*, for an attentiveness toward animals shapes a sauntering form that has the potential to cultivate a way-of-being in the midst of multiple species.

"but here"

As hinted at above, Merwin's genius for sauntering emerges again throughout *The Shadow of Sirius* (2008), as does his attentiveness toward animals—and the absence of animals—amidst mass extinction.[31] By way of conclusion, I explore just one poem from *The Shadow of Sirius*, "The Mole," where the *poiesis* of humans and animals merge but in a surprising way. An attentiveness toward the absence of the mole pervades the poem (paradoxically) through the speaker's attentiveness toward the presence of the material signs left over from the mole's activity. The mole is never present in the poem nor along the speaker's (and his beloved's) walks. The poem also extends the paradox of the "place-space synergy" at work throughout Merwin's *oeuvre*, for the speaker's sense of identification with the mole (place) occurs through emphasizing the vast distance between humans and the mole (space).[32] "The Mole" also exhibits one innovative gesture that emerges, I suggest, from an attentiveness to these paradoxes surrounding that place where the mole's sphere merges with the human's:

> Here is yet one
> more life that we see only from outside

> from the outside
>
> not in itself but later
> in signs of its going
> a reminder
> in the spring daylight
>
> it happened when we were not noticing
> and so close to us
> that we might not have been here
> disregarded as we were
>
> see where we have walked
> the earth has risen again
> out of its darkness
> where it has been recognized
> without being seen
> known by touch
> of the blind velvet fingers
> the wise nails
> descendants of roots and water
>
> we have seen them
> only in death and in pictures
> opened from darkness afterward
>
> but here the earth
> has been touched and raised
> eye has not seen it come
> ear has not heard
> the famous fur
> the moment that finds its way
> in the dark without us (*P* 2:577–78)

The zoopoetic dynamic where an innovation in poetic form emerges, in this case, from an attentiveness to "the moment that finds its way / in the dark without us" occurs in the line break between "we have seen them / only in death and in pictures" and in the emphatic "*but here.*" The stanza begins with place, "we have seen them," only for the next line to cancel out the moment of positive identification, replacing it with absence, distance, and therefore space, "only in death and in pictures / opened from darkness afterward." The following stanza break accentuates a caesura in which the reader can linger in the paradox. If readers *listen to the weight of the language as it moves*, the next stanza begins with an emphatic attentiveness to this site of a present absence, "*but here.*" The "here" refers to the place where the mole "touched and raised" the earth as well as to the paradox of a present absence. I use "place" in Gary Snyder's sense, for it is "like a mirror" and "can hold anything, on any scale." This mirror holds past and present markings, for Snyder suggests that the earth is a "palimpsest," a "great

tablet holding the multiple overlaid new and ancient traces of the swirl of forces." He continues, "Each place is its own place, forever (eventually) wild. A place on earth is a mosaic within larger mosaics."[33] The "signs" of the mole—created by the "blind velvet fingers / the wise nails"—is merely a micro-mosaic etched momentarily on the earth's "great tablet." But for Merwin, it is a moment charged with the paradoxes outlined above, and it is explored in a poetics that gestures toward the walk. The breaks across "only in death and in pictures / opened from darkness afterward . . . // But here" mime the posture of one who engages the present absence of an animal while *sauntering*, with all of its observations, pauses, reflections, silent musings, and the original energy of the first stirrings of *poiesis*.

In *The Shadow of Sirius*, Merwin is still "learning [his] steps"—cultivating a way-of-being amidst and amongst other species on a planet in the midst of mass extinction. The form of his poetry often mimes the rhythm of these steps. To read Merwin is to walk with him too. Merwin, though, is not the only poet to attentively engage animals with an awareness of mass extinction. A younger contemporary poet, Brenda Hillman, does so as well, and though Merwin can be seen as a political poet (especially in *The Lice*), he is much more reserved in comparison to Hillman.

Notes

1. Henry David Thoreau, *The Essays of Henry D. Thoreau*, ed. Lewis Hyde (New York: North Point Press, 2002), 149.
2. W. S Merwin, "On Open Form," in *Regions of Memory: Uncollected Prose, 1949-82*, ed. Ed Folsom and Cary Nelson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 299.
3. Merwin does, for instance, use punctuation in "The Last One" from *The Lice* (*P* 1:271–73).
4. W. S Merwin, Ed Folsom, and Cary Nelson, "'Fact Has Two Faces': Interview," in *Regions of Memory: Uncollected Prose, 1949-82* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 357.
5. Though I trace a continuity from Whitman, through Cummings, to Merwin, there are crucial differences. Concerning Whitman and Merwin, Thomas Byers articulates a sharp difference. Whitman's "most fitting relationship to nature" depends upon speech, while Merwin's relationship calls for silence and therefore "a speech that is self-negating." Thomas B. Byers, "Believing Too Much in Words: W. S. Merwin and the Whitman Heritage," *The Missouri Review* 3, no. 2 (1980): 87. Indeed, in the interview with Nelson and Folsom "Fact Has Two Faces," Merwin shares his unease with Whitman's overbearing celebration of westward expansion ("Fact Has Two Faces," 321). And as a later note highlights in this chapter, *The Lice* subverts Whitman's vision through several clear allusions to *Leaves of Grass*. However, the similarity I trace has to do with an attentiveness toward animals and toward the materiality of the poetic page despite the fact that Whitman seemed to listen more through his voice while Merwin seems to listen first with the roots of his hair.
6. Merwin, Folsom, and Nelson, "Fact Has Two Faces," 355.

7. Ibid., 356.
8. Jeanie Thompson and Jonathan Weinert, "Raw Shore of Paradise: A Conversation with W. S. Merwin," in *Until Everything Is Continuous Again: American Poets on the Recent Work of W. S. Merwin*, ed. Jonathan Weinert and Kevin Prufer (Seattle: WordFarm, 2012), 117, 118.
9. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to articulate and encompass the full extent of the emergent term *ecopoetics*. Here, I use it in the spirit of Jed Rasula's discussion of the poet-as-bat, where poetry is a "kind of echo-location" that can cultivate a profound awareness of both place and space within the biosphere (*This Compost*, 8). J. Scott Bryson's *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* offers a helpful, three-fold definition of ecopoetry: ecocentricity, an "imperative toward humility," and activism. J. Scott Bryson, "Introduction," in *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*, ed. J. Scott Bryson (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2002. 5–6. For a more current discussion of ecopoetics, see Brenda Iijima's edited collection *)((eco(lang)(uage(reader))* (Brooklyn: Portable Press, 2010); and Angela Hume, "Imagining Ecopoetics: An Interview with Robert Hass, Brenda Hillman, Evelyn Reilly, and Jonathan Skinner," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 19, no. 4 (2013): 751–66.
10. W. S. Merwin, *The Collected Poems of W. S. Merwin*, ed. J. D. McClatchy, 2 vols. (New York: Library of America, 2013), 1:294; hereafter cited parenthetically as *P*.
11. J. Scott Bryson, *The West Side of Any Mountain: Place, Space, and Ecopoetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 104, 111, 109.
12. Jarold Ramsey, "The Continuities of W. S. Merwin," in *W. S. Merwin: Essays on the Poetry*, ed. Ed Folsom and Cary Nelson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 37.
13. In "'I have Been a Long Time in a Strange Country': W. S. Merwin and America," in *W. S. Merwin: Essays on the Poetry*, ed. Cary Nelson and Ed Folsom (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), Ed Folsom explores how *The Lice* subverts Whitman's vision for an abounding, ever expanding, all encompassing self: "*The Lice* is Merwin's anti-song of the self. Here, instead of the Whitmanian self expanding and absorbing everything, naming it in an ecstasy of union, we find a self stripped of meaning, unable to expand, in a landscape that refuses to unite with the self, refuses to be assimilated, in a place alien and unnameable" (235). He observes that the first poem begins with a "ruined American Adam" who has no animals left to name; likewise, the final poem of *The Lice* subverts the end of "Song of Myself." Whereas Whitman ends with the notion of "finding," Merwin ends with the notion of looking (242).
14. Byers, "Believing Too Much in Words," 86.
15. Shepard, *Thinking Animals*, 249, 6–7. In light of Donna Haraway's *When Species Meet*, we recognize that intra- and interspecies "play" can also generate this reciprocal spiral toward intelligence.
16. Abram, *Spell*, 86.
17. Burke discusses the leviathan in his section on "Power" in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 5th edition (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1767), 114–115.
18. Jane Frazier suggests that Merwin confronts the Judeo-Christian paradigm with his own "theologically laden homily" (101–102), but I prefer the term "myth." It is not only that Merwin is an "ecoprophet . . . confronting us with what we are doing to the animals of the planet and our subsequent denial of responsibility," but moreover that "For a Coming Extinction" erases and then recasts one of the troubling myths of creation. Jane

Frazier, *From Origin to Ecology: Nature and the Poetry of W. S. Merwin* (Madison: Associated University Press, 1999), 101.

19. The term "palimpsest" refers to the process of erasure and reinscription. When scribes scraped text off of a manuscript made of parchment (skin of a cow) or of vellum (the skin of a calf) in order to clear space for a new inscription, they created a palimpsest. One can detect vestiges of the old text beneath the new, rendering the manuscript a multilayered and fascinating artifact. Within Merwin studies, the palimpsest concept serves as a trope for the ways in which the text alludes to, subverts, and rewrites a particular story, tradition, or idea. For instance, Walter Kalaidjian describes Merwin's poetry as an intertextual "web of fragments, a palimpsest, where what can be read is either never entire or a dialogic effect of other utterances it simultaneously reveals and effaces." Walter Kalaidjian, "Linguistic Mirages: Language and Landscape in W. S. Merwin's Later Poetry," in *W. S. Merwin: Essays on the Poetry*, ed. Cary Nelson and Ed Folsom (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 204. Also, in the interview "'Fact Has Two Faces,'" Merwin, Folsom, and Nelson discuss the "feeling of inhabiting a palimpsest" while driving through the country and while engaging Merwin's poetry and poetics ("Fact Has Two Faces," 328).

20. Hank Lazer, "For a Coming Extinction: A Reading of W. S. Merwin's *The Lice*," *ELH* 49, no. 1 (1982): 268.

21. Bryson, *West Side*, 111, 104.

22. W. S. Merwin, *The Ends of the Earth: Essays* (Washington D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004), 180, 189, 188.

23. Merwin, Folsom, and Nelson, "Fact Has Two Faces," 334.

24. Merwin, "On Open Form," 299.

25. Merwin, Folsom, and Nelson, "Fact Has Two Faces," 357–58. As the implications of Merwin's palimpsest poetics unfold, I note Cary Nelson's and Ed Folsom's observations in the first appendix from *W. S. Merwin: Essays on the Poetry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987). In the subsection "Writing as Revision," they summarize how Merwin, at times, follows a "rather palimpsestic writing practice" as he makes new compositions upon the "reverse side of his own earlier manuscripts" (332). This "palimpsestic writing practice" dovetails well with issues surrounding the role of poetry amidst biological and linguistic extinction. Though the planet (and poetics) are scraped, so to speak, vestiges of a present-absence remain.

26. Matthew Zapruder, "Most of the Stories Have to Do with Vanishing," in *Until Everything Is Continuous Again: American Poets on the Recent Work of W. S. Merwin*, ed. Jonathan Weinert and Kevin Prufer (Seattle: WordFarm, 2012), 80.

27. Thoreau, *Essays*, 149.

28. Jeanie Thompson, "To Shine after It Has Gone: Resonance in W. S. Merwin's *The Vixen*," in *Until Everything Is Continuous Again: American Poets on the Recent Work of W. S. Merwin*, ed. Jonathan Weinert and Kevin Prufer (Seattle: WordFarm, 2012), 89.

29. Ibid., 94, 95.

30. Hopkins' line comes from "God's Grandeur," and despite Hopkins' optimism that "nature is never spent," the trodding upon the earth—where "all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil; / And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell"—*has*, in a radical and perhaps irredeemable way, "spent" nature. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. W. H. Gardner (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 27.

31. In "The Silence of the Mine Canaries" for instance, the mine (which stands for the planet) and the canaries (who stand for all species extinct or on their way toward extinction) revisit Merwin's sense of urgency (*P* 2:589–90). At the poem's end, Merwin lists many species who no longer return to familiar places, which ought to generate a similar kind of urgency as Carson's *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002). Though more personal, "Calling a Distant Animal" revisits the ideas from *The Lice*'s "The Animals" (*P* 2:566–67; 1:267), and therefore an attentiveness toward the absence of animals, in this time the speaker's companion species. And yet, poems such as "One of the Butterflies" further explore the stirrings that occur when and where species meet in all of their presence (*P* 2:592–93).

32. Bryson, *West Side*, 111.

33. Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild: Essays* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 25, 27.