

How In Shadowed Landscapes?

"This is the world in profile, medieval, the landscape gathered up into the face..."

Jorie Graham ['Harvest for Bergson' in *Hybrid of Plants and Ghosts*]

Aim:

This workshop will explore *how* the notion of landscape haunts our presence, *how* landscape and language grows from our own fractured 'scapes,' *how* landscapes divulge, sunder, determine the spaces we inhabit, *how*, as writers and figures in landscape, we can re-articulate 'landscape' in order to engage in waves of thinking and writing about its role in the world, question *how* fragile and formidable it is, ask ourselves, *how* in shadowed landscapes there is sentience to which we must pay close attention, *how* in the words of Jorie Graham,

"easily our tracks
are filled. How easily
we are undone, ... " [On Why I Would Betray You]

The workshop will reflect on poetry which engages in and departs from walks through literal and personal landscapes, across time and place: Zoë Skoulding, Harriet Tarlo, Peter Riley as well as the voices of Latasha N Nevada Diggs, Camille Dung, Louise Glück and Jorie Graham, will cross our reading paths on which discuss and develop our writing ideas. We will appropriate our own conceptual notions of landscapes and nurture their intent, allowing the "line of the landscape /run through me to somewhere else/ ((Zoë Skoulding).

Preparation:

Before the workshop:

1. Please read *The Poetics of Place: Inviting landscape to become part of poetry* by Harriet Fraser, Rob Fraser & 'Somewhere-Nowhere.' I think it's a lovely piece on building a relationship with landscape.

Underline ideas and concepts (I have started to do this on the PDF) that appeal to you, even *phrases* that resonate. These might prove to be fruitful in your writing, you may play around with some of these ideas in your writing about *walking through a landscape* or place them elsewhere in another piece of writing. I like the sentence, "We are looking at a tree but the tree is looking out." (pg. 61) I also like the idea of making art in a landscape and how the landscape really is art.

2. Take a walk. This walk could be an urban walk, as simple as a walk to the local shop or a countryside/seaside/woodland walk. On this walk, observe everything intently. How do the trees move? How do the roads bend/glimmer in certain angles of light? What can you not hear? How do you feel entering this landscape? Or is the landscape entering you somehow? Does it take you back somewhere as you walk through it? Try to make mental notes but write them down as soon as you get home. ***Don't edit anything***, let everything just pour. If you are lucky enough you might want to sit somewhere and make observations or *write as you move*. You might develop the notes in this writing further, but don't edit at this stage! Make sure you have these notes with you for the workshop.

Introduction:

"A bird re entering a bush,
like an idea regaining
its intention, seeks
the missed discoveries
before attempting
flight again..." (Jorie Graham 'One in the Hand' in *Erosion*)

"I have grave doubts that an "ecopoetics" can be anything but personal." (John Kinsella from *Redstart*)

"Place is about event as much as location. Place is interstice. Place is also a reckoning of intrusion and damage and the labelling of forces (greed, security, self and communal empowerment, spiritual materialism) that seem adverse to the health of a biodiversity."
(John Kinsella in *Redstart*)

Warm Up:

5 min

What does landscape mean for you? What type of landscape do you identify with? Or have a connection to? A relationship to which you return? How do you feel when you are in that landscape? What *season/s* best represents you?

Could you write freely in response to this? It could be a list of places /names or things in nature. For example, I return to the landscape of woods, houses, and to the image of snow.

Read:

Harriet Tarlo's poem:

my self

a hair -hooded
 shadow
over bright grass
into twisted
 bark
in eng land

2/3 min Could you write/sketch a '*self*' in words of how you see yourself, either walking through a landscape or in a landscape/place – perhaps you might refer back to your walking notes? Perhaps this could be the beginning of a longer narrative on *self in your landscape*. (Keep the notes)

Exercise 1: part (a)

Read the following poems & discuss the structure and how it might reflect walking and how the poems observe the landscape and the *self* and *shadows* of the landscape.

Peter Riley's *Vertigo*

Thomas A Clark's *The Grey Fold*,

Harriet Tarlo's *Steady yourself on a grass* (from *Nab*)

Exercise 1: part (b)

With this in mind, look at this image below (on the next page) and imagine that you might be walking *in and through* this landscape (perhaps it doesn't resemble a landscape for you) perhaps you see something else? Respond to this image. You might focus on a small part of it and focus on the *texture*, that too might develop into another narrative, it might remind you of the texture of the earth, you might even go back to your *walking notes* in the pre workshop exercise and incorporate some ideas from that into this image. **Layer the narratives, write like layers of paint.**



<http://www.lesleyclarkeart.com/Gallery.html?tryabstractart=8390520672>

DO NOT LOOK AT ANY INFO ON THIS IMAGE BEFORE YOU START TO WRITE ANYTHING. -

Exercise 2: part (a)

Listen to this You Tube clip called *Sounds in the Clouds*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFJaxN0vQwo>

As you watch, write down your emotions, what you hear musically? Does this match the movement of cloud in any way for you? What landscapes and shapes do you notice in the clouds? What metaphorical charge could clouds drive/represent? Write briefly and freely what you observe.

Exercise 2 (part b)

Read the poem *Patched* by Mark Dickinson – I like this loose structure how it reflects the movement of clouds and maybe something else too?

Now look at your notes that you have just written, could you spend 5-7 min on restructuring what you have written? Play around with structure and have some fun!

Exercise 3 (part a)

Read two poems by Zoë Skoulding: *In the forest where they fell* and *Through Trees 2* (there are 6 of these poems but we are only looking at one of these).

In the forest where they fell – Focus on how Skoulding observes this forest, how granular she is with her descriptions, is she also saying something else? What kind of a walk through the forest is this? Is there an emotion you can identify in this poem? Or does it feel retrained, distanced?

Through Trees 2 – This poem looks like a slender tree. It is almost a microscopic, tactile print of bark skin, evoking age, time and the environment.

Exercise 3 (part b)

Look at the following images: What do you see through the trees? What can you hear? What shadows are there? Could you *deconstruct* your narrative in some way, reminiscent of Skoulding's poem. Provide half a narrative or a fractured narrative. Perhaps approach it by zooming in on the bark?

Imagine that the trees in image 2 are people – What kind of people would they be? What is their relationship?

Write in response to one or both of these tasks. 10 min



image 1: Tree Drawings Vincent Van Gogh



image 2: Amy Talluto

Exercise 4 – (part a)

Personal Landscapes

Read Camille T Dungy's ***First Fire***

Latasha N Nevada Diggs's ***My First Black Nature Poem***

Louise Glück's ***A Summer Garden***

I think these poems embody personal landscapes as well as physical ones. They move the reader to other 'personal scapes' using direct and indirect images of nature to anchor the reader, and frame a personal narrative. There are layers of narrative evoking history, death, questioning race and culture, age and the fading beauty of nature itself. And potentially much more –

First Fire

Camille T Dungy

Stripped in a flamedance, the bluff backing our houses
quivered in wet-black skin. A shawl of haze tugged tight
around the starkness. We could have choked on August.

Smoke thick in our throats, nearly naked as the earth,
we played bare feet over the heat caught in asphalt.
Could we, green girls, have prepared for this? Yesterday,

we played in sand-carpeted caves. The store we built
sold broken bits of ice plant, empty snail shells, leaves.
Our school's walls were open sky. We reeled in wonder

from the hills, oblivious to the beckoning
crescendo and to our parent's hushed communion.
When our bluff swayed into the undulation, we ran

into the still streets of our suburb, feet burning
against a fury that we did not know was change.

Camille Dungy, "First Fire" from *What to Eat, What to Drink, What to Leave for Poison*.
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My First Black Nature Poem

Latasha N Nevada Diggs

there is a dark mass following me. these legs are clumsy. they flap quickly.
I want to slow them down. but my nerves. *Lord*, these pensive endings.

the sun slumps against the merging fall on red leaves.
and *where the natives are unenlightened*, the mass comes closer.

only white people swim in lakes nowadays
you know . . . Crystal Lake?

never seen a black person jump in a lake;
let alone a river till this summer.
the Bronx River is said to be clean: we care about clean.
a month before, two boys drowned in the Bronx River.
a week after, a boy jumps into it unfazed.

abandoned tires, relics of its sewer days, river herring spark no fear.
and a publicly funded park with a biology class, a boat-making workshop
for the children of Hunt's Point, gives me hope we'd wet our hair again.

(these follicles don't surf; don't swim)

but here in Virginia, there's little comfort.
the blush current from underwater springs makes me tense.

white people form groups to paddle on boards across the Hudson,
taking on trends from Hawai'i. they tap into the yesterdays
of Algonquian tongues. Wappinger. Mohican.

a sporty new aged (like gouda) convenience.
a luxury to admire when Long Beach is too far
and Rockaway too dirty.

black folk don't swim. we splash and cool off.
we a ways forward from a Splenda hint of Senegalese manliness diving from a ferry,
miles off shore from Gorée. that water got too much memory.
we much prefer chlorine. that salt and fresh water our hypertension.

and that ocean is curiously scary.
and this lake is charmed and churning with tales from the deep.

profound is this river of B-rated torture.
deep are shadow people speculated through my rave tangerine goggles.

on Lake Champlain at night, the chilly air felt like a presence.
swamp monsters (this ain't a swamp). tubular amphibians (they'd be in rivers).
aquatic reptilians. ancestors distraught and vengeful (like Jason).

but this is smaller and gnawing like chiggers; something from my weed days
could live. down. here.

my arms fight the green clearness. so mud olive I cannot see the bottom.
beneath me is crisp. a fallen branch is mistaken for an eel.

LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, "My First Black Nature Poem™" from *TwERK*. Copyright © 2013 by
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A Summer Garden

Louise Glück

Several weeks ago I discovered a photograph of my mother
sitting in the sun, her face flushed as with achievement or triumph.
The sun was shining. The dogs
were sleeping at her feet where time was also sleeping,
calm and unmoving as in all photographs.

I wiped the dust from my mother's face.
Indeed, dust covered everything; it seemed to me the persistent
haze of nostalgia that protects all relics of childhood.
In the background, an assortment of park furniture, trees and shrubbery.

The sun moved lower in the sky, the shadows lengthened and darkened.
The more dust I removed, the more these shadows grew.
Summer arrived. The children
leaned over the rose border, their shadows
merging with the shadows of the roses.

A word came into my head, referring
to this shifting and changing, these erasures
that were now obvious—

it appeared, and as quickly vanished.
Was it blindness or darkness, peril, confusion?

Summer arrived, then autumn. The leaves turning,
the children bright spots in a mash of bronze and sienna.

2

When I had recovered somewhat from these events,
I replaced the photograph as I had found it
between the pages of an ancient paperback,
many parts of which had been
annotated in the margins, sometimes in words but more often
in spirited questions and exclamations
meaning “I agree” or “I’m unsure, puzzled—”

The ink was faded. Here and there I couldn’t tell
what thoughts occurred to the reader
but through the bruise-like blotches I could sense
urgency, as though tears had fallen.

I held the book awhile.
It was *Death in Venice* (in translation);
I had noted the page in case, as Freud believed,
nothing is an accident.

Thus the little photograph
was buried again, as the past is buried in the future.
In the margin there were two words,
linked by an arrow: “sterility” and, down the page, “oblivion”—

“And it seemed to him the pale and lovely
summoner out there smiled at him and beckoned...”

How quiet the garden is;
 no breeze ruffles the Cornelian cherry.
 Summer has come.

How quiet it is
 now that life has triumphed. The rough

pillars of the sycamores
 support the immobile
 shelves of the foliage,

the lawn beneath
 lush, iridescent—

And in the middle of the sky,
 the immodest god.

Things are, he says. They are, they do not change;
 response does not change.

How hushed it is, the stage
 as well as the audience; it seems
 breathing is an intrusion.

He must be very close,
 the grass is shadowless.

How quiet it is, how silent,
 like an afternoon in Pompeii.

Beatrice took the children to the park in Cedarhurst.
 The sun was shining. Airplanes
 passed back and forth overhead, peaceful because the war was over.

It was the world of her imagination:

true and false were of no importance.

Freshly polished and glittering—
that was the world. Dust
had not yet erupted on the surface of things.

The planes passed back and forth, bound
for Rome and Paris—you couldn't get there
unless you flew over the park. Everything
must pass through, nothing can stop—

The children held hands, leaning
to smell the roses.
They were five and seven.

Infinite, infinite—that
was her perception of time.

She sat on a bench, somewhat hidden by oak trees.
Far away, fear approached and departed;
from the train station came the sound it made.

The sky was pink and orange, older because the day was over.

There was no wind. The summer day
cast oak-shaped shadows on the green grass.

Which poem can you identify with? Which poem speaks to you in some way? Which poem reminds you of a recent political/environmental situation? For example, on my first reading of Dungy's *First Fire*, I thought of the wild fires breaking out in Australia and other parts of the world, and then started to think about *fire* metaphorically and then of course the image of the fire in the poem, working on many levels.

Ideas to think about for your writing. Can you think of a situation you feel strongly about/political/historical/personal experience? (Make notes on this). Can you think of a photograph that you have kept for a long time? What do you like about this photograph? What season was it taken in? What can you say about it beyond the image that is before us? Can you think of an incident in your childhood that you feel explores a strong emotion:

such as anger or guilt, confusion etc – can you place it or incorporate an outside landscape on the memory?

Reference:

<https://www.aaihs.org/the-radical-nature-of-black-eco-poetry/>

The traditional context of the nature poem in the Western intellectual canon, spawned by the likes of Virgil and Theocritus and solidified by the Romantics and Transcendentalists, informs the prevailing views of the natural world as a place of positive collaboration, refuge, idyllic rural life, or wilderness. The poetry of African Americans only conforms to these traditions in limited ways. Many black writers simply do not look at their environment from the same perspective as Anglo-American writers who discourse with the natural world. The pastoral as diversion, a construction of a culture that dreams, through landscape and animal life, of a certain luxury or innocence, is less prevalent. Rather, in a great deal of African American poetry we see poems written from the perspective of the workers of the field. Though these poems defy the pastoral conventions of Western poetry, are they not pastorals? The poems describe moss, rivers, trees, dirt, caves, dogs, fields: elements of an environment steeped in a legacy of violence, forced labour, torture, and death.

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Fraser, Harriet, and Fraser, Rob. "Poetics of Place." *Performance Research* 24.2 (2019): 58-62.

Graham Jorie: *Erosion*, Princeton University Press, 1983

Graham Jorie: *Hybrids of Plants and Ghosts*, Princeton University Press, 1983

Full versions of the poems by Jorie Graham on the next page –

ONE IN THE HAND

A bird re-entering a bush,
like an idea regaining
its intention, seeks
the missed discoveries
before attempting
flight again.
The small black spirit
tucks in its wings,
softest accordion
whose music is
the perfect landing,
the disappearance
into the dangerous
wintered body
of forsythia. Just as
from time to time
we need to seize again
the whole language
in search of
better desires.
If we could only imagine
a better arc
of flight; you get
just what you want.
And see how beautiful
an alphabet becomes
when randomness sets in,
like mother tired
after disappointment,
and keeping us
uninformed—the man
walking away whom we
want to recall
and in whom we invest

the whole explanation.
One in the hand,
one in the mind,
how clearly you know
what you have, how clearly
what he'll want to do, and do
when you let go.

ON WHY I WOULD BETRAY YOU

Because this is the way our world goes under: white lies,
the snow,
each flake a single instance of
nostalgia. Before you know it
everything you've said
is true. The flakes

nest in the flaws, the hairline cracks, the stubs
where branches
snapped—only unbroken lines, unwavering,
for building on. How easily our tracks
are filled. How easily
we are undone,

knowing the events
without the plot: caution and light and the odor of skin
threading
the secret, a loom. What will happen?
What I do
in betrayal

is play at being small, the body a protectorate I can
win back
at will; is alter the rules
in the pattern,
what happened.
It snows

like there is no tomorrow, the world growing younger
in her new attire. Who wouldn't love to render
her white lies to their flawlessness like this,
in brushstrokes
dagger true,

yet kind. For is it not true, this smooth new skin,
were we not also good? Each indiscretion
a caress of faithlessness,
a feather to touch
you by.

HARVEST FOR BERGSON

Last night I watched the harvest moonrise. There were moths
trapped in with me. Hear them tap like fingertips
on walls and windowpanes. For moonlight
blurs the facts,

its shade not keen or rational like that of sunlight
seeking to capture the nature of its subject;
it seeks, rather, to let it go,
to show what it is not . . .

Because it is what is not animal in us, the best intentions
we still have
at the moment of perception: to see it all.
Then we grow hot, tragic and fleshed
with intellect,

dividing. The world we live in
is going to change, to more than disappear.
This is the light that blinds you by degrees
that it may always feel like sight. This is the world

in profile, medieval,
the landscape gathered up into the face, the foreground;
and if the foreground sways
it isn't to awaken us, ever so gently; no, it means for us
to go

to sleep, perspective drawing in like peasants gathering
within the city walls
when war is imminent. The distance, its fields,
growing baroque, then wild

then dry. And those that, squinting, will peer out over
the moonlit walls tonight,
can't quite make out the empty fields, which one
is theirs; it slips their mind. . . . This is what dies
not in duration
but in time.