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Poetry and ecological awareness:

Inspiration from Pierluigi Cappello’s poetry

Marzia Varutti

Poetry and ecology

In the poem "Idillio," Pierluigi Cappello writes:

> A spiderweb, just after a thunderstorm,
> a clapping of light changing,
> unchanging, in the cool breeze […]

The breeze, in turn, “gives breath” to the leaves. In a few words, Capello’s poem registers stillness in the changing light, crispness in the air, enlivening of the foliage; a few words make us ‘feel’ the past thunderstorm, partake in the essence of the moment. This is the power of poetry: words chosen with art can electrify our senses, ignite the imagination needed to envision and create a different world, and shake off some of the inertia of everyday living, which invites inattention and disconnection. All this has ecological relevance as these habitual human responses are a major obstacle to climate action.

The aim of this chapter is to show that poetry is uniquely positioned to pierce through inertia, apathy and denial. Poetry can enhance ecological awareness—that is, awareness of our deep

entanglements with the planet—and in educational settings, it can lay the foundation for lifelong engagements. Ecological awareness is a necessary condition for ecological action (Chawla 2008; Angelovska et al. 2012). If ecology is essentially about inter-relatedness, about relationships between organisms and their environments, then poetry *is* ecology as it is intrinsically about relationships – with ourselves, fellow human beings, the planet; indeed poetry can be seen as the art and craft of putting those relationships into words. Given the inherently cross-disciplinary character of the argument, the chapter draws on debates on the concept of ecological awareness in the humanities (Morton, Ingold), and proposes a 'poetic affective methodology' based on full participation, attention and affective involvement of the writer with the poetic oeuvre.

I will draw on the works of Italian (Friulian) poet Pierluigi Cappello[2] to illustrate my arguments. A unique voice in contemporary Italian poetry, Cappello shows us how to practice attention to the world and how to tend to the human and other-than-human condition whilst acknowledging their deep entanglement. To my knowledge Cappello has not explicitly positioned himself or his work as ecological or 'eco-poetic'[3]; I believe this does not detract from the pertinence of linking his poetry to ecological awareness, quite the contrary, it reinforces my argument that poetry – all poetry – is inherently ecological as it teaches us to notice, to pay attention and become aware of our connection to what surrounds us.

Poetry has shaken off (neo-)romantic bohemian stereotypes and is today perhaps more than ever popular. In January 2021, it was the moving performance of the young African-American poet Amanda Gorman that caught global attention at the inauguration of the 46th President of the United States. Gorman's popularity comes in the wave of the Canadian Punjabi-Sikh poet Rupi Kaur, whose 2014 collection *Milk and Honey* sold millions copies. Kaur has become the emblem of a generation of 'Instapoets', young poets with a prominent media presence on platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, where they publish short, plain, confessional-style poems. Albeit raising concerns about the commodification of poetry (Miller 2019; Wilson 2017), the sudden and

sensational popularity of 'Instapoetry' indicates that poetry – in new formats and through new channels – does have a readership, unprecedentedly large and young. Consistently, as Instapoetry flows from our screens, bookshops are replete (Ferguson 2019) with anthologies of poetry pharmacopoeia (eg. Alma 2015; Sieghart 2017) offering to come to the rescue of our battered souls. It is not a coincidence if we turn to poetry in the hardest times, as poetry responds to a deep need to reconnect, to mend and heal broken relationships, including with the planet.

Poetry carries deep ecological relevance. Poetry matters to us as individuals, to our emotional and mental well-being, which directly affect our capacity to function and act in ecologically responsible manner. Poetry matters to us as societies, and the relationship we entertain with each other, as the global scale of ecological degradation demands globally coordinated, concerted action. Poetry matters to us as a species, as it can indirectly inform our relationship with the planet we inhabit. And poetry matters also beyond us, beyond human presence, as it affects our capacity to imagine and shape the worlds we will leave behind as legacy.

A poetic affective methodology

The affective turn in the humanities and social sciences (Clough & Halley 2007) has cast light on the pivotal importance of emotions in our lives. Whilst much research is exploring how affect and emotions as theoretical and analytical lenses change our epistemologies (eg. Dukes et al. 2021), less attention has been paid to how the renewal of interest towards affect is transforming the way we do research: the way we observe, participate, reflect, interpret, and write. To capture these dimensions, we need to turn the lenses of affect onto ourselves and our research endeavours. I experiment with this approach in this chapter.

My main argument – poetry fosters ecological awareness – informs the research methodology, whereby a poetic gaze permeates the way I read a poem and write about it, as I let the poem guide me into new forms of attention, of tending to the world and my deep enmeshment with it. I (the reader / academic writer) enter into an affective dialogue with the poet and the poem's

subject matter in order to engender what anthropologist Tim Ingold (2022, xii) has called 'knowing from inside': 'a method, that would join *with* the people and things with whom and which we share a world, allowing knowledge to grow from our correspondences with them'. I am interested in exploring poetic ways of writing academically. I suggest that this is not so much a matter of writing style, as of positioning: I consciously wish to abandon the position of 'impartial' observer advocated by the scientific approach, and intentionally put myself in the position of being a participant, 'being with', and therefore being affected (on affect as method see Varutti 2021). I share anthropologist Tim Ingold's (Spencer & Ingold 2020, 211) lament that in academic texts, words 'have been sterilised, sanitised, cut off from the world whose praises they sing. We should not blame words for their academic incarceration.' Rather, he continues 'words, especially when they are written by hand, are feelingful, they well up from the body in manual gesture, and as every poet knows, they are laden with affective resonance.' Writing academically about poetry should not pre-empt the possibility to write from a poetic standpoint, which I take to be a participant standpoint. In adopting this stance, I am inspired by a long tradition of academics writing poetically as affected participants, such as anthropologist Tim Ingold mentioned above (see for instance 2000, 2022), environmental biologist Robin Wall Kimmerer (eg. 2020, 2021) and ecologist and philosopher David Abram (eg. 1996, 2011) among many others. They all show that poetic academic writing is in itself a kind of *training* – both for authors and readers – in the skills of seeing, listening, noticing, paying attention, letting ourselves be affected, and entering into dialogue with the surrounding animate world. These practices constitute the essence of what I call a 'poetic affective methodology'.

I suggest they carry ecological relevance. In a poem, metaphors and images are mobilized to convey a complex interplay of sensory, embodied, cognitive, affective and linguistic dimensions. Exposure to, and engagement with this composite grammar nurtures what Fritjof Capra (1995) has called 'ecological literacy' or ecoliteracy, that is "our ability to understand the basic principles of

ecology and to live accordingly" (Capra 2007, 8), and more specifically 'sustainability literacy' "the skills, attitudes, competencies, dispositions and values that are necessary for surviving and thriving in the declining conditions of the world in ways which slow down that decline as far as possible" (Stibbe 2009, 11). Ecoliteracy is a crucial skill for young and future generations, and we should harness all resources available in order to instil it, especially in children, teenagers and young adults. Poetry is uniquely suited to the purpose. Whether we are teachers in public education institutions, pedagogues in informal educational frameworks, trainers in self-development courses, or simply speakers in community events, poetry offers significant educational value and potential as the analysis of poetic texts can be used to educate to attention, to bring about and hone the skills of sensing and feeling, tending to, focusing on, tuning with, and participating in. These are to a large extent innate skills, and are most often intact and vibrant in children. It's therefore less a matter of teaching them to look and notice, as a matter of teaching them the *value* of looking and noticing, and teaching them the resilience it takes to keep up these skills, and the ethos that underpins them, in a society that tends to overlook them, or worse, devalues them. Teachers of all grades and kinds are called to play a critical ecological role; poetry can be another precious arrow in our quiver.

After a brief discussion of the concept of ecological awareness, I illustrate my propositions through the analysis of the poetry of Cappello, which I approach through the lenses of a poetic affective methodology.

Poetry and Ecological awareness

Ecological awareness is awareness of what it means to exist – to live, think, act, feel, dream – in relation to, and together with other organisms and environments. It entails a (re-)awakening of the senses, alertness to sensory stimuli and a firm grounding in the present and in the soil right under our feet. Ecological awareness effectively counters inattention and indifference by developing more attentive ways of being in the world.

Poetry is advantageously positioned to foster ecological awareness. If we agree that poetry is a form of art, then we might subscribe to the argument of philosopher Tim Morton (2021) that art can ultimately awake us to the wonder and strangeness of the world. More to the point, the words of Tim Ingold offer a valuable perspective on the unique gifts of poetry to reawaken our senses:

> Science does not teach us how to love the world. It is left to art to bring us to our senses, to show us how to open our hearts and minds to what surrounds us, rather than turning our backs on it in the name of objectivity. Art rekindles wonder and astonishment. (…) I do think that art can and should rekindle the senses, so that we can learn to attend directly, even lovingly, to the world around us, and to respond in kind—with precision, sensitivity and wisdom. That's what I mean by ecological awareness (Spencer & Ingold 2020, 214).

Following Ingold (2018, 225), writing and reading poetry become forms of inquiry in their own right, as each artwork/poem is an experimental form of 'ecological' investigation that 'moves forward in real time along with the lives of those who are touched by it, and with the world to which both it and they belong' (2018, 218). Ingold's approach is based on what he calls (drawing on Miyazaki) 'the method of hope', that is, 'the hope that by paying attention to the beings and things with which we deal, they, in turn, will attend to us, and respond to our overtures' (Ingold 2018, 218).

Ecological awareness is nested in the dialectics inherent in poetry: as we attune our senses and awareness in the act of writing and reading a poem, we also simultaneously engage with the world within and around us. The poet's attention is captured by an aspect of the world, the poem is written in response to that. When we read a poem, we are given the opportunity to live (again and again) the poet's response to a fleeting moment. Both writing and reading a poem then encapsulate the multiple acts of observing, paying attention to the world, marvelling at it, and responding to it in

words. The poem is a response in kind, as Ingold suggests, born out of precision, sensitivity and wisdom. As Aretoulakis (2014, 174 drawing on Bate) notes, "poetic discourse, almost by definition, constitutes an ecological language to the extent that it does not 'name things in order to make them available for use but rather in order to disclose their being in language'". In poetry, language becomes the vehicle for a specific ontology, a particular way of being in, and of this world, as the poem links author and reader in a journey from the illusion of being external, dispassionate observers, to acknowledging, even enacting, full entanglement and participation in the world. This 'enmeshed' ontology is condensed in the words of feminist and science theorist Karen Barad (2003, 829): 'We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world (…) we know because "we" are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming'.

This stance entails a degree of humbleness. Humbleness is intrinsic to the poetic gaze, the poet will need to set aside their ego in order to observe in detail, listen deeply, and transcend themselves in order to catch something that permeates the self and the stretches beyond. Crucially, humbleness is also inherent in ecological awareness, as this implies awareness of human limitations and of the place of human beings in the wider realm of life on this planet. As Tim Morton explains, ecological awareness 'is awareness of unintended consequences' (2018, 11), that is, awareness that our human capacity of imagining and anticipating the consequences of our acts is limited when confronted with the scale of complexity of biological processes. In Morton's words, 'ecological awareness is knowing that there are a bewildering variety of scales, temporal and spatial, and that the human ones are only a very narrow region of a much larger and necessarily inconsistent and varied scalar possibility space, and that the human scale is not the top one' (Morton 2017, 186). Writing and reading poems is then a training in paying attention, participating, being ecologically aware, and cultivating an attitude of humbleness. The crystalline poetry of Pierluigi Cappello offers an ideal illustration of these points.

A journey towards ecological awareness through Pierluigi Cappello's poetry

The poetry of Pierluigi Cappello reflects the depth of thought and intensity of feeling of a life claimed and savoured in spite of extraordinary difficulties: first the childhood traumatic experience in 1976 of a disastrous earthquake that destroys Cappello's home and relocates the family to the small village of Chiusaforte, in the Friulian mountains, and then, when Cappello is only 16, a tragic motorcycle accident that condemns him to a wheelchair for life. Memory and sense of place are key perspectives in Cappello's poetry: appreciation for the local natural landscape, its colours and seasons, for the lifestyle and cultural identity of Friulian mountains, together with a tender nostalgia for childhood, permeate much of Cappello's work. Never self-victimizing, Cappello's continuously worked on his sensitivity and love of words, effectively turning his boundedness into a resonance box for insight, empathy and imagination.

Ecological sustainability demands an economy of means in the same way as poetry demands an economy of words. Both sustainability and poetry invite to shed the un-necessary, the superfluous, in order to appreciate the simplicity of the essential. Cappello's poetry resonates strongly with this: simplicity is a stylistic signature of Cappello's poetry and in several instances it becomes a theme of its own, as in the verse 'the simplicity of the stone / ready to resolve itself into dust'[4]. Simplicity is so central that to describe Cappello's work, the poet himself and literary critics have used the expression 'bare words' (Linguaglossa, 2017)[5]. Spirit of observation and sensitivity brought Cappello to perceive the extraordinary that lies just behind the veil of the ordinary; he never lost childhood's capacity to marvel at the most un-remarkable details: the light on the garden's trees or a fly on his desk could become the protagonists of special moments, captured, frozen in time, and then unfolded skilfully, carefully, laying down one by one – as Ingold put it, with precision, sensitivity and wisdom – the words that would bring his perceived and imagined universes to life, again and again, as we read his poetry.

It is possible to extrapolate from the literature in environmental studies and environmental philosophy a series of shifts and steps likely to lead to ecological awareness. Below I expand on

some of these shifts and show, using examples from Cappello's work, how poetry can facilitate and promote these changes towards more ecologically aware individuals and societies.

Tuning with, reawakening the senses

One of the main tenets of ecological action is the need to reconnect with the natural environment through the activation of the senses. Awareness of the properties of the environments we live in begins with the rekindling of the senses, the very basis of ecological awareness. Art scholar Barry Bignell (2009, 193) explains this process as a "felt change of consciousness (…) it is about entering, in full consciousness, the experience of knowing and, in the experience, seeing the known and ourselves in a new light." To some extent, ecological awareness recalls children's innate capacity for wonder. As environmental scholar David Orr (2000, 19) observed

> Before their minds have been marinated in the culture of television, consumerism, shopping malls, computers, and freeways, children can find the magic in trees, water, animals, landscapes, and their own places. Properly cultivated and validated by caring and knowledgeable adults, fascination with nature can mature into ecological literacy and eventually into more purposeful lives.

Wonder, fascination, and the capacity to marvel at the world are not exclusive prerogatives of childhood, they are not lost opportunities, but skills one can nurture – also through poetry. In particular, poetry can teach us what poet Matthew Zapruder (2017) calls 'defamiliarisation', the capacity to look at familiar, everyday objects and events through fresh eyes. Poetic compositions can achieve this through a range of tools, including metaphors and synesthetic constructions. Skilfully chosen, evocative metaphors are pivotal to attain a defamiliarization effect as they make the reader both alert and participant through acts of imagination. So for instance swift-moving nightingales in the sky become 'a handful of gold pennies / thrown into the air who knows by whom'.[6] Here Cappello layers the metaphor with a synesthetic dimension where the activation of one sense gives way to the automatic activation of another. In other words, synesthesia entails 'a

metaphorical process by which one sense modality is described or characterized in terms of another' (Poplavskyi et al. 2020, 303). In the poem cited, we come to 'see' in our mind's eye the nightingales flying in the sky, but we also come to 'hear' them, their crisp sound as gold bits that tickle our hearing.

Tuning out, decentering

Awakening the senses, tuning them to what surrounds us leads to locate the human within a broader network of relations where human and other-than-human coexist, and where not only does the human perceive but is also being perceived (Abram 1996). Developing ecological awareness implies acknowledging this interconnectedness and displacing the centrality of the human – a deep-rooted legacy dating back to Greek philosophy and reinstated in Renaissance Humanism. As social scientists Andrew Metcalfe and Anne Game (2014, 297) noted, 'ecological awareness involves open response to a difference or otherness that is not locatable, that is inside-and-outside; ecological responsibility is this response. Our argument is that this responsiveness is not possible with a subject- and human-centered form of being.'

The themes of participation, relatedness and embeddednes in the fabric of life emerge when poets inscribe themselves into the scene of the poem, as in this instance: 'outside the sun / blossomed on the tree branches, smiling / between me writing and the word nothing'[7]. Here Cappello writes himself into the outdoors scene he is depicting, a sunny day in the outside garden. His participation appears to reach so deep that the sun rays permeate the poet's thinking and writing process, they inhabit the space between several thresholds: perceiving and thinking, the word written on the paper and the one not yet conceived, the humanity of the poet and the surrounding world. Another example of full, embodied enmeshment with life is the verse 'and the February sky turns into breathing / inside and outside your lungs'[8], the body contours almost blur, merging with the outside air of February: that particular air of that particular day and season, is literally incorporated, it becomes part of us.

Appreciating interconnectedness does not mean reducing or negating the alterity of the Other. Quite the contrary, it means recognizing alterity and encountering it on its own terrain and on its own terms; it means encountering what philosopher Tim Morton has called 'strange strangers' referring to entities that become increasingly unfamiliar as we get close to them. By offering opportunities for proximity with 'strange strangers', poetry can change the way we perceive and relate to the world. For instance, writing about a spider that made its cobweb in a corner of his studio, Cappello invites us to pay attention, to take in its being different: 'look at it closely / alien as a lunar module'.[9] Through multiple little shocks of images and metaphors, poetry captures our attention and then sustains it by creating a space for personal, creative forms of intimacy with the other-than-human world.

Tuning in, grounding, slowing down, belonging

Poetry teaches us to tune in with our feelings, to feel that we belong in our body and our world. Philosopher Tim Morton proposes that we develop an awareness of ourselves and/in the world around us that "is still and moving at the same time, a ground state of feeling or doing or mentating or being embodied. Awareness rocks" (2017, 188). The type of awareness Morton refers to, is of very special quality: it is an elastic, flexible, fine-grained, penetrating attention; it defies the superficial, short-lived glances fuelled by the mediaspheres (Citton 2014).

Tools for nourishing the special kind of attention Morton is proposing, can be found in Cappello's poetry. Cappello was acutely and patiently attentive to the material world and to his thinking and feeling body – he, who could feel his body less than others, yet could feel more than many. In the poem 'Poiein', Cappello writes about being grounded in his body and being in the present. The opening words firmly set the poet in his reality: 'you are from here, from this world' and almost as evidence of this, he observes the shadow his own fingers cast on the writing paper. But his being grounded goes *through* and beyond the material world, as he lives 'within the words', in the shape of things when they catch his attention, his awareness immanent and evenly distributed

between his material and immaterial being and the world around him – an awareness still and moving, as Morton noted. From this expanded, diffused awareness he/we can attempt to grasp the present (almost stolen to the wind, he writes) by refocusing on the materiality of the body, and it is from this bodily materiality that we can look beyond and imagine eternity: 'the present of these hands / as if it were eternal'.[10]

Poetry nurtures a kind of attention that can only emerge when we change pace, and slow down. As Cappello put it, 'time is a host in a hurry'.[11] It is not surprising then that Cappello's poetry brings us to decrease our speed and impatience, and coaxes our awareness to hang at the threshold of the instant, as in these lines: 'between the last word said / and the first new one to be said / that is where we live'.[12] Cappello brings us with him at the edge of the present, right at the point when the moment that is present is about to drop into future. This bears witness to Cappello's skill, and lesson, to take notice of, and even try to dwell in that interstitial and ephemeral space that we call present. This meditative, contemplative slowing down is at the essence of poetry, as much as it is at the essence of ecological awareness.

Taking responsibility

Engaging in sustainable action and cultivating ecological awareness involve claiming rights and facing obligations: the right to a home, the continuation of life in and around us, a future; as we do so, we are faced with the responsibility of taking care of this home, the present life, and its future.

In his self description as a human being in whom 'a God precipitated the whole Earth / the Earth wholly distanced that God'[13] Cappello conceives of the human being as a condensation of the whole Earth, but also acknowledges humanity's distancing itself from a deep sense of the sacred. Yet, it is of no use to succumb to 'anthropic guilt' (Smyth 2022), far more constructive is to think of responsibility as the response, the consequence of becoming ecologically aware (Metcalfe & Game 2014). Barnett (2018, 992) noted that taking responsibility for ecological degradation is to 'realize we are the culprits of a crime we have been investigating'. Whist this realization is crucial, the investigation must continue, and it must involve our own selves. This is precisely the unique gift of

poetry: its ability to hold up a mirror to ourselves and give us a tool to ponder our depths, however intimidating or uncomfortable that might be. Poetry is the vessel for us to become, as Cappello put it, 'archeonauts' of ourselves (Cappello 2018, 117), it encourages us to take full responsibility for the consequences of our decisions, even when, as Morton warned, we cannot foresee all the consequences because the scale of complexity is unimaginable.

Healing

Ecological awareness does not come to an end with taking responsibility for our decisions, we need to move further towards healing in order to find motivation for ecologically responsible action and problem-solving. We can find in poetry venues and instruments to shift from despair to hope, such as opportunities for venting our rage, sharing our grief, shedding the non-essential, and finding a mental space and inspiration to nurture a re-enchantment for the world. Writing and reading poetry provide stimuli and frameworks for these healing processes.

On the one hand, we can imagine that the writer will find some kind of relief in giving names, verbs and images to knotted feelings; for instance Cappello translates a feeling of anxious wait through the desperate bouts and flights of a hornet in an enclosed space, 'a dollop of rage' drawing 'spikes of air'.[14] On the other, the reader might find solace in reading of a familiar pain, or perhaps surprise at finding a secretly held grief magistrally explained there, black on white on the page. Feelings that we believed were ours only, turn out to be a shared experience; from this, emerges a sense of understanding towards others, as well as a feeling of being understood. The poem creates a dialogue between writer and reader, and imagined communities of shared feelings among readers.

One of the strengths of poetry that make it ecologically relevant, is that it can bring about healing through connection with the other-than-human by fostering a sense of participation in a composite world – a broader community. It can help us perceive the life that is breathed into the cosmos, as in Cappello's poem 'The Starry Sky' where the stars turn into infinite fragments of

ourselves and ‘a still breath of shadows, light / contours the dim embryo of the moon’.[15] We find ourselves scattered in the universe, contained and dispersed into infinite distant, celestial bodies. It might be a terrifying image but Cappello infuses it with the warm glow of life, as the cosmic breath brings the moon alive, even, it turns it into the very emblem of life, the embryo, perpetuating the ever lasting promise of life. Even in his acknowledgment of human limitations and fears in front of the unknown, Cappello never leaves the reader in despair. The force and artistry of the poet is in finding the silver lining, the leverage point that upturns the mood and tips it towards opportunity and hope. In one of his last prose compositions Cappello reflects on the future of humanity offering us a shining image of hope: ‘Tiny, just a seed facing the unknown, the human being is nothing but a cub, whose eagerness to know has been bearing fruit for millennia. And so, the pensive nakedness of a child from the back, faceless and therefore with all possible faces, we might as well call it future.’[16]

In closing: the ecological relevance of poetry

Ecological sustainability will remain an unrealistic goal unless the current levels of ecological awareness and engagement are swiftly and significantly heightened. A paradigm shift in current epistemologies, axiologies, and actions is urgent and imperative if we are to avert an ecological collapse. What is needed is an epistemology that is no longer human-centered and no longer driven by growth but by a more respectful relationship with the other-than-human. I hope to have shown in this chapter that poetry is deeply nested within this thinking (and feeling) and therefore uniquely positioned to make a substantial contribution to this task of paradigm shift. Notably, poetry contributes to forging an alternative to the current epistemology paradigm, an alternative where ecological awareness lies at the core of more organic and more sustainable approaches to the very notion of humanity, now re-envisioned through its deep interrelatedness with the other-than-human. The ecological awareness engendered by poetry has a unique power as it is based on a re-awakening of the senses, a decentering of the human that enables more equal relationships with the other-than-

human, slowing down in order to notice and ground in the present, taking responsibility for our (in)actions, and finally, finding solace and healing in sharing the journey. The ecological awareness fostered by poetry nurtures a vision geared towards action and wild imagination steeped in hope, as the ultimate form of resistance. In our damaged world, ecological awareness is a civic duty and a social responsibility; poetry a vessel to that.

In times of ecological degradation, the poet takes up a demiurgic role: poetry is a tool for envisioning and re-worlding, for making the world anew as a form of resistance and militance. In a prescient statement, science-fiction writer and poet Ursula Le Guin (2019, 113) cautioned 'Hard times are coming, when we'll be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now, can see through our fear-striken society and its obsessive technologies to other ways of being, and even imagine real ground for hope. We'll need writers who can remember freedom – poets, visionaries – realists of a larger reality'. Pierluigi Cappello was 'a realist of a larger reality', an artist who could see alternatives to how we live now and suggest new ways of living our humanity, and of relating to the other-than-human – a poet demiurge. That we can read his poems and find generous clues on how to be better, or just more, human beings and give ourselves a chance to survive as a species, bears witness to the extraordinary gift that Cappello left us: words that travel across boundaries – geographic, disciplinary, cultural, temporal, generational – and reach to the heart of the human condition and its prospective future.

We can open a poem and find inspiration and guidance to become more ecologically aware and sustainable inhabitants of this planet; this bears witness to the power of poetry in all its multiple voices and formats. This is the power to talk to and from the core of our humanity, the power to re-inject our senses with wonder and emotion. Without these, ecology is just scientific data with little or no traction on our hearts – the current ecological situation, more than half a century after scientific data provided us with evidence of the imminent collapse, is a sad illustration of this. Poetic thinking should have a prominent place in ecological education, as poetry opens to understandings of the

world and our place in it, that are not cognitive but emotional. Ecological awareness is then felt, embodied, appropriated, it becomes a personal experience, a skill, an ontology, part of who we are as we recreate ourselves as ecological beings.

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Endnotes

1. From the poem 'Idillio' by Pierluigi Cappello. Original text in Italian: 'un battimani di luce che varia, non varia, al fresco di brezza che ha messo respiri alle foglie' (Cappello 2018, 116).
All translations of Cappello's poems by the author, unless otherwise stated.

2. All Cappello's poems have been gathered in the posthumous anthology *Un Prato in Pendio* (*A Meadow on a Slope,* Cappello 2018, in Italian). The volume *Go Tell It to the Emperor: The Selected Poems of Pierluigi Cappello* translated by Todd Portnowitz (2019) includes a significant selection of Cappello's poems in English. Several English translations of poems also feature in De Thomasis et al. 2017, and in journals such as *Poetry, Asymptote,* and *Narrative Magazine*.

3. I refer to ecopoetry here following Samantha Walton's definition: 'Ecopoetry can be defined as poetry that addresses, or can be read in ways that address, the current conditions of our environmental crisis' (Walton 2018, 1).

4. Untitled poem. Original Italian: 'la semplicitá del sasso / pronta a risolversi in polvere' (Cappello 2018, 132).

5. The expression 'bare words' ('parole povere') featuring in the title of one of his most well known poems has been appropriated by critics to refer to the key characteristic of Cappello's production: the neat, plain, essential writing, deprived of verbosity. *Parole Povere* is also the title of a video documentary devoted to Cappello, directed by Italian director Francesca Archibugi in 2013 (52 minutes, Italian with English subtitles).

6. Untitled. Original Italian: 'una manciata di spiccioli d'oro / gettata nell'aria chissà da chi' (Cappello 2018, 128).

7. From the poem 'Il Calabrone' ('The Hornet'). Original Italian: 'Fuori il sole / è fiorito sui rami, sorridente / fra me che scrivo e la parola niente' (Cappello 2018, 120).

8. From the poem 'Febbraio' ('February'). Original Italian: 'e fa del cielo di febbraio un respirare / dentro e fuori i tuoi polmoni' (Cappello 2018, 385).

9. From the poem ‘Un Ragno e Altre Cose’ (‘the Spider and Other Things’). Original Italian: ‘vedilo da vicino / alieno come un modulo lunare’ (Cappello 2018, 192).

10. From the poem ‘Poiein’. Original Italian: ‘Tu sei di qui, di questo mondo’, ‘stai dentro le parole’, ‘e il presente di queste mani / come se fosse eterno’ (Cappello 2018, 283).

11. From the poem ‘Febbraio’ (‘February’). Original Italian: ‘il tempo è un ospite che ha fretta’ (Cappello 2018, 385).

12. Untitled poem. Original Italian: ‘fra l’ultima parola detta / e la prima nuova da dire / è lì che abitiamo’ (Cappello 2018, 134).

13. From the poem ‘Al Sole’ (‘In the Sun’). Original Italian ‘un organismo dove / un dio precipitò tutta la terra / la terra allontanò tutto quel dio’ (Cappello 2018, 121).

14. From the poem ‘Il Calabrone’ (‘The Hornet’). Original Italian: ‘il calabrone è un acino di rabbia. / Ha descritto da parete a parete / spigoli d’aria’ (Cappello 2018, 120).

15. From ‘Il Cielo Stellato’ (‘The Starry Sky’). Original Italian: ‘un respiro immobile di ombre, luce / contorna il fioco embrione della luna’ (Cappello 2018, 111).

16. From the prose ‘Oceano Indiano’. Original Italian: ‘Minuscolo, appena un seme davanti all’ignoto, l’uomo non è che un cucciolo, la cui ansia di conoscere fruttifica da millenni. Allora la nudità pensosa di un bambino di spalle senza volto, quindi con tutti i volti possibili, chiamiamola pure futuro’ (Cappello 2018, 409).

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