AWP EVENT OUTLINE

Event title: POLLEN, RUST, LAKES, & PLAINS: WRITING POEMS IN THE MIDWEST
Room 2104B, Kansas City Convention Center, Street Level
Friday, February 9, 2024, 10:35 am to 11:50 am

Description: How can poetry account for the material conditions of the environment, tethering regional circumstances to questions of conservation, extinction, or the nonhuman? This panel of Midwest poets will consider what forms—ode, mess, palimpsest, somatic, plein air—might best connect a region’s particulars to global transformation. Poets will share experiences of writing their region and useful place-based prompts, texts, or fieldwork for landscapes that combine the urban, industrial, and agricultural.

Category: Poetry Craft & Criticism
Organizer: Caryl Pagel
Moderator: Caryl Pagel

Participants & bios:

Nicholas Gulig is a Thai-American poet from Wisconsin. The author of North of Order, Book of Lake, and Orient, he works as an Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. In 2023, he was appointed poet laureate of Wisconsin through 2024. In 2023, Gulig received an Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellowship.

Caryl Pagel is the author of three books of poetry, most recently Free Clean Fill Dirt, and the essay collection Out of Nowhere Into Nothing. She is a co-founder and editor at Rescue Press and Director of the CSU Poetry Center. Pagel teaches at Cleveland State University and in the NEOMFA program.

Robin Beth Schaer is the author of the poetry collection Shipbreaking. She has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Ohio Arts Council, Yaddo, MacDowell, and others. Her work has appeared in Tin House, Bomb, the Paris Review, and elsewhere. She teaches writing in Ohio.

Zach Savich is the author of seven books of poetry, including Momently, and two books of creative nonfiction, including the memoir Diving Makes the Water Deep. His work has appeared in American Poetry Review, Boston Review, and elsewhere. He teaches at the Cleveland Institute of Art.

10:35–10:45: INTRODUCTION

Welcome to POLLEN, RUST, LAKES, & PLAINS: WRITING POEMS IN THE MIDWEST. A few reminders from the conference organizers before we begin:
For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let me know and a printed copy will be delivered to you.

Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.

Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.

Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.

Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

Now I will introduce our speakers in the order in which they are sitting: [read bios].

10:45am–11:20/25 READINGS & FRAMING

Today’s talk will center around ecopoetic thinking through the lens of place. Each panelist will now spend 5-10 minutes sharing a bit about their own poetry including its connection to their position in the Midwest, their thinking about writing a specific region or environment, and the forms or techniques that have been useful in their place-based practice. Poets will read and talk through a specific poem or discuss their poetics in general and then we’ll move through a broader conversation aimed at introducing strategies for place-based poems of your own. If you have questions, please save them for the end, when we’ll open up the discussion.

Some questions this panel considered while putting together their thoughts:

—How does a Midwest positioning affect your poetry or poetics? Are their formal or thematic concerns that have arisen from your region’s particular landscape, politics, culture, or climate?

—What regional or environmental issues feel most personally urgent or interesting to you now in your own reading and writing?

—What prompts, texts, forms, adventures, or approaches have you experimented with in order to connect your region’s specifics to larger issues of climate crisis, the Anthropocene, nature writing, the pastoral, extinction, conservation, documentary writing, ecopoetics, land narratives, the nonhuman, or learning about place?

11:20/25–11:40 DISCUSSION

The panel will have an open conversation led by the moderation using following questions as guide:

—To begin in a moment of language and terminology: how do you describe the region where you live? How might we think of regional terms such as “the Midwest,” “Rust Belt,” “Heartland,” or “Third Coast” in a broader context? Do these descriptions impact the lens through which you see the places your write about?
— What do you see as the challenges or contradictions inherent in place-based writing? As a genre, in publishing or editing, in relationship to activism, in relationship to daily practice...

— What forms and practices have you found for engaging ecopoetic ideas or material either as part of the writing process (walks, journaling, collaboration, fieldwork, etc.) or as useful traditions or shapes (ode, mess, palimpsest, instruction, fragment)?

— Discuss an example of a place-based or ecologically-minded project you love and return to as inspiration?

— Can you share a prompt, exercise, or way of thinking about place-based praxis for our audience? A strategy to get them writing?

11:40–11:50 QUESTIONS FROM AUDIENCE
We will field a few questions from the audience as well as have our rec reading and prompts lists available or passed around.
REC READING (POETRY & MORE):

Oliver Baez Bendorf, Advantages of Being Evergreen
Inger Christensen (tr. Susanna Nied), Alphabet
Cody Rose Clevidence, Listen My Friend This Is The Dream I Dreamed Last Night
Allison Cobb, After We All Died
Allison Adelle Hedge Coke, Look at This Blue
Katy Didden, Ore Choir
Camille Dungy, Soil and Trophic Cascade
Cornelius Eady, Hardheaded Weather
Ross Gay, Catalogue of Unabashed Gratitude
Ross Gay & Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Lace & Pyrite
Jorie Graham, To 2040
bell hooks, Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place
Jamaica Kincaid, A Small Place
Amy Leach, Things That Are
Lucy Lippard, The Lure of the Local
Jed Munson, Commentary on the Birds
Aimee Nezhukumatathil, World of Wonders and Oceanic
Lorine Niedecker, Lake Superior
Peter O'Leary, Earth Is Best
Craig Santos Perez, From unincorporated territory [series]
Lia Purpura, On Looking
Pam Rehm, Larger Nature
Ed Roberson, Asked What Has Changed
Roy Scranton, Learning to Die in the Anthropocene
Layli Long Soldier, Whereas
Philip Sorensen, Solar Trauma
Juliana Spahr, That Winter the Wolf Came
Brian Teare, Doomstead Days and Companion Grasses
C.D. Wright, Casting Deep Shade
Emily Wilson, The Keep

Big Energy Poets: Ecopoetry Thinks Climate Change, ed. Heidi Lynn Staples & Amy King
The Ecopoetry Anthology, ed. Ann Fisher-Wirth & Laura Gray Street
Here: Poems for the Planet, ed. Elizabeth J. Coleman
Ecopoetics: Essays in the Field, ed. Angela Hume & Gillian Osborne
Recomposing Ecopoetics by Lynn Keller
Counter-Desecration: A Glossary for Writing Within the Anthropocene, Ed. Linda Russo & Marthe Reed
PROMPTS:

1) Write a poem using a natural form particular to the place where you live.

2) Write a poem—to future generations—about your lived experience while alive on earth. Lean into your curiosities, your interests, your confusion about the way we do and/or did things to ourselves and to the health of the planet.

3) Write a poem against nature poems: what irritates or annoys you about the language of environmental work, what do nature poems get wrong, what is the opposite of environmental language?

4) Write a poem about the land you live on: what people, plants, and animals live there now or have lived there before you, what has changes through the years, how has this land adapted to or been transformed by your living there, how have you engaged or thought about the space?

5) Write a series of plein air drafts, as a painter might. Find a spot outdoors and write a few sketches of the same landscape or view, collecting as much of the panorama as you can.

6) Write a poem about light.

7) Write a poem about your memories of nature or being outside as a child, how they compare with your experiences of nature now.

8) Write a poem about your connection with deep time: what in your daily life tethers you to multiple epochs, centuries, or scales? Rocks, stars, sounds, birds? How do humans figure (or not figure) into this massive geological story?

9) Write a poem about water.

10) Write a poem incorporating a list of your greatest climate concerns. Make a list. Make it exhaustive. Reach the limits of what could go wrong. Stay in the anxiety, where does it lead you?

11) Write a poem based on notes you’ve taken about the weather for a month.

12) Write a poem that reverses or complicates observations you’ve collected from a long walk.

13) Write a poem for a nonhuman being.

14) Write a poem responding to a series of “ordinary” or daily photos you’ve taken in your neighborhood. Include what you heard, said, or noticed while taking those photos.