

“Earth’s Powder / in the Basilica of the Cosmos:”

Ecocatastrophe and its scale
in Marcin Ostrychacz’s *Cielenie
lodowca* [*Iceberg calving*]

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See the scale

Examining the presence of catastrophic motifs in ecocritical texts, Lawrence Buell stated that, starting with George Perkins Marsh’s 1864 book *Man and Nature; or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action*, five characteristic features recur in all texts which talk about the impending major environmental crisis.¹

¹ Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination. Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1995), 301–306. Marsh’s work is considered the first English-language work to anticipate and warn against the long-term consequences of human impact on ecosystems.

The first motif is the figure of the network, essentially a system of inalienable dependencies between people and the environment. It is always presented as complex, multidimensional, and thus overwhelming. The second motif is biotic egalitarianism. It is a view based, among other things, on the recognition of the fact that since one of the ways to counter the impending catastrophe is to protect biodiversity, the death of non-human beings cannot be considered less significant than the death of human beings. Biotic egalitarianism thus challenges Peter Singer's human chauvinism.² The third and fourth motifs concern the scale: magnification, discovering the complexity and significance of seemingly insignificant events, and conflation, extending the connection between what is close and present and the impending catastrophe. Last but not least, Buell writes that the fifth motif is "the sense of imminent environmental peril" that permeates or binds all the other motifs; it is a deep conviction that a global catastrophe, a borderline moment for human civilization against which one should be constantly warned, is imminent.

These five motifs, although undoubtedly significant, require some further explanation and contextualization provided by contemporary ecocriticism. For example, the perception of the climate crisis as an imminent borderline event allowed, among other things, to perceive it in the context of the biblical Apocalypse. Such a vision dominates in the media, but the metaphor of the climate Apocalypse also frequently appears in scientific texts, pop culture, and literature.³ This vision is so prominent in Western culture that Buell considered it to be the most powerful conceptual tool of ecocritical writing.⁴

Other scholars, however, point to the possible dangers of repeated references to Judeo-Christian motifs. For example, Julia Fiedorczuk points out that the conceptual categories connoted by the Apocalypse and the climate catastrophe differ. While the Judeo-Christian Armageddon marks the ultimate end of human domination – it is the inevitable result of divine intervention and a one-off event, a point in time, something that takes place in the future – the climate crisis should instead be read as the end of certain ways of inhabiting the planet and (importantly) a process that is already taking place; its intensity may vary, as it is determined by human influence.⁵ The American literary scholar Lynn Keller concurs. Drawing on Frederick Buell, Keller writes about the destabilization of one of the guiding features of environmentally engaged writing:

[...] the prominent function of environmental apocalyptic writing to date – as a warning that conveys to readers the gravity of current circumstances so as to avoid disaster – is being destabilized as human impact on the planet increases and the sense of ongoing crisis intensifies.⁶

² Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1975), 59-63.

³ The term "apokalipsa klimatyczna" [Climate Apocalypse] generates 60,000 Google hits.

⁴ Lynn Keller, *Recomposing ecopoetics. North American Poetry of the Self-Conscious Anthropocene* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 101-102.

⁵ Julia Fiedorczuk, "Przeciw apokalipsie" [Against Apocalypse], *Przekrój*, 11 August 2021, <https://przekroj.pl/artykuly/felietony/przeciw-apokalipsie-julia-fiedorczuk>.

⁶ Keller, 98.

Indeed, the attempts to formulate literary warnings against the impending catastrophe turn out to be more and more ineffective, because the catastrophe itself is nowadays part and parcel of everyday life – it is not an event that may still be avoided. From this perspective, Buell's fifth and final motif may be questioned. Nowadays, instead of “waiting for” we are “dwelling in crisis,”⁷ the complexity and functioning of which is extended on a planetary scale, and we need new creative tools to process it. Consequently, some authors believe that imagining an ecological catastrophe using apocalyptic scenarios is nothing short of a trap or an obstacle, making it more difficult to respond to environmental problems.

As long as the ecological catastrophe was treated as a future event, something that lies beyond the horizon (or around the corner), it could be freely and creatively processed and envisioned as something specific and finite, for example, the Apocalypse. Nowadays, as we are dwelling in crisis (which is clearly confirmed, among others, by the sixth IPCC Assessment Report⁸), it is extremely difficult to conceptualize, order, and make sense of it, especially in the face of processes that are significant even on a geologic time scale. Indeed, Aleksandra Ubertowska argues that:

[...] global warming and its outcome in the form of the environmental catastrophe are beyond our comprehension in every respect – their scope, duration and potential results transcend the time and space of human life; it is impossible to understand global warming by means of simple analogies or comparisons.⁹

Timothy Clark agrees. He pointed out that there are simply no ways to effectively process the scale of the ongoing crisis.¹⁰ However, Keller argues that we need to face the problem of the scale regardless of the limits of human agency and the tools which we have at our disposal. The problem of the scale lies at the heart of all kinds of initiatives that try to react to the anthropogenic degradation of the terrestrial biosphere.¹¹ Joanna Piechura also argues that while the role of imagination may raise some doubts, it remains the most basic instrument for conceptualizing the incredible dimensions of the imminent crisis.¹² Both authors encourage poets to look for a new language or new imaginative categories that would, firstly, capture the scale of the ongoing processes, and secondly, counter the awareness of being incorporated into them.

⁷ Frederick Buell, *From Apocalypse to Way of Life. Environmental Crisis in the American Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁸ See: “The Sixth IPCC Assessment Report”, February and April 2022, <https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/>. The IPCC Assessment Report is the largest climate report in the world. Over 700 researchers have analyzed 14,000 scientific papers over the course of eight years.

⁹ Aleksandra Ubertowska, “Krajobraz po katastrofie: natura, historia, reprezentacja” [Landscape after the catastrophe: nature, history, representation], in: *Poetyki ekocydu. Historia, natura, konflikt* [Poetics of ecocide. history, nature, conflict], ed. Aleksandra Ubertowska, Dobrosława Korczyńska-Partyka, Ewa Kuliś (Warsaw, Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2019), 29–30.

¹⁰ Patryk Szaj, “The time is out of joint. Anthropocene and Ecocentric Reading of Literary Texts”. *Forum of Poetics* 24 (2021): 12–13.

¹¹ Keller, 31–34.

¹² Joanna Piechura, “Zaangażować wyobraźnię” [Use your imagination], *Dwutygodnik*, December 2021, <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/9874-zaangazowac-wyobraznie.html>.

It seems that Marcin Ostrychacz makes such an attempt in his collection *Cielenie lodowca* [Iceberg calving]. The poems paint an extremely diverse and complex picture of events taking place on a planet in crisis. It should be emphasized that the catastrophe – intricate and beyond human comprehension as it may be – is a kind of underpinning of everyday life and something that has already affected our lives, and not a potential threat. Its traces may be found in, for example, the post-pastoral vistas of Zakopane (the poem *Świt w Zakopanem* [Dawn in Zakopane]), references to the bloody traditions of the Siberian peoples (*Megale Arktos* and *Ursa Minor*), the most important events in the history of human civilization (*Kroki* [Steps]), the deepening fear of artificial intelligence (*Wilki dogonią Słońce i Księżyc* [Wolves will catch up with the Sun and the Moon]), or, more directly, in the descriptions of civilizational chaos (*Strefa* [The Zone]) and economic crisis (*Słodkie trofea z wakacji* [Sweet Holiday Trophies]), and, of course, in the anthropogenic degradation of the biosphere (*Hibernakulum* [Hibernaculum]; *Ziemia, której nie ma* [The Earth That Doesn't Exist]; *Zwrotka* [Stanza]).

The accumulation of such diverse and seemingly distant events corresponds to Clark's and Ubertowska's sense of being lost, the impossibility of processing the size and the complexity of the crisis. However, Ostrychacz offers the reader a tool, a conceptual category, which allows him to adopt a more stable position. The entire collection revolves around the image of the Earth seen as a detail in the vast Universe. We observe the Earth, and the climate catastrophe, from a cosmic perspective and in the context of cosmic processes. Carl Sagan's pale blue dot seems to be an extremely important point of reference.¹³ Such references appear for the first time in the poem *Dom* [Home], the first poem in the entire collection:

Paproszek Ziemi w bazylice Kosmosu ogrzany gwiazdą.	Earth's powder in the Basilica of the Cosmos heated by a star.
Elektryczny zygzak uderzył o tafię pierwotnej zupy.	Electric zigzag hit the surface of the primal soup.
Bakteria Ziemi w próbówce Kosmosu ogrzana gwiazdą.	Earth's bacterium in the test tube of the Cosmos heated by a star. ^{<?>}

The planet inhabited by humans for a moment ceases to be seen as Morton's hyperobject, an object of incredible size, and instead becomes small. Importantly, humans inhabiting it also become small. Its place in the solar system is revealed in relation to other, sometimes much larger, planets. Such optics returns in most poems. For example, in the poem *113 tys. km/h* [113,000 km/h]:

¹³See: Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot. A Vision of the Human Future in Space* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994).

Asysta Jowisza wyrzuciła nas daleko,
 a przeszłość się stała mniejsza od kwarka.
 Wszystkiemu winne jest życie, które
 panicznie boi się utraty samego siebie,
 bo nawet medycyna nie zagwarantuje,
 że wytrzymamy cywilizację
 lub inną katastrofę.

Jupiter's assist has thrown us far away,
 and the past became smaller than a quark.
 It's all because life
 is terrified of losing itself
 because even medicine cannot guarantee
 that we will survive civilization
 or some other catastrophe.

Respectively, the author clearly shows his aversion to human civilization, especially considering its impact on the environment. Ostrychacz's poems remind us of Lawrence Buell's concept of biotic egalitarianism and seem to prove that the death of human beings would be beneficial for the biosphere. Buell, drawing on David Rains Wallace, writes: "[...] imagining that a world purged of humans by human-engineered environmental apocalypse would not be so apocalyptic [...] because wildness [...] would be sure to endure."¹⁴ And Ostrychacz writes miniature poems which show the Earth after the apocalypse. The three-line poem *Wieżowce* [Skyscrapers] reads: "Po ssakach / zamieszkały w nich / ptaki" [After mammals / they were inhabited/ by birds] [23]. And the poem *Zwrotka* reads:

Przestwór wspomina ptaki.
 Gleba wspomina lasy.
 Woda wspomina ryby.
 Nas nikt nie wspomina.
 Wszystko chce nas zapomnieć.

The air remembers the birds.
 The soil remembers the forests.
 The water remembers the fish.
 Nobody remembers us.
 Everything wants to forget us.

Returning to the image of the Earth as a detail in the Cosmos, deliberately showing its insignificance as compared with the rest of the Universe, also allows us to overcome the belief that the climate catastrophe is unprocessable. Returning to the image of the Earth as a specific point in the Cosmos makes it easier to establish connections between events that, metaphorically speaking, would not reveal their relationality right away. A point is finite, comprehensible; it is much easier to map it and to process it. Such approaches and imaginations are consistent and deliberate. Natural environments and the progress of civilization, all kinds of human or more-than-human events, cannot belong to separate unrelated orders, not least because they all exist on a microscopic piece of cosmic rock. It can also be said that natural resources, seen in a planetary context, turn out to be limited and they cannot be exploited uncontrollably.

Such approaches and imaginations also help us process a particular paradox. Discussing the aforementioned concept of realism, Debjani Ganguly writes: "To talk of planetary realism is to register – linguistically, tropologically, and narratologically – the paradoxical imprint of this fundamental shift in calibrating the scale of human habitation on earth as at once monumental and insignificant."¹⁵ We must realize that humans will influence the terrestrial biosphere for incomparably longer than they existed as a species and a civilization, which is considered momentary from a geological perspective. The poet who looks at the Earth from

¹⁴Lawrence Buell, 304.

¹⁵Debjani Ganguly, "Catastrophic Form and Planetary Realism", *New Literary History* 2 (2020): 425.

a cosmic perspective, sees it as a detail, as a blue dot, recognizes that humanity is neither the first nor the last life form dominating the biosphere. Such a vision again relates (or cooperates) to a sense of humility before the more-than-human world, which may prove important, considering how difficult the relationship between man and nature is. Carl Sagan emphatically states:

Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of [...]. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. [...] Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light.¹⁶

Ostrychacz's poems can evoke in the reader almost the same response as the famous photograph. Capturing this feeling in poetry, however, would not be possible without first directing the poetic imagination against the usual automatisms associated, for example, with limiting the perception of reality to a certain locality.

The detail allows the poet to evoke a state (or stimulate a consciousness) of the astronaut looking at the Earth from the surface of the Moon. Edgar D. Mitchell, a member of the Apollo 14 mission, described it as follows: "You develop an instant global consciousness [...], an intense dissatisfaction with the state of the world, and a compulsion to do something about it. From out there on the moon, international politics looks so petty. You want to grab a politician by the scruff of the neck and drag him a quarter of a million miles out and say: Look at that [...]."¹⁷ Mitchell's experience is, of course, unique, but it can be assumed that in the analyzed poems a shift in imagination marks a shift in perspective; the Earth is seen in a different light, and its, for the most part, inaccessible image is restored. The adopted approach also clearly resonates with the postulates of building a more holistic vision of reality, which recurs in the eco-critical discourse.¹⁸ Once again, working on a scale, intentionally recognizing, or seeing a detail in something that is considered maximal, reconfigures what we see. Just for a moment, we distance ourselves from the so-called clichéd forms of seeing, we change our perspective, because the conceptual challenges posed by the climate catastrophe demand it.

Find a counterbalance

We use imagination in such a way not only because we are working on a scale, but also because we want to find counterbalance. Indeed, in many poems the ecological catastrophe is not presented as imminent threat but as part and parcel of everyday life. Respectively, as Keller

¹⁶Sagan, 6-7.

¹⁷"Edgar Mitchell's Strange Voyage", *People*, 8 April 1974, <https://people.com/archive/edgar-mitchells-strange-voyage-vol-1-no-6/>.

¹⁸See, for example: Andrzej Marzec, "«Jesteśmy połączonym z sobą światem» – Timothy Morton i widmo innej wspólnoty" ["We are an interconnected world' – Timothy Morton and the specter of a different community], *Teksty Drugie* 2 (2018): 88–101, or Olle Widhe, "Modes of environmental imagination. The eco-movement and the representation of reality in Swedish children literature from 1967 to 1977", *Barnlitterært forskningsblad* 1 (2019): 1–16.

proves, while many poems convey a sense of fear, breakdown, or threat posed by the climate crisis and the end of civilization, they also offer practices which are supposed to help one function in such an unstable reality. Keller writes:

[...] poets also counterbalance the grief and despair of apocalyptic awareness through deliberate cultivation of pleasures grounded in immediate physical experience and perception. Without some counterforce, such grief and despair can prove paralyzing, both artistically and politically [...].¹⁹

Jorie Graham and Evelyn Reilly, whose works Keller analyzes in her book, adopt such a strategy. Regardless of whether their poetics at a given moment are humoristic, pastoral, or focused on a direct, sensual experience of reality in the company of non-human beings, the goal is to remind the reader about the growing need to appreciate the real physical existence and coexistence with the world, even by means of simple everyday practices. According to Keller, as a result, in addition to finding a counterbalance to the ongoing catastrophe, the reader also connects with her environment, which in turn fosters a more personal, ecological involvement.

At this point we should ask whether Ostrychacz's poems also derive pleasure from a direct, physical contact with everyday life and whether such a counterbalance to the apocalyptic visions is still viable, whether it is enough. Let us focus on the poem *Wziąć się za szczęście* [Get tough with happiness], which almost directly enters into a dialogue with the phenomena described by Keller. I quote selected stanzas:

Pokój w którym pod światło widać
ile jest kurzu i wirującej sierści
jak odcinki babiego lata
ze szczelinami na dwa centymetry w parkiecie
i nieszczelnymi oknami od których ciągnie zimą
czy to jest szczęście?

Czy cząsteczki brudu na moich stopach
pianka wydrapana z fotela jego czerwona
ekoskóra kocia sierść
resztki tytoniu włosów chipsów a nawet
resztki marihuany
czy to jest szczęście?

Czy powinniśmy jeść warzywa?
wszak udowodniono że drzewa porozumiewają się
a kwiaty lubią Schuberta i potrafią być
szczęśliwsze od ludzi.

A room where you look into the light and see
how much dust and fur is swirling around
like threads of gossamer
with two-centimeter-wide gaps in the parquet floor
and draughty windows which let the cold
in in winter
is this happiness?

Dirt on my feet
foam scratched from the armchair its red
eco-leather cat fur
pieces of tobacco hair chips and even marijuana
is this happiness?

Should we eat vegetables?
After all, it has been proven that trees communicate
and flowers like Schubert and can be happier
than people.

¹⁹Keller, 98–99.

The presented situation and the adopted poetics clearly stand out against the background of other poems in the collection. Reflection on the condition of the Earth in the planetary dimension, on the events that led to such a state, and the constant need to imagine people and civilization from a cosmic perspective are replaced here by what seems to be a very private insight into one's everyday life and one's home. Agnieszka Budnik additionally pointed out that, unlike other poems, *Wziąć się za szczęście* does not employ "we" and uses the personal "I" instead.²⁰ The "I" looks very closely at the surrounding space, emphasizing the bodily, sensual aspects of life. He notices dirt, looks at the layers of dust revealed by the light, traces of his own presence (pieces of tobacco, marijuana, hair) and the presence of other beings with whom he shares his space (cat fur). He also notices the width of the gaps between the floorboards. One can get the impression that the "I" manages to distance himself from catastrophic weather news and other apocalyptic premonitions, if just for a moment, and immerse himself in (as postulated by Keller) direct, deep experience. The "I" looks at reality, focusing on the inconspicuous details of his own existence.

The poet, however, ingeniously asks: "is this happiness?" This question is repeated throughout the poem (it returns at the end of almost all stanzas). The final couplet reads: "szczęście mogłoby być srebrne / ale nie miałem pewności" [Happiness could be silver/ but I wasn't sure]. These lines precede the final poem in the collection which describes people escaping from the Earth. It seems to prove that such an immersion failed to bring any kind of refuge or relief. Focusing on the everyday, the "I" finds only more doubts, more questions. He has to face disappointment, a sense of insufficiency or lack that fails to soothe his fear of the climate catastrophe.

Ostrychacz's lyrical "I" does not find refuge in everyday life, in physical coexistence, nor does he seem to believe in the agency of individual, pro-ecological engagement. The ironic doubt contained in the final quote exposes the superficial understanding of biocentrism and the limits of individual agency.²¹ As an aside, let me add that a sarcastic take on the vegetarian diet, insofar as we need to stop eating plants for the sake of the biosphere, appears quite often in environmentally engaged literature. Even Ursula K. LeGuin joked about it in 2012.²²

In *Cielenie lodowca*, a direct, bodily experience comes face to face (almost literally) with the impending cataclysm. It happens twice. Apart from *Wziąć się za szczęście*, *Sol lub ludzkość to film katastroficzny* [Sol or humanity is a disaster movie] is also of interest to us. This poem describes scenes before the "end:"

²⁰Agnieszka Budnik, "Od zagłady ludzkości do pytania o szczęście" [From the destruction of humanity to the question of happiness], review of Marcin Ostrychacz's *Cielenie lodowca*, *Wielkopolska. Kultura u podstaw*, 14 August 2020, <https://kulturaupodstaw.pl/od-zaglady-ludzkości-do-pytania-o-szczęście/>.

²¹Julia Fiedorczuk, *Cyborg w ogrodzie. Wprowadzenie do ekokrytyki* [Cyborg in the garden. An Introduction to Ecocriticism] (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo naukowe Katedra, 2015), 53–56, 119–122.

²²Ursula K. LeGuin, *No Time to Spare. Thinking About What Matters* (New York: Harper, 2017), 128–130.

koniec w plazmie brzmi lepiej
 niż koniec z własnych
 dłoni i złapałibyśmy się za nie
 i tarzilibyśmy się po dywanie
 [...]
 taczalibyśmy się ze śmiechu
 pękalibyśmy w obliczu
 końca pięknego serialu
 [...]
 i uprawialibyśmy miłość
 na podłodze
 ostatnią miłość
 w pozycjach naczelnych

the end in plasma sounds better
 than the end made of our own
 hands and we would hold them
 and we would roll on the carpet
 [...]
 we would roll on the floor laughing
 we would burst in the face
 of the end of a beautiful TV series
 [...]
 and we would make love
 on the floor
 last love
 in primal positions

In this case, happiness and carefreeness come hand in hand with despair and relief, insofar as they appear as a response to the ongoing destruction, the sudden insignificance of our lives. Although bodily pleasure is indeed contrasted with catastrophic suffering, it is only meant to ease the pain; it appears at the end, when nothing else is possible, and cannot be considered as a counterbalance to the mental and emotional burden of the crisis, the course and intensity of which are still subject to certain influences.

It seems that momentary comfort or relief in *Cielenie lodowca* is brought only by the imaginative scaling, deliberately looking at the Earth as a detail in a cosmic picture. Ostrychacz's lyrical "I" is extremely aware of and fascinated by the location of its home planet and the presence and the influence of other planets. This kind of sensitivity can be found, for example, in the poem *Dźwięki* [Sounds]. In the poem, we "listen" to the sounds made by various planets in the solar system, and compare them to different music genres, instruments, or (more broadly) the terrestrial audiosphere in general:²³

Wenus dmie w didgeridoo
 Jupiter puszcza ambient
 Io dark ambient
 Saturn psychodelę na odkurzacz,
 [...]
 Uran zloopował przelot F-16.
 Neptun – fale, piasek
 [...]
 pierścienie Urana jak lodowe dzwoneczki
 U nas idylla na rozlewiskach.

Venus blows into the didgeridoo
 Jupiter plays ambient music
 Io plays dark ambient music
 Saturn plays a vacuum cleaner psychedelic piece,
 [...]
 Uranus looped the F-16.
 Neptune – waves, sand
 [...]
 Uranus rings like ice bells
 And we can hear the sound of idyllic backwaters.

²³The recordings to which the poet refers may be easily found, for example, on YouTube or on different NASA websites.

The ongoing climate catastrophe and the social unrest associated with it, traces of which are present in almost all other poems in the collection, are completely absent in *Dźwięki*. Instead, a pastoral motif of idyllic backwaters has been introduced. Importantly, this kind of ignorance about or detachment from the ongoing crisis is visible when the "I" adopts cosmic optics. In this perspective, references to musical genres also seem important – they can also be found in the title of the poems *Megale Arktos* and *Ursa Minor*. As in *Dźwięki*, they refer to ambient, relaxing music. Listening to other planets – in a way the only form of contact available to the "I" – allows him not only to find respite, but also to expand his own imagination. He acknowledges that there are other worlds, apart from the Earth and the catastrophe that is taking place on it, and such a realization may be a counterbalance to the apocalyptic weariness, the feeling of being placed in a difficult, incomprehensible, and uncontrollable position. Similar processes may also be found in the poem *Kosmos podgląda kopulację żab* [Cosmos Peeps at Copulating Frogs]:

[...] To Kosmos.
 Pozwala wątpić
 i we wszystko wierzyć,
 na przykład w mapy
 bez Drogi Mlecznej.
 Teraz nad nenufarem słucha
 świergotu żab, nie znalazł
 nigdzie indziej we Wszechświecie
 żab o takim głosie –
 [...]

[...] The Cosmos.
 It allows one to doubt
 and believe in everything
 for example in maps
 without the Milky Way.
 Now over the water lily it is listening to
 croaking frogs, it could not find
 frogs with such a voice
 anywhere else in the Universe –
 [...]

Playing with the scale and unimaginable proportions, which plays a crucial role in the entire collection, lies at the heart of this poem. The "I" builds an imaginary connection between an event which may be easily overlooked (even from the surface of the Earth) and the vast universe. Fascinated with cosmic spaces and cosmic phenomena, the "I" also emphasizes how unique the terrestrial biosphere is. It can be said that native habitats are recognized as all the more unique when compared to the vast cosmos. Re-connecting with the habitat, an essentially pro-environmental process, as discussed by Keller, is possible through renewed appreciation, fascination, or reestablishment of a sense of belonging. In *Kosmos podgląda kopulację żab* we do not witness a close coexistence with the physical world and its inhabitants but, instead, re-connect with the world through distance; the poem makes it clear that the progressive, anthropogenic degradation of the Earth's biosphere has wiped out unique habitats and species – they were unique not only in the context of the Earth but also on a cosmic scale. One of America's most prominent environmental poets, W.S. Merwin, also called for such an approach and sensitivity.²⁴ Once again, the perspective has been shifted thanks to a shift in imagination, which enables one to process experiences differently.

²⁴Julia Fiedorczyk, *Inne możliwości. O poezji, ekologii i polityce. Rozmowy z amerykańskimi poetami* [Other possibilities. On poetry, ecology and politics. Conversations with American Poets] (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo naukowe Katedra, 2015), 37–38.

Summing up, the entire collection is built and focused on shifts in imagination which counter the obvious. The poet is able to see the Earth as a pale blue dot – a detail in the unimaginably vast Universe. This approach, importantly, allows one to come to terms with the fact that we are part of the ongoing catastrophe and to find a counterbalance to it. Of course, this is not to say that Ostrychacz tries to diminish its importance or seriousness or suggest that it is a completely unnoticeable event from the cosmic perspective. Perhaps, however, the climate crisis and its effects viewed in global, planetary optics become smaller, more noticeable, organizable, and understandable, which in turn could help one find more effective forms of counteraction. The collection essentially reduces vastness to a detail, thus restoring the image of the Earth that is otherwise hard to grasp. *Cielenie lodowca* thus tries to accomplish one of the most important tasks of environmental poetry – to see the Earth anew through writing (about) it anew, which (as a consequence) is meant to lead to more environmentally-friendly and ecologically-responsible decisions.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT:

This article is devoted to the analysis of Marcin Ostrychacz's poems collected in the volume *Cielenie lodowca* [Iceberg calving]. The article examines the poems using the concepts of the environmental catastrophe and the almost unimaginable scale on which it is taking place. Both concepts play a crucial role in the eco-critical discourse. The author tries to prove that by using the category of the detail, Ostrychacz strives to regain conceptual control over both notions. The poet sees the Earth as a detail in the cosmos and thus is able to process the phenomena which function on a wider planetary plane and find a counterbalance to the apocalyptic visions.

Marcin Ostrychacz

scale

ecopoetics

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