[00:00:00] Brian McAllister**:** It was not all long lines of connection and utopia. It was a brackish stream. And it went through the field beside our house. But we let into our hearts the brackish parts of it also. Some of it knowingly. We let in soda cans. And we let in cigarette butts. And we let in pink tampon applicators. And we let in six pack of beer connectors.

[00:00:29] And we let in various other pieces of plastic that would travel through the stream. And some of it unknowingly.

[00:00:35] **Jim Phelan:** This is Jim Phelan, Director of Project Narrative at The Ohio State University. And I'd like to welcome you to the Project Narrative Podcast. In a typical episode, A narrative theorist selects a short narrative to read and discuss with me or another host. Today I'll be talking with Brian McAllister, who has selected Juliana Spahr's poem "Gentle Now Don't Add to Heartache", which was first published in 2005, and then included in Spahr's 2011 collection, Well, Then, There, Now.

[00:01:10] Brian McAllister is Assistant Professor of English at the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Brian McAllister is Assistant Professor of English at the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. Brian's areas of expertise include modern and contemporary literature, poetry studies, environmental literature, as well as eco narratology and rhetorical narratology. Brian has published essays on Samuel Beckett, J. M. Coetzee. and Edwin Morgan, among other, topics. And he served as the guest editor of the 2014 special issue of Narrative on Narrative and Poetry. Brian also has an essay forthcoming in the October 2024 issue of Narrative, entitled Landscape Rhetoricity, Narrative, Ecology, and Topographic Form. Brian, welcome to the podcast.

[00:02:07] Is there anything you'd like to tell our listeners before you read Juliana Spahr's "Gentle Now Don't Add to Heartache"?

[00:02:13] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah, thanks, Jim. Thanks for the opportunity to read this poem and to talk to you about it. I'm really looking forward to it. So Juliana Spahr is poet whose writing often explores relationships between nature and culture.

[00:02:25] She's originally from Chillicothe, Ohio, and that Ohio setting makes its way into the content of this poem. Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache is a key work of eco poetry. It's been anthologized several times and one of the concepts that we can probably talk about later is this idea of eco poetry.

[00:02:44] **Jim Phelan:** Okay, yeah.

[00:02:45] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah, I read the poem likely notice influences from Walt Whitman on the text. Consider the effect of its long, overwhelming use of lists. Also, maybe consider how repetition shapes your experience of listening to the poem. And then think about that listening experience and how it may be different from, say, an experience of reading it silently to yourself with the text in front of you.

[00:03:09] **Jim Phelan:** Right. Okay. All right. Terrific. Now, here's Brian McAllister reading Juliana Spahr's Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache.

[00:03:17]

[00:03:17] Brian McAllister**:** Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache. One. We come into the world. We come into the world, and there it is. The sun is there, the brown of the river leading to the blue, and the brown of the ocean is there. Salmon and eels are there, moving between the brown and the brown and the blue. The green of the land is there.

[00:03:40] Elders and youngers are there. We come into the world and we are there. Fighting and possibility and love are there and we begin to breathe. We come into the world and there it is. We come into the world without and we breathe it in. We come into the world and begin to move between the brown and the blue and the green of it.

[00:04:04] Two. We came into the world at the edge of a stream. The stream had no name, but it began from a spring and flowed down a hill into the Scioto, that then flowed into the Ohio, that then flowed into the Mississippi, that then flowed into the Gulf of Mexico. The stream was a part of us, and we were a part of the stream, and we were thus part of the rivers, and thus part of the gulfs and the oceans.

[00:04:30] And we began to learn the stream. We looked under stones for the caddisfly larvae and its adhesive. We counted the creek chub and we counted the slenderhead darter. We learned to recognize the large, upright, dense, candlelight clusters of yellowish flowers at the branch ends of the horse chestnut, and we appreciated the feathery gracefulness of the drooping but upturning branchlets of the larch.

[00:04:56] We mimicked the cat like meow, the soft quart or quat, and the louder, braiding ratchet calls of the gray catbird. We put our heads together. We put our heads together with all these things. With the caddisfly larva. With the creek chub and the slenderhead darter. With the horse chestnut and the larch. With the gray catbird.

[00:05:16] We put our heads together on a narrow pillow. On a stone. On a narrow stone pillow. And we talk to each other all day long. Because we love each other. We loved the stream and we were of the stream, and we couldn't help this love because we arrived at the bank of the stream and began breathing and the stream was various and full of information, and it changed our bodies.

[00:05:38] With its rotten, with its cold, with its clean, with its mucky, with fallen leaves, with its things that bite the edges of the skin. With its leaves, with its sand and dirt, with its pungent at moments with its dry and prickly with its warmth. With its mushy and moist, with its hard, flat stones on the bottom, with its horizon lines of gently rolling hills with its darkness, with its dappled light, with its cicadas buzz, with its trills of birds.

[00:06:08] Three. This is where we learned love, and where we learned depth, and where we learned layers, and where we learned connections between layers. We learned and we loved the black sandshell, the ash, the American bittern, the hair lipped sucker. The yellow bullhead, the beech, the great blue heron, the Dobson fly larva, the water penny larva, the birch, the redhead, the white cat's paw, the elephant ear, the buckeye, the king eider, the river darter, the sauger, the burning bush, the common merganser, the limpet, the mayfly nymph, the cedar, the turkey vulture, the spectacle case, the flat floater, the cherry, the red tailed hawk, the long nosed gar, the The brook trout, the chestnut, the killdeer, the river snail, the giant floater, the chokeberry, gray catbird, the rabbit's foot, the slenderhead darter, the crabapple, the American robin, the creek chub, the stonefly nymph, the dogwood, the warbling vireo, the sowbug, the elktoe, the elm, the marsh wren, the monkey face, the central mud minnow.

[00:07:16] The gray cheeked thrush, the white bass, the predacious diving beetle, the hawthorn, the scud, the salamander mussel, the hazelnut, the warbler, the maple leaf, the American eel, the hemlock, the speckled chub, the whirligig beetle larva, the hickory, the sparrow, the caddisfly larva, the fluted shell, the horse chestnut, the wartyback, the white heel splitter, the larch, the pine groesbeak, the brook stickleback, the The River Red Horse, the Locust, the Ebony Shelf, the Giant Waterbug, the Maple, the Eastern Phoebe, the White Sucker, the Creek Heelsplitter, and the The mulberry, the crane fly larva, the mountain mad tom, the oak, the bank swallow, the wabash pigtoe, the damselfly larva, the pine, the stone cat, the kidney shell, the plum, the midge larva, the eastern sand darter, the rose, the purple wartyback, the narrow winged damselfly, the spruce, the pirate perch, the treehorn wartyback, the threehorn wartyback, the sumac, the blackfly larva, the redside dace, the tree of heaven, the The Orangefoot Pimpleback, the Dragonfly Larva, the Walnut, the Goldfish, the Butterfly, the Striped Fly Larva, the Willow, the Freshwater Drum, the Ohio Pigtoe, the Warmouth, the Mayfly Nymph, the Club Shell.

[00:08:39] And this was just the beginning of the list. Our hearts took on many things. Our hearts took on new shapes, new shapes every day as we went to the stream every day. Our hearts took on the shape of well defined riffles and pools, clean substrates, woody debris, meandering channels, floodplains, and mature streamside forests.

[00:09:00] Our hearts took on the shape of the stream and became riffled and calmed and muddy and clean and flooded and shrunk and dry. Our hearts took on the shape of whirligigs swirling across the water. We shaped our hearts into the sycamore trees along the side of the stream. And we let into our hearts the long, pendulous, polygamous racemes of its small green flowers, the first formed male flowers with no pistil, and then the later arriving hairy ovary with its two curved stigmas.

[00:09:28] We let ourselves love the one day of the adult life of the mayfly, as it swarms, mates in flight, and dies all without eating. And we shaped our hearts into the water willow, and into the eggs spawned in the water willow. Our hearts took on the brilliant blues, reds, and oranges of breeding male rainbow darter, and our hearts swam to the female rainbow darter, and we poked her side with our snout as she buried herself under the gravel, and we laid upon her as she vibrated.

[00:09:59] We let leaves and algae into our hearts, and then we let the mollusks and the insects, and we let the midge larvae into our heart. And then the stonefly nymphs. And then a minnow came into our heart, and with it a bass. And then we let the blue heron fly in, the raccoon amble by, the snapping turtle, and the water snake also.

[00:10:18] We immersed ourselves in the shallow stream. We lied down on the rocks, on our narrow pillow stone, and let the water pass over us. And our heart was glochida, and other things that attach to the flesh. And as we did this, we sang. We sang, gentle now. Gentle Now Club Shell, don't add to heartache.

[00:10:40] Gentle Now Warmouth, Mayfly Nymph, don't add to heartache. Gentle Now Willow, Freshwater Drum, Ohio Pigtoe, don't add to heartache. Gentle Now Walnut, Goldfish, Butterfly, Striped Fly Larvae, don't add to heartache. Gentle Now Blackfly Larvae, Redside Dace, Tree of Heaven, Orangefoot Pimpleback, Dragon Larvae.

[00:11:03] Don't Add to Heartache Gentle Now Purple Wartyback, Narrow Winged Damselfly, Spruce, Pirate Perch, Three Horned Wartyback, Sumac. Don't add to heartache. Gentle Now Pine, Stone Cat, Kidney Shell, Plum, Midge Larva, Eastern Sand Darter, Rose. Don't add to heartache. Gentle Now Creek Heel Splitter, Mulberry, Cranefly Larva, Mountain Madtom, Oak, Bank Swallow, Wabash Pigtoe, Dams will fly.

[00:11:33] Larvae don't add to heartache. Gentle Now, pine Grove Beak Brook, stickleback River, red Horse Locust Ebony Shelf Giant water bug. Maple Eastern. Phoebe White sucker don't add to heartache. Gentle now Worrly gig Worrly gig Beetle larvae. Hickory Sparrow Caly larvae. Fluted shell horse chestnut, Wardback white heel splitter.

[00:11:57] Larch don't add to heartache. Gentle Now. White bass Predaceous diving Beetle. Hawthorne, Scud, Salamander Mussel, Hazelnut, Warbler, Maple Leaf, American Eel, Hemlock, Speckled Chub, Don't Add to Heartache, Gentle Now, Stonefly Nymph, Dogwood, Warbling Vireo, Sowbug, Elk Toe, Elm, Marsh Wren, Monkey Face, Central Mud Minnow, Fur, Gray cheeked Thrush, Don't add to heartache.

[00:12:27] Gentle Now, Long Nose Gar, Brook Trout, Chestnut, Kill Deer, River Snail, Giant Floater, Chokeberry, Gray Catbird, Darter, Crabapple, American Robin, Creek Chub. Don't add to heartache. Gentle Now, King Eider, River Darter, Sauger, Burning Bush, Common Merganser, Limpet, Mayfly Nymph, Cedar, Turkey Vulture, Spectacle Case, Flat Floater, Cherry, Red Tailed Hawk.

[00:12:54] Don't add to heartache. Gentle Now, Black Sandshell, Ash, American Bittern, Hairlip Sucker, Yellow Bullhead, Beach, Great Blue Heron, Dobson Fly Larva, Waterpenny Larva, Birch, Redhead, White Cat's Paw, Elephant Ear, Buckeye, Don't Add to Heartache. Gentle Now, we sang. Circle our heart in rapture. In love ache, circle our heart.

[00:13:19] Or, it was not all long lines of connection and utopia. It was a brackish stream. And it went through the field beside our house. But we let into our hearts the brackish parts of it also. Some of it knowingly. We let in soda cans. And we let in cigarette butts. And we let in pink tampon applicators. And we let in six pack of beer connectors.

[00:13:43] And we let in various other pieces of plastic that would travel through the stream. And some of it unknowingly. We let the runoff from agriculture, surface mines, forestry, home wastewater treatment systems. Construction sites, urban yards, and roadways into our hearts. We let chloride, magnesium, sulfate, manganese, iron, nitrite nitrate, aluminum, suspended solids, zinc, phosphorus, fertilizers, animal wastes, oil, grease, dioxins, heavy metals, and lead go through our skin and into our tissues.

[00:14:18] We were born at the beginning of these things, at the time of chemicals combining. At the time of stream runoff, these things were a part of us, and would become more a part of us, but we did not know it yet. Still, we noticed enough to sing a lament. To sing in lament for whoever lost her elephant ear, lost her mountain mad tom.

[00:14:40] And whoever lost her butterfly, lost her hair lipped sucker. And whoever lost her white's cat's paw, lost her rabbit's foot. And whoever lost her monkey face, lost her speckled chub. And whoever lost her warty back, lost her ebony shell. And whoever lost her pirate perch, lost her Ohio pigtail, lost her club shell.

[00:15:01] 5. What I did not know as I sang the lament of what was becoming lost, and what was already lost, was how this loss would happen. I did not know that I would turn from the stream to each other. I did not know I would turn to each other. That I would turn to each other to admire the softness of each other's breasts, the folds of each other's elbows, the brightness of each other's eyes, the smoothness of each other's hair.

[00:15:29] The evenness of each other's teeth, the firm blush of each other's lips, the firm softness of each other's breasts, the fuzz of each other's down, the rich, ripe pungency of each other's smell, all of it, each other's cheeks, legs, neck, roof of mouth, webbing between the fingers, tips of nails and also cuticles, hair on toes, whorls on fingers, skin discolorations.

[00:15:55] I turn to each other, Ensnared, bewildered, I turned to each other and from the stream. I turned to each other and I began to work for the chemical factory. And I began to work for the paper mill. And I began to work for the atomic waste disposal plant. And I began to work at keeping men in jail.

[00:16:13] I turned to each I didn't even say goodbye, Elephant Ear, Mountain Mad Tom, Butterfly, Hairlip Sucker, White Cat's Paw, Rabbit's Foot, Monkey Face, Speckled Chub, Wartyback, Ebony Shell, Pirate Perch, Ohio Pigtoe, Club Shell. I replaced what I knew of the stream with Lifestream Total Cholesterol Test Packets, with Snuggle Emerald Stream Fabric Softener Dryer Sheets, with Tisserand Aromatherapy Aromastream Cartridges.

[00:16:44] With filter stream dust tamer, and streams app PC remote control, acid stream launcher, and viral data stream. I didn't even say goodbye, Elephant Ear, Mountain Mad Tom, Butterfly, Hairlip Sucker, White Cat's Paw, Rabbit's Foot, Monkey Face, Speckled Chub, Wartyback, Ebony Shell, Pirate Perch, Ohio Pigtoe, Club Shell.

[00:17:07] I put a streamlined tilt mirror in my shower, and I kept a crystal serenity sphere. With a winter stream view on my dresser. I didn't even say goodbye, Elephant Ear. Mountain Mad Tom, Butterfly, Hairlip Sucker, White Cat's Paw, Rabbit's Foot, Monkey Face, Speckled Chub, Wartyback, Ebony Shell, Pirate Perch, Ohio Pigtoe, Club Shell.

[00:17:30] I bought a Gulfstream blue polyester boat cover for my 14 to 16 foot V Hull fishing boat with beam widths of up to 68 feet. And I talked about value stream management with men in suits over a desk. I didn't even say goodbye, Elephant Ear, Mountain Mad Tom, Butterfly, Hairlip Sucker, White Cat's Paw, Rabbit's Foot, Monkey Face, Speckled Chub, Wartyback, Ebony Shell, Pirate Perch, Ohio Pigtoe, Club Shell.

[00:17:58] I just turned to each other, and the body parts of the other suddenly glowed with the beauty and detail that I had found in the stream. I put my head together on a narrow pillow and talked with each other all night long, and I did not sing. I did not sing, oh to to toi. Dark. All merged together. Oy. I did not sing groaning words.

[00:18:20] I did not sing oh, toh, toh, toy. Dark. All merged together. Oy. And I did not sing groaning words. I did not sing oh, whoa, whoa, whoa. And I did not sing I see. I see. I did not sing whoa. Whoa.

[00:18:36] **Jim Phelan:** Okay. Thank you, Brian. So, there's a lot going on in that poem. Good job reading it. All those lists. So the lists I think maybe is where we should start just because it's especially when you read it aloud the piling on of the flora and the fauna especially in part three.

[00:18:59] what are some of the kind of immediate effects of the list, do you think?

[00:19:03] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah, I was thinking about this when I was practicing reading it for this recording. And I mean, it's kind of exhausting to read a list like that. I mean, maybe multiple senses, right?

[00:19:13] It's, and it wears you out. And then it, also seems to be a kind of an attempt at a comprehensive listing of the species of this particular ecosystem. but I was thinking about the process of reading it out loud, but also then the process of listening to it. And,

[00:19:29] mean, when I'm reading it.

[00:19:31] Whether silently or out loud. I see the list, right? I see the beginning and then I see the end and I know where it's coming, right? So I know that there is an end to it.

[00:19:40] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah,

[00:19:41] Brian McAllister**:** but I can imagine listening to it with no experience of the text, or not having the text in front of you, it seems sort of like it's never ending, right?

[00:19:50] Yeah,

[00:19:50] **Jim Phelan:** interminable qualities. Right, right, right. Right, and then we get that great line, right? And this was just the beginning of the list, right? Right. And it's, on one hand, it's like, It's like, on the other hand, it's like, sure, right? I mean a joke, a joke, mean, she kind of has it both ways, right? Because I think of Samuel Johnson on Paradise Lost.

[00:20:14] No one wished it longer. Yeah. But. there is something there too, about, the kind of recognition on the part two with that line, okay, it's just the beginning, like, I've been doing this really long list, it could go on. The other thing about it too, I think, is And for someone I mean, obviously, different listeners will have different relationships with nature, but it's an interesting combination of commonly known fish and trees and things and, and others that are, like, these are, a lot of these words are new to me, a lot of these terms, right?

[00:20:47] A lot of these species I didn't know about, right? So that's a kind of interesting feature of it too, I think.

[00:20:54] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah, I think so. Like I mean, one of the things, especially as a listener of the poem is that so many of these, unless you're an ecologist, right? And the ecologist of this specific ecosystem, right?

[00:21:06] these are just words, right? and some of them reference, categories of meaning have nothing to do with the Ohio sort of freshwater systems, right? Like spectacle case or I don't know , the salamander mussel or the ebony shelf or words like these are fresh water drum effects of sound that they produce.

[00:21:26] And I mean, one of the things I was thinking about with that listing is that, kind of paratactic one thing after another, after another, right? Is that, It what it doesn't do in terms of representing the ecosystem is explain the relationship between these difference. Right, right. Other than we have the comma instead of like the prepositional phrase, right?

[00:21:46] So we have each species sort of existing on its own. But adjacent to and sort of amongst this kind of overwhelming list of species, right?

[00:21:59] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah, yeah, and the kind of the naming of the individual. I'm going to name this one, this one, this one. And the kind of equality then, as you say, without prepositions or other kinds of syntax, just the paratactic piling on.

[00:22:14] makes them all equivalent in some sense. Yeah. And so you have, individually, they're all equivalent, and then cumulatively, there's this larger sense of the ecosystem.

[00:22:26] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah, it's a, it's almost like an attempt at representing, the emergence while also acknowledging the impossibility of that representation, right?

[00:22:35] Yeah. How it does. a collection of species interact with one another in order to form a kind of ecosystem?

[00:22:43] And the representation of that, and maybe this is also what's being gestured in that line, and this was just the beginning of the list. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Representation of that is always going to miss that moment where it shifts from a collection of species to an ecological system.

[00:23:00] **Jim Phelan:** Uh huh. Uh huh. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's good. Yeah. So I think there's probably more that we could say about that and especially about part three, but it might be good to think about the movement of the poem as a whole a little bit. and maybe some of the Ur-narratives that she's working with here, like with the emergence is one.

[00:23:19] It also seems like a kind of know, you think of Adam in Genesis naming the creatures that they see in Eden and things like that, right? And so we come into the world, there is this kind of creation story. I don't know you wanna pick up on that?

[00:23:35] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah. it seems like at least the first two and into the third section, we're getting this kind of creation story, this, story of an, entrance into this world.

[00:23:45] Mm-Hmm. . And then. a kind of recognition of the position within that world, right?

[00:23:50] **Jim Phelan:** yeah.

[00:23:51] Brian McAllister**:** An understanding of how that world works and how it's sort of integrated. In the first section in particular, the one that is the most sort of ambiguous or the most kind of general, where rather than listing species and talking about the specificities of this particular stream ecosystem we have a list of colors, right?

[00:24:10] The brown of the river leading to the blue and the brown of the ocean is there, right? So, the colors are sort of this collective vision of, the world, right? Yeah. And

[00:24:21] **Jim Phelan:** it is sort of a world that we're not, in Ohio. I don't think, I mean, they were not specified, right? I mean, because we've got, the ocean, we've got salmon, we green of the land we come into the world.

[00:24:31] The world gets that word gets repeated again and again, so it's, like the world exists and then we come into it, and then, and to, there's a more specific version of that. But, yeah, so, I mean, go

[00:24:43] Brian McAllister**:** ahead. In that sense the one, it sort of hints at the possibility that this kind of recognition can happen in any kind of ecosystem.

[00:24:52] Right? And then, in two, three, and then beyond, we shift our focus to the hyperspecific ecosystem of this stream in the Ohio River Valley. Right,

[00:25:02] **Jim Phelan:** right.

[00:25:03] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah.

[00:25:03] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah. And it's interesting, too, in the first part one, we have present tense, right? We come into the world we come into the world and there it is, the sun is there.

[00:25:14] But it's almost like with the we, too, and we'll talk some more about the pronouns, I think, but with the we, it's like, okay, this is, something that repeats, right? I mean, that, is a kind of an iterative quality to this action in the first, part.

[00:25:28] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah. I mean, yeah, that use of present tense there and then the shift to past tense and all the remaining sections seems, important, right? There's a kind of experience of this awareness as it occurs in the first section and then in later section, then this becomes especially important in the final sections where loss becomes a component.

[00:25:49] There's a kind of retroactive reflection on that, right? Like we're in the moment of awakening and awareness in part one. Right. In part two and part three and then later into four and five. We are reflecting on our experience of that.

[00:26:05] **Jim Phelan:** Right, right. And that and that experience has an interesting arc.

[00:26:07] Right? So in, part two in the first part of part three, there is this kind of Eden to it. Right? we are integrated. Right? We loved the stream. We were of the stream. we couldn't help this love because we arrived at the back of the stream again.

[00:26:22] Breathing in the stream was various and full of information. et cetera, right? So this integration, Eden, kind of thing, and then we get three, and then we get four and five, as you already mentioned, the sense of loss, and four and five, we go back to the idea of the kind of creation, it's creation, and then the arc is to fall, right?

[00:26:46] Right.

[00:26:47] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah, I mean, it seems like one of the things that's happening through the, sort of, general arc of the poem is a kind of shift in understanding of the relationship between this, this we or this I, the, the sort of first person voice of the poem , and the kind of nature that surrounds them, right?

[00:27:04] Yeah. in the sort of first half of the poem, it's a kind of, integrative relationship, right? Our hearts on the shape of the stream the naming of the species in some way brings those species into the being of this voice, right? Like they're, they become a part of this ecosystem and it's a kind of mutual relationship, right?

[00:27:24] One that establishes a kind of interdependence maybe, or interrelationship of some sort, right? Right,

[00:27:31] **Jim Phelan:** right.

[00:27:31] Brian McAllister**:** But in the, second half of the, poem, And it begins to happen in the very kind of like poetic language of part three, we begin to see a kind of separation or maybe a kind of overwhelming a kind of how do you phrase it?

[00:27:46] Like an instance where the human voice takes over, right? Where the way that we understand that nature becomes entirely human, right? Right, right,

[00:27:58] **Jim Phelan:** right.

[00:27:58] Brian McAllister**:** To the point that by the end, rather than talking about the stream, They're talking about products with the word stream within it, right?

[00:28:06] **Jim Phelan:** Exactly.

[00:28:06] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, so, maybe one way to hold some of this together is to say, Alright, we have a narrative arc over the course of the whole poem of the creation fall, right? And we've already talked about some of the features of that. And then, Part three, though, with all the lists, and we've already talked about some of the first part of part three, right?

[00:28:30] That seems to be like an extended lyric interlude, right?

[00:28:36] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah, that's right. It seems like the narrative sort of pauses at that moment. In order to kind of dwell within that Massive massive list, right? Rather than there being events or a kind of causal relationship happening. It's a time sort of pauses there, right?

[00:28:53] **Jim Phelan:** Right. We're exploring What is like. What this integration is like. who's part of it, et cetera, et cetera, right? And you know, there's interesting, and this is maybe hard for listeners to get, but on the page it's a little clearer, like there are three parts to part three.

[00:29:11] We have the first, long listing, then, and this was just the beginning of the list. Then we have the, our hearts took on many things, and that gets elaborated. That's like the second part of part three. Mm-Hmm. . And then we shift, as you were saying to the poetic apostrophe gentle now don't add to heartache and that, goes.

[00:29:33] And so just to pick up on what you're saying, it's like there is a progression. within the lyric from the listing to the integration and then to separation with the human addressing the flora and the fauna. So it's, a lyric interlib, but I think we can see some progression within the lyric.

[00:29:52] Yeah. Yeah, maybe we should, Talk a little bit more about the, apostrophe section and the human voice coming in and so on, and the phrase itself, right. Gentle. Now don't add to heartache. what do you make of that? How do you, as a kind of apostrophe to the flora and the fauna?

[00:30:10] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah, so, I mean, if we're thinking of this, third section, this is the longest section of the poem and it's the one that's maybe the most exhausting for listeners and for people reading it out loud. But if we think of this section as a kind of shifting dynamic of the relationship between the kind of human voice and the ecosystem in which they're reflecting on that final section that repetition of gentle now, gentle now.

[00:30:33] And then a listing of species don't add to heartache seems to be the moment where The kind of human meaning takes priority. We think about like Jonathan Kohler in his understanding of the lyrics as one of its key characteristics is this apostrophe because it, it seeks to like animate the world with meaning.

[00:30:51] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah.

[00:30:52] Brian McAllister**:** I think One of the things that's central to that animation is it's human centered meaning, right? It's meaning through the use of human language. And so, when we say, so, gentle now, club shell, don't add to heartache. Gentle now, war mouth, mayfly nymph, don't add to heartache. This is, a call to these species to sort of animating them with a kind of meaning, but that meaning is always related to this sense of heartache, right?

[00:31:16] Right,

[00:31:17] **Jim Phelan:** right, right,

[00:31:17] Brian McAllister**:** right. In their very being. there's something that is sort of producing or that could potentially influence this heartache that, this voice is in some ways it's sort of like hinting at the lament that happens later on, right?

[00:31:33] **Jim Phelan:** Right, right, right. Yeah, and then that, raises the question that we can talk about a bit more too about responsibility for a heartache, right?

[00:31:42] I mean, who is at fault, right? Before the fall, and that kind of thing, right? There's a kind of worry here gentle now, don't, don't, right? But maybe you're kind of also a denial or something, right? Or an effort to offload responsibility.

[00:32:00] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah, I think like culpability or blame is central to the sort of final shift in the poem, right?

[00:32:07] Thinking about when does the voice become responsible for this change and when do they recognize that responsibility? I mean, this is, sort of central to a lot of thinking about, climate change and The concepts like the Anthropocene even now, right? So we recognize the Anthropocene only after the fact, right? It's a moment that we can only look shift from one kind of world to To another world where humans have become a kind of geological force capable of changing the climate and the landscape and everything around them. The whole

[00:32:39] **Jim Phelan:** planet, yeah.

[00:32:40] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah, it's something we can only recognize after we've crossed that threshold, right?

[00:32:45] And so, here we have a kind of, you know, We have a hint of it in that gentle now don't add heartache that becomes fully realized by the final section, right? Right, right. regret that they didn't even sing the lamentation. They didn't sing the primal, sorrow of those final lines of the poem.

[00:33:04] **Jim Phelan:** Right, right. But there's also that, interesting juxtaposition of the human voice addressing the elements of nature.

[00:33:13] don't, I'm warning you, or I'm asking you, I'm imploring you, don't add to heartache. But in four and five, they're not the problem, right? The elements of nature are not the problem, right?

[00:33:25] So there's something about, that relationship that's also interesting in the poem. Like they're not quite ready to admit or it's just the beginning of the human separation, right? Instead of integration, we have separation. And then as that separation continues, we have more human action, which leads to heartache.

[00:33:44] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah.

[00:33:45] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah.

[00:33:45] Brian McAllister**:** I mean, one of the ways you could think about the shift from Section 3 to Section 4 to Section 5 is in each section, the voice, Has a changing understanding of its relationship to this concept of nature, right? to the very concept itself, right? So in, three, there's still that connection, right?

[00:34:03] This, this understanding of a kind of like interrelationship. In four, there's an understanding of nature that's at the core of modernity, right? This nature as this place that is separated from the human world. And in some way shaped by human action, right? So animal runoff pollution, soda cans, all those sorts of things are human things interpenetrating the natural world, right?

[00:34:32] Right. So there's still a separation between the two. but humans are interfering in some way, right?

[00:34:40] **Jim Phelan:** Right, right. And the other thing about 4, I think that's important, is the emphasis on We let into our hearts the brackish parts of it also, some of it knowingly, and then, a little bit later, some of it unknowingly.

[00:34:54] Right, right. So which is interesting in turn, again, in picking up on sort of what you were saying about the Anthropocene, like the, time of the telling here. Right. So we have an interesting relationship between the action, right? While this was happening, we were aware of some of the things we were doing that were disrupting the integration.

[00:35:17] But we were also doing things, That we weren't aware of how disruptive they were, but now as I'm, writing this poem, I do have some awareness.

[00:35:29] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah. Yeah. so at that moment it's a sort of retrospective awareness, a retroactive awareness again, right?

[00:35:35] Right. Once we see the effects of those actions, we can see the actions themselves, right?

[00:35:41] **Jim Phelan:** Right, exactly, right. And now, and now, sort of we shift then from kind of the celebration of stanza two, or part two, to this lamenting in four and five, right? Sing in lament. We noticed enough to sing a lament.

[00:36:02] Right. To sing it. But then in the beginning of five, we have this other interesting thing with time, right? What I did not know as I sang the lament of what was becoming lost and what was already lost was how this loss would happen. So I'm already aware in four at a certain time, and I'm lamenting, but now this time of telling.

[00:36:28] It's almost like the time of the telling shifts. And I was aware of some things enough to lament, but I, I didn't know how the loss would happen. And then she, in the five elaborates on how that loss happens, right?

[00:36:44] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah. I mean, and, how it would happen is even sort of embodied within the grammar of that final section, right?

[00:36:52] Because it's when we have the clear shift from this kind of we voice to the first person singular I, right? Right, right. But the individual is the one that did not know as I sang the lament how this would happen. But at the same time that it shifts from the plural to the singular, it maintains the grammatical structure at key moments of that plural voice of the we voice, right?

[00:37:15] So

[00:37:16] **Jim Phelan:** I

[00:37:17] Brian McAllister**:** did not know that I would turn from the stream to each other. I did not know I would turn to each other, which is a, Right. Weird phrasing, right? It doesn't, yeah. You know, the we would turn to each other, right?

[00:37:28] **Jim Phelan:** Right, right. Exactly. We, yeah. The we is grammatical. I is not, right? So, so we're sort of forced into thinking, okay, this, as you say, I think it, it really works.

[00:37:40] It sort of to have it both ways. The individual and the, collective, the I and the we are Right. Sort of built into, the ungrammatically of it. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

[00:37:51] Brian McAllister**:** It's The question about, again, about like culpability or blame is this collective blame? Is this individual blame?

[00:37:57] this loss, this lamentation how this loss would happen is, becomes the sort of bigger question of Section 5, right? Right,

[00:38:05] **Jim Phelan:** right, right.

[00:38:06] Brian McAllister**:** I I think one of the things that I really like about this poem is that it, rather than kind of trying to make sense of that world of the new kind of world that exists. it kind of lingers within that experience of loss, right. Of recognition. What is it like to suddenly recognize the kind of transformation of this concept of nature, right? So that now it, in many ways, exists in, or if it exists, it exists in a radically transformed way. So that it's entirely kind of human centric, right?

[00:38:35] There's no part of the world now that isn't shaped by human action.

[00:38:39] **Jim Phelan:** Yes, yes, right. And,

[00:38:41] Brian McAllister**:** and other than just trying to understand that, it's, this is a poem through its kind of lyric hybrid or lyric narrative hybridity is like thinking about, What does that kind of loss feel like, right?

[00:38:52] How do we lament that loss? Even though we didn't lament it when it was happening. Yes, right,

[00:38:57] **Jim Phelan:** right, right. Yeah, exactly. And so, we, in the I think part five adds a kind of interesting, um, Lyric narrative hybridity itself, right? Because we are getting the story of, okay, I began to work for the chemical factory.

[00:39:13] I began to work for the paper mill. I began to work for the atomic waste disposal. I replaced what I knew of the stream with life stream total cholesterol package with all these other products that, as you said before, have the name stream in them. So we have that. narrative. And then we have.

[00:39:32] I didn't even say goodbye. and it repeated, right? I didn't even say goodbye. And it's the same

[00:39:38] Brian McAllister**:** species, right? Right,

[00:39:40] **Jim Phelan:** right.

[00:39:41] Brian McAllister**:** I imagine if listening to it, you were expecting it to kind of go back into that listing, right? Right. Comprehensively describing all of those various species that were listed in Section 3, but it focuses on just those few over and over and over again.

[00:39:55] Right,

[00:39:56] **Jim Phelan:** right.

[00:39:56] Brian McAllister**:** Right. I should have looked it up, but I don't what these may be is species that have disappeared, right? Most of them are by valves, right? Various sorts. So these may be species that are either endangered or extinct. but whether or not that repetition kind of, you shifts this into that kind of lamenting voice, right?

[00:40:16] Absolutely. It's not the, oh to to toy of the end, which comes from Agamemnon and Cassandra's lamentations. But it's a kind of repeated over and over in the listing of these species as a kind of lamentation about their loss or the changed relationship with them. Right,

[00:40:32] **Jim Phelan:** right, right, right, yes.

[00:40:33] And the regret that's built into the repetition of, I didn't even say goodbye, I didn't even say goodbye. Which then I think highlights then the lyric ending, right? The lyric quality of the ending. I did not sing you know, and it's that, the negation of earlier, we've talked about there's been references to singing, right?

[00:40:56] And, but now it's, I did not sing. So And that's repeat, again, we have the repetition. I did not sing ototoi, etc. I did not sing groaning words, and so on. I mean, the

[00:41:09] Brian McAllister**:** first thing that came to mind for me in this end, and in the, kind of, the various references to singing, was Whitman's Song of Myself, right?

[00:41:16] Okay,

[00:41:17] **Jim Phelan:** yeah.

[00:41:18] Brian McAllister**:** but what's interesting here is that, that, use of the negative, I did not sing is interesting because it's I didn't sing at that moment, but in this very poem, in the, voice here, I am given the opportunity to lament, right? Exactly.

[00:41:30] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah.

[00:41:31] Brian McAllister**:** I did not sing, but by saying that, I am in many ways singing it now, right?

[00:41:35] Yeah, yeah. The lyric voice, in its negation, creates the opportunity for that lamentation. Right, right, right,

[00:41:41] **Jim Phelan:** right. when we think of singing, obviously lamentation is one thing, but one option. But we more commonly associates singing with celebration, Right.

[00:41:52] that kind of thing. so we have, The emphasis on the lamentation, I guess, with the, I did not sing, right? there is something poetic about it, the repetition and, so on.

[00:42:02] Brian McAllister**:** I was thinking about the opening of Song of Myself. Okay. Celebrate myself and sing myself.

[00:42:09] But I assume you shall assume for every atom belongs to me as good belongs to you. This is thematically . not equivalent, but very connected to the sort of first sections of the poem, right? So we can sort of see this as a kind of like eco poetic rendering of that, vision of Whitman.

[00:42:29] It's a kind of Whitmanian over, exuberance about the kind of interconnectivity of nature, right? Then as the poem progresses into these final sections, that interconnectivity breaks down and as we were talking about the recognition of that breaking down changes through those sections until by the end we have this strange double voiced idea of like, I didn't lament and therefore by acknowledging that I am in some way lamenting now,

[00:42:59] **Jim Phelan:** right?

[00:42:59] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah. Yeah. So it's it's like taking up that, Whitmanian. Universe or perspective, right? And then recognizing how modernity and the kind of transformations of the Anthropocene have undermined its possibility, right?

[00:43:14] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:43:15] Brian McAllister**:** and then thinking about, well, what does it mean to mourn that loss, right?

[00:43:18] Not just of these individual species, but of that very idea of nature, right?

[00:43:23] **Jim Phelan:** Right, right, right, right. And so, I mean, that maybe raises a larger question, which, as we move toward the end here, about what kind of work in the world can a poem like this do, right? And, A poem of creation and fall, of lamentation recognition

[00:43:43] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah, I mean, I think, so if we think about this in the kind of larger genre of eco poetry, one of the things , that eco poetry is interested in exploring is, I mean, it, it has lots of connections to other forms of ecological writing as well, but, EcoPoetry is interested in thinking about relationships between nature and culture between language and ecology.

[00:44:07] But what distinguishes it from something, I mean, this, there's many competing definitions of eco poetry. So this is just one possible one. But what I see distinguishing it from say landscape poetry or the kind of romantic poetry of like Wordsworth or something like that is that its attention always returns to the ecological, right.

[00:44:25] It's thematic or it's political concerns are always in understanding or representing or critiquing something about our relationship with ecology,

[00:44:37] **Jim Phelan:** right? Yeah, yeah.

[00:44:39] Brian McAllister**:** so there's a kind of political vision at the core of eco poetry. Right, right. That is shaped by its use of poetry, right?

[00:44:48] Of its use of poetry.

[00:44:49] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah, yeah,

[00:44:50] Brian McAllister**:** yeah. I mean, the audience doesn't have the text in front of them, but one of the things that you could talk about is the use of lineation, the way that In the printed version, the long lists almost appear as a kind of paragraph.

[00:45:03] **Jim Phelan:** Right, right.

[00:45:04] **Guest:** Abandoning lineation. But when we get to, say, the use of apostrophe, and the use of those more traditional poetic structures, lineation comes back. So we see, like, The use of poetic structures as a way to reinforce this dynamic of understanding the shifting relationships between nature and the voice in the poem.

[00:45:24] Yeah, yeah,

[00:45:25] **Jim Phelan:** very much, right, right, right, very good. Yeah, yeah, yeah, and certainly the part five especially as it progresses, becomes increasingly sort of seems self conscious of the poetic devices of the repetition and so on and the juxtaposition of the lyric and the narrative and the ending so strongly with the lyric and then the invoking of Cassandra, right?

[00:45:49] I mean, that may be also part of the political work there. Do you want to comment a little bit on that intertextuality?

[00:45:58] Brian McAllister**:** I would, I mean, like, thinking about the prophecy, right? The ability to recognize the future and be denied by the people around you, right?

[00:46:05] Right,

[00:46:06] **Jim Phelan:** right, right, exactly.

[00:46:07] Brian McAllister**:** Here, though, the temporality is sort of reversed, right? Rather than looking to the future, Right. This poem is sort of, Shifting its attention to the past, right? This change that happened, and they didn't even notice it. Right,

[00:46:20] **Jim Phelan:** right.

[00:46:20] Brian McAllister**:** Didn't even say goodbye.

[00:46:21] So it's, the same kind of lamentation with a different sort of temporal direction.

[00:46:26] **Jim Phelan:** Right, right. The retrospective Cassandra, sort of. Yeah, that's right. Right, right, yeah, yeah, yeah. Which I mean, I don't know if I'm over reading here, but, then it does seem to be also a warning, right?

[00:46:41] I mean, we don't have to repeat this, right? I mean, this is something that happened. partly because it is Cassandra, right? It is retrospective, but there is also this Cassandra is also associated with prophecy as you're saying, right? So, I

[00:46:53] Brian McAllister**:** mean, I would say, like what's different in this poem from other more maybe, Activist is not the right word for it, but poems that are calling calling for action.

[00:47:05] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah,

[00:47:05] Brian McAllister**:** yeah. Is that this poem is asking us to pause, right? rather than say, this is what we need, we can do now, it's saying, we need to draw our attention to the loss and to the experience of mourning that comes with that loss. Right,

[00:47:19] **Jim Phelan:** right, the elegiac quality of the whole thing. Right, that's right, yeah.

[00:47:24] Yeah, yeah, yeah, no, that makes a lot of sense. Brian, anything else that you'd like to touch on that we didn't get to?

[00:47:31] Brian McAllister**:** I don't think so. I mean, one of the things that it's kind of built into what we were saying, but the use of puns seems like, especially in that final section, the streams that come up in the products, right?

[00:47:43] So, so even in those products where nature has become sort of pushed to the side, The presence, as a kind of pun, creates this breakdown, right? Like thinking about Culler again and his discussion of puns, it's a moment where both possibilities exist, even though one is the more dominant, right?

[00:48:01] **Jim Phelan:** Right, right, right, right. So,

[00:48:03] Brian McAllister**:** yeah. Yeah,

[00:48:04] **Jim Phelan:** The puns have a particular force of the contrast between what stream meant in part two and what it means here was associated with these products in part five. Yeah, yeah.

[00:48:17] Brian McAllister**:** I mean, and then the only other thing that I was thinking about was just my experience of the lists. As you said, there's a few species in there that I knew, but most weren't species that I had any idea of and I think that there's something really compelling about that and the way that it invites the movement outside of the text, right? Like, rather than these just being sonic effects, these are species that she wants us to know.

[00:48:40] Exactly.

[00:48:41] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:48:42] Brian McAllister**:** So there's a kind of call, if there's a call to action there, it's a call to understanding, right? Like, we should know That a spectacle case is not just a spectacle case, but it's also a freshwater mussel. And we should know what a white cat's paw is, or, these are things that we are responsible for understanding.

[00:48:59] **Jim Phelan:** We should know our ecosystem. Right. Then we do. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. All right. Well, great. Thanks so much, Brian. that was a really good conversation.

[00:49:08] Brian McAllister**:** Yeah, thank you. This has been really fun. I appreciate it. Yeah.

[00:49:11] **Jim Phelan:** Great. Okay. Well, and I want to thank our listeners and say, we'd appreciate your feedback, which you can send to us at our email address, projectnarrative@osu.edu or on our Facebook page.

[00:49:25] Or to our Twitter slash X account @PNOhioState. And I also want to remind you, you can find more than 30 other episodes of the podcast at the Project Narrative website or on Apple Podcasts. Thank you all.