Discovering the Weatherworld: combining ecolinguistics, ecocriticism and lived experience.

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Introduction

This chapter explores the power of ecolinguistics, ecocriticism and lived experience to help people rediscover and reconnect with nature: not just the relatively solid forms of plants, animals, soil and landscapes but also the more transient wind, sun, rain, mist and snow. The combination of the solid, slowly-changing forms of nature and the quickly-changing forms of weather is what Tim Ingold describes as the *Weatherworld*. One task for environmental communication is to encourage people to live in the Weatherworld, experiencing and enjoying the local nature around them in all weathers, rather than staying indoors being entertained by gadgets, shopping in a covered mall or flying off in search of the sun. Living in the Weatherworld can not only help people fulfil their needs without excess consumption, it can also encourage them to value their local plants, trees, wildlife and the larger ecosystems that life depends on. Ecolinguistics can play a role in encouraging people to reconnect with the Weatherworld through critical awareness of how language encodes the stories we live by. One of these stories, found often in travel agent discourse and the discourse of weather forecasts in the UK, is that anything aside from still, hot and sunny weather, is nuisance and inconvenience – from clouds, mist and grey skies to rain. This story discourages participation in the Weatherworld and works against true belonging to place.

The chapter begins by analysing discourses of travel agents and weather forecasts to reveal how linguistic choices encode the story ONLY SUNNY WEATHER IS GOOD. It then shows how lived experience – running each day in the Weatherworld and comparing that direct experience with how the weather is described in weather forecasts – can lead to new insights into the Weatherworld. Finally, the chapter takes an ecocritical look at nature writing: both new nature writing in the UK and Japanese Haiku, to see how authors write in ways that value a great variety of different weathers and encourage participation in the Weatherworld.

The writing style of the chapter is deliberately personal and concrete since one of the aims is to search for language which brings us closer to the Weatherworld, rather than language

which isolates us from it in a cloud of abstractions, technicalities and jargon. And ecolinguistics, ecocriticism and direct participation in the Weatherworld are tools that can be useful for everyone, not just a specialised group of scholars.

Sunshine Holidays

There is a story told within UK culture, repeated countless times in conversations with strangers, in weather forecasts, and in the advertising of the travel agents, that ONLY SUNNY WEATHER IS GOOD, and all other kinds of weather are bad. We can investigate this story using *ecolinguistics*, an approach which uses linguistic analysis to reveal the stories we live by and questions them from an ecological perspective (Stibbe).

The words "sun" and "sunshine" are splashed across British travel websites, even appearing directly in some of their names: *sunshine.co.uk, sunshineholidaysltd.co.uk, lowcostsunshine.co.uk, justsunshine.com*, and *sunshineholidayscornwall.co.uk*. On Thomson's "Sunshine Holidays" webpage the words "sun" and "sunshine" appear 23 times in its 504 words, a clear case of what linguists call "overlexicalisation". Overlexicalisation is when words appear abnormally often, giving a sense of over-persuasion that suggests something is problematic or contentious (Machin and Mayr 37).

The words "sun" and "sunshine" are collocated with (i.e., placed near to) positive adjectives like *exotic, great, favourite, fantastic, perfect, ideal, popular,* and *world-famous.* In contrast, the weather closer to home in Britain is represented negatively as:

> Fed up with wet summers and ice-cold winters? Take a break from the traditional British weather and get away to one of our destinations for all-year-round sunshine holidays. (Thomson)

Asking the reader if they are fed up with wet summers and ice-cold winters presupposes firstly that summer in Britain is "wet" (which is arguable since there are usually plenty of dry days) and winter is "ice-cold" (which is again arguable since few days are actually frosty or snowy). It also implies that wet and cold are the kind of things that the reader would be expected to be fed up with, planting this association in their minds.

Other travel websites and newspapers also represent British weather negatively in a variety of linguistic ways. The following examples are extracts from a corpus of news and travel agent sources:

> Fed up with wintry Britain? Here are ten destinations where you're likely to find more pleasant temperatures.
>
> As the cold, dark nights drag on, summer seems further away than ever ... but in Orlando fun-in-the-sun never stops.

> Autumn is a fantastic time to jet off somewhere sunny. You don't need to go far to find better weather than British clouds.
>
> Winter in the UK can be a depressing experience; freezing temperatures, grey skies and sleet that can keep you indoors for days.

The first implies that temperatures in Britain are unpleasant; the second sets up a strong contrast between the negative term "drag" and the positive "fun"; the third implies that there is something wrong with cloudy weather; and the last associates a clearly negative emotion, *depression,* with cold, grey, sleet. All of these use a problem frame to set up a "problem" (bad weather), and then provide the "solution" (the holiday).

Other travel websites and newspapers in the corpus represent the sunshine holiday as a form of "escape", framing British weather negatively as a kind of prison:

- Are you looking to ***escape*** the gloomy British weather with an amazing summer holiday?
- It's time to start planning your ***escape*** from the UK this winter.
- …***escape*** from the unreliable British weather. There are many other countries and resorts where sunshine is more predictable.
- ***escape*** to the sun and leave the rain behind.

One travel website talks about sunshine as a "remedy for the chilly British winter weather", which frames British weather negatively as a disease. By contrast, the sunshine holiday is framed as the cure.

I could, of course, go on and on, but the pattern is very clear already. Using a number of linguistic devices such as framing, collocation, contrast, and presupposition, newspapers and travel agents are telling a clear story. The story is that ONLY SUNNY WEATHER IS GOOD. Cloudy, cold or wet weather is associated (rather unfairly) with Britain while the good weather belongs to the distant holiday resort. The intension is to encourage the reader to feel dissatisfied with the place they live in and the diversity of constantly changing weather in that place, in order to goad them into purchasing holidays in the sun. Yes, it can be cold in winter, but flying off for a week in Spain is an extreme, expensive, and only temporary solution compared to buying a warm coat from a second-hand shop.

These holidays, of course, are ecologically destructive because of the fuel used in transport, the environmental impact of the hotels and the huge amount of shopping that tends to go with them. But another concern is that the holidays are just for one or two weeks a year, whereas the green spaces near home can be experienced and enjoyed all year round, with the diverse and changing weather providing variety and interest.

This problem goes to the heart of what is wrong with the capitalist society we live in. No-one makes a profit from people gaining wellbeing for free in their local surroundings. The

economy does not grow, even if people are healthy and happier. So there are no advertisements describing the wonderful places and experiences that can be had nearby, just advertisements for holidays in the sun. The travel companies are taking something which is quintessentially free, the weather, and packaging it up into sunshine holidays to sell to the consumer. The newspapers, which rely on advertising for their profit, amplify the pattern.

The pattern can be broken, though, with critical awareness of how advertisements and newspapers use language to convey stories; stories which generate dissatisfaction and encourage us to harm the environment. With critical awareness comes the possibility of resisting these stories, both by exposing them and pointing out their deficiencies, and more practically by taking a "holiday" in whatever green spaces can be found nearby.

The Weather Forecast

It was not the travel companies who invented the story that sunny weather is good and any other kind of weather is bad, although they certainly amplify and promote the story. No, the story runs much deeper than that, and goes to the heart of British culture. When strangers meet they greet each other with "Lovely weather isn't it!" (meaning only that it's hot and sunny) or "Terrible weather, isn't it" (meaning there's even a hint of mist, rain or cloud). Perhaps the stranger has different political or religious beliefs, but the one thing they can be counted to agree on is that sun is good and rain is bad.

The story ONLY SUNNY WEATHER IS GOOD is so widespread that it can be considered one of the *stories we live by* in Britain. The stories we live by are ways of viewing the world that exist in the minds of many people within a culture, and appear frequently in the everyday texts that surround us, from conversations with friends to weather forecasts. Sometimes they are helpful, but sometimes they are damaging and dangerous. A story like ONLY SUNNY WEATHER IS GOOD can be damaging if it stops people enjoying the place they live in, alienates them from nature for large parts of the year, and encourages them to travel in cars, go shopping in covered malls, escape to virtual worlds, or fly off to the sun.

Aside from everyday conversation, the story that ONLY SUNNY WEATHER IS GOOD is most strongly promoted by the seemingly innocent and mundane language of the weather forecast. Weather forecasters never seem to talk about rain as something cooling, refreshing, invigorating or life-supporting, just as a disappointment or an inconvenience.

My interest in the weather forecast started a few years ago during a long heatwave – three weeks of searing temperatures in July when I felt exhausted every day and oppressed by the sun beating down on my head and shoulders whenever I left the shade of the house. I longed for the cool, refreshing rain that would not only revitalise me, but also the wilting plants and the birds who were longing to splash their wings in puddles. What surprised me

was how the weather forecast described the heat and sun so positively. This is a typical example, from the hottest day in the heatwave:

> It's going to look fantastic weatherwise for tomorrow…anything that you've got planned outdoors will be unspoiled, glorious sunshine, some very high temperatures… a very low risk of rain so broadly speaking a glorious weekend (from my local weather forecast, BBC Points West)

The pattern is clear: hot, sunny weather is positive (fantastic, glorious), and anything else is negative. There is the implication in "unspoiled" that any other kind of weather would spoil the sunshine, and rain is a "risk" rather than a welcome and tantalising possibility.

All through the heatwave I watched weather forecasts and wrote down the expressions they used to talk about different kinds of weather. I found that dry, hot and sunny weather was represented positively using the words *fine, pleasant, nice, lovely, beautiful, best, fantastic, glorious, decent, good, perfect, glorious,* and *cracking*. And all other kinds of weather (*misty, cloudy, rainy, overcast, thundery, muggy, showery, damp, breezy, wet, dull,* or *grey* weather) were described negatively.

The words for describing what are actually completely normal British weather conditions are almost comically negative. One forecast uses the adverb *alas* in "Alas, a lot of cloud…" indicating total despair. There are *outbreaks* of rain and a *plague* of cloud, as if they were a disease. Clouds *encroach, linger, mull about* and are a *nuisance*, as if they were teenagers up to no good. Emotions are brought in when *sadly* Scotland will be "a bit showery" (while England is "basking in lovely weather close to 30 degrees"), and "bits and pieces of rain" are described as *disappointing*. Low coastal mist, fog, and showers are described as a *threat*. When at last the heatwave broke and there were heavy showers, the weather forecast described this is as *nasty* weather.

Looking closely, it is clear that everything that is treated negatively in the weather forecast is related either to water (cloud, rain, mist, or humidity) or to darkness (dull, gloomy, grey weather). This suggests a profound cultural fear of water, and a fear of the dark. In terms of sustainability, this worrying since 60% of the human body is water, and we, along with all other life on the planet, depend on water for our continued survival. And darkness: in the UK there is certainly far more time that is dark, dull or grey than bright sunshine. This cultural fear of water and dark could stop us from enjoying the world we live in for most of the year, and the weather forecast could be accused of stoking this fear.

Running in the Weatherworld

"Another glorious day, no threat of rain". As I sat sweating in the 33-degree heat, I realised that the weather forecast had got it wrong. Not that it had failed to predict the weather accurately, but that it had failed to predict me, the viewer correctly. The weather forecast had presupposed that I was the kind of person who obviously thought that hot sun is good, and hated the mist, rain and clouds. My worry is that if weather forecasts constantly presuppose that hot sun is obviously good and any other kind of weather is obviously bad, then viewers may eventually end up thinking like that.

So I decided to do some unusual research. I would check the accuracy of the weather forecast by listening to it carefully, then going out running every morning in the fields outside my house, in all weathers. I would experience the weather directly with my body, noticing very carefully how I felt, and compare it with images in the forecast. If the forecast said "A murky and disappointing start to the day" I would check its accuracy not by looking at the weather conditions around me to see whether it was actually murky or not, but whether I felt disappointed. I would write a diary about my experience, comparing the accuracy of the weather forecast with other sources, like nature writers who describe the fog rolling in off the hills in reverent tones rather than as a nuisance.

Looking at my Weatherworld diary, I can see that at the beginning it was hard to get out of bed at 6:30am into the dim morning light and cold and push an unfit body to run. The weather forecast that September morning stated *"It's a bit of a cold start to the day tomorrow morning, some mist and fog around at first as well but otherwise I think a nice bright picture, some good sunny spells".* It was wrong. Wrong in the sense that it put the positives on "bright" (a nice bright picture) and sun (good sunny spells) and used "but" to contrast this with the mist and fog, as if mist or fog cannot be nice and good in itself. But the mist was "nice" and "good". I wrote:

> Still light on this morning's run, coolness in the air. It looked like the sun, but it was a low full moon, hazy behind the thin clouds. The tops of hedgerows poking out of the cold light mist; heavy dew on the grass showing up the spider webs; feet getting wet. (abridged from diary entry)

I wrote that something had changed by the time I got home, and that was because of the beauty of the fog and mist and moon and trees, the feeling of being alive and running through this, through the Weatherworld. The realisation that this was there outside all the time, but I had not noticed it. And that it would be waiting for me tomorrow morning and every morning.

The next day the weather forecast talked about an "invasion of cloud" and used the negative word "linger" for the mist, then "hopefully we'll get some sunny spells". There were clouds, but in the sunrise they gradually became tinged with red and gold and became a thing of beauty, not of threat.

I brought my camera to capture the spectacle but when I got home and uploaded the photos I realised how impossible it is to capture the experience in a flat, square photograph. The experience of being in the same mist as the trees and grass, smelling it, breathing it in, taking in the wide sweep of the hedgerows and trees. It's a theme I returned to often – the impossibility of capturing the experience of being out in the Weatherworld in either words or photographs. I hear a chorus of birdsong in a bush and as I peer in I see the see shadowy shapes of birds flitting from stem to stem. I want to capture this – in a photograph? Impossible. In words? Also impossible because there was something wonderful about what I saw that is not captured at all by the word "wonderful". I've been searching among the most talented of nature writers and poets, and some seem to get closer than others to describing the Weatherworld, but none can capture it fully. And that is why it is essential to be out there, in the Weatherworld and experience it directly, not just on the internet, on TV, in books, photographs or magazines.

The weather forecast said "disappointingly grey to start with" but I notice that the sky is never grey, it's an ever-changing swirl of different greys and whites as the cloud thins and thickens, sometimes with blue or pink patches opening and closing. I am not "disappointed" at all. I started looking at Gilbert White's weather diary, to see his thoughts on the weather on the same day in 1768, and on October 30th he wrote *Fine grey day. Fallows glutted with water, and full of weeds.* The phrase "fine grey day" would now be considered an oxymoron, a complete contradiction.

I'm running in the same place each day, but it is never monotonous, never boring, because it is always changing. Slow changes as the winter warms to spring, flowers start appearing and dying; and fast, minute-by-minute, second by second changes as clouds sweep overhead or a fox runs across my path. I write:

> I felt strongly this morning how unique each experience of the Weatherworld is. There was warmth, a peculiarly warm wind, a hint of rain in the air, a black line of clouds in front and the pink, white and blue of the sunrise behind. As I walked the black line of clouds swept overhead, unstoppable, and as I broke into a run the rain swept down. An instinct of wanting to hide or take shelter gave way to a feeling of exhilaration and being alive as I ran through the rain, getting wetter and wetter.

I noticed that in the rain and wind I can *hear* the trees around me as well as see them. I hear the leaves as they rustle in the wind and are hit countless times by droplets of rain. And the leaves are responding to the same rain and breeze I feel on my cheek – we are together in the Weatherworld.

The weather forecast was almost always negative about the rain, of course: "a *rogue* shower", "rain *creeping in",* "a *rash* of showers developing towards the afternoon", "the day we're *worried* about I think will be Friday when the showers could turn out to be slow moving". It's the "we" in "we're worried about" that concerns me because it brings the

viewers in and includes them (and me), as if we are the kind of people who are worried about a little rain.

John Ruskin once wrote “Sunshine is delicious, rain is refreshing, wind braces us up, snow is exhilarating; there is really no such thing as bad weather, only different kinds of good weather” (Ruskin qtd. in Sutton 43). Ruskin may be overstating it, however. Not every moment in the Weatherworld has been enjoyable – the driving hail stinging my face was surprisingly painful, the frost soon soaked through my thin running shoes and my feet felt like blocks of ice. There are often practical problems that the weather causes – it may be highly inconvenient to be soaked through on the way to work, trainers getting mouldy. Or more seriously, the floods and droughts and heatwaves caused by climate change will become increasingly severe and life-threatening.

What I can say about my running in the Weatherworld is that I have had experiences that have increased my wellbeing and helped me learn about myself and the world around me. And I have had these positive experiences *in a far wider range of weathers* than the narrow range praised in everyday conversation and the weather forecast. If I had a fear of the dark and a fear of water in my mind from being immersed in UK culture I have banished it, and now will gladly throw myself into the rain at 6:30 am, looking forward to the feeling of being alive and at one with the Weatherworld.

UK Nature Writing

In her article “Longing for Clouds - Does Beautiful Weather have to be Fine?”, Mădălina Diaconu criticises what she calls “the poor blue-sky thinking that underlies widespread consumption of tourist destinations at long distances”. The problem, she says, is that we like dry sunny days because they allow us to ignore the weather and get on with other things like transport, sport, or leisure activities that are unconnected with appreciating the ever-changing diversity of the weather conditions around us. It is this diversity which fulfils our deep psychological need for variation in life, and living in a paradise of endless sunny days would end up monotonous and boring. Diaconu calls for “a reflective aesthetic attitude on weather, as influenced by art, literature, and science, which discovers the poetics of bad weather and the wonder that underlies average weather conditions”.

To put it another way, in the UK, the story ONLY SUNNY WEATHER IS GOOD is so deeply entrenched in the culture that it is a *story we live by*. We need to become aware of these stories, question them, and if we find there are problems with them, and then then we need to search for new stories to live by. Ecolinguistics has to power to ‘discover the poetics of bad weather’ through critical discourse analysis of texts which represent ‘bad weather’ in positive ways. One place to turn in order to find such texts is literature.

Over the last few years I have been reading contemporary UK nature writing to help me see the world around me through the eyes of other people, people who go out into the Weatherworld and explore it with a sense of wonder and appreciation. They go out into the rain, into the dark, into the mist, and in stark contrast to the messages of their culture, find something wonderful there. And not only that, they find ways of expressing what they discover in vivid prose that conveys the essence of their experience to the reader. Of course, they cannot capture the full experience in words, but they can encourage us to go out and explore the world around us for ourselves, approaching it in a new way and making new discoveries.

Nightwalk: *a journey to the heart of nature* is a book by Chris Yates, who is best known as an advocate of fishing as a way of getting closer to nature. In *Nightwalk*, however, he leaves the fish alone (luckily for them) and instead explores nature at night: "This evening, the ponds and lakes will be jumping but I will be elsewhere" (6).

Yates's description of his dusk-to-dawn journey from his garden, over hills and through woods, resists the deep-seated fear of the dark that is built so deeply into British culture. He makes the point that in the dark it's possible to see things which are impossible during the day: "At night there were no people anywhere [just] all kinds of…creatures, each one casually going about its night-time business, a whole secret world coming alive in the undisturbed dark" (15). Or to see familiar things in quite literally in a new light: "I like the way my familiar surroundings are differently transformed by the twilight as I walk through them" (10).

As he walks across the shadowy hills and woods he encounters deer, hares, birds, trees, hills, woods and rivers. But at the same time, he is intensely aware of the weather, pointing out "a single vaguely fish shaped cloud that was drifting from the south" (5), beech trees "quivering restlessly in an isolated nocturnal breeze" (28), and how "the interior of the valley below filled with a blueish mist" as the moon rose (46). He is exploring not just the world of the night, but the Weatherworld of the night.

The positivity Yates gives to the Weatherworld comes partly from the detailed descriptions of the sights, sounds and smells around him. Just mentioning them indicates that they are noteworthy or special in some way, for example:

> Everything along the ridge above me was in solid unilluminated silhouette: a heart-shaped hawthorn, a young ash tree, several clumps of thistle and at least five pairs of rabbit ears. (Yates 23)

By mentioning the light and shapes rather than giving an objective description ("there was a hawthorn, a tree, some thistles and some rabbits") Yates is placing the reader in his position, looking up at the ridge and seeing the outlines of other beings above. And that is what this writing does – it places the reader in an ordinary place and conveys a sense of

positivity about being there, encouraging readers to go out themselves and have similar experiences.

As well as the detailed description, Yates also draws on a particularly powerful lexical set (a group of words from the same area of life). It is a lexical set of myth, magic and religion. Here are some examples:

> the antlered deer appeared "slightly unreal – a ***mythic*** descendant from the time when all this was one vast medieval deer forest" (24)
>
> "a wood pigeon began to coo, repeating his familiar soft-toned ***mantra*** – a ***mesmerizing*** sound in that setting" (46)
>
> "the ***magical*** light, the intoxicating air…" (24)
>
> "there is something ***miraculous*** about the way the bird materialises out of a clear night sky" (29)

In using these powerful and positive words, Yates resists the cultural story DARK IS BAD and replaces it with THE DARK CAN BE GOOD, very good indeed. He opens up the Weatherworld at night as a place of wonder and mystery instead of being somewhere we cut ourselves off from by closing the curtains. The new experiences that can be had in the dark contribute to the diversity and variety that is necessary for a satisfying life, in a way which does not require buying shiny new things or traveling to distant countries. The story THE DARK CAN BE GOOD is therefore a useful counter story to ONLY SUNNY WEATHER IS GOOD, a *story we could live by.*

What Chris Yates does for the dark, Melissa Harrison does for the rain in her book *Rain: four walks in English weather.* She walks in Wicken Fen, Shropshire, the Darent Valley and Dartmoor, in four seasons, in the rain, and discovers that the rain can be inconvenient but also wonderful. And more than that, she discovered that rain plays a role in making us who we are as human beings. Together Yates and Harrison address the two deep phobias built into British culture: fear of the dark and fear of water, and through vivid language suggest new stories to live by.

Like Yates, Harrison goes out into the Weatherworld in conditions that would normally deter us: "Because it's something that sends most of us scurrying indoors, few people witness what actually happens out in the landscape on a wet afternoon" (Harrison xi). The solution to getting wet is simply waterproof clothing. Quoting Alfred Wainwright, she states that "There's no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing" and then describes in detail the sights and sounds of the world in the rain:

> That day, we walked from Keswick to Threlkeld along an old railway line in full waterproof gear (even the dog had her coat on) and it absolutely *hossed* it down, as the locals say. But…it was wonderful; we were dry and warm inside our clothes, the

> River Greta rushed and roared white, a dipper dinked smartly from the gleaming rocks and the leaves dripped green and glossy on the trees (xiii).

The theme of water on plants is one that she returns to "There were a few bare hawthorns hung with silver drops" (10), "I find a single tiny speedwell in flower…its petals close in wet weather to prevent its pollen being washed away" (14). These images bring together the weather and the world into a seamless Weatherworld.

One of the ways that Harrison gives positivity to the rain is to describe the claustrophobic feeling of being cooped up on rainy days as a child, in contrast with the freedom of being outdoors:

> Being stuck indoors was the most terrible punishment: outside was where everything exciting happened (11)

> On fine days we had the run of the local woods…a really wet day…meant the reduction of that vast territory to the smaller, duller, enclave of the house itself; and we chafed at it. (12)

What I like most about Harrison's writing is the way that she represents nature actively. Rain, she says, is "co-author of our living landscape" (xi), and it often appears as the agent (the one doing something) in clauses: rain "dimples the surface of the lode" (9), it "begins to patter invisibly once more on [the pub's] blistered roof and streak it's ancient, cloudy panes" (26). And all kinds of living beings are also represented as active agents, getting on with their business in the world:

> April…is changeable, rainclouds tend to build and blow in (and over) quickly…April is about change on the ground, too. Deep in the warm, damp-earth seeds are germinating, the hedge-rows are coming into leaf, wild flowers are beginning to bloom and insects breed, and everywhere the birds are at their most active, building nests and defending their territories. Life is getting on with the grand business of growing and reproducing; rain may feel like an inconvenience, but at this time of year it's essential (29).

This is one of the best descriptions of the Weatherworld that I have come across: it describes the weather actively, with the rainclouds blowing in, and life active on the ground below, with seeds, hedgerows, wildflowers, insects and birds all doing things, and then describes the interconnection and dependence of that life on the weather. The human is not separate from all this either – she is right there, in her waterproof clothes, seeing everything.

Japan

The search for new stories to live by can take us to distant places, and distant times, when traditional cultures had very different ways of viewing the world. Robert Macfarlane describes the Shan-Shui (山水, mountain-water) artists and writers of China:

> [Shan-Shui writers] explored their mountains in what they called the "dragon-suns" of summer, in the long winds of winter and the blossom storms of late spring. They wrote of the cool mist that settled into valleys at dawn, of bamboo groves into which green light fell, and of how thousands of snowy egrets would take off from lakes like lifting blizzards (32).

These writers lived in the Weatherworld, describing the changing weather, the changing seasons, and the animals and plants whose lives were intimately linked with the weather. They did not think of the "cool mist" as a disappointment, but as a part of nature as beautiful as the bamboo groves or the snowy egrets.

My early research took me to China in the search for new stories to live by about life, death and illness. But it was only much later when I lived in Japan that my outlook broadened beyond the human world to consider and reconsider the natural world around me.

I was living in Futsukaichi, a village in the southern island of Kyushu surrounded by mountains, temples, hot springs, and bamboo groves. I started reading Japanese haiku poetry, short poems about nature in the form of a five-syllable line, a seven-syllable line, and another five-syllable line. These poems spoke of a moment of connection where the poet stopped and noticed something ordinary in the natural world around them: a frog, a shepherd's purse flower, a bee, a sparrow, a pine tree, the moon, cherry blossoms. The poems capture the experience concisely and as authentically as is possible. And by framing an ordinary part of nature in the form of a poem they make a statement that it is worthy of attention, special, to be appreciated.

The haiku below is one of my favourites because of the tenderness it shows towards an insect being swept away on a floating branch by the river:

> 鳴ながら　　naki nagara
> 虫の流るる　　mushi no nagaruru
> 浮木かな　　ukigi kana
>
> still singing
> the insect drifts away...
> floating branch (Issa qtd. in Lanoue)

Reading haiku poetry helped change the way I saw the world around me – I paid attention to things I would have disregarded before: flowers by the side of the road, an ant crawling across a leaf, a bee flying out of a cosmos flower, shiny colours reflecting from the back of a starling.

In the same way that haiku poets find beauty in ordinary plants and animals, they also find beauty in ordinary weather. Here are some examples taken from haiku anthologies:

- 夜はうれしく/昼は静かや/春の雨
  Joyful at night / tranquil during the day / spring rain (Chora qtd. in Addiss and Yamamoto 18).
- おもしろし/雪にやならん/冬の雨
  What fun / it may change into snow / the winter rain (Bashō qtd. in Addiss et al 90)
- 山陰や涼みがてらのわらぢ茶屋
  Mountain shade / while enjoying the cool air / straw sandals, teahouse (Issa qtd. in Lanuoe).
- 五月雨/ある夜ひそかに/松の月
  Summer rains / secretly one evening / moon in the pines (Ryōta qtd. in Addiss et al 39).
- 春なれや/名もなき山の/朝霞
  Spring is here / morning mist / on a nameless mountain (Bashō qtd. in Addiss and Yamamoto 16).
- 梅の樹の/かたちづくりす/初時雨
  Sculpting the shape / of the plum tree / first winter rain (Kitō qtd. in Addiss et al 91).
- 三たびないて/聞こえずなりぬ/雨の鹿
  Calling three times / then no more to be heard / the deer in the rain (Buson qtd. in Yamamoto 23).
- 春雨や/木の間に見ゆる/海の道 Spring rain / visible through the trees / a path to the sea (Otsuni qtd. in Addiss and Yamamoto 25).

The positivity that these give to the rain, mist, dark, snow, and cool comes partly from just appearing in haiku poems, which traditionally praise aspects of nature. It also comes from combining the rain and mist with culturally valued natural features: mountain, moon, pines, plum trees, deer and the sea. The combination places the poet, and hence the reader, right there in the middle of the Weatherworld, looking up and down and appreciating the surroundings.

Looking closely, it is possible to see the drops of water in the character for rain (雨). And this character combines with other characters to create dozens of expressions for different kinds of rain. Among the many expressions there is 春雨 (harusame) which the Goojisho Japanese-Japanese dictionary describes as 春、しとしとと静かに降る雨 (gentle, quietly falling rain in spring). There is 村雨 (murasame) which the dictionary describes as “light stop-start rain between the end of autumn and the start of winter”; 時雨 (shigure) “passing rain that falls in large drops between the end of autumn and start winter” and 夕立 (yūdachi) “cooling rain that falls on a summer evening”. These expressions are often used in haiku poems to distinguish, represent and celebrate a great diversity of kinds of rain, opening up a new world of experiences to those whose reaction in the past would be to run inside at the first drop of rain (Stibbe 102).

While reading poetry is not for everyone, Japanese animation has proved popular far beyond the shores of Japan, and provides a route for vivid depictions of the beauty of the Weatherworld to spread across the world. To pick one example, the animated film *Tonari no Totoro* (my neighbour Totoro) has a highly memorable rain scene which lasts a full 11 minutes.

The scene begins with black clouds moving slowly in the background against a foreground of pink flowers with green stems. Raindrops fall into the water of the rice paddy, rippling into circles. Rain falls against a background of fields, hedgerows, trees, purple hydrangeas, and wooden shrines. A frog walks slowly across along the path, taking its time. A last drop lands in a puddle with a splash. The frog lets out a croak. The film represents the dark and rain as another world, one that can be scary but is filled with beauty, wonder, and adventure. The sense of wonder arises not only from the supernatural forest spirits who appear from time to time, but also from the very ordinary frog walking slowly along the path in the rain. And in the background, there are rich green plants and trees. The depictions of ordinary nature in the scene, and across the whole film, resemble haiku – short moments where the shot lingers on a snail, a leaf, a frog, a butterfly, in its full natural context, long enough to show that it is special and worthy of attention, respect and care.

The importance of representing ordinary nature in inspiring ways in haiku and animation is that after reading the poetry or seeing the films, we are likely to come across the same flowers, plants, birds, insects, mist, or rain in our everyday lives. The haiku help us to notice them and set up an appreciative way of approaching them, opening up paths to participation and enjoyment of nature that may not have been open before.

Conclusion

Aldo Leopold wrote that “It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value” (Leopold 189). In this chapter I’ve been arguing for the benefits and importance of respecting and admiring not just the land, but the wider Weatherworld in which we live.

This is how all the things I’ve been writing about come together: There is a story deeply embedded within British culture that only bright sunny weather is good. All other weathers are an annoyance to be avoided by staying indoors watching TV, escaping to virtual worlds where there is no weather, ducking into indoor shopping malls, or flying off on a sunshine holiday. If we can overcome this story then we can appreciate the great diversity and variety of the natural world around us, gaining a sense of health and wellbeing from being outside in all weathers in the green spaces we can find around us. And more than that, we can reflect philosophically on who we are, as beings who evolved within a green Weatherworld, and are adapted physically and mentally to thrive in that world.

Ingold writes that in modern cities people attempt to banish the weather "to the exterior of their air-conditioned, temperature regulated, artificially lit, and glass-enclosed buildings" (72). I have described three tools that could help in the shift from hiding from the Weatherworld to fulling living in it and part of it.

The first tool is ecolinguistics, where we can use linguistic techniques to reveal the stories we live by – the cognitive structures that are shared across the minds of individuals within a society and influence how we think, talk and act (Stibbe 10). The story that ONLY SUNNY WEATHER IS GOOD is embedded deeply within UK culture and is such a part of the fabric of the culture that it is rarely noticed. After revealing the stories we live by, ecolinguistics questions those stories from an ecological perspective. The story ONLY SUNNY WEATHER IS GOOD can be seen to be damaging because it encourages an indoor life entertained by consumer gadgets, shopping in covered malls or flying off to the sun.

The second tool is ecocriticism (Garrard), which can be used to interrogate local and worldwide literature to search for new stories to live by – alternative perspectives which encourage appreciation of, and participation in the Weatherworld in all its faces and moods. These new stories both encourage us to go outside and once outside give us ideas for how to look, what to notice, and what to appreciate.

The third, and essential tool, is direct participation in the Weatherworld, because language, no matter how vivid, can never fully capture the reality of being there. We need to feel the wind on our check, hear the leaves rustle, watch the clouds pass over the moon, and smell the unmistakable earthy smell of autumn – all with our own senses, and all simultaneously, not linearly as we read about them across a page. While ecolinguistics can help us realise that there a deep problems with the stories we live by, and ecocriticism can help us discover new stories to live by, it is the Weatherworld itself that can tell the most authentic, vivid and engaging stories, if we just go outside and listen.

Notes

1. This research is based on a European Union funded project MeWeWhole (http://mewewhole.com). An earlier but fuller version of the material presented here, together with a photographic exploration of the Weatherworld, diary extracts and teaching materials (in English, Italian, Slovenian and Turkish) can be found at http://intheweatherworld.wordpress.com.
2. All quotations from weather forecasts are from a corpus of forecasts transcribed from BBC Points West and BBC national weather forecasts.

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