
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Interconnectedness: A Study of Forrest Gander's *Be With* through the Lens of Ecocriticism

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| ABSTRACT

Forrest Gander is the 2019 Pulitzer Prize Winner in Poetry for his volume *Be With*. Although such work is normally regarded as a collection of elegies, Gander's distinctive poetry writing techniques and ecological insights are profoundly manifest in this collection, with intricate words exploring the relationship between nature and culture, language and perception. Through associating the American eco-critic Scott Slovic's thoughts about ecocriticism, including the strategy of broadening the analyzing texts of ecocriticism, the reasons for ecological crises, and methods to deal with current environmental problems, this paper aims to examine Gander's central ecological idea of interconnectedness in *Be With*.

| KEYWORDS

Forrest Gander, Scott Slovic, *Be With*, Interconnectedness, Ecocriticism

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1. Introduction

Forrest Gander (1956-) is an American poet, translator, and essayist, who was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 2019 for his collection *Be With*. Subsequently, his other poetry collections came out, including *Twice Alive* (2021), *Knot* (2023), and *Mojave Ghost* (2024). In recognition of his exceptional creations in literature, Gander was awarded a 2023 Arts and Letters Award in Literature, a Whiting Award, and two Gertrude Stein Awards for Innovative North American Writing. Despite the honors bestowed upon Gander and his oeuvre, the scholarly discourse focused on *Be With* remains relatively sparse in domestic and overseas research fields.

In domestic, Song Lin (2021) posits that the collection *Be With* is primarily written to memorize Gander's late wife, putting much emphasis on the analysis of the title (p. 68). However, Song ignores the core thought that Gander often articulates in works, the thought of the relationship among different individuals, namely the interconnectedness of all forms in the universe. "Interconnectedness" is a buzzword in recent years, "referring to a state of development in which everything of the universe is interconnected, or an ideology that views everything in the universe as an organic whole" (Zou, 2024, p.138). It is also a crucial concept in ecocriticism. Abroad, Fiedorczuk Julia explores (2020) Gander's quest for the "poetic of listening" from Judith Butler's theory of vulnerability and the concept of "interbeing" in Buddhism (p. 157). Although Julia categorizes Gander's poems as "eco-poetics", she does not sufficiently integrate Butler's sights and the Buddhist concept with his eco-poetry to effectively illuminate his ecological thoughts.

Research about Gander and his works does not align with the accolades he has achieved. Moreover, discussions of Gander's *Be With* chiefly concentrate on its themes of love, life, and death. As a poet holding degrees in both geology and English literature, Gander mixes geological terminology with poetry creations, including some in *Be With*. As Julia says, his poetry particularly emphasizes "landscape and the multiple ways in which it shapes human subjectivity and selfhood" (2020, p. 159). These factors suggest a promising avenue for appreciating Gander's poems in *Be With* through the lens of ecocriticism.

To analyze the ecological thoughts embodied in Gander's poetry more specifically, this essay will introduce an American eco-critic, Scott Slovic (1960-). Gander's unique understanding of eco-poetry, which does not stereotype nature as the theme, but attempts to investigate "the relationship between nature and culture, language and perception" (Gander & Kinsella, 2012, p. 2), resonates with Slovic's effort to expand the boundaries of ecocriticism. What's more, both scholars advocate for individual

responsibility in the world through written words and practical actions. Their common ecological philosophies lay the foundation for this study.

2. "Strategic Openness" of Ecocriticism: The Interconnectedness of All Things

For Slovic, no work of art, literature, or popular culture is beyond the purview of environmental scrutiny. He defines "ecocriticism" as "either the study of nature writing by way of any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any literary text, even texts that seem (at first glance) oblivious of the nonhuman world" (2008, p. 27). Consequently, some scholars name such an approach as "strategic openness": a flexible and inclusive approach designed to welcome diverse perspectives within the field (Slovic & Yang, 2010, p. 106).

One example Slovic often cites to illustrate the concept of "strategic openness" is a poem written by Wilfred Owen (1893-1918), "Dulce et Decorum Est". While the poem ostensibly addresses themes of patriotism, appearing to have no connection to nature, ecology, or even ecocriticism, Slovic argues that it fundamentally engages with death and can be interpreted as a critique of anthropocentrism. The depiction of soldiers dying on the battlefield underscores the notion that human beings are ultimately subject to the laws of nature, the cycle of life and death. Furthermore, Slovic interrogates the significance of those soldiers' deaths, questioning their commitment to a nation, a construct of human design. He wonders whether there exists another form of patriotism: one that advocates for loyalty not only to specific groups but also to the earth and the tangible places providing vital resources and necessities for life (Slovic & Wu, 2015, p. 145).

Slovic's interpretation of the patriotic poem from the perspective of eco-criticism endows it with a broader and more far-reaching connotation. Therefore, employing "strategic openness", the following analysis will explore the ecological thoughts of some poems in *Be With*, including "Son" and "Epitaph", which former scholars have primarily interpreted in terms of life, love, and death.

"Son" is commonly regarded as an elegy dedicated to Gander's wife, poignantly portraying the profound silence between the father and son following the loss of their most beloved. In this poem, Gander transcends mere recollection of his deceased spouse, rather concentrating on "relationship", including the intimate bonds among individuals and the close connection between humanity and nature.

In "Son", Gander writes, "...The heart of charity/ bears its own set of genomes. You lug a bacterial swarm in the crook of your knee, and through my guts/ writhe the helminth parasites. Who was ever only themselves" ¹(Gander, 2020, p. 129). Gander innovatively uses the concept of genetic inheritance and parasitism to analogize the intimate relationship: Among different individuals, blood ties and kinship make them firmly connected, as Gander states "Her one arterial child. It is just in you her blood runs" (p. 129). Furthermore, the presence of bacteria and parasites within the human body highlights a mutual dependence between the host and organisms, forming a complex ecosystem, which underscores Gander's assertion that "nobody is only themselves," and exhibits the theme of interconnectedness.

Connecting Slovic's "strategic openness", it is not hard to analogize the relationship between man and nature. Just as bacteria and parasites inhabit the human body, humans often exploit nature, consuming its resources and inflicting harm on the environment, which can lead to ecological disasters. Through Gander's nuanced and indirect language, he seeks to remind human beings that interconnectedness extends beyond human relationships, emphasizing the vital bond between humanity and the natural world.

In another poem "Epitaph", he expounds on a similar theme of interconnectedness with these lines, "To write You/ existed me/ would not be merely/ a deaf translation" (p. 132). On the surface, this poem serves as a lament for his wife. Gander once said in an interview about his feelings about losing his wife, "To lose a beloved is to lose part of oneself-to die a little"² (Julia, 2020). In the intimate relationship, "you" is the premise of "my" existence. The weight of this loss permeates the poem, reflecting the profound impact of losing a beloved one. The heaviness of losing the beloved could be traced in the poem's lines. In every line of this poem, there are no more than five words, and in some stanzas, Gander deliberately interrupts some complete sentences as well as some fixed phrases, for example, the chunking between "halt" and "blind", the separation between "aware" and "of", and the separation of the subject "I" from the predicate (p. 132). Short and serious words provide readers with a sense of sorrow and heaviness. The unexpected pauses between words also remind the speechless and disorderly after losing the beloved, being like a healthy man suddenly becoming handicapped.

Similarly, from the intimate relationship to the relationship between man and nature, when the interconnection is broken and man could no longer ask for resources and supplies from the environment, human beings are crippled, either. In the third stanza,

¹ In the latter parts, Gander's name and the publication year would be omitted in the in-text citation for the essay's clarity and simplicity. The complete quotation can be seen in the "references" part.

² Gander speaks about this experience and poetry as a way of metabolizing grief in an interview for *Przekrój*, pointing out that loss is "a useless word" when it comes to such a fundamental bereavement (Fiedorczuk, 2020, [online] <https://przekroj.pl/kultura/strata-slowo-bezuzyteczne-julia-fiedorczuk>)

Gander shifts from mourning to depict a man who has realized the irreversible harm inflicted upon nature, adopting a somber tone:

Where I stand now
before the throne of
glory, the script
must remain hidden. Where,
but in the utterance itself?

Born halt and
blind, hooped-in by
obligations, aware
of the stare of
the animal inside, I
hide behind mixed
instrumentalities
as behind a square
of crocodile scute- (lines 8-21)

Standing in front of the grave, the protagonist envisions himself before a “throne of glory”, reminiscent of Oedipus, who was also “born halt” and fell into the abyss after achieving great success. This scene creates a stark contrast between the “throne of glory” and the protagonist’s disabilities. What’s worse, the protagonist is not only physically impaired but also consciously obtuse.

It is only upon recognizing the “obligations” of living in the world, after having caused unrecoverable damage to the earth, that the protagonist becomes aware of the “stare of the animal inside” (p. 132). Although he attempts to shield himself with “mixed instrumentalities” (p. 132), the technology invented by man, he cannot alter the reality that the toxins have already penetrated the circulatory system, “while cyanide drifts/ from clouds to/ the rivers” (p. 133). Because of interconnectedness, man is destined to bear the consequences of its transgressions. Gander’s caution extends further as he writes: “Although I also wear/ my life into death, the/ ugliness I originate/ outlives me” (p. 133). Even as those causing harm to nature pass away, the repercussions of their misbehavior persist, continuously impacting future generations. Human beings must pay for their excessive desires and shortsighted behaviors.

Slovic said, “There is no category of text that you can imagine that does not find some kind of meaning about the environment” (Slovic & Wu, 2015, p. 143). Gander’s core ecological thoughts of interconnectedness, including that “nobody is only themselves” and “man is part of nature”, are embodied in poems to memorize his departed wife. Slovic’s thoughts of ecocriticism provide more possibilities for comprehending Gander’s poetry. Meanwhile, Gander’s innovative creation of eco-poetry is evident in his intricate and indirect language use. Rather than addressing nature as a direct theme, he begins with human relationships, encouraging readers to reflect on the essence of these connections before delving into the deeper relationship between man and nature, which exhibits Gander’s wisdom of extending oneself to others, namely extending human beings to things in the universe. Moreover, the possibility of extending oneself to others, and extending man to the universe lies in the interconnectedness of all things.

3. “Psychic Numbing” and “Slow Violence”: The Source of Ecological Crises

Besides the innovative strategy of broadening the texts of ecocriticism, Slovic endeavors to uncover the source of ecological crises. In the book *Numbers and Nerves: Information, Emotion, and Meaning in a World of Data* (2015), he integrates the psychological perspective with ecocriticism to scrutinize the reasons why human beings are continuously ignoring the interconnectedness among things and always act with short-sightedness. Subsequently, he utilizes the concepts of “psychic numbing” and “slow violence” in psychology to elucidate these issues.

The concept of “psychic numbing” is elaborated in Robert Jay Lifton’s seminal book *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (1967), and his subsequent essays. In an article, Lifton defined it as “a diminished capacity or inclination to feel” (1995, p. 58). Originally, “psychic numbing” was a survival mechanism applied to trauma. However, the boundaries of numbing become blurred over time, as “the tendency toward numbing can even extend to everyday forms of human interaction” (Lifton & Mitchell, 1995, p. 59). Likewise, Slovic suggests that “we are inundated with information about devastating losses, from earthquake victims in Turkey to the extinction of species in North America, and numbing seems to be the automatic and widespread psychological response” (2008, p. 149). Therefore, “psychic numbing” is identified as one of the factors in man’s inaction when facing negative environmental changes.

Another concept related to “psychic numbing” is “slow violence”, which was first introduced in Rob Nixon’s 2011 book *Slow Violence and the Environmental of the Poor*. “Slow violence” highlights the gradual and often invisible nature of violence wrought by climate change, toxic drift, and the environmental aftermath of war. Slovic also expounds on the similar phenomenon, contemplating that it stems from human beings’ evolutionary tendency to respond to immediate threats rather than gradual ones

(2008, p. 151). According to neurologist Robert Ornstein and population biologist Paul Ehrlich, ancestors of human beings who act powerfully to sudden danger are more likely to survive than those who "pondered the evidence more calmly" (1989, p. 113). Consequently, humans are inherently better equipped to cope with immediate crises than those approaching gradually. Enlightened by Nixon's idea, Slovic clarifies the concept of "slow violence", as being insensitive to significant phenomena in the environment (Ye & Han, 2020, p. 4).

Meticulous descriptions of human being's "psychic numbing" and "slow violence" are presented in Gander's works. In "Tell Them No", still beginning with a remembrance of his late wife, the poet writes, "What a good/ human life/ looks like. In/ bed as/ out. An extreme/ conjunction" (p. 156). The "badger-hair shaving brush" (p. 157), a gift from his wife, locks the "shocking feral musk" (p. 157) on his face. Time preserves the things but claims the people. The poet only sees, "Fog all morning, impressive/ gray hat-band under/ mottled crown of mountain, / its top edge sliding/ south and thin/ steam from the Petaluma/ dairy spewing in/ the same direction" (p. 157). The flowing, shifting fog and vapor are as fluid and diffuse as the poet's thoughts. He recalls the intimate life with his wife, but then "stumbling again/ dumbly/ home into the/ line of my/ own questioning. / Carried too far/ off course?" (pp. 158-159). In a trance, the pain, confusion, and helplessness sweep over the body.

Nevertheless, the protagonist doesn't dwell on those feelings. He is looking for solutions: "Then scratched my/ arm with my teeth, / nicking the cap/ of the eggshell and/ taking the larvae of recognition into/ my mouth", "to parcel it/ out, the self/ as introduction. Who am I is/ what I can do" (p. 163). Obtaining the "larvae of recognition", "I" am much proud, confidently claiming "Who am I is/ what I can do". Isn't this an insinuation to the delusional human beings relying on technology to change nature? Since agrarian civilization, competence has become a status symbol. The idea of man's superiority has also become an important manifestation of anthropocentrism. However, the poet follows by saying that "at some point, change results in a retrogression" (p. 164). "I", holding the "larvae of recognition", fails to find the lost "you", as "when what is/ demanded is/ change so/ fundamental/ only another/ personality could/ accomplish it" (p. 165).

Likewise, change and progress may concomitantly bring about destruction and disasters. That's because, "To be oblivious, in some/ manifold danger. And/ so one lives" (p. 173). To those "manifold dangers" surrounding, man is still "oblivious", being insensitive and self-satisfied, even immersed in the "spectacularization/ of the trivial, bad/ faith hilarity..." (p. 172). These lines authentically capture the numbness and shortsightedness of human beings. Gander ultimately characterizes this flaw as a "self-absorbed error" (p. 177), whereas it has evolved into a "terror" now.

Subsequently, the poem culminates with the following lines: "Dog baying in tune/ with the siren. Maybe the/ couple will arrive yet/ in time for events/ to assign them/ another meaning. As/ she disengages the hooks/ from the eyelets, he stiffens" (p. 178). Gander intentionally concludes the poem with imagery that alludes to mortality, "dog baying in tune", "the siren", and the disengaging of the "hooks from the eyelets", not only symbolizing the demise of the poet's spouse but also portending the dire future of humanity if they continue making the same mistakes of indulging in the state of insensitivity and complacency with the present.

Similarly, such numbing and "slow violence" are permeated in "Stepping out of the Light". The poem begins with an illustration akin to the Chinese landscape painting, with fog delineating from a "vast of green, the silhouette of each pine on the slope" (p. 141), and bleaching the spaces between each trunk. Such hazy beauty in nature makes the poet ponder "Maybe it's like that, / only all along it was/ obscured by what? / Rush, distraction?" (p. 141). Gander speculates that being rushed and distracted are not the reasons, but human numbness. Men are unable to fully appreciate the overt beauty in nature, nor are inclined to acknowledge the detrimental actions they have inflicted upon it. To the great dangers, humans are "obscured" by their insensitivity and complacency.

People are too insensitive to such disasters, being like a "querying grosbeak" (p. 141), even when they find themselves in "another world" (p. 141). It is the world that they "weren't looking for" (p. 141). In this world, people would discover their other own:

And you burst
in as the Mangler,
you gouge out
your right eye which
hath offended. And you
burst in as the Great
Liar gorging
On your own flesh
And as Won't
Let Go who shreds
your tendons, gnaws
your femur. You can't
stop bursting in,
coming upon yourself
alone, vulnerable, in the

privacy of your dying (lines 24-39).

In this tumultuous world, people fiercely gnaw the body of themselves, who are “alone” and “vulnerable”, serving as a metaphor for human beings’ predicament amidst ecological crises. Their excessive activities, for instance, the brutal slaughter of animals, unrestrained exploitation of resources, and wanton destruction of ecosystems, will finally reverberate back onto man. Compared with the mighty nature, vulnerable and incapable humans are bound to reap as they have sown. Gander conscientiously capitalizes words and phrases like “Mangler”, “Great Liar”, and “Won’t Let Go”, with the first two referring to humanity, and the latter alluding to humans’ destiny.

In the later part of the poem, human beings gradually realize that they are like a “crushed spider” (p. 142), discovering themselves “once again already/ to have been inside something/ like an equation with/ a remainder, a deodand, a/ reminder of the impossibility/ of reconciliation” (p. 142), metaphorically conveying their insignificant and marginalized position within the vast universe. Then, some begin to regret, while some unashamedly say “forgive yourself” (p. 142), prompting them to seek solace in words. Yet, the poet contradicts those people, “but/ after you forgive/ what you have lived, / what is left”, and “you can’t/ set aside the jigger/ of the present from/ the steady pour of hours” (p. 142). It is impossible to separate the present moment from the ceaseless flow of time, as an ancient Chinese poem Li Bai (701 AD-762 AD) said, “The sword cuts off the water and the water flows even more” (Zhao, 2006, p. 58). Things left by man are only their life traces which have been deeply inscribed into nature through time. Indeed, Gander’s view of time embodied here coincides with the Zen view of being and time: “Time itself is being, and all being is time..... Essentially, everything in the entire universe is connected and independent of each other as if they were moments in time” (Ozeki, 2013, p. 30). This also provides a philosophical source for the idea of interconnectedness.

These two poems mentioned above exemplify the ignorance and numbness of human beings facing potential environmental dangers, prove the concept of interconnectedness, and exhibit Gander’s concern for potential catastrophe. Recognizing the urgency of the issue, Gander employs the medium of ecological poetry as a siren, calling out to awaken the public’s awareness of these crucial problems and challenges brought about by their complacency and insensitivity. Additionally, Gander also tries to find practical ways to get rid of such insensitivity in another poem.

4. The Trans-scalar Imaginary: A Practical Method to Deal with Ecological Insensitivity

As most humans do not even think about the real implications of changes in the environment, some visual and literary artists and journalists have developed strategies to help man break the wall of insensitivity in human minds (Shi & Slovic, 2020, p. 5). One of these strategies Slovic mentioned in his book *Going Away to Think: Engagement, Retreat, and Ecocritical Responsibility* (2008) is called “trans-scalar imaginary”, which is proposed by a Seattle-based photographer, Chris Jordan.

One of Jordan’s pictures looks like a beach made of tiny pebbles when viewed from a distance, but when the viewer gets close to it, he or she would find that such a “beach” is made up of myriad plastic bottles. If a viewer constantly moves close and then far away, the viewer would develop the ability of “trans-scalar imaginary”, signifying the ability to think across scales, from one to many, and from small to large (Shi & Slovic, 2020, p. 5). Enlightened by the artistic practices embodied in paintings and pictures, Gander also acclimates the similar strategy of “trans-scalar imaginary” to his poetry, including “Madonna del Parto”, and “A Clearing”.

The poem “Madonna del Parto” is an adaptation of the eponymous painting by the Italian Renaissance artist, Piero Della Francesca (1416-1492), which depicts the image of the pregnant Virgin Mary. At the onset of this poem, Gander writes “And then smelling it, / felling it before/ the sound even reaches/ him...” (p. 139). In the verse line, “it” refers to the imagined waterfall. The reason why Gander uses “and then smelling it, / feeling it” before hearing it, lies in that he first sees it as he is still looking at the painting. The hearing and tactile sensations are both imagined by himself, conjuring as the imagined extensions of this visual experience.

The poet’s observation of the Virgin Mary’s swollen belly, adorned with a robe billowing outwards, triggers a metaphorical association with a waterfall in nature: “...the now/ visible falls that/ gush over a quarter/ mile of uplifted sheet-/ granite across the valley” (p. 139). Through crossing time and space, the poet imagines himself “kneeling at cliff’s edge”, and “turning his head toward the now visible falls” (p. 139). To better feel the gushing power of the falls, he “pauses, lowering his eyes for a moment”, and only to find the “tranquility-vast, unencumbered, terrifying, and primal” (p. 139).

As Gander mentioned in an interview with the journalist from *Southern People Weekly*, when he worked on this poem, he was still immersed in the sorrow of losing his wife, which is like getting lost in a thick forest³. As he saw the painting, he was reminded of the falls gushing from the two valleys. He “pauses, lowering his eyes for a moment, unable to withstand the tranquility” (Li, 2019), until he regains calmness with the divinity of nature: “That/ naked river/ enthroned upon/ the massif altar, / bowed cypresses/ congregating on both/sides of sun-gleaming rock...a shifting/ rainbow volatilized by/ ceaseless explosion” (p. 139). Everything is disintegrated into nothingness before the absolute power of nature. Through crossing space, time, and imagination,

³ The interview is conducted by the journal *Southern People Weekly*. Li Naiqing (李乃清), 2019, [online] <https://www.nfpeople.com/article/9361>

Gander connects the current scene with a setting in nature, realizing the trans-scale from the painting to the viewer's inner world, and from an individual man to the accommodating nature.

The poem "A Clearing" is inspired by a series of photographs taken by a photographer Raymond Meeks. Those pictures are the impetus for Gander's poetic exploration of the harsh realities of life in the mining region in Myanmar, as he writes "dull assertiveness of the rock heap, a barren monarchy. / Wolfspider, size of a hand, encrusted with dirt at the rubble's edge", and "in the open pit at noon, men waning in brightness" (p. 210). In the same interview mentioned above, Gander expressed his desire to forge a connection with those people, despite their vastly different backgrounds. Being enlightened by these pictures, he composed such a poem.

At the beginning of the poem, the poet starts a direct dialogue with the anonymous figures in these pictures, "where are you going? Ghosted with dust. From where have you come/ ... Iris in an eye, mound in the photograph, / Don't pick him up, rocks say, because the dead belong to the rocks" (p. 210). Through lines of poetry, Gander shows deep sympathy for those people living in remote areas, transcending geographical and cultural barriers. Furthermore, Gander's belief in the interconnectedness is articulated in the lines "one step forward and he is with us. One step back, another realm absorbs him" (p. 210), which appear twice in the poem. They also exhibit Gander's attempt to establish a link between himself and the figures in the photographs.

The idea is closely aligned with Indra's Net in Buddhism. The Indra's Net is a huge diamond-studded net where every diamond reflects and is in turn reflected by all the other diamonds (Julia, 2020, p. 164). Meanwhile, in this poem, the trans-scalar imagination enables Gander to broaden his horizon from people in one corner of the world to the whole of nature and the universe. As Gander says, some people may only focus on their realm, disregarding realms owned by others. However, for Gander, every "realm" is connected and he does not think only the "realm" he belongs to is real, nor does he agree that man can underestimate the "realm" of others (Li, 2019). Changing the perspective from the close range to the distant, and zooming out the position of humans, are the trans-scalar imaginary strategies Gander used in his works.

"Trans-scalar imaginary" is not only beneficial for reducing insensitivity to vital environmental problems but also a practical way for people to change their view of anthropocentrism. Since the philosophy of "man is the measure of all things" has been widely recognized, human beings gradually lose their awe towards nature, ignorantly falling into the trap of anthropocentrism. To some extent, "trans-scalar imaginary" does illustrate man's limited vision and capability. To diminish human beings' insensitivity and promote their introspection is what Slovic and Jordan want to realize (2008, p. 205). That's also the reason why Gander tries to emphasize the divinity and the interconnectedness of things in nature when he practices the "trans-scalar imaginary".

5. Conclusions

John Muir, the icon of American environmental writing, comments that "I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in" (1979, p. 439). For Muir, walking in nature is equivalent to retrospection of man's inner world. Meanwhile, Slovic also emphasizes the idea of "going away to think", meticulously reflecting on ecological responsibility as a writer, an eco-critic, and a teacher. He expresses his aspiration to balance the "savor" and "save", to balance the desire to enjoy life and the duty to do good in the world (2008, p. 3). Rather than condemning human's pursuit of "pleasure now", he acknowledges it is the inherent human nature and reality of living on the Earth. In addition, for numerous readers or individuals, he ponders on "what kind of language might break through this apparent insensitivity and trigger new alertness to the potential hazards our civilization faces?" (2008, p. 152). He firmly believes in that "nature writing" or "environmental writing", has the potential to "help readers reimagine their relationship with the planet and overcome crippling fears and feelings of alienation" (2008, p. 153). These ideas can explain why he spares no effort to expand the texts of ecocriticism, to broaden the reader's perspective to include themselves in a broader universe.

As for Gander, his approach to contributing to nature is manifest through his unique writing of "eco-poetry". Uniquely intertwines science and nature spirituality, Gander is called an "eco-poet" (Julia, 2020, p. 159). Nevertheless, in his book *Redstart. An Ecological Poetics* (2012), Gander clarifies that what interests him is not the "'nature poetry', where nature features as a theme", but "poetry that investigates-both thematically and formally-the relationship between nature and culture, language and perception" (Gander & Kinsella, 2012, p. 2). He thinks that human beings are living in an era characterized by the proliferation of increasingly standardized, utilitarian, and transcribable language. The information that people are exposed to is often presented in prefabricated and normalized language patterns. Such a trend towards standardized language practices, argues Gander, has the potential to significantly constrain human thinking and perception (2022, p. 83). Therefore, he calls for more innovative, intricate, and nonstandard language to write, which is perfectly embodied in *Be With*.

Incorporating some important ecocritical concepts of Slovic, including "strategic openness", "psychic numbing", "slow violence", and "trans-scalar imaginary", this essay delves into the ecological thoughts embedded in Forrest Gander's collection, *Be With*. To a certain extent, this exploration also showcases Gander's unique poetry composing features of being an "experimental poet". As Xi Chuan comments, Gander's poem is always "full of magic", which is "dense, intricate, and as firm as a rock" (2020, p. 116). The remarks of Xi Chuan resonate deeply with the discoveries presented in this essay: Gander skillfully interweaves the ecological idea of interconnectedness in his elegy and memoirs. Thus, the title of this collection, *Be With*, not only conveys Gander's longing for companionship with his lover but also elucidates the co-existential situation of man and nature. These elements collectively verify Gander's proposal of eco-poetry creation, which is to create "poetry that investigates...the relationship between

nature and culture, language and perception" (Gander & Kinsella, 2012, p. 2). His insightful ecological thoughts and distinctive way of expression are worthy of discovery.

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