

Part III

Nineteenth-Century Ecopoetics

Daniel A. Finch-Race

Ecopoetic Adventures in Rimbaud's 'Sensation' and 'Ma Bohème'

Abstract: The profusion of ecological matters in Arthur Rimbaud's 'Sensation' and 'Ma Bohème' of 1870 draws attention to the peculiar relationship between mankind and its surroundings in the later years of the nineteenth century. The feeling of fulfilment ensuing from the teenage poet's communion with nature in a space beyond the confines of urban industry is associated with versificatory particularities that are suggestive of personal and stylistic evolution based on a distinctive mode of enmeshment in the non-human world. Rimbaud's rendering of a world on the cusp of the metropolis entails a quest for personal independence outside traditional constraints. The visual and tactile evocations of the narrator's surroundings and corporeal circumstances are complemented by auditory metaphors that emblemise a transition beyond Hugolian lyricism. The present chapter contends that the ecological framework of the poems provides an insight into the peculiar identity of the countryside in the era of industrialisation and Haussmannisation. It is conjectured that the distinctive versification of the poems (several caesurae are overridden; there are multiple instances of enjambement and unsettled rhythms; rhyming richness markedly varies from stanza to stanza) embodies increasingly significant correspondences between environmental circumstances and cultural production at a moment of accelerated change in ecological and sociocultural conditions in France.

The attentiveness to environmental elements in Arthur Rimbaud's 'Sensation' and 'Ma Bohème' of 1870 contrasts with mid-century accounts lauding the scientific and technological wonders of urban society. The fantastical pieces of verse evoke personal and poetic satisfaction resulting from communion with a kind of nature that is characterised as a grand counterpoint to the narrator's impoverished circumstances. The emphasis on sensorial experience of a peri-urban space signals the complex relationship of humanity to its environment in the industrial era, and develops the Hugolian Romanticism of the first half of the century. Rimbaud's rendering of experiences on the cusp of the metropolis bears the traits of a quest for personal independence outside traditional constraints, with auditory, tactile and visual evocations of the world and the narrator's circumstances emblematising a new breed of lyricism. The ecological framework of the narratives ultimately provides an insight into the peculiar identity of a tensioned borderland between the city and the countryside. This chapter conjectures that structural particularities convey ecosystemic qualities at a moment of accelerated change in environmental

and sociocultural conditions: several caesurae are overridden; there are multiple instances of unsettled rhythms and enjambements; rhyming richness undergoes sizeable shifts; acoustic patterns create surprising resonances. The guiding proposition of the analysis is that Rimbaud's verse articulates correspondences between ecological circumstances and shifts in cultural production.

'Sensation' and 'Ma Bohème' depict contact with extra-urban nature in an eco-poetic mode: the earlier poem conveys wonder with reference to tactile and visual phenomena in open fields on summer evenings; the later poem expresses thoughtfulness ensuing from the experience of sitting alongside rural tracks on September evenings after wandering through the countryside. In both poems, the absence of dealings between a human society and the solitary narrator suggests a division between a municipal sphere and the environment through which the protagonist rambles. The narrator's distanciation from a space of commercial and sociocultural activity opens up the possibility of unalloyed communion with the world in places that are valorised for lacking artifice and the accelerated rhythms of urban life. The two poems point to sixteen-year-old Rimbaud as an eco-poet because they draw attention to the importance of the non-human world amid the escalating metro-centrism of France in the era of Haussmannisation. According to Scott Bryson,

Ecopoets offer a vision of the world that values the interaction between two interdependent and seemingly paradoxical desires, both of which are attempts to respond to the modern divorce between humanity and the rest of nature: (1) to *create place*, making a conscious and concerted effort to know the more-than-human world around us; and (2) to *value space*, recognising the extent to which that very world is ultimately unknowable.¹

Both poems from 1870 revolve around the narrator's efforts to determine his position in the world by concertedly interfacing with his surroundings, and Rimbaud focusses on the importance of affording a place to the numinousness of the non-human world as a counterpoint to contemporaneous portrayals of the marvels of urban development. The two evocations of a personal attempt to come to terms with physical nature develop traditional referents for comprehending experience and poetry: the narrator of both poems is an eco-poetic subject making (*ποιεῖν*) a dwelling (*οἶκος*) beyond the institutions and the modes of existence shaping the outlook of his increasingly urbanised contemporaries. Rimbaud's tales of world-making provide an insight into the capacity of versified forms to articulate the poeticity of physical environments. For Jacques Rancière,

1 J. Scott Bryson, *The West Side of Any Mountain: Place, Space, and Eco-poetry* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 8.

La poésie [...] est [...] une manifestation particulière de la poéticité d'un monde, c'est-à-dire de la manière dont une vérité se donne à une conscience collective sous forme d'œuvres et d'institutions. [...] [E]lle est un organon privilégié pour l'intelligence de cette vérité. Elle est un morceau du poème du monde.²

[Poetry is a peculiar manifestation of the poeticity of a world, that is to say the manner in which a truth presents itself to a collective consciousness in the form of works and institutions. It is a privileged organ for the understanding of this truth. It is a piece of the poem of the world.]

The thought-provoking content and form of Rimbaud's ecosensitive poems convey an avant-garde vision of the place of humanity in a rapidly altering world. The narrator's status as a figure outside the strictly delineated order of metropolitan society gives rise to an unconventional perspective on the changing nature of nineteenth-century France, as importance is accorded to the poeticity of places differing from the artificial composition of Haussmannian Paris.

Rimbaud's poems referring to the non-human world demonstrate a fascination with adventuring beyond the cosseted sphere of civilised society into a space that allows the narrator to undertake a liberatory endeavour of attunement to the cosmos. In both depictions, the protagonist is on an excursion from a municipal sphere to which he is destined to return on account of his need for lodging and nourishment. The two poems – marked by an aspiration to make the most of the freedom gained from the abandonment of a municipal life in favour of the openness of bohemian wandering – draw attention to the extraordinary nature of sites possessing an organic type of place identity that starkly contrasts with the increasingly systematised makeup of industrial Paris and its environs. The absence of a manmade shelter in both poems signifies the appeal of ecosensitive dwelling in an open space that inspires the narrator to become acutely responsive to environmental phenomena. Yi-Fu Tuan proposes that 'human lives are a dialectical movement between shelter and venture, attachment and freedom. In open space, one can become intensely aware of place.'³ The two poems express the alterity of the protagonist's position in a rural setting crisscrossed by trails that underscore the transitionality of his contact with the non-human world. Rimbaud's adventures beyond the anaesthetising artifice of an urban agglomeration indicate a fascination with surveying environmental minutiae that are the primary constituents of a system connected to the numinous cosmos. Both poems accentuate

2 Jacques Rancière, *La Parole muette: essai sur les contradictions de la littérature* (Paris: Hachette, 1998), 40 [unless indicated, translations are mine].

3 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 54.

the sensorial immediacy of the narrator's engagement with unembellished elements of nature. Michel Collot observes that 'au lieu d'en maquiller le visage, le poète cherche à dévoiler la face nue de la terre [instead of concealing its face, the poet seeks to unveil the naked appearance of the earth]'.⁴ Rimbaud's two poems designate an effort to comprehend the realities of nature by way of a grounded perspective in the wake of Romantic eulogies of bucolically verdant spaces and grandiose phenomena. The unorthodox suppleness of Rimbaud's verse in 1870 amplifies the attitude of openness signalled by the insistence on imaginative and sensorial stimulation in an environment beyond the confines of human culture.

'Sensation' and 'Ma Bohème' are the work of a sixteen-year-old whose studious and tranquil existence in Charleville amid the rustic climes of the Ardennes was transformed due to the conflagration of the Franco-Prussian War that inspired the young poet's precipitous journey to Paris via Belgium in August 1870. The poems from the initial stages of Rimbaud's creative development appear quite conventional in the light of his revolutionary poetics of 1871 and 1872, yet there are several instances of versificatory particularities that herald an evolution in the identity of poetry at the dawn of the Third Republic. Shifts in rhythm, rhyming richness, medial accentuation, acoustic patterns, and the dynamics of the *e caduc* demonstrate an escalating incidence of structural diversity that parallels the progressive outlook of post-Romantic narratives. Robert St Clair notes that in Rimbaud's innovative verse 'il s'agit d'une poétique [...] qui préserve une trace du *différent* dans le même – la forme métrique de l'alexandrin, par exemple [it is a question of a poetics that conserves a trace of the *différent* in the same – the metrical form of the alexandrine, for example]'.⁵ Structural quirks in both poems underscore the novelty of Rimbaud's approach to long-established referents in a world undergoing substantial reconfiguration due to scientific advancements and new forms of urban construction. The signs of stylistic and sociocultural metamorphosis in the two poems herald a new concept of poetry that responds to the intensification of industrialisation and urban modernity as driving forces in French society. The dynamic contours of the Rimbaudian alexandrine emblematises a more open relationship to the non-human world, as a groundbreaking breed of textual environment begins to emerge in tandem with the proliferation of new kinds of spatiality in the physical world. Daryl Lee contends that 'Rimbaud makes it possible [...] to imagine a different poetic

4 Michel Collot, *Paysage et poésie: du romantisme à nos jours* (Paris: Corti, 2005), 93.

5 Robert A. St Clair, 'Le Moderne absolu? Rimbaud et la contre-modernité', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 40.3–4 (2012), 307–26 (318).

construction, a different *verse* spatiality'.⁶ Rimbaud's verse points to uncharted territories beyond the scope of ideas about poetics and the world that prevailed for the majority of the nineteenth century. The two evocations of eco-poetic adventures from 1870 afford an opportunity for analysis of the dynamics of nature from a rural perspective in the industrial era. The potency of the tactile and visual interaction with non-human elements in 'Sensation' particularly stimulates conjectures about modes of ecological attunement in verse.

The opening quatrain of the eight lines in 'Sensation [Sensation]'⁷ presages an intimate experience of rural nature giving rise to far-reaching reflections on the human condition:

Par les soirs bleus d'été, j'irai dans les sentiers,
Picoté par les blés, fouler l'herbe menue:
Rêveur, j'en sentirai la fraîcheur à mes pieds.
Je laisserai le vent baigner ma tête nue. (1–4)

[On blue evenings in summer, down paths,
Spiked by sharp corn, I'll trample new grass.
Dreaming, I'll feel the cool on my feet,
The wind will bathe my bare head.]

The arrangement of the *rimes croisées* (M-F-M-F) sets up the projected entwining of the narrator and his feminised environment by means of a rhyme scheme that encompasses regular alternation in the wake of the femininely inflected line at the outset. The unequivocal caesurae in the first and second lines ('d'été, // j'irai' (1); 'blés, // fouler' (2)), which emphasise the generative season and the abundant plants in the foreseen countryside, contrast with the syntactic overriding in the third and fourth lines ('sentirai/ la fraîcheur' (3); 'le vent/ baigner' (4)) that accentuates the projected journey through the soft grass and the gentle breeze. The attenuations of medial accentuation at the end of the quatrain suggest an opening of the storyteller's disposition in response to environmental stimuli because the traditional configuration of the caesura-demarcated alexandrine is imbued with fluidity. The narrator's rapt interest in finding a place of fulfilment in nature is communicated in an ecosensitive mode that expresses burgeoning attunement to climatic and geographic conditions. Bryson asserts that 'ecopoets encourage us to discover and

6 Daryl P. Lee, 'Rimbaud's Ruin of French Verse: Verse Spatiality and the Paris Commune Ruins', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 32.1–2 (2003), 69–82 (70).

7 Arthur Rimbaud, *Poésies; Une saison en enfer; Illuminations*, ed. by L. Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 50; *Collected Poems*, trans. by M. Sorrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11.

nurture a tophiliac devotion to the places we inhabit.⁸ The three instances of a first-person singular subject pronoun ('j'irai' (1); 'j'en sentirai' (3); 'Je laisserai' (4)) and two instances of a first-person singular possessive determiner ('mes pieds' (3); 'ma tête' (4)) highlight a longing to construct a sense of self in relation to the habitat beyond the influence of a metropolitan civilisation. The three occurrences of the future tense ('j'irai' (1); 'j'en sentirai' (3); 'Je laisserai' (4)) underscore an eco-poetic aspiration to become more involved in the non-human world, and the elevenfold alliteration in [ʁ] ('Par [...] soirs [...] j'irai' (1); 'par [...] l'herbe' (2); 'Rêveur [...] sentirai [...] fraîcheur' (3); 'laisserai' (4)) conveys affection for the envisioned environment. The fourfold plosive alliterations in [p] ('Par' (1); 'Picoté par' (2); 'pieds' (3)) and [b] ('bleus' (1); 'blés [...] l'herbe' (2); 'baigner' (4)) throw into relief the profusion of tactile and visual phenomena anticipated by the protagonist in his yearning for ecstatic immersion. According to Renaud Lejosne-Guigon,

Les cinq sens sont au cœur du lyrisme rimbaldien dès les poèmes de 1870. Déjà dans 'Sensation' [...] se dessine un entremêlement du sujet lyrique et du monde où le *je*, dans une promenade érotique, pénètre la nature tout en étant pénétré par elle.⁹

[The five senses are at the heart of Rimbaldian lyricism, starting from the poems of 1870. As early as 'Sensation', an enmeshment of the lyric subject and the world is depicted, with the *I*, on an erotic stroll, penetrating nature at the same time as being penetrated by her.]

The fourfold sibilance ('soirs [...] sentiers' (1); 'sentirai' (3); 'laisserai' (4)) and the twofold alliteration in [f] ('fouler' (2); 'fraîcheur' (3)) draw attention to the mellowness associated with the plan to stroll beyond the confines of the neighbouring society into a non-human world of airiness and limpidity. The two manifestations of an *e caduc* ('l'herbe menuë' (2); 'tête nue' (4)) emphasise the significance of points of contact between humanity and the non-human world because the grass and the storyteller's head gain prominence from the presence of the femininely inflected vowel that differentiates the rhythmic identity of metrical verse from everyday speech (in which it tends to be left unpronounced). The rising cadence of the third line (3+9), together with the masculine *rime suffisante* in [je] between 'sentiers' (1) and 'pieds' (3), starkly sets up the feminine *rime léonine* in [ə.ny] between 'menuë' (2) and 'tête nue' (4) that expresses the spirited expectation of immersion in nature leading to abundant delight. The enrichment of the textual environment due to the lavishness of the feminine rhyme signals the import of the rural landscape as a source of eco-poetic energy for the versifier's art.

8 Bryson, *The West Side of Any Mountain*, 12.

9 Renaud Lejosne-Guigon, 'Consommer le réel: les poèmes de 1872 d'Arthur Rimbaud', *Dix-Neuf* 18.3 (2014), 247–58 (247).

The replication of the first-person-singular-subject-pronoun structure from the beginning of the fourth line ('Je laisserai' (4)) at the beginning of the fifth line ('Je ne parlerai pas' (5)) highlights a shift into reverent quietude in the concluding quatrain:

Je ne parlerai pas, je ne penserai rien:
 Mais l'amour infini me montera dans l'âme,
 Et j'irai loin, bien loin, comme un bohémien,
 Par la Nature, – heureux comme avec une femme. (5–8)

[I shan't speak, I'll clear out all my thoughts.
 But love without end shall fill my soul,
 And I'll travel far, very far, Nature's
 Vagabond – happy as with a woman.]

The anaphora and the unequivocal caesura in the fifth line ('Je ne parlerai pas, // je ne penserai rien' (5)) point to the serene mood and the absence of utterances in the latter stages of the poem. The manifestation of the traditional rhythm of a caesura-demarcated alexandrine, suggestive of calm and moderation, evokes a restoration of primal creativity resulting from communion with nature. The identical syllabification in each hemistich (1+1+3+1) underscores the prospective opening of the narrator's quietened consciousness to the world, and the accretion of monosyllabic terms highlights the idea of a soothing retreat from the complexities of everyday existence in an industrial society. The three occurrences of a first-person singular subject pronoun ('Je ne parlerai pas, je ne penserai rien' (5); 'j'irai loin' (7)) and the occurrence of a first-person singular indirect object ('l'amour infini me montera' (6)) bring into focus the concept of the storyteller intimately interfacing with nature to the point of quasi-sexual communion. The four instances of the future tense ('Je ne parlerai pas, je ne penserai rien: | Mais l'amour infini me montera dans l'âme, | Et j'irai loin' (5–7)), the only conjugated form in the poem, throw into relief the intention to diverge from tradition through an eco-poetic adventure. The tenfold alliteration in [ʁ] ('parlerai [...] penserai rien' (5); 'l'amour [...] montera' (6); 'j'irai' (7); 'Par [...] Nature, – heureux' (8)) creates a network of acoustic correspondences between human and non-human elements that amplifies the impact of the scenario of compenetration. The attenuation of medial accentuation in the sixth line ('l'amour infini/ me montera' (6)) exemplifies the joy inundating the narrator's being, since the traditional rhythm of the caesura-demarcated alexandrine is overridden due to the syntactic association between subject and verb. The overflow of rhythmic energy across the midpoint of the line is suggestive of burgeoning organicity in the textual environment, whereby eco-poetic forces in the physical world trigger growth in the body of the poem. For Pierre Brunel, 'la montée de "l'amour infini" (*Sensation*, v. 6) [est]

comme celle de la sève dans l'arbre [the rise of "l'amour infini" (*Sensation*, l. 6) is like that of sap in a tree].¹⁰ The adverbial repetition on the cusp of the unequivocal caesura in the seventh line ('j'irai loin, bien loin, // comme' (7)) points up the arboreal nature of verse, which is based on lines with different rhythms woven into a harmonious unit, amid a moment of generativeness associated with the soaring pursuit of a mystical ideal. The eightfold alliteration in [m] towards the end of the poem ('Mais l'amour [...] me montera' (6); 'comme [...] bohémien' (7); 'comme [...] femme' (8)) adds to the recurrence of the comparative structure of the seventh line in the eighth line ('comme un bohémien' (7); 'comme avec une femme' (8)) that underscores the protagonist's position between humanity and the non-human world. The masculine *rime pauvre* in [ê] between the syneresis of 'rien' (5) and the dieresis of 'bohémien' (7) throws into relief the adjective at the end of the seventh line ('bohémien' (7)) that plosively heralds the ecosensitive poet's continuing adventures in 'Ma Bohème'. The prepositional structure focalising the non-human world at the beginning of the final line ('Par la Nature' (8)), which replicates the ecocentric composition of the opening line ('Par les soirs bleus d'été' (1)), signals the apogee of the journey in the rural world. The sole dash of the poem ('Par la Nature, – heureux' (8)), together with the rising cadence of the line (4+8), highlights the link between the storyteller's happiness and his immersion in the non-human world. The association between the proper noun and the adjective is particularly forceful on account of the elision (one of only three occurrences in the poem) that causes the rhythmic energy of the line to be channelled without interruption between the protagonist and the source of his happiness. The proximity of 'Nature [...] femme' (8) reinforces the impression of feminised nature as an idealised source of bounteous nourishment, and the feminine *rime suffisante* in [am] between 'l'âme' (6) and 'femme' (8) puts a spotlight on the intimation of Gaian inspiration. The overall depiction of the narrator of 'Sensation' deriving eco-poetic and personal vigour from a vision of female-inflected nature is perpetuated in 'Ma Bohème' through the address to the Muse at the outset of the sonnet.

A pioneering mode of eco-poetic adventurousness is called to mind in the quatrain with which the fourteen lines of 'Ma Bohème [My Bohemia]'¹¹ open:

Je m'en allais, les poings dans mes poches crevées;
 Mon paletot aussi devenait idéal;
 J'allais sous le ciel, Muse! et j'étais ton féal;
 Oh! là là! que d'amours splendides j'ai rêvés! (1-4)

10 Pierre Brunel, *Rimbaud: projets et réalisations* (Paris: Champion, 1983), 53.

11 Rimbaud, *Poésies*, 74-5; *Poems*, 63-5.

[And so I went, hands thrust in torn pockets.
 My coat was more idea than fact.
 Beneath the sky – my Muse, my liege – I went;
 Oh my! what dreams of splendid loves I had!]

The rising cadence of the first line (4+8) in the sonnet emphasises the aspirational quality of the narrator's frequent wanderings beyond the world of time-honoured referents to which the conventionality of the *rimes embrassées* (F-M-M-F) alludes. The four instances of the first-person singular subject pronoun ('Je m'en allais' (1); 'J'allais [...] j'étais' (3); 'j'ai rêvées' (4)) couple with the two instances of a first-person singular possessive determiner ('mes poches' (1); 'Mon paletot' (2)) to underscore the activity generated from the protagonist's communion with a celestial ideal. The four occurrences of the imperfect tense ('allais' (1); 'devenait' (2); 'J'allais [...] j'étais' (3)) invoke a sense of frequent wanderings that is perpetuated by the seven instances of the imperfect tense in the later stanzas ('avait' (5); 'égrenais' (6); 'était' (7); 'avaient' (8); 'écoutais' (9); 'sentais' (10); 'tirais' (13)). Brunel suggests that "Je m'en allais" conjugue à l'imparfait le "j'irai" de *Sensation* ["Je m'en allais" transforms the "j'irai" of *Sensation* into the imperfect tense].¹² The repetition of the first-person-singular form of the imperfect tense from the first line at the beginning of the third line ('Je m'en allais' (1); 'J'allais' (3)) amplifies the feeling of an evolution in outlook and style centred around a deeper and more brooding appreciation of nature than was the case with the rapturous experience of 'Sensation'. The sole instance of the perfect tense in the sonnet ('que d'amours splendides j'ai rêvées' (4)) hints at a transition beyond outlandish adulations of nature, and the remaining verbs – a past participle ('assis' (9)) and a present participle ('rimant' (12)) – draw attention to the lowly versifier deriving eco-poetic inspiration from the cosmos. The attenuation of medial accentuation due to a syntactic linkage in the first, second and fourth lines ('poings/ dans' (1); 'paletot/ aussi' (2); 'd'amours/ splendides' (4)), and due to the elision – the sole instance in the quatrain – at the heart of the third line ('Muse!/ et' (3)), highlights the overflow of eco-poetic invigoration ensuing from the protagonist's attunement to the non-human world, since the traditional structure of the caesura-demarcated alexandrine is overridden as part of an ebullient rhythm. The fourfold plosive alliteration in [p] ('poings [...] poches' (1); 'paletot' (2); 'splendides' (4)), together with the fivefold sibilance ('aussi' (2); 'sous [...] ciel, Muse!' (3); 'splendides' (4)), throws into relief the storyteller's lowliness as a contrast to the sidereal backdrop. The second-person singular possessive determiner in the third line ('ton féal' (3))

12 Brunel, *Rimbaud*, 56–7.

evokes a movement towards intimacy with the classical spirit of creativity that is accentuated by the masculine *rime léonine* in [e.al] between ‘idéal’ (2) and ‘féal’ (3). The lavishness of the rhyme points to the fruitfulness of heeding a celestial ideal because the borders of the textual environment are potently enriched by the masculine coupling. The dramatic interjection at the beginning of the fourth line (‘Oh! là là!’ (4)), which communicates wonderment in the face of nature, becomes more striking due to the feminine *rime suffisante* in [ve] between ‘crevées’ (1) and ‘rêvées’ (4) that bears the tinge of a *rime léonine* due to the reinforcing [ʁ]. The intimation of a particularly rich rhyme underscores the stimulatory quality of the eco-poetic adventure, since the supplemented harmony of the feminine coupling draws attention to the narrator transcending an impoverished existence through dreams of love inspired by his wanderings in the countryside.

The latter quatrain of the sonnet markedly contrasts with the opening quatrain because the phonemic patterns of the second set of *rimes embrassées*, which unexpectedly entail a masculine rhyme enclosing a feminine rhyme, are new:

Mon unique culotte avait un large trou.
 – Petit-Poucet rêveur, j’égrenais dans ma course
 Des rimes. Mon auberge était à la Grande-Ourse.
 – Mes étoiles au ciel avaient un doux frou-frou (5–8)

[My one and only trousers were hugely holed.
 – Starry-eyed Tom Thumb, I strewed my path
 With verse. I laid my head at Great Bear Inn.
 – My stars swished softly in the sky]

The masculine *rime suffisante* in [ʁu] between ‘trou’ (5) and ‘frou-frou’ (8) incarnates a weakening of rhyming richness that emphasises the meagreness of the storyteller’s frayed trousers in comparison with the majesty of the sidereal presences. The limited resonance of the masculine coupling, which goes against the opulence of the masculine rhyme in the opening quatrain, constitutes a divergent strain in the textual environment that hints at an eco-poetically energised system emerging from the heavily codified form of traditional verse thanks to non-human inspiration. The four instances of a first-person singular possessive determiner (‘Mon unique culotte’ (5); ‘ma course’ (6); ‘Mon auberge’ (7); ‘Mes étoiles’ (8)), along with the sole instance of the first-person singular subject pronoun (‘j’égrenais’ (6)), convey the protagonist’s increasing attunement to his surroundings. The grandly creative echoes of the elevenfold alliteration in [ʁ] (‘trou’ (5); ‘rêveur, j’égrenais [...] course’ (6); ‘rimes [...] auberge [...] Grande-Ourse’ (7); ‘frou-frou’ (8)) frame the unequivocal caesura in the sixth line (‘rêveur, // j’égrenais’ (6)) that contrasts with the attenuation of medial accentuation in the fifth, seventh and eighth lines

due to elisions ('culotte/ avait' (5); 'auberge/ était' (7)) and a syntactic linkage ('ciel/ avaient' (8)). The ecopoetic energies overflowing the traditional structure of the alexandrine in three-quarters of the quatrain vividly counterpoise the caesura-demarcated line with its focus on lyrical dreaming. The sevenfold assonance in [u] ('trou' (5); 'Petit-Poucet [...] course' (6); 'Grande-Ourse' (7); 'doux frou-frou' (8)) points up the idea of the young wanderer becoming acutely beholden to feminised nature on a creative ramble through a space characterised by rural openness that counterpoises the built world of the versifier's origins. According to Michel Murat,

À l'univers artificiel et dégradé de la vie parisienne [Rimbaud] substitue une rêverie d'intimité cosmique, et il unifie ce *mundus muliebris* en reprenant la même voyelle /u/ dans les deux rimes du quatrain.¹³

[In place of the artificial and degraded universe of Parisian life, Rimbaud substitutes a reverie of cosmic intimacy, and he unifies this *mundus muliebris* by reusing the /u/ vowel in the two rhymes of the quatrain.]

The two proper nouns – the last of the three in the sonnet – framing the female-inflected coupling at the core of the quatrain ('Petit-Poucet' (6); 'Grande-Ourse' (7)) give prominence to the mythological and cosmological interests of an agrarian culture in harmony with nature. The enjambement of the sixth line runs into a trisyllabic *rejet* ('j'égrenais dans ma course | Des rimes' (6–7)) that culminates in the unusual incidence of a full-stop in the midst of the first hemistich of the seventh line ('rimes. Mon' (7)). The *coupe lyrique* of 'rimes' (7) combines with the syntactic overrun and the rising cadence of the line (3+9) to foreground versificatory practices inspired by the wanderings in a rural space. The two occurrences of a dash – the only occurrences in the sonnet – at the beginning of the sixth and eighth lines ('– Petit-Poucet' (6); '– Mes étoiles' (8)) glaringly frame the feminine *rime riche* in [uɛs] between 'course' (6) and 'Grande-Ourse' (7) that underscores the importance of liberatory contact with feminised nature at the heart of the quatrain. The enjambement of the eighth line ('frou-frou | Et je' (8–9)) highlights the creative impetus of the protagonist communing with the non-human world because the space of the *volta* is overridden. The blurring of the conventional contours of the textual environment augments the aura of generativeness surrounding the open-field experience on nights replete with climatic and artistic luminosity.

The wave of ecosensitive creativity in the quatrains surges into the first tercet at the beginning of a meditative and witty *envoi*:

13 Michel Murat, *L'Art de Rimbaud* (Paris: Corti, 2002), 182.

– Mes étoiles au ciel avaient un doux frou-frou

Et je les écoutais, assis au bord des routes,
 Ces bons soirs de septembre où je sentais des gouttes
 De rosée à mon front, comme un vin de vigueur; (8–11)

[– My stars swished softly in the sky

And, seated on roadsides, I heard them
 On lovely evenings in September, feeling dew
 Drop on my face, like invigorating wine;]

The two instances of the first-person singular subject pronoun ('je les écoutais' (9); 'je sentais' (10)) combine with the sole instance of a first-person singular possessive determiner ('mon front' (11)) to highlight the storyteller's tactile and synaesthetically auditory (hearing triggered by vision) immersion in his surroundings. The attenuation of medial accentuation due to a syntactic linkage in the ninth line ('écoutais,/ assis' (9)), and due to the elision in the tenth line ('septembre/ où' (10)), contrasts with the unequivocal caesura of the eleventh line ('front,// comme' (11)) that re-establishes the traditional contours of the textual environment after the rhythmic inundation of the initial alexandrines. The flow of ecopoetic energy through the first two-thirds of the tercet, corresponding to a crescendo in the narrator's attunement to his environment, conveys the great worth of nature for the young versifier's creative efforts. Steve Murphy proposes that 'le troubadour est à la recherche de la nature, de l'amour et de la créativité, trois aspirations dont les *figures* du poète inscriraient l'association intime [the troubadour is in search of nature, love and creativity, three aspirations whose intimate association is inscribed in the poet's *figures*].'¹⁴ The enjambement of the tenth line ('des gouttes | De rosée' (10–11)) embodies the dew trickling down the protagonist's forehead in an overwhelmingly sensual interaction with non-human matter, as the intoxicating experience of nature provokes an upsurge of generativeness that reshapes the conventional contours of the body of verse. The construction of the tercet according to a pattern of feminine *rimes plates* plus a masculine line (F-F-M) emphasises female-inflected identities in the closing stages of the sonnet. The feminine *rime suffisante* in [ut] between 'routes' (9) and 'gouttes' (10), enmeshed in the fourfold alliteration in [ʁ] ('routes' (9); 'soirs [...] septembre' (10); 'rosée' (11)), points up the refreshing conditions of the rustic environment crisscrossed by manmade tracks that emblematises the activities of a progress-oriented populace intervening in nature. The limited resonance of the

14 Steve Murphy, *Stratégies de Rimbaud* (Paris: Champion, 2004), 123.

feminine coupling incarnates a diminution in the textual environment that hints at the peculiarity of the moment of confluence between humanity and nature. The threefold plosive alliteration in [b] ('bord' (9); 'bons [...] septembre' (10)) and the fourfold sibilance ('assis' (9); 'soirs [...] septembre [...] sentais' (10)) foreground the storyteller's gratifying familiarity with tranquil evenings towards the end of summer in a space beyond an industrial culture.

The final tercet humorously expresses an outpouring of versificatory activity in the midst of the non-human world at dusk:

Où, rimant au milieu des ombres fantastiques,
 Comme des lyres, je tirais les élastiques
 De mes souliers blessés, un pied près de mon cœur! (12–14)

And rhyming verse among the phantom shadows,
 I harped on the laces of my wounded boots,
 One foot by my heart.]

The locative relative pronoun at the beginning of the twelfth line ('Où' (12)), which appends a clause to the temporal expression in the tenth line ('Ces bons soirs de septembre/ où' (10)), embodies a syntactic amalgamation that draws attention to a correspondence between lyrical creativity and experience of the non-human world. The rising cadence of the line (1+11) heralds a rush of ecopoetic energy, propelled by the storyteller's concentrated communion with nature, that effervesces through the sixfold alliteration in [ʁ] ('rimant [...] ombres' (12); 'lyres [...] tirais' (13); 'près [...] cœur' (14)), the fivefold assonance in [i] ('rimant [...] fantastiques' (12); 'lyres [...] tirais [...] élastiques' (13)), the sixfold alliteration in [l] ('milieu' (12); 'lyres [...] les élastiques' (13); 'souliers blessés' (14)), the threefold assonance in [j] ('milieu' (12); 'souliers [...] pied' (14)), and the fourfold sibilance ('fantastiques' (12); 'élastiques' (13); 'souliers blessés' (14)). The attenuation of medial accentuation due to a syntactic linkage in the twelfth and fourteenth lines ('au milieu/ des' (12); 'blessés,/ un' (14)) contrasts with the *césure lyrique* in the thirteenth line ('lyres, // je' (13)) that underscores the witty comparison of the narrator's shoelaces to the strings of the instrument symbolising poetry from antiquity. The mottled constitution of the alexandrines surrounding the evocation of ecopoetic inspiration denotes a case of hybridisation in the textual environment that is the result of humanity intermingling with the non-human world. The lavishness of the feminine *rime léonine* in [a.stik] between 'fantastiques' (12) and 'élastiques' (13) foregrounds the wondrous creativity inspired by the fantastical experience of the non-human world, as the body of verse is bountifully enriched in the wake of the protagonist's communion with the cosmos. Benoît de Cornulier remarks that 'au second tercet, comme une conséquence naturelle de l'influence

du ciel, succède [...] l'expression d'une activité poétique de l'enfant inspiré [in the second tercet, the expression of poetic activity by the inspired child ensues as a natural consequence of the influence of the sky]¹⁵ The enjambement of the thirteenth line ('les élastiques | De mes souliers' (13–14)), which amplifies the humorous presentation of the narrator's relationship to lyrical conventions, embodies a rhythmic and syntactic surfeit that demonstrates the far-reaching effects of such an ecosensitive event. The versificatory polysemy of the noun at the beginning of the final hemistich of the sonnet ('un pied' (14)) points up the particularities of form linked to the open-field pastime, as the masculine *rime suffisante* in [œʁ] between 'vigueur' (11) and 'cœur' (14) draws attention to the unusual kind of invigoration reaching from the rural world to the storyteller's viscera and essence. The limited resonance of the final rhyme in the sonnet heralds a transition beyond a conventional understanding of verse because the harmony of the textual environment is blurred in the wake of the ecopoetic adventure.

'Sensation' and 'Ma Bohème' ultimately represent the initial stages of Rimbaud's crafting of a modern identity for verse. The early compositions by the young poet from the eastern reaches of France express a pioneering sensitivity to nature and worldly experience that is highlighted by versificatory particularities. The textual environments of the two poems evince an ecopoetic evolution based on an increasingly profound attunement to climatic and geographical elements, as ecosensitive moments in the narratives correspond to modulations in the structure of verse. The dynamics of the *e caduc* articulate the complex relationship between feminised nature and the male protagonist because the manifestation or the attenuation of the major differentiator of verse evokes the fluctuating importance of a female-inflected construct in the poet's consciousness. Shifts in the intensity of caesurae disclose a transformation of long-established referents ensuing from invigorating contact with nature because the variable authoritativeness of the marker of medial accentuation hints at a redrawing of environmental contours. Rhythmic fluctuations suggest the emergence of new currents of energy in a world marked by accelerating progress because the altering cadences of the body of verse allude to reconfigurations in the life-cycles around which an ecosystem is synchronised. Multiple enjambements reveal the generativeness of the journey towards nature on the limits of society because the rhythmic and syntactic overflow of the alexandrine surpasses the confines of conventional modes of being. Oscillations in rhyming richness divulge the elementally diverse constitution of

15 Benoît de Cornulier, *De la métrique à l'interprétation: essais sur Rimbaud* (Paris: Garnier, 2009), 53.

the storyteller's non-human surroundings because the euphony or the scantiness of the accord between phonemes illustrates the interplay of abundance and dearth in natural systems. Acoustic resonances foreground the subtle links in the ecosystemic mesh encompassing the protagonist because the repetition of assorted consonants and vowels in close succession exposes deep correspondences in the body of verse that add to individual materialities. Rimbaud's ecopoetic adventures of 1870 narratively and structurally create places of communion with the non-human world, and valorise spaces that are creatively and ecologically fruitful beyond the precincts of metropolitan industry. The youthful poems evoke the worldliness of poetry, and the poeticity of the world, at a key moment in the environmental and sociocultural evolution of modern France.

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David E. Evans

Towards an Eco-poetics of French Free Verse: Marie Krysinska's *Rythmes pittoresques*

Abstract: This chapter examines the potential of *vers libre*, a radical new departure for French poetry in the 1880s, to provide a model for eco-poetic reading that allows the poetic text and its representations of nature to resist conventional, familiar modes of interpretation. While the natural world is a constant presence in French poetry throughout the nineteenth century, until the 1880s it is subsumed within an artificial, regular and highly codified metrical structure. The authority of such a restrictive form gradually wanes in the face of social, political and artistic factors specific to France, namely the crisis of absolute authority that befalls the country after revolution. Poems in free verse reflect this instability, since they come with no pre-existing, distorting metrical lens. They require the reader to construct patterns of meaning while reading – each of which is unstable, none of which is able to claim absolute authority. Nature features prominently in these texts, and my examination of the representation of nature in key works by Marie Krysinska (1857–1908) posits that the poetics of French free verse makes nature and the text itself into a site of resistance to measurement and commoditisation. Such resistance is a recurrent theme of recent ecocriticism, and poetic strategies particular to the French context have a significant contribution to make to ecocritical modes of reading.

In a recent essay on the practice of poetry readings since the 1950s, Abigail Lang highlights the stark contrast between the approaches taken in France and the USA. The North American tradition, she argues, has its roots firmly in beatnik counter-culture, with an emphasis on sociopolitical engagement, whereas poets in 1970s France, such as Jacques Roubaud and Claude Royet-Journoud, strove in their readings to present the poem as independent of context. While their transatlantic cousins railed against inequalities and injustices, notably the Vietnam war, French poets were trying to distance language from blunt messages and explicit reference, or as Lang puts it, attempting to ‘dire sans vouloir dire [to speak, not to say]’.¹ In the same volume, Roubaud rails against ‘la domination du narratif, de l’exclamation éthique, limitée aux thèmes reconnus par CNN [the dominance

1 Abigail Lang, ‘De la *poetry reading* à la lecture publique’, in *Dire la poésie? À propos des lectures publiques de poésie*, ed. by J.-F. Puff (Nantes: Default, 2015), 205–35 (226) [unreferenced translations are mine].

of narrative, of ethical exclamation, limited to themes recognised by CNN]’ in readings at international poetry festivals:

Vous pouvez dire tout ce que vous voulez de féministe, de multiculturel, d’antiraciste, d’anti-bombes anti-personnel, vous pouvez tchernobyliser à qui mieux mieux, bêler sur la paix et votre grand-mère, pourvu que vous ne puissiez pas être soupçonné de pratiquer des ‘jeux formels’, ou de parler ‘difficile’, ce qui serait ‘élitiste’, non ‘démocratique’ et vraisemblablement une atteinte aux droits de l’homme et une insulte aux ONGs.²

[You can say anything you please as long as it’s feminist, multicultural, anti-racist, anti-bomb, you can Chernobylise all you like, bleat about peace and your grandmother, as long as you can’t be suspected of playing “formal games”, or of talking “difficult”, which would be “elitist”, not “democratic” and probably a contravention of human rights and an insult to NGOs.]

In this light, it is little wonder that a certain brand of French theory was identified by early anglophone ecocritics as inimical to their cause. Since, according to the caricatural portrait of structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstruction, there is nothing outside the text, this mode of French criticism might appear to deny the existence of a world beyond the page on which language might be able to have an effect – hardly a propitious starting point for an environmental-critical movement concerned with responding to an urgent sense of measurable, and very real, ecological catastrophe.³ Instead of articulating a political message expressed by a subject locatable in time, space and culture, French poetry in the grand tradition of Mallarmé and Valéry appears incompatible with subjectivities and individualities, instead devoting itself to the lofty notion of absolute poetry. Ruminating on the ideal reading performance, Jean-François Puff asks ‘comment neutraliser dans la voix ce que la voix porte nécessairement de subjectivité? [how to neutralise in the voice what subjectivity the voice necessarily carries?];⁴ a question that hardly seems conducive to a politically engaged environmental message. If French poetry appears concerned first and foremost with abstract questions of language, with the search for ‘une manière de le laisser parler pour lui-même de lui-même sans référence à rien [a way of letting language speak for itself of itself without reference to anything],⁵ might it be a fruitless enterprise to speak of a French ecopoetics?

2 Jacques Roubaud, ‘Poésie et oralité’, in *Dire la poésie? À propos des lectures publiques de poésie*, ed. by J.-F. Puff (Nantes: Default, 2015), 307–18 (314–15).

3 Pippa Marland, ‘Ecocriticism’, *Literature Compass* 10.11 (2013), 846–68 (848).

4 Jean-François Puff, ‘La Voix off de soi-même: poétiques de la diction non-expressive (Claude Royet-Journoud et Jacques Roubaud)’, in *Dire la poésie? À propos des lectures publiques de poésie*, ed. by J.-F. Puff (Nantes: Default, 2015), 357–75 (367).

5 Puff, ‘La Voix off de soi-même’, 365.

There are ways, though, in which a specifically French mode of writing and reading, while not articulating an explicit environmental message, can contribute to the ecocritical project by heightening our awareness of both the natural world and the world of the text, as well as the analytical, affective, even embodied responses that we bring to them as dwelling and interpreting subjects. As Clive Scott argues in an article proposing a poetics of eco-translation, 'reading is in itself an ecological activity, is living-in-an-environment, where environment is to be understood as the continuous texturing of the life-dynamic and thus something which fully incorporates ecologies of all kinds, and of all kinds of perceptual/conceptual contact.'⁶ Nineteenth-century French poetry provides a unique textual landscape for such an understanding of reading, since the profound changes it undergoes between the publication of Lamartine's *Méditations poétiques* [*Poetic Meditations*] (1820) and Mallarmé's radical constellation-poem 'Un coup de dés [A Roll of the Dice]' (1897) are unparalleled in any other century. These changes take place against the seismic social, political, economic and cultural shifts of the industrial revolution, to which our contemporary environmental concerns may be traced. It is thus possible to read in these texts' multiple hesitations between tradition and innovation a poetic enacting of environmental anxieties, both extra- and intra-textual, of our relationship with it and our duty towards it. In her survey of ecocriticism, Pippa Marland suggests:

Perhaps the time has now come for a reinvigoration of slow and close reading, which, whether in the hope of generating environmental praxis or in a more purely investigative mode, applies these new paradigms in full-length engagements with cultural forms, interrogating from every possible angle the 'imaginings' that reflect and influence our ongoing modes of being in the world.⁷

French free verse, which presents the reader with particular problems of interpretation that are culturally specific to the French context, might offer a productive model for such a 'slow reading'. Emerging towards the end of the nineteenth century, free verse was presented by its ardent supporters as a break from past modes of textual experience that had become dulled, habitual, mechanical and repetitive. It promised new ways of seeing, feeling, writing and reading, yet it could not help but maintain an open and frequently uneasy dialogue with past frameworks for inscribing our experience of the world in text. I will focus on a book that remained largely ignored until a recent surge of interest in nineteenth-century female poets:

6 Clive Scott, 'Translating the Nineteenth Century: A Poetics of Eco-Translation', *Dix-Neuf* 19.3 (2015), 285–302 (286).

7 Marland, 'Ecocriticism', 860.

Rythmes pittoresques [*Picturesque Rhythms*] (1890), the first collection of poems by Marie Krysinska, a pioneer of *vers libre* who was sidelined by the self-appointed theorists of the form such as Gustave Kahn and Jean Moréas.

In his overview of *vers libre*, Michel Murat pays Krysinska almost no attention at all, minimising her importance and omitting her from a timeline running from Rimbaud's 'Marine' and 'Mouvement' (1873–5), via Laforgue's *Derniers vers* (1887) and Kahn's *Palais nomades* (1887), to Apollinaire's prose-to-verse *découpage* 'La Maison des morts' (1913).⁸ There is no doubt, though, that Krysinska, who published poems in *vers libre* as early as 1882, well before Kahn and Laforgue, was an innovator who challenged the conventional modes of perception characteristic of regular poetic form. While the natural world is a constant presence in French poetry throughout the nineteenth century, it is subject to an artificial and highly codified metrical structure through which it can only appear as a rarefied cultural artefact. Poems in free verse, however, come with no pre-existing metrical lens – they require the reader to construct patterns of meaning with every reading, each of which will be unstable, fragile, unable to claim absolute authority. As J.-H. Rosny argues in the preface to the first edition of *Rythmes pittoresques* (1890):

Les cygnes, les lys, les papillons et les roses, les rossignols et les étoiles, les grands souffles de l'alexandrin, la jolie ciselure du sonnet, la grâce de la ballade, tout cela apparaît tellement fatigué en face de la merveilleuse jeunesse de la prose.

[...] Notre génération ne perd donc pas son temps lorsqu'elle détruit les vieux systèmes, lorsqu'elle s'efforce de transformer l'emploi de la rime, de la cadence, du nombre ou de la forme, lorsqu'elle établit de frais dispositifs capables de remplacer les splendeurs surannées des types où s'imprimaient l'ode et la chanson, l'épopée et l'élegie, le conte et la satire...⁹

[Swans, lilies, butterflies and roses, nightingales and stars, the pomp of the alexandrine, the pretty sculpture of the sonnet, the grace of the ballad, that all seems so tired in the face of the marvellous youth of prose.

[...] Our generation is thus not wasting its time in destroying the old systems, in striving to transform the use of rhyme, of cadence, of metre or form, in establishing fresh systems capable of replacing the outdated splendours of forms in which were printed ode and song, epic and elegy, tale and satire.]

Rosny reflects a widespread fatigue with the tired clichés and the fixed forms of nature poetry – forms such as the sonnet and the *ballade*, defined by their rhyme scheme, in which natural phenomena unflinching find themselves shackled to the

8 Michel Murat, *Le Vers libre* (Paris: Champion, 2008), 70.

9 J.-H. Rosny, 'Préface', in Marie Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques* (Paris: Lemerre, 1890), vii–xi (ix–x).

same limited vocabulary, with a predictable set of associations: *onde / profonde / sonde / monde* [waters / deep / fathom / world]; *murmure / nature / obscure* [murmur / nature / obscure]; *écorce / force* [bark / strength]; *branche / penche* [branch / hang]; *vague / vague* [wave / vague]; *mer / amer* [sea / bitter]; *étoile / voile* [star / veil]; *terre / mystère* [earth / mystery]; *cieux / yeux* [skies / eyes]; *amour / jour* [love / light]; *infinie / harmonie* [infinite / harmony]. Since the nouns, verbs and adjectives that happen to rhyme with nature-words in French perpetuate a fixed interpretation of nature as intimately bound to human emotions and preoccupations, framed by an aestheticising gaze with a penchant for mysticism, *vers libre* offers a ‘frais dispositif’ for reading and writing the world.

Krysinska takes this line in the preface to her second collection, *Joies errantes* [*Errant Joys*] (1894), strategically subtitled *Nouveaux rythmes pittoresques* [*New Picturesque Rhythms*], in which she argues for the value of ‘le dispositif inattendu [the unexpected system]’ because ‘telle pièce traduisant quelque capricieux coin de nature, ou quelque anxieux état de rêve, perdrait toute son intensité à être enfermée dans un cadre régulier – alors que d’autres sujets appellent à eux les rigides architectures du vers [any piece translating some capricious corner of nature, or some anxious dream state, would lose all its intensity by being enclosed in a regular frame – while other subjects call for the rigid architectures of verse]’.¹⁰ Krysinska’s use of *traduire* suggests a vision of the natural world as a coherent sign-system – unstable and shifting (‘capricieux’), perhaps, but ripe for interpretation. On several occasions she refers to a mysterious language in nature, to which only certain souls are receptive, as in ‘Symphonie en gris [Symphony in Grey]’:

Du sol consterné monte une rumeur étrange, surhumaine.
Cabalistique langage entendu seulement
Des âmes attentives. (9–11)¹¹

[From the distressed ground rises a strange, superhuman murmur.
Cabalistic language heard only
By attentive souls.]

The rustling of the wind in the leaves produces the same effect in both ‘Le Hibou [The Owl]’ – ‘Les grands arbres balancent leurs têtes chevelues, chuchotant d’obscures paroles [The great trees nod their shaggy heads, whispering obscure words]’ (10–11) – and ‘Ballade [Ballad]’ – ‘Et le feuillage qui chuchote

10 Marie Krysinska, *Joies errantes: nouveaux rythmes pittoresques* (Paris: Lemerre, 1894), vi–vii.

11 Marie Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, ed. by S. Whidden (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2003), 39.

mystérieusement et perfidement quand approche la nuit apaisante [And the foliage whispering mysteriously and treacherously when the soothing night approaches]' (38).¹² Although ecological thought today argues for a reconnection with, and revalorisation of, the natural world, this notion of a hidden language in nature is hardly a 'frais dispositif'. It is one of the oldest clichés of Romantic poetry, a favourite theme of Victor Hugo, and the 'obscures paroles' proffered by Krysinska's trees echo Baudelaire's 'Correspondances', the poem that perhaps more than any other influenced the Symbolists' mystification of the natural world:

La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laisseront parfois sortir de confuses paroles (1–2)¹³

[Nature is a temple where living pillars
Sometimes emit confused words]

While the form may be innovative, then, the vision of nature found in *Rythmes pittoresques* is not new. Rather, it features topoi familiar from almost any book of nineteenth-century nature poetry: a sense of potential transcendence expressed through a vague mysticism or sense of the divine ('Et le crépuscule monte de la terre – | Comme une vapeur d'encens | Monte de l'encensoir [And twilight rises from the earth | As a cloud of incense | Rises from the censer]') ('Le Calvaire [The Cross]', 24–6));¹⁴ an irrepressible anthropomorphism ('Et les aimables lianes | Prennent dans leurs bras amoureux | Les torsos des puissants chênes [And the pleasant creepers | Take in their loving arms | The torsos of the powerful oaks]') ('La Source [The Spring]', 37–9));¹⁵ and an insistence on the music of nature ('Et les rythmes et les parfums se confondront en une subtile et unique symphonie [And the rhythms and the perfumes will mingle in a subtle and unique symphony]') ('Symphonie des parfums [Symphony of Perfumes]', 9)).¹⁶ We might read these topoi of nineteenth-century French poetry ecocritically – they certainly represent an attempt to re-enchance our relationship with a natural world reduced by industrialisation and urbanisation to a source of raw materials, or to a picturesque, nostalgic refuge. In the preface to *Intermèdes*, Krysinska claims that her first *vers libre* poems were 'la réaction contre le naturalisme versifié de 1881–82 [a reaction

12 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 57; 82.

13 Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by C. Pichois, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 11.

14 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 52.

15 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 32.

16 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 54.

against the versified naturalism of 1881–82],¹⁷ yet by the time of the appearance of these poems in 1890, such motifs are as tired as the swans, the lilies and the nightingales that Rosny dismisses in his preface as cultural clichés that perpetuate an artificial vision of the natural world – a reverent vision, certainly, but one doomed to keep nature enframed, static, sterile. How, then, might *Rythmes pittoresques* be read as a ‘frais dispositif’ with the potential to shape ecocritical reading strategies?

One answer, I would suggest, lies in the form. While the content of these poems might seem overly familiar, retrograde even, the great theoretical debate that preoccupied the *vers libre* poets concerned not the content, but formal features, namely the notoriously slippery concept which defines French poetry perhaps more than any other: rhythm. In his review, Dubus declares: ‘on a voulu, le titre en est un sûr témoignage, que le rythme régnât ici en maître absolu. *En tyran!* diraient, non sans quelque raison, les partisans des formes classiques de la poésie française [as the title surely attests, the author intended rhythm to reign here as supreme ruler. The supporters of the classical forms of French poetry would say, not without some justification, “As a tyrant!”]’.¹⁸ It is precisely the defenders of traditional, regular forms that Krysinska takes to task in her preface to *Intermèdes* in the name of ‘cette évolution constante dans les formes poétiques [this constant evolution of poetic forms]’.¹⁹ Instead of the ‘intolérable monotonie’ of regular alexandrines preferred by Sully-Prudhomme, a staunch critic of *vers libre*, Krysinska demands variety: ‘la nouvelle profession de foi poétique peut se formuler ainsi: confiance plus ouvertement avouée dans les vertus de la variété et du pittoresque par conséquent, coupes alternantes librement et selon le besoin de la précision stylistique [this latest profession of poetic faith can be summed up thus: confidence more openly expressed in the virtues of variety and picturesque, and thus rhythmic freedom as dictated by stylistic precision]’.²⁰ Since the term *pittoresque* also features in the title, it is worth pondering: while the word is commonly applied to landscapes, to paintings, or to literary description, it is less obvious how a rhythm, non-semantic and non-representational, might be described as picturesque. How, or what, might a rhythm represent? In his *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*, Pierre Larousse explores how the term *pittoresque* was applied to the representation of nature across the arts. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he explains, literature was full of stifling codes which put nature in the background

17 Marie Krysinska, *Intermèdes: nouveaux rythmes pittoresques* (Paris: Vanier, 1903), xxvi.

18 Edouard Dubus, ‘*Rythmes pittoresques*, par Marie Krysinska’, *Mercur de France* 1.12 (1890), 443–4 (443) [original italics].

19 Krysinska, *Intermèdes*, xii.

20 Krysinska, *Intermèdes*, xvii.

– ‘les règles et les conventions reléguèrent la nature au second plan; or c’est de la nature seule que le poète, comme le peintre, peut tirer les éléments du pittoresque [rules and conventions relegated nature to the background; whereas it is from nature alone that the poet, like the painter, can derive the elements of picturesque]’ –, whereas, in the nineteenth century, ‘c’est précisément chez les écrivains plus libres, plus vrais, plus naturels que les autres, qu’il faut en général chercher le pittoresques [it is precisely in writers who are freer, truer, more natural than others, that the picturesque is to be found].’²¹ It is in this sense of freedom that Krysinska’s rhythms articulate the alluring unknowability of the natural world.

In the preface to *Intermèdes*, Krysinska asks ‘peut-on prétendre que le rythme obligé d’une marche militaire, soit un rythme préférable et supérieur à celui de tel capricieux ballet [...] ou telle danse espagnole pleine de soubresauts nerveux et de fantaisie? [can we claim that the rigid rhythm of a military march be preferable and superior to that of some capricious ballad [...] or some Spanish dance full of nervous jolts and flights of fancy?].’²² The choice of adjectives is telling, with the totalitarian implications of ‘obligé’ contrasting with ‘capricieux’, which recalls her description of ‘telle pièce traduisant quelque capricieux coin de nature’. Examples of both kinds of rhythm are to be found in *Rythmes pittoresques*, and they enact the tension between constraining forms and irrepressible freedom, as in ‘Les Fenêtres [Windows]’. The poem describes ‘le Paris noctambule [the Parisian night]’ (24) with its ‘bruits de fêtes [sounds of parties]’ (35) until the streets empty again:

Puis l’heure silencieuse et froide vient éteindre lumières et bruits.

Seul le pas régulier d’un sergent de ville va et vient sur le trottoir sonore, sous
les fenêtres qui s’endorment comme des yeux lassés. (36–7)²³

[Then the silent and cold hour comes to extinguish lights and sounds.

Only the regular step of a city guard comes and goes on the sonorous pavement,
beneath the windows which fall asleep like tired eyes.]

The only regular rhythm present in the whole volume is produced by this representative of the state, doing his rounds to ensure all is in order on the streets of the capital. The music played at the various *soirées* is of a different sort altogether: ‘Et sur la vitre qui est d’opale, on voit glisser des ombres fugitives, aux rythmes de musiques plus vagues que des souffles [And on the pane, which is of opal, fugitive shadows may be seen to glide, to the rhythms of music more vague than

21 Pierre Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*, vol. 12 (Paris: Administration du Grand Dictionnaire Universel, 1874), 1090–1.

22 Krysinska, *Intermèdes*, xvi.

23 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 36.

breath]’ (30).²⁴ Whereas the regular rhythm of the ‘sergent de ville’ suggests order and conformity, the dancers glimpsed through the darkened windows are fleeting shadows, as if their identity were harder to grasp amid the rhythmic vagueness. Likewise, the ecopoetic dimension of Krysinska’s verse might be located in the ungraspable quality of her poetic rhythms, where shocks and jolts, echoes and surprises, ensure that our responses to the reading experience are as fresh and as challenging as our encounters with the natural world.

All other references to rhythm in *Rythmes pittoresques* articulate this unpredictability, this refusal to settle. In ‘Chanson d’automne [Autumn Song]’, ‘le vent, comme un épileptique, mène dans la cheminée l’hivernal orchestre [the wind, like an epileptic, leads into the hearth the wintry orchestra]’ (13),²⁵ indicating a spasmodic movement that is a far cry from the footsteps of the ‘sergent de ville’, and illustrative of nature’s potential to wrong-foot us in our search for regular, predictable patterns. In ‘Le Démon de Raccoczi’, a demon depicted in an etching produces a bewitching music on his violin:

La valse déchainait son tournoyant délire.
 Rythmée comme par des soupirs d’amour;
 Chuchoteuse comme les flots,
 Et aussi mélancolique qu’un adieu;
 Désordonnée, incohérente, avec des éclats de cristal qu’on brise;
 Essoufflée, rugissante comme une tempête;
 Puis alanguie, lassée, s’apaisant dans une lueur de bleu lunaire. (33–45)²⁶

[The waltz unleashed its whirling frenzy.
 As if rhythmized by sighs of love;
 Whispering like the waves,
 And as melancholy as an adieu;
 Disordered, incoherent, with noises like breaking crystal;
 Breathless, roaring like the tempest;
 Then languid, weary, subsiding in a lunar blue light.]

As in the case of the epileptic wind, these rhythms are disordered, incoherent, broken and their extreme states of frenzy and repose are compared to natural phenomena, namely moonlight and the tempest. A suite of eight poems entitled ‘Les Danses [The Dances]’ further develops this contrast, beginning with two relatively sober dances, the pavane and the minuet, both characterised by measured,

24 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 36.

25 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 45.

26 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 106–7.

tranquil rhythms – ‘Dansez la Pavane au rythme câlin [Dance the Pavane with its caressing rhythm]’ (‘La Pavane [The Pavane]’, 1; 18) – and:

Les galants paniers
 Où éclosent
 Des roses
 Brodées
 Se bercent au rythme lent et mesuré
 Du menuet. (‘Menuet’, 4–9)²⁷

[The gallant baskets
 Where embroidered
 Roses
 Bloom
 Sway to the slow and leisured rhythm
 Of the minuet.]

As the dances become more exotic, the rhythms break loose, as in ‘Danse d’Espagne’, in which the tambourines suggest the ecstatic buzzing of bees:

Palpitantes guitares
 Sur des rythmes barbares
 Comme des gorges pâmées
 Doucement sanglotez!
 Ollé!

Les paumes frappent dans les paumes
 Et les tambourins bourdonnent et sonnent
 Comme des abeilles enivrées
 Du sang des roses
 Ollé! (7–16)²⁸

[Palpitating guitars
 To barbarian rhythms
 Like swooning bosoms
 Sob gently!
 Olé!

The hands clap
 And the tambourines buzz and sound
 Like bees drunk
 On the blood of roses
 Olé!]

27 Kryszynska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 93; 94.

28 Kryszynska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 95.

In ‘Danse d’Orient’, the dancers move ‘Sous le charme de quelque incantation vague [Charmed by some vague incantation.]’ (16), a far cry from the steady rhythm of European ballroom dances, before the music becomes even less coherent:

Et tandis que harcelée par les miaulements
 Rauques de la *derbouka*
 Et stimulée
 Par les
 Nerveuses crotales,
 La jupe de l’almée
 Se gonfle d’air
 Comme une voile
 Sur la mer. (17–25)²⁹

[And while harassed by the rough
 Caterwauling of the *derbouka*
 And spurred on
 By the
 Agitated vipers,
 The dancer’s skirt
 Fills with air
 Like a sail
 On the sea.]

Here the convulsions of the wild oriental music are replicated in the rhythms of the poem, with two cases of emphatic enjambement, the first building up to an awkward disyllabic *rejet* (‘miaulements | Rauques’) and the second separating a definite article from its noun (‘les | Nerveuses crotales’). Enjambement does not function in *vers libre* as it does in regular metrical verse – there is no predictable pulse that might be momentarily disrupted before the forward momentum of regularity is restored –, yet these examples disturb our reading of the text by introducing a kind of epileptic jolt, to use Kryszynska’s term. As the poem draws to a close, we find three consecutive hexasyllabic units that call to mind the regular 6+6 rhythm of the alexandrine, reinforced by sibilance, before a pentasyllabic unit (‘en faisant couler’) breaks the anticipated regularity, and the rhythm disappears in the following nonasyllable with only the persistent [s] pattern providing an echo of what might have been:

29 Kryszynska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 96.

Et songe que ce soir, / il pourra étancher	6+6	
Sa soif jalouse d'elle, / en faisant couler	6+5	
Son joli sang rouge sur ces seins	9	(29–31) ³⁰

Is that a dodecasyllable in the line ‘Sous le charme de quel/que incantati-on vague’, a broken alexandrine of the kind popularised by Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Verlaine in the 1860s and 1870s, itself a vague incantation? Taken on its own, it does not strike our ear as an alexandrine, but given the six-syllable fragments we find towards the end of the poem, we might be encouraged to scrutinise the textual landscape for other rhythmic signposts. As Scott suggests, the rhythm of free verse is ‘the instrument of restless, active relating, a mode of palpation of sense, of linguistic becoming.’³¹ It is the tentative negotiation of such patterns, at once familiar and unfamiliar, with which *vers libre* encourages us to grapple, that could provide the key to an ecocritical reading of the volume’s picturesque rhythms.

In her use of traditional metre, Kryszyska operates a kind of rhythmic defamiliarisation that serves to heighten our senses in each encounter with the text. While line-lengths range from two syllables to over two dozen across the whole volume, giving the impression of freedom, of a ‘frais dispositif’, there are lines which strike the ear as strangely familiar, thanks to the eerie presence of what seems to be an alexandrine appearing out of the rhythmic haze:

Plus d’ardentes lueurs / sur le ciel alourdi	(‘Symphonie en gris’, 1)
C’est l’Heure épanouie / comme une large Fleur	(‘Midi’ III, 7)
Tout est miraculeux / dans ce Jardin de Joie	(‘Eve’, 8)
Rouges comme des cœurs / et blancs comme des âmes	(‘Eve’, 110)
Un merveilleux Serpent / à la bouche lascive	(‘Eve’, 31)
Le ciel a revêtu / ses plus riches armures	(‘Ariane’, 22)

The effect is even more compelling, sensual even, in the case of a palpable 3+3+3+3 pulse:

Et voici / que pareil / à un bras / amoureux	(‘Eve’, 34)
Les murail/es d’azur / qui support/ent son ciel.	(‘Marie’, 7)
Et des pierr/es émane / une odeur / de tristesse	(‘Magdelaine’, 3)
Où le ciel / attristé / semble prendr/e en ses bras	(‘Midi’ III, 8)

In these lines, the natural imagery is enframed in a familiar rhythmic context that marks it as high art, artifice even, and the effect on the reader is reassuring, soothing. We are not obliged to read these isolated examples in *vers libre* poems as alexandrines, so their value is unstable to the extent that we are unsure

30 Kryszyska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 97 [original italics].

31 Scott, ‘Translating the Nineteenth Century’, 293.

what exactly they represent – as Murat observes, ‘le vers libre met en évidence la nécessité en même temps que l’indécidabilité du choix [free verse highlights the necessity, as well as the impossibility, of choosing]’.³² These fragments, while encouraging ever closer scrutiny, resist our interpretative gaze to the extent that we might wonder if they are there at all. Given that the book opens with a section entitled ‘Mirages’, perhaps this elusive shimmering effect is precisely the point: just as a quasi-alexandrine from ‘Naissance d’Aphrodite’ – ‘Et les reflets de l’eau / devenue radieuse’ (33) – is transformed six lines later into a 5+6 hendecasyllable, an imperfect reflection – ‘Les reflets du ciel / et de l’eau radieuse’ (39) –,³³ the poems create a rhythmic mirage. Does the author intend such lines to be read as alexandrines? To expect an answer is to miss the point, for, as Seth Whidden points out, free verse performs ‘une constante remise en question [...] de toute notion d’autorité [a constant questioning [...] of all notions of authority]’.³⁴ In the context of nineteenth-century France, when political as well as religious authority was consistently challenged, we might read this textual undecidability, this provocative questioning, as a way in which the poem and the natural world depicted in it resist utilitarian, one-dimensional and exploitative readings.

The contours of this rhythmic mirage, as the text flutters between the familiar and the unfamiliar, are further blurred by the inclusion of numerous lines reminiscent of the *vers libéré*, the alexandrine that is metrically destabilised by indivisible syntactic units around the caesura:

Où fermente **le vin / noir** des mélancolies (‘Eve’, 17)

By a monosyllabic preposition, or a counted feminine ‘e’ in sixth position, pre-caesura:

Du Dieu qui règne **sur** / les sublimes ivresses (‘Ariane’, 55)
Ainsi, le flot **rose** / d’un vin de Syracuse (‘Hélène’, 16)
La mer écumante / de sa révolte vaine (‘Marie’, 10)

By a counted feminine ‘e’ at seventh position, post-caesura:

Mais, voici reparaître **le** montagne – Reine (‘Midi’ III, 15)
Les branchages s’étoil**ent** de fruits symboliques (‘Eve’, 9)
Coucha toutes les jeun**es** et puissantes joies (‘Ariane’, 6)

32 Murat, *Le Vers libre*, 228.

33 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 60.

34 Seth Whidden, ‘Sur la “supercherie” de Marie Krysinska: vers une lecture sérieuse de “Symphonie en gris”’, in *Le Vers libre dans tous ses états: histoire et poétique d’une forme (1886–1914)*, ed. by C. Boschian-Campaner (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009), 79–88 (86).

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By an uncounted feminine 'e' pre-caesura – the *coupe épique* familiar from medieval verse, but unsanctioned in the nineteenth century:

Et le Lotus august(e) / rêve aux règnes futurs	(‘Eve’, 18)
Et vêtus d’ailes sombr(es) / comme les Trahisons	(‘Eve’, 24)
O les nuits irréell(es), les merveilleuses nuits!	(‘Ballade’, 18; 22)

Or, most tenuously of all – since the possibility of reading a quasi-alexandrine does not announce itself at a word boundary, and must be practically counted on the reader’s fingers – by a mid-word caesura:

Dans tous les chers et <i>charm/eurs</i> parfums d’autrefois	(‘Symphonie des parfums’, 2)
Frémissent les <i>papill/ons</i> d’ombre saphirine	(‘Ariane’, 19)
Celle qu’il devait <i>aim/er</i> d’un amour unique	(‘Roman dans la lune’, 7)

Finally, what are we to make of the line from ‘Symphonie des parfums’ that looks like prose on the page – ‘Mes souvenirs chanteront sur des rythmes doux, et me berceront sans réveiller des regrets (3) –, but might be seen to conceal, if we peer closely enough, at least two dodecasyllables, if not two alexandrines:

Mes souvenirs chante/ront sur des rythmes doux,
et me berceront sans / réveiller des regrets.

None of these lines demand to be metrically read, but such hesitation lies at the heart of *vers libre*, a form in which, in Murat’s words – with a nod to Mallarmé – ‘chaque poème et même chaque vers y devient le moment d’un coup de dés où tout doit être réinventé [every poem, and even every line, becomes a roll of the dice where everything must be reinvented]’.³⁵ As we look for patterns, as we measure and gauge, as we speculate and infer, our efforts to interpret the text rhythmically recreate the processes by which we create meanings for the world that are always unstable, fragmentary, conjectural. It is in this sense that Krysinska’s rhythms are picturesque: they do not paint a fixed picture of a rural idyll; they formally recreate the interpretative hesitations to which the world constantly makes us return.

Such hesitations become even more acute in lines of eleven or thirteen syllables that seem to push our reading towards the familiar, only to disappoint us. Although these lines are harder to spot, there is a precedent for both forms in poems from the pre-*vers libre* canon that compensate for the unstable rhythm with a constant caesura, such as Banville’s ‘Le Triomphe de Bacchos à son retour des Indes’ from *Les Stalactites* (5+8 throughout) and the fourth of Verlaine’s ‘Ariettes oubliées’ from *Romances sans paroles* (5+6 throughout). Krysinska’s 6+5 lines

35 Murat, *Le Vers libre*, 68.

begin as if luring us into anticipating a satisfying alexandrine rhythm, only to confound us with a missing syllable:

Le long des boulevards / et le long des rues	(‘Les Fenêtres’, 27)
Qui porte dans les plis / de son long manteau	(‘Midi’ III, 16)
Et l’opaque fumée / de notre malice	(‘Le Calvaire’, 11)
Où la Fée de la Nuit / mène sous la lune	(‘La Reine des Neiges’, 43)

The 6+7 lines create similar confusion:

Un deuil cruel et cher / la possède pour jamais.	(‘Magdelaine’, 10)
Et les oiseaux veilleurs / chantent l’immortel Amour	(‘Nature morte’, 23)

More than once, Kryszynska creates a curious mix of the familiar and the unfamiliar with the chiasitic pattern 6+5 | 5+6 over consecutive lines:

Et, tandis que sa main / enfantine mêle	
A ses beaux cheveux / les odorantes roses	(‘Hélène’, 41–2)
L’air est plus opprimant / par ce soir d’orage	
Dans le creux de roche / où Magdelaine pleure	(‘Magdelaine’, 1–2)

A similar sense of unfulfilled rhythmic potential comes in lines beginning with two tetrasyllabic units that appear to announce a 4+4+4 alexandrine, only to have the third unit prove too short, or too long, by one syllable:

En vain rôdaient / autour de lui / leurs yeux ivres	4+4+3
(‘Roman dans la lune’, 21)	
Musc minuscule / et compliqué / comme une arabesque	4+4+5
(‘Symphonie des parfums’, 17)	

These familiar fragments force us to examine our reading habits, to question the pertinence of the interpretative framework that we bring to the text. In 1890, metrical verse in France still had decades left in it, and *vers libre* emerged after centuries of metrical conditioning. It is thus hardly surprising that we feel drawn towards the suggestion of regular rhythms – those rhythms through which nature had hitherto been expressed in poetry – as a means of guiding our response to the text. Yet the text encourages us to doubt our assumptions and question our habits: by identifying and classifying these rhythms, are we not doing an injustice to the complexity and the infinite diversity of the material?

Should our metrical framework, then, be seen as an artifice to be abandoned so that we might read unencumbered by tired habits? In order to preserve the salutary otherness of the natural world, should our rhythmic experience not also slip out of our grasp just at the point of seizing it? In ‘Métempsychose [Reincarnation]’, Kryszynska imagines human souls returning to ‘la terre veuve | Où toute vie aura cessé [the widowed earth | Where all life has ended]’ (6–7) to examine the ruins

of what they had built ‘Tandis que palpitait en eux la terrestre vie [While earthly life palpitated in them]’ (22).³⁶ Life on earth, in which humans play an integral part, is thus characterised by rhythm, palpitation. While metrical rhythms may seem artificial, they respond to a fundamental rhythmic truth about the world and our relation to it – and yet that truth must remain elusive. As if to demonstrate this tension, Krysinska expresses that essential rhythm in a tantalising 6+7 line – ‘Tandis que palpitait / en eux la terrestre vie’ – that makes us anticipate the most traditional of alexandrines, before the metrical rhythm collapses with the one word that refuses to submit to the syllable count, ‘vie’ itself. This is especially noteworthy because the line would have been a perfect alexandrine if Krysinska had placed the adjective after the noun, as one might expect – *Tandis que palpitait / en eux la vie terrestre*. As such, this line articulates the quintessential picturesque rhythm, illustrating the endlessly elusive nature of life on earth through a carefully constructed rhythmic hesitation.

Enjambement also plays an important role in this rhythmic breaking and re-making, as indivisible units – compound nouns, preposition + noun, noun + adjective, article + noun – find themselves dislocated across two lines:

Contagieuse douleur Des choses	(‘Effet de soir’, 21–2)
aux bras enlaçants D’amants...	(‘Magdelaine’, 32–3)
des branches D’arbres	(‘La Reine des neiges’, 32–3)
les bûchers du Saint- Office	(‘La Pavane’, 19–20)
les âpres portes Du Réel	(‘Sonate’, 42–3)
Les bras le long Du corps	(‘La Gigue’, 32–3)
devers Les mers	(‘Midi’ I, 4–5)
devant Les rides.	(‘La Reine des neiges’, 6–7)
l’instant Immortel	(‘Sonate’, 40–1)
toute Pleurante	(‘Pleine mer’, 5–6)
Par les Recors	(‘La Gigue’, 18–19)

The effect is not the same as in isometric verse, since the presence of such disruptive pressure-points in *vers libre* asks different questions of the text. In metrical verse, enjambement might suggest a momentary rebellion against predictable form, but here the poet’s hands are not tied by any such obligation, and in several of these examples the transgressive words are isolated in blank space:

Balancent leurs fervents encensoirs	
Auprès	
Des chères coupes des Iris	(‘Eve’, 14–16) ³⁷

36 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 111.

37 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 28.

[Swing their fervent censers
By
The dear heads of the Irises.]

For Scott, at such moments the page becomes ‘a particular typographical/topographical ecology, a certain distribution and dynamisation of language, a certain set of pathways, a psychogeography, no longer a surface for the eye to skate across, but a tabular location for the eye, the ear and the voice endlessly to explore and engage with.’³⁸ From a rhythmic perspective, such ‘couples’ (rhythmic breaks) are indeed ‘chères’ since they enact in verse our fundamental interpretative hesitations about the world, a simultaneous joining and breaking-apart. Krysinska also frequently achieves this with a disjunctive hyphen within a syntactic unit:

les boucliers des héros morts – resplendissaient au soleil (‘Pleine mer’, 12)
les jours clairs et monotones – d’enfance (‘Effet de soir’, 2)

This sense of deconstruction and reconstruction is vital to the negotiation between *vers libre* and traditional verse, and to the free-verse dramatisation of our interpretative encounter with the world. In ‘Javanaises’, emphatic enjambement such as ‘la folle | Vision’ (4–5) and ‘des chattes | Jaunes’ (8–9) accompanies the broken rhythms of the dance:

Tandis qu’en rythmes brisés,
Pleuvent des musiques farouches et subtiles. (14–15)³⁹

[While in broken rhythms,
Wild and subtle musics rain down.]

Although the rhythm is dislocated, the poem creates formal patterns across the rhyme scheme, adhering not to traditional rhyming rules (such as no singular with plural, and no masculine with feminine), but to the transgressive principle of rhymes for the ear – ‘idoles / folle / symboles’ (1–5) and ‘graciles / avril / subtiles’ (11–15) – alongside a strong *rime léonine* ‘grisés / brisés’ (12–14). Rhyme is not banished from free verse, but the acoustic patterning in each poem is new and surprising, while encouraging our irrepressible sense of rhythm:

Implacablement
Et rythmiquement,
Avec une méthode d’enfer,

38 Scott, ‘Translating the Nineteenth Century’, 287.

39 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 97.

Les talons
 Vont. ('La Gigue', 9–13)⁴⁰
 [Implacably
 And rhythmically,
 With a devil of a method,
 The heels
 Fly.]

Such rhythms are capricious, but extremely productive, as in the text-as-landscape metaphor that Krysinska offers in 'Danse slave [Slavic Dance]' by linking the fiddler's rhythmic gesture with the hand which sows the seed:

Le ménétrier assis sur la table
 Lance d'un geste large de semez
 Le rythme de la danse. (11–13)⁴¹
 [The fiddler, sat on the table
 With a wide sowing movement sets off
 The rhythm of the dance.]

Thus we might see the rhythmic exuberance of Krysinska's poems as generating new life within the text, at the point where nature and culture meet.

This essay took as its point of departure anglophone ecocritics' dismissal of a strand of theory seen as particularly French. I hope to have suggested ways in which French free verse might provide a compelling model of ecocritical reading as an exciting, productive, and necessary encounter with otherness. Indeed, several critics found *vers libre* disconcerting on account of its foreignness: of Krysinska's poems, Aurélien Scholl wrote in *Le Matin* that 'on dirait des couplets traduits d'une langue étrangère, et où le traducteur ne met pas de rimes pour conserver la pensée intact [they resemble verses translated from a foreign language, the translator avoiding rhyme in order to preserve the meaning]';⁴² while Philippe Gille of *Le Figaro* suggested that 'on dirait d'une traduction d'un poème étranger, et l'œuvre de Mme Krysinska est pour l'oreille une nouvelle musique qui, pour n'être pas celle de notre vers français, possède cependant un charme pénétrant et incontestable [it seems to be the translation of a foreign poem, and Mme Krysinska's work provides the ear with a new music which, while not that of our French verse, possesses nonetheless a penetrating and incontestable charm]'.⁴³ For some, this hybridity was to be feared, with Catulle Mendès dismissing Peruvian poet Nicanor Della

40 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 100.

41 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 98.

42 Aurélien Scholl, 'Chronique parisienne', *Le Matin* (18 October 1890), 1 (1).

43 Philippe Gille, 'Revue bibliographique', *Le Figaro* (26 November 1890), 5 (5).

Rocca de Vergalo, author of *Poétique nouvelle*,⁴⁴ as ‘un excellent homme, un peu ridicule, féru, comme beaucoup d’étrangers, de transporter dans notre langue les règles prosodiques et même grammaticales de sa langue natale [an excellent fellow, slightly ridiculous, intent, like many foreigners, on importing into our language the prosodic and even the grammatical rules of his native language]’.⁴⁵ There is one point, however, on which all sides agree: in Charles Maurras’s words, ‘les poètes ne sont point des superfluités ainsi que l’imaginent quelques hommes d’État, et, de toutes les lois, de tous les parlements, c’est encore le rythme qui nous fait le plus d’heur et d’honneur dans le monde [poets are not superfluous, as some statesmen might think, and, of all the laws, of all the parliaments, it is still rhythm which seals our greatest glory and honour in the world]’.⁴⁶ It is this specifically French concept of poetic rhythm – the banner behind which poets of all convictions unite – that in free verse can reflect the diversity of the world and its ultimate unknowability, performing a kind of resistance to ownership that provides an answer to what Marland identifies as ‘the difficulty of speaking for the earth itself’.⁴⁷ Such an ecocritical mode of reading provides a way of inhabiting the text as one inhabits the world, challenging us to reassess modes of dwelling and reading. Through the shocks, jolts, hesitations and temptations of the rhythmic experience, French free verse might provide a potent example of a text which demands Marland’s ‘slow reading’, a practice that Roman Bartosch and Greg Garrard identify as crucial to the ecocritical project: ‘a slow reading that conducts the student into a singular and unpredictable encounter with otherness’.⁴⁸

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44 Nicanor A. Della Rocca de Vergalo, *Poétique nouvelle* (Paris: Lemerre, 1880).

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