



## ENVIRO AND NATURE WRITING EXEMPLARS

There are so many ways to examine the relationship between humans and the natural world. We've collected some of our favorite approaches to serve as models. Read on for some dazzling reflections and an impressive [collection](#) of poems that investigate humans and the environment.

### REFLECTIONS

**Thich Nhat Hanh**

***Love Letter to the Earth***

At this very moment, the Earth is above you, below you, all around you, and even inside you. The Earth is everywhere. You may be used to think of the Earth as only the ground beneath your feet. But the water, the sky, and everything around us comes from the Earth. We often forget that the planet we are living on has given us all the elements that make up our bodies. The water in our flesh, our bones, and all the microscopic cells inside our bodies all come from the Earth and are part of the Earth. The Earth is not just the environment we live in. We are the Earth and we are always carrying her within us.

*[Find a copy of this book at your [local library](#).]*

**Rebecca Giggs**

***"Whale Fall"***

A few years ago I helped push a beached humpback whale back out into the sea, only to witness it return and expire under its own weight on the sand. For the three days that it died the whale was a public attraction. People brought their children down to see it. They would stand in the surf and wave babies in pastel rompers over the whale, as if to catch the drift of an evaporating myth. The whale was black like piano wood and because it was still young, it was pink in the joints under its fins. Every few minutes it exhaled loudly and slammed its fluke against the sand – a tantrum or leverage. Its soft chest turned slack, concertinaed, when it rolled.



At first the mood was festive. People cheered every time the whale wrestled in the breakers. Efforts made to free it from a sandbar in the morning had been aided by the tide. That the whale had re-stranded, this time higher up the beach, did not portend well for its survival but so astonished were the crowd and such a marvel was the animal that immoderate hope proved difficult to quash. What the whale inspired was wonderment, a dilation of the ordinary. Everyone was talking about it, on the buses and in the delis. There were dogs on the beach held back by their owners, sweeping flat quarter-circles in the sand with their tails. How they imagined the whale – predator, prey or distant relation – was anyone’s guess, but the dogs seemed keen to get a closer look. At sunset armfuls of grease-blotted butchers’ paper, chips and battered hake were passed around. The local lifesavers distributed zip-up hoodies. Wildlife officers, who had been stand-offish with the gathering crowd, relaxed and taught some lessons on whale physiology.

‘Whales are mammals,’ they began, ‘as we are too.’

*[You can read the rest of this piece [here](#) on Granta’s website.]*

**Helen Macdonald**

***H is for Hawk***

Forty-five minutes north-east of Cambridge is a landscape I’ve come to love very much indeed. It’s where wet fen gives way to parched sand. It’s a land of twisted pine trees, burned-out cars, shotgun-peppered road signs and US Air Force bases. There are ghosts here: houses crumble inside numbered blocks of pine forestry. There are spaces built for air-delivered nukes inside grassy tumuli behind twelve-foot fences, tattoo parlours and US Air Force golf courses. In spring it’s a riot of noise: constant plane traffic, gas-guns over pea fields, wood-larks and jet engines. It’s called the Brecklands – the broken lands – and it’s where I ended up that morning, seven years ago, in early spring, on a trip I hadn’t planned at all. At five in the morning I’d been staring at a square of streetlight on the ceiling, listening to a couple of late party-leavers chatting on the pavement outside. I felt odd: overtired, overwrought, unpleasantly like my brain had been removed and my skull stuffed with something like microwaved aluminium foil, dented, charred and shorting with sparks. Nnngh. Must get out, I thought, throwing back the covers. Out! I pulled on jeans, boots and a jumper, scalded my mouth with burned coffee, and it was only when my frozen, ancient Volkswagen and I were halfway down the A14 that I worked out where I was going, and why. Out there, beyond the foggy windscreen and white lines, was the forest. The broken forest. That’s where I was headed. To see goshawks.

*[Find a copy of this book at your [local library](#).]*



**Gretel Ehrlich**

***The Solace of Open Spaces***

It's May and I've just awakened from a nap, curled against sagebrush the way my dog taught me to sleep—sheltered from the wind. A front is pulling the huge sky over me, and from the dark a hailstone has hit me on the head. I'm trailing a band of two thousand sheep across a stretch of Wyoming badlands, a fifty-mile trip that takes five days because sheep shade up in hot sun and won't budge until it's cool. Bunched together now, and excited into a run by the storm, they drift across dry land, tumbling into draws like water and surge out again onto the rugged, choppy plateaus that are the building blocks of this state.

*[Find a copy of this book at your [local library](#).]*

**Wendell Berry**

***What Are People For***

"For many years, my walks have taken me down an old fencerow in a wooded hollow on what was once my grandfather's farm. A battered galvanized bucket is hanging on a fence post near the head of the hollow, and I never go by it without stopping to look inside. For what is going on in that bucket is the most momentous thing I know, the greatest miracle that I have ever heard of: it is making earth. The old bucket has hung there through many autumns, and the leaves have fallen around it and some have fallen into it. Rain and snow have fallen into it, and the fallen leaves have held the moisture and so have rotted. Nuts have fallen into it, or been carried into it by squirrels; mice and squirrels have eaten the meat of the nuts and left the shells; they and other animals have left their droppings; insects have flown into the bucket and died and decayed; birds have scratched in it and left their droppings or perhaps a feather or two. This slow work of growth and death, gravity and decay, which is the chief work of the world, has by now produced in the bottom of the bucket several inches of black humus. I look into that bucket with fascination because I am a farmer of sorts and an artist of sorts, and I recognize there an artistry and a farming far superior to mine, or to that of any human. I have seen the same process at work on the tops of boulders in a forest, and it has been at work immemorially over most of the land surface of the world. All creatures die into it, and they live by it."

*[Find a copy of this book at your [local library](#).]*



**Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann**  
**Dadirri: A Reflection**

Our Aboriginal culture has taught us to be still and to wait. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course - like the seasons. We watch the moon in each of its phases. We wait for the rain to fill our rivers and water the thirsty earth... When twilight comes, we prepare for the night. At dawn we rise with the sun.

We watch the bush foods and wait for them to ripen before we gather them. We wait for our young people as they grow, stage by stage, through their initiation ceremonies. When a relation dies, we wait a long time with the sorrow. We own our grief and allow it to heal slowly.

We wait for the right time for our ceremonies and our meetings. The right people must be present. Everything must be done in the proper way. Careful preparations must be made. We don't mind waiting, because we want things to be done with care. Sometimes many hours will be spent on painting the body before an important ceremony.

We don't like to hurry. There is nothing more important than what we are attending to. There is nothing more urgent that we must hurry away for.

We wait on God, too. His time is the right time. We wait for him to make his Word clear to us. We don't worry. We know that in time and in the spirit of dadirri (that deep listening and quiet stillness) his way will be clear.

We are River people. We cannot hurry the river. We have to move with its current and understand its ways.

We hope that the people of Australia will wait. Not so much waiting for us - to catch up - but waiting with us, as we find our pace in this world.

*[You can read the rest of this piece [here](#).]*

POEMS:



Please visit the Poetry Foundation's ["Poetry and the Environment"](#) collection for an excellent cross-section of "poetic approaches to the natural world and ecology."