

“Manifest” by Bill Stobb

Twelve thousand versions of twelve dozen ivy blossoms
in the compound eye

of a dragonfly
Shoulder-wide
crevice opens above a gravel run
bottles
and a condom we decided
not to touch
part of the preserve

Grove of future dirt
surrounds a cluster of brightly-
clothed children
One
as they say
is mine

Near the scout shelter along the tracks
a woodpecker harvested termites
from the decaying limb of an Ash

Sawdust
sprinkled over
the sumac’s beseeching leaves
Idea’s that
we’re getting what birds are just doing?
Who drew that
white line

on the sky?
Mine’s spied
the day’s first vapor trail—
passenger plane on the hop to Chicago
By nine
it’s diffused
combined with others of its kind
and high cirrus
One white charge
snaps through made weather

Twelve thousand versions
of twelve dozen blossoms
in the compound eye

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Annotation by Emilie Clavette

“Manifest” by William Stobb explores the connection between the natural and the man-made, pushing the boundaries of the typical definition of nature. Gary Snyder, in “The Etiquette of Freedom”, also questions humanity’s concept of nature, writing, “The physical universe and all its properties—I would prefer to use the word nature in this sense.” Coming to a similar conclusion as Stobb, Snyder emphasizes that everything within the world should be considered a part of nature, which includes man-made objects and phenomenon. This includes the “made weather” described by Stobb in his poem. The description of the clouds created by vapor trails of planes shows a creation of nature by the human species. Stobb emphasizes the fact that humans are changing the world, but does not comment on whether or not this influence is positive or negative. The Mississippi Valley Conservancy’s goal is to interact with nature in a positive way, so when they alter nature the purpose is to restore it to what it used to be. Their ecological restoration projects focus on removing invasive species and using land management techniques in order to help the ecosystem reach a healthy state.

In terms of imagery, this piece reminded me of the Trempealeau Lakes Nature Preserve and allowed me to more fully take in what surrounded me while I was there. The idea of seeing through a dragonfly’s eyes is introduced in the first line when Stobb writes, “Twelve thousand versions of twelve dozen ivy blossoms / in the compound eye / of a dragonfly.” Stobb continues this idea of seeing through the dragonfly’s eyes through his use of white space, creating an image similar to what one would imagine looking through a dragonfly’s eyes would be. Gazing out at the lake and hearing the frogs chirp, imagining what it would be like to see this scene through the eyes of a dragonfly helped me to experience the lake in a new way. Allowing my attention to flit around, focusing on new sounds and sudden movements, trying to take in everything at once, but being swiftly moved on to the next experience. Taking in the trees as if I were seeing twelve dozen of the same oak at a time. Experiencing nature in a more swift, sporadic way and coupling that with the more calm and serene way I would normally view nature helped to create a sense of fullness when visiting Trempealeau Lakes Nature Preserve.