

# Nature's Warning: Waste In Juliana Spahr's "Gentle Now, Don't Add To Heartache"

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## ABSTRACT

"Gentle Now, Don't Add To Heartache" is one of the representative works of the American poet Juliana Spahr and a landmark work of modern Western environmental poetry of the 21st century. Throughout the history of civilisation, as industry has developed, the environmental crisis has become increasingly serious and the ecosystems on which people depend have been destroyed. With "Gentle Now, Don't Add To Heartache", the author warns of this crisis of which few people are aware. In this poem, Spahr explores the human connection to nature, tracing its transformation. In "Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache," Juliana Spahr uses poetic imagery, metaphors, and repetitive references to express how to "Gentle" address the current environmental pollution issues during a time of escalating environmental concerns. Through this book, Juliana Spahr aims to convey to all readers that humans should respect the lives and value of every species, uphold the rights of other species to exist and thrive in the Earth's natural environment, and simultaneously address various levels of environmental injustice. It emphasizes the importance of mitigating severe pollution issues and achieving harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

## KEYWORDS

Gentle Now; Don't Add To Heartache; Waste; Ecological Civilization

## 1 Introduction

"The Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant (FDNPP) accident released a large amount of radioactive materials into the environment since 2011." (Akio, 731)

In the wake of this catastrophic event, a chilling question arises: Can we truly move beyond the shadow of nuclear leakage and its far-reaching impact on the environment and human life? Inside the frightening story of Fukushima, the dangers of waste and modern society collide to create a new kind of warning tale.

"Gentle Now, Don't Add To Heartache" serves as a contemporary green classic poem that offers a multitude of inspirational ideas across various levels. It is a work worthy of careful exploration. While there are numerous issues causing "Heartache" for our planet, pollution stands out as the most crucial problem. In this paper, I will interpret the representation of waste In Juliana Spahr's poem "Gentle Now, Don't Add To Heartache". First, I will analyze the meaning of waste In the poem. Next, I will state the poem In relation to the causes of waste on our planet now. Finally, interpret Spahr's solution for "Gentle". By analyzing the intricate and profound themes and significance of the poem "Gentle Now, Don't Add To Heartache," it aims to showcase the severity of Waste and underscore the importance of "Gentle" in addressing it.

## 2 Understanding Waste: Definitions and Perspectives

Waste is the most urgent problem in the world at present. Waste can contribute to pollution. When waste materials are not properly managed and disposed of, they can have detrimental effects on the environment, leading to pollution. So we must pay attention to the problem of waste.

Waste refers to the inefficient or unnecessary use or consumption of resources, energy, or materials. It can involve the squandering or disposal of valuable resources without deriving any significant benefit from them. . (Morrison, 232)

In the context of the poem "Gentle Now, Don't Add To Heartache," waste symbolizes the destructive consequences of human actions on the environment. It represents the disregard for the finite nature of resources and the negative impact of excessive consumption and irresponsible disposal practices.

In "Gentle Now, Don't add to heartache," the concept of waste is central to the poem's message. The poem highlights the devastating effects of waste on the environment and urges readers to recognize the urgency of addressing this issue.

The poem teaches readers that waste, whether it is physical waste or the wastefulness of human actions, has profound consequences on the natural world. It portrays waste as a destructive force that leads to the withering of beauty and the silence of once vibrant ecosystems. The poem emphasizes that waste is not confined to a single stream or location but is a widespread problem affecting countless streams and the overall environment.

Through vivid imagery and powerful language, the poem evokes a sense of loss and desolation caused by waste. It

invites readers to reflect on the impact of their own actions and the choices they make in relation to waste generation and disposal. The poem serves as a reminder that waste is not isolated from the rest of the world but directly affects the interconnectedness and balance of ecosystems.

Ultimately, the poem encourages readers to take responsibility for their waste and consider sustainable practices that minimize waste generation and promote environmental preservation. It serves as a call to action, urging individuals to actively participate in waste reduction efforts and advocate for environmentally conscious behaviors in order to mitigate the negative effects of waste on the natural world.

### 3 Analyze Poem

#### 3.1 Verse III: List of biodiversity

"Gentle now black sandshell, ash, american bittern, harelip sucker, /yellow bullhead, beech, great blue heron, dobsonfly larva, /water penny larva, birch, redhead, white catpaw, elephant ear, buckeye, /don't add to heartache." (Spahr, Line 170-174)

The last part lists the species and elements, which praises the beauty and complexity of nature and further emphasizes the connection and awe with nature.

Spahr's interview mentioned why the List was used in this section: "I like the list. I like lists because they are inclusive. You can keep sticking things into them. And they don't require categorization. So each item in the list can be as important as the others. I especially like the list as lament. As a sort of recognizing or call out of what is becoming lost. In these poems with lists of plants and animals in them I am thinking of poetry as a place for storing information. I am thinking of the age old uses of the list poem as a way of keeping knowledge that needs to be kept." (Spahr)

#### 3.2 Verse IV: Polluted stream

"Soda cans, cigarette butts, tampon applicators, beer connectors, pieces of plastic": These specific objects serve as metaphors for the pollution caused by human beings in the natural environment. They symbolize human consumption habits, wastefulness, and environmentally destructive behaviors.

"Runoff from agriculture, surface mines, forestry, home wastewater treatment systems, construction sites, urban yards, and roadways": These words that describe pollution sources metaphor the negative impact of various human activities on the environment. They symbolize human's exploitation of land, over-utilization of resources and irresponsible behavior.

"Loss of species": These descriptions of lost animal and plant species imply the destruction of natural ecosystems and the loss of biodiversity. They symbolize the destruction of ecological balance and nature by human activities.

#### 3.3 Verse V: Forsaking nature's beauty

"I didn't even say goodbye": The repetition of this phrase reflects the protagonist's lack of attention and farewell to the gradually disappearing natural elements. It reveals the indifference and disregard of humans towards the loss of nature.

"I replaced": This word appears repeatedly to describe how the protagonist replaces natural elements with consumer goods and virtual things. It implies a weakening dependence on nature and the pursuit of satisfaction through substitutes and artificial products.

"I did not sing": The repetition of this phrase emphasizes the protagonist's silence and the state of no longer singing. It reflects the protagonist's mourning for what is lost and a sense of powerlessness in the face of environmental destruction.

### 4 Waste In The Poem

The previous section analysed waste and pollution in the poem. This shows that waste is a topic that cannot be ignored. The next section focuses on why the author writes about waste and pollution in the poem.

Rachel Carson said this when she mentioned human chemical pollutants-pesticides in "Silent Spring": "Can anyone believe it is possible to lay down such a barrage of poisons on the surface of the earth without making it unfit for all life? They should not be called 'insecticides' but 'biocides'." (xvi)

Juliana Spahr's poem also incorporate the ugliness and wickedness found in the city. There are soda cans, cigarette butts, sanitary pads, plastic, beer bottles, wastewater, fertilizers, feces, heavy metals. In the poet's depiction, the Earth becomes desolate and barren due to Waste: species disappear, water sources are polluted, resources are wasted; the Earth becomes lifeless and devoid of vitality. Humans have destroyed the environment they rely on for survival, living in a dirty and dreadful wasteland.

"We were born at the beginning of these things, at the time of /chemicals combining, at the time of stream run off. / These things were a part of us and would become more a part of us/ but we did not know it yet. /Still we noticed enough to sing a lament."(Spahr, Line194-198)

She described the external world that we usually see, expressed concern about environmental damage and species extinction, and criticized our deprivation and waste of natural resources.

"I turned to each other. /Ensnared, bewildered, I turned to each other and from the stream. /I turned to each other and I began to work for the chemical factory/ and I began to work for the paper mill and I began to work for/ the atomic waste disposal plant and I began to work at keeping/ men in jail." (Spahr, Line 222-225)

It highlights the problems of modern human existence and presents a realism-based environmental ethics view—irresistible entanglement. The poem uses words like "ensnared" and "bewildered" to imply that individuals in real life may be constrained by various economic, social, and systemic pressures, forcing them to accept jobs related to environmental pollution, even if these jobs may have negative impacts on the environment. This reflects the real challenges and moral dilemmas faced by environmental ethics. It suggests the choices and trade-offs individuals face in environmental justice and the complexity of decision-making in specific environmental contexts and conditions.

## 5 Causes of "Waste"

In the long history of primitive slave societies and feudal societies, humans had a certain reverence for nature, and there was a relatively harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. Humans and nature were intertwined, and human survival relied on nature. However, everything changed with the advent of industrial society. Humans began to understand nature and attempted to reshape it according to their own will. Against the backdrop of post-war reconstruction efforts in various countries, humans indeed achieved unprecedented economic miracles. As humans repeatedly succeeded in conquering nature at that time, their thoughts and consciousness became extremely inflated. Coupled with the development of science and technology, humans were endowed with tremendous power to transform nature. With this power, humans became reckless and oblivious, believing that they could triumph over nature, even considering themselves as the masters of the universe. Humans delighted in the unrestrained exploitation and utilization of nature, without realizing that they were gradually pushing nature into a dire situation. Just like Perera mentioned plastic waste in her essay: "Concerns about usage and disposal are diverse and include accumulation of waste in landfills and in natural habitats, physical problems for wildlife resulting from ingestion or entanglement in plastic, the leaching of chemicals from plastic products and the potential for plastics to transfer chemicals to wildlife and humans."(325) Humanity's relentless exploitation and utilization of nature also incurred a backlash from nature.

Spahr's poem embodies the traditional anthropocentrism, which led humans to completely lose their reverence for nature and disregard the severe consequences of ecological destruction. It ultimately led to an ecological crisis. Humans originally intended to reshape "nature" according to their desires but ended up facing unexpected outcomes. In Verse III of "Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache," Spahr writes about the price we pay for our actions: the harm humans inflict on the state of nature.

The beautiful and serene stream depicted in "Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache" is later disrupted by a sudden and devastating Waste that withers everything, casting a shadow of death over the entire stream and plunging it into an eerie silence. This stream is just one among countless others, but what is it that stifles the springtime voices of so many streams? Spahr's heart-wrenching outcry points to the crisis of drinking water and the extinction of various water-related organisms caused by human-induced environmental destruction. As Smith mentioned about: "Aquatic ecosystems cover over two thirds of our planet and play a pivotal role in stabilizing the global as well as providing a large array of services for a fast-growing human population. However, anthropogenic activities increasingly provoke deleterious impacts in aquatic ecosystems."(4500) The misuse of chemical agents and land pollution also harm the green vegetation of the Earth, leading to the disappearance of numerous animals that depend on vegetation for survival. The birds' songs are no longer heard, and the sky rains down a deathly precipitation. This world is plagued by diverse channels of pollution, truly representing a "toxic era."

The distinction between humans and other organisms in nature does not lie in humans being at the top of the entire ecological food chain, but rather in humans possessing moral aspirations. The pursuit of ecological harmony is precisely the noble vision of coexistence between humans and nature. Therefore, in the process of development, humans must not only consider their own interests but also take into account the impact on the ecosystem. If humans pursue short-term gains at the expense of the environment, it will lead to extensive resource waste and environmental pollution. Forgetting that humans are also part of this vast nature, they will inevitably face the backlash of nature and move toward their own destruction.

The impact of "Gentle"

The word "gentle" in the poem "gentle now, don't add to heartache" carries the meaning of being mild, soft, and

tender. It conveys a sense of warmth and tranquility. A gentle attitude towards the world can be environmentally friendly. Gentle attitude is of great significance.

Juliana Spahr's poem "Gentle Now, Don't Add To Heartache" explores the theme of waste and its impact on the environment and society. As Emerson said in "Nature": "The world is emblematic. Parts of speech are metaphors, because the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind." (19) This poetry carries the poet's contemplation and reflection on contemporary social, political, and environmental issues. Through the language and form of poetry, it presents the poet's understanding and observations of the interrelationship between humanity and the natural environment.

The use of innovative forms: By employing unique language techniques, forms, and structures in their poetry, the poet breaks free from traditional modes of expression and creates new possibilities for communication. Techniques such as metaphors, repetition, and listing are utilized, allowing for experimentation and innovation. These experiments and innovations serve as inspiration and examples for future poets and writers, encouraging them to explore and express environmental issues in new ways.

Environmental consciousness: Spahr's work can be seen as part of a broader literary and cultural movement that seeks to promote environmental consciousness and sustainability. Through her poetry, she contributes to the ongoing dialogue on waste management, pollution, and the need for more sustainable practices.

Next, I will focus on analyzing the impact of these two aspects on future generations:

#### A. Integration of Rhetorical Devices and Reality

The use of rhetorical devices by Spahr serves multiple purposes in advocating for environmental protection. When employed in environmental poetry, writers can emphasize, reinforce, and leave an impression on environmental issues, inspiring readers' emotional resonance and willingness to take action. It also allows environmental issues to be prominently showcased in the works, highlighting their urgency and significance. By repeatedly mentioning keywords, phrases, or sentences related to environmental problems, writers can direct readers' attention to these issues, emphasizing their immediacy and urgency.

For readers, descriptions of the beauty of natural landscapes, the extinction of animal species, and the scarcity of natural resources can serve as reminders and warnings, keeping readers constantly aware of environmental issues and eliciting emotional resonance regarding the sadness, anger, and concerns brought about by environmental destruction. By repeatedly emphasizing issues such as environmental degradation, ecosystem collapse, or resource wastage in their works, writers can alert readers to the existence of environmental crises, strengthen readers' emotional connection to environmental issues, and encourage people to take action. This stimulates readers' enthusiasm and sense of responsibility, prompting them to take practical measures to protect the environment and integrate environmental conservation into their daily lives and behavioral choices.

#### B. Integration of "Gentle" with the Era

In different era, people's awareness of the environment is different. This urges our concept of gentleness to keep pace with the times. "Gentle Now, Don't Add To Heartache" integrates themes of natural beauty, ecological destruction, and environmental crises to raise awareness and consciousness about the environment. Through artistic language and imagery, it conveys a sense of awe and appreciation for nature, helping individuals reestablish their connection with the natural world. This type of poetry emphasizes the urgency and importance of environmental issues through emotive and poignant expressions. It employs unique language and imagery to reveal the severity of problems such as environmental degradation, ecological imbalance, and resource depletion, evoking resonance and contemplation in readers. Furthermore, it stimulates emotional resonance in readers, encouraging them to take proactive environmental protection actions.

By depicting the beauty of nature as well as the wastefulness and destruction of natural resources, it awakens a sense of responsibility and willingness to take action, driving individuals and communities to engage in environmental conservation efforts. Most importantly, environmental poetry helps shape and reinforce people's environmental values. Through artistic expression, it conveys ideas of respect, protection, and sustainable development towards the natural world, prompting individuals to reflect on their behaviors and lifestyles, and striving for harmonious coexistence with nature.

## 6 Conclusion

So to say Gentle in this poem means gentle treatment of the environment means interacting with and managing it in a respectful, caring, and sustainable manner. It encompasses a range of behaviors and attitudes aimed at minimizing negative impacts on the environment and preserving the health and sustainability of ecosystems. Juliana Spahr's works and ideas have had a profound impact on contemporary literature and cultural studies. Through her creative writing and critical work, she has sparked important discussions on the environment, social justice, and power dynamics, becoming a significant voice in the contemporary literary world.

Through her poetry and prose, Spahr calls upon us to recognize our responsibility as human beings towards the Earth and contemplate how to establish more sustainable and harmonious ways of coexistence with nature. She explores core issues of environmental ethics, focusing on marginalized organisms and ecosystems within the environment, and urges people to pay greater attention to and protect them.

Spahr's works aim to provoke readers to contemplate environmental ethics and remind us of how our actions impact the Earth and other species. Through poetic and artistic expressions, she stimulates profound reflections on environmental ethics, prompting readers to consider our responsibilities and obligations, as well as how to take action in our daily lives to protect and preserve the environment.

Overall, Spahr's "Gentle Now, Don't add to heartache" offers thoughtful insights and inspiration on environmental conservation and sustainable development through its engagement with environmental issues. She explores our relationship with the natural world in a poetic manner and conveys concerns about environmental destruction and sustainability, providing readers with a perspective to examine and contemplate the interactions between ourselves and nature.

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