Nature has disappeared. For many postmodern theoreticians, nature is now only a word on pages of text, and that word is a social construction. Its meaning is the product of how human culture and social institutions have trained the author of that word to perceive. The word “nature” and the text in which it appears are useful in contestations for authority and power, but what Murray Bookchin calls “first nature” (21), the referential world of our direct sensuous experience in our planetary ecosystems, does not exist in social constructionist discourse. Micheal Soulé, the founder of the Society for Conservation Biology and chair of the Environmental Studies Board at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Gary Lease, dean of humanities at Santa Cruz, expressed their concern about this social constructionist denial of first nature by editing a collection of essays, *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction* (1995). Most of the essays point toward varieties of postmodernism, especially the leveling effects of deconstruction and Lyotard’s disruption of the hegemonic, as the culprit. Paul Shepard, for instance, cites the work of Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Lyotard, Rorty, and critics of visual arts such as Hal Foster for creating the illusion that “the referent does not exist,” that “the words for things are more real than the things they stand for,” and that “nothing can be traced further than the semiotic in which everything is trapped.” Hence “the text—the only reality—is comparable only to other texts. Nothing is true, says Michel Foucault, except ‘regimes of truth and power’” (20–22).

Soulé calls this position “nihilistic monism” (149), yet he recognizes
that “the myths of postmodernism are politically potent” (159). The Soulé and Lease edition originated with their concern that “the wave of relativistic anthropocentrism now sweeping the humanities and the social sciences might have consequences for how policymakers and technocrats view and manage the remnants of biodiversity and the remaining fragments of wilderness” (159). Soulé argues that we still need stewardship, especially given our collective inability to control our population. But if first nature is an illusion, as social constructionists believe, why bother with conservation?

This postmodern social constructionist position is a more nefarious incarnation of the philosophical dualism that has dogged Western culture for centuries. Separating the knower from that which can be known inevitably leads to a devaluation of first nature and domination by humans. Contemporary environmentalists, ecologists, physicists, molecular biologists, historians of science, and environmental poets have identified philosophical dualism, the mechanistic legacy of Bacon, Descartes, and Locke, as the most pervasive perceptual disease that afflicts our planet. Decades ago Shepard stated that dualism has created the perception that “nothing in nature has intrinsic merit” (5). The geneticists David Suzuki and Anita Gordon question the myth that “the scientist is an objective observer of an external reality,” for the human “economy is really a subset of the natural world” (165–166). For Carolyn Merchant, conceptualizing reality as a machine “sanctioned the domination of both nature and women” (xxi, 193). Gary Snyder echoed the ecologist Eugene Odum (27) by asserting that dualism was the creation of city-dwellers whose work evinced “a profound rejection of the natural world” (18–19). Wendell Berry was most direct: for him dualism is “the most destructive disease that afflicts us” (105).

In the Soulé and Lease edition, N. Katherine Hayles argues that science has proved that first nature does exist—she calls it the “unmediated flux” (54)—and constraints exist in that flux (the law of gravity, for instance) “that limit which representations will be viable” (60). Hence “not all representations are equal” (61). Though “inherently unknowable” (50), the flux of first nature is real. We need to emphasize our connectedness and interaction with the flux, and our historical/cultural positionality, for “everything we know about the world we know because we interact with” that flux (48). “Because we are embodied,”
writes Hayles, “the range and nature of sensory stimuli available to us, the contexts that affect how these stimuli achieve meaning, the habituated movements and postures that we learn through culture and that are encoded for gender, ethnicity, and class—all affect how learning takes place and consequently how the world comes into being for us” (56). Hayles proposes “constrained constructivism” to account for “the interplay between representation and constraints. Neither cut free from reality nor existing independent of human perception, the world as constrained constructivism sees it is the result of complex and active engagements between the unmediated flux and human beings” (53–54). Shepard similarly emphasizes connectedness and takes heart in the labors of the naturalist who attends “to species who have no words and no text other than context and yet among whom there is an unspoken consensus about the contingency of life and real substrutures…. A thousand million pairs of eyes, antennas, and other sense organs are fixed on something beyond themselves that sustains their being, in a relationship that works” (“Virtually” 27).

For the poet Pattiann Rogers, humans are not separate from nature, nor has nature disappeared into textuality and social constructions. In her book *Firekeeper: New and Selected Poems*, Rogers celebrates our embodied connectedness to other orders of living nature, to Shepard’s “thousand million pairs of eyes,” in a flux that works to sustain our lives. 11 A decade ago, in an interview with Richard McCann, Rogers revealed that her poetry envisions “an ongoing creation, and that we are a part of it, and to separate ourselves as merely observers of the universe is a big error. We have been a part of it; we are right in the middle of the universe, not only being an effect but also affecting this ongoing process” (32). 12 Rogers not only has a B.A. and an M.A. in English, but she minored in zoology as an undergraduate. To celebrate this ongoing, nondualistic process, Rogers adds to her literary talents insights from quantum physics, cellular biology, astronomy, and other areas of the physical sciences. For Rogers “the meaning that we invent is physical, rooted in our bones, integral to our blood and flesh, one with the material of the universe” (35). Her project reverses the hermetic treatment of language as its own world of creative process, as in poststructural language theory. Rogers’s work is congruent with contemporary advances in the sciences—the physics of David Bohm, the biology of Robert
Pollack and Gerald Edelman—and the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. We can see some of her nondualistic project in poems that emphasize speech as physical sound, the process of involution in cellular development, and the ubiquity of sight and perception among living entities. We recover the referential in Rogers by paying self-reflexive attention to our moment-by-moment adhesion to the first nature that bore and sustains us.

The physicist David Bohm believes that quantum physics and relativistic theory emphasize nondualistic context dependence in “an implicature that is also enfolds us” (67). He argues that the wave behavior and lack of continuous motion of quanta, when added to the shifting force fields of Einsteinian theory, indicate that contemporary physics “has dissolved the mechanistic view” (60) and that “it is a mistake to think that the world has a totally defined existence separate from our own and that there is merely an external ‘interaction’ between us and the world” (67). Rogers argues the same points in her poems about sound as a physical property of all living entities. Through sound we respond to an animistic creator inseparable from creation and self-evident from observation. The creator in the poem “In Addition to Faith, Hope, and Charity” is known by works, for all living entities make noise. Noise appears in every heart’s motions as well as in “the rappings of otters / cracking molluscs with stones” and in “the cacophony” of “the individual / staccato tickings inside all gnaticatchers, / kingbirds, kestrels, rock doves.” The data prove the existence of a “power” operating “in favor / of such a racket.” God is similarly within creation in “The Creation of the Inaudible,” speaking inseparably from the cries of cicadas and swallows, as well as the contortions of “the blind click beetle flipping in midair.” Like waves of electrons and force-field modifications, we can detect God through creation, through the continual modifications and mixings of sound, “the spoken postulation of his unheard presence.”

Language will never recover all there is to know of firsthand experience in “The Mad Linguist,” for no one user completely understands nature’s language. Yet the desire to reach outward beyond the self to communicate is so ubiquitous in living creation that, like Bohm’s implicature order, it drives all living creatures toward networks where we express our emotional life by enfolding the outer world within us. The language of pines and poplars in “The Mad Linguist” is “a network / of
ever-smaller branches spreading outward” and upward, heedless of discrete boundaries and mechanistic measurements. The result is a nondualistic epiphany where the language of nature necessitates a bonding of speaker and audience:

Here every verb contains a subtle allusion
to ascension; predicates rise vertically
out of pines into the sky.
What an ideal language for describing
the emotional state of anyone who feels
the recitations of seven thousand
riverside birches trembling in his bones.

Language is both sound and social phenomenon in “The Mad Linguist” and is certainly not limited to the aesthetics of the linguistic product. Rogers begins the concluding stanza with a quote: “All spoken words presuppose the existence / of an audience that perceives them.” Though I cannot at this point identify the source, the quote testifies to the adhesion of all living creation in a social process of giving and receiving communication that is not limited to the phonetic speech of humans. Rogers seems to be extending beyond human speech an observation of Saussure: “for the realization of language, a community of speakers [masse parlante] is necessary. Contrary to all appearances, language never exists apart from the social fact, for it is a semiological phenomenon” (77). Nature’s language and Rogers’s poems are always already dissolving the boundaries of subject and object to underscore their connectedness.

Rogers is intrigued (McCann 33) by Fred Wolf’s suggestion that “atoms may not exist without the observers of atoms” (6). If such is the case at the microcosmic level, are human observations integral to how we believe the macrocosm is constituted? In “Supposition,” another meditation on sound, Rogers suggests that our welfare is bound in part to our perceptions of an expanding universe, and this expanding universe is quite possibly related to the human need for praise. For centuries theologians and scientists have praised the design of the universe as evidence of a controlling power interested in our welfare. At the outset of “Supposition,” Rogers asks us to “Suppose the molecular changes
taking place / In the mind during the act of praise” emanated into space as the physical expression of the need for our welfare. Does the act of praise affect the human sensorium’s visual instrumentation, as for Heisenberg the instrumentation that we use affects our perceptions of what we observe? Human praise of a harmonious macrocosm may be an expression of our need for welfare as creatures surrounded by a void. Hence our subjective needs may connect us to the flux through sound, in the physical act of praise, and may likewise be the source of our perceptions of an expanding universe. So goes the tantalizing suggestion at the poem’s close: “Suppose, for the prosperous / Welfare of the universe, there were an element / Of need involved.”

Enfolding appears to be a characteristic of all created matter. In some of her poems Rogers celebrates the biological process of involution, where cells in the nearly hollow but fertilized egg or blastula coil up and tuck inside to form a primitive gut. In “The Rites of Passage,” Rogers describes how complex transformations initiated by DNA replication and mitosis occur very quickly to turn a clear, fertilized egg of a *Xenopus laevis* into a swimming, feeding tadpole that can escape predators (1037–1050). The fertilized blastula feeds on stored food in the egg during the transformations. Rogers ends her poem with a startling analogy to how artistic creation incorporates a “sudden white involution of sight” and how the poem becomes the linguistic memory of a process of nondualistic enfolding ubiquitous in all creative matter,

a vision of tension folding itself
Inside clear open waters, by imitating a manipulation
Of cells in a moment of distinction, wishing to remember
The entire language made during that crossing.

Rogers in “Elinor Frost’s Marble-topped Kneading Table” sees that same “folding and overlapping,” that “initial act / of any ovum,” that “taking all of its outside surfaces inward,” in the “core / of thunderheads,” inside amaryllis bulbs, and in the simple actions of Robert Frost’s wife kneading dough. There, at the core of artistic creativity, “at the only center where it has always been,” we will find types of “Mother Nature”—aproned figures kneading, “ripe / with yeast, her children at her skirts.” In *Signs of Life: The Language and Meanings of DNA*, the mol-
ecular biologist Robert Pollack regularly describes the transfer RNA and the regulatory proteins that work with DNA to produce new proteins as complicated structures that fold back on themselves (69–81). Though we do not understand the rules for the precise folding of amino acids into proteins, Pollack notes that “the freedom to fold and twist into three-dimensional structures gives a protein its capacity to express the meaning of the DNA that encoded it” (70). The kneading and folding Rogers describes, characteristic of all living matter, suggests that no dualistic divorce exists between inner and outer nature.

“Diving for Gold: The Bottom of the World,” a meditation on its Ecclesiastes epigraph, similarly obliterates dualism. “That which is far off and exceeding deep, who can find it out?” questioned the author of Ecclesiastes (7: 24). Like Dante near the end of Inferno, Rogers imagines herself on a journey to the gravitational center of the earth, as a diver searching for the deepest and farthest recess of known creation. Also like Dante, Rogers suggests that, when one has arrived at that center, all reference points would prove anomalous: inside and outside, up and down, nearness and farness—all would prove undecidable as the deep-sea diver is weightlessly suspended in the ocean depths. Here even the sound and pronunciation of the word “deep” “recedes / and returns, circles and tides, involutes, / turns itself upside down, the head below / the feet now.” As inside and outside are no longer distinguishable, the diver’s body would truly become one with nature. The stars would surround the diver everywhere, and this explorer of the deep would have an experience of closeness to the natural world as intense as that of the earliest hunter-gatherers.

The intrepid Rogers ventures further, aligning herself with the Nobel Prize–winning brain research of Gerald Edelman in “Before I Wake” and “Inside God’s Eye,” by strongly suggesting that the action of cellular recoil and enfolding in humans actually produces consciousness. “Before I Wake” at first appears to be a lovely paean to a natural world that supports humans while they sleep. With repeated reading, however, we recognize that this natural world, even while humans sleep, is necessary not only for dreaming but also for human self-awareness. The turning and pivoting of marsh marigold and bluefish eye in the opening stanza, as well as the silence and stillness of wolf spiders and fetal sea horses in stanza two, are processes that also occur in sleep as humans
creatively mull over their daytime experience. Outward and inward motion in stanza three, including the “involution” of cowbird egg buds, “the tight coiling and breaking / of light traveling in the beads of the sawgrass,” and the “outward motion of the hollow web / Of the elm making leaf,” mimic the creative ability of humans to reflect on previous conscious experience during sleep. Thus meaning is interactional, as Edelman believes, and the environment plays an open-ended role in human awareness and learning (30).18

“Inside God’s Eye” suggests, as Rogers herself has stated, that “we are in some way involved in the process of creating god. . . . He becomes as we create him; he is not omnipotent, and he depends on us to complete his creation” (McCann 35). The poem stresses that the conscious awareness of humans constitutes “the only point of reversal / Inside his eye, the only point of light / That turns back on itself.” Rogers intimates that conscious awareness is the high point of evolution and that the giving of meaning depends upon the ability to ingest and creatively meditate upon our experience, a sort of poetic involution. Edelman finds “recursive and repetitive reentry,” the brain’s capacity to reevaluate and change the findings of its parallel signaling between separate and diverse neural maps along ordered anatomical connections, to be a source of conscious awareness in humans (49–54). All of the created world and its motions rest inside God’s eye in Rogers’s poem, but since humans are the most evolutionary advanced creatures and the only creatures who actively reflect on their experience, we may be God’s sole pathway to further self-knowledge.

“Love Song” does not contain the word “involution,” but with lush sensuous imagery Rogers suggests that sex for a woman is a kind of involution, a craving for growth through an ecstatic desire to take the world into the self. Addressed to an ambiguous “you” that encompasses lover, reader, and the entire living world of nature, the persona placates an anxious lover by saying that it is all right that you are no better than a “snorgling” boar or the ejaculating “explosion of the milkweed pod,” for she admits that “This is precisely what I seek, mad myself / To envelope every last drupe and pearl-dropped ovule.” As the persona admits in the poem’s conclusion that “this is exactly what I contrive to take into my arms,” the reader recognizes the sexy design. The poem is a contrivance to take the world into Rogers’s arms; its luxuriant stanzas engorge
themselves on every one of the five senses. The succulent imagery suggests an insatiable urge among all living creatures in nature to bond in love. Reading "Love Song" will dissolve any separation anxiety in the reader and replace it with an invigorating, healthy feeling of connectedness to nature.

At the center of Merleau-Ponty’s nondualistic phenomenology are his nontheological foundational concepts of the primacy of perception and the flesh of the visible. For Merleau-Ponty, the seeing body and the visible body intertwine with all other seers and visible bodies. There is a "strange adhesion of the seer and the visible. There is vision, touch, when a certain visible, a certain tangible, turns back upon the whole of the visible, the whole of the tangible, of which it is a part, or when suddenly it finds itself surrounded by them..." (138–139). Here “flesh” is a philosophical principle, not blood and muscle:

If we can show that the flesh is an ultimate notion, that it is not the union or compound of two substances, but thinkable by itself, if there is a relation of the visible with itself that traverses me and forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own. (140)

Human consciousness for Merleau-Ponty is “sustained, subtended, by the prereflective unity of my body” and open to other sensible/sentient bodies in a “reversibility of the visible and the tangible” (141–143). At the heart of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, according to M. C. Dillon, is his belief that consciousness is always an embodied consciousness, not a purely interior Cartesian cogito, and that thought is an extension of that embodied consciousness. Even an infant, when attempting to grasp an object, sees his or her hand approaching the object and at the same time lives through that hand in the act of exploring (110–124). The visible and the sensible/sentient in humans crisscross constantly in the act of perception with other orders of visible and sensible creation for humans to be conscious of themselves. Rogers’s poems about the phenomenology of perception present a similar nondualistic adhesion of the visible and the tangible to suggest that human consciousness is not completely separate from other orders of living creation.

“That’s Why” responds to its Stephen Jay Gould epigraph. “Both the
eye and the mind are notoriously fallible instruments," wrote Gould, and because of this, Rogers intimates in the poem, it is fortunate that perception must adhere at every moment to the external world. Intentionality necessitates a "something out there" for consciousness to know itself. Rogers further suggests that the act of perception is so synthetic that we cannot separate mind from eye from heart grasping what it needs for sustenance. The retina is like a "dawn bat" clinging with its "wiry nails" to the visible. But just as the bat's mind sees by echolocation, so we can detect the bat's beating heart grasping the blossom even in the dead of night by its small heat. Sentient/sensible nature wraps around whatever it perceives, and, as Gould intimates, perception cannot be merely a function of a particular organ—the eye or the mind or the heart's desire. The world delivers us from isolation in the redemptive act of intertwining. At the end of the poem Rogers prays to let the visible flesh of the world be forever waiting for us, for as fallible beings we at least recover from the referential a sense of ongoing participation in a holistic process. Perception is partial, synthetic and imperfect, and that is why the visible must impinge upon us at every moment—to reinforce as well as correct our first impressions.

Though perception begins in childhood with help from others, "In Order to Perceive" argues that perception is most penetrating when it recognizes the divinity within the self as part of the divinity of all living matter. The fire imagery in the poem suggests this: sparks, torches, and flames surround each perceived object as the perceiver in the poem gradually moves from recognizing simple outlines to distinguishing more complex organizations. Finally, the perceiver sees herself floating over the "lanterned hillsides" with "points of fire" at the fingertips and "hair spreading / Like a phosphorescent cloud." As for Merleau-Ponty, philosophical quests begin for Rogers with the lived body, and we learn to see "beyond the physical by means of the physical" (McCann 40). All living matter partakes of divine energy.

"A Common Sight" declares that all creation aspires to sight, to some measure of awareness of the inhabited surround. "Nothing goes unnoticed"; even the tiny copepod has a "red eyespot sensitive to the hour." Rogers implies that the source of this aspiration toward sight is not only the desire for food but also a desire to validate what Merleau-Ponty calls the "anonymous visibility" that all living creatures share (142). All crea-
tures enfold in a participatory environment. The conclusion of the poem suggests that every linguistic act incorporates a watching that bears witness to this nondualistic inhabited space.

And I have an eye myself
for this particular vision, this continuous
validation-by-sight that’s given
and taken over and over by clam shrimp,
marsh treater, bobcat, the clover-coveting
honeybee, by diving teal, the thousand-eyed
bot fly, the wild and vigilant,
shadow-seeking mollusk mya.

Watch now, for my sake, how I stalk. Watch
how I secure this vision. Watch how long
and lovingly, watch
how I feed.

Vision is a shared biological property of sentient/sensible nature, and poetry records biological encounters. The eye feeding itself on first nature in every waking moment is one unassailable definition of conscious life.

The stalking and feeding that Rogers emphasizes in her rendering of the act of perception in “A Common Sight” underscores Hayles’s point about how our perceptions are embodied—how our physical body and its whole history of prior experience, marked by gender, ethnicity, and class, come into play in what Rogers calls our moment-by-moment “validation-by-sight” of the world we inhabit. Merleau-Ponty also suggests that perception in humans is embodied—that it can never be reduced to a pair of passive, innocent eyes, operating like a laboratory instrument, in dualistic divorce from the environment and from the body that the eyes inhabit.

In “Cezanne’s Doubt,” Merleau-Ponty argues that Cezanne’s constant state of anxiety over his art, which at times troubled his vision, and his shunning of human contact gave him the freedom to investigate with clarity and circumspection the activity of the act of perception, “to make visible how the world touches us” (19). Cezanne was able to paint
“the lived perspective, that which we actually perceive, [which] is not a geometric or photographic one” (14). His paintings present the actual distortions of perspective in the act of perception, where objects up close appear smaller than in a photograph and those far away larger, and where objects seem to swell in their density, suggesting depth (14–15). Cezanne’s paintings render the actual process of the act of perception, how the eye organizes the chaos of visual sensations in the flesh of the visible. In his “silent and solitary experience” (19), Cezanne was able to paint embodied perception—how, in his words, “the landscape thinks itself in me” (17), for classical artists “created pictures; we are attempting a piece of nature” (12). For Merleau-Ponty, Cezanne’s art is the creative distillation of his entire life’s experience, including that life’s involvement in rendering nature through paint, for his “uncertainty and solitude are not essentially explained by his nervous temperament but by the purpose of his work” (19). Merleau-Ponty concludes that “there can be no consciousness that is not sustained by its primordial involvement in life and by the manner of this involvement” (24). Contra dualism, in our visual stalking and feeding, humans adhere at every moment to visible nature.

“Reaching the Audience” begins with a quiet visual meditation on a single blue dwarf iris, develops into an investigation of a stand of blue flag iris, spills over into a “survey” of a five-mile field of purple iris, and then metamorphoses into an art lesson on how many artistic compositions, photographic series, prose accounts, oriental paintings, linguistic analyses, and scientific investigations it will take to “remember” what one first saw nakedly in nature—the actual iris. As the poem catalogs, through cloying verbal excess, a list of human attempts to recapture that first experience by owning it in texts, it manages to suggest in words what words can never replace—the full immersion in first nature, the three-dimensional encounter with an iris. Why totalize in second-hand texts, the poem seems to argue, when one can revel in first-hand experience? Almost the reverse of “Cezanne’s Doubt,” Rogers here portrays how difficult it is to render adequately in any artistic medium the complex interactions of the active eye in first nature. The poem also slyly asserts, contra social constructionists, that there must be a first nature as the Aristotelian efficient cause or Thomistic prime mover of the textual
product. Rogers reaches her audience by subtly teasing them away from text into green context.

Almost as if to refute the social constructionists, Rogers in "Synthesizing the Word" ends each stanza with the self-reflexive "I" in visual interaction with nature. The use of the progressive present whenever that "I" intrudes in the first two stanzas suggests that the "I" is interacting with nature's flux moment by moment—that poetic perception is an active process of synthesizing the visible into language. This deliberate pattern creates an artifice: it suggests by contrast that the first half of each stanza relates what is occurring in the naked flux, before the "I" mediates the encounter:

The speckled wood butterfly guards his spot of light
On the forest floor. He rests in that circle of sun
Like a powdery flower against the earth, sounding
Its fragrances. He flies in a spiral upward
Against usurpers, settles again on everything good
That he can distinguish. I am trying to find
Your name. I am trying to remember.

In the third and fourth stanzas, the watching and trying at the ends of stanzas give way to a more assertive willing, emphasizing the deliberateness of the craftsmanship and the growing intensity of the encounter. In stanza three, where the "I" observes the wheat that bends in ditches by the road, Rogers underscores the interconnectedness of nature and language: "The other side of its existence is here in these words." The poem conveys how the poet launches out into the unknowable flux and actively feels her way through vision and language to find the right word to complete the encounter. This active process is exactly what Heidegger believes, in his late essays on language, to be the poet's donnée—the ability to search carefully and slowly in the moment of perception, denying the easy fix of the ready-made cliché of sedimented language, for the right word to articulate an originary encounter with the unknown, to bring the what-can-be-known into being, into presence (63). In so doing, the poet, according to Heidegger, articulates the right "relation between being and saying" (80) in a presencing that yet "keeps the thing as
thing” (83) and reveals the being in the flux. This suggests a reciprocal relatedness between the things in the flux and the words on the page: contrary to the social constructionists, both are necessary, and the words on the page hint at the reality in the flux that brought these and only these specific words onto the page.

Rogers never tires of suggesting that subjective and objective, perceiver and flux, are inextricably connected. In “Suppose Your Father Was a Redbird,” Rogers meditates on how human need colors our vision and helps to guide our interactions with the flux. In the interview with Michael Silverblatt that concludes the 1993 Lannan Foundation video where she reads her poems, Rogers tells a lengthy story of how this poem came to be written. By jumping from one support joist to another in the attic of the garage, her seven-year-old son, Arthur, caught a baby redbird that flew in and became confused. After many humorous complications, baby and father redbird were reunited the next day, and Arthur had the pleasure of accomplishing what he loved to do: “help mother nature.” Rogers then meditates on “what would it be like if everything good you knew in the world came from a redbird.”23

“Suppose Your Father Was a Redbird” discusses how you would course study your red provider, learning his physical characteristics, marking his departures and returns, and learning to distinguish his flight from that of other birds. Soon “The modification of your eye” would be such that you could spot “a red moth hanging on an oak branch / In the exact center of the Aurorean Forest.” The principles of your faith would naturally arrange themselves “from pink to crimson,” and your dreams and perceptions of night stars would be tinged with red. Finally, you would try to understand what attracts your eye as the setting sun pulls “itself and the sky in dark red / Over the edge of the earth.” The interplay of vision with first nature in the poem suggests that what we train ourselves to perceive in the flux modifies our vision. By analogy the poem also suggests that, since nature is our provider, we should be solicitous of its health as we learn to value things green. “Suppose Your Father Was a Redbird” depicts our connectedness to nature as a continual process of modification and adjustment in a way that also exemplifies Merleau-Ponty’s nondualistic reciprocity of vision and the flesh of the visible. Here “flesh” is the totality of visible, sensible nature. We are in it and composed of it (135–137):
Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh? Where in the body are we to put the seer, since evidently there is in the body only “shadows stuffed with organs,” that is, more of the visible? The world seen is not “in” my body, and my body is not “in” the visible world ultimately: as flesh applied to a flesh, the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it. A participation in and kinship with the visible, the vision neither envelops it nor is enveloped by it definitively. The superficial pellicle of the visible is only for my vision and for my body. But the depth beneath this surface contains my body and hence contains my vision. My body as a visible thing is contained within the full spectacle. But my seeing body subtends this visible body, and all the visibles with it. There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other. (138)

Recognizing the connectedness and modifications of vision within the flux of the visible will lead to a recognition of our dependence upon nature. It should also lead to investing some of our time in what Soulé calls “active caring” for the environment. Bohm believes that the mechanistic philosophy behind dualism not only falsifies what twentieth-century physics has revealed, but its fragmented vision promulgates habits that lead to environmental pollution, deforestation, and the like (7, 16). 24 Bohm states that if we believe that “the world is actually constituted of separate fragments,” this “will cause us to act in such a way that we do in fact produce the very fragmentation implied in our attitude to the theory” (7). Wholeness, however, is what relativity and quantum theory imply, and an “implicate order” of “internal relatedness” (“Post-modern” 66) would lead us to perceive nature in terms of harmony and health (Wholeness 20). What we need, Bohm argues, is to revise our perceptions to incorporate originality and to learn how thought and the flow of events in the environment partake of an undivided totality always in the process of becoming (51, 56).

Nature has not disappeared for Pattian Rogers. In her poetic celebrations of nature, Rogers constantly challenges our perceptions to recognize this holistic process. Her fiercely interdisciplinary work incorporates important aspects of twentieth-century physics, astronomy, biology, and phenomenology, all in service of a vision that can only promote environmental health. As Rogers revels in the primacy of
lived referential reality, she opens our eyes to a world where perceptions of wholeness and connectedness to first nature can reduce exploitation, pollution, and environmental degradation.

Notes


