

**Beating the Bounds: Exploring Borders and Scale  
in Contemporary British Environmental Poetry**

Submitted by Ben Oliver Sebastian Smith to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English (Creative Writing) in September 2012.

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## Abstract

This work consists of a collection of poetry, *Lessons in Augury*, preceded by a thesis, 'Beating the Bounds: Exploring Borders and Scale in Contemporary British Environmental Poetry'. This thesis examines the significance of borders that are both culturally and ecologically meaningful, asking how these borders function in contemporary environmental poetry. It argues that such borders provide sites in which environmental poets can explore the interconnection of anthropocentric and ecocentric systems of value and work towards an understanding of human concerns at more-than-human, ecological scales.

The first chapter examines the significance of the borders of the 'dwelling space' in John Burnside's poetry. The following chapters move on to investigate the significance of more specific borders: coastlines and mountain ranges in Thomas A. Clark's recent collections, the river in Alice Oswald's *Dart* and the border between day and night in Richard Caddel's posthumously published *Writing in the Dark*.

The main focus of this thesis is creative practice. It investigates how poets writing out of very different traditions use borders that are culturally and ecologically meaningful as sites where they can develop their environmental poetics. The analysis of these poets' explorations of borders provides the basis for a comparative study of their creative practices and poetic techniques. In particular, this thesis argues that the act of 'beating the bounds' – the physical exploration of border spaces – is fundamental to all of the works discussed.

The final chapter, 'Lines of Flight', offers a point of connection between the critical and creative aspects of this project. It examines the relationship between critical research and creative practice, and charts some of the links between this thesis and the poetry collection *Lessons in Augury*.

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