



STORYTELLING FOR SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION

Translating academic knowledge about sustainable transformation into accessible, fun, and inspiring language with the use of Ecological Fairytales



TARA SMEENK

LUND UNIVERSITY – DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY
HEKN14 Human Ecology: Political Ecology, Crisis, and Identity



Contents

1. Storytelling for sustainable transformations	2
2. The Fisherman and The Pike: story analysis	3
2.1. The first aspect: Realizing connectedness	3
2.1.1. Going into the forest	3
2.1.2. Meeting the witch	4
2.1.3. Sticking back the leaves: initiating change	5
2.2. The second aspect: Developing new habits.....	5
2.2.1. Clearing the lake: identifying the root cause	5
2.2.2. Frequently emptying the landing net: developing new goals.....	6
2.3. The third aspect: Letting go of desire and replacing it with vision	6
2.3.1. Showing emotions and restating values	7
2.3.2. Crying: the healing power of tears	7
3. Concluding remarks.....	8
4. Sources	9

Appendix: The Fisherman and The Pike



1. Storytelling for sustainable transformations

The planetary crisis is, among other things, a crisis of imagination. In their book *Climate Leviathan, A Political Theory of Our Planetary Future*, Wainwright et al. (2018) describe how Adorno (1966) expressed a utopian hope for a potential re-convergence of history and nature. They emphasize that this means not simply calling our age the Anthropocene. Rather, it requires living radically differently than we do know.

However, research shows that information about climate change and sustainability does not connect with all worldviews and cultures in the same way (Norgaard, 2011). What is at stake here is not an issue of sovereignty; rather, it is about the dynamic construction of counter-sovereignty, which is best understood as an attempt to claim ‘the right to be responsible,’ individually and collectively: to have meaning, to have power, to understand oneself, one’s communities, and one’s histories as not only inseparable but also ineliminable from reciprocity and the land (Wainwright et al., 2018). Hence, we need to come up with alternatives to guns, walls, and finance as tools to address the problems that we face.

I would like to offer such an alternative way of inspiring sustainable transformation, one that appreciates differences in worldviews, cultures and priorities: I want to tell stories. I am inspired by Clarissa Pinkola Estés, who is an American writer and Jungian psychoanalyst with a doctorate in ethno-clinical psychology on the study of social and psychological patterns in cultural and tribal groups. Estés describes in her book *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of The Wild Woman Archetype* (2008), how fairytales, myths, and stories give us insights that sharpen our view so that we can again see and follow the pathway that nature has left behind. Stories are medicine. They have such a power; they do not require us to do, be or pretend to do anything – we just have to listen.

After years of writing academic papers, I wanted to challenge myself to find a new way to transmit my message. Hence, I have written what I would like to call an ‘Ecological Fairytale’, in which I have integrated my thoughts about sustainable transformation. This fairytale is included in this paper as an appendix. With this approach, I am trying to bring two worlds together: the world of academic research and the world of storytelling. I hope that through sharing my analysis of this Ecological Fairytale, I can contribute to the creation of alternative tools to solve the planetary crisis. I want it to do justice to the broad variety of worldviews and cultures that exist in the world. I want to provide space for interpretation, introspection and inspiration. I also hope you will enjoy my story, because in the end, that is what stories are for!

2. The Fisherman and The Pike: story analysis

The story about the fisherman and the pike revolves around three main aspects that I believe to be essential ingredients for sustainable transformation, which will be separately described:

- ☛ *Realizing connectedness*: solving the ‘Illusion of Disconnection’, getting to know and learning to trust in *nature* as the sense of the *natural world*; i.e., *everything*;
- ☛ *Developing new habits*: understanding the potential of ‘just doing things differently’;
- ☛ *Letting go of desire*: re-defining core values. Showing emotions and becoming vulnerable. Working with vision.

2.1. The first aspect: Realizing connectedness

The story begins with a description of a little village next to a large forest. The people of this village never go to the forest, because they have ‘forgotten about nature’. Their situation symbolizes peoples disconnection with nature, causing them to ‘live in darkness’. The fisherman and the villagers live in the *Illusion of Disconnection*. Being called a ‘fisherman’, he only catches fish to win the yearly contest so he can eat, drink and spend money. This living style has made his body fat and his mind foggy. Moreover, the abundance of luxuries has robbed him from the ability to really enjoy the things he has. The fisherman could live on like this until his lifestyle becomes fatal. However, instead he decides to leave his village and walk into the forest.

2.1.1. Going into the forest

Clarissa Pinkola Estés (2008) describes how going into the woods entails the first step in self-realization:

“Go out in the woods, go out. If you don’t go out in the woods nothing will ever happen and your life will never begin.”

The forest stand for the unknown. Motivated to improve his personal record, or in other words, by the urge for personal development, the fisherman distinguishes himself from the villagers by going in to the forest.

The relation between going into the forest and the concept of ‘Wilderness’ as described by Hailwood (2015) is two-sided. On the one hand, going into the forest can be interpreted figuratively as the search for undiscovered knowledge. On the other hand, it can be viewed as literally reconnecting with nature. The two interpretations go together, however, because knowledge, awareness and experience are all essential ingredients for reconnection. I chose a forest as a setting for this reconnection to take place, because I believe that, as Juniper (2013) describes: we [humans] flourish best in environments that are significantly similar to the natural conditions in which we evolved.

Why a reconnection with nature? Hailwood (2015), argues that we are facing an environmental crisis: we are living in a time of anthropogenic mass extinction, ecosystem destruction, large-scale soil erosion, ocean acidification, and serious climate change. These matters, combined with serious environmental injustice and the steady depletion of natural resources, are causing this environmental crisis. On top of that, what is seriously wrong is that we are, or have become, *alienated* from nature.

Steven Vogel (2011) refers to what he calls *tragic* conceptions of humanity’s ‘alienation from nature’, that deplore our state of being while making it conceptually impossible to escape (Vogel, 2011). It is impossible to escape because the idea of our being alienated from *nature in the overall sense* – of which we are inescapably a part – is inescapable by definition and also trivial. I cannot provide a better

definition of our alienation from nature or wilderness, because I think that defining these kinds of terms is mostly a matter of perspective (see Hailwood, 2015; Vanninni & Vanninni, 2016). However, dragging on our 'inescapably being a part of nature in the overall sense', I would like to argue that I think that we¹ at least have created an *Illusion of Disconnection*. This means that we believe, or want to make ourselves believe, that our actions have no unexpected or unseen consequences. Or, when we do realize the consequences of our actions, we deny them (Norgaard, 2011), compensate for the guilt we feel, or try to distract ourselves (Ciplet et al., 2015). Now we have been completely swallowed by this illusion, we desperately try to keep it into existence, even though we know that our lifestyles are destructive. Why do we do this? Because from the moment we realize that we are all part of the same system, we also have to admit that we are all part of the problem. With this realization, topics like climate change suddenly become very personal.

However, because I see our alienation from nature as an *illusion*, I believe that our sense of connection is still somewhere, and can be rediscovered. I also think that if we dare to 'go into the forest', we learn to feel it again. Vanninni & Vanninni (2016) describe that nature still has both a clear extrinsic and intrinsic value to many people while including a famous quote of Thoreau:

"In wildness is the preservation of the world."

The fisherman, searching for personal development and this sense of connection, goes into the forest, and there he finds the largest fish he has ever seen. The pike represents the undiscovered knowledge about the preservation of the world that becomes available to the fisherman. However, the true colors of the pike are not visible to him yet, and he is not strong enough to catch it. The knowledge and the equipment that have served the fisherman so far in his life do not meet the requirement a challenge of this size. If he wants to catch the pike, the fisherman has to agree to make a deal; in order to do something that he has never done before, he has to go where he has never been, learn to approach issues in ways he has never known, and feel what he has never felt.

2.1.2. Meeting the witch

The fisherman encounters the witch. Her figure is inspired by the story of Skeleton-Woman, a skeleton caught in a fisherman's net. In this story, the fisherman at first is afraid of Skeleton-Woman as told by Estés (1992). Then, he opens his home to her, takes her in and accepts her. He feeds her and when he sleeps he dreams. When he dreams, he cries. In the end, Skeleton-Woman drinks his tears and comes to live, after which they become lovers. The story contains a promise: when you help a to free a women from her tangled and misunderstood state and realize her as a teacher and lover, she becomes your ally and your partner.

The witch in this story is more than just a woman. She is the Goddess of Light. She represents insight, she induces love and compassion. She is as wise and mysterious as what we call 'Mother Earth'. However, none of these things are to be seen yet: she is ugly and thin. Her needs have been neglected for a long time and she is in an abandoned state, just like nature in our current world.

On a more philosophical level, the witch stands for what Donna Haraway calls 'feminist objectivity'. Haraway (1988) describes how feminist objectivity makes room for ironies and surprises at the heart of all knowledge production; we are not in charge of the world. Therefore, the witch is a welcome companion for the fisherman in his search for knowledge, awareness and connection. However, the witch has a double nature. Haraway, in speaking of richly evocative figures to promote

¹ With 'we', I am referring mostly to the people living in the Western world under the influence of Capitalism. However, considering our connectedness, I want to keep this open for interpretation.



feminist visualizations of the world as a witty agent, mentions the Coyote or Trickster, who is embodied in Southwest native American accounts. This archetype stands for the situation we are in when we give up mastery but keep searching for loyalty, knowing all the while that we will be deceived. The fisherman will encounter it later.

2.1.3. Sticking back the leaves: initiating change

The witch gives the fisherman a first assignment: sticking back the leaves on the bare trees. This assignment is similar to the challenge of achieving system change: it seems an unachievable task. Yet, even though he does not believe that he can do it, the fisherman starts making small changes by climbing some trees and sticking back some leaves. On his own, the fisherman will never be able to fully complete the task. But the fact that he pays attention to the needs of the forest and listens to the witch, things that no one has done in a long time, is enough to initiate something. What happens next is crucial: his attempts alone amuse the witch to such an extent that she starts to sing. In many stories, songs cure wounds, they are used to attract wildlife (Estés, 1992). The singing of the witch is answered by the sounds of birds, and these sounds attract more animals. Also, the longer she sings, the clearer her voice becomes. The animals start helping the fisherman with his task, and in no time, the job is done.

The first assignment involves getting to know what Hailwood (2015) describes as the usage of the term *nature* as the sense of the *natural world*; i.e., *everything*. This all-encompassing, overarching sense of nature is an ancient one. Also, the idea of the natural world in this sense is available to us, like it is to the fisherman, and its most significant definitive aspect is that it encompasses more than the human; it includes and goes beyond humanity, our actions, and the results of our actions (Idem). By experiencing this, the fisherman has started break down his Illusion of Disconnection. With that, he initiates change, which becomes larger than he expects.

2.2. The second aspect: Developing new habits

The fisherman has completed his first assignment. However, for the leaves not to fall of the trees again, and for the animals to stay, change on a deeper level is required. The driving force of the forest – a lake full of clear water – is contaminated: the water has become turbid and undrinkable. The witch asks the fisherman to clear the lake. However, she only provides him with a landing net, and when he drags it through the water, it does not make a significant difference. Only when he finds the source of the contamination and frequently empties the landing net, the fisherman is able to fulfill his task.

2.2.1. Clearing the lake: identifying the root cause

The first attempts of the fisherman to clear the lake showed to be ineffective; by dragging his small landing net through the water, he was only attacking symptoms of the problem. In order to effectively and permanently solve the problem, the fisherman has to find its root cause and attack it.

The lesson to be learned during the second assignment relates to the main argument made by Cipler et al. (2015): that climate change is a problem that is deeply enmeshed in global power relations specific to the temporary world order and that if warming continues to be unabated, the commonsense discourse that the global market, if harnessed properly, can solve society's problems, will ring increasingly hollow. Also, only attacking symptoms of unsustainability instead of identifying root causes

can become dangerous when sustainability language is used by actors without good intentions (i.e. 'green washing'). Cipler et al. (2015) talk about 'false solutions'. These involve responses to climate change that serve to further entrench or reproduce existing relationships of environmental inequality, placing a disproportionate burden on those that are marginalized in the global economic, political and social hierarchy (Cipler et al., 2015).

Finding and attacking root causes is not simple, however. For instance, when identifying Capitalism as a root cause of unsustainability, it has to be kept in mind that, as Wainwright et al. (2018) describe: 'The driver of inequality in capitalist society is the capital-labor relation itself, and its ramification through state power, so change is not so easy' (p.101).

2.2.2. Frequently emptying the landing net: developing new goals

Even though the fisherman has found the root cause of the contamination of the lake, his solution is only effective when he keeps frequently emptying the landing net. The lesson to be learned from this is: in order to effectively change a system, we have to integrate new habits into our daily lifestyles. This part of the story refers the transformative potential of alternative social practices, which means 'that people just do things differently' (Jonas, 2017). Alternative political strategies to lower CO2 concentrations and to subsidize solar energy and large-scale environmental technologies are not enough (Brand & Wissen, 2018). More is needed, and investigating the specific relations between people and between society and nature is a good start (Idem). Changing habits or practices, as argued by Brangsch (2015), and enabling such changes through infrastructural and institutional framework conditions and societal discourses, as well as unlearning other habits or practices, constitutes the core of a progressive social-ecological transformation. Wright (2010) argues: 'the interplay of unintended consequences of individual actors' actions and the deliberate strategies of transformation' constitutes an important factor in overcoming what he calls our 'Imperial Mode of Living'.

Alternatively, when the cultural dimensions of climate change are ignored, both adaptation and mitigation strategies are likely to be ineffective because they simply do not connect with what matters to communities and individuals (Nicholson-Cole et al., 2009). Moreover, the perception of loss of control and lack of inclusion in the process of decision-making are found to be the greatest barriers to legitimate incorporation of plural values. Hence, developing an understanding of the cultural dimensions of climate change and using this knowledge to stimulate the integration of new, sustainable habits into peoples lives, combined with alternative political strategies for sustainable development, makes up the foundation of effective sustainable transitioning.

2.3. The third aspect: Letting go of desire and replacing it with vision

The witch drinks from the clear water and starts to dance. When she starts to dance, the earth begins to tremble and her feet heat the ground: she brings the forest back to life. She eats the berries that start to grow and flesh appears on her hips and thighs. The more she eats and drinks, the more she dances. The fisherman watches her when he is resting. 'She certainly looks different than before', he thinks.

Estés (1992) explains that when we free Skeleton-Woman, we see that she is ancient. She is older than the times that we know. She is the one that measures energy against distance, time against libido, and spirit against survival. She ponders it, she studies it, she thinks, and then she animates it with a few sparks, or she sets it ablaze. She knows what is necessary. She knows when it is time (Estés, 1992).

The arrival and the actions of the fisherman allow the witch to heal from her neglect: she regains faith and strength. Now, she can use her ancient knowledge and powers to bring the forest back to life.

2.3.1. Showing emotions and restating values

The forest is still surrounded by darkness, and the witch asks the fisherman to fulfill a third task: bringing back the sun. No matter how hard the fisherman tries, he does not know how to do it. He sits down and compares his old life to his new one. He faces the archetype of Coyote Trickster. This part of his character, which was not fully grown, caused him to be guided by his lusts. It only loved pleasure, and tried to hide his insecurities and fears (Estés, 1992). Then the fisherman realizes that he cannot go back to his village. His life has meaning now, and that he has become attached to the forest and the witch. This realization allows him to let go of his past desires and develop a new vision of what he wants. However, he becomes very sad, because he cannot provide the forest and the witch with what they need. Then, he cries.

What happens to the fisherman here is what happens to us when we step out of the Illusion of Disconnection. We realize that we are part of nature in an all-encompassing, overarching sense and with that, we also see that we are part of its destruction. It makes us emotional and vulnerable. We have to admit that our previous ways of living, our habits and our values – no matter how well-intended – have contributed to the destruction of our world.

I had to include this experience in the story because, as for instance argued by Norgaard (2011), emotions, despite their apparent salience in how people process information about climate change, are missing from the current discourse about nonresponse. However, they are essential: although certain realizations can make us feel devastated and powerless, they also provide us with an opportunity to change our views and create a common vision for a sustainable future. There is something incredibly important about the acts of courage required to open up ourselves to the uncertainty, fear, anxiety, and vulnerability that arise from the creation of new forms which could trump the system that we are working against (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015).

Emotions are tied to the moral values of a social movement framing process, provide motivation for people to enter movements, shape social movement goals, and form the basis of solidarity among participants of movements (Jasper, 1998; Goodwin et al., 2001). By destabilizing social norms, a range of new actions and responses becomes possible (Morales & Harris, 2014). Rutten (2006) describes that: 'The emotion of shame has long been explored as key to reinforcing social relationships, functioning as a mechanism by which individuals internalize the 'cultural criteria for self-evaluation'. It enables us to draw conscious attention to our norms and to subject them to scrutiny, which can make us aware of choices we make every day of which we have previously been unaware (Raymond & Weldon, 2013). We need to do this, because progressive sustainability transformations require a comprehensive transformation perspective (Brand & Wissen, 2018). This, on its turn, requires a different understanding of well-being beyond ecological modernization and the green growth imperatives (Idem).

2.3.2. Crying: the healing power of tears

The fisherman cries so much that a waterfall develops from the mountain he is sitting on. Tears do not only symbolize feeling, they also form lenses that give us a different perspective on things. In fairytales, tears change people: they show them what is important, and save their soul (Estés, 1992). In the story of Skeleton-Woman, the inner feeling of tenderness that moves the fisherman to free her, also shows



him other forgotten desires, and enables him to restore his self-compassion. The ending of the story tells us how strong we can become when we dare to show emotions and compassion. This is the final step for the fisherman in his journey to self-realization. As Estés (1992) describes: when the fisherman frees Skeleton-Woman with his tears, he receives 'handy' knowledge about the cycle of life and death. Freeing her means getting a clear insight in ourselves and others.

In the end, I let the fisherman return to the pike, and the fish is willing to go with him. The pike shows the fisherman its true colors and sacrifices itself for the good of the system. By eating the fish, the fisherman receives the knowledge about the preservation of nature, and fully becomes a part of the system. He passes on his knowledge, and he and the Goddess of Light live happily ever after.

3. Concluding remarks

With this story, I wanted to communicate what I think are three essential aspects for sustainable transformation in a fun and inspiring way. The practice of transmitting my academic knowledge and personal thoughts through storytelling has challenged me to deeply analyze my thoughts, relate them to both academic literature and mythical archetypes, and translate them into accessible language. It has been striking to me how often I had to look up words and sentences, which pointed me to the fact that while I am qualified to write in academic English, my general English still has to be improved. I think this is of major importance, because if we – as environmental researchers – want to make a lasting impact, we have to be able to communicate with society. That is why I want to continue exploring the potential of Ecological Fairytales. I hope to inspire everyone who likes stories to find back our sense of connection, to start 'just doing things differently', and to allow ourselves to become vulnerable by showing our emotions. I believe it can help us to use our diverse inspirations to create a common vision for a sustainable future. After all, the planetary crisis is, among other things, a crisis of imagination.

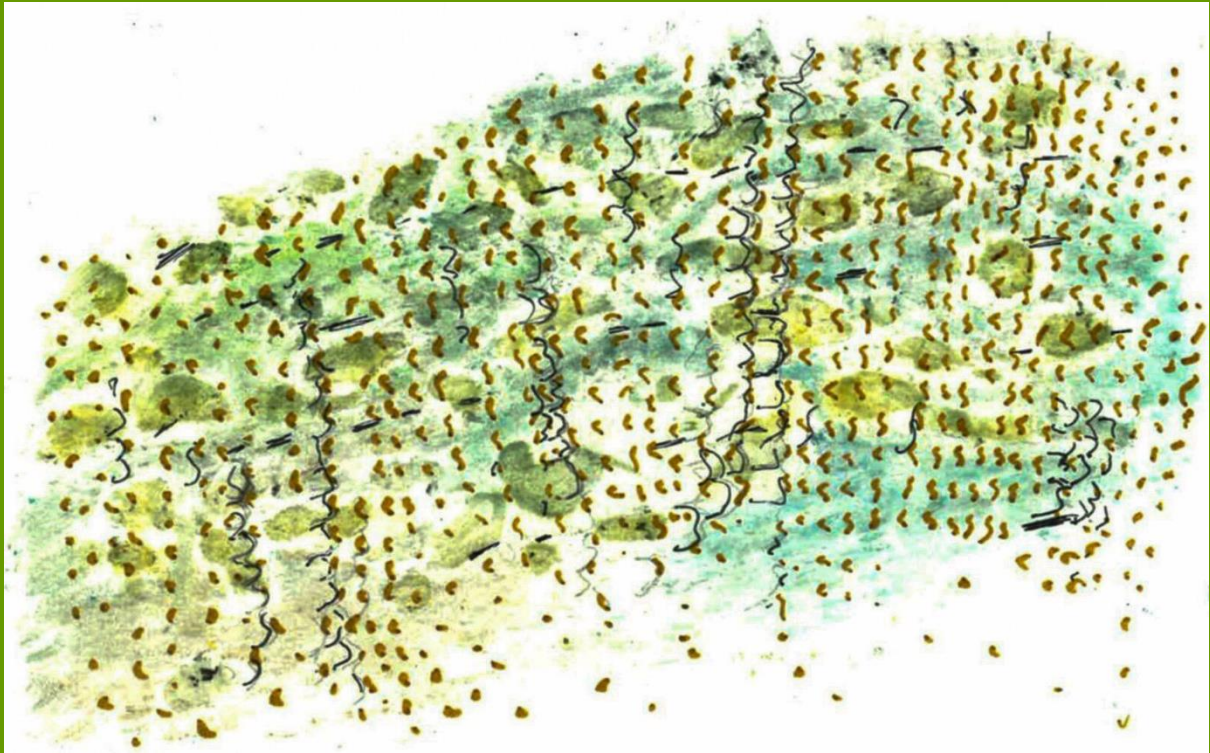
4. Sources

- ☞ Adorno (1966). *Negative Dialectics*, 356-57, cited in Deborah Cook (2011), *Adorno on Nature*. Durham, Acumen Press.
- ☞ Brand, U. & Wissen, M. 2018. What kind of Great Transformation? The imperial Mode of Living as a Major Obstacle to Sustainability Politics, *GAIA – Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society*, vol. 27, no.3, pp. 287-292, Available online: <https://doi.org/10.14512/gaia.27.3.8>.
- ☞ Brangsch, L. 2015. Entwicklung, Revolution, Reform und Transformation. In: *Lasst uns über Alternativen reden. Beiträge zur kritischen Transformationsforschung 3*. Edited by M. Brie. Hamburg: VSA. 130–147.
- ☞ Ciptet, David, J. Timmons Roberts & Mizan R. Khan (2015): *Power in a Warming World: The New Global Politics of Climate Change and the Remaking of Environmental Inequality*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- ☞ Estés, C. P. (1992). *Women who run with the wolves : myths and stories of the wild woman archetype*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- ☞ Goodwin, J., Jasper, J. M., & Polletta, F. (2001). Why emotions matter. In *Introduction to Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (pp. 1-24). University of Chicago Press.
- ☞ Hailwood, S. 2015. Alienation and nature in environmental philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pages 1-12 and 38-48.
- ☞ Haraway, D. (1988). "Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective", *Feminist Studies* 14, no 3:575-599.
- ☞ Harcourt, W. and I.L. Nelson 2015. Introduction: Are we 'green' yet? And the violence of asking such a question. In W. Harcourt and I.L. Nelson (eds.) *Practicing Feminist Political Ecologies: Beyond the Green Economy*. London: Zed Books.
- ☞ Jasper, J. M. (1998, September). The emotions of protest: Affective and reactive emotions in and around social movements. In *Sociological forum* (Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 397-424). Kluwer Academic Publishers-Plenum Publishers.
- ☞ Jonas, M. 2017. Transition or transformation? A plea for the praxeological approach of radical socio-ecological change. In: *Praxeological political analysis*. Edited by M. Jonas, B. Littig. London:Routledge. 116-133.
- ☞ Juniper, T. (2013). *What has nature ever done for us?: How money really does grow on trees*. Profile books.
- ☞ Morales, M.C. and L.M. Harris (2014) Using subjectivity and emotion to reconsider participatory natural resource management. *World Development* 64, 703-712, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2014.06.032>.
- ☞ Nicholson-Cole, S. & O'Riordan, T. (2009). in *Adapting to Climate Change: Thresholds, Values, Governance* (eds Adger, W. N., Lorenzoni, I. & O'Brien, K.) 368–383. Cambridge Univ. Press.
- ☞ Norgaard, Kari Marie (2011): *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Excerpts (pp. xiii–12, 63–95, 207–42).
- ☞ Raymond, L., & Weldon, L. (2013). *Informal Institutions and Strategies for Social Change* (Workshop on Informal Institutions and Intractable Global Problems Issue Brief).
- ☞ Rutten, R. (2006) Shame and Worker Activism: Emotional Dynamics in Face-to-Face Encounters. *Qual Sociol* 29, 353–372. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-006-9029-6>.
- ☞ Vannini, Phillip & Vannini, April (2016): *Wilderness*, Abingdon: Routledge. Excerpts, TBA.
- ☞ Vogel, S. (2011). Why 'Nature' has no place in environmental philosophy. *The ideal of nature: Debates about biotechnology and the environment*, 84-97.
- ☞ Wainwright, Joel & Mann, Geoff (2018): *Climate Leviathan: A Political Theory of Our Planetary Future*, London: Verso.



Wright, E.O. 2010. Envisioning real utopias. London: Verso.

The fisherman and the pike



Once upon a time, in a faraway land, there was a small village. Next to the village was a large forest, but the people from the village never went there, because they had forgotten about nature. Also, in this village it was always night, but the people didn't know that they were living in darkness, because they had forgotten about daylight too.

Every year, a contest was organized alongside a small river that flowed through the village. The rules were simple: who would catch the biggest fish, would receive an unlimited amount of gold, food, and beer for the upcoming year.

The contest had been won by the same fisherman for over more than a decade, and now he was so rich that there was nothing new he could buy, all the food he ate had made him fat and bulky, and all the beer he drank had made him so foggy that he never had anything interesting to say. However, he still wanted to win the contest, because that was the only thing he was good had. He was also very stubborn and proud, so every year he wanted to impress everyone by catching an even bigger fish than he had done the year before.

This year, the fisherman knew that there were no bigger fish in this river. Hence, if he wanted to improve his personal record, he would have to follow the river and find another place. So he packed his equipment, and walked alongside the river, into the forest. In the forest there were no animals and no sounds, and the trees were bare. After a while, the river ended in a black lake. 'I've never seen so much water,' thought the fisherman. 'I bet there are bigger fish here.' So he threw out his fishing rod, and waited.

Not long after the fisherman sat down, the fishing rod moved. The fisherman jumped to his feet, and started taking it over. He pulled, and pulled, until a large, grey pike became visible. It was the largest fish he had ever seen in his life. But the pike was strong, and no matter how hard the fisherman pulled, he could not get it out of the water. After a few hours of trying, the fisherman got tired, and shouted angrily towards the water: 'Stupid fish! Why won't you give in? Don't you realize that I've got you?' 'Well,' said the fish, 'you're not strong enough, and I don't want to be eaten!' The fisherman started laughing. 'I'm not going to eat you, you look disgusting! Besides, the water you live in is dirty, and it smells bad.' 'Then why do you want to catch me?' Asked the pike. 'I need to bring you to the village to win a contest, you're the biggest fish I've ever seen.' For a moment, both were silent. Then the pike said: 'I have a hook through my lips that I can't get out myself, and you are not strong enough to pull me out of the water. I think we reached an impasse, and we have to make a deal. I am the king of this lake, you see, and I cannot simply abandon my kingdom. Besides, we are in a state of crisis. The forest is dying and my lake goes down with it. If you can bring the forest back to life, I am confident that my kingdom can do without me, and I will go with you.'

The fisherman was used to things going the way he wanted so he was very frustrated by this proposal and angrily stamped with his feet. However, now he had seen this pike he wanted to catch it. So he tied his rod to a tree and started walking while mumbling: 'I don't know how to bring a dying forest back to life, I only know how to catch fish.' He became more and more angry, but then he stumbled upon something that looked like a tiny, crooked house. The door of the house swung open and behind it appeared a little witch. She was so thin that she looked like a walking skeleton, and very ugly, and she screamed with her creaky voice: 'who are you?!' 'I am a fisherman,' said the fisherman. 'You don't look like one, fishermen aren't that fat,' the witch replied. 'Well, I *am* one,' said the fisherman, who now became really annoyed. 'And I have to bring the forest back to life in order to improve my personal record. Do you happen to know how to do that?'

Even though the witch did not really like the fisherman, she had been alone for a very long time, so she decided to put him up to a challenge. 'Maybe,' she said. 'There was a time when the trees weren't that bare. I saved all the leaves that fell off in case someone could stick them back on. You can start with that.' She showed the fisherman the leaves, and went back into her house. 'This is becoming more and more ridiculous,' thought the fisherman. 'How can I possibly stick all these leaves back on the trees?' But stubborn as he was, he decided to at least give it a try. So he started climbing the trees and sticking the leaves back on the branches.

The witch watched it all from behind her window, and because she was so amused by the whole spectacle, she started to sing. It sounded very unpleasant at first, because of her creaky voice, but the more she sang, the softer and clearer her voice became. Suddenly, her singing was answered by the sounds of birds. The sounds of birds attracted squirrels, and slowly, more and more animals cautiously showed themselves around the lake. The animals also started picking up leaves and sticking them back on the trees, and in no time, the job was done. The fisherman, somewhere up in a tree, was slightly confused. He looked down on the lake, and even though it was still very dark, the green of the leaves was reflected in the water. He could just make up the pike, still swimming around with the hook through his lips. And he saw that the scales of the pike had acquired a green glow.

The fisherman climbed down and walked back to the witch's house. The witch came out, laughed, and said with her changed, clear voice: 'That went well! Now the trees look just like before. Even the animals came back!' But immediately, her expression changed from happy to sad. 'I wonder how long they will stay. There is nothing for them to eat, and the water of the lake is so dirty that they cannot drink from it. No, if the water stays like this, then it was all for nothing.' The fisherman looked at her. Even though this witch was very ugly, she had sung beautifully, and he felt a little sad for her. 'Sticking back the leaves went easier than I thought,' he said. 'If you can tell me how, I guess I can clean the lake for you.' The witch looked up hopefully, and went inside her little house. When she came back, she carried a small landing net.

'This is all I've got. But I think you must be able to clean the lake with it.' She gave the landing net to the fisherman, and quickly disappeared.

The fisherman shook his head. 'That witch isn't very smart. How can I possibly clean an entire lake with a landing net?' But stubborn as he was, he decided to at least give it a try. He started pulling the landing net through the water, and with every stroke he filtered a little bit of dirt out of the water, but it didn't make a real difference. However, the fisherman remembered that he also started his previous assignment like this. Therefore, he decided to keep filtering the water while following a narrow path that seemed to circle around the lake. Then, when he almost wanted to give up, he noticed a tiny stream that flowed into the lake. 'This must be where the lake originates,' he thought by himself. 'So that's where all the dirt is coming from. If I place the landing net here, the whole lake will be filtered.' So that's what he did, and it worked! Clear water came through the landing net. Happily, the fisherman made his way back to the witch.

In the meantime, the witch, who hadn't been drinking clear water for a long time, approached the lake and drunk from the water that had been purified. Then, she started to dance. With her dancing, the earth begun to tremble. Her feet heated the ground, and because of the heat, the forest came back to life. Berries started to grow, which she ate, and because of that, flesh appeared on her hips and thighs. Her bony body became curved, and the more she ate and drank, the more she danced. The fisherman watched her dancing. 'She certainly looks different than before,' he thought. Then, it occurred to him that the landing net must be full with dirt by now, so he walked back to empty it again.

This went on for a while. Multiple times a day, the fisherman walked to the landing net and emptied it. When he wasn't walking or emptying the net, he sat down on a stone to rest and watch the witch dancing and listen to her singing. When the lake was fully cleared, the moon appeared in the night sky, and her white light was reflected in the water. When passing by the pike, which was still swimming around with the hook through his lips, the fisherman saw that the moonlight had given it white spots all over its body.

He came back to the witch, and because he had been watching her and listening to her for so long, and because she was much less ugly now, he approached her quite shyly. 'Thank you very much!' She said, 'I totally forgot what it was like to taste real food and to drink fresh water. The forest has come back to live!' But immediately, her expression changed from happy to sad. 'No matter how much I love to dance, I cannot keep on dancing forever. I will get tired. You know, in the past there used to be sunlight. The trees and the plants would feed on it, and the animals would feed on those. But the sun doesn't rise anymore. No, without sunlight, it was all for nothing.' The fisherman looked at her. Even though he had to empty the landing net all the time, he liked watching her dance, and he felt a little sad for her. 'Sticking back the leaves went easier than I thought, and I found a way to clear the lake,' he

said. 'Maybe I can also bring back the sun for you.' The witch looked up hopefully. 'That would be amazing,' she said. 'But I have forgotten how it can be done.' 'I will figure it out.' Said the fisherman, who was now quite confident. 'I'm sure I can find a way.'

The fisherman continued emptying the landing net, and he simultaneously tried to think of a way to bring back daylight. At first he was sure that he could do it, but when time passed, he became more and more insecure. In fact, he didn't even know what daylight looked like. After all, he had always been living in the night. After a long time, when the pile of dirt next to the landing net had become as big as a small mountain, his heart sank and the fisherman didn't know what to do. Ashamed to go back without having a solution, he climbed the small mountain, and looked down over the lake. 'Maybe I should just go back to the village,' he sighed. 'But can I still live there? My only purpose in life back there was to catch a big fish once every year, so that I could eat and drink and spend money during the rest of the year. I thought that winning the contest was the most important, but that was before I came here. This lake needs me. Someone has to empty the landing net. Without me, the water won't be clear and then that witch over there can't dance and sing. Without her, the forest won't survive. In this place, my life has meaning.'

Without noticing, the fisherman had become used to his way of living in the forest. Also, the fisherman had become attached to the little witch. He enjoyed her company, and he really wanted to bring back daylight for her. Therefore, his incapability to do it made him deeply sad. It made him so sad, that he started crying. He cried, and cried, and he couldn't stop. He cried so much that a waterfall formed from the small mountain he was sitting on.

Then, he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was the little witch, she had heard him crying and she came to see what was going on. 'Why are you crying?' She asked. 'I can't do it,' the fisherman replied. 'Even though it's what I want the most, I cannot bring back daylight for you.' The witch looked at the fisherman, who had lost all of his stubbornness and pride. 'That's okay. You tried.' She climbed down and looked at the waterfall of tears. Then, she walked through it. When she came out of the water, what had remained of her ugliness had disappeared, and before the fisherman, now stood a beautiful woman with gleaming eyes and golden hair. 'You don't look like a witch at all!' Exclaimed the fisherman. Now the witch started laughing. 'I'm not a witch. And I've never been one. I am the Goddess of Light. But although I am a goddess, I am nothing without the Earth and the Moon. I was alone and abandoned and I had forgotten about all of this. You have helped me to remember who I am!' She climbed to the top of the mountain and spread her arms. Colors filled the air and the sun appeared on the horizon. For the first time in his life, the fisherman saw the world in daylight.

When they walked back to the house, the fisherman noticed the pike. The fish was still swimming around with the hook through his lips. The light of the sun was

reflected by the water, and the fisherman saw that the pike was covered in golden speckles. 'Now I can see that you're a king,' he said. 'Thank you for bringing the forest back to life,' said the pike. 'I will go with you now.' The fisherman shook his head. 'I am not going back to the village. I want to stay here, so I guess I will let you go.' He bowed down towards the water, preparing to remove the hook from the pike's lips. 'Wait,' said the pike. 'You might not want to use me for winning the contest, but aren't you getting a bit hungry?' The fisherman stopped, viewing his own reflection in the water. He had not been eating for weeks. The climbing in trees and the emptying of the landing net had made his body shrink and his muscles grow. He was indeed a bit hungry, and the pike didn't look as disgusting as before. 'I could eat something, yes. But don't you want to stay alive?' 'I do,' said the pike. 'But the existence of my kingdom is more important to me. My kingdom needs the lake, and the lake needs the forest. The forest needs daylight, and they all need you. Therefore, your life is more important to me than that of my own.'

So the fisherman ate the pike. After he was fed, he kept carrying out his tasks and the fisherman and the Goddess of the Sun lived happily ever after. They lived with the forest and the forest lived with them.

They say that this was the first fisherman to ever catch a pike. And they say that he told this story to his children, and that they told it to their children, and so on. They also say that therefore, only real fishermen who are descendants of the first, know how the pike got its colors. When they see the pattern on the scales, they are reminded of this tale. That is why they will never forget about nature, and they will never live in darkness.

