

The Poem “Insects are Vanishing from Our Lives” had a long gestation period, from a New York Times Op Ed on “The Coming Insect Apocalypse” into the sestina it became. My grief at the cascading losses due to climate change has birthed a series of poems of all shapes and sizes. In this case, I scribbled down the quote from Edward O. Wilson that became the poem’s epigraph, and almost immediately wrote down 6 words that might be the end words to a sestina (I’ve only written one other) to get at the escalating consequences of human activity and inaction. The title which came quickly too, echoed a Phil Levine poem “Animals are vanishing from our Lives,” that I’d heard him read once. I shared my idea with a poet friend, but it took me over six months to sit down and “play” with my idea and the sestina form.

In the intervening months, only more bad news of threats to honey bees and monarch butterflies, and other climate horror stories. When I made the time to focus, it was the breathtaking claim in Wilson’s quote, plus some of the stark details in the Op-Ed, and the pressure created by the sestina’s repetition (with slight variations) of the end words, that sparked my imagination. Then the humor of fessing up to my own distaste for the insects I confront in my daily life, just showed up. I’m no sestina expert, but I’ve read, and taught, a fair number, and I found the challenge and improvisation inherent to the form, in this case created a mix of whimsy and seriousness to invoke a sobering reality. It’s ironic that I don’t see poems with an “argument” as my forte, yet the requirements (or the *game* of sestina - making) helped me construct an argument worth making, both hard hitting and playful.