



Goodbody, Axel, Kate Rigby, eds. *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2011.

Ecocritical theory is in the early stages of self-creation and self-definition. Such theory, the editors remind us in their introduction, must include a recognition of the fact that ecological thought is a made up of disparate elements rather than being a single system with clear borders. They further assert that theory about such theories includes a number of assumptions, including that there is an ecocritical theory-phobia, and that such theory will differ from continent to continent, even from one geographical area to the next.

This look into theoretical approaches now being developed in Europe specifically highlights both transatlantic and European regional differences. The long-time domination of American philosophy departments by French thought that, as the editors note, “seemed to offer no point of entry for ecological concerns,” [2] has made Americans skittish about adopting such ideas for the creation of a theory meant to address “Nature”—an example of the theory-phobia to which they refer. Europeans, for their part, have concerns and assumptions that divide them from some basic American beliefs, such as the identification of Nature with national identity. The heterogeneous landscape of Europe has “prompted awareness of the relativity of cultural values and understandings of human interaction with the natural environment.” [3]

The sum of these differences, we are told, is that in America we tend to think of Nature and ecology as referring to the whole of the interconnections of the world around us, while in Europe there is more reflection on how the constituent parts can be understood to interlock. The editors have selected and arranged the twenty essays here to highlight and to clarify these differences.

Some of the analyses and proposals in the essays are quite unexpected, and the proposals for new approaches to ecological theory involve overlooked resources. The first essay here, for example, Kate Soper’s “Passing Glories and Romantic Retrievals: Avant-garde Nostalgia and Hedonist Renewal,” sets aside the usual view of Romantic writing as gloomy and elegiac, and finds in it the potential for a revolution in our received notions of success and pleasure. She considers the possible uses of Romantic thinking and English Romantic poetry to help mitigate the rush to adopt a “‘work and spend’ economy and its consumerist dynamic” by all “affluent societies, and those aspiring to emulate them, in the era of globalization.” A reinvigoration of Romanticism, Soper suggests, could create a new attitude toward consumption, “organized around more sensually rewarding and ecologically progressive conceptions of pleasure and fulfillment.” [17]

Anne Elvey’s “The Matter of Texts: A Material Intertextuality and Ecocritical Engagements with the Bible,” illustrates once again how the use of the Bible as a resource tends to bring out the extremes in writers. The essay includes some very interesting linguistic angles for illumination of the Parable of the Sower, offered by Elvey, but also quotes a pun-driven analysis by Stephen Moore of the crucifixion as paralleling the creation of the Bible as a material object that comes across as such a strained method as to approach a parody of theory:



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[Jesus] is in the process of becoming book. . . . His flesh, torn and beaten to a pulp, joined by violence to the wood, is being transformed into processed wood-pulp, into paper, as the centurion looks on. As tree and budding book, Jesus is putting forth leaves, the leaves of a gospel book. . . . [191]

Likely without meaning to, this essay illustrates both the most interesting and most over-wrought kinds of writing that theories can produce.

On the high side is “From the Modern to the Ecological: Latour on Walden Pond,” Laura Dassow Walls’ succinct capture of Emerson and Thoreau as they laid the keel of the dialectical American view of Nature. Emerson, she writes, created “nature as a bottomless resource for the human imagination,” while Thoreau found “not objects apart from subjects but networks, agents, and a succession of temporal frames.” [99] She brings in Bruno Latour as a way of looking at how this gap and others in our modern world might be better mediated. Here Continental Philosophy seems a natural partner to American ecological theory rather than its bugaboo. The partnering of two writers in Trevor Norris’ “Martin Heidegger, D. H. Lawrence, and Poetic Attention to Being,” is bumpier and much less fruitful.

The entire last section of this anthology, “Models from Physics and Biology,” shows the meta-efforts of thinkers who are trying to place ecocritical theory within a greater ecology of science and literature. For all the arcane ideas presented here in passages seeking metaphors within and connections with such specialized disciplines as cybernetics, biosemiotics, quantum theory and more, these approaches strike us as less foreign seeming and more sensible than Soper on Romanticism, where the emphasis is on passion and language. This serves to remind us just how one-sided our approaches to ecological theory have become.

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Lynch, Tom, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster, eds. *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place*. Univ. Georgia Press, 2011.

The recent publication of *The Bioregional Imagination* by the University of Georgia Press marks a new threshold of attention gained by a central concept in ecocritical thought and practice. Well edited by longtime ASLE members Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster, this big anthology showcases an idea that first received substantial recognition more than a generation ago. It concludes with Kyle Bladow's "Bioregional Checklist," and of this core list of seventeen books plus one article, just half were published more than a decade ago. The increasing focus upon bioregionalism in the new century's first decade or so marks its coming of age, as it has clearly gained critical mass in scholarship and popular consensus. This timely anthology salutes that fact.

Both in the Introduction and in many essays, generous homage is paid to Peter Berg, Gary Snyder, and Kirkpatrick Sale as godfathers of bioregional thinking. *The Bioregional Imagination* provides an excellent primer and forecast for ways in which bioregionalism could and should dominate our personal and professional lives in this century. In particular, the anthology negotiates the sometimes tricky passages between localism, apart from which bioregionalism is inconceivable, and globalism and its attendant emphases upon environmental and social justice. Many of those passages are delineated in Ursula Heise's *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008). *The Bioregional Imagination*, in many of its essays, affirms in many new ways a familiar truism: that the local remains the best path to the global. Additionally, several of its twenty-four essays are set outside North America, directly attesting to bioregionalism as an international habit of mind and ground practice.

In their Introduction the editors review bioregionalism's recent history within and alongside American environmentalism. They contend it emerged "to address matters of pressing environmental concern through a politics derived from a local sense of place." (p. 2) They define bioregionalism as "a political and cultural practice that manifests as an environmental ethic in the day-to-day activities of ordinary residents" (p. 3), recognizing that it includes the core concepts of "*dwelling, sustainability, and reinhabitation.*" (p. 4, italics original) Unsurprisingly, bioregionalism is conceived as fundamentally home-grown, grassroots, local: it revises even as it depends upon an acute sense of *place* and the literature of place that reflects and celebrates that sense. In both theory and praxis, bioregionalism privileges watershed boundaries over arbitrary political boundaries and includes, among its basic content, local interdisciplinary knowledge as reflected in the "Where You At?" quiz first promulgated in *CoEvolution Quarterly* over three decades ago (p. 8) For at least the past generation, for example, a range of writers in my native region, the U.S. Pacific Northwest, have ignored the Medicine Line in their detailed botanic, climatic, and literary evocations of Cascadia.

Lynch, Glotfelty, and Armsbruster contend that "it is exactly the *cultural* dimension of bioregionalism that has been undertheorized and only minimally explored" (p. 11), and their anthology happily fills that void. This foregrounding of bioregionalism's cultural dimension nicely negotiates the profound nexus between localism and globalism. Many essays demonstrate the value of Ursula Heise's advocacy of "ecocosmopolitanism" (p. 9) and Bill McKibben's call for "increased engagement." (p. 10) The three Editors organized the collection into four sections—Reinhabiting, Rereading, Reimagining, and



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Renewal—cleverly arguing that the prefix “re envisions not a simple return to the past but, rather, a creative salvaging, a new-old process that reorients us toward elegant adaptation.” (p. 18) These categories semantically overlap, and in fact some essays could switch places without too much notice, but that condition in no way diminishes the work. Those four “R” words *do* overlap, in some contexts, considerably.

As part of bioregionalism’s dependency on localism, each essay features, near its beginning, a map of the area or region scrutinized by that particular essay, and for anyone loving maps as this reviewer does, this graphic feature easily pulls readers into each place and enhances our local geographical knowledge.

The Bioregional Imagination opens with Glotfelty’s “Conversation with David Robertson and Robert L. Thayer, Jr.,” and highlights their profoundly interdisciplinary work at UC Davis with the Putah-Cache Bioregional Project (1993-2001) immediately west and northwest of Davis. Many essayists subsequently cite Thayer’s *LifePlace: Bioregional Thought and Practice* (2003), which distills their Project and is included in Bladow’s “Bioregional List.” Inevitably in such a big anthology, occasional redundancy occurs (e.g. in literature review and citations), but that proves only a minor annoyance. Through these essays the reader travels to Italy’s polluted Po River Valley, Ireland’s Aran Islands, Australia’s southwest Victoria and vast deserts, southwest Nigeria, northern Lapland, as well as central British Columbia and the Bow River drainage on Alberta’s Rocky Mountain front.

Most essays constitute literary criticism, thus underlining literature’s crucial place in the “*cultural* dimension of bioregionalism.” Others focus more directly upon particularly enviro-social justice issues, or current manifestations of global climate change that rudely revise the lifeways of indigenes. Only three or four essays depend too much upon a particular set of current academic jargon, which clogs their respective arguments. The final section, “Renewal,” focuses squarely upon pedagogy, and this quartet of essays demonstrates some of the range of smart ideas and topics that inculcate bioregionalism and change students’ lives. It provides an optimistic closing to a big, strong book. I can hardly wait to try some of these in my classes.

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Babcock, Matthew James. *Private Fire: Robert Francis's Ecopoetry and Prose*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011.

The frontispiece of Matthew James Babcock's *Private Fire: Robert Francis's Ecopoetry and Prose* shows the Amherst Community History Mural by David Fichter. In the black and white view, Robert Francis, who died in 1987 at the age of 85, stares toward but beyond the viewer, with his right hand against a tree trunk and his left hand on his hip. He looks out of the mural, engaging with the world, but not quite making eye contact. Fichter's imaginative rendering of Francis serves as visual shorthand for Babcock's critical analysis of Francis's large but neglected body of writing. In the mural, the hermit writer supported by the tree lifts his eyes to the world—and the world beyond.

Babcock's analysis covers Francis's published and unpublished works in a wide variety of genres and considers Francis's "distinctly multifarious and sometimes unstable views concerning the influence of his poetic predecessors, sexuality, environmentalism, conservation, spirituality, politics and pacifism" (11). Having established in the Preface that Francis was a complex man with kaleidoscopic ideas and condemning "decades of prejudice and protean scholarly pigeonholes," Babcock settles on his own category in the Introduction: "It is time to uproot Francis from the obscurity of the green margin and to plant him where he belongs: in the expanding canon of twentieth-century American ecopoets" (36, 37).

Babcock's horticultural metaphor is an example of how his admiration for Francis sometimes leads to what seems like exuberant excess in his own writing; he calls Francis "a master of the *quip pro quo*," and says he wishes to avoid comparing Francis and Robert Frost by "following Francis down a road less traveled" (34, 35). On the other hand, Francis himself, "fueled on playful postmodernist paradox," invented new forms for his environmental poetry, "'mono-rhyme,' 'word count,' 'fragmented surface,' and 'silent poetry,'" so Babcock's own playfulness is a relief during his serious effort to canonize Francis in the "present eco-catastrophic moment" (152, 149, 13).

Private Fire is arranged in "nine loosely related chapters on a smattering of topics," all passionately devoted to recovering Francis from unjust marginalization (10). Babcock follows his Introduction with a chapter on "The Influence of Dickinson and Frost." Chapter 2 grounds and contextualizes Francis, reading Dickinson's "eco-influence" on Francis as a sacred inheritance from both Dickinson and Amherst (44). Where Frost is concerned, Babcock goes out on a limb and says, "[I]t is perhaps more interesting at this historical juncture to consider how Francis influenced Frost and how he may re-shape Frost studies," anticipating that Francis will be retrieved from the margin and brought into the academy as a major poet (55). This is one of Babcock's stated goals for his book, as he says, "In arranging my material, I sought [. . .] to be accessible to academic audiences as well as general readers," a paradoxical ordering, given that Francis's own journals "plot his slow pilgrimage away from institutionalized education toward individualistic geocentric enlightenment" (10, 24).

According to Babcock in the chapter "Sex, Gender, and the Rural Erotic," Francis's geocentric view undercuts egocentric and divisive cultural categories, demonstrating "that Francis's brand of American ecopoetics sought for unification, rather than division, and that he wrote in order to strengthen the



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natural affinities between sexuality, literary genre, and environmental preservation” (62). In another example of his own wordplay, Babcock writes, “In the same way that Francis’s rural sketches, portraits, and lyrics locate the orgasmic in the organic, they seek to map the certain and sometimes uncertain distance between the erotic and the biotic” (76). Babcock refers to Francis, who was gay, as a nature writer who challenged literary genre and gender definitions and calls him “a boundary creature” and “a unique breed of writer, perhaps one of a kind” (77).

While reveling in Francis’s uniqueness, Babcock insists that Francis himself was distressed by being a writer without a genre, “torn between identifying himself as either a poet or a writer of prose” (80). In Chapter 4, “Fiction and Non-Fiction,” Babcock explores Francis’s literary content and forms, including his bioregional narrative, *We Fly Away*, published in 1948. This work, in keeping with Francis’s tendency to blur boundaries, “ceases to differentiate between fact and fiction, between bioregion and biography” (92). In reviewing Francis’s essays, Babcock finds that Francis describes himself as a “wordman” who “wrote and was changed.” Further, Babcock insists that Francis’s readers want to change as a result of Francis’s work: “In the reader’s consciousness, a nagging dissatisfaction with the wastefulness of the contemporary world summons a desire to live more conscientiously, to consume less, and to generate more positive energy” (95). Babcock himself was moved in this way, as he notes in the book’s Conclusion: “The more I wrote about Francis, the more I became dissatisfied with the wasteful, consumerist aspects of my life, the habits of excess and insensitivity toward the natural world that I had accepted as normal” (186).

“Positive energy” could describe the coupling of Francis’s spiritual views with his political ones, which Babcock explores in Chapter 5, “Ecospirituality and Ecopolitics.” Francis writes to find “footholds in the shifting sands of modernism,” pairing “an ‘open’ spirituality (a curious pastiche of Christianity, nature worship, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other Eastern world views) with a committed, more ‘closed’ political stance (pacifism, non-violence, conscientious objection, activism, and dissidence)” (110). Francis’s writings on war sometimes address its violence with jarring syntax, and Babcock himself uses metaphorical bellicosity to describe Francis’s life away from and protest against military-materialist culture: “With blitzkrieg bluntness, Francis dug in at Fort Juniper [Francis’s home in the woods of Amherst] for over four decades and from his biocentrist bivouac launched a full-frontal assault at international conflict” (125). Francis’s anti-war stance was solid, but his spiritual perspective was skeptical, “adopt[ing] a multiplicity of stances, as if exploring the infinite degrees of doubt” (116). Again, Francis defies categorization, using ecopoetry to move “toward the salvation of remaining undecided and uncommitted” to a single spiritual definition.

Nevertheless, Francis was an ascetic committed to living simply, in material poverty, described in “Economy, Place, and Space.” Babcock sees Francis’s economic activism reflected in his writing style: “In material terms, he consumed very little energy, natural resources, and food—just enough, and sometimes not nearly enough, to live on. As a result, he authored a slim body of prose and poetry whose chief characteristic is its sparing use of language” (130). In closely reading Francis’s experimental poetry in chapter 7, Babcock returns to the language of violence, claiming, “Francis snapped sentences across his knees like kindling, peeled the bark from each word, and crumbled the fragments on the page [. . .] In order to engender healing and change, Francis used his fragmented surface poetry to penetrate



the surface relationships of a broken society on a broken earth" (159). Once again, Francis is shape shifting, this time between destroyer and creator. Babcock concludes his reading of Francis with *Valhalla*, a long narrative poem of "environmental apocalypics," in which Francis questions why "cultures have thought it necessary to divide a whole entity into two concepts" (166, 175). Francis's end-time vision is not annihilation, but reunification, erasure of categorization and classification.

In "Conclusion," Babcock writes, "[T]o Francis, lifestyle and poetic stylistics sprouted from the same taproot"; life and art, the natural world and the human-made were not separate for Robert Francis (184). Babcock's last chapter is as autobiographical as it is analytical, remarking on the changes he has undergone while reading Francis's work and suggesting that reading Francis is to transcend boundaries: "His writing acts as a portal for what is geologically and geographically analogous, or 'geologous,' between cultures, species, populations, and landforms across time and space" (189). Matthew James Babcock has written a scholarly and poetic green reading of Francis, a "quest-like narrative" that burns with devotion for his subject, who "demonstrated that to be an eco-poet meant to be not one thing but many" (13, 21).

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Ryan, Terre. *This Ecstatic Nation: The American Landscape and the Aesthetics of Patriotism*. Amherst: U of Mass. Press, 2011.

Terre Ryan's book *This Ecstatic Nation: The American Landscape and the Aesthetics of Patriotism* synthesizes an assortment of writing styles while arguing that the landscape aesthetics of 19th century America have persisted into the present day, perpetuating the unsustainable, Frontier-era paradox of nature as both secular cathedral and consumable resource. Central to Ryan's work is what she terms "Manifest Destiny aesthetics," an amalgam of aesthetic tropes – including the pastoral, the picturesque, the beautiful, and the sublime – that she believes functions on visual, political, and cultural levels. Ryan illustrates the pervasiveness of Manifest Destiny aesthetics throughout the last two hundred years of American history using critical readings of others' texts as well as her own on-the-ground reporting and narrative-style vignettes.

Overall, *This Ecstatic Nation* successfully distills its broad subject matter into an informative and wonderfully readable introduction to how outdated aesthetic values continue to dominate our culture's perception of the natural environment and our place in it. However, at some points the scope of Ryan's work begs for a longer treatment than the book's 138 pages can provide. Most noticeably, her theoretical explorations are neither as involved nor as convincing as her reportage or her narrative. The result of this imbalance is that a book that seems confused as to whether it is a meditation or an argument ultimately works much better as the former than as the latter.

The book's first chapter functions as an extension of its brief introduction, continuing to lay theoretical, factual, and personal groundwork. Here, Ryan is excellent at synthesizing her various writing voices to provide a historicocultural context for the reader while, refreshingly, not remaining an emotionless dictator of sources and statistics. For example, she is careful to admit her own complicity in the environmental destruction brought about by Americans' upholding of Manifest Destiny aesthetics while still convincingly suggesting that awareness of such complicity can be the first step in building a new, more constructive paradigm. Her writing is at its strongest when she combines personal narrative with reportage, as she does when she uses this chapter's anchoring image of an enormous Pabst beer bottle that hovers above the Holy Sepulchre Cemetery as viewed from New Jersey's Garden State Parkway as a lesson in how landscapes aesthetics reflect cultural values.

When Ryan moves into more abstract territory, though, things become muddled. As mentioned above, she rolls assorted visual tropes into her idea of Manifest Destiny aesthetics; however, with only very minimal theoretical justification for such a move, the result is an implicit suggestion that there is little to no difference between, say, the pastoral and the picturesque. Burke's sublime, in particular, is scarcely defined but then wielded enthusiastically throughout the rest of the book in various guises. In the first chapter alone "technological sublime" and "virtual sublime" are introduced, and later we get "postmodern sublime," "military sublime," and "digital sublime," but it never becomes satisfyingly clear what Ryan means by any of these terms, and ultimately their usage does not give any coherent sense of a 21st century evolution of a 19th century trope. A number of other concepts – including Cheryll Glotfelty's "placism" – are also introduced near the end of the first chapter, but likewise serve no lasting



rhetorical purpose and seem to exist only as discussion starters for discussions that, unfortunately, do not continue throughout the rest of the book.

Each of *This Ecstatic Nation's* three remaining chapters are explorations of Manifest Destiny aesthetics' effects on particular locations as observed by Ryan herself. In these later chapters, her narrative and reporting voices truly shine, especially in the second chapter, where she discusses how the American southwest became the major testing site for the atomic bomb by virtue of the desert failing to meet the standard of beauty we expect from our natural landscapes. The trajectories of the final two chapters – which deal with clearcutting in Oregon and the natural gas industry in Wyoming, respectively – are a bit less clear, but amid numerous one- and two-page digressions, the strength of Ryan's nonfiction prose keeps the reader engaged in her pilgrimages to these places.

Much like its introduction, the book's conclusion raises many fascinating possibilities that are unfortunately given short shrift. Ryan's linking of Manifest Destiny aesthetics to patriotism and her subsequent exploration of "green patriotism" is perhaps the most interesting part of the entire text, despite coming at the very end. Aside from this suggestion of a new theoretical direction, though, *This Ecstatic Nation* provides few if any answers for the questions it raises. Though highly readable, Ryan's book doesn't accomplish anything from a theoretical perspective that others – Slotkin, Cronon, Morton, Kittredge, Solnit, etc. – haven't already accomplished. That said, however, Ryan's work does stand out in the ways that her reflections and investigative work personalize grand historicocultural concerns by showing how the perpetuation of Frontier-era environmental aesthetics still deeply affects small communities and individuals across the American west. Though it may not provide many answers in the end, *This Ecstatic Nation* finds new ways to pose old questions, making them impossible to ignore any longer.

-- Ben S. Bunting, Jr. Washington State University

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011. Print.

Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* is a reminder that in each moment there is a pressing and long-term environmental crisis too often left undetected by the spectacular and immediate eyes of society. By coalescing the words slow and violence, Nixon cogently engineers a way in which to discuss the accretion of acts that birth catastrophic effects that are delayed or made invisible by the passing of years, if not centuries. More than a way to define the long-term effects of environmental "slow violence," Nixon also stages a method to better perceive these events so that agents can respond accordingly.

One agent of particular interest is the "writer-activist" who Nixon puts forth as a wielder of literary and imaginative tools. The writer-activist is not underestimated in his or her ability to respond alongside the indigenous and underrepresented poor that have had their lands and their way of life most effected by slow violence. Nixon's work largely focuses on such agents who might help readers to better understand and articulate resistance from a transnationally informed perspective. Moreover, environmental and postcolonial studies combine to effectively imbue an understanding of how language and representational strategies are crafted in order to strengthen widespread struggles against slow violence.

By identifying slow violence as a distinct brand of temporal violence, Nixon provides a means to overcome the representational obstacles that undermine efforts to mobilize change. In order to accomplish this objective, Nixon highlights the work of writer-activists who have successfully channeled their voice through environmental causes. One example of such a writer-activist is Ken Saro-Wiwa, a member of the Ogoni people, which is an ethnic minority in Nigeria. Saro-Wiwa was a prolific writer who was eventually executed as a result of his non-violent protests aimed at protecting his homeland, Ogoniland, in the Niger Delta. While the charges that led to his execution have been internationally questioned, he "believed to the last that his writing would return to haunt his tormenters" (104). These "tormenters" include those protecting crude oil extraction, which has caused long-lasting environmental damage due to indiscriminate petroleum waste dumping in his homeland.

With this in mind, what Nixon provides is not only the context surrounding the struggles of Saro-Wiwa, but also his textual strategies. In particular, these include his alertness to "shifts in audience and occasion," flexibility in "register and focus," his ability to articulate "the literature of commitment in expressively environmental terms," the unique "combined appeal to minority and environmental rights," (109) and ultimately the resistance he crafts "in a language that melded new modes of environmental defiance with a more traditional reverence for the land" (118). Despite many Americans' ignorance of Saro-Wiwa or his people's cause, he represents a passionate embodiment of the freedom of speech, democracy, nonviolence, and anti-censorship. In fact, Nixon claims that Saro-Wiwa presents "the most vocal literary protest since the [Salman] Rushdie affair" (122). While this awareness is enlightening in its own right, Nixon immediately throws into relief Saro-Wiwa as a writer-activist with



the equally revealing writings of his son. This juxtaposition provides further evidence of Nixon's awareness of the complexity that slow violence presents in relation to the writer-activist.

This example is synecdochic of the invisible and incongruent state of human and environmental injustice that is chronicled as a representational concern in the text. Such concerns span from "Climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of wars, acidifying oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes" (2). The array of possible concerns that the concept of slow violence encompasses is at minimum eye opening, and at most ubiquitous in its perpetual unfolding. It is not merely the fractured violence of political histories that is conjured, but violence that is marked as a text that requires the work of scholars like Nixon to revisit, negotiate, and interpret.

The context surrounding Saro-Wiwa is one of the many potential examples supporting Nixon's argument that European and American leaders are largely responsible for implementing neoliberal policies that have exacerbated the effects of slow violence on the global South. The idea is that by centering on frequently discounted casualties, often left strategically absent from the public's collective memory, Nixon might also provide the writer-activist a means to counter or more simply to understand the bloodless and unspectacular tragedies that are just as real as more visible and media-ready natural disasters. By continuing to ignore catastrophes that emanate from both temporal and geographical outsourcing, the veiled matrix of racial and political-economic inequality will continue to surface.

On its own, Nixon's critique of neoliberalism, imperialism, and to some extent capitalism is nothing new. However, his updated vision brings together a tradition of critiques—going back to Robert Bullard, Rachel Carson, and many others—in a way that uniquely focuses on aesthetics, genre (fiction and non-fiction), media, and the representational obstacles that environmental justice movements have faced over the past thirty years. Moreover, it is Nixon's ability to employ postcolonial and environmental studies as lenses to reveal slow violence, the writer-activist, and the climate of neoliberalism that deserves attention, particularly from literary scholars who might desire to view their own contribution to these issues in a new light.

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Dallmayr, Fred. *Return to Nature? An Ecological Counterhistory*. Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 2011.

There are a few widely held theories as to the origins of our problematic relationship to the natural world and its manifestation in environmental crises. Some see our alienation from non-human nature as the inevitable consequence of the otherworldly promise of the Abrahamic religions; others trace the split all the way back to the invention of agriculture. As a philosopher, Fred Dallmayr naturally looks for the origins of the problem in our philosophical tradition, and he finds it in the mind-world dualism of Rene Descartes. Though he acknowledges the roles science, technology, and spirituality might play in solving environmental problems and rehabilitating our utilitarian and anthropocentric perspective on the natural world, Dallmayr posits that this is fundamentally a philosophic problem in need of a philosophic solution. He believes that “the model of mastery over nature can be traced back to the onset of modern Western philosophy, when the human ‘mind’ was separated rigidly from ‘extended matter’”; one important way to solve the problem then is to unify this dualism (155).

His aim here is to trace the history of philosophy’s attempt to heal the rift of Cartesian dualism. Balancing summary, history, synthesis, and analysis, Dallmayr traces the strains of Western thought that run counter to the dominant Cartesian, scientific-rationalistic current that supports the dualism of man-nature and/or mind-body. This history begins right at the time of Descartes by examining how Spinoza opposed this dualism almost immediately. A near-contemporary of Descartes, Spinoza sought to “remedy the fissures or splits to which modern reason gives rise: the splits between thought and action, between self and other, between reason and faith, and between God and nature” (11). Subsequent chapters examine this move towards unifying such dualisms in Schelling and German Idealism, Romanticism (as manifest in Germany, England, and America), Dewey, Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger. Though these figures are the focal points, many others receive significant attention: Leibniz, Hegel, Kant, Fichte, and others. Finally, since the focus has been squarely on the Western tradition, the last chapter is dedicated to acknowledging the ways in which Indian, Buddhist, and Chinese thought is congruent with the aims of the counterhistory he has been presenting. Two appendices add significant content: one summarizes the contributions of Thomas Berry to environmental philosophy; the other contemplates the fall and potential revival of the now-neglected field of philosophical anthropology.

Dallmayr’s book is broadly useful. Though he explicitly situates his work as philosophical inquiry, his breadth of scope and straightforward, readable prose contributes to its accessibility and wide applicability. Students and scholars of Romantic literature, for instance, will find much to engage with in his analysis of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Emerson, and Thoreau. But even beyond that clear interdisciplinary appeal, only a basic understanding of the Western philosophic tradition is necessary to be able to digest Dallmayr’s account of the thread of anti-Cartesian-dualism that runs through Western philosophy. Anyone who deals with ecological issues in whatever field – literature, philosophy, the sciences, or the humanities – should find valuable perspective here on the origins and essence of the human-nature problem. At the same time, there is enough close and detailed analysis to satisfy students of philosophy – such as his explication of the divergence of Leibniz from Spinoza via the former’s



concept of monads. But even the most esoteric concepts are explained plainly and clearly, making this book useful to anyone whose research is concerned with the origins of ecological problems.

--David Tagnani, Washington State University



Fiege, Mark. *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States*. Seattle, London: University of Washington Press. 2012. Print.

The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States by Mark Fiege looks at iconic events in American history through the lens of nature to determine nature's or the environment's role in the shaping of the events. This undertaking involves looking at the "... form, function and meaning of nature" (7). In addition, the book is peppered with photographs, cartoons and illustrations, all of which contribute to the enhancement of the project. However, the second part of the book's title "An Environmental History of the United States" is problematic or perhaps misleading because the book is not an environmental history of America, nor does it trace the history of the awareness of the environment's importance on the American consciousness. Books that do attempt to provide such comprehensive guides to American environmental history are Ted Steinberg's *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* (2002) and Douglas Sackman's *A Companion to American Environmental History* (2010).

Starting with the premise that, "nature is central to the human experience" (9) because it is "the omnipresent substance of reality," Fiege reminds us that this "omnipresence often dulls our awareness of its significance" (131). He then proceeds to define key terms such as "nature," "environment," "natural law" and others, and this is where Fiege is at his best, in defining, clarifying and expanding the boundaries of terms. For example, nature is defined as "matter, energy and forces that constitute the universe and compose all life" (10). Since Fiege's purpose is not to assess the effects of the chosen iconic events on the environment, as a historian he proceeds to include the neglected element of nature into the equation of the event. Yet at the same time he warns us not to over-emphasize the role of nature in the chosen event because nature "shapes events only within a range of what is possible" (11). Finally, Fiege explains why this study is so important: because American history was defined by its early colonists' struggle "to shape themselves and their new land according to their faith," and since the republic was made possible by a large expanse of land, its ideology was shaped by the notion of "nature and nature's god [who] deposited in every person a capacity for reason, the exercise of which would lead to human betterment" (11-12).

Fiege selects nine iconic moments of American history and adds to them the component of nature that had been previously missing. These selected moments in chronological order are: the role of nature in the Salem Witch Trials; the role of the theory of "natural law" in the creation of the American republic; the role of the cotton industry in the South and concurrent issues of slavery; the significant role of nature in the formation of "Nature's Nobleman," Abraham Lincoln; the role of nature in the Battle of Gettysburg; the manipulation of nature in the building of the transcontinental railroad; the contradictions between scientists' fascination with nature and the building of the atomic bomb; the role of nature in *Brown v. Board of Education*; and nature and the oil crisis. Although each chapter on these issues is a complete unit by itself, the chronology of chapters does provide a narrative of important events of American history.



The book is an absorbing narrative and chockfull of interesting information such as Mici Teller's single-handed, successful campaign to stop of the Army Corp of Engineers from bulldozing a patch of pine trees even as her husband, the scientist Edward Teller, was busy building the hydrogen bomb and she was doing consulting work for the Manhattan Project. Such contradictions revealed by scientists' sense of love and wonder for nature and their creation of the most lethal weapon against nature is explained as a compartmentalization process where each part is kept separate from the other.

Since Fiege is a historian the book is written from the perspective of the historian, not the environmentalist, and that is where the book falls short in not providing enough information on the nature component. Nonetheless, it is a good read and meaningful addition to the field of environmental studies because of its specificity and focus on American history.

--Su Senapati, Professor of English, Abraham Baldwin Ag. College, Tifton, GA, ssenapati@abac.edu



Newman, Lance, ed. *The Grand Canyon Reader*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2011. Print.

The Grand Canyon Reader, a new collection of essays edited by Lance Newman, revitalizes images of the Grand Canyon based on personal narratives of the place. With stories from twenty-seven contributors ranging across generations, the text constructs a collage of this famous national landmark by incorporating the perspectives of previously under-represented groups, including women and Native Americans. Unlike previous books that seek to represent the cultural history of the Grand Canyon region, including Michael Anderson's *Living at the Edge: Explorers, Exploiters, and Settlers of the Grand Canyon* (1998), Todd Berger's *It Happened at Grand Canyon* (2007), and Robert C. Euler and Frank Tikalsky's *The Grand Canyon: Intimate Views* (1992), Newman's book not only documents the physical and cultural realities of the place but also tells stories that are inspired by it. This is clear in Terry Tempest Williams's story, "Stone Creek Woman," which appears in Newman's collection as a representative of how reporting a subjective experience rather than attempting to represent an objective encounter in the Grand Canyon environment can successfully foreground space while emphasizing the cultural significance of that particular environment. *The Grand Canyon Reader* contributes to the well-established body of literature on this region, but adds a rich vein of subjectivity through reflective creative writing.

Newman divides the book into three distinct sections: "The Rim," "The River," and "The People." Each of these covers one perspective on the canyon and progresses from contemporary narratives to Native American oral histories, an unusual reverse chronology, which the author explains is intended to meet "readers on the common ground of the present moment" (2). Indeed, the reverse chronological structure allows an entry point for contemporary readers, but it also foregrounds the continued importance of this region in the lives of people living today. Through this inclusiveness of the contemporary reader and diversity of perspectives represented in the book, *The Grand Canyon Reader* appeals to a general audience. It is in this that the book achieves its primary purpose of inspiring environmental stewardship through exhilarating stories, artful narratives, and diverse perspectives. Newman argues that by reading the stories in these three sections—or, as he calls them, "three journeys"—readers experience the canyon itself and "will be changed by their experiences" (3). Indeed, the collection's vivid depictions of the place encourage the reader to see what his or her own experience in the canyon will bring. In this way, the stories inspire a desire for experience that ultimately leads to a sense of connection and even protection of the place. As we realize that this enduring place has been a part of human lives for as far back as our literature takes us, we begin "to work for the preservation of the beautiful and sustaining home given to us by time" (6).

The intention of this book, then, is to promote a deeper understanding of the Grand Canyon and thus to increase the reader's desire to protect both it and other wild spaces like it through a telling of individuals' unique experiences at the site. As such, the various encounters of the contributors, while often focused around sublime experiences, demonstrate to the general reading audience that the wonder of experiencing this place, like the variable landscape itself, is not prescribed or predetermined. It should be noted, though, that the first section is front-loaded with stories by Craig Childs and Edward



Abbey that depict contemporary associations with the canyon as adventure stories in which white male writers retreat into the wilderness and intentionally undertake risks solely for the exhilaration and sublimity of the experience. For some ecocritics, such retreat narratives raise problematic questions about this collection's suitability to the increasingly third-wave ecocritical environment in which issues of privilege, race, gender, and globalization, as Lawrence Buell explains in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, problematize first-wave favoring of the retreat into the wilderness—a concern that Newman's other work, which often engages in Marxist ecocriticism, shares. Although the collection is saved by other contributors, namely Patricia McCairen and Terry Tempest Williams, who add gender diversity to such wilderness escapes, I find that the collection's depiction of environmental experience as demanding escape into the wild exposes it to common critiques of first-wave ecocriticism.

Despite this objection, the collection's inclusion of women and Native American narratives is perhaps its greatest strength. Patricia McCairen's "Canyon Solitude," which depicts a woman rafting alone down the Colorado River, deals with problematic gender stereotypes in which women are advised not to run the river alone. Similarly, Terry Tempest Williams's "Stone Creek Woman" employs a poetic style to creatively depict a woman's enlightening experience in the wilderness. These stories of female encounters with the canyon are a testament to the collection's intention to be inclusive, but this intention is even more profoundly apparent in the final section, "The People," which "places both contemporary and traditional Native American stories alongside journal entries and reports written by the conquistadors and explorers who 'discovered' the canyon and the people who had always called it home" (3). As Newman explains, the presence of Native American voices reconstructs images of the Grand Canyon by giving it life before its discovery by white men or, conversely, demonstrates the ongoing relevance and vitality of such traditional stories rather than the extinction of those cultures. By concluding the book with the Native American creation story "Tudjupa Creates the People," Newman illustrates the deep roots of this place and reveals not only its personal significance to writers like Childs and Abbey, but also its cultural significance to the indigenous people of Northern Arizona.

-Sarah Nolan, University of Nevada, Reno

McMillin, T.S. *The Meaning of Rivers: Flow and Reflection in American Literature*. Ames: University of Iowa Press. 2011.

By T.S. McMillin's own admission, *The Meaning of Rivers* is not a comprehensive account of rivers and their meaning, but "an associative field guide" (xv). Read in this way, the text does much to explore the meanings that a limited number of writers have given rivers, as it tends to focus on the white male experience of rivers. McMillin is himself an Emerson scholar, but seeks to expand his research—including a good deal of field work outside of Transcendental writers—in an attempt to understand the ways we overlook, remain by, go up and down, and cross rivers.

American upriver narratives, McMillin points out in one chapter, were nearly all commissioned journeys where the explorer went looking for something worth exploiting. The struggle was not just with the formidable current and elements, but with the strange surroundings: game they've never tasted, "Native peoples whom they fear, whom they are charged to convert" (63). As such, upriver narratives emphasize struggle. Even when the elements overwhelm the river-goer—as when Ralph Lane essentially failed in 1586 to make it up the Roanoke—McMillin points out that the story that gets told afterward is of courage and the promise of future voyages, not of failure. This seems a particularly American response to against-the-current struggles. The upriver struggle, he says, is also uniquely American (or Colonial) in its push to bring "civilization" up to the source of the wild, wild river.

In contrast to upriver stories, downriver narratives raise questions of "truth, fiction, and their correlatives" (88). McMillin acknowledges how downriver travel also sometimes portrays progress (and Manifest Destiny, specifically) as unproblematic and the natural way of things. Downstream river-goers, he notes, have the reflection time to play with truth and fiction and retell stories in a variety of ways. This is especially apparent in Major John Wesley Powell's 1869 expedition on the Colorado. His downriver journey, McMillin points out, has been told and re-told many times including a *Scribner's Monthly* series of articles six years after the expedition, a scientific and popular account, and even a Disney movie. Ultimately, all accounts penned by Powell, McMillin argues, match the unconformity of the Colorado River itself—"part scientific report, part literary narrative" (106).

Perhaps because there are so few river narratives written by women, McMillin spends little time on them and it does seem like a void. He uses Ann Zwinger's *Downcanon: A Naturalist Explores the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon*, but primarily to contrast it with Edward Abbey's "Down the River" (from *Desert Solitaire*). And he takes up Akiko Busch's *Nine Ways to Cross a River* as well as Gloria Anzaldua's poetry. But these non-phallogocentric narratives take up far less real estate than say, the chapter dedicated to Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*.

McMillin lends a wonderful sense of humor to his reflections on American rivers and our struggles with them. In order to better understand Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze's painting *George Washington Crossing the Delaware*, for example, he not only contextualizes the painting historically, but also crosses the Delaware himself, in a canoe in summer, which he says, "gave him a sense of what Washington



experienced *not at all*, since [for Washington] it was frozen and in the middle of the night” (McMillin, T.S.- “Friends Book Talk”).

For the reader seeking a more comprehensive meditation on rivers in American literature, *The Meaning of Rivers* might be read alongside Anissa J. Wardi’s recent *Water and African American Memory: An Ecocritical Perspective*, which considers waterways as a form of resistance and redemption. Similarly, Tom Lynch and Cheryll Glotfelty consider the reclamation of creeks and river basins in one section of *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place*.

--Heather Springer, Washington State University

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- McMillin, T.S. *The Meaning of Rivers: Flow and Reflection in American Literature*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011. Print.



Taylor, Bron. *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*. Berkeley: U of California P. 2010.

In his latest work on the conjunction of religion and nature, Bron Taylor explores the ways in which a world left bereft of traditional supernatural religion after the Darwinian bombshell has groped for ways to fill the void with the spiritual innovations that he calls the “dark green religion.” With the explicit goal of appealing to a wide audience of both scholarly and general readers, Taylor’s prose is highly readable and his methods intuitive and logical. His primary mode of analysis is classification and division: he first distinguishes between nature religion, green religion, and dark green religion before dividing the last classification into four sub-species: supernatural animism, natural animism, Gaian supernaturalism, and Gaian naturalism. He spends the second chapter working through this four-fold typology, providing illustrations by examining significant figures in environmental thinking, such as Gary Snyder, Jane Goodall, James Lovelock, and Aldo Leopold, and dissecting their words to determine their classification. This methodology is representative of the book as a whole, as the bulk of the text consists of identifying the ways in which these strains of dark green religion have permeated every aspect of Western civilization.

Subsequent chapters examine the emergence of dark green religion in various manifestations in Europe and North America. First, a brief recapitulation of the influence of British Romanticism – particularly the role of the sublime – leads into an examination of the evidence of animistic and Gaian thinking in Emerson, Thoreau, and Muir. Then Taylor moves into an examination of the dark green religious foundation of much environmental activism in North America by examining the rhetoric utilized by Earth First!, the Earth Liberation Front, Dave Foreman, Ed Abbey, and others. Themes of millennialism and apocalypticism are emphasized here in an especially convincing argument for the religious aspects of the green movement. Another chapter explores how surfing is an expression of dark green religion in both its origins and contemporary practice. A fascinating chapter follows on visual representations of dark green religion on television, in nature documentaries by Suzuki, Cousteau, and Attenborough, and even in Disney movies. Perhaps most surprising, Taylor dedicates a chapter to how even scientists have become infused with the sentiment of the dark green religion. Finally, the penultimate chapter looks at its incursion into politics.

Perhaps it is a clue as to the dominant mode of Taylor’s approach that he chooses to take his analytic cues from anthropologist Benson Saler: Taylor cites Saler’s “polyfocal” approach to the study of religion as a guiding principle in defining the term for his purposes here. Taylor explains that to anthropologists, religion and spirituality are practically interchangeable terms, and that is pretty much the working definition here. Religion denotes neither supernaturalism nor an organized, homogenous set of beliefs or believers. It simply means that which connects us to what we value. In this way, Taylor is deviating from the more popular definition of religion as connoting the supernatural. But in relying upon anthropology to define his parameters – something he does again later on with Jonathan Benthall’s term *parareligion* – Taylor positions himself in this study as dispassionate observer, as the social scientist who records and classifies, but does not judge. But as I hinted above, there is an implicit argument here: namely, that these ideas are indeed *religious* in nature. Taylor tries to downplay this



implication, as he claims to not be concerned with patrolling the boundary between what is considered religious and what is not: "I have opted for a descriptive and analytic strategy that looks for patterns and resemblances without laboring obsessively to demarcate boundaries" (42). However, this concern inevitably surfaces. For example, when Taylor examines the apocalyptic rhetoric that inheres in much of the writing of environmentalists, he is making an explicit connection to the Abrahamic tradition. But he also acknowledges that this "apocalypticism" is actually based on science, not scripture. What, then, is the significance of this? Is it mere coincidence, or is there some greater affinity between these seemingly conflicting ideologies? This would appear to be an area ripe for analysis, but it is scarcely commented upon as it does not quite fit with Taylor's goal of identifying when and where dark green religion manifests. And if there is one flaw in the book, it is this strict adherence to identification as not only the primary mode of analysis, but sometimes the *only* mode. But one must maintain focus, and Taylor certainly adheres to his stated intention.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the book is Taylor himself. His long and extensive field experience often comes to the fore in personal interviews with poets and activists, in his narration of an evening in the African bush, or in his recounting of how he earned the trust of activist William C. Rogers in the wilderness of Idaho. His first-person experience is something that sets this study apart from other scholarly treatments of similar topics. He has personally spoken to many of the figures he classifies as adherents of the dark green religion, and this immediacy lends the text a credibility different from the rationalistic justifications that are typically the primary support for scholarship. For example, Taylor's brief recapitulation of Snyder's life and philosophy might be helpful context or unhelpful generalization, depending on the reader's area of expertise. But that soon gives way to fascinating discussion – an actual discussion that Taylor himself had with Snyder – of Snyder's thoughts regarding interspecies communication, including the poet's recounting of a walk through the redwoods with a mystic companion in the 1950s (19). Fascinating stuff. In this way, Taylor's work is more akin to the field work of the scientist than the logical deductions of the scholar. Though the scholar in me sometimes longed for deeper, more sustained analysis, this type of immediacy was ample recompense.

--David Tagnani, Washington State University



Kerber, Jenny. *Writing in Dust: Reading the Prairie Environmentally*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2010.

Using an ecocritical approach, Jenny Kerber examines Canadian prairie literature and its history, narrative structures, and political groundings. The result is *Writing in Dust*, a well-researched study that places the Canadian prairie in a complexly mediated global context while maintaining regional concerns. Kerber's consideration of history, economics, colonialism, myth, and environmental rhetoric demonstrate not only the usefulness of her study but also the offerings of ecocriticism as a whole.

Kerber begins her study by revisiting prairie history. She examines the effects of World War I, changes in agricultural production, and cultural tensions through the works of Edward McCourt, Robert Stead, and W.O. Mitchell. One point Kerber makes is that environmental prairie issues are not recent developments. Rather, the prairie has always been a site of change and conflict in spite of certain narratives that touted it as a fixed, eternal space. Kerber asserts that exploring these writers' works shows how "the prairie elicits no single, natural response" (64).

In the next section, Kerber convincingly demonstrates how power, nativity, race, and history all play a role in the nature memoir through her exploration of the writings of Frederick Philip Grove, Wallace Stegner, and Trevor Herriot. She argues that "the nature memoir is everywhere infused with a host of mediating and sometimes contradictory forces" (107). In other words, memoirs are influenced by memory, by meaning, by politics, and by intention, which means nature writing is not free from politics. Kerber's argument does not reject the genre – rather she refutes depictions of nature as a space free from social ills, placing her amongst third-wave ecocritics who were troubled by earlier studies that privileged realism and environmental aesthetics. Her belief that "the memoir's presentation of prairie nature is never as transparent as it initially seems" moves the Canadian prairie from the local into a transnational discussion (80).

Through her exploration of poetry by Tim Lilburn, Louise Halfe, and Madeline Coopsammy, Kerber examines concepts and definitions of home as they relate to the prairie. She contests narrow definitions of prairie as rural, white, and male and pushes for more flexible understandings that encompass multiple identities and backgrounds. The prairie is not a static space – rather, it is "in a perpetual state of becoming" (148). Since there is no one or right way of viewing/defining the prairie, Kerber looks at how each poet does something different with writing. Lilburn aims to "unwrite" the prairie in response to colonialism and industrialism, Halfe seeks to restore previously silenced voices, Herriot looks to recreate and rebuild the prairie through poetry as a means to reject ideas of the prairie's disappearance, and Coopsammy creates a community that transcends borders. Ultimately, Kerber manages to still consider the local as well as the "global socio-environmental struggles" when analyzing Canadian prairie poetry (120). She writes "to be a citizen of prairie place involves thinking through the connections of one's immediate place to other places and times, recognizing that no region or regional consciousness functions in isolation" (148). So considering the global does not reject or neglect the local for the two are not mutually exclusive.



In the final chapter, Kerber deconstructs the environmental binary of Eden/wasteland through an investigation of various myths. She argues that “the works of an increasing diverse group of prairie writers shows just how limited some of the dominant scripts have been in terms of imagining and describing the prairie environment” (201). No one story is adequate – to understand a place means to look at it from many angles and possibilities. By considering multiple “origin” stories by writers such as Thomas King and Rudy Wiebe, readers are led to a better understanding of the prairie as a diverse and multifaceted space.

Writing in the Dust is a useful addition to the rapidly evolving field of ecocriticism through its review of history and connections to present-day environmental views and issues. Kerber includes multiple points of view and offers complex and nuanced readings of prairie literature that pushes the field of ecocriticism beyond its previous boundaries. Her awareness of various pitfalls that have trapped past ecocritics makes the study timely and carefully considered.

--Andrea Campbell, Washington State University, Tri-Cities



Cenkl, Pavel, ed. *Nature and Culture in the Northern Forest: Region, Heritage, and Environment in the Rural Northeast*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2010.

The thirty million acres of the Northern Forest form a diverse yet coherent landscape, marked by its unique—but dynamic—mixture of geologic traits, flora and fauna, histories, and cultures. *Nature and Culture in the Northern Forest*, published as a part of Iowa’s American Land and Life Series, introduces its readers to this beautifully complex region through fourteen interdisciplinary essays, each exploring the affinities between the land and its culture.

The collection is divided into four sections: “Encounters,” which includes essays on personal encounters with the plant and animal life of the region; “Teaching and Learning,” in which essayists discuss pedagogical approaches to the region; “Rethinking Place,” focused on specific figures; and “Nature and Commodity,” which considers commercial interests in its examination of the regional culture. The overall structure reflects the concerns of many of the individual essays, in that it prioritizes inter- and multidisciplinary approaches to the study of the region and emphasizes the continuity of specific threads, which wind their way through the sections, turning up in diverse essays. The commonalities themselves are unsurprising: Henry David Thoreau, Robert Frost, and birches, for example, make multiple appearances throughout the collection. As these subjects reappear through multiple essays, though, each new perspective adds a layer of complexity to readers’ understanding of their place in this region.

While all of the essays are very much grounded in the specificities of the Northern Forest region, the collection’s practical and theoretical approach to fully interdisciplinary study of place is informative for scholars and teachers in all of regional studies. The essays in “Teaching and Learning,” especially, articulate some of the advantages and difficulties of studying and teaching place from interdisciplinary perspectives. Catherine Owen Koning, Robert G. Goodby, and John R. Harris’s contribution, “Place as a Catalyst for Engaged Learning at Franklin Pierce University” summarizes the authors’ experiences leading courses on the Monadnock region of New Hampshire in ecology (Koning), archaeology (Goodby), and American studies (Harris). Each course approaches the region from a different disciplinary perspective, but as the essayists make clear, the students’ ultimate understanding of and connection to the specific place depends on practical cross-disciplinary inquiry.

Also in this section is “Interdisciplinary Teaching about the Adirondacks,” written by Ernest H. Williams, Patrick D. Reynolds, and Onno Oerlemans of Hamilton College. The Adirondacks course discussed in this essay is team taught, and as Williams discusses in some detail, the essayists describe it as both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, striving not only to examine the region from multiple perspectives but also to bridge those perspectives in order to reach a more complete and complex understanding of the region. As do the Franklin Pierce essayists, the authors of this essay write frankly about the obstacles to and in some cases undesirability of fully interdisciplinary study, and Williams’ section includes a concise but detailed discourse on how the authors imagine interdisciplinarity and how they seek to achieve it. The course, as they describe it, can be read as a metaphor for *Nature and Culture in the Northern Forest* as a whole. Oerlemans, a literature professor, writes that the Blue Line,



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delineating the boundary of Adirondack Park is “an arbitrary, entirely human construction. Its only reality is on maps, a clearly insipid attempt to frame and overlay an entirely imagined and necessarily fractured idea onto something itself inaccessible and probably unknowable.... And yet it does vaguely outline a place that possesses a distinct physical reality” (91), comprising a very specific and visible ecology. Students of the Adirondacks, then, must navigate between sometimes sweeping and vague cultural constructs of place on the one hand and very focused natural markers on the other—pulling them together, one hopes, into a coherent understanding of the region.

Navigating successfully between specific and general is in fact the greatest strength of the collection as a whole. The essays in “Teaching and Learning” consciously address means of relating the specific (the Northeast Forest region) to the general (nation; world; wider disciplinary concerns). In addition to the two essays already discussed, Jill Mudgett examines the history of how young people were taught to think about rural New England, and Kathleen Osgood Dana discusses the specificity of place in the poetry of Frost and the Sámi poet Nils-Aslak Valkeapää. In doing so, Dana argues explicitly for the grounding of the poetry in the poet’s “everyday reality,” rather than leaping straight to the universal symbols. Of Frost’s poetry, she writes, “while the basic symbolic meaning of the poem seems accessible to even the novice literary scholar, the actual physical and experiential sensation of open land and slow wheel ... are absent from their catalogue of experience and understanding” (62). In this essay, Dana uses that same emphasis on specificity of place in a comparative study of Valkeapää’s poetry, finding similarities in seemingly disparate poetries and places. Most importantly, she writes, both poets are fully grounded in their own particulars of place, such that a complete understanding of their poems requires a complete understanding of the place.

Much of the remainder of the collection turns to particularities of the landscape in order to develop that more complete understanding of the place. The “Encounters” section, which begins the volume, represents individuals’ forays into the forest itself, focusing on specific flora and fauna they find there. Terence D. Mosher, like Dana, connects Frost to his landscape, in this case through birdsong. Natalie Coe describes the devastating spread of Beech Bark Disease, situating in a sweep of history and geography a phenomenon that can only be understood by getting out into the woods. Timothy Stetter, in “Meeting the Twinflower,” most explicitly imagines his particular encounter as connecting to places beyond this region, writing “[p]erhaps the experience of twinflower cannot be separated from the experience of its place,” while also noting that when he first encountered it, he “made a connection to Thoreau, [John] Burroughs, and the other people, places, and stories that touch this miraculous plant” (25).

Similarly, the “Rethinking Place” essays connect specific figures or institutions of importance within the Northern Forest region to strands of thought and histories outside the region. Larry Anderson revisits Benton MacKaye’s early twentieth century “camp ethics,” an ideal rooted in the New England landscape but explicitly connected to patriotism and influential in national conservation movements. Daniel S. Malachuk argues for the recognition of the Northern Forest’s influence on William James, a philosopher whose grounding in this place is not generally acknowledged. Richard Paradis connects the Appalachian Mountain Club huts with alpine hiking huts in Scotland. Jim Warren, in “Living with the Woods,” uses Tom Wessels’ disturbance histories not to analyze the Northern Forest landscape, but turning it instead on the nature writers who interpreted it, specifically Thoreau and Burroughs. Each of these essays, in



their own ways, encourages us to rethink how we theorize this specific region and especially how we connect it to our ways of understanding region and nation more generally.

The final section returns to objects in nature. Like the essays in “Encounters,” the essays in “Nature as Commodity” focus on direct relationships between people and the landscape, though here the encounters do not come from trekking out into the woods, necessarily, but instead are mediated through products. Priscilla Paton leads off this section with “In Awe of the Body,” which reminds readers that though literature may call for bodily contact, such experiences are increasingly commodified and filtered, and the same efforts that seek to increase forays into the woods—here she mentions not only the camp roads but also the L. L. Bean catalog—quite often contribute to their destruction. “Claiming Maine,” by Lorianne DiSabato, picks up this thread in exploring Thoreau’s acquisitive, commodifying attitude in *The Maine Woods*, reminding readers that a writer so often considered “at home” in the wilderness approached it as a consumer. Matthew Bolinder turns to the contemporary consuming of Maine in “So Much Beauty Locked Up in It: Of Ecocriticism and Axe-Murder,” an essay that opens with an advertisement offering attractively hewn birch logs for sale as firewood, at a premium, with “ a portion of the proceeds [going] toward the protection of Maine forestland” (262). From here, Bolinder considers the ideology of utility in our understanding of the objects of a place. *Nature and Culture in the Northern Forest* culminates, then, with a reflection on ecocriticism itself—and the problems of ignoring the complexities of the construction of a place.

Pavel Cenkl has put together a volume of engaging and insightful essays that convey both a distinct sense of the specificities of the Northern Forest and an understanding of how the Northern Forest and the specific places within its boundaries connect to the larger world. The deftness with which the individual authors bridge multiple disciplines and connect local specifics to national or global histories and ideas is echoed in the structure of the collection as a whole. So many of these essays seek to focus on a specific trait or object, grounding their subject in this particular place, while making connections across space and disciplinary perspectives. Their successes in doing so are reinforced when the essays are read side by side, and readers can see those traits recurring through half a dozen specific, diverse lenses. *Nature and Culture in the Northern Forest* succeeds in clarifying readers’ understanding of this one region, as well as our understanding of this region’s significance to regional studies as a whole. It joins a small but growing body of recent books that are bringing Northeastern ecocriticism back to the forefront of regional studies.

--Rhonda Jenkins Armstrong, Augusta State University



White, Damian F., and Chris Wilbert, eds. *Technonatures: Environments, Spaces, and Places in the Twenty-first Century*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009.

Many postmodern theories see the self as "fluid, emergent, decentralized, multiplicitous, flexible, and ever in process" (Zuern vi). Postmodernism asks us to consider how we experience "being in the world" and to consider new ways of shaping that ever-in-process experience. Where modernism posited that the self remained stable and separate, postmodernism contends that the self cannot be constructed in isolation; in fact, there is no way to isolate ourselves from the world: we are always in, constructing, and being constructed by our environment. It is this postmodern sense of the world that the edited collection *Technonatures: Environments, Technologies, Spaces, and Places in the 21st Century* utilizes to expose the complexity of sociopolitical relationships in environmental politics. It begins with the premise that the current environmental movement is not having a great impact on our society because of a fundamental flaw at its core: our definition of "nature" remains a static and pastoral one, leading to what editors Damian F. White and Chris Wilbert term a "politics of limits" that "has significantly constrained the imaginative capacities to rethink a productive, progressive politics of the environment" (3). Drawing primarily on Haraway, Latour, LeFebvre, and Marx, *Technonatures* seeks to redefine our understanding of nature and ecocritical practice by looking at how they function in a capitalistic political economy.

In the introduction, "technonatures" are defined as worlds that are "technologically mediated, produced, enacted, and contested, and furthermore, that diverse peoples find themselves, or perceive themselves, as ever more *entangled* with things – that is, with technological, ecological, cultural, urban, and ecological networks and diverse hybrid materialities and non-human agencies" (6). White and Wilbert discuss the necessity of understanding political economy in order to formulate new theories of political ecology. They outline the basics of capitalism in the environmental movement, focusing on manufacturing, the development of the urban and the suburban, and how the "nature of the 'environment' is being contested, expanded, *and* rendered plural" (13). The implication is that technology has permeated the "natural" and that without new, more flexible definitions of nature and the environment, we will not make any progress towards reconciling the green left with the conservative, production/consumption-focused right.

Technonatures covers a wide variety of topics, from global systems of consumption, new ways in which to view cities and suburbs as living beings, how cell phone usage in the countryside changes our experience of "nature," to issues of agriculture and medical technology. Each author shows us different aspects of how technology creates, mediates, and enacts our understanding of the world. Timothy Luke coins the term "urbanatura" to describe the modern world, since he sees no clear boundary between "society" and "nature," and Erik Swyngedouw argues that because humans are a part of nature, there is absolutely nothing "unnatural" about manmade creations. One of the most interesting chapters was Julie Sze's "Boundaries and Border Wars: DES, Technology, and Environmental Justice." Sze expertly applies Haraway's cyborg metaphor to her analysis of DES (diethylstilbestrol), a man-made estrogen



that, for nearly forty years, was hailed as the solution for treating menopause, used as a “morning after” contraceptive, and given to livestock and chickens to fatten them and create more tender meat. In actuality, however, it was extremely toxic and caused multiple cancers and genital abnormalities. Sze takes an in-depth look at the “feedback loop” of DES, showing how technology, people, and the environment are intricately linked, and how “*female identity* itself was defined medically and socially through hormones” (131). As with the other authors, she warns us that boundaries are porous, and that new definitions are needed to understand these interconnected relationships. In the final chapter, Brian Milani proposes that the only way to regenerate “the natural earth” is through a major overhaul of both economic and social systems, and that the development of measures of qualitative value, rather than quantitative, is absolutely necessary in these post-industrial times.

While the collection does provide an excellent understanding of the complexity of political ecology, one fault might be that the message is the same from each of the authors, and there is quite a bit of overlap when discussing new ways in which to view urban and suburban areas. And while Haraway and Latour figure prominently in the collection, at times I felt like some of the authors didn’t fully understand the theories they were seeking to apply. Swyngedouw proposes that we view the city as a cyborg, and uses the metaphors of “circulation” and “metabolism” to describe the functions that take place within a city; however, he never moves beyond Haraway’s cyborg, so his conclusion is simply a restating of her theory. The other possible flaw is that the collection is very theory-heavy, and in several instances, a familiarity with the theorists cited is assumed, so while the text is advertised as being suitable for a wide audience, in actuality it is more appropriate for a graduate or upper-division undergraduate course in ecocriticism.

In a global environment, the flow of products, information, and interactions between people and objects is one that takes place across multiple spaces and times, and *Technonatures* really highlights the complexity of the relationships involved in that flow. While its overall message is not new to ecocriticism, its focus on political economy helps the reader understand the complexity of our social and economic structures, and why those structures must be taken into account in any politics of the environment.

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Works Cited

Zuern, John. “Online Lives: Introduction.” *Biography* 26.1 (Winter 2003): v-xxv.