



Fisher-Wirth, Ann, and Laura-Gray Street, eds. *The Eco-poetry Anthology*. San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2013.

It is the sheer heft of the anthology that is, at first, most striking: 80 historical poems (1850's–1950's) and 300 contemporary poems (1950's–present) represented by over 200 writers. Its 628 pages make a two-fold statement: eco-poetry has roots, and its growth at its outer-limits is exponential. In his introduction, Robert Hass foregrounds how the editors have “given us . . . their reading, sweeping across 150 years, of the ways American nature poetry developed toward an eco-poetics, toward the necessity of imagining a livable earth” (lxv).

As such, Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street fill a gap within ecocritical discourse by bringing forth a comprehensive anthology of eco-poems. These poems undergo what Snyder has called the “real work” of poetry: learning to dwell in language and on the earth—and in the vertiginous interactions between those spheres.

Within the vast collection, readers will find toxicity, urban environments, ethics, and politics. Readers will also find poems that cultivate an awe of the earth and a profound identification with streams and mountains, plants and animals, fire and wind. Readers will find ecophobia and ecophilia, trauma and tranquility, bioregional imagination as well as environmental and social injustices. Most crucially, readers will find poems that protest against, to use Fisher-Wirth's words, the “colossal failure of heart, will, and imagination” that hovers very close to the root of environmental crisis (xxxv, see also xxvii). The anthology becomes a collective protest against that failure from a gathering of today's and yesterday's poets.

And readers will find only a faint map. Aside from Robert Hass's contextualizing introduction and the editors' insightful prefaces, the anthology provides little more guidance. The historical section unfolds chronologically by the poet's birth year, while the contemporary section is arranged alphabetically. The editors also provide short biographies of the poets (578–606), but these biographies focus primarily upon geography, publications, and awards. What the editors foreground, therefore, are the poems on the page.

The lack of guidance could be seen as a weakness of the anthology. For the reader new to ecocritical discourse and/or to the evolution of poetry and poetics across one and a half centuries, the book may seem daunting. Many of the poets in the anthology are represented by only one poem, and it may be difficult to gain a sense of the poet's poetics that so often illuminates the work a poem accomplishes.

And yet, the lack of guidance is also the anthology's strength. Rather than reading through a cultivated garden, the reader meanders through a wilderness. Synergetic connections emerge through happenstance juxtaposition. As the editors foreground, the anthology models the content: “like ecological entities—species, watersheds, habitats, and so on—the categories that eco-poems fall into are overlapping, various, discontinuous, and permeable.” One poem “may participate in multiple categories” (xxx), and therefore thematic groupings ultimately unravel. In Elizabeth Bishop's “The Moose,” for instance, readers witness multiple environments (wilderness, pastoral,

technological) as well as human-animal encounters and the inklings of a toxic consciousness in a way that makes the poem difficult to place (101–106). Therefore, any thematic sections, headings, explanations, or “guidance” would impose orderings and mappings that can detract from a reader actually reading the poem aloud, lingering in the materiality of language both on the page and performed by the body, and, as Street suggests, finding a “way of thinking within and through” the interrelated facets of the eco-poem (xxxviii).

The point is not necessarily to acquire knowledge about ecopoetics—although that happens; rather it is to experience new ways-of-being in language and on the earth. Fisher-Wirth, drawing on William Carlos Williams, argues that ecopoems have “the power to move” us and the world, “to break through our dulled disregard, our carelessness, our despair, reawakening our sense of the vitality and beauty of nature.” She continues, “With that awareness, let us pledge to take actions that will preserve it” (xxxv). The anthology, indeed, contains what William Rueckert called the “stored energy” within a poem—energy waiting to be unleashed through communities of readers and writers (108). Energy that has the “power to move.” The editors have collected the energy. Now it is time for readers to realize its kinetic potential.

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Works Cited

Rueckert, William. “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.” *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, 105–123. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1996. Print