



Redstart: An Ecological Poetics

Forrest Gander, John Kinsella

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The damage humans have perpetrated on our environment has certainly affected a poet's means and material. But can poetry be ecological? Can it display or be invested with values that acknowledge the economy of interrelationship between the human and the nonhuman realms? Aside from issues of theme and reference, how might syntax, line break, or the shape of the poem on the page express an ecological ethics?

To answer these questions, poets Forrest Gander and John Kinsella offer an experiment, a collaborative volume of prose and poetry that investigates—both thematically and formally—the relationship between nature and culture, language and perception. They ask whether, in an age of globalization, industrialization, and rapid human population growth, an ethnocentric view of human beings as a species independent from others underpins our exploitation of natural resources. Does the disease of Western subjectivity constitute an element of the aesthetics that undermine poetic resistance to the killing of the land? Why does “the land” have to give something back to the writer?

This innovative volume speaks to all people wanting to understand how artistic and critical endeavors can enrich, rather than impoverish, the imperiled world around us.

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Derek says

The long sequence "Redstart" ranges across poetic registers and is sometimes provocative, as is Kinsella's essay "The Movements of Yellow-Ranged Thornbills: Twittering Machines." But the writers too often feel compelled to rehearse truisms of language-oriented poetics and postmodern theories of subjectivity, all repackaged as ecocriticism.

steffi says

Good, especially the essays. I liked the "idea" of the poetry more than I liked the poems themselves, though I enjoyed reading them. If you want to read further about ecological poetics, read the poetry/essays of Tim Lilburn and Don Mckay.

Paula says

I like the idea of writing from a place or about a place as opposed to a landscape (which always seems to reference the I as subject-focal point, the landscape as object or field for the I's emotions, aesthetics, etc). Ecopoetics seems to acknowledge place & the species that inhabit that place as subjects entire onto themselves. "Nature" is the word coined to refer to all that isn't human, setting the human species apart. It's currently popular to insist that humans are part of nature, although that is by definition not possible. I think Gander & Kinsella come closer to describing a working relationship between our species & the rest of what constitutes the world we inhabit. Their argument is complex, however, & I haven't as yet completely absorbed it. I enjoyed the back and forth of the poetry, two poets writing from very different locations (Kinsella-Australia; Gander-various American locations). I perhaps appreciated the essays even more.
