

**Lisa Ottum and Seth T. Reno, eds, *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics: Affect and Ecology in the Nineteenth Century*. Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2016. Pp. 253. \$40. ISBN 9781611688955.**

This diverse collection of essays reconsiders major aspects of Romanticism and Wordsworth in relation to affect and ecology. Contributors, including William Stroup, Ashton Nichols, and Amanpal Garcha, argue for the constructive role that negative feelings, such as embarrassment, fear, doubt and indecision, play in the formation of ecological thinking. Stroup warns that the representation of nature in poetry becomes so mediated that it fails to call for urgent ecological action. He argues that while a more hands-on use of poetic language, for example, a statement such as ‘we kill the albatross every day’ (74), might lack a polite distance between readers and a suffering nature, it would stand a better chance of provoking positive ecological action

In chapter 6, for instance, Ashton Nichols avows that the mariner’s fear of the albatross, Frankenstein’s fear that motivates his creation of the Creature, and Thoreau’s expressions of fear about an ambivalent nature in *Walden* (1854), are all instances of an internal ‘existential fear’ (155). One remedy to this fear, Nicholas posits, is to lose one’s identity in the vastness of nature and to accept the temporality of human consciousness and its participation, through love, in the finite purposefulness of nature of which we are all a part.

Contesting the dominant culture of contemporary efficient and market-driven decision-making, chapter 8 by Amanpal Garcha speaks in defence of the states of hesitation and doubt which, he argues, cause one to think twice before choosing against the environment. Garcha identifies the Wordsworthian notion of ‘infinite options’ (189) as an answer to the contemporary anguish of choosing, and sees true freedom and delight in the poet’s abundance of countless ‘dwellings’, ‘vales’, ‘groves’, and ‘streams’ (ll.11-13, Book 1, *The Prelude*).

This collection also addresses the issue of genre and mediation. Clare A. Simmons, in her contribution in chapter 7, questions the effectiveness of certain genres and ideals, particularly in relation to the gothic and the picturesque in George Crabbe’s *The Borough* (1810), to represent nature realistically and inspire ecological thinking. This is because, Simmons contends, the gothic often draws attention to the romance featured and requires the narrative to be drawn to a moral close, and the picturesque keeps landscape at an artistic distance to leave those suffering individuals in nature diminished in an idealised, but otherwise generalised, depiction of the natural world.

Lisa Ottum in chapter 9 casts doubt upon the confidence placed in a Rousseauian first-hand experience of environmental education. She advocates what can be called ‘eco-reading’, where not only what we read, but also how we read, is important; before being beneficial to ecology, literary genres first have to be beneficial to what Richard Louv terms ‘the ecology of the imagination’ (218).

Similarly, in chapter 4, Sarah Weiger suggests that Romantic literary genres are more permanent forms to ‘embody’ the ‘ephemerality’ (110) of nature (such as that of a hummingbird), which may otherwise become the lifeless specimens possessed by Romantic collectors. For Weiger, science does not eradicate transcendence but establishes a material ground for it. Consequently, she discovers an ‘unearthly’ (111) and revelatory side of nature in the otherwise matter-of-fact and down-to-earth descriptions of nature by Gilbert White and William and Dorothy Wordsworth.

Seth Reno, Kurt Fosso, and Allison Dushane offer novel definitions of ‘[a] motion and a spirit’ (l.103) in ‘Tintern Abbey’ (1798). Their respective readings of Wordsworth resist the tendency of ‘vitalists’ to assign metaphysical significance to the notion of ‘spirit’. These interpretations by Reno, Fosso, and Dushane are grounded in the material world and give

substance to the traditionally conceived of transcendent, immaterial, 'spirit'. Reno defines '[a] motion and a spirit' as the scientific truths that underlie all living things. He argues that despite moments of transcendence, Wordsworth's poem advocates a sense of the bodily, which encompasses both the heart and the mind, located in a physical place that fosters both intellectual activity and the formation of love.

In chapter 3, Fosso, for his part, establishes a purely material ground for the '*moral life*' (83) exhibited in 'Tintern Abbey'. Reading in conjunction with Erasmus Darwin's *Zoonomia*, Fosso suggests the 'spirit of animation' (83), which gives energy to activities such as the beating of the heart in the human body, is most readily equated with Wordsworth's sense of 'motion' and 'spirit'.

Dushane does not rid the 'motion' and the 'spirit' of their transcendent implications, but suggests an indwelling manifested through beings human and non-human, as well as living matter. Such 'visionary materialism' (128), Dushane claims, ushers the whole of existence into a more inter-connected and harmonious ecosystem through which each plays a part and contributes to the existence of others.

By explaining how writing of the period is expressive of an 'ecophilia, a feeling of unconditional love for everything that exists in the place we call "home", both living and nonliving' (234), this collection makes a strong and credible case for resisting symbolic interpretations of Romantic nature in a favour of a more ecologically sensitive and materially grounded response to the nature of Romanticism.

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