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Françoise Besson, *Ecology and Literatures in English: Writing to Save the Planet* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 520 pp.

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In this sweeping exploration of environmental literature, Françoise Besson has gathered a lifetime of meditations on better ways of living with more-than-human nature. *Ecology and Literatures in English* offers reflections garnered over decades of reading. Venturing into English-speaking territories around the world and adopting perspectives both dominant and indigenous, Besson's forages from a variety of genres. Her work extends to French territories (including French popular music), and rhizomatically connects ecopoetic, philosophical, ethical, political, and ecological grounds. Spanning 520 pages, this flowing study is not so much about how literature might "save the planet"—as the subtitle may suggest—but rather, about how it can rebuild connections with the living world. In consequence, Besson argues literature can contribute to curtailing the damage humans have been inflicting upon the Earth and upon our many, precious companion species. The stories and episodes Françoise Besson has gleaned to share with her readers are all about interconnections. "Like cairns placed in [the] paper path" traced by her book, Besson explains, these texts renew our sense of wonder. They inspire feelings of love, and prompt us to reconsider what it might mean to be human. Besson's ecocritical reflections and close ecopoetic readings offer gentle guidance through texts that encourage humility, inviting us to reign in modern hubris and appetite. These texts, Besson demonstrates, intimate how we must own up to our responsibilities toward nonhuman nature—itsself involved in making kin and ecopoetics.

In her Foreword, Françoise Besson sets the tone of her ecoliterary venture: "This book," she writes, "mingles literary texts, academic references and personal experiences without any separation, as in a meadow there is no separation between the soil where the grass grows, the various species of flowers, trees, insects and other animals and the water allowing everything to live." From the outset, a sense of the scholar's own poetry and philosophical reveries seeps through. Titled "The Butterfly, the Rhododendron and the Star," the preface scales across vegetal, animal, and elemental realities, pinpointing sources of wonder along the way. This "is not a book," warns Besson, "but rather a walking forest, a forest in disguise, which tries to attack, in a peaceful way, the castle of growing, growing at any price, which seems to be gradually murdering Gaïa." In her introduction, "Can Literature Save the Earth?" Besson tackles the provocative statement that forms the subtitle of her book—no, not a book, but a walking forest! She situates her endeavor

within earlier discussions on the notion of “saving” the planet by Rebecca Solnit and Scott Slovic. In addition to the hope that environmental literature can bring about wholesome changes, Besson defends working toward a world that “is still to be reinvented.” Following the preface, the book is then divided into five parts, comprising 18 chapters altogether, and rounded out by a short conclusion.

Part 1, “Literary Genres as Environmental Action,” embarks on a journey from within the Shakespeare Gardens inspired by the playwright’s work. Besson provides evidence of how drama can affect botany. The next chapter retraces how Romanticism has paved the way for ecology. The following and much longer chapter explores the vital use of ecological poetry and ecopoetics, which is perceived as a creative and open artistic process resting on the invention of new principles and the transformation of pre-existing ones. As with most of Besson’s book, this chapter strolls from one Anglophone place to another, from one moment in time to another, crisscrossing various genres. The chapter links ecopoetics with ecological disaster, nuclear poisoning, women mutilated by breast cancer, restoration, animal presences, and awareness of beauty. Moving through the works of poets and essayists drawing from naturalist knowledge, Besson eventually calls upon indigenous writers such as Joy Harjo, N. Scott Momaday, and Niyi Osundare. She thus offers a few glimpses into non-European ecopoetics, highlighting how these re-entangle humans’ wounds, consciousness, dances, songs, and voices with those of the earth. Chapters 4 and 5, respectively, read a number of songs as ecoliterature, and several detective novels as signaling “ecological warning.”

Part 2 begins with a substantial chapter that delves into the perception of biodiversity as expressed in travel writing and mountaineering accounts—two genres that Françoise Besson has specialized in. Taking observations of vegetal life as its starting point, this chapter focuses on the tiny, then on botanical lists and epiphanies of the natural world through travel writing. Besson also scrutinizes some instances where the loss of biodiversity is mapped out in travel books. These, she shows, furthermore document the marks on the land left by colonization. Chapter 7 then focuses on an ecopoetics of color, and chapter 8 on comics as a medium for “ecological allegory.” All three chapters examine ecopoetic texts through the lens of visual imagination.

Part 3 studies environmental literature in the light of ecological struggles in various parts of the world. The first two chapters deal with deforestation issues and water resources. The third chapter touches upon science fiction and the fantastic in relationship with the overexploitation and spoiling of lands. The last chapter in this part braids thoughts on Aboriginal and Native American literatures, dealing with reciprocity and with a spiritual connection to other-than-human nature.

Wavering between philosophical, literary, spiritual, scientific, and ethical considerations, Part 5 relays many of the concerns dear to Françoise Besson when it comes to “critters.” Chapter 13 gleans various thoughts on human-animal connections and on matters of responsibility as tackled via literary texts. Chapter 14 focuses more specifically on children’s books that kindle an ethics of care, rendering their readership sensitive to animal perspectives and existences. Chapter 15 then takes up one of Besson’s central claims throughout this book—that animals show humans “the way.” This

worldview that is shared by many non-Western cultures, who also look to plants as guides. Unsurprisingly, the three sections in this fifth part foreground many non-European visions and tales, here connected with scientific and ethological understandings of animal lives and behaviors.

Part 5 surveys a literature of resistance. Chapter 16 moves through some of the ways contemporary theater has brought environmental issues to the stage. Chapter 17 then interweaves reflections on “Native languages,” the voices of nature, and an eco-poetics of resistance. Chapter 18 broaches various texts (and paintings) from all over the world, which arise in response to violence inflicted upon humans, upon lands, and upon more-than-human nature.

As a conclusion to this spiritually uplifting, sensitive collection of meditations that make the case for an eco-poetics of resistance and healing, Françoise Besson envisions “literary human voices as the translators of nonhuman voices.” As writers, poets, and artists take in the wonder and value of the more-than-human world, and as they watch carefully and follow animal and vegetal ways, they too in turn “show us the way to our sense of responsibility and action.” Sauntering through a planetary, eco-poetic garden-forest, Françoise Besson joins the chorus of those writing of their travels in the hope that readers might respond with more compassion and care for the beauty of life on Earth. As Besson puts it, “Books are letters sent to the world to echo the nonhuman world.” If some readers might feel frustrated by the author’s tendency to merely touch upon some of the complexities in the ideas, concepts, works of art or ecological realities it ventures into, the book stays true to Besson’s initial intention. Indeed, Françoise Besson writes the way a guide might take you on a walk, leading her readers on connecting paths through a billowing, planetary forest, calling their attention to the carefully balanced cairns others have built along the way.

In line with the resounding sense of humility, gratitude, generosity, and interdependence at the heart of Françoise Besson’s writing, the book closes with six and a half pages of “acknowledgements,” delicately paying tribute to the many students, friends, relatives, other-than-human companions, writers, artists, scholars, academic institutions and associations, and to many thinkers and beings who have contributed to revealing “life as a gift, a wonder and a fight.”