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David Farrier, *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones and Extinction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 164 pp.

Matthew Griffiths, *The New Poetics of Climate Change: Modernist Aesthetics for a Warming World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 211 pp.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37536/ecoazona.2021.12.2.4369>



On 17 May 2019, *The Guardian* announced changes to its style guide to “introduce terms that more accurately describe the environmental crises facing the world” (Carrington). According to Editor-in-Chief Katharine Viner, “The phrase ‘climate change’ [...] sounds rather passive and gentle when what scientists are talking about is a catastrophe for humanity.” Henceforth, *The Guardian* would therefore opt for “climate emergency, crisis or breakdown” in lieu of “climate change” and instead of “global warming” would use the term “global heating.” The new language is part of *The Guardian*’s ongoing efforts to increase public awareness and understanding of the severity of anthropogenic climate change, which, in our post-400 ppm world, poses an immediate threat to the continuance of our own and many other species.

Attention to language and precise wording lies at the heart of many vocations, not only climate science and journalism but also, of course, poetry. Two recent ecocritical books—David Farrier’s *Anthropocene Poetics* and Matthew Griffiths’s *The New Poetics of Climate Change*—address the intersection of poetry and environmental crisis, exploring how poetry can enact tensions that both call into question and help concretize the provocations and complexities of our times.

David Farrier’s *Anthropocene Poetics* is a small and weighty book that opens with a definition and brief discussion of the term “Anthropocene” that, over the past two decades, has risen to prominence as the term for an era in which our shifting human identity requires us to “think differently about the poem” (5). As the book’s title suggests, questions about deep time are central to the Anthropocene, which has profoundly unsettled human notions of time; while on one hand “our dependence on fossil fuels, rare earth minerals, and plastics puts us in intimate contact with far-distant pasts,” on the other, the “ruptures that these dependencies have created—such as changes in atmospheric, soil, and oceanic chemistry and the depletion of biodiversity—also highlight our intimate relationship with the very deep future” (6). Farrier argues that the reconstruction of the earth in service of “our desires and priorities” necessitates adjusting not only “our perception of deep time,” but also “our relation to it” (7).

Deep time is a unifying thread throughout the book but forms the central topic of the first of the book's three chapters, each of which take up one of three "rubrics for understanding environmental crisis in the humanities" (8). Chapter one examines the concept of *thick time*, here defined as the capacity of the lyric to collapse deep time into a digestible representation that contains a lively awareness of multiple temporalities. Here Farrier explores the work of Elizabeth Bishop, whose figurings of slow time and geologic intimacies have "much to offer [...] to a study of Anthropocene poetics," (23) and Seamus Heaney's poetic encounters with geology. The second chapter examines "sacrifice zones," specifically the Plantationocene pine plantations of Philip Larkin's poetry and the "eclectic mix of registers" in Evelyn Reilly's *Styrofoam*, which probes at plastic's "volatile, unstable materiality" (74).

The third and final chapter centres on Donna Haraway's "more playful and multispecies-focused Chthulucene" (Farrier 9) which asserts that "cultivating a sense of kinship with multispecies familiars is the most pressing obligation in an era of hemorrhaging biodiversity" (89). It explores "a range of literary figures that can provide us with shapes for thinking about what a *poetics* of kin-making might look like" (90). Here, Farrier considers how such familiar literary devices as metaphor, apostrophe, and citation "can provide frameworks for thinking about an intentional turn toward the nonhuman life that is also a turn back to the (newly strange) self" (91). Specifically, he centres on extinction that "perhaps more than any other environmental crisis [...] pitches us into deep time: into awareness of the richness of our inheritance from the deep past, and the depleted legacy we will leave to the deep future" (92).

These chapters consider both poets familiar to ecocritics and those whose work has yet to be thoroughly examined from an ecocritical perspective. In all cases, Farrier's approach is original, stimulating and highly readable. Perhaps most compelling is the book's central argument that poetry *means differently* as a result of the Anthropocene; in these difficult times, meaning must be reconfigured and poetry of all kinds figures prominently in this process. In enabling "the intrusion of other times and places in the given moment," lyric poetry has the capacity "to draw vastly distant temporalities within the compass of intimate experience" and in doing so can show us that "geologic intimacy is a condition of being human" (127). At the same time that relationships with deep time implicate us "in relations of violence," poets call on us to establish new relationships—"collaborative rather than exploitative"—with the species around us. The making and remaking of meaning, Farrier concludes, is central to life, which is itself "an ongoing process of multispecies *poesis*" (128).

Like Farrier, Matthew Griffiths contends that the climatic instability of our contemporary world—and the questions it raises and civilizational uncertainty that it portends—not only demands new approaches to poetry, but also highlights a new role for poetry in helping us grapple with uncertainty and change. The book focuses on the poetic genre it deems most suited to the task, i.e., Modernist poetry of the early- to mid-twentieth century, and in particular the works of Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, Basil Bunting and David Jones. These poets all lived through a period of profound social and artistic upheaval, and their strategies for making sense of change "make them distinctively

valuable to the comprehension of climate change” (30). Griffiths argues that several particular features of Modernist poetry, particularly “ironies of representation and a resistance to received ideas of ‘Nature’; transnational or global scales; hybridization of natural change with cultural and social...change...; a new problematics of environmental selfhood; [and] language’s vexed attempt to engage with the world and, reflexively, with its own materialism” (30) make it particularly suited to our troubled times.

While chapters one through five offer insightful discussions on the Modernist poets under consideration, I felt that *New Poetics* truly finds its stride in its final chapter, “The Poems of Our Climate Change,” which is dedicated to poems produced since the emergence of climate science that take up climate change as their central concern. To highlight one example, Griffiths touches on the series of twenty-one poems on climate change, overseen by then-UK Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy, “that appeared on the *Guardian’s* website in the months leading up to COP21” (158). Griffiths is critical of this and similar poetic projects that directly address climate change; in “making available audio of the poems as read by well-known actors, with the option of viewing the text next to portraits of the performers” and choosing “established contemporary poets” he notes that “the project is mainstream in its aim” and is “largely more conventional than experimental as a result.” Instead, he favours contemporary poets that follow in the Modernist vein of “refusing to be absolute or definitive” and instead articulating the “uncertainty” that accompanies the climate crisis (154).

The poetry in the vein emphasized in *New Poetics* opens important avenues for grappling with humanity’s place in an unstable and increasingly unpredictable world in which the boundary between nature and culture must increasingly be called into question. *New Poetics* makes an important contribution in this regard. At the same time, the book’s insistence on the value of experimental, unconventional and challenging Modernist poetry to the exclusion of other literary forms—including those with broad popular appeal—is not always convincing. For example, the book opens with a lengthy critique of Andrew Motion’s climate poem “The Sorcerer’s Mirror” commissioned as part of the *Guardian’s* 10:10 Climate Change series. The poem is criticized for its “outdated” and “pastoralist” aesthetic, which allegedly is insufficient to unsettle received notions of the environment and our place in it. Apart from this questionable claim (other scholars have argued that lyric poetry plays a similar role to that ascribed solely to Modernist poetry in this volume), I couldn’t help feeling that Motion’s poem was unfairly represented in the critiques of it that surfaced throughout the book. Contrary to implying that “‘getting outside’ would only work if we could go to the calving face of the [arctic] ice itself” as Griffiths claims (4), Motion makes clear that the arctic ice and other climate-damaged landscapes are symbolically present in his small, flooded corner of London:

Already my patch of lawn
is awash, and when I look from my shelter down
to the stippled surface, it opens like the miraculous
O of a sorcerer’s mirror. *Here* are the rising tides
overflowing their slack estuaries and river basins,
the Arctic shore, Shanghai, Florida and Alaska.
Here are the baffled species taking to high ground,

the already famously lonely polar bear and caribou. (Motion; my emphasis)

Through the “sorcerer’s mirror” of his lawn, Motion sees the global calamity and sense of human responsibility that both extend from and affect his backyard (and by extension our own) which is not removed from world events but is very much part of them. While repeated critiques of Motion’s occupy considerable space in the book, the other climate poems in the Guardian’s 10:10 series—including those by literary heavyweights Kathleen Jamie, Margaret Atwood, Alice Oswald, and Carol Rumens—aren’t mentioned in *New Poetics* at all.

As Farrier argues, “the environmental crisis is also a crisis of meaning” (4). *The Guardian’s* conscientious discussion of its choice of terms makes clear that how we articulate the environmental crises of our times, how we make meaning of them through language, is fundamentally important. Language can clarify or obfuscate humanity’s shifting relationship with the world around us and the gravity of our current situation. As both Farrier and Griffiths agree, the climate and environmental breakdown of the Anthropocene require us to revisit the very ways in which we make meaning, including our understanding of what poetry is and what it does. Importantly, regardless of how we think about or frame them, contemporary environmental crises are not merely ideas, they are material realities with devastating consequences for life on our planet. As these books make clear, how we talk about the Anthropocene matters. What we do about it matters even more.

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