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[Review of] Encyclopedia of the Environment in American Literature

Jennifer A. Bartlett

University of Kentucky, jen.bartlett@uky.edu

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Encyclopedia of the Environment in American Literature.

Edited by Geoff Hamilton and Brian Jones. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013. 350 p. Acid free \$75 (ISBN: 978-0-7864-6541-5). E-book available (978-1-4766-0053-6), call for pricing.

Environmental and ecocritical theory, once small specializations in literary criticism, have enjoyed increased popularity over the past few years. The increasingly multidisciplinary nature of environmental literary studies encompasses science, history, politics, and art as well as literature, and has sparked new approaches to environmental literary research.

This encyclopedia, while it includes seminal environmental writings that readers might find in standard texts such as *The Norton Book of Nature Writing* (Norton, 2002), attempts to address the increasingly far-reaching scope of literary ecocriticism. Its focus is not American nature writing *per se*, but on those authors whose works have had a historical influence on perspectives about the American environment and landscape. As the editors state, “This is an encyclopedia of the environment, imagined and revealed in literature, not of literature on or about the environment” (1). Thus, the reader will find profiles of canonical writers such as Rachel Carson, John Muir, and Henry David Thoreau alongside that of contemporaries including Michael Crichton, Barbara Kingsolver and Al Gore. However, the book also offers unexpected authors. For instance, the eighteenth-century theologian Jonathan Edwards, best known for his sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” also posited that observation of nature could lead to greater understanding of God’s purpose for the world.

Individual author entries, arranged alphabetically, are followed by short discussions of the authors’ most influential and representative works, and span five centuries of fiction, nonfiction, oral accounts and poetry, from early Native American creation myths to nineteenth-century Transcendentalism to science fiction. Scientific works are not included. Interspersed with the author entries are essays on general themes and topics such as “American Naturalism and Environment,” “The Conservation Movement,” “American Pastoral,” and “Ideologies: Manifest Destiny, the American Dream, and the Land of Opportunity.” All author and themed entries offer concise and useful bibliographies.

Although individual authors are easy to find, more cross-referencing of themes either in the index or the entries themselves would be useful. For example, a reader might expect an entry on “Native Americans” or “Indians” in the index, given the influence of early Native American creation stories and belief systems on American nature writing (not to mention contemporary Native American writers such as N. Scott Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko). Instead, a reader needs a bit of luck and persistence to find entries including the

“Iroquois Creation Story” from *Sketches of the Ancient History of the Six Nations* and Bernd Peyer’s *The Elders Wrote*. In addition to a more complete index, the volume’s usefulness as a reference work would be improved by a table of contents and a chronology. The reader might also wish for a list of the encyclopedia’s contributors and their affiliations.

Despite these technical shortcomings, the book is well-written and thoroughly researched. Casual readers and serious researchers alike will certainly find interesting authors, works, and topics to pursue. Although many general environmental encyclopedias include entries on American authors and works, this encyclopedia’s targeted focus is a needed addition to the genre. It is a useful supplement to current introductory ecocritical guides such as *Teaching North American Environmental Literature* (Modern Language Association, 2008), Timothy Clark’s *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Glotfelty and Fromm’s *The Ecocriticism Reader* (University of Georgia Press, 1996), and is recommended for public and academic libraries.—Jennifer A. Bartlett, *Head of Reference Services, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington, Kentucky*