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Elin Kelsey, *Hope Matters: Why Changing the Way We Think is Critical to Solving the Environmental Crisis*. (Vancouver/Berkeley: Greystone Books, 2020), Kindle, approx. 228 pp.

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Upon first examination, an insistence on doom, gloom, or catastrophe in (almost) all environmental matters seems a *fait accompli*. In her book *Hope Matters* (2020), Elin Kelsey takes up the baton from Rebecca Solnit's *Hope in the Dark* (2005). Solnit took up this issue in an attempt to embrace uncertainty rather than fear it. Kelsey is an accomplished U.S. scientist and conservation biologist, and an award-winning environmental writer, who publishes successful children's and young-adult literature. Her work centers on questions of hope and resilience in the context of environmental changes. To encourage others to share their success in marine biology, she coined the Twitter hashtag #OceanOptimism. Kelsey argues that there is plenty of support for hope as a better mindset through which to approach environmental aspects and narratives. *Hope Matters* takes up that concern. She points out the many detrimental effects of all-pervasive crisis talk, catastrophe journalism, and disaster pedagogy:

> The vast scale, complexity, urgency, and destructive power of biodiversity loss, climate change, and countless other issues are real. Yet assuming a fatalistic perspective and positioning hopelessness as a foregone conclusion is not reality. It is a mindset, and it's a widespread and debilitating one. It not only undermines positive change, it squashes the belief that anything good could possibly happen. (Kelsey 317–374)

Kelsey's arguments show to what extent the perception of environmental issues suffers from problematic mindsets, language use, and narratives. People have been so enthralled by catastrophe that they cannot bring themselves to project a more optimistic, desirable vision for a future in which they also have agency. Reasons for environmentalists' persistent reluctance to fully embrace hope-and-success stories may lie in the fear of further inciting destruction by offering an excuse for complacency or shirking one's responsibilities.

In her opening chapters, Kelsey lays the foundation for working toward a more positive, hopeful mindset, while the later chapters of the book dive into concrete details on how to find solutions, or how people can become more active environmental agents. Kelsey argues, "By focusing our attention so heavily on what's broken, we are reinforcing a starting-line fallacy that makes it feel as if nothing useful has ever been accomplished and that all the hard work lies ahead" (113–116). The book makes the case for optimistic, resilient, diversified, and action-oriented mindsets that collate and present conclusive evidence from different disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, and philosophy. By

leaving behind despair or helplessness, readers could develop greater awareness for positive achievements that have an empowering, motivating, and almost "contagious" effect (593) on other people and communities.

Too often, learners associate environmental change with deep fear, rage, frustration, or desperation. This exposes just how dysfunctional communication about the environment has become: most mass media—yet also political motions and scientific findings—persistently confront people with negativity, behavioral reproaches, and moralistic questions. Kelsey's first chapter, therefore, offers evidence and explanations of how people's thoughts, attention, and perceptions shape their lives. Kelsey explores psychology and human-behavior studies in establishing the basis for a discussion on hope and despair (Chapter 1). Human psycho-emotional protective mechanisms function in such a way that people are pushed to desensitize themselves or outright deny (environmental) problems when relentlessly exposed to seemingly impossible challenges. Kelsey further explores the destructiveness of doom-and-gloom stories (Chapter 2). Although strong emotions may motivate action in the short term, they wear off quickly and leave behind bitterness. With this knowledge in mind, the proliferation of dystopian visions in our culture (and in school curricula and teaching materials) seems extraordinarily disconcerting. Therefore, Kelsey follows with assertions about the power of positive mindsets (Chapter 3). She shows that hope can nourish a sense of self-effectiveness rather than overpowering paralysis, thereby promoting individual agency as well as communal and societal changes. The recent surge of environmental activist movements across the globe must be seen as a case in point. The hope invoked here is not of the spiritual, helpless kind; instead, its positivity creates a "meaningful present" (880). Kelsey invokes a concept of hope that directs people toward their larger goals, despite seemingly insurmountable challenges—a hope that restores one's value system and sense of community. Where the more traditional doom-and-gloom stories trigger anxiety and apathy, Kelsey demonstrates that hope-and-success stories can spread motivation, innovative narratives, and a sense of agency and activism. Yet, as Kelsey reminds us, at the same time, hope requires that people give up denial and "look truth in the eye" (898), which may seem particularly challenging in a historical moment like ours.

Kelsey explores the ways we tell stories about the environment, and she explains the ways in which gruesome metaphorical or iconographic images of environmental destruction can normalize despair (Chapter 4). Retelling the same doom-and-gloom stories through the dominant obsession with dystopian narratives or alarmist, anxiety-mongering cultural products motivates taking a narrow perspective on hopelessness. Kelsey insists that this lopsidedness of popular culture must be counteracted by a greater diversity of arguments, examples, and multi-perspectival narratives.

Many of the book arguments touch upon the question of scale. Profound changes to the environment are difficult to perceive, as they often occur over long periods or in restricted areas or populations. Understanding, contextualizing, and narrating these changes is a greater challenge, yet Kelsey succeeds impressively. The book is full of examples that beautifully illustrate significant changes and build enthusiasm for Kelsey's turn towards the hopeful. Her work moreover argues that the digital transformation can

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be put to positive use by connecting it with the environmental movement: digital apps allow for detailed observation of individual animals, thereby invigorating environmental protection. Kelsey also discusses research by indigenous groups and reliance on indigenous epistemologies, as well as innovations to international legal systems—for example, on behalf of non-human agents in the environment. Relying on other, more diverse perspectives on environmental issues would drive home the need for further exploration of biodiversity and the manifold entanglements of humankind with all other life forms, including the symbiotic bacteria in and on our bodies. This may include understanding forms of existence, previously overlooked, as active agents in this great web of being (Chapters 5 and 6). The growing demand for mindfulness and compassion, not only within human relationships but also within environmental movements, could help overcome societies' reluctance to adapt to environmental changes more swiftly and underscore the comprehensive cultural changes needed (Chapter 7). Several trends are sketched out that could ring in a new era of environmental thought. They include resorting to new (vegan) food supplies, managing waste or plastics differently, revamping transportation infrastructure, and further greening and re-wilding neighborhoods.

I cannot help but notice that many of Kelsey's concrete suggestions have recourse to technological fixes after all. Yet, I reckon that storytellers, journalists, humanities researchers, and, most importantly, educators and schoolteachers—the lens through which I have read this book—will have to bear the brunt of such work of change, inciting more positive, forward-looking, and activist mindsets, and encouraging learners to build their own hopeful, active lives and careers. As one of the many suggestions for accomplishing this, Kelsey refers to the rise of *solutions journalism* (2352), a line of reporting that gives attention to environmental success stories. Would it not be helpful to expand that notion to teaching and education? What would that look like? The task ahead, it seems to me, is for educators to become positive agents in the quest to find solutions to environmental problems, particularly when it comes to the language we use or the stories we tell about the environment and ourselves.

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