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Bénédictte Meillon, *Eco poetics of Reenchantment: Liminal Realism and Poetic Echoes of the Earth* (Lexington Books, 2023), 386 pp.

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For Bénédictte Meillon, eco poetic “reenchantment” is not, or not only, an act of resistance to Weberian “disenchantment” (*Entzauberung*, lit. “de-magic-ation,” the stripping away of caprice and wonder from the world by rationalization). It is, she insists, fundamental to generative critical practice in the twilight of the Anthropocene. Note the emphasis on *practice*: one of the primary accomplishments of Meillon’s book is its repeated call to literary scholars to do more than diagnose our disenchanted relations with the more-than-human world, or propose remedies based on the authors and texts we decipher. We must, Meillon demonstrates, practice our own reenchantments by way of the plurality of our individual readings. “What I am interested in,” she writes, “is an eco poetics that sheds light on the entanglements between matter, mind, and discourse. [...] The eco poetics I mobilize explores texts that reveal *immanence* in a world that is very much *here and now*” (9; emphasis in original). That is, in both the general time and place of our collective ecological crisis and the immediacies of our subjective encounters with texts sensitive to its music.

“Today’s prose eco poets,” Meillon writes, “conscientiously work as bioregional mediators of the flesh of the world in different places, as translators of its polyphonic song, and, in turn, as co-composers of the symphonies of the Earth that may flesh out the scientific worldviews available elsewhere” (117). And this, the book proposes, the critic may also do: *eco poetic* critical “reenchantment”—Meillon often renders this as “reen-*chant*-ment”—resonates between the writer’s work and the critic’s traversal of expressive matter (narrative and language) mobilized by the work. (Mobilized, not merely *represented* by it, as that would limit its *biomimetic* effects and weaken its pull on the “wild music” of the reader’s bodymind.) In that liminal, performative space, the critic may be liberated also to seek her personal experiences of immanence.¹

Meillon’s critical-theoretical influences are wide-ranging: bio semiotics (Wendy Wheeler), ecophenomenology (David Abram, Maurice Merleau-Ponty), feminist spirituality (Judith Plaskow, Carol P. Christ), Indigenous knowledge traditions (Paula Gunn Allen, Linda Hogan, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Starhawk), and new materialism

¹ For a stirring demonstration of this see *Etats de corps...*, Béranger Lacoste’s 2024 film of Caroline Granger and Meillon dancing among the rocks, streams, plants, and animals of the Forêt de la Massane in the French Pyrenees.

(Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad) figure prominently. Her literary corpus is similarly diverse: long and short fiction and nonfiction by Jean Giono, Hogan, Barbara Kingsolver, Kimmerer, Aldo Leopold, Ann Pancake, Annie Proulx, Richard Powers, Leslie Maron Silko, and Starhawk. Novels by Giono (*Joy of Man's Desiring* [*Que ma joie demeure*], 1936), Pancake (*Strange as This Weather Has Been*, 2007), and Powers (*The Overstory*, 2018) are given extended, detailed readings of their multisensorial landscapes, soundscapes, odorscapes, and feelscapes; human/more-than-human interimplications (“the material continuity between humans and the greater stuff of the more-than-human world” [72]); and multispecies, multi-kingdom (*Animalia* and *Plantae*) conviviality.

The unifying theme is Meillon’s focus on the stuff of a *making-with*—she cites Donna Haraway’s *sympoiesis* as a model—characteristic of the texts’ “liminal realism,” something between a genre and the enactment of a linguistically-based but conceptually eccentric organicism. “Rather than laying claim to a single, unified, and total truth,” she writes,

ecopoetic liminal realism cautiously negotiates the understandings that not only will the nature of reality always remain partly elusive, it moreover shifts depending on the means available to those trying to form a coherent picture of it. As readers of liminal realism, we must therefore always keep in the back of our minds the willful use and abuse of metaphor, myth, and anamorphosis at play, which are exploited for their charming, uplifting, or revealing powers. (52)

Respectful of the status of “magical realism” as an established genre and critical concept, Meillon complains of the frequent inability of academics to escape a dualistic interpretation of it: “how could anything be ‘magical’ and realistic at the same time?” (129). She prefers therefore to recast realism as an unstable, “liminal” mode of expression and experience, better-suited to an ecofeminist project of rational reenchantment “at an intricate crossroads between human and other-than-human lifeforms and perspectives” (132).

Essential to traversing the linguistic registers of the crossroads is Meillon’s appropriation of Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytic distinction between the symbolic and the semiotic (286–302). The former is the post-Oedipal order of language as structure, mimesis, and the speaking being *qua* grammatical subject, the domain of patriarchal law. The latter, according to Kristeva, is pre-Oedipal, undifferentiated, pre-grammatical, affective, and of the mother: the realm of melody, prosody, and rhythm—all the sensuous elements of language accessed by Meillon’s exuberantly materialist and reflexive method.

The performative and personal dimensions of her project become clear if her reader tunes in to her careful attention to the syntagmatic and phonological registers of the texts she discusses, and to the expressivity of her own prose. The book is run through with neologisms and portmanteaus, more semiotic than symbolic in their import. The variants on *en-chant-ment* have been mentioned; comparable agrammaticalities include *anthrop-o(bs)cene*, *ecopoet(h)ics*, *restor(y)ing*, *rewor(l)ding*, in which the internal parentheses and hyphens hardly contain the instability of her spellings. The word *ecopoiesis* is italicized every time it is mentioned

(85 times), as though in every iteration after the first its foreignness is to be felt again, and its multiples to mark a refrain. Another master-signifier (and the clearest indication of Meillon's knowing collocation with her texts): all but two of the 74 uses of the word *corpus* occur in the form "my *corpus*"—a fixed syntagm (*syntagme figé*), or maybe it is a full-on lexeme, in any case not so much a claim of mastery or possession as the trace of a humble, gentle gathering of songs. Meillon observes of a 2016 spoken-word performance by American poet Ron Rash of a particularly semiotic-synesthetic passage from Giono's *Joy of Man's Desiring*, "Reen-chant-ment [...] banks on the *tra la la* potential of language" (323). One has only to listen well to sing along.

Works Cited

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