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Judith Rauscher, *Ecopoetic Place-Making: Nature and Mobility in Contemporary American Poetry* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2023), 277 pp.

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Judith Rauscher's *Ecopoetic Place-Making: Nature and Mobility in Contemporary American Poetry* is the first book in the innovative Literary Ecologies series published by transcript Verlag, which is based on ongoing discussions in the field of ecocriticism.

Divided into five main chapters—each devoted to a particular poet, with an introduction and conclusion—Rauscher's book exemplifies how contemporary American poetry (and prose) intertwines and problematizes relationships between humans and nature. The book also explores how the selected poets, from diverse geographical backgrounds, densify the meanings of im/mobility as it is framed by history and culture, in systems often characterized by violence and oppression. It offers readers a sophisticated and guiding interpretation of five contemporary poets: Craig Santos Perez (Guam/Guåhan, 1980 —), Julian Spahr (Chillicothe, Ohio, 1966 —), Derek Walcott (Saint Lucia, Eastern Caribbean, 1930-2017), Agha Shahid Ali (New Delhi/Kashmir, 1949-2001), and Etel Adnan (Beirut, Lebanon, 1925-2021). Although all of these poets lived and published in the USA, their poetry conveys an international atmosphere that is essential for contemporary readers on all continents.

According to what Rauscher considers to be the two main and interrelated issues of our time—human agency on the planet and the consequent mass mobility—the study deepens the concepts presented in the title of the book, highlighting the uneven line that defines the movement from a sense of belonging to environmental degradation and forced mobilities.

Rauscher's main and original point is that contemporary American poetry can help readers understand some of the complex ways in which human impact on the life of the planet and mass mobility are interrelated. According to the author, it is important to move beyond the figure of the climate refugee and even beyond the "sedentary lifestyle idealized by traditional environmentalist discourses, most strands of ecocriticism, and the dominant traditions of ecopoetry" (11) because these perspectives fail to represent a large part of the world's population and "will only become more so as the oceans continue to rise and the deserts continue to spread" (11). Thus, in times of national and global crisis, when "(pseudo-)ecological, racist, and anti-immigrant discourses" that attack marginalized communities emerge,

Rauscher's selection of poets from diverse migrant backgrounds aims to counter racist and anti-immigrant discourses and show alternative and enriching "models to live place-conscious and sustainable lives" (12). As also explained in the introduction, a section that is both explanatory and somewhat suffocating in the sense that the reader is confronted with a variety of terms and concepts, *Ecopoetic Place-Making* "examines the complex visions of belonging and the ecological horizons of care evoked in contemporary American poetry about nature and mobility" (14).

In order to show how the selected poets reimagine the relationship between human and nature from different perspectives of mobility, the author reads the poetry of the CHamoru poet Craig Santos Perez, the Anglo-American poet Juliana Spahr, the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott, the Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali and the Lebanese-American poet Etel Adnan, poets who "evoke human-nature relations that are meaningful in environmental terms not merely *in spite of*, but precisely *because of* the experience of mobility that shape these relations" (15). Poets whose poetry imagines "meaningful 'glocal' human-place relations in the context of mobility" (15) and reveals the enduring "importance that local natural environments hold for migratory subjects" (16).

In the first chapter, "Decolonizing Environmental Pedagogy: Rerouted Knowledges and Participatory Ecopoetics in the Poetry of Craig Santos Perez," Rauscher claims that Perez is an "heir to the American tradition from the perspective of migration, without turning his back on CHamoru cultural practices" (66). It is within the conflicted cultural territory, and as a response to the threat to Guåhan culture and environment, that Perez's poetry "emerges as a particularly useful tool of environmental knowledge production and transmission that can resist imperial logics of homogenization through openness and ambiguity" (66). Rauscher demonstrates his belief in the power of language to carry the embodied experiences and environmental knowledge of his land and people into the future, as the following verses show: "I want to ask you, *is it still possible to hear our paper skin opening* [we] / carry our stories overseas to the place called 'voice' / and call" (85). Perez's poetry, Rauscher argues, highlights CHamoru environmental imaginaries of mobility and engages his readers in a decolonial project of ecopoetic place-making.

In "Situating Ecological Agency: Anthropocene Subjectivity and Settler Place-Making in the Poetry of Julian Spahr," Rauscher's perspective focuses on "showing how Spahr's poetry explores the cultural and political conflicts as well as the emotional and cognitive contradictions produced by life in the Anthropocene for the more privileged demographic segments in the United States" (88). Spahr is interested in questions of "neoliberal notions of ecological agency" (101) and in showing how industrial capitalism and consumer culture harm both people and the environment. As a result of moving to Hawai'i, a colonized place, her place-based poetry aims to show not only "the beautiful bird," but also "the bulldozer off to the side that was destroying the bird's habitat" (106). Spahr's poetry, Rauscher argues, shows an attentiveness to moments of (settler) irresponsibility, as these verses imply: "Asking what it means matters. / And the answer matters too" (127).

Chapter Three: “Lyricizing the Planetary Epic: Genre Mixing and Discrepancies of Scale in Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*,” gives voice to Walcott’s poetry, particularly *Omeros*, his 1990 book-length poem, and the tensions between “the universal and the particular, the communal and the individual, the global and the local, the postcolonial and the transnational” (129). Walcott’s *Omeros* evokes the fate of racial minorities and indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, and, the narrator, informed by postcolonial sensibilities, offers answers to what is important to ask about different kinds of environmental change and degradation, as well as different kinds of displacement, migration and mobility, enabling, as Rauscher suggests, “a trans-historical, trans-ethnic, highly self-aware and explicitly situated act of mourning” (158).

In “Reimagining Ecological Citizenship: Environmental Nostalgia and Diasporic Intimacy in the Poetry of Agha Shahid Ali,” Rauscher reads *A Nostalgist’s Map of America* (1991) as demonstrating the poet’s “engagement with human-place relations” and “a particular sensitivity to those historical processes that make places contested territories, whether politically or culturally” (171). Again, in parallel with the acute vision of an imperial America, Rauscher invites the reader to see how Ali’s verses evoke environmental degradation: “I see Peru without rain, Brazil / without forests - and here in Utah a dagger // of sunlight: it’s splitting [...]” (199). At the same time, Rauscher emphasizes that Ali’s poems affirm and acknowledge the place-making practices of migrants and victims of displacement, a process that is “crucial for the development of more mobile environmental imaginaries and more inclusive forms of ecological citizenship” (205). Most importantly, the author of *Ecopoetic Place-Making* exposes the idea that Ali’s poetry allows readers to reflect on the reasons why migrants like him “might seek a sense of belonging and meaningful connection to place in nature rather than in the company of people” (205), drawing attention to the ways in which racism, xenophobia, and marginalized communities are represented in contemporary society.

Chapter five considers the poetry of Lebanese-American painter and writer Etel Adnan: “Queering Ecological Desire: Post-Mobility and the Apocalyptic Environmental Ethics in the Poetry of Etel Adnan.” Drawing on insights from queer theory, queer ecocriticism and queer phenomenology, Rauscher’s analysis reads Adnan’s poetry as “informed by two different kinds of post-mobility: a reorientation towards nature in the aftermath of the disorientation caused by migration and in the light of an acute awareness of the increasing immobility that comes with old age” (207). While the poet affirms that “Planet Earth is [...] the house we are discarding” (208), Rauscher asserts that Adnan’s poetry not only questions the conventional symbolic organization of human-nature relations in the Euro-American tradition, but that it is imbued with an “eco-erotics [that] seeks to surpass the trappings of (heteronormative) romantic ecology” (227).

In “Conclusion: Environmental Cultures of Im/Mobility,” Rauscher confirms that the main argument of *Ecopoetic Place-Making* is that “it is productive to read contemporary ecopoetries of migration from the joint perspective of ecocriticism and

mobility studies because the environmental imaginaries of mobility that these poetries produce can shed light on some of the many complex ways in which environmental issues and human mobility are connected” (245). To make her point, Rauscher adds that her attention to ecopoetic placemaking through contemporary American poetry written by authors of diverse migratory backgrounds is intended to offer readers “poetry of place-sense and place-attachment from perspectives of mobility that has socio-political and environmental significance because it calls into question the idea that long-term residence is the only way by which human beings develop meaningful relationships with the nonhuman world” (245). Rauscher’s aim has been fully achieved, for if readers of American poetry already had an insightful guide to poetry that engages with the natural world—and I’m thinking, in particular, of John Felstiner’s *Can Poetry Save the Earth? A Field Guide to Nature Poems* (2009)—the world has become more complex and diverse since then. As Rauscher signals, our world is one of converging “ecological and mobility crises,” requiring us as readers to have “more inclusive notions of environmental literature, more critical environmental pedagogies, and a better understanding of how we might arrive at conceptualizing and enacting more ecoethical ways of being in the world that take into account the perspectives of migrants and other people on the move” (245).

This, I claim, is the real strength of *Ecopoetic Place-Making*, the fact that if all the poets Rauscher analyses can be understood as belonging to ecological poetry, then their works “challenge” and “expand” the characteristics of the genre (36). Rauscher’s examination of the selected poets responds to the complexity of our times, bringing into discussion the consequences of colonialism and its human domination over humans and nonhumans, as well as notions of belonging, racism, nationalism, and indigenous knowledge, thus stimulating a larger debate about the place of poetry in the current global environmental crisis and mass migrations taking place across the planet.

Rauscher’s study is relevant to contemporary readers because the author shows that poets of migration evoke natural environments, but they do so “by conceiving of places as porous formations open to various translocal, transregional and transnational connections” (246). In a world inhabited by intense conflicts and experiencing various crises, this vision is of the utmost importance because it results from the convergence of different geographical backgrounds and experiences, creating a shared common place where language houses “acts of ecopoetic place-making” (250). In other words, it becomes a space defined by negotiation, dialogue and movement, something that “can help us along the way” (245).

Based on a solid and informed bibliography of the poets chosen and theories adopted—namely ecocriticism, postcolonialism, spatial mobility, climate change, indigenous diaspora and queer phenomenology—this is a book characterized by poetic encounters that allow the reader to perceive the world in a wider and extended sphere. Nevertheless, the book would have benefited from an index. Also, the many and varied scholarly categorizations stifle the voice of the poets, making the reading

less fluid and enjoyable, as we are constantly struggling with notions, concepts, ideas (as the overly compact table of contents shows).

On the whole, the book offers both students and scholars a meticulous and excellent approach to the concepts and debates within environmental literature and ecocriticism. Moreover, *Ecopoetics and Place-Making* is an auspicious inauguration for the series, and it is more than fair to look forward to reading the books that will follow.