

Review: *Place of the Wild*.

Edited by David Burks

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Burks, David, editor. *Place of the Wild*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1994. 340 pp. US \$16.95 paper ISBN: 1-55963-342-5. Recycled, Acid-free paper.

In the opening line of his contribution to this anthology, educator and environmental journalist Paul Faulstich states -- "Let me make it clear from the outset: my vision for Earth is a planet populated sparsely by humans, where nonhuman processes prevail, and where alienation between humans and nature is absent" (161). Others in this collection share his vision. It is a vision they examine closely, with intelligence, and most importantly, with a rare sense of pragmatic realism.

Place of the Wild is unique among recent nature anthologies, in that it features all new work. These aren't snippets from the popular press, or warmed over servings of environmental classics. The volume consists of thirty-one narratives, essays, and poems, grouped in three sections. Contributors include many of the most recognized names in environmental literature. Gary Paul Nabhan, Terry Tempest Williams, Bill McKibben, John Haines, Max Oelschlaeger, Gary Snyder, Alison Deming, and Dave Foreman are but a few of the more familiar. We may know less of others featured; yet all are knowledgeable and articulate. Together this group examines issues surrounding the preservation of species, open space, and natural systems. At the same time, their work honestly addresses the sociological change that must accompany any such efforts if they are to be successful.

Unlike some activist writers, this assemblage slips the trap of an "us versus them" dichotomy. Their collective buckets of cold-water reality splash equally on everyone involved, multinational corporations, indigenous peoples, mainstream environmentalists, even the authors themselves. No one is exempt. These are, in short, statements of challenge addressing us as a species. They call for the immediate protection of the few wildlands still in existence, and insist parts of the earth's original biodiversity remain intact. They suggest we must reorder our thinking and learn to behave as a part of nature, rather than as an

invading alien force. It is this fundamental rethinking of our planetary role that lies at the heart of the book. The majority of authors express optimism along with their realism, something all too uncommon in environmental writing. They are convinced change can be accomplished.

If there is a flaw to be found in this collection, it is one of homogeneity. Editor David Burks tells us that the epistemological coherence of these contributions "owes more to happenstance than design" (6). However it came about, these diverse individuals have woven a surprisingly uniform fabric of thought. A cover to cover reading of the book begins to reveal redundancies. However, this is a small matter. These pieces contain enough substance to stand on their own, and are best approached that way. Many of the essays would be particularly useful for stimulating discussion in an educational setting, and are guaranteed to invoke profound, late night thought in anyone concerned with the fate of the earth. This is an important anthology of thoughtful work on humans, nature, and human nature.

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