

Review: The Poetic Species: A Conversation with Edward O. Wilson and Robert Hass
By Lee Briccetti

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Wilson, Edward O. and Hass, Robert. *The Poetic Species: A Conversation with Edward O. Wilson and Robert Hass*. Forward by Lee Briccetti. New York: Bellevue Literary Press. 2014. 112 pp. ISBN 9781934137727, e-book. US \$16.95. Also available, ISBN: 9781934137727, hardback. US \$16.95.

There is an interesting conversation contained herein, the kind one might go to a public event to see in person a luminary or two they admire on stage. As such, Edward O. Wilson and Robert Hass are giants in their field, and guiding lights to many people, especially educated ones. At stake here is a discussion about what to do with the Natural world. Ideas about human Nature are also explored here. It is interesting to be party to this meeting of the minds, especially in this troubled time for Environmentalism where people seem to recklessly be changing the definition of Nature and the wild, and the movement being blamed for its eating habitats and the cause of global warming. It has become a dialogue filled with compromises.

The discussion is not a confrontational one, but in a few places, the assembled do express their frustrations with each other's field. They are also interested in knowing more from each other. This book, however, favors the poets who have a wider knowledge and more skills at being persuasive. Wilson was a break out writer who commented on many subjects and argued that our human nature has some predetermination from our genes. Hass puts the struggle of Wilson, i.e. the need to protect wild places, wild creatures and more, in a bigger modern cultural context.

The book is challenging and not as long as the reader is likely to desire. Lee Briccetti, Executive Director of Poets House, sets the tone and introduces Wilson and Hass as people very concerned with biodiversity and natural systems. It is important to realize, as gained from this book, that Wilson is having difficulties convincing everyone of the need to defend Nature. Hass's frustration with science is apparent in several places, especially when he does not fully explain that Ecologist H.A. Gleason was arguing that Ecologist Frederic Clements got it wrong. Hass emphasizes the ideas of the latter who proposed that Nature could be a superorganism. Gleason argued, however, that creatures were not interconnected, but could be found in places that had advantageous physical conditions for them. Gleason's argument being that a group of creatures like certain weather conditions as opposed to Clements' argument that creatures are found

where they are because of the interactions they have with certain others organisms. Was it weather or neighbors, with the poet being confronted with an argument between others?

The poets here are valued as an insightful and political force and Wilson invites their help in the struggle as he probably has with many other groups before. The book is also weighted towards the poets, but they are not interlocutors here. Wilson and Hass are both Renaissance men who have addressed the modern crisis from many perspectives.

This is an empowering book for poets and the literary. The embracing of environmental concerns of E.O. Wilson by poets is a great victory, but not a new one or finished one. Not all poets are green. One should notice that Hass does play the Devil's Advocate here pointing out some of the discrepancies. The poet prevails here, but since many more people in the field are familiar with the activism of Wilson, it is interesting also to environmentalists who can learn more about themselves through the eyes of others. Artists and scientists can learn from each other, but Wilson is more of a visitor here.

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Electronic Green Journal, Issue 38, Spring 2015, ISSN: 1076-7975