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*Every Grain of Sand: Canadian Perspectives on Ecology and Environment.* Edited by J.A. Wainwright. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004. viii + 181 p. ISBN 0-88920-453-5 \$24.95)

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***Every Grain of Sand: Canadian Perspectives on Ecology and Environment.* Edited by J.A. Wainwright. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004. viii + 181 p. ISBN 0-88920-453-5 \$24.95)**

Nature can be glimpsed not only through the lenses of the sciences, but through poetry, philosophy, the arts and the personal responses of individuals. Understanding how this happens is one of the tasks of *Every Grain of Sand*. The ways in which the varieties of ecological experience are rooted in the personal flow through several of the chapters. Monte Hummel writes of the loss of biodiversity as species disappear or are critically threatened by the anthropogenic forces that permeate the delicate “Earth-apple’s skin” of the biosphere (p. 119); he deftly shifts scales in his chapter to a short discourse on the wintergreen plant, and to memories of his own delight as a child in a plane viewing Canada from above. Andrew Wainwright, the editor of the collection, and himself both an academic and a poet, recalls the origins of the idea for the book in his southern Ontario world of the 1950s. We hear from others in the book of such experiences as environmental campaigning in British Columbia, fishing with the writer’s father in Ontario, backpacking in Alberta and encounters with hunters and hunted animals. These are creative perspectives on, and nicely complementary to, the contributions to the understanding of the earth and our place in it that we get from environmental scientists.

Several interconnected themes run through this richly diverse volume, which blends the insights of both doers and contemplators. A central argument, not novel but well worth retelling, is that we are not living well or wisely on the diminishing bounty of the earth’s resources. Most of the authors come from universities; there are two from environmental organizations, and two contributors are private environmental researchers and consultants. The problem they address is not primarily an economic one centred on the use of natural resources, or a managerial task of the rational solving of environmental problems. Rather, as the editor puts it, humans are living in “a profound cultural and spiritual crisis arising from our flawed exchange with land, water, and life forms to which we are

genetically disposed, but with which, historically and culturally, we have been so much in conflict” (p. 9).

Part of this crisis, as both symptom and cause, is the growing distance of the lives of many people from the natural world. The rest of the biosphere is ignored, or appears boringly distant—not even possessing the familiarity of the alien—instead of being felt as a set of intimate and interconnected networks of which humans are part. As Ehor Boyanowsky observes, “You can live your whole life in Toronto without ever confronting any true wildness in nature” (p. 136). There is a reluctance on the part of the contributors to concede that conventional scientific maps and guide-books can be up to the challenge of viewing nature in its diverse guises. There are multiple representations of nature, and many voices that attempt descriptions of specific locales, species and landscape features. Labrador is a primeval wilderness for some, and for others either a romantic region, a resource eldorado or a world populated with native voices, according to Peter Armitage (chap. 13). And yet we live in a predominantly urban world: pondering these alternatives, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands insists, does not mean “advocating a nostalgic return to some pre-capitalist culture of nature” (p. 53).

Some of the most intriguing parts of the book explore historical threads. Onno Oerlemans revisits Wordsworth and Shelley (chap. 9). Both, of course, are apt choices, though readers interested in probing further Wordsworth’s connections to the history of science will have to look elsewhere. This was a poet who had what John Wyatt has referred to as a “geographer’s eye,” who wrote in prose as well as poetry of the local topography of the river Duddon and its environs. Wordsworth was also familiar, personally and through their writings, with the work of many of those who, from the 1830s, came to be called “scientists,” particularly geologists. James Hutton’s *Theory of the Earth* was published in 1795, and brought with it a sense of the seemingly unfathomable age of the planet, of its grand cycles and their ebbs and flows, and of the role of natural forces, particularly rivers, in shaping the landscape we see. These kinds of connections back and forth among poets and scientists have regrettably become a rarity in the early twenty-first century, ironically so at a time when advances in earth-systems knowledge have forged new syntheses that lack appraisal from those blessed with the “poet’s eye.” *Every Grain of Sand* takes us in these and other rewarding directions, and deserves to be widely read by all interested in the conditions of Canada’s natural environment.

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