

# Book Reviews

To Lents's credit, he seems aware of this potential critique and offers a solution: human sexual ethics should be decided first by Nature and then Society. When using nature as a guide, he finds that same-sex behavior and gender fluidity are (1) taxonomically widespread, (2) quantifiably beneficial to a species, and (3) biologically influenced. Therefore, Lents infers that these behaviors are morally acceptable. However, in nature we also find that sexual assault, incest, and sexual contact with minors are (1) taxonomically widespread, (2) quantifiably beneficial to a species, and (3) biologically influenced. If his reasoning is valid, one could advocate for the moral acceptability of these behaviors as well.

Lents avoids this unpalatable consequence by suggesting that it is then up to society to determine what natural inclinations are acceptable or not. He surveys human cultural diversity, finding that same-sex behavior and gender fluidity have been normalized and encouraged in various societies throughout human history. His logical conclusion then is that these behaviors *are* morally acceptable; they are natural *and* socially accepted. However, as he does for the darker parts of nature, Lents ignores or glosses over the fact that sexual assault (e.g., marital rape among the Gusii people of Kenya<sup>3</sup>), incest (e.g., brother-sister marriages in ancient Egypt<sup>4</sup>), and sexual contact with minors (e.g., the coming-of-age rituals of the Simbari and Mangaia peoples [Lents, p. 188]) have *also* been normalized and encouraged in various cultures throughout human history. These behaviors too are natural and at times socially accepted.

It is clear that neither nature nor society provide the robust standard of morality that Lents, indeed all of us, are searching for. Nature tells us that virtually all behaviors and inclinations are permissible, while morality according to society is subjective and ephemeral.

The worrisome evolutionary ethic undergirding *The Sexual Evolution* demands an effective response. Christians need to present an objective sexual ethic grounded in the character of God and affirming that all humans are made in God's image while also accurately describing our biology. Who we *were* and who we *are* by nature really does matter. Crafting this response will require careful, compassionate effort across academic disciplines. Will you join me?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Lisa F. Gill, Jaap van Schaik, Auguste M. P. von Bayern, Manfred L. Gahr, "Genetic Monogamy Despite Frequent Extrapair Copulations in 'Strictly Monogamous' Wild Jackdaws," *Behavioral Ecology* 31, no. 1 (2020): 247–60, <https://doi.org/10.1093/beheco/arz185>.

<sup>2</sup>Rebecca Hooper, Kathryn Maher, Karen Moore, Guillam McIvor, David Hosken, and Alex Thornton, "Ultimate Drivers of Forced Extra-Pair Copulations in Birds Lacking a Penis: Jackdaws as a Case-Study," *Royal Society Open Science* 11, no. 3 (2024): 231226, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.231226>.

<sup>3</sup>Peggy Reeves Sanday, "The Socio-Cultural Context of Rape: A Cross-Cultural Study," *Journal of Social Issues* 37, no. 4 (1981): 5–27, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1981.tb01068.x>.

<sup>4</sup>Russel Middleton, "Brother-Sister and Father-Daughter Marriage in Ancient Egypt," *American Sociological Review* 27, no. 5 (1962): 603–11, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2089618>.

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## ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

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**POETRY IN PLACE: Poetry and Environmental Hope in a Southern Ontario Bioregion** by Deborah Bowen and Noah Van Brenk, eds. Guernica Editions, 2025. 378 pages. Paperback; \$19.00. ISBN: 9781771839716.

In *Poetry in Place*, Deborah Bowen, emerita professor of English at Redeemer University, along with her assistant Noah Van Brenk, has gathered 125 poems by forty-three Canadian poets from the southeast corner of Ontario. The poems explore a bioregion between the Grand River on the west and Lake Ontario on the east, part of the so-called Golden Horseshoe that includes both fertile farmland and industrial cityscapes. In her beautifully written introduction, Bowen explains the purpose of her anthology as a listening to the land, a slowing down to acknowledge what is actually there around us in a particular place. Poetry can forge connection: in this case, between heart and home. The result of such connection is hope, and hope is essential to any effort of environmental repair.

The poems themselves are grouped under ten headings: "Land," "Water," "Trees," "Birds," "Wild Creatures," "Insects," "Flowers and Plants," "Farming and Gardening," "Food," and "Future Perfect Tense" – the latter category an umbrella for anxieties about climate change. Most of the poems are in free verse, though some employ the random rhyme of spoken-word poetry. And, of course, some are better than others. We learn in the section on flowers and plants that, etymologically, the word *anthology* refers to an arrangement of blossoms. But any bouquet will have its weeds.

First to the genuine blooms, however, of which there are many. From "Hibiscus," by Mia Anderson: "The barn-swallows / have breasts the colour of the borealis" (p. 189). These two lines are a liquid pleasure in our mouths. We notice the alliteration and consonance of *barn* and *breasts* and *borealis*, and we may not notice, but nevertheless feel, the vowels rise upon our palate. We also feel the swinging rhythm, the memory of meter, in the repeated two-stress segments – The barn-swallows / have breasts / the colour of / the borealis – a rhythm that matches the swinging turns of swallows in flight. And finally, of course, the surprise and explosion of

metaphor. In *borealis* we get not only a color, but also a color that pulses across the sky. A bird we might hold in the palm of our hand suddenly fills the entire horizon, large as the universe itself. This, in miniature (but not in miniature at all!) is what good poetry can do.

By contrast, take these lines from Marilyn Gear Pilling's otherwise promising poem "Looking Out": "What happens when you spend time / on the edge / of such power, such beauty, such / possibility?" (p. 70). Notice the flatness of this passage, the lack of image or metaphor, the crowding in of abstractions. Do I, as a reader, feel power, or beauty, or possibility in these lines? I do not.

Fortunately, the barn-swallows by far outnumber the flightless abstractions in this rich array of poems. I suspect such a collection as this will inevitably be uneven. First, by limiting the contributors to those with a connection to a relatively small geographic area, and by further limiting the contributors to those with environmental awareness, the editors have narrowed the field. Suppose, for example, that in the early nineteenth century some enterprising anthologist had gathered a volume of poems about the Lake District. William Wordsworth would loom large, as would Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey. But who else, really?

The second danger of such an anthology as this is its very environmental intent. Because environmentalists have a message. When Honey Novick ends her poem "Mushquoteh" by telling us that "Norway maple is a new metaphor / for decolonization" (p. 95), I want to say, save this for an academic essay. And when she writes, in "Oh, Mother Earth," that "Expediency lives in our hearts" (p. 50), I want to say, keep this for a sermon. I suggest that it is not the job of poems to preach or to pontificate, but to cast a magic spell.

Such a spell is beautifully cast by John Terpstra in "Giants":

They'd sit  
their giant hinds in a row along the top edge  
of the escarpment, and pick at the loose rock  
with their hands or their feet, then throw or skip  
the smoothest stones across the bay, to see who could  
land one  
on the sandstrip, three miles away ... (p. 57)

There is true imagination at work in the creation of such giants sitting atop the Niagara Escarpment, standing in for the land itself.

Also notable are the many richly sensuous poems about keeping and tilling the land. Take this elderly gardener in Adam Dickinson's "Beetroot":

Her fingers are asparagus stalks,  
stubbled and coiled cucumbers,

thick from years of having carried the charge  
of her burly, grandmotherly care,  
the pots of turnip  
that need lugging to the kitchen. (p. 179)

One of the unique features of this anthology is a series of interviews with each of the contributing poets. Each writer is asked to describe their relationship to the land, their spiritual grounding, and their motivation in writing poetry. And many are eloquent in their responses. Twelve of the poets are thoughtfully Christian, and thirteen more admit to the influence (for better or worse) of a Christian upbringing. There is also a rich ethnic diversity, with sixteen of non-European descent, six of these appropriately First Nations. And there are even some scientists in the mix! Bowen and Van Brenk have assembled a worthy crew to give witness to a worthy place—as worthy a place as any that lies unobserved on our very doorsteps. Perhaps poetry can indeed offer hope for environmental repair. Readers of *PSCF* will find this anthology a delightful supplement to the usual academic discussions on creation care.

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## EVOLUTIONARY THEORY

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**EVOLUTION "ON PURPOSE": Teleonomy in Living Systems** by Peter A. Corning, Stuart A. Kauffman, Denis Noble, James A. Shapiro, Richard I. Vane-Wright, and Addy Pross, eds., Vienna Series in Theoretical Biology, Gerd B. Müller, Thomas Pradeu, and Katrin Schäfer, eds. The MIT Press, 2023. 390 pages including index. Paperback; \$75.00. ISBN: 9780262546409.

This revolutionary and transformative book heralds a major paradigm shift in the science of biology and opens the door to an entirely new approach to understanding the science of life. Its core message is that while life follows the laws of chemistry and physics, it cannot be defined, described, or understood solely in terms of those laws. Most of the book's editors are pioneers in the demolition of the gene-centric, deterministic evolutionary concepts that have dominated the ideology of neo-Darwinism for many decades.

Recently, a new movement in evolutionary biology, sometimes called "The Third Wave," has emerged that questions some of the more basic tenets of the established theory. One of the milestones of this new movement was a meeting of the Royal Society in 2016, at which several leading biologists (including some of the editors and authors of *Evolution "On Purpose"*) discussed a series of possible alterations to the established theory of evolution by natural selection. These included concepts