Rebecca Bushnell, ed. *The Marvels of the World: An Anthology of Nature Writing Before 1700*. **Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021. 363 pp. ISBN 9780812252842. $95.00 hardback.**

Rebecca Bushnell opens her century-spanning anthology *Marvels of the World: An Anthology of Nature Writing Before 1700* with a quotation from Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, in which the encyclopedic Roman author "highlights the contradictions that inform so much of our experience of the natural world" (1). These contradictions, as interpreted by Bushnell, include our desire to experience the earth's abundance while our anthropocentrism blinds us to our interconnection with all other living begins; our admiration of the beauty nature produces while we fear the violent effects of natural forces beyond our control; and our predilection to take nature's bounty for our own and in the process destroy our common "mother." Bushnell uses her engagement with Pliny to illustrate that in, and even preceding, the first century of our Common Era, premodern authors were preoccupied with our relationship to the non-human world and contemplated ecological destruction and climate anxiety in ways that anticipate how we attend to such issues today.

While the nature of these concerns and the frameworks through which this ecological inquiry were conducted may be different from those of the modern period, we can point to texts like Pliny's and read it as environmental literature. For many scholars in premodern fields, this kind of argument is not new. Indeed, as Bushnell observes, "[i]n

the past twenty-five years, understanding of premodern nature writing's complexity and depth has grown," calling this "a change driven by contemporary ecological concerns and new theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches" (3). And yet, most anthologies of Western nature writing rarely engage with sources before 1800. Bushnell muses that this tendency to exclude pre-1800 texts in collections of environmental literature "reflects two dominant trends in ecocriticism: a focus on ideas of nature derived from Romanticism and a primary interest in American literature and culture. [Indeed] [w]hen most people think about 'nature writing' today, they just cannot reach back further than Thoreau or Wordsworth" (2). As a corrective for this common omission and as a means of honoring the nearly three decades of work on premodern ecology, Bushnell's "anthology aims to broaden and complicate the story of premodern nature writing in the West" (4). *Marvels of the World* joins Todd Borlik's rich anthology *Literature and Nature in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge UP, 2019) in bringing early modern texts together to showcase premodern ecological expression while also reaching beyond the early modern period into classical literature, the writings of late antiquity, and medieval literature. What results is a thoughtful, erudite collection of literary, philosophical, and practical texts that span two millennia, and which illustrate the long and rich transmission of ecological thinking in the premodern era.

Such an immense undertaking requires careful consideration of materials, organization, and reader experience. On all three of those fronts, Bushnell shines as an editor. *Marvels of the World* is a decidedly Western nature writing anthology, and while many selections in the anthology are English literary texts and anticipate a broader Anglophone environmental literary history, it also sources material from the Bible, classical Greek and Roman writers such as Aristotle, Theophrastus, Virgil, and Pliny, as well as premodern continental writers including Guillaume de Salluste du Bartas, Anselm Turmeda, and Michel de Montaigne. To navigate this broad archive of texts, Bushnell divides the anthology into seven major sections based on foci of environmental inquiry: "natural philosophy and natural knowledge," "plants," "animals," "weather, climate, and seasons," "inhabiting the land," "gardens and gardening," and "outlandish new worlds." By arranging the anthology along these lines, Bushnell conducts the reader through smaller genealogies of ecological writing pertaining to a specific topic.

For instance, drawing on her own astute research on gardens, Bushnell explains that the section on gardens and gardening can help readers "untangl[e] the centuries-long debate on grafting, which addressed the mechanisms and social and philosophical implications of mastering plant reproduction" (5). Within that fifty-page section of the anthology, the reader can sample texts including Columella's *On Agriculture*, the multi-authored thirteenth-century *The Romance of the Rose*, early modern how-to books by Gervase Markham and John Worlidge, poetry from Lady Hester Pulter, prose from Mary Somerset (Duchess of Beaufort), and a selection from Book II of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. Bushnell aids the reader in placing the extracts in each section within particular genealogies through her decision to introduce each section with general context that frames the selection and the issues the chosen texts raise. In addition to this broader introduction to each section, Bushnell also provides readers with a paragraph-length headnote for each text, situating her selections within the organizing themes that structure the anthology. Editorial organization and contextualization thus work hand in hand to accomplish Bushnell's mission in helping "the reader [...] follow changes and continuities over time, while comparing different genres of writing" by "point[ing] to interconnections among selections throughout the anthology, [and] guiding the reader by references through these networks" (5). By crafting these networks of referents and highlighting the interconnections among them, Bushnell evinces an unmistakable ecological approach to her editorial practice. Bringing together two millennia of Western nature writing through networks and interconnection, *Marvels of the World* allows for a reflexive, transhistorical understanding of currents in premodern ecological thinking.

Throughout the anthology, Edmund Spenser's poetry is referenced within a broader network of environmental literature. For instance, Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calendar* is put in conversation with John Lydgate's "The Debate of the Horse, Goose, and Sheep" and Thomas More's *Utopia*. Bushnell also references *The Shepheardes Calendar* when discussing how "[i]n literature human emotions may be said to reflect or even imaginatively influence the weather" (127) in the introduction to the section on "Weather, Climate, and Seasons." The reader first encounters a work from Spenser, however, in the anthology's fifth section, entitled "Inhabiting the Land," within which Bushnell deftly introduces the "January" eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calendar* by situating it with reference to its Virgilian progenitor and the older almanac form of the

Kalendar of Shepheardes. Here, she points out the mélange of thematic inspirations Spenser borrows from humanistic and Protestant discourse and discusses the stylistic imprint of Geoffrey Chaucer's Middle English. Additionally, Bushnell helpfully breaks down the visual components of the woodcut emblem accompanying each month and includes the woodcut for "January" at the top of the anthology's excerpt. Bushnell handles E.K.'s glosses in an astute manner: after explaining that "the poems were published with interpretative notes provided by a mysterious 'E.K.' who some scholars think was a front for Spenser himself" (242), she places E.K.'s annotations alongside her own. By deliberately moving his notes out of the frame of the poem, so that modern readers can encounter a "clean" poetic text, and into the interplay of her own editorial matter, she creates a conversation between her own glosses for the modern reader and Spenser's glosses for his early modern one. This interplay of interpretive practice underscores Spenser's explicit archaism and self-conscious scholarly affect.

In addition to these astute editorial decisions, Bushnell makes a bold claim that while the eclogues in *The Shepheardes Calendar* are allegorical and political in nature, "they also function as a form of nature writing in Theocritus' pastoral tradition, and not just a veil for human affairs" (241). By making this assertion, Bushnell invites the reader to connect Spenser's "January" eclogue with Theocritus' *Idyll 7*, the selection that opens "Inhabiting the Land." Moreover, Bushnell's encouragement to read Spenser's poem as a form of nature writing allows readers who are not familiar with the topical issues of Spenser's time to encounter the poem as a pastoral text through which they can understand the conventions of pathetic fallacy, ecological self-realization, and pastoral lyric within a larger legacy of Western literature about shepherds and the rural life. The "January" eclogue is thus presented as a great way to introduce the reader to the general project of the eclogues, who the character of Colin Clout is, and how Spenser self-consciously seeks to participate in the Virgilian pastoral practice. It is framed as an exemplary eclogue that provides the reader with an approachable poetic/lyric "I" who weaves together the fabric of his emotional world and the wider pastoral tradition when he picks up his pipe.

As mentioned above, we also find an excerpt from Book II of *The Faerie Queene* in the sixth and penultimate section of the anthology "Gardens and Gardening." There, Bushnell draws a comparison between the description of the Bower of Bliss (in Book II,

canto xii, stanzas 42-63) and an allegorical garden in *Le Roman de la Rose* to reveal the literary trope of the garden "touched with sensuality" as it appears through time and space in the Western canon. This literary heritage offers a rich set of contexts for exploration in her headnote for the Bower of Bliss passages. She sets up this excerpt by explaining that Guyon often "faces temptations including sexual pleasure, which is allegorized in the Bower of Bliss, a garden inhabited by the female figure of Acrasia (whose name means both excess and disorder). This garden evokes the common association of garden and flowers with female sexuality" (277). Here, Bushnell offers a general reader clear characterization and explains the way the allegory interacts with Guyon's trial for temperance while also linking Spenser's garden allegory to the larger figural historiography of allegorical gardens.

This approach to introducing Spenser's allegory to generalist readers, such as those studying the humanities or taking English undergraduate courses or even graduate seminars interested in transhistorical approaches to premodern ecocriticism, facilitates the (in)famously difficult task of teaching Spenser to a wider audience. Moreover, as exemplified by the overall anthology's aims to show networks of environmental writing in literature before 1700, Bushnell encourages modern readers to engage with Spenser and the *Faerie Queene* within a broader, richer archive of (premodern) environmental literature. Furthermore, the seven page "Recommended Reading and Bibliography" section at the end of the anthology offers rich opportunity for students and instructors to engage with important ecocritical scholarship of premodern literature and to explore fresh ways of thinking about the selections they are reading in the anthology. In this way, instructors may find this anthology an especially appealing tool to showcase ecocritical approaches to premodern literature for emerging scholars, many of whom come to encounter Spenser's four century old poetry in classrooms that offer respite from the environmental emergencies outside their windows.

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