An Ecotopian Lexicon, edited by Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy

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Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy, eds. *An Ecotopian Lexicon*. Minnesota UP, 2019. Paperback. 344 pg. $24.95. ISBN 9781517905903.

Many scholars have acknowledged the need to expand our current conceptualizations of the complexity and scale of climate change, and of the Anthropocene more widely. Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy's *An Ecotopian Lexicon* takes an unusually direct approach to this task by offering a collection of essays, each of which makes a case for adding a specific new loanword to English from another language. In the foreword, Kim Stanley Robinson suggests that this text can function as "sourcebook, clarification, diagnostic, and stimulus" (xiv) for conceptualizing contemporary climate issues. Each of the thirty essays and fourteen pieces of art in *An Ecotopian Lexicon* draws attention to crucial issues through examining a specific loanword. Most helpfully, each essay begins with a pronunciation guide and an example for its respective loanword. These loanwords aim to broaden the imagination and are highly diverse in origin; some, such as "heyiya" and "terragouge" are derived from speculative novels and science fiction. Others, such "Qi," "nahual," and "solastalgia" find their roots in Confucianism, Mesoamerican cultures, and ecopsychology, respectively. What they all appear to share, however, is the ability to address an existing gap in the English language. In other words, each loanword provides a concrete term for an existing concept, emotion, or movement that engages with environmental challenges but has yet to be articulated by the English-speaking world.

An Ecotopian Lexicon offers two ways in which to navigate these loanwords. The first contents pages alphabetize the essays while the second groups them into the following themes: Greetings, Dispositions, Perception, Desires, Beyond the Human, and Beyond "the Environment." Many may consider the latter option more helpful, given the unfamiliar nature of loanwords. However, if reading this text in alphabetical order, ~*~ is the first loanword presented. According to Melody Jue, in the "Apocalypto" entry, this loanword is pronounced by blowing softly on the back of your hand (15). In addition to its curious pronunciation, ~*~ is the most glyphically unusual loanword contained in *An Ecotopian Lexicon*. Inspired by Dolphinese, ~*~ can be described as the "vibratory jouissance" (17) felt when dolphins use soundwaves to tickle each other, often across considerable distances. In terms of its practical usage, Jue suggests that ~*~

can function as a metaphor for figurative language in relation to the aquatic within terrestrial and human contexts. Indeed, the example she provides at the beginning of her essay elucidates her suggested usage nicely: "That USB comedy sketch about a BP board meeting struggling to clean up all the coffee spilled at their table really ~*~ me when I watched it on YouTube" (15).

Through drawing attention to a method of communication used by Dolphins and why we should also make use of ~*~ as a metaphor, Jue inadvertently subverts the Anthropocentric binary notion of "us" (humans) and "them" (animals). As noted by Matthew Calarco, this idea has continued to pervade Western philosophies since Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics suggested an innate separation between humans, animals, and other forms of nonhuman life alongside a corresponding hierarchy (8). While many may consider the subversion of this idea to be a worthy ambition, particularly as it has been used to justify countless ecological atrocities against nonhuman species, practical utilization of ~*~ is potentially problematic in many circumstances. This, unfortunately, undermines its presence within a text that seeks to embed the usage of useful loanwords into the English language. While it may be relatively easy to type ~*~, as demonstrated by the example that Jue provides, using it in lectures, presentations, and more casual conversation would be somewhat tricky, thus diminishing ~*~'s potential for widespread usage.

Carolyn Fornoff's essay, "Nahual," occurs approximately halfway through the text, finding itself placed before ~*~ within Beyond the Human. It is not entirely clear why this essay was placed first (the decision was evidently not based on alphabetical order) but Fornoff's exploration of the loanword "nahual" is both interesting and engaging, nonetheless. Like Jue's essay, Fornoff's criticises the notion of humans as being separate from the animal kingdom and the suggestion that "humans and nonhumans occupy separate, discrete realms of activity and knowledge" (163). The term nahual, which can be pronounced as "na-wal," represents a Mesoamerican concept that suggests every human is linked to an animal alter-ego. In this sense, the daemons featured in Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000) could be considered reminiscent of this idea. For example, in both, the form of each person's nahual or daemon is determined according to key characteristics of their personality. Understood metaphorically, nahualism, Fornoff suggests, can offer a crucial counterpoint to current Western conceptualizations of humans as separate from animals and provide a way of conceiving our human selves as innately bound to non-human life. Furthermore, she suggests that a better understanding of the inseparability between humans and animals can shift our ethical relationship with nature from one that is generated by individual moral codes to a relationality-based code of ethics (169-170). Indeed, nahualism has the potential to provoke decisive action against ecological degradation and what scientists such as Samuel T. Turvey have described as the Holocene extinction. Although this research on nahualism provides an interesting insight into Mesoamerican worldviews and a symbolic method of visualising the interconnectedness between humans and non-human animals, it does little to help us conceptualise the complex relationships that exist within ecosystems.

Destabilising separatist views is clearly a recurring theme within *An Ecotopian Lexicon*; in some essays, it is a key motif while in many others it is a more peripheral motif. Janet Tamalik

McGrath's thought-provoking essay on the loanword "sila" critiques this view through her examination of the English language at a structural level. Given that *An Ecotopian Lexicon* aims to harness the power of language to expand our conceptualization of climate change, essays such as this one seem appropriate for inclusion. The term sila, which can be pronounced as "see-lah," is a noun derived from Inuktut (one of several Inuit languages) and, unlike ~*~ and nahual, is placed in Beyond "the Environment." Although McGrath acknowledges the difficultly of a direct translation of this loanword, sila can be thought of as a concept that suggests humanity is responsible for preserving nature due to our ability, as a species, to influence its progress. Of course, concepts that promote this sort of stewardship are not unfamiliar to the English-speaking world and can be found in Christian, Islamic, and Jewish doctrines alike. However, according to McGrath, sila differs from these ideas as it can be thought of as a "superconcept" that emphasizes the interconnectedness between abstract ideas such as intelligence, spirit, and the cosmos. In this essay, McGrath also highlights how the linguistic structure of Inuktut is used to convey the highly relational worldviews held by many Innuits. Unlike English, Inuktut utilizes transitive verb agreement endings (subject and object as a single unit), is ungendered, and does not distinguish between animate or inanimate objects. In addition to being a highly relational language, Inuktut places the subject at the end of the sentence rather than the beginning as English does. For example, in English we may say "I am going to the store." In Inuktut, however, the morphology would be more akin to "the store-going to-will-I" (260). Through exploring sila in the context of the linguistic structure of Inuktut, McGrath raises intriguing questions about how the structure of language itself has the ability to shape our perception of and relationship to the world. In addition, McGrath raises intriguing questions as to what effect putting ourselves at the end of the sentence may have on how we react to climate change.

Overall, this text is highly thought provoking and has the potential to be widely influential. However, its level of influence is altogether dependent on how it is used. For example, if those who read it actively incorporate these loanwords into everyday conversation, presentations, academic work etc., it could significantly develop our conceptions of climate change. Therefore, perhaps this book can be used most effectively by educators, academics, and researchers. That being said, those with an avid interest in climate change and the Anthropocene would be likely to find its contents interesting and informative. The inclusion of artwork to represent selected loanwords is also a nice touch and acknowledges the role that art, as well as language, can have in allowing us to better visualise climate change. Overall, I would recommend this book to anyone seeking to expand their understanding of climate change as well as to those seeking to educate others on this topic. However, a revised edition of *An Ecotopian Lexicon* with further loanwords that address its complex temporal aspects, and perhaps even climate change denial, would be a welcome addition to literature on climate change and the Anthropocene more widely.

Works Cited

Calarco, Matthew. *Thinking Through Animals*. Stanford University Press, 2015.

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