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"What Does Poetry Have to do with Ecology? An Introduction to Eco-poetics"

ABSTRACT

A growing number of scientists are of the opinion that the age we are living in now should be referred to as "the Anthropocene," since its most distinctive feature is human being's impact on Earth's life-supporting systems. The fictions we have created about nature and our place in it have lost their explanatory validity in the face of climate change, rapid loss of biodiversity, toxic contamination of the oceans and shortage of drinking water (to name only a few of the most serious environmental problems). This unprecedented situation constitutes a challenge to the human imagination. Facts provided by science are hard to absorb: the dominant affective reaction is anxiety followed by repression. Eco-poetry, as opposed to traditional nature poetry, is the imagination's attempt to respond to the ecological crisis. Eco-poets distance themselves from obsolete ways of representing nature (including its romantic idealization) and the nature/culture binarism, and look for alternative poetics which would constitute a more pertinent expression of the knowledge we have about the functioning of the environment, and the threat to life on Earth posed by technocapitalism. Eco-poetics rejects the high modernist idea of the autonomy of an artistic object, explores connections between aesthetics and ethics, between reflection and activism, between poetry and science. My talk will be an introduction to contemporary tendencies within the interdisciplinary field of eco-poetics.