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Carly E. Thomas
York University

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**Review of *The Terranauts* by T.C. Boyle and
Addlands by Tom Bullough**

***The Terranauts* by T.C. BOYLE**
Ecco, 2016 \$21.00

***Addlands* by TOM BULLOUGH**
The Dial Press, 2016 \$36.00

Reviewed by **CARLY E THOMAS**

The importance of land ties these two seemingly disparate works together: one, *The Terranauts* by T.C. Boyle, rests solidly within the category of science fiction, while the other, *The Addlands* by Tom Bullough, falls between historical fiction and land-based literature. Boyle's story takes place in an artificially created ecosystem under glass called 'Ecosphere 2' (E2), itself located in the Arizona desert, while the multi-generational story told by Bullough takes place in a very specific corner of Wales on Funnon Farm, cared for by members of the Hamer family for numerous generations.

Rather than the creation of an entire dystopian world, in *The Terranauts*, Boyle has chosen to tell the story of an isolated group of individuals whose cult-like fanaticism regarding the "Space Ecosphere Enterprises Ecosphere 2 project" requires self-sacrifice and extreme dedication from all those involved. At one point, the crew's lives are threatened due to changing conditions inside E2 and one character demonstrates his dedication:

"We're not breaking closure," I said, the words out before I knew my lips were moving. "No matter what. That's the pledge we took." (190)

Boyle's concept is loosely based on the Biosphere II experiment of the early 1990s,

which was meant to simulate the possibility of living in a closed-system Mars colony.

The world in which the members of the Hamer family live is extremely ordinary, and yet the detailed manner in which the locals know and name every tree, hill, farm, fence, and pond, as well as their stories, gives the land a level of agency that is not often seen in modern society. While connections to place in the novel are often transient, superficial, and temporary, the characters pay careful attention to the land around them, noticing details in unpredictable, yet vivid ways:

There was frogspawn in the weepy ground on Cefn Wylfre: clods like tapioca scattered through the puddles, the dots in their bubbles already extending into commas. (Bullough 53)

Boyle tells his story through the perspectives of three main characters, two E2 Terranauts and one outside E2, a Terranaut in waiting. All of these characters are richly developed, with differing perspectives on the events occurring throughout the process of the E2 experiment, which adds depth and a consistently complex perspective on events. At times, the plot seems to drag, as we see the same event from so many different perspectives, and while this can sometimes seem frustrating, it helps the reader to better understand the perspectives of the Terranauts waiting out their two-year closure in E2.

The Hamer family, over a total of four generations, are the protagonists of Bullough's work. The intimate knowledge these characters have of the land on which they live and nurture life is displayed through the passing on of knowledge from one

generation to the next, as well as through the interactions the characters have with the land itself as time passes and they encounter various challenges brought on by weather, world events, and societal changes. Their familiarity with the land is enough to make one envious of this connection and level of knowledge. The story is told in a series of moments, events in the life of the farm and family, skipping many years in between. While this style of narration makes for a fragmented read, it brings a feeling of continuity to life between these events. One can assume that between chapters life on the farm has continued with little or no change.

Boyle gives his characters a depth of knowledge and awareness of the ecology of E2 that they share with readers in such a way that the layers of complexity of such a project are made clear. This novel successfully illustrates the myriad interactions between organisms and the environment and how unpredictable an artificially created closed system can be. The consequences of a single change in weather, species movement, or human interaction can be drastic and have direct impacts on the survival of the Terranauts inside E2. Boyle's emphasis on interconnectedness is directly paralleled to the ecology of E1, planet Earth, whose scale and many poorly understood biomes render this interconnectedness even more complex.

Throughout the novel Boyle uses the duality of those on the outside versus those on the inside as a comparative tool. This is facilitated by his choice of using three distinct narrators, one of whom is not chosen as a Terranaut for the E2 mission. This comparison is readily expanded to those who have made the choice to act sustainably and those who have not, those who are willing to make sacrifices for the good of E1 and those

who are unwilling to do so. Bullough uses duality in a similar manner by comparing those who care for Funnon farm and those who do not, those who dedicate their lives to the land and those who chose to leave their land to pursue other opportunities.

As events proceed within E2, the Terranauts, the project leaders, and public relations representatives are eager to present the project in the best light at all times. Politics have a major role to play in any environmental initiative, and the struggles of the characters in this novel are a further commentary on the inevitable political component of sustainability. The importance of politics in environmental projects cannot be understated; one can only wonder how our world today might be different if ecologists were more aware of presentation and public relations as they share their knowledge and understandings of our planet's future.

Politics, societal changes, and economics all play a significant role in life on Funnon Farm, altering the feasibility of the farm as a source of income for the family and the priorities of those living on the farm and the various members of the Hamer family. As times continue to change, the members of the family must continually adapt; while their way of life is not easily maintained over the 70 years of the story's timeline, it is, in the opinion of the characters, worth fighting for.

The final tie between both of these works of fiction is the value of earth, whether it is the sustainability of the planet as a whole or that of a specific, cherished piece of land. People must work together and make sacrifices to care for the earth as it cares for them, whether that takes place in the Arizona desert or in the fields of a Welsh farm.

CARLY E THOMAS is a high school science teacher with degrees in Biology, French and Secondary Education. She is an avid camper and traveller, exploring biomes the world over. She lives in Toronto, Ontario where she is currently completing her Master's degree in Environmental Studies at York University, with a research focus on culture and environmental education.