


6-12-2019

Hawk on Wire: Ecopoems by Scott T. Starbuck

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Hansen, Vivian M.. "Hawk on Wire: Ecopoems by Scott T. Starbuck." *The Goose*, vol. 17 , no. 2 , article 16, 2019,
<https://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose/vol17/iss2/16>.

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An Eco Prophecy

Hawk on Wire by **SCOTT T. STARBUCK**

Fomite, 2017. \$15.00 USD

Reviewed by **VIVIAN HANSEN**

Scott T. Starbuck's *Hawk on Wire: Eco-poems* was a finalist for The Montaigne Medal, sponsored by The Eric Hoffer Book Award, for "most thought-provoking book." As any eco-poetry collection reminds us these days, a thought-provoking book ought to be required reading.

Hawk on Wire is relatable to Don McKay's essays about ecopoetry, where he asserts that a key element in ecopoetics is "poetic attention." In this creative space, the poet reproduces a kind of awe that "celebrates the wilderness of the other; it gives ontological applause" (26). The poet caught in this wilderness poetic discovers an alternative path into the wild. *Hawk on Wire* is a fine example of essential poetic attention; it plays the grains of art and advocacy into a not-so-peculiar merge.

Starbuck's style looks outward from his grounded position as a fisherman. The innate dream of that fisherman conjures an old Indigenous parable in "Wind Spirit": "He knew king salmon had a bright red soul so he went to ask, / but all king salmon were dead"(4). The angler tips his poetic line to a gift of knowledge in "Staring at PLAYA Pond Thinking of Impermanence":

When you hold someone or
something dying,
you move through layers of grief
and acceptance,
grief again, acceptance, a space-time
dragonfly
on a farm pond near a rope swing
as Giant Bass of Death leaps, bites,

swallows,
splashing artfully invisible as whole
scene
of fading planets, lovers, parents
rings in shadow of spirit angler
working the water. (18)

Starbuck's key points of view come from ghosts who speak of climate change: Mark Twain, Rilke, Galileo, Mother Teresa, Edward Abbey, T'ao Ch'ien, Bukowski, Orwell, and Socrates all take poetic stage to comment. Rilke speaks this:

The river is a mirror
that changes as you change.
An eagle flies by
then her partner
then your shadow
unchilled, unforced. (44)

These ghosts remind us that past insights merge into a future charted by ecoprophecy and its poetic voice. These ghosts are the prophets that inform the humble fisherman of truths departed, but still relevant to the simple seeker.

Starbuck's poetry is a stage of query, refreshing as it draws attention to death and ghosts to show the remains of life. Here is where we find a crossroads to climate change: "but the ancient voice, old as missing rain, says look, look, look" (31). The collection is mostly written in unrhymed couplets. Where form meets content, the visual couplet in this work suggests a collective, a unity of purpose and understanding that reveals itself in common concern. The lyrical whiplash is effective, as the angler fisherman finds himself in a ghostly place: "and fish ghosts from the dried lake darted up, in, and out of my dreams" (33).

Starbuck's sense of "poetic attention" is captured in the stillness of his waking dreams. When he rouses in the moment of drama, his attention diverts the reader to the ever-present decisions we all make. In one such story entitled "Enkidu Moment," the poem and the deer in the poem merge with the poet:

I was casting for fall chinook in October
when the deer tore downriver, almost
catching my line.
He dogpaddled for all he was worth,
and
his eyes begged
"Please don't tell."
I was a river hunter, not a deer hunter,
and the mixed metaphor of a salmon-
deer
was odd.
Orange vests emerged, excited, cursing,
crashing through alders. "Which way",
they demanded.

I thought a moment, looked at tall
evergreens,
and pointed over the wrong ridge. (43)

Although this poem holds
anthropomorphism in its gaze, that seeing
is doubled in its judgment toward the
hunters.

Starbuck's poetic attention is more than
just a nod to some small visions he receives.
He calls for human devotion toward the
wild and climate change, a devotion that
intercepts the hunter and veers toward
prophecy and the promise of a new vision.

WORKS CITED

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