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Review: The New Earth Reader: The Best of Terra Nova

By D. Rothenberg and M. Ulvaeus (Eds.)

Reviewed by [Xavier E. Gros](#)

European Commission Joint Research Centre, The Netherlands

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Rothenberg, David., & Marta. Ulvaeus (Eds.). *The New Earth Reader: The Best of Terra Nova*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999. 208 pp. ISBN 0-262-18195-9 (hardcover). US\$24.95

This is one of these books that you can take up on any page and find something well worth reading. *The New Earth Reader* achieves what its editors claim; i.e. " ... a larger, more encompassing view of nature, the environment, and nature writing itself." *The New Earth Reader* is the first volume of the Best of Terra Nova's book series dedicated to a specific theme, namely the earth. Forthcoming titles are expected to deal with water, air, and fire. This publication, that collects sixteen essays and interviews from the first ten issues of the journal *Terra Nova*, succeeds in reconciling "the human and natural worlds."

The New Earth Reader contains the right balance of essays and interviews, harmonized with high quality photographs. This makes it suitable for a large audience, and not just for scholars. Next, the writings are clear and refreshing, with topics range from skyjacking to surviving a crocodile fight. Finally, it offers readers the diversity of the earth within a heterogeneous environmental literary structure. Readers will share authors' personal experiences in the wilderness, learn about bioregionalism, explore human and animal behaviours in their living environment, and partake of dreams, hopes and expectations of making our world a better place.

Bikram Narayan Nanda and Mohammad Talib report in an ingenious way about power, oppression, and industrial pollution in an Indian village. By focusing on political corruption and industrial development without account for the environment, they give a concerned vision on human degradation and exploitation. In their essay, a factory's fumes are perceived as a living entity that feeds on the human natural environment. Reminiscent of the novel *Germinial* by Emile Zola (1840-1902), they reveal the power of glorified capitalism and the fight of villagers to preserve their habitat. Their story reads as a call for desperate measures and international help. On a different topic, author Charles Bowden provides an insight into human endurance in an urban Mexican jungle, where alcohol, violence, and drugs are daily features. Others discuss environmental changes, ecology, wildlife protection policies, and more.

Horace Walpole (1717-1797) summarized what one may conclude after reading this book: "this world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel." However, the reader is motivated, rather than disheartened. The vitality and dynamism conveyed in this book demonstrate that, whether we are human, animal, or vegetable, we struggle to survive and preserve our natural environment, and that our planet is wild, dangerous, and suffering, but also alive and worth fighting for.

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