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Jan Zwicky edited by MARK DICKINSON and
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Described by its editors as “the first formal measure” of Jan Zwicky’s influence, *Lyric Ecology* comprises twenty-seven pieces (by twenty-six contributors) that vary in length from one to thirty-two pages. Richly eclectic in voice, structure, approach, and content, these pieces can be read in isolation. However, to grasp fully the value and import of *Lyric Ecology*, one must read it front to back—preferably more than once. The reason is music. In her essay “Bringhurst’s Presocratics,” Jan Zwicky says: “Lyric resonance is a function of the attunement of various distinct components. It thus requires an open structure with distinct elements or distinct axes of experience which stand in a non-linear relation to one another.” Remarkable about *Lyric Ecology* is its own lyric resonance, for which editors Clare Goulet and Mark Dickinson deserve high praise. In this 272-page appreciation of Zwicky’s work, there is abundant evidence of the editors’ commitment to embodying—in both form and content—the resonance about which Zwicky speaks and which is characteristic of her own work. But *Lyric Ecology* is not a case of imitation being flattery’s highest form; the book is Zwicky-inspired, not derivative.

In a bounty of strong contributors to *Lyric Ecology*, two of the strongest riff, directly or obliquely, off Zwicky’s own work. These authors are transfused by her poetry, poetics, and philosophy and—thus nourished—noodle with their own responses and ideas. One is relatively sober (Warren Heiti), one richly witty (Trevor Goward); both are awash in co-contemplation with Zwicky. The form of Heiti’s “Ethics and Domesticity” is a nod to that of *Lyric Philosophy* and *Wisdom and Metaphor*. Though it does not

The Whole (So Far) Grasped in the Particular

Lyric Ecology: An Appreciation of the Work of

follow their “duon,” or facing-page structure, it is a flowing conversation between the writings of other philosophers (including Zwicky) and Heiti himself. It is a thinking-through, a working-out, a journey. It is a thoughtful examination of entry into Zwicky’s philosophy and an attempt to move that philosophy forward by engendering more questions. In “Membrane & Mosquito,” lichenologist Trevor Goward takes us on a (metaphorical) hike to the origin of metaphor. He is a scientist unafraid of saying—is in fact compelled to say—that *life is magic*, and that what we know now about it is about as much as we’ll ever know. His connection with Jan Zwicky, beyond friendship, seems to be in his sense that her philosophy and poetics express what he has tentatively concluded, as a scientist, about our existence.

Like Goward’s, other essays shed light on the use of “ecology” in the book’s title. Adam Dickinson proposes a link between the thinking of Jakob von Uexküll—a founder of modern ecology—and Zwicky’s poetry. “Surreal Ecology: Freud, Zwicky and the Lyric Unconscious” argues that in Zwicky’s effort to imagine poetically the world of the other (an apple, etc.) is the spirit of von Uexküll, who attempted “to subvert the assumed objectivity of scientific thinking by imagining how the world would look to other creatures.” In his four-page “Metaphor and Ecological Responsibility,” Darren Bifford manages to show how the work of advancing ecological responsibility is directly connected with Zwicky’s understanding of the work of metaphor, which is, in part, to link seemingly disparate things.

Not surprisingly, since Zwicky’s thinking and writing are steeped in the exploration, use, and significance of metaphor, many more *Lyric Ecology* contributors (too numerous to mention) address this aspect of her work. In their essays is a refreshing paucity (though not complete absence) of markedly interpretive literary criticism—that is, criticism with its mind made up about meaning. (In “Bees Humming in the Hand:

Zwicky’s Surprises,” Brian Bartlett takes a break from the theme, mining Zwicky’s poetry for places and ways in which its effectiveness does *not* depend on metaphor.)

Complementary essays by Dennis Lee and Clare Goulet address structure in two of Zwicky’s major works, *Lyric Philosophy* and *Wisdom and Metaphor*. In “The Music of Thinking: The Structural Logic of *Lyric Philosophy*,” Lee draws from conversations with Zwicky and from his own reading of *Lyric Philosophy* to elucidate the book’s construction and organization: their genesis, *raison d’être*, and effect. Lee shows—proves, even—that in the overarching contrapuntal/binary nature of *Lyric Philosophy* “Zwicky has devised an original medium for philosophic thinking.” Goulet’s “Reading *Thisness*” takes a different tack, placing one ostensibly tiny element of both *Lyric Philosophy* and *Wisdom and Metaphor* under the microscope. In her dissection of Zwicky’s use of the dash—its many and precise variations—Goulet stumbles onto a realization: Zwicky’s choice of dashes, like a cabinetmaker’s meticulous choice of hinges, is a manifestation of attention (appropriate and necessary) to the functioning of a work. Both Lee and Goulet articulate the extent to which Zwicky is devoted to clarity—of word but also of form—in broad stroke and in detail.

Several essays in *Lyric Philosophy* serve as introductions to fields of knowledge that inform Zwicky’s work. For example, Gordon Johnson’s “Dust in Sunlight” illuminates her Beethoven poems, addressing subtleties lost on those of us not schooled in the biography and peculiarities of that composer. Carolyn Richardson’s “Talk About Talk” is partly a primer on analytic philosophy, which helps us understand her broader reflections on how and why Zwicky’s voice necessarily troubles the waters of that school.

Teachers of creative writing could benefit from reading one of *Lyric Ecology*’s best examples of “applied” Zwicky. In his essay “Why I Teach Jan

Zwicky," H. L. Hix describes a writing course that draws from Zwicky's arguments for analytic and lyric philosophy. He advocates sagely for both skill and oracularity in poetry writing, and for conceiving of poetry as something that goes beyond "literature."

In "The Back-Stretched Connection," coeditor Mark Dickinson notes that Zwicky keeps "the details of her personal life and the stories behind her ideas away from the public." With minimal deviation from this desire for privacy, and with sensitivity, *Lyric Ecology* still manages to bring Jan-Zwicky-the-Person to life. Two contributors (a former teacher and a former student) excel. Christopher Wiseman's "The Unforgettable Teenager" recounts Zwicky's presence in the first-ever creative writing class at the University of Calgary. Charles Barbour studied philosophy with Zwicky in her early days of teaching. In his aptly titled "Echoes of the Ardent Voice," Barbour shares the profound influence Zwicky has had on his thinking and life.

In *Lyric Ecology*, where resonance in content and structure is palpable, there are also lamentable silences. One I will simply note: except for a brief quote in the editors' preface, Don McKay does not speak. Another silence I will expand upon. In 2003, JackPine Press published a book in limited edition—*Contemplation and Resistance: A Conversation*—a correspondence-based exchange between Zwicky and Tim Lilburn. It long ago sold out. Comprising 11.5 double leaves, this short volume is a distillation of Zwicky/Lilburn thinking that is itself a coherent, resonant whole. *Lyric Ecology* includes less than half (the first) of *Contemplation and Resistance*. Whether this omission is owing to reprint rights issues or to an editorial decision is unclear. Whatever the case, it creates a rare point of dissonance in the book and prolongs limited accessibility to an important piece of Zwicky's (and Lilburn's) work.

But these misses are minor, relative to the overall success of *Lyric Ecology*. Reading it

reminded me of a colleague's comment to a university class on the fundamentals of thinking and writing about literature. Specifically about collections of poetry, Jeremy Leiper said, "Don't imagine that when you close the book, nothing's going on. Those poems continue talking with one another." Likewise, in *Lyric Ecology* there ensues a conversation between its twenty-six contributors: appreciative, yes, but also informed, inspired, stimulating, good-willed (if not always in accord), new ideas seeding and forming. And now a twenty-seventh person has joined the conversation in my personal copy of *Lyric Ecology*, which is pencilled with commentary, questions, and the graphic equivalents of furrowed brow, excitement and insight.

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