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Review: Bringing the Biosphere Home: Learning to Perceive Global Environmental Change

By Mitchell Thomashow

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Mitchell Thomashow. *Bringing the Biosphere Home: Learning to Perceive Global Environmental Change*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002. 244 pp. ISBN 0-262-20137-2 (hardcover). US\$27.95. Alkaline paper.

We all believe we are familiar with our local environments: the landscapes surrounding our homes, the places we like to go to get away, the state of our air, water and green space. We may even be aware of the changes that have occurred over the years. But how deeply do we realize how much any simple action occurring within this space may affect its balance? How many of us look beyond our locales, and wonder how these actions, made in our small areas, can affect places on the other side of the globe? In *Bringing the Biosphere Home: Learning to Perceive Global Environmental Change*, Mitchell Thomashow uses anecdotes and metaphors from his local surroundings in New Hampshire to show how his observations can be translated into a more global picture. He begins each chapter with a vivid description of a scene close to home or a personal experience, and then relates this to a biospheric perspective.

Professor Thomashow describes his book as "a series of interconnected essays that explore various approaches to learning about global environmental change," essays that emphasize perception and interpretation. His teaching experiences, intellectual encounters, and personal narratives all contribute to his arguments. By incorporating the writings of Edward O. Wilson, Richard Fortey, Vladimir Vernadsky, Stephen Jay Gould, and others into his deliberations he gives them substance and reinforcement. He suggests that the magnitude of global environmental change, which can be overwhelming even to those who are familiar with the expanse of the biosphere, can be more manageable when personal actions and practices are studied.

In his first chapter Thomashow raises many questions: "How can global environmental change be interpreted? How can loss of biodiversity, global climate change, and habitat degradation become more accessible and personal so they are directly perceived and intrinsic to everyday awareness? How can local activities and events be of interest to the world, and how does the global movement of peoples, species and weather systems affect the local community? How do people learn of these connections?" Throughout

the remaining seven chapters, he addresses each of these thought-provoking queries, and finds ways to clarify and respond to them.

Using intriguing terms, such as "global wave of the millennium," "perceptual ecology," and "diasporic residency;" wonder stories, such as that of the migration of the monarch butterfly, that impress and awe the imagination; and down-to-earth suggestions, such as developing a biospheric curriculum for K-12 and undergraduate students, he stimulates the intellect of the reader. With his parting words, "Biospheric perception is a song of the soul learning to sing earth's music. ... Life is improvisation and the biosphere is its ever-changing symphony. Our task is to practice its music," Thomashow provides a final, charming metaphor to leave his reader inspired and energized.

This book is written simply and respectfully. Thomashow is an educator, and has used his professional experience and knowledge to arouse inquiry in his audience. Bringing the Biosphere Home should be of interest to many, lay and professional alike, as a source of inspiration to generate thought and action about the natural world, close to home, and beyond.

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