

Caitlin Silberman invites us into James McNeill Whistler's Peacock Room. She sees it as a paean to the unique creative power of the artist, opposed equally to John Ruskin's view of beauty as a gift from God and to Charles Darwin's grounding of beauty in animals' reproductive choices.

Victorian Science and Imagery is a first-rate piece of work. It offers fresh perspectives on the ideas and anxieties that reverberated through Victorian culture. It will also be of more general interest to students of the relations between the sciences and the visual arts, as the book more than lives up to its promise to show how the tools and practices of art history can open up new perspectives on those relations.

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Raf de Bont, *Nature's Diplomats: Science, Internationalism, and Preservation, 1920–1960*

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The term 'nature's diplomats', which titles Raf de Bont's admirable study of early to mid-twentieth-century international environmental networks, is one that raises eyebrows. Diplomats represent states, organs of political power for whom diplomacy is a means of communicating with peer entities. Nature has no such institutional standing. But as De Bont notes, to be a diplomat is also to perform a set of behaviours characterized by adherence to conventions, to *act* in a particular manner within an international context. Thus is the peace kept, the existing order of things maintained, and outsiders kept at bay. The diplomats in this book were not acting on nature's orders so much as acting on their own desires to protect what they deemed valuable in nature. As such, the study focuses on how privileged actors used and lost power more than on the development of scientific ideas – though De Bont ensures that these are woven into his analysis. Chronologically the book occupies a niche between the early years of the twentieth century and the 1960s. Before the flowering of modern interest, De Bont argues, came a period of international coordination and organizing through 'civic, internationally conceived, and scientifically inspired organizations' and networks, through which many of the central assumptions and conventions of the modern conservation movement were developed (p. 9). The nature that these well-heeled individuals sought to protect was found around the world, but its saviours were overwhelmingly based in Western and Northern Europe and the East Coast of the United States.

De Bont begins with a world that will be familiar to historians of environmentalism, of national romantic conceptions of natural heritage and concerns for imperial fauna. Most notable perhaps was Paul Sarasin, a Swiss naturalist who sought to make nature protection an international concern in both conceptual and practical terms – which De Bont singles out as significant for taking existing traditions and reframing them in universalist terms. Sarasin passed the torch to Pieter Gerbrand van Tienhoven, whose bulging address

book forms the backbone of the second chapter. Both knowing and protecting nature were goals that could be pursued through correspondence. In doing so, the gentlemen concerned sought what De Bont describes as a 'scientific aura' that would strengthen their claims to authority, even as most (like the lawyer Van Tienhoven) were not scientists themselves (p. 83).

The middle section of the book takes three case studies – migratory birds, the European wisent and the Albert National Park in the Belgian Congo – to explore how international nature protection was practised as well as discussed during the interwar years. Particularly striking is De Bont's analysis of how Germans such as the Nazi sympathizer Lutz Heck embedded the concept of *Heimat* (roughly 'homeland'), rooted in a romantic association between place and national heritage, in an international quest to protect and restore the wisent. The dispersal of the animals necessitated both collaboration across borders and technologies of control (notably the studbook). De Bont uses the Albert National Park to explore a different tension, between an aspiration to present the park as an international laboratory embodying civilized European values and the national sinews of power that characterized colonial rule.

The final three chapters take the book's story past the Second World War. Readers will feel a shift as organizations loom larger relative to individuals, even as particular actors such as Julian Huxley remained prominent. De Bont argues that the new postwar initiatives nevertheless drew on existing networks and the pedigree they provided, neatly illustrated by the photograph of Sarasin's memorial stone at the start of the proceedings of the 1946 International Conference for the Protection of Nature. Conservation gained favour over preservation in part because a new generation of conservation-minded ecologists successfully established themselves as authorities within both national and international structures dedicated to management. De Bont concludes that practical management inevitably involved bending universal schemes to local realities; deep knowledge of place an essential component of devising effective management solutions.

What is the importance of the history that *Nature's Diplomats* excavates? De Bont makes the case that the world of international gentlemen left traces that persist in meaningful ways to the present. He detects echoes of times past in the cultural orientation of bodies such as the World Wildlife Foundation, and in species data books with their own lineage in Lutz's studbooks. Species-centric concepts of conservation biology and biodiversity further reflect a vision of nature as in need of protection from human malice.

Nevertheless, I find myself uncertain about his conclusion that nature 'will need diplomats more than ever. But it might require a new kind of diplomacy' (p. 207). If environmental concerns have become increasingly located within wider discourses for sustainable development, then nature may perhaps be regarded as a citizen within a polity also containing culture, to be represented by functionaries within rather than emissaries to the world of human affairs. From another perspective, a new diplomacy is perhaps already emerging through the concept of the rights of nature, particularly as articulated by Indigenous scholars and knowledge keepers, which frames nature as possessing inherent rights – while again inviting reflection on who exactly argues for those rights within human affairs. De Bont's book will stimulate welcome reflection on this question – and, through its careful historical analysis, on the enduring structural privilege that many of those speakers possess.

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