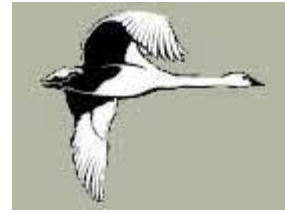


## The Trumpeter (2001)

### Book Review: Under the Tough Old Stars



Richard Arnold

A native of Alabama, since 1985 Richard Arnold has lived, worked, raised a family, and explored the wilderness on Vancouver Island, B.C. His creative and scholarly writings have appeared in *The Trumpeter*, *Ecoforestry*, *ECW Press*, *Organization & Environment*, *Isle*, and *Snowy Egret*.

BOOK REVIEW: “*Under the Tough Old Stars*”: *Ecopedagogical Essays*.

By David W. Jardine. Brandon, VT: Foundation for Educational Renewal, 2000.

Price \$24.95 (paper).

David Jardine, a professor in the Education Faculty at University of Calgary, is widely published in the field of ecopedagogy. Although this concept has been practiced for many centuries in traditional societies, as a named discipline it is rather a novelty in North America. Thank heaven for Jardine, and for other writers and teachers like him who are bringing this way of education to a generation of students. Basically, “ecopedagogy” means using (as often as possible) non-technological (i.e. natural) methods of instruction. It also involves an interconnected or “holistic” approach to knowledge—an approach which, as Jardine argues, overturns the standard western pedagogy of “isolating facts.”

“Under the tough old stars” is a line Jardine borrowed from poet Gary Snyder. It is comforting to read an education text which not only pays deep respect to poetry—citing Snyder, Wendell Berry, David Ignatow, and other poets—but which is itself poetic.

This is achieved by using un-prosy language, coined/compound words, and metaphor. Some passages in the book have a distinctly lyrical quality, like poetry; a good example is the closing chapter, “All Beings Are Your Ancestors,” subtitled “A Bear Sutra on Ecology, Buddhism, and Pedagogy.” Here, Jardine brings us immediately into his narrative with the opening sentence:

Just spotted a year-old black bear crossing Hwy.66 @ McLean Creek,  
heading north. (225)

In this chapter the bear, though actual and ordinary, becomes more than just a bear—as does the animal in William Faulkner’s “The Bear” (1940), surely the most powerfully poetic hunting story ever written. Jardine’s bear “mak[es] this whole place show its fragility and...mak[es] my own fragility and momentariness show” (226). Tinged, perhaps, with the quality of sound explored by Modernist writers (Pound, T.S. Eliot, Stein, as well as Faulkner), we read phrases like:

Stopped and watched him amble up the shalysteeep creekedged. Wet.  
Greenglistening...Like little bellybreath tingles on downarcing childgiggle  
swingsets...Nearby, the lowest Chakra tingles with an upspine burst to  
whitesparkle brilliance. (225-6)

This linguistic creativity may appear frivolous to readers expecting standard academic

prose, but I think it gives Jardine's narrative a first-person experiential quality which makes it more interesting and memorable.

Some chapters of this book give us too much "theory" on ecopedagogy, and not enough practice; I also find it bothersome to read the same quotes over and over (e.g. "To damage the earth is to damage your children," by Wendell Berry). Perhaps this latter condition arises because many of the essays were first published separately in journals.

There are some factual errors; for example, on page 224 Jardine writes: "I'll sit here a bit, near Solstice, facing Sol's perennial highpitched summer stasis over the Tropic of Capricorn." This should be Tropic of *Cancer*, assuming Jardine is located in the northern hemisphere. Citations in the text occasionally don't match the list of references—e.g. for Wendell Berry, is it 1986 or 1987? For Gary Snyder, 1977 or 1980? These inconsistencies need to be cleared up. Otherwise, I find "Under The Tough Old Stars" to be a unique yet practical, musically-written text on the education which *really* matters: teaching students that we humans are a part of nature, not apart from it.

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