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"Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1991) and Archival Reimaginations of Eco-Cosmopolitanism"

Hicks, Scott

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This article blurs the boundaries of literature, agriculture, public history, grassroots political activism, and public policymaking in order to problematize the current eco-cosmopolitan trajectory of ecocritical theory, a trajectory promulgated by Ursula K. Heise in important essays and books. Foregrounding the voices of grassroots environmentalists as well as the public-relations campaigns of multinational agribusiness trade groups, materials collected in the special collections of Iowa State University, the article resituates Smiley's prizewinning novel and offers a complication of current conceptualizations of eco-cosmopolitanism. The article aims to show the struggles of rural people to embrace a planetary consciousness—a global awareness that can paradoxically foreground as well as participate in the continued ecological devastation of the landscapes these activists hold dear. These local voices underscore the challenges human subjects face in articulating and narrating environmental relationships—even despite their intimate proximity to these landscapes. Just as *A Thousand Acres*'s mastery of a complex environmentalist voice is hard won, so too is that of dozens of rural people across the world. The challenges they face demand the close attention of the environmental humanities, not only to deeply engage appropriate texts, but to engage them with a framework that expands the orchestra and zeros in on the critical problems of global agriculture, planetary health, and human rights.

— Adapted from the author's abstract.

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