Jorie Grahams collection of poems, Never, primarily addresses concern over our environment in crisis. One of the most challenging poets writing today, Graham is no easy read, but the rewards are well worth the effort. While thematically present, her concern is not exclusively the demise of natural resources and depletion of species, but the philosophical and perceptual difficulty in capturing and depicting a physical world that may be lost, or one that we humans have limited sight of and into. As she notes in The Taken-Down God: We wish to not be erased from the / picture. We wish to picture the erasure. The human earth and its appearance. / The human and its disappearance. With a style that is fragmented and somewhat whirling—language dips and darts and asides are taken—Graham stays on point and presents an honest intellect at work, fumbling for an accurate understanding (or description) of the natural world, self-conscious about the limitations of language and perception. If you open and close your eyes there should be a difference, no, in the way the thing seen is— in its weight?—and then what the thinking has begun to make ... because there is, on it, which we've somehow introduced, this wash which is duration....

(Philosophers Stone) Never is a brilliant example of the struggle to preserve the physical, both in mind and in art. While this notion applies to all artistic endeavors, Grahams poems argue implicitly for preservation since our means of documentation are faulty. --Michael Ferch

I have been trying to write something resembling a review of this book for a long time - during which time I have been living with and trying to absorb
everything in NEVER, which is so much, and I still find it promising more even, than what I have from it already. The most immediate moment that presents itself in "Prayer" is the "here" of the now that is ghostly, yet audible somehow, still speakable, "posed," even on the lips. This "here" is just behind us as we read, and while it is lost in its instantiation as a moment of the most distinct pre-eminence, it is released in its passing into the visual current of the poem, and thus rendered palpable in different form. The persistence of this "spot of time" in light of what I would call its never-more-ness (and nevertheless still-being-ness) is what is at stake in the book, among many other things, among them, the difference between eternality (in part or whole, and as whom?) and immortality (in the sense of a Keatsian steadfastness of the bright star) and the idea of time as gravity, allowing for the possibility of being bound, itself the condition of freedom. The self does not save, and is not "saved" in its sameness, but in its being constantly sifted through time. And yet the "never" is next to the "here" and felt as such, as existing in intimate relation to it, neither by design nor choice, and not without the pathos of mute distance between them. In other words, I could not disagree more with the view expressed by Sven Birkerts (in his comment on NEVER in the New York Times) that "the disappearance of the perceived thing or the felt experience into the inconclusive enactments of process points to a dead end in Graham's art." It is precisely the tension between the perceiver and the thing perceived, the "here" of experience and the undertow in which it is swallowed up and released in new form that Graham addresses, with seriousness and the grave beauty of patient attention. I should also add that being in her class was a great joy for me. She is a generous and brilliant teacher and the care with which she reads poems is a moral statement, as well as a pleasure to behold.

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