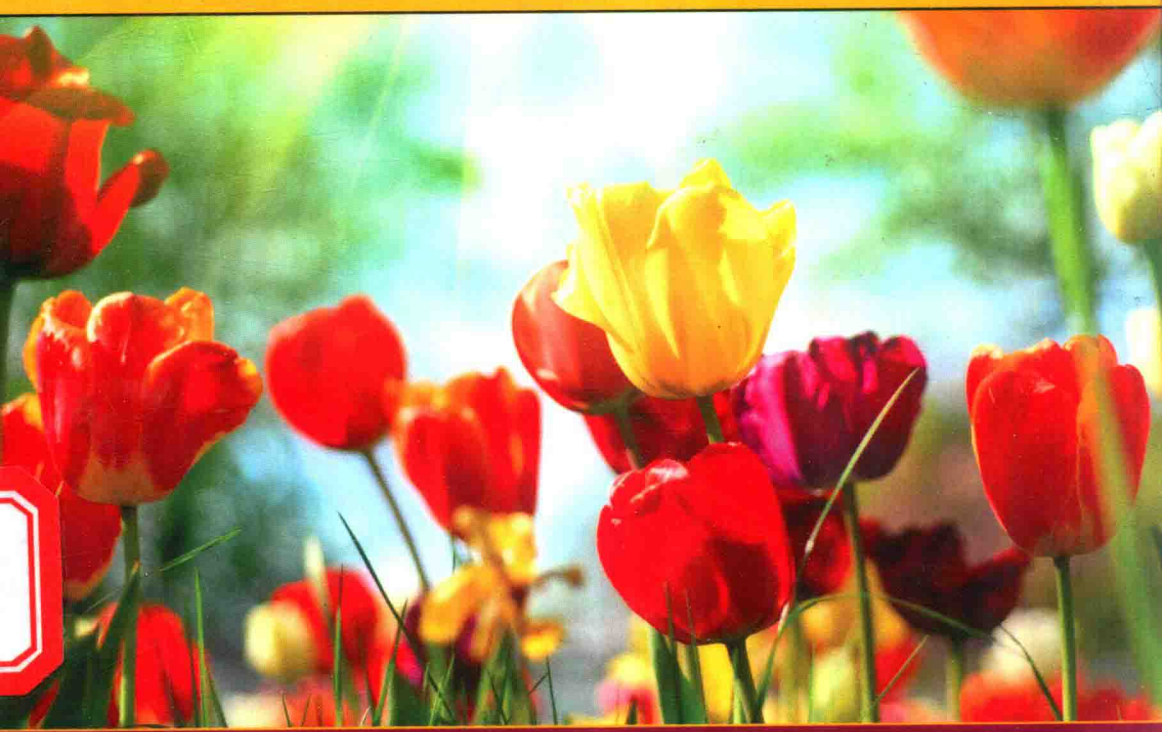
New International Voices in Ecocriticism



EDITED BY SERPIL OPPERMANN

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Edited by
Serpil Oppermann
Foreword by Scott Slovic
Afterword by Greta Gaard

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New International Voices in Ecocriticism

Ecocritical Theory and Practice
Douglas A. Vakoch, California Institute of Integral Studies, USA

Ecocritical Theory and Practice highlights innovative scholarship at the interface of literary/cultural studies and the environment, seeking to foster an ongoing dialogue between academics and environmental activists. Works that explore environmental issues through literatures, oral traditions, and cultural/media practices around the world are welcome. The series features books by established ecocritics that examine the intersection of theory and practice, including both monographs and edited volumes. Proposals are invited in the range of topics relevant to ecocriticism, including but not limited to works informed by cross-cultural and transnational approaches; postcolonialism; posthumanism; ecofeminism; ecospirituality, ecotheology, and religious studies; film/media and visual cultural studies; environmental aesthetics and arts; ecopoetics; ecophenomenology; ecopsychology; animal studies; and pedagogy.

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Urban Ecologies: City Space, Material Agency, and Environmental Politics in Contemporary Culture, by Christopher Schliephake

Foreword

Scott Slovic

At the beginning of a new academic year, I enter the classrooms expecting to be surprised and unsettled by fresh perspectives presented to me by my students. This happens year after year, even more so now that the gap between my generation and the youth of my students has yawned rather wide. And each time I'm startled by student insights that come across as personal challenges, I tell myself: "This is a good thing. This is how our field—and society—will make progress."

About two years ago, my friend Serpil Oppermann and her graduate students at Hacettepe University in Ankara, Turkey, had the bright idea of turning this commonplace encounter between teachers and their up-and-coming students into an opportunity—an opportunity to share some of the boldest new ideas in the field of ecocriticism, ideas born of the special vigor of graduate students working to carve their professional niches by reaching into terra incognita, with a vast world of readers. Though I was initially uncertain about the plausibility of such a volume, I am blown away by the range and passion of these articles. I shouldn't be surprised, as four of these contributors are my own former students—superstars all—and I've had the chance to meet and learn from many of the others during visits to Ankara, Augsburg, Beijing, Madrid, and Chennai. This is simply a powerhouse lineup of current graduate students from Asia, Europe, and North America, offering samples of their best, edge-pushing work, which is itself a sample of the brilliant work graduate students in literature and environment are doing in many other parts of the world.

I have been working in this field since I was a first-year Ph.D. student in 1984—I'm sure many of the contributors to this book had not even been born yet when I stumbled across John Muir's *Wilderness Essays* in the university library and thought to myself, "This is the type of writer who should be

getting more attention from literary scholars!" That ah-hah moment has now lasted for three decades. The field has evolved dramatically during this time. Those who subscribe to the "wave model" of ecocritical development have marked four waves up to now: the first wave with its focus on wilderness, Anglo-American nonfiction, and discursive ecofeminism; the more internationally inclusive second wave, with its turn toward urban experience and acknowledgment of environmental justice and postcolonial concerns across a wide swath of literary genres; the comparative and self-critical tendencies of the third wave; and more recently the emergence of a distinctive fourth wave, with a vigorous application of New Materialist vocabulary and thinking to environmental aesthetics and a dedication to making the environmental humanities count for something as humanity grapples with challenges of sustainability in a warming world.

I love how the contributors to the current volume ask Big Questions and self-consciously—I mean, *intentionally*—press themselves to "boldly go where no ecocritic has gone before" (to borrow from the famous motto of *Star Trek*—a television series that pre-dates most of the scholars in this book). There is an urge here to "expand" upon the material tendencies that have so newly emerged in ecocriticism—to erase the national boundaries that have constrained the field's focus until the recent comparative trend hit its stride—to go beyond nature even and seek ecocritical applications in "unnatural" contexts— and to ask "what we are" and "dismantle 'conceptual straitjackets'."

Those who wish to take the pulse of contemporary ecocriticism could hardly do better than to open this book and savor the international, multigeneric, and theoretically edgy perspectives of twelve contributors, coached and supported by Professor Oppermann. This is an unusual project in that all of the main contributors have yet to attain the Ph.D. degree—but this is entirely in keeping with the spirit of the field of ecocriticism, I think, which privileges intellectual energy and commitment to the cause of understanding the relationship between culture and nature rather than rank, tenure, or institutional affiliation.

I take heart in this beautiful new "ecobook," which reminds me so strongly of my own hopeful entry into ecocriticism before the field even had a name. That young scholars across the globe now devote themselves to this enterprise is cause for celebration.

Scott Slovic
University of Idaho, USA

Acknowledgments

The idea of this book originated at the University of Nevada, Reno during my six-month visit (September 2011–February 2012) as a Fulbright professor. The exciting journey of this book started there with a warm welcome from my academic host, distinguished professor Scott Slovic who joined me in in the early phase of this journey. I am immensely grateful to him for extending invaluable support in the preparation of its main outline, and later in the journey bestowing the honor of contributing with his Foreword. I extend special gratitude to Greta Gaard for supporting this project with her eloquent Afterword. Special mention must be made of the invaluable assistance of Simon C. Estok, who has helped me with his meticulous editing of many essays. I thank him for giving skillful attention to details and for his important feedback. To Serenella Iovino I send heartfelt gratitude for her precious insights and comments as I worked with the contributing authors. Her positive energies accompanied me at every stage of this book's development.

Special thanks go to the contributors themselves, who have been admirably punctual, collegial, and self-disciplined during the long process of revisions. I thank the Ecocritical Theory and Practice Series editor Douglas Vakoch for supporting this project, and extend my deep appreciation to assistant acquisitions editor Lindsey R. Porambo and to the editorial team at Lexington Books.

My final thanks go to the anonymous readers for their helpful feedback and invaluable suggestions.

Contents

Introduction

New International Voices in Ecocriticism

Serpil Oppermann

Ecocriticism is by nature transnational, multicultural, interdisciplinary, and pluriform. From its inception in the early 1990s, it has taken a rhizomatic path with multiple theoretical methods and international alliances that have fundamentally contributed to the exponential growth of the field into a worldwide movement without boundaries. A cursory survey of ecocritical anthologies and edited collections would testify to this development.[1] As anticipated by Cheryll Glotfelty in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* in 1996, "a diversity of voices"[2] has become the present constituency of ecocriticism. In fact, Glotfelty's words have proven to be highly prophetic: "In the future we can expect to see ecocritical scholarship becoming ever more interdisciplinary, multicultural, and international."[3]

Following Glotfelty and Fromm's foundational volume, many other ecocritical collections of essays have been influential in fostering the ecological critique of literary studies in the face of growing environmental problems, such as *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and Environment* (1998) edited by Michael Branch, Rochelle Johnson, Daniel Patterson, and Scott Slovic; *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature* (1998) edited by Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammell; and *Reading Under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in Ecocriticism* (2000) edited by John Tallmadge and Henry Harrington. The explosion of ecocritical articles in scholarly journals since 1996 also indicates how the field of humanities was being increasingly characterized by an ecological turn. Its proponents were urgent to formulate ecologically informed critical and intellectual tools for the interpretation of literary and cultural texts, to challenge the boundaries between nature and culture, and above all to respond to the pressing issues of

globalism as well as to the local socio-cultural problems which are closely linked to the increasing pressure of the environmental challenges. This background has significantly moved ecocritical scholarship beyond nature writing, as evidenced by the publication of Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace's *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* (2001). The main objective of this collection was to demonstrate the importance of expanding the generic and the disciplinary boundaries of ecocriticism. In order to display the field's "true range," the editors in their introduction to the volume stated that, "*Beyond Nature Writing* is our attempt to help ensure that ecocriticism does not get sidelined as yet another interesting but ultimately insubstantial subfield within English departments. The contributors . . . share our belief that ecocriticism offers a critical perspective that can enliven any literary and theoretical field."[4] Rooted in the environmental justice movement and its questions of race, gender, and class in environmental contexts, *The Environmental Justice Reader* (2002) edited by Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans and Rachel Stein, signals the field's first serious response to the connections between social issues and environmental degradation. This book in its entirety can be compared to a prism through which we can understand how the discourses of ecocriticism can contribute to our environmental problems.

Such connections are not a new discovery for feminist ecocritics. As a noteworthy example, Louise Westling's *The Green Breast of the New World* (1996) provides an in-depth analysis of the interrelations between the environment and race, gender, and class. Another feminist ecocritic, Patrick D. Murphy, developed a further argument on the implications of the patriarchal association of women and nature. In his chapter entitled, "'The Women Are Speaking': Contemporary Literature as Theoretical Critique," in the 1998 anthology he edited with Greta Gaard, *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*, Murphy conceptualized the "ecological" in relation, first, to the metonymic and the metaphoric functions of the ecosystem "for a set of necessary human-land relationships," and second, as "components of cultural heritage and continuity."[5] Murphy's exemplification of the ways in which cultural practices relate to the environmental effects did contribute to the much-needed critique of the environmental Others. Needless to say, the work of Val Plumwood, Karen Warren, Marti Kheel, Lori Gruen, Noël Sturgeon, Greta Gaard, Catriona Sandilands, Rachel Stein, Gay Bradshaw, Carol Adams, Simon C. Estok, among many others, has been influential in creating an "intersectional analysis of nature, gender, race, class, species, and sexuality"[6] in eco/feminist and ecocritical scholarship.

Another influential pathway that opened with the publication of Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman's edited volume, *Material Feminisms* (2008), points to the significance of the "emerging models of materiality in feminist theory." The editors suggest that "thinking through co-constitutive material-

ity of human corporeality and nonhuman natures offers possibilities for transforming environmentalism itself."[7] Material feminists have provided conceptual frameworks—such as Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality and Nancy Tuana's viscous porosity—for the paradigmatic expansion of ecocriticism into the ideological domains of bio-socio-cultural and science studies. Focused on the posthumanist reconfigurings of subjectivity, material agency, and corporeality, their theorizing not only helped initiate the material turn in the environmental humanities, but also launched revolutionary perceptions of agency, ontology, epistemology, and ethics. Material feminism's theoretical position accounts for nature's agency, suggesting that nature "acts, and those actions have consequences for both the human and nonhuman world."[8] While material feminisms offered a larger environmental perspective on the entanglements of human and nonhuman bodies, natures, and culture, another perspective that considers human relations with the nonhuman world (on a local scale) is offered by bioregionalism, as proposed by Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster in their co-edited volume, *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology and Place* (2012). Although different from material feminist theorization of human interchanges with the nonhuman environments, bioregional thought also considers the significance of intertwined environments, both cultural and natural, as constitutive features of human identity. In other words, bioregionalism explores human identity "in a larger community of natural beings—our local bioregion."[9]

The works of these scholars epitomize how ecocriticism has produced what Ursula K. Heise calls an "expanding matrix of coexisting projects," which, according to her, "explains the theoretical diversity it has attained in a mere dozen years."[10] This diversity in ecocriticism's broad framework has two consequences. The first is that with its methodological and theoretical eclecticism, as Steven Rosendale had pointed out in his anthology *The Greening of Literary Scholarship* (2001), ecocriticism has generated transdisciplinary perspectives that are inherently global in nature, incorporating a wide variety of international viewpoints that also underline the influence of the local in the interpretations of the world. The second consequence of this eclecticism is the provisional formulation of fragmentary methods and theories that presents an openness to theorize the field. As a worldwide network of sometimes conflicting views, ecocritical enterprise has an academic standing that, unlike other critical discourses in the humanities, disseminates in all directions, resistant to being framed or fixed in a field-defining methodology. Referring to the environmental turn in literary studies as "a concourse of discrepant practices"[11] in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), Lawrence Buell claims quite rightly that "the progress of environmental criticism in the field of literary studies has been on the whole encouraging but mixed."[12] Ecocriticism's procession on several fronts indicates what John Tallmadge and Henry Harrington had anticipated earlier when they

observed that "ecocriticism is really less a method than an attitude, an angle of vision, and a mode of critique."[13] Ecocriticism, to quote their words, still "remains open, flexible, capacious, and . . . capable of supporting the most diverse and sophisticated researches without spinning off into obscurantism or idiosyncracy."[14] Scott Slovic's similar assessment in his essay, "Ecocriticism: Containing Multitudes," in Laurence Coupe's edited volume, *The Green Studies Reader* (2000), explains that "ecocriticism has no central, dominant doctrine or theoretical apparatus—rather, it is being re-defined daily by the actual practice of thousands of literary scholars around the world."[15] Since ecocriticism is, as David Mazel also convincingly notes, "less a singular approach or method than a constellation of approaches having little more in common than a shared concern with the environment,"[16] and since its expansion is seen as "potentially rewarding,"[17] it has turned into an interesting rhizomatic activity with the rhizome serving as the model that "provides the best explanation for the current multiple trajectory of ecocriticism.[18] By transitioning "into a field of diverse specialities and methodologies,"[19] ecocriticism has become a complex area of study in the humanities, with the largest developments in recent years reflecting ASLE's (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) international growth and its influence in developing ecocritical scholarship across North America, Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa, New Zealand, and Latin America. [20] In "The Third Wave of Ecocriticism," Scott Slovic defines this development as "The impulse to study human experience in relation to the more-than-human world and to compare human experience across cultures."[21] In this international context, ecocriticism also "enables us to identify . . . texts that . . . offer us needed perspectives on the relations between the human and the nonhuman."[22] Incorporating ecology into culture and environmentalism into literary studies, ecocriticism has effectively challenged and subverted the anthropocentric visions of the world instigated by master narratives of domination and exploitation, and offered ethically and ecologically accountable readings of nonhuman others, as well as of place, race, gender, identity, and the body, the latter more specifically addressed by feminist and postcolonial ecocritics. Ecocriticism, writes Stacy Alaimo, "must continually engage in discursive critique, tracing not only how various conceptions of nature have implications for environmentalism, but how they have been bound up with pernicious notions of gender, race, sexuality and class,"[23] and must foreground, as Greta Gaard compellingly argues, "the gender/species/ecology connections that are so relevant to ecocriticism."[24] Benefiting from posthumanism and feminist animal studies alike, contemporary ecocriticism also fundamentally unsettles the liberal humanist conception of the human subject as the only intelligent agent with the ability to control nonhuman others.

It is in this climate of critical reflection that ecocritics have come to consider more seriously the interaction of ideas and the environment. "Most

of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas," wrote Richard Kerridge, "in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis."[25] Since ideas condition our responses to the physical world, many ecocritics today focus on exploring how ideas fashion our explanations of the world, and consequently how ideas can bring about a change in the way people behave toward the natural environments. We know that the best way to change the way people behave is to change the way they think. The question of how our perceptions of the world are culturally shaped, then, constitutes the general outline of ecocritical inquiry. Today's ecocritics offer a more material grounding for the ethical commitments ecocriticism has maintained from its early beginnings. Another implication is that by stepping beyond its complicity with mimesis and the U.S. nature writing tradition, ecocriticism has become more theoretically grounded. It is important to note here, however, that the earlier modes of ecocriticism still continue to be important today, as the new theoretical approaches *join* the early phases of ecocriticism, rather than leaving them behind. Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007) and *The Ecological Thought* (2010), Stacy Alaimo's *Bodily Natures* (2010), Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby's edited volume *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches* (2011), Timo Müller and Michael Sauter's collection *Literature, Ecology, Ethics: Recent Trends in Ecocriticism* (2012), and Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's edited collection, *Material Ecocriticism* (2014), are primary examples of the new theoretically engaged ecocritical pathways that have joined the conversations initiated by earlier phases of ecocriticism.

In this matrix of expansion as Ursula K. Heise would say, ecocriticism has no single distinctive method, but it is today a distinctive field of critical inquiry across the disciplines, from the humanities to the sciences, using models from molecular biology, ecology, quantum physics, geography, sociology, ethics, politics, and philosophy. Although such connections, especially to the hard sciences, remain "extraordinarily ambivalent"[26] and contested, one can nevertheless say, as Helena Feder has put it, "Ecocriticism is a good faith experiment in two cultures,"[27] and claim with confidence that this partly explains the increasingly diverse methodologies of the discourses of ecocriticism to help generate a rather hybrid environmental-literary-cultural constituency. The work of ecocritics such as Timothy Morton, Ursula K. Heise, Stacy Alaimo, Serenella Iovino, Jeffrey J. Cohen, Catriona Sandilands, Joni Adamson, and Scott Slovic, among others, exemplifies "the broadening of the generic horizon of ecocriticism."[28] As Serenella Iovino concedes, "the literary works and cultural objects analyzed by ecocriticism are not necessarily part of an 'ecological' or 'environmental' genre nor strictly connected with Anglo-American studies."[29] Iovino is "convinced that outstripping the borders of these genres—something which is becoming more and more frequent—reinforces ecocriticism."[30] Evidently, the project of ecocriticism le-

gitimates not only the transgression of borders and divides, conceptual and ontological, but also goes beyond the bounds of the simple notion of "nature" as pure, untouchable, ideal, or sacred, as Timothy Morton has also argued. The disconcerting contemporary reality, in this view, as projected by dark ecology that "includes ugliness and horror,"[31] is part of present ecocritical inquiry.

Today, noteworthy ecocritical discussions explore the relationship between the body, disability, and social justice in terms of the concept of disempowered ecological other. Sarah Jaquette Ray's *The Ecological Other* (2013) instantiates aspects of this orientation, reflecting on how the disabled body "is the consummate ecological other, forming the corporeal basis for other expressions of environmental exclusion."[32] There are also discussions of dirt, human health, food, and toxicity: for example, Heather Sullivan suggests "dirt theory" to bridge the gap between "green thinking" and the human sphere. She proposes it as "an antidote to nostalgic views rendering nature a far-away and 'clean' site . . . to suggest that there is no ultimate boundary between us and nature."[33] The Japanese ecocritic Masami Yuki discusses the diseases that have exploded due to "eating contaminated sea food"[34] in Minamata in southern Japan. Regarding food safety, the Korean ecocritic Won-Chung Kim calls attention to "the sporadic threats of foot-and-mouth-disease, avian influenza, mad cow disease, the melanin scandal in China, and the recent radioactive contamination in Japan."[35] Knowing that there is no safe ground on which to stand, these ecocritics have compelling arguments about the interconnectedness of ecological and human health, a point which Greg Garrard perceptively underlines in his essay, "Nature Cures? Or How to Police Analogies of Personal and Ecological Health": "when our health deserts us, we *can't* know positively, what it is, since it is likewise an entanglement of physiological fact and cultural value."[36] One thing is certain: ecocriticism is well aware of "how ecological health," to quote Serenella Iovino, "is strictly connected to political, social, and ethical issues."[37] It is, therefore, not surprising that these entangled topics of toxic-related diseases, pollution, health, and their cultural, social, and ethical dimensions feature strongly in ecocriticism, and in a highly self-conscious fashion in international contexts.

INTERNATIONAL INFLECTIONS

Ecocriticism is widely open to transatlantic dialogues, as spotlighted by Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer's *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism* (2006), and Simon C. Estok and Won-Chung Kim's *East Asian Ecocriticism: A Critical Reader* (2012). The last statement of the introduction in Gersdorf and Mayer's volume con-

firms the "vitality of the ongoing ecocritical exchange"[38] among ecocritics from many different countries: "As an ecologically inspired approach to literary and cultural studies, ecocriticism can participate in such a project, one that needs to be . . . a transatlantic, transnational endeavor."[39] As an immediate response to Gersdorf and Mayer's call, additional volumes emerged, developing ecocriticism's international conversations: *The Future of Ecocriticism: New Horizons* (2011) edited by Serpil Oppermann et al.; Joni Adamson and Kimberley N. Ruffin's collection *American Studies, Ecocriticism, and Citizenship: Thinking and Acting in the Local and Global Commons* (2013); Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok, and Serpil Oppermann's edited volume *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism* (2013); and Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran's *Ecoambiguity, Community, and Development: Toward a Politicized Ecocriticism* (2014). These publications underscore the significance of building what Serenella Iovino calls "non-anthropocentric humanism" or "a culture of copresence."[40] But, more crucially, this development represents third-wave ecocriticism as Scott Slovic and Joni Adamson have defined it in their guest editors' introduction to the special issue of *MELUS* (2009): "This special issue of *MELUS* starts from the premise that there has long been 'a diversity of voices' contributing to the understanding of the human relationship to the planet, both within the United States and throughout the world."[41] This has been one of the primary motivations in recent ecocritical enterprise, as the field is more and more engaged with international contacts. As I have stated elsewhere, "by placing a concerted emphasis on the diverse relations between the local sense of place and its reconceptualization as translocality, ecocriticism visibly signals the unfolding process of transnationalization in the field," opening "a dialogue between and among literatures and cultures."[42]

The transition of ecocriticism into a field of transnational (in the sense of transcending borders) environmental horizons is still an ongoing process, and the incorporation of emerging new voices, as they appear in this collection, to the plurality and diversity of approaches and methodologies prompts ecocriticism to attain a more visible sense of academic egalitarianism. What comes out of this diversity and plurality is the fact that ecocriticism is now developing more complex ways of understanding the entangled relationships between socio-cultural practices and local and global ecosystems, and especially human-nonhuman relationships. What are these ways? One specific caveat here is the way in which the animal question has been addressed by ecocritics in terms of interspecies ethics, or contextualized from perspectives that reveal "deep human conflicts, inconsistencies, and constructed boundaries."[43] Regarding interspecies care in the Taiwanese context, Chia-ju Chang and Iris Ralph provide interesting examples of the interspecies relations between "gou mama women" and "the plight of abandoned dogs";[44] and in the