

The Oxford Handbook of ECOCRITICISM

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

ECOCRITICISM

Edited by
GREG GARRARD



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ECOCRITICISM

PREFACE

In 1980 population biologist Paul Ehrlich and economist Julian L. Simon made a wager. Ehrlich, in his best-selling book The Population Bomb (1968), forecast that the exponentially growing human population coupled with increasingly resource-consumptive lifestyles of the affluent would outstrip natural resources, resulting in widespread famine in the 1970s and 1980s and resource shortages on a global scale. Simon, author of The Ultimate Resource (1981), countered that human ingenuity, technological innovation, and market forces would keep pace with environmental problems, averting catastrophe perhaps indefinitely. The bet concerned whether the prices of five different commodity metals would increase or decrease in ten years. Prices fell during the decade, and Simon won the first round of a continuing debate between environmental doomsayers and those whose hope lies in homo sapiens technologicus. Simon's victory notwithstanding, the specter of environmental catastrophe persists, and although cornucopians and environmental jeremiahs disagree, ultimately both positions share faith in the human potential to create a better world, cornucopians through innovation within the framework of the existing social order, jeremiahs through changes in policy and culture. Ecocriticism emerged as a movement among literary scholars in the early 1990s, born of an awareness of environmental crisis and a desire to be part of the solution.

The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism marks the coming-of-age of this movement. The 2013 projected publication date of this volume coincides with the twenty-first anniversary of the major professional organization in this field, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE). Founded in the US in 1992, ASLE began with fifty-four members, most of whom shared a scholarly interest in American nature writing, a tradition that had until then received negligible attention from literary critics. By 2012 ASLE's membership topped one thousand, with nine international affiliate organizations—in the UK and Ireland, Canada, India (two groups), Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand, and Europe. As David Mazel's A Century of Early Ecocriticism documents, writers and scholars have long been interested in the relationship between literature and the environment. The consolidation of these concerns in the late twentieth century under the rubric of ecocriticism created a community of scholars whose conversations and collaborations have accelerated the rhizomatic spread of this field to the point where a guidebook is needed to navigate the terrain.

The proliferation of anthologies of ecocriticism is one measure of the astonishing growth of environmental literary studies, and the specific topics of these volumes as well as their places of publication map the diversification of the field. Between 1990 and 1995, seven critical anthologies were published on literature and environment, most of

which investigated the representation of nature, wilderness, or environment in literary works. In the next five years, 1996 to 2000, eighteen ecocriticism anthologies appeared, broadening the purview to include urban environments, ecofeminist perspectives, rhetorical studies, and international audiences (with books published in Japanese, Korean, German, and French). Between 2001 and 2005, twenty-three ecocritical anthologies were published, further widening the reach "beyond nature writing"—as one book was entitled—with titles on environmental justice, theater, ecolinguistics, children's literature, and animal studies. The years 2006 to 2010 brought to print thirty-three ecocritical anthologies and marked the rise of postcolonial ecocritical studies, queer ecology, transatlantic conversations, toxic discourse, studies of visual media, and an expanding international reach in subject and place of publication to include China, India, Australia, the Caribbean, Finland, Spain, and Latin America. In just two years, 2011 and 2012, twenty anthologies have been published or are forthcoming, continuing the earlier interest in animals, and also including the posthuman, naturecultures, material ecocriticism, introductory anthologies for classroom use, and titles from or about Korea, Italy, Turkey, and Norway, in addition to the perennially productive United States and United Kingdom.

It is inaccurate to say, as some have claimed, that early ecocritics were hostile to literary theory. After all, what is ecocriticism if not an effort to bring environmental considerations into the discourse of literary criticism and theory? The Ecocriticism Reader (1996), edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, frequently cited as a foundational anthology in this field, opened with a substantial section on ecotheory. Regardless of ecocriticism's early stance toward theory, one of the most striking aspects of the Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism as a state-of-the-field collection is how theoretical the field has become, heavily influenced by continental philosophy and thinkers such as Gaston Bachelard, Roland Barthes, Ulrich Beck, Guy Debord, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud, David Harvey, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Wolfgang Iser, Fredric Jameson, Jacques Lacan, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Bruno Latour, Karl Marx, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Edward Said, Ferdinand de Saussure, Gayatri Spivak, Raymond Williams, and Slavoj Žižek, among others cited by the contributors to this volume. These sources help ecocritics to theorize connections between literature, the environment, and, for example, the nature of language, textuality, perception of space, construction of difference, species boundaries, social class, power, risk, ideology, agency, human psychology, epistemology, and ontology.

Equally noteworthy in contemporary ecocriticism is that a handful of recent theorists (several are contributors to this volume) are cited with great frequency, raising questions and piloting approaches that are shaping the discourse of ecocriticism in the twenty-first century: Stacy Alaimo, Lawrence Buell, Donna Haraway, Ursula Heise, Timothy Morton, Catriona Sandilands, Rob Nixon, Val Plumwood, and Cary Wolfe. Taken together, this new canon of theorists suggests that emerging directions in ecocriticism include interrogating conceptions of the human to take fuller account of embodiment, materiality, trans-corporeality, contingency, hybridity, animality, queerness,

and technology. Race, class, and gender stand out as important ecocritical categories in current practice, inflecting work in postcolonial ecocriticism, environmental justice, and globalization studies. The nature of Nature continues to preoccupy ecocritics, with increasing emphasis on breaking down the nature-culture binary, critiquing the conceit of a nature separate from the human realm. Indeed, the growth of ecocriticism parallels the rising awareness of the "end of nature," as Bill McKibben's 1989 book on climate change was so memorably titled. We live in the age of the Anthropocene, in which humans are a major force influencing the land, water, and weather of the Earth. That human-wrought changes are damaging the life support systems of the planet lends urgency to any project that may help us better understand culture as reflector and shaper of people's attitudes and actions.

The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism joins more than three hundred other titles in fourteen subjects covered by the Oxford Handbook series. The series is rapidly expanding and is now online. In 2012 the Literature subject area had twenty-one titles, with strengths in Shakespeare, early modern, modern, and American topics. This volume on ecocriticism is one of the first volumes in the series devoted to criticism and theory. The thirty-plus essays featured in The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism, authored by a mix of established leaders and newer scholars, together offer a critical overview of major historical periods, theoretical approaches, topics, genres, and geographies. In commissioning essays, editor Greg Garrard has struck a fine balance between critical overviews of major areas of inquiry and experimental forays into new territory. Readers will welcome fresh approaches to ecocritically well-studied periods such as romanticism and the nineteenth-century as well as ventures into less-studied periods, such as the medieval and the postmodern. You will find essays representing lively theoretical arenas, such as postcolonial ecocriticism, environmental justice, and feminist science studies, and essays venturing into new realms such as biosemiotics and pataphysics. In addition to essays that make new arguments about nature-oriented genres-for example, Daniel J. Philippon's "Is American Nature Writing Dead?"—are pioneering treatments of genres that have been heretofore all but ignored by ecocritics, genres such as humor, old-time music, children's literature, and digital media. Finally, in a selective update of Patrick D. Murphy's The Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook (1998), The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism concludes with reports on ecocritical activity and research in India, China, Japan, and Germany, and a coda by one of the most eloquent of contemporary environmental critics, South African writer Rob Nixon.

If population was regarded by many as the most pressing environmental issue of the 1970s and 1980s, the dominant environmental issue looming over this collection like a big, dark cloud is climate change. Many essays mention climate change, and two explicitly focus on it. Adam Trexler, whose essay considers how fiction mediates climate change, found more than two hundred works of fiction about anthropogenic global warming, published in the last thirty years. Ursula Kluwick examines how climate change science is communicated to the public via nonfiction narrative forms such as the documentary, popular science books, and climate change manuals. However, despite

keen attention to climate change, compared with early work in this field ecocriticism as practiced today focuses less on specific environmental issues and more on questions of environmentality and the nature of the human.

After twenty-one years of concerted effort, what have ecocritics achieved? Ecocriticism has changed the landscape of literary studies, moving from the margins into the mainstream. Virtually all major academic journals in literary studies publish ecocriticism, and many have devoted special issues to the topic. Ecocriticism has attracted the best and brightest minds in the discipline, the editor of the *Oxford Handbook* being a prime example. Ecocriticism has given literary scholars, most of whom are teachers, a meaningful role to play in addressing the most pressing issue of our time—the degraded environment. But has ecocriticism made a difference? It is too early to tell. The field is yet young. By the geological clock twenty-one years is infinitesimal. Even in the timescale of human evolution, two decades is scarcely one generation. It takes time for ideas to reach a tipping point. It takes even more time for culture to change. Meanwhile, the work goes on at a prodigious pace. Were he alive today, poet Allen Ginsberg might howl:

I saw the best minds of my generation obsessed by theory, burning ecocritical brainy, chaining themselves to the computer screens at dawn looking for a climate fix.

Cheryll Glotfelty

NOTE

 This paragraph and the final paragraph are adapted from Cheryll Glotfelty, "Why Anthologize Ecocriticism? Questioning Audience, Purpose, Publisher, and Cost," a paper delivered at the conference of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, Bloomington, Indiana, June 2011.

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Contents

Preface	ix
Cheryll Glotfelty	
Introduction Greg Garrard	1
PART I HISTORY	
Being Green in Late Medieval English Literature GILLIAN RUDD	27
2. Shadows of the Renaissance ROBERT N. WATSON	40
3. Romanticism and Ecocriticism KATE RIGBY	60
4. Cholera, Kipling, and Tropical India UPAMANYU PABLO MUKHERJEE	80
5. Ecocriticism and Modernism Anne Raine	98
6. W. E. B. Du Bois at the Grand Canyon: Nature, History, and Race in <i>Darkwater</i> JOHN CLABORN	118
7. Pataphysics and Postmodern Ecocriticism: A Prospectus ADAM DICKINSON	132
PART II THEORY	
8. Ecocriticism and the Politics of Representation CHERYL LOUSLEY	155

9.	Cosmovisions: Environmental Justice, Transnational American Studies, and Indigenous Literature Joni Adamson	172
10.	Feminist Science Studies and Ecocriticism: Aesthetics and Entanglement in the Deep Sea Stacy Alaimo	188
11.	Mediating Climate Change: Ecocriticism, Science Studies, and <i>The Hungry Tide</i> ADAM TREXLER	205
12.	Ecocriticism, Posthumanism, and the Biological Idea of Culture Helena Feder	225
13.	Ferality Tales GREG GARRARD	241
14.	Biosemiotic Criticism Timo Maran	260
15.	Phenomenology Timothy Clark	276
16.	Deconstruction and/as Ecology Timothy Morton	291
17.	Queer Life? Ecocriticism after the Fire CATRIONA SANDILANDS	305
18.	Postcolonialism Elizabeth DeLoughrey	.320
19.	Extinctions: Chronicles of Vanishing Fauna in the Colonial and Postcolonial Caribbean LIZABETH PARAVISINI-GEBERT	341
	LIZABETH PARAVISINI-GEBERT	
	PART III GENRE	
20.	Ecocritical Approaches to Literary Form and Genre: Urgency, Depth, Provisionality, Temporality RICHARD KERRIDGE	361
21.	Are You Serious? A Modest Proposal for Environmental Humor MICHAEL P. BRANCH	377

	CONTENTS	vii
22.	Is American Nature Writing Dead? Daniel J. Philippon	391
23.	Environmental Writing for Children: A Selected Reconnaissance of Heritages, Emphases, Horizons LAWRENCE BUELL	408
24.	The Contemporary English Novel and its Challenges to Ecocriticism Astrid Bracke	423
25.	"A Music Numerous as Space": Cognitive Environment and the House that Lyric Builds Sharon Lattig	440
26.	Rethinking Eco-Film Studies DAVID INGRAM	459
27.	Green Banjo: The Ecoformalism of Old-Time Music Scott Knickerbocker	475
28.	Media Moralia: Reflections on Damaged Environments and Digital Life Andrew McMurry	487
29.	Talking about Climate Change: The Ecological Crisis and Narrative Form URSULA KLUWICK PART IV THE VIEWS FROM HERE	502
30.	Ecocriticism in Japan Yuki Masami	519
31.	Engaging with <i>Prakriti</i> : A Survey of Ecocritical Praxis in India Swarnalatha Rangarajan	527
32.	Chinese Ecocriticism in the Last Ten Years QINGQI WEI	537
33.	German Ecocriticism: An Overview AXEL GOODBODY	547
34.	Barrier Beach Rob Nixon	560
Inc	dex	567

INTRODUCTION

GREG GARRARD

SEVENTEEN years ago Jennifer Wallace wrote a piece for the *Times Higher Education Supplement* introducing ecocriticism to British academia. An environmental activist nicknamed "Swampy" had recently become famous for constructing and inhabiting tunnels underneath woodlands threatened with road-building projects. According to Wallace, ecocritics such as Jonathan Bate and James McKusick were "Swampy's Smart Set"—the high-brow cultural arm of the environmental movement. The frame of reference of the article is explicitly Romantic: ecocriticism is understood to confront Marxists and New Historicists over the meaning and significance of British Romanticism. Marilyn Butler is quoted speaking of the new movement with patrician curiosity and indulgence. Wallace says Butler

is a little uncertain about the parameters or the point of ecocriticism. "What is it? Who are they?" she wonders. Much of it seems to her to be old-fashioned and nostalgic writing about nature under a new, trendy name. But on the other hand, she is intrigued by the latest interest in science and man's dependence on his environment. (Wallace 1997)

Bate's responses to some degree confirm Butler's anxieties: he asserts that ecocriticism is an anti-Enlightenment counter-revolution inspired by British Romanticism and American wilderness writing. Jay Parini's 1995 New York Times Magazine article "The Greening of the Humanities" depicts ecocritical pioneers who share the values and ambitions of their British counterparts, but are healthier with deeper tans: "Magnificent specimens of the human animal" in fact (Parini 1995).

Perhaps it is something to warrant a stereotype. If so, the sturdy sandal-wearing back-packer/literary critic laboring to reverse the Enlightenment disenchantment of the world might seem tolerably flattering. This figure is, though, representative only of what Lawrence Buell, one of Parini's original "specimens," has taught us to see as "first-wave" ecocriticism: inclined to celebrate nature rather than querying "nature" as a concept; keen to derive inspiration as directly as possible from environmental activism; and willing to defer in matters of truth to the natural sciences, especially ecology. "Second-wave" ecocriticism is too diverse and diffuse to summarize, let alone stereotype, but its connections with political environmentalism and ecological science are, on the whole, more complex and ambivalent. As Buell observes, for second-wave critics, "The discourses of