

Introduction: 2020 Ecocriticism, in Europe and Beyond

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Interest in ecocriticism has witnessed rapid growth over the past decade: it has established itself worldwide as an important branch of literary and cultural criticism, and entered into fruitful interdisciplinary collaborations with other disciplines under the umbrella of the environmental humanities. *Ecozon@* has played a part in this development in the European context. The articles we present in this tenth anniversary issue revisit questions raised in the journal's opening number, and touched on periodically in subsequent issues, concerning the state of ecocriticism in Europe, and the future of ecocriticism in general. As in our first issue, we invited leading theorists and practitioners to contribute short essays reviewing the development of ecocriticism in their region or field and indicating possible future directions. We are hugely grateful for their willingness to accept the challenge of surveying what was often uncharted territory and drawing conclusions within a limit of 3000 words.

European ecocritics typically face in two directions, seeking to introduce scholars and the public in non-English-speaking countries to ecocritical concepts and debates, while offering analyses of exemplary works from their own culture for an international readership. Ecocritics in Europe have been inspired by the foundational American theorists and practitioners, and have drawn extensively on their concepts and arguments. Individual American scholars have also played an influential role in internationalising ecocriticism: Scott Slovic in particular, editor of *ISLE* (1995-2020), has worked tirelessly to promote ecocritical approaches to literature and culture across Europe and elsewhere, and served as mentor for a generation of European scholars.

However, European ecocriticism is at the same time defined by its opposition to American landscapes and values. Inhabited cultural landscapes substitute for wilderness as an ideal, and critical practice has been described (by Peter Barry) as possessing an

“admonitory” rather than a “celebratory” tendency. European ecocritics are not necessarily primarily interested in wilderness issues, which drive their American counterparts, and personal accounts of supposedly untouched landscapes, which appear in American ecocriticism as nature writing. European ecocritics tend to be more concerned with rhetorical structure, form and language. They are also more preoccupied with relations between nature, culture, and literature. Revising the traditional conceptions of nature is a major point of concern. Developing more disanthropocentric ecocultural frameworks is therefore more emphatically foregrounded in European ecocritical studies. A further difference is that while Michael Cohen once cited a characterisation of (American) ecocriticism as the work of scholars who “would rather be hiking” than seated at a desk, colleagues in Europe are less likely to see such a direct link between academic work and lifestyle as the norm, and more cognisant of the tensions and contradictions inherent in studying environmental literature as opposed to environmental science, and those between different forms of environmental commitment. The transatlantic dichotomy these observations suggest is, however, qualified not merely by the succession of waves of ecocritical focus and the multiplicity of approaches found side by side in America, in what Lawrence Buell has described as “a concourse of discrepant practices,” but also by the culturally determined diversity of ecocritical theorising and methodologies in Europe, a continent characterised by multilingualism and cultural plurality.

The first section of this issue, “Literature, Landscape and Identity in Nations and Regions,” is therefore devoted to exploring cultural difference in Europe (extending beyond it in two instances), as manifested on the one hand in novelistic, filmic and other cultural representations of nature. On the other hand it examines differences in approaches to ecocritical analysis, shaped as these latter are by the academic traditions, dominant schools of thought and differently structured institutions in individual countries. The culture-specific inflections of ecocritical scholarship which it is concerned with are not the same thing as the transnationalisation of ecocriticism which was hailed by Ursula Heise and others ten years ago, when it was transitioning into a globalised ecocultural and ecoliterary field of enquiry focused on works of world literature. Ecocriticism in Europe seeks to throw light on the interconnections between cultures, physical environments and histories: it is more interested in the particular and the situated than in the universal.

In the first of the ten essays assembled here, a team of Scandinavian Studies researchers consisting of Aasta Marie Bjørvand Bjørkøy, Sissel Furuseth, Anne Gjelsvik, Ahmet Gürata, Reinhard Hennig, Julia Leyda and Katie Ritson show how depictions of climate change in Norwegian literature, film and TV are coloured by Nordic identity and the nation's cultural history. Bénédicte Meillon follows with an account of how French ecocriticism focuses on poetics (drawing on narratology, semiotics, stylistics and linguistics), demonstrating herself that its very language is characterised by a Gallic pursuit of elegance. Elena Past reveals that thinking “on foot,” at a pace enabling an ethic and aesthetic attuned to historical depth and ecological crisis, is an impulse guiding Italian

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ecocriticism and a recurrent trend in Italian cinema—one reclaiming a Southern European form of representation from the domination of the global North.

The next three essays review the themes and methodologies which characterise the study of literature and environment in Poland, the Baltic countries and Turkey. Wojciech Małecki and Jarosław Woźniak, Kadri Tüür and Ene-Reet Soovik, and Meliz Ergin show how the panoply of Anglophone terms and theories which arrived at the beginning of this century spread outwards from departments of American Studies and Comparative Literature, and triggered a rediscovery of both native traditions of nature writing and the work of pioneering domestic precursors of ecocriticism. This has led to fruitful hybridisations and new impulses for international scholarship. Culturally unique perspectives from Poland, Estonia and Turkey have fed significantly into developments including Empirical Ecocriticism, Biosemiotics and Material Ecocriticism, complementing such European contributions to environmentally-oriented literary theory and methodology as Geocriticism (from France) and Cultural Ecology (from Germany). (N.B. For overviews of German and Spanish ecocriticism, see Anna-Marie Humbert's and Beatriz Lindo Mañas's review essays presenting and assessing key publications in the Book Review Section of this issue). That European scholars are contributing similarly to other disciplines in the environmental humanities is illustrated by the recent launch of *Ecocene: Cappadocia Journal of Environmental Humanities*, a new journal co-edited by scholars based in Turkey and Iceland.

The remaining essays in the section situate national ecocriticisms in the wider context of postcolonial relations. Lisa Fitzgerald shows how in Ireland, where up to 2010 discussions of depictions of place and landscape tended to stress their function as a means of establishing national identity rather than of fostering environmental awareness, colleagues have since been busy rereading works of Irish literature and culture from an ecocritical perspective. Sule Emmanuel Egya argues that in sub-Saharan Africa, an ecocriticism based on the natural, social and cultural particularities of the continent and foregrounding the entanglement of the human and nonhuman worlds has similarly begun to emerge in the second decade of the century, after a period in which discussion of depictions of nature was dominated by questions of environmental justice. José Manuel Marrero Henríquez characterises the Hispanophone world as a transnational sphere embracing neo-indigenous cultures and sophisticated hybrid forms of poetry and art drawing simultaneously on European and native traditions in Latin America alongside Iberian culture. His essay takes the form of a personal manifesto, calling for a decentralised, "ecologized Hispanism", as a form of Spanish literary and cultural studies which dialogues with Spanish-speaking counter-hegemonic socio-ecological movements around the world and is open to ecological philosophies from outside Euro-American environmentalism.

In the final contribution to the section, Serenella Iovino and Pasquale Verdicchio revisit the concept of 'Mediterranean Ecocriticism' as one rooted in the "in-betweenness" of the marine space separating Europe from Africa and the Middle East, which Iovino first expounded in her themed issue of *Ecozon@* in 2013. They focus on the task of promoting

and explicating depictions by writers, artists and film makers of the often fatal attempts of climate migrants to cross the Mediterranean to Europe, in which the depersonalised masses are rehumanised, and the invisible is rendered visible, by naming individuals and including reference to the entrapment of nonhumans between borders which parallels that of the human migrants.

The second section of the issue, "Food, Plants, and Interspecies Relations," presents essays surveying thematic approaches which have emerged over the last ten years and established themselves as part of the portfolio of environmentally-oriented theories underpinning ecocritical analysis. It opens with a cluster of essays on Plant Studies and Veganism. Heather Sullivan introduces Plant Studies as a field which has come to join Animal Studies as a perspective enriching and rejuvenating literary criticism, by exploring narratives, scientific as well as creative, of plant-human relations. Laura Wright offers Vegan Studies (a term only coined in 2015) as an ecofeminist methodology that exposes explicit linkages between "climate change, the historical violence enacted upon native peoples, and the contemporary violence against livestock animals, women, people of colour, Muslims, and immigrants in the U.S." Simon Estok exposes the "ecophobia" which characterises the packaging of veganism today, contributing troublingly to its striking growth in popularity (in North America).

In the next group of essays, Susan Morrison shows how the aesthetics of Slowness which has been developed in literary and film studies over the last ten years can inform ecocritical readings of works from the distant past—in this case the fourteenth-century *Clerk's Tale* from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*—and be a way of heightening sensitivity to the ecological damage for which we are all culpable. Alexa Weik von Mossner traces the development of affective ecocriticism, revealing the wealth of fascinating research into the roles played by the emotions in writing on nature, and how recent work has drawn on the theorising of affect studies which began in the 1990s, and on cognitive approaches to emotion.

The remaining essays in the section are concerned with inter-related branches of ecocriticism which have emerged and experienced rapid development since 2010, focusing respectively on transcorporeality, environmental risk and toxic discourse. The first takes the form of an interview with Stacy Alaimo conducted by Julia Kuznetski. Alaimo, who introduced the concept of transcorporeality in 2010, explains how she came to focus her research on the enmeshment of self with place, discusses the genre of "material memoirs" and aesthetic images as a way of motivating people to care about the environment, and argues that COVID-19 provides an opportunity for us to consider what it means to be embedded within the material world that capitalism, colonialism and extractivism have so radically transformed. Noting that ecocritical scholars, many of them Europeans, have been at the forefront of introducing risk theory into literary and cultural studies, Sylvia Mayer documents the development whereby key publications since the turn of the century have shed light on the participation of fictional and nonfictional texts, literary, filmic and other works of art in environmental risk discourses, with metaphors and narrative genres serving as cultural tools for organising information about risks and

contributing to the formation of risk judgements. In the final essay in this section, Scott Slovic explores the characteristics of a (Gothic) poetics of toxicity as exemplified by a volume of poems telling the story of a North American town where a zinc smelter was situated. Juxtaposing his findings with those in a recent study of the literary and visual texts created in the wake of the Bhopal chemical disaster in India, he concludes that such writing is essential to our efforts to cultivate an ability to imagine the toxic byproducts of industrial society that invisibly pervade our bodies as well as the environment.

The third section of the issue, "New Ecocritical Practices," is devoted to exploratory calls for new forms of ecocriticism. Building on Roberto Esposito's critique of ecological immunization and Lynn Margulis's understanding of evolution as driven by symbiosis rather than interspecies competition, Hannes Bergthaller argues that environmentalism, far from being a form of resistance against the anthropocentrism of Western modernity, is by virtue of its focus on maximizing the reproduction of biological life a logical culmination of modernity: the biopolitical immunization of modern society has led to the devastation of swathes of the biosphere. This has profound implications for environmental thinking, and for the ecocritical assessment of texts, literary and otherwise. Ursula Heise and Jon Christensen set differences of opinion over what kind of restoration is appropriate for a degraded area of coastal wetland in California in the context of theories of justice. They argue compellingly for (multispecies) justice as a problematic central to environmentalism today, and for a form of ecocriticism (and environmental humanities research) focused on the implications of opposing views and the battles between different socio-environmental visions of the future. Adapting the term 'stigmergy' (which originally denoted the biological mechanism whereby traces left in the physical environment by the actions of insects prompt subsequent actions of the same or other insects – the process whereby ant paths are built from pheromone traces – and has become a key concept in theories of swarm intelligence), Monika Rogowska-Stangret and Olga Cielemecka propose a theory and methodology of 'Stig(e)mergy'. They conceive stig(e)mergy as a feminist extension of Material Ecocriticism focused on the study of waste (understanding it as the traces human beings leave behind). Hybrid matter, simultaneously dead and alive, waste functions as a disruptive agent in relation to the existing order of things.

Steven Hartman follows with a call for more meaningful involvement with policy advisors and makers in the environmental humanities, and a greater focus on actionable findings. Lamenting the prevailing lack of recognition by international organisations of the potential contribution of humanities research into environmental learning, education and the power of metaphor in public communications to environmental knowledge and social change, he illustrates the possibilities of informing national policies and international agreements concerning environmental risks with reference to the BRIDGES initiative, which aims to develop a portfolio of place-based demonstration projects around the world, carried out by transdisciplinary team-based collaborations of specialists together with local stakeholders. Dolly Jørgensen identifies analysis of the stories we tell about the human-nature relationship as a concern shared by ecocritics and

environmental historians. Using the case of a giant tortoise on display in a Paris natural history museum, she discusses three types of texts (in the broadest sense) in which it is presented, each of which tells a different story. Ecocritical approaches to the genres of scientific text and animal biography, and material ecocriticism prove useful in making sense of the sometimes contradictory narratives involved in environmental history. Antonia Spencer's interview with the social anthropologist Tim Ingold addresses topics similarly revolving around the common ground between ecocriticism and other disciplines in and beyond the environmental humanities. Ingold, who is best known for his innovative work on environmental perception, language and technology at the interface between anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture, explains with characteristic forthrightness why he rates cross-disciplinary accessibility above modish interdisciplinarity, and advocates taking materials seriously while distancing himself from Material Ecocriticism. He calls for a mode of reading literature akin to painting and walking, as a form of ecocriticism that "joins with and thinks with" writing, art and music, to show "we can open up differently to the world and perceive things to which we paid no attention before".

Mark Cladis seeks to counter the pessimism which predominates in much EH work as it grapples with climate change and environmental disasters by adapting the notion of dark, wild hope which sustained the African-American sociologist, historian, novelist, poet and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois in the face of racism in the first half of the twentieth century. He explains that Du Bois anticipated a central tenet of ecocritical thinking and environmental justice in regarding the wild as a place and a condition of resistance and hopeful transformation. Hope is not blind to unpleasant social realities, but a social practice informed by suffering and loss, uncertainty and vulnerability. In the final essay, Greta Gaard traces parallels between Mindful Ecocriticism and other "new" approaches in the second decade of the century (the study of ecophobia, econarratology, affective ecocriticism, queer ecocriticism and empirical ecocriticism). Aligning with the four key Buddhist concepts of interbeing, impermanence, the unavoidability of suffering and present-moment awareness, Mindful Ecocriticism adopts a Deep Ecological perspective. Gaard explains that ecocritics have begun to develop theory and pedagogy for using mindfulness to support students in grappling with climate change, involving the promotion of critical awareness of the "heroic" narratives which have encouraged individualism and inhibited empathy in modern Western society. Mindful Ecocriticism involves radical reconsideration of dominant cultural definitions of happiness.

With this tenth anniversary issue of *Ecozon@* we have sought to demonstrate that ecocriticism today with its expanded matrix can contribute not only to solving local environmental problems but also to meeting globally taxing social and environmental challenges. We believe that only by utilising both interdisciplinary and international collaborations to explore previously ignored cultural narratives which address the underlying causes of current global inequities, can we together successfully restructure our human-human, human-animal, and human-environmental relations and tackle today's multiple ecological and social injustices. European ecocriticism is a vibrant field

of interdisciplinary enquiry, and new themes and approaches are constantly emerging, so our stocktaking of developments over the past decade is inevitably incomplete: posthumanism, ecofeminism and degrowth are areas which we were regrettably unable to cover in this issue, which is already considerably larger than usual. It could only be our aim to assemble a collection of articles offering concise information on the state of the art of ecocriticism, focusing on work in Europe, in the hope that these may give new impulses for future research. The plurality of responses to the shared experience of environmental degradation and the deficient anthropocentric mindset which they exemplify is a clear demonstration that ecological thought and ecocritical practice are no monolithic discourse, but constantly open to alternatives and new possibilities. Recognition of cultural diversity is of vital importance if we are to meet the socio-environmental challenges of the future.