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Laurenz Volkman, Nancy Grimm, Ines Detmers, and Katrin Thomson (eds.), *Local Natures, Global Responsibilities: Ecocritical Perspectives on the New English Literatures* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 370 pp.

Ecocriticism needs more publication outlets for the dissemination of research. The development of online peer reviewed journals has helped, but there is more work to be done. Laurenz Volkman's *Local Natures, Global Responsibilities* is an additional attempt to disseminate the diverse approaches to ecocritical practice by researchers who participated in the Nineteenth Annual Conference of the German Society for the Study of English Literatures, which took place at Friedrich-Schiller-University in Jena Germany in May 2007. Overall, the volume is very broad and contains more than twenty quality papers, both by rising European ecocritics and by more recognized scholars such as Serenella Iovino and Greg Garrard. While conferences on ecocriticism abound, it is encouraging to see Volkman take the considerable effort necessary to disseminate the research presented at the conference held in Jena. *Local Natures, Global Responsibilities* will be useful to those already familiar with the general debates within ecocriticism, and will be especially valuable to those interested in views originating from outside primarily English-language cultures.

The book is broken down into five sections, and the overall organization is broad and inclusive. The wide-ranging collection reveals one of the difficulties of ecocritical scholarship generally, which is a perceived lack of thematic, political, and methodological uniformity. This can be seen at ecocritical conferences worldwide and is even common in the most important ecocritical books suitable for classroom use. This seeming fragmentation within ecocriticism is not necessarily only a problem, though, as Volkman emphasizes. Insofar as it implies a diversity of opinions and approaches, it can also be considered a source of strength. If ecocriticism is to continue to proliferate, and if it can maintain momentum, then it needs to embrace the diversity within its own ranks. In the introduction to *Local Natures, Global Responsibilities*, Volkman acknowledges the wide scope of the papers present in the collection: "The ecocritical perspectives explored here do not adhere to a single genre or dominant cultural tradition. Rather, they represent a multiplicity of voices and narratives" (xiii). Many of the papers published in *Local Natures, Global Responsibilities* exhibit a genuine effort to discover, develop, and recalibrate concepts to assist in the increasing theorization of ecocriticism.

Also important is that Volkman's collection highlights the ever-expanding loop of ecocriticism outside of the English language world. The publication is based on a conference held in Germany, is produced in English, and many of the papers deal with

English and American texts. However, a number of papers also engage with environmental discourse from less familiar parts of the Anglophone world. Derek Barkers' discussion of the state of ecocriticism in South Africa was new for me, as was Sissy Helff's intriguing paper on the deep complexities of Australian identity and the practice of whaling. Michael Mayer's paper on nature as decolonizing force left me wondering if concepts of decolonization can be extended to texts written outside of the postcolonial genre. Silke Stroh's essay on Scottish representations of the oil industry in postcolonial terms also hints at that possibility. She questions prevailing attitudes about what is considered appropriate material for postcolonial ecological consideration: "Scotland, like Britain's former overseas colonies, also had a pre-capitalist economy at some point, which was replaced by an externally induced (and often violent) capitalization" (200). If Stroh is correct, then it follows that all former colonies are potentially open to postcolonial ecocritical investigations, including those cultures that are now considered as part of the developed world.

While the volume contains several other strong papers, one cannot discuss every essay here. I will instead look at two papers taken from different sections of the book, which, I believe, exemplify the strengths of the collection as a whole. Serenella Iovino's enigmatic paper "Ecocriticism and a Non-Anthropocentric Humanism" raises fascinating questions about the future of ecocriticism and the moral core of the human being. Early in the paper, Iovino discusses why, in her view, an "interdisciplinary approach to literary criticism is necessary, and allows us to 'use' literature as a means of culture and of social awareness" (30). She goes on to suggest that the exchange between literature and philosophy can be especially helpful in making us think about how to face a myriad of environmental challenges in the next decades. She puts forward what she calls "non-anthropocentric humanism," one in which humans and nature participate in the "same emancipatory discourse" (32). As compelling as this idea is, a more extensive and concrete articulation of the concept would have been welcome. An important consideration is whether Iovino's ideas can be fashioned into critical tools: How might one read a cultural text within a non-anthropocentric humanist framework? Iovino argues that the move to a non-anthropocentric humanism forces us to reconsider the relationships between humans and culture – but how exactly does it do so? If we can overcome our deeply rooted anthropocentrism, at least intellectually, might that not suggest that humans are in fact different, perhaps even *superior*, to other nonhuman creatures? I also wonder whether the move to a non-anthropocentric humanism is even possible. As Buell rightly points out, zero-degree anthropocentrism might be neither feasible nor desirable: "It is entirely possible without hypocrisy to maintain biocentric values in principle" while conceding human considerations (*Future* 134). In other words, one can strive towards biocentric thinking while accepting human needs. Perhaps Iovino could have more explicitly explained how her concept of non-anthropocentric humanism is similar to, and different from, other manifestations of the caged human essence. For instance, I would have liked to see her explain how her concept differs from Mathew Humphrey's 2002 discussion of the same term. Nonetheless, Iovino certainly poses bold questions that force us to think, and for that reason alone, her paper is

noteworthy. Perhaps it is best to think of her paper “Ecocriticism and a Non-Anthropocentric Humanism” as the philosophical foundation of a needed conversation about the subsequent development of distinctive ecocritical methods.

Greg Garrard’s “Reading as an Animal: Ecocriticism and Darwinism in Margaret Atwood and Ian McEwan” is an intriguing departure from his frequent focus on pedagogical matters. It certainly makes sense to apply Darwinian concepts to literature. As Michael Cohen reminds us: “Ecology is, after all, a slice of evolutionary theory, or vice versa” (qtd. in Arnold, Buell, Cohen et al., 1093). However, I am not fully convinced of Garrard’s methodology in this paper. Garrard never clearly explicates how “Darwinian literary theory” actually functions in the analysis of cultural texts (240). It would have been helpful had Garrard put more effort into explaining the small details of such a method of literary analysis than into the lengthy summaries of Atwood’s and McEwan’s texts. In other words, Garrard does not take full advantage of the opportunity to provide a roadmap for those interested in extending Darwin’s concepts to literature. If Garrard is serious about developing, or fine-tuning, a Darwinian literary method, he needs to show how such a method would function in practice. Moreover, Garrard is not the only person to have proposed Darwinian methods of literary reading. Both Gillian Beer and George Lewis Levine have developed methods of “green” reading based on Darwin’s thinking decades ago, but Garrard does not go into enough depth to distinguish his own approach from those developed in their book-length studies. Doing so could have been an important step in helping legitimize Darwinian forms of environmental reading today.

Other minor gripes I have with Garrard’s paper are his use of inflated diction and his clearly secular view. In “Reading as an Animal,” for example, Garrard employs terms such as “aetiology” (224) and “mythopoeic” (228) without further explanation. He also borrows words from both French and German for rhetorical use, when suitable equivalents exist in English. This forces me to return to an issue I often have with the state of ecocriticism today. Kip Robisch has criticized what he calls the increasing “obfuscation, abstractionism, language obsession, and rarification” within ecocriticism as a serious problem (702). This view is supported by Beat writer Gary Snyder, who encourages scholars to “write clean prose, reject obscurity, and not intentionally exaggerate” (33). I am not accusing Garrard of exaggeration, but the language he chooses to employ could be far more accessible. Garrard’s wider point in the essay seems to be that humans are subject to the same laws of nature as other biological species and will therefore eventually go extinct. Garrard thus proposes some sort of secular humanism, one in which we accept our evolutionary fate. In strict environmental terms, a human move towards modesty would be a positive development. But I am left wondering if such a secular view can come across as defeatist and narrow, and even dismissive of nonwestern mystical insights that can both enrich ecocriticism and decenter it from its predominantly Western standpoint.

Altogether, *Local Natures, Global Responsibilities* reveals the difficulties of overarching breadth common to existing ecocritical anthologies but delivers in providing a crucial glimpse into European variants of ecocriticism. Volkman’s collection reminds us of the need to disseminate the strong ecocritical research

presented at the many international conferences taking place. My hope is that other conference organizers will follow Volkmann's lead in offering more publishing venues for ecocritical scholarship from outside the Anglophone world.

Works Cited

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