

ECOCRITICISM: A THEORETICAL BIOSPHERE*

Carmen Flys Junquera
Universidad de Alcalá

Terry Gifford
Bath Spa University

Juan Ignacio Oliva
Universidad de La Laguna

ABSTRACT

This essay reflects on the changing trend of Ecocriticism from a certain phobia towards theory to an exponential growth of theoretical approaches. Ecocriticism's initial rejection of the idea that everything was either socially and/or linguistically constructed went against the grain of most literary theories. However, Ecocriticism has proved very diverse and eclectic in combining different approaches and disciplines, offering new readings of literary and cultural texts; moreover, its relevance to our contemporary world and environmental crisis have turned it into a fruitful theoretical biosphere. This trend is illustrated with three discussions of diverse cross-fertilizations: contrasting interpretations of the pastoral mode, the combination of postcolonialism and ecocriticism and, finally, the use of law and philosophy to address issues of environmental justice and ecological justice for the more-than-human world.

KEY WORDS: Ecocriticism, anti- post-pastoralism, pathetic fallacy, nature as "other," green postcolonialism, environmental and ecological justice.

RESUMEN

Este ensayo reflexiona sobre los cambios por los que ha pasado la disciplina científica de la ecocrítica, desde el primer rechazo a una excesiva teorización hasta los últimos enfoques teóricos, que han ido creciendo exponencialmente. La reticencia inicial de la ecocrítica, a contra corriente de la mayoría de las teorías literarias, partía de la refutación de que todas las cosas fueran construidas social o lingüísticamente. No obstante lo cual, la ecocrítica se ha ido mostrando como una ciencia muy diversa y ecléctica en la interdisciplinariedad de sus enfoques, ofreciendo diversas y muy variadas relecturas de textos culturales y literarios; además, su importancia para el mundo actual ha ido creciendo hasta convertirla en una fructífera biosfera teórica. Dicha retroalimentación se ejemplifica aquí a través de tres modelos de teorización: una interpretación contrastiva de lo pastoral en la literatura, la combinación del postcolonialismo y la ecocrítica, y, por último, el uso de la filosofía y el derecho para tratar temas de justicia medioambiental y ecológica, para todo lo que trasciende el mundo humano.

PALABRAS CLAVE: ecocrítica, anti- post-pastoralismo, la "falacia patética", la otredad de la naturaleza, eco-postcolonialismo, justicia medioambiental y ecológica.

Ecocriticism is a relatively new school of literary and textual criticism, having its recognizable founding in the last decade of the twentieth century. The exponential growth, both of academics and publications in the field are testimony to its acceptance. Precursor William Rueckert, in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978), discusses the developments of diverse trends in literary criticism, their waxing and waning, and speaks of the principle of *relevance* as the one which should guide us in establishing the validity of a critical school. Certainly, the current environmental crisis makes the case for a critical theory that brings ecological issues to the forefront. However, Ecocriticism has its detractors, and certainly the traditional academy has not yet embraced it as a valid critical school, particularly in some areas, such as Europe. Ecocriticism is often accused of not having a theoretical basis or merely being issue driven, a thematic approach. Its methodology is eclectic, which often makes it seem dubious as a critical method. However, as Peter Barry (*Beginning Theory* 2009) points out, perhaps the major difference between the dominating critical schools and Ecocriticism is that ecocritics tend to reject the notion that everything is socially and/or linguistically constructed, which is one of the principal recurrent ideas of most other theories. While initially Ecocriticism did not have a strong theoretical slant, to the degree of being accused of theoretical phobia, this has changed over years, and theory has become a major concern as the recent special focus section of the key journal of Ecocriticism, *ISLE* 17.4 (2010) illustrates.

A major reference in environmental criticism, Lawrence Buell traced the rapid evolution of Ecocriticism using the metaphor of waves or story-lines, recognizing that all of them coexist. Initially Ecocriticism tended to partially reject theory due to its abstraction, claiming the need for an alliance between writers, activists, educators and critics and insisting on the need for a practical, experiential mode with nature, so Ecocriticism became "synchronous with earthcare" (Buell, *Future* 21). American Ecocriticism tended to be celebratory of a "pristine nature," advocating its conservation, while British "green studies" tended to be more "minatory," denouncing environmental threats (Barry 242). Early Ecocriticism placed much of its focus on the Romantics, Transcendentalists and non-fiction nature writing. At the beginning of the 21st century, a second story-line gained force, one that questioned the "organicist models of conceiving both the environment and environmentalism" (Buell, *Future* 22). Many critics pointed out that both, natural and built environments, are inextricably intertwined and that social issues were often linked to environmental ones. This trend emphasized issues of environmental justice (Adamson, Evans and Stein), the link between ethnicity and environmentalism (Flys-Junquera "Ethnicity"; Adamson and Slovic) as well as unsettling the normative thinking about what environmental concerns were, such as what ecological economist Martinez-Alier calls, "environmentalism of the poor" (Adamson and Slovic). A third story-line, after Buell's study and

* An earlier version of this article was presented as a round table discussion at the 35th AEDEAN Conference in Barcelona, 2011. The authors of this essay are all members of the GIECO research group. The research was funded by the CLYMA project (IUENUAH-2009/003) of the Franklin Institute at the Universidad de Alcalá.

signaled in Adamson and Slovic's introduction, has also emerged, foregrounding the relationship between indigeneity and environmentalism, issues of transnationalism, eco-cosmopolitanism, and globalization, all of which share increasing interdisciplinarity. The coming together of different disciplines and approaches has resulted in fruitful analyses as these found below and in the other articles of this special issue of *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*. The exponential growth of critical literature in Ecocriticism and its internationalization is proof of the wealth and diversity of approaches. *ISLE*, the foremost journal in Ecocriticism has gone from 2 to 4 issues a year, special issues devoted to Ecocriticism have become abundant and in 2010, and *Ecozon@ European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* appeared: the first ecocritical journal to accept articles in languages other than English.

The relevance of environmental approaches to literary and cultural texts, in an age of environmental crisis, and more significantly, when the financial crisis has paralyzed any serious attempts to address ecological issues, cannot be denied. However, despite its relevance and the wealth of debates and publications, in many academic forums, Ecocriticism is still not considered. Barry affirms that Ecocriticism has “turn[ed] criticism inside out” (248), due to its rejection of constructedness and the focus on a new dimension to the reading of a text. Might this be at the root of the frequent skepticism towards environmental criticism in the traditional academia? Precisely one positive aspect of Ecocriticism is its eclectic and interdisciplinary nature; as Barry notes: ecocritical readings of texts, are “diverse and eclectic, not hidebound by a single issue...but having a methodological balance and openness which allows it to build from a wide range of materials, not restricting itself, in the way that most critical approaches do, to a single type of evidence” (259). Thus, the purpose of this introductory article is to offer some of these recent debates and cross-fertilizations between different disciplines and critical schools which are currently feeding the ecocritical field, which “is itself a diverse biosphere” (Barry 259), in which very diverse disciplines and perspectives coexist and enrich each other. One definite characteristic of environmental criticism is its interdisciplinary nature and in the following sections we hope to offer the reader some of these fruitful cross-pollinations. The first section will present the cross-pollination of transatlantic cultural perspectives of the traditional literary mode of pastoralism and how it has adapted to our urgent cultural needs. The following section will highlight the fertile ground of merging two different critical schools, Postcolonialism and Ecocriticism. Finally, the third section will foreground the cross-fertilization of different disciplines such as law, public policy, activism and philosophy with ecocriticism, reassessing our concept of justice and ethics applied to nature.

ECOCRITICAL PASTORAL THEORY: UK AND US PERSPECTIVES

Like tragedy and epic, pastoral is one of the oldest European modes of literature, a tool for reflecting upon not just our human relationship with nature, but what is natural in the instabilities and uncertainties of the human condition—



how our inner nature can be understood by reference to outer nature. Of course, postmodernism and posthumanism challenge such grand narratives whilst eroding distinctions between inner and outer nature. Indeed, the death of nature itself under the pressure of human influence upon genetics and the biosphere, for example, is now a trope that has accompanied that of the death of the author. British ecocritic Greg Garrard dismisses pastoral as “appealing to the illusory objectivity of a supposedly authentic or pristine state of nature” (65). Earlier, the editors of *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse*, John Barrell and John Bull, declared that the pastoral mode was now dead due to a lack of separation between town and country. These British rejections of pastoral are very much in contrast to the continuing belief amongst US ecocritics that the mode is an essential and adaptable one that is able to examine the changing forms of questions about our relationship with our environment. Indeed, the contemporary demand for composite forms of the pastoral concept (radical pastoral, ghetto pastoral, gay pastoral, postmodern pastoral) might suggest that postmodern theory cannot kill off what American ecocritic Lawrence Buell has called “a species of cultural equipment that western thought has for more than two millennia been unable to do without” (*Environmental* 32). As American Early Modern scholar Todd Borlik concludes: “The pastoral’s ‘staying power,’ its adaptability, is precisely what we need” (209).

To briefly summarise these two different perspectives one might say that, whilst in British criticism pastoral is a pejorative term (especially in its verb form: to *pastoralize* a subject), associated with the idealised and nostalgic, often located in a Golden Age, typified by a movement of retreat to an Arcadia followed by a return to the urban court renewed by various degrees of insight, the US notion of pastoral ranges from the representative (Alpers) to the realistic (Roorda). Buell’s classic text of “counter-institutional” retreat is Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854), the most taught text in the US educational system, and therefore ultimately institutionally endorsed. Buell observes this as a common pattern for American pastoral literature. In the UK there is a recognition of the classical pastoral tradition that is distinct from the current pejorative use of the term in literary criticism. In the US the term “pastoral” has a third, more general meaning concerned with any representation of wilderness, landscape, or nature, as distinct from the urban. Within this broad literature Leo Marx offered a critical discrimination between “sentimental” and “complex” pastoral, a tool which went unused in American Ecocriticism until Borlik’s book in 2011. Meanwhile UK criticism generated proletarian pastoral (Empson), childhood pastoral (Marinelli) and Freudian pastoral (Lerner), whilst US criticism provided urban pastorals (Berman), revolutionary lesbian ecofeminist (Buell, *Environmental*) and postmodern pastoral (Philips). These terms emerged, however from very different traditions. English Renaissance pastoral referred back to *The Idylls* of Theocritus (3rd c. BC) and the *Eclogues* of Virgil (1st c. BC) in a tradition which ran from Edmund Spenser through Shakespeare, Milton, Marvell, Pope, Wordsworth, Charlotte Smith and Isabella Lickbarrow, to Tennyson, Hardy, and the Georgian poets. Leo Marx traced an American pastoral from the earliest pioneers Beverley (1705), Crèvecoeur (1782) and Jefferson (1785), through Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, Thoreau, to Frost and Fitzgerald.



Of course, any theory of pastoral has to acknowledge a parallel anti-pastoral tradition. This is what Raymond Williams called “counter pastoral,” a corrective to idealisation and escapism (23). Actually, it is to be found often within a “complex” pastoral such as the earliest classical pastoral text, Theocritus’s *Idylls*: “Wherever you tread the ground’s one thorny ambush.” But in English literature anti-pastoral writers would include Stephen Duck, Mary Collier, John Clare, Oliver Goldsmith, George Crabbe, Matthew Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach” and in the 20th century Ted Hughes’s poem “February 17th.” But it is less easy to identify an American anti-pastoral tradition. Has being “counter-institutional” at the same time as institutionally endorsed been the triumph of sincerity over cynicism? Or does the presence of what Leo Marx characterised in American literature as “the machine in the garden” constitute in itself an anti-pastoral mode? Perhaps one can see an emergent anti-pastoral mode in late 20th-century texts such as Philip Roth’s novel *American Pastoral*, A.R. Ammons’s long poem *Garbage*, Rebecca Solnit’s travel memoir *Savage Dreams* and Cormac McCarthy’s novel *The Road*, together with what Buell has identified as “Toxic Discourse,” the literature of pollution.

Perhaps outflanking the polar tension of pastoral and anti-pastoral is the challenge facing the contemporary nature writer. Then how would one characterise such writing? If “pastoral” has become an obsolete term, associated with idealisation, what is needed is a term for writing that takes responsibility for both our problematic relationship with our natural homeground (from slugs to the solar system), and our representations of that relationship. Since 1994 I have been using the term “post-pastoral” for such writing, whether British or American. This is not postmodern, in that it is conceptual rather than temporal: not “after” but “beyond” pastoral limitations. It includes what Marx calls “complex pastoral,” but in its modern forms it encompasses an awareness of the problematics of our environmental crisis. So it includes Shakespeare’s pastoral dramas, the work of Blake, the best of Wordsworth, American writer Rick Bass’s narrative *Fiber* and the English poet Ted Hughes’s collection *River*. Rather than the escapism of so much pastoral literature, post-pastoral demonstrates that retreat can result in a more complex understanding of community, in a fully ecological sense.

Post-pastoral texts raise for the reader some or all of six questions, as elaborated in the final chapter of Gifford’s *Pastoral*. Each question is here exemplified by a line from the US ecopoet Gary Snyder:

1. Can awe in the face of natural phenomena, such as landscapes, lead to humility in our species? That is, can a respectful stance of fundamental wonder reduce the hubris of the human species? (“I’ll sleep by the creek and purify my ears” 26.)
2. What are the implications of recognising that we are part of that creative-destructive process? If we recognise the exquisite interlocking balance of the processes of renewal and decay, can we confront fully our own part in those processes, including our own deaths and our own part in the death process? (“Shaving soils, paving fields,” 373.)
3. If the processes of our inner nature echo those in outer nature in the ebbs and flows of growth and decay, how can we learn to understand the inner by



being closer to the outer? Consider the ambiguous role of flower imagery in love poetry, or the metaphor of a river in a journey narrative, and how they help us appreciate inner tensions and journeys on the part of the writer. (“Creek music, heart music,” 308.)

4. If nature is culture, is culture nature? If nature is mediated by culture as soon as we communicate about it, is culture itself our species mode of considering, with our natural faculties, our place within nature? (“We *are* it // it sings through us,” 234.)
5. How, then, can our distinctively human consciousness, which gives us a conscience, be used as a tool to heal our troubled relationship with our natural home? Can we consciously rethink our place in nature, even as we make daily living choices informed by our current “best guesses” towards healing the damage we’ve done for generations? (“The log trucks remind us,/ as we think, dream and play/ of the world that is carried away.” 289.)
6. How should we address the ecofeminist insight that the exploitation of our planet emerges from the same mind-set as our exploitation of each other, the less powerful? Can we tackle poverty, for example, at the same time as our environmental crisis? What insights can be offered by the “environmental justice” movement into literature’s treatment of “toxic discourse,” for example? (“North America, Turtle Island, taken by invaders who wage war around the world.” 237.)

Post-pastoral features in texts that raise some of these questions for readers are being investigated by ecocritics around the world who are asking what their regional post-pastoral literature might be.¹ Indeed, the term is frequently cited in articles in *ISLE* and more recently in studies of Renaissance pastoral. At the University of Cambridge an MA module is offered using the concept of post-pastoral as its starting point. The concept offers a renewal of pastoral for our urgent current cultural needs.

POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICISM

The convergences and contestations between two modern trends in literary and cultural criticism (that is, Postcolonial Studies and Ecocriticism) can also be subjected to debate, to prove that they can form a theoretically solid single line of research. Though this field is emerging, there has been ample revision of the progress being made, despite early reticence, as can be shown in recent issues of specialized journals, such as i.e. *The Mississippi Quarterly* (Christine Gerhardt’s “The Greening of African-American Landscapes: where Ecocriticism Meets Post-Colonial Theory,” Fall 2002), *The Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* (special issue on

¹ For examples of post-pastoral practice at work see Gifford, *Reconnecting*.

“Postcolonial Studies and Ecocriticism” 13.2/14.1 2006-2007), *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (Anne Maxwell’s “Postcolonial Criticism, Ecocriticism and Climate Change,” 45/1, 2009), even *Green Letters* (one of the pivotal journals in Ecocritical Studies) has called for papers for a special issue on “Ecocriticism: Postcolonial/Global Ecologies” that will come out in 2012. The culmination of this tight relationship is the recent publication in 2010, precisely by some of the “founders” of Postcolonial Theory, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, of *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, which proves the really close connection between both schools of thought. This book has been followed by *Postcolonial Green. Environmental Politics and World Narratives*, Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt, eds., published in Charlottesville VA, US by the University of Virginia Press, 2010, and by *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, edited by Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, and published in Oxford, UK by Oxford University Press, 2011; all of them show the present vitality and interest for this theoretical trend. Ultimately, one of the main objectives for Ecocriticism is the dissolution of the false divide between human/non-human (animals, earth, landscape, environment...), and in postcolonial subaltern studies the concept of hierarchy and difference between unequals is underlined. Thus, when joining both theories, “green postcolonialism” or “ethnic environmentalism” do inevitably fit together.

Largely speaking, if we take into account the diminishing role of Nature in postmodern societies, many elements of comparison between the postcolonial theory and environmental studies come to mind when regarding the subaltern position in which Earth, and all the non-human species that inhabit it, have been progressively treated in the evolution of humankind, and especially in the last and current historical period that has been denominated as the Anthropocene Era by Paul J. Crutzen.² Postcolonial studies have as one of their main objectives the analysis of the subaltern condition in the power pyramid scale and the deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of unequal “Others.” In this sense, postcolonial concepts such as class, gender and race, and items like “dislocation,” “surfacing,” “voicing,” or “agency,” in colonized subjects can be easily applied to the ongoing debate over Nature as an articulated material agent that can be addressed at differently throughout the history of humanity. Thus, postcolonial concepts will serve as a tool in the rewriting of the canon of Nature in human culture, and animal and pastoral literature can be reread to endow it with a new sense of dignity in which, as Kenyan critic Ngũgĩ wa

² P. Crutzen is a Nobel-prize winning atmospheric scientist who, in 2000, coined the term “Anthropocene” Era, to refer to the times we are living in nowadays that are characterized by quick environmental changes produced by humanity, that affect planet Earth in much more magnitude than in other earlier Eras, like the Holocene one, especially since the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century that is said to be one of the possible beginnings of the Anthropocene Era. These drastic changes, like the Ozone layer hole and the global warming, are now a matter of serious concern to the point of risking the sustainability of the Earth.



Thiong'o would put it, the mind will have to be decolonized of prejudiced anthropocentric thoughts.³

Another interesting controversy nowadays, in which the postcolonial theoretical development can easily fit in, has to do with the way in which we, human beings, can communicate with these other species without being subdued by our hegemonic and colonizing language. In other words, the dichotomy "Anthropocentrism vs. Naturocentrism" leads us to discern if the subaltern can effectively speak, or better if we are prepared to hear from it. Therefore, we can pose the question whether Nature is enslaved and silenced or rather whether we can speak as advocates in "her" favour, or also, if we are using the "pathetic fallacy" when trying to intercommunicate with Nature. This "pathetic fallacy," or so to say, the ruse that makes animals be able to speak and transmit feelings using the human language (a strategy used mainly in many literary children books) is the key to understand the way in which we, as "homo sapiens/loquens" genus, have been preconceiving our language as the "lingua franca" of the world, thus placing Humans in the centre of the universal knowledge of things. Can we perceive our milieu as an active signifier in the same way as Darwinist approaches to race as a power pyramid of evolution have been discarded and rewritten by contemporary wisdom? Are we going to be able to rethink our contact with other species, taking into account the idea that life itself is a process of signification as suggested by the science of biosemiotics? We can also question whether we can thus centre or de-centre Nature at our convenience, and whether we can place Nature as a menace for humankind or, inversely, whether humankind is exploiting Nature to its limits, what leads us to analyse if we do have a colonized sense of place as environmental exploiters of the planet.

Other items that result from the fusion of both schools of thought, the postcolonial and the ecocritical, are those derived from the analysis of the relationship existing between place and migration in diaspora writings, for instance. In this sense, famous postcolonial critic, Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* speaks about the idiosyncrasy of the construction of a definite culture, based on the milieu in which it is produced; or Chinese-American environmentalist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan analyses the loves and hates felt for a place, due to the socio-cultural and personal circumstances that affect the individual and his/her perception of the environment that surrounds (*Topophilia; Space and Place*). Both can serve as another example for the intimate connection between the study of racial, social or gender difference in a specific context and the analysis of the sense of place undertaken by ecocritics and other environmentalists.

New trends in postcolonialism include urban studies, hybridization and the post-metropolis, which bear elements in common with Ecocriticism as well, like the relationship underlying multiracial societies and spatial sustainability; or the clashes

³ Wa Thiong'o affirms that the process of decolonization takes much longer (years, even decades), when referring to language and mental structures, than the decolonization of the physical territory. It can also be applied easily to the anthropocentric stereotypes in our brain and language.

and boundaries established between postcolonial citizenship and the care (or neglect) felt for the urban settings. Consequently, environmental justice theory and the toxic discourse studied by ecocritics like i.e. Lawrence Buell (“Toxic”) merge very well into postcolonial concepts of margins and centres, suburbs, racialized ghettos and NIMBY situations, to name only a few of them.

To conclude, Huggan and Tiffin state that there has been “a long history of ecological concern in postcolonial criticism” (3), thus remarking the longed-for questioning of Westernization, Eurocentrism, Human-centredness, white supremacy, male chauvinism, and other hierarchical attitudes as constant features of the field. Ecopostcolonialism, then, will continue the task of bringing to light other –isms, such as zoocriticism, ecological racism, the segregation of species, Nature and colonization, racial and social environmentalism, or first world/third world ecological imbalance.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

The environmental justice movement is one of the most active and dynamic one in recent years. Although the movement may seem relatively recent, Dorceta Taylor traces the environmental justice movements back to the early 19th century in the United States. The environmental justice movement is linked to what Juan Martinez-Alier calls “environmentalism of the poor,” or “environmentalism of the South,” where the emphasis lies on the inextricable link between social injustice and environmental problems. It has been amply proven that the poor, whether it be a community within a nation, or a country, are more affected by environmental hazards, toxic wastes sites or deforestation than the affluent. In his landmark report, *Toxic Wastes and Race*, Benjamin Chavis illustrated the link between poverty and race and environmental hazards, defining environmental racism as racial discrimination in the enforcement of environmental laws, the siting of toxic waste disposal and polluting industries, and the exclusion of people of color from environmental decision making (3-4). Laura Pulido notes that the struggles for environmental justice “are embedded in the larger struggle against oppression and dehumanization that exist in the larger society” (25) and as critic Jonathan Bate notes, “colonialism and deforestation have frequently gone together” (87). Environmental justice is often perceived as the anthropocentric face of environmentalism, due to its equal concern for social justice. Moreover, the term justice is clearly one determined by a legal and political system, and thus, inevitably shaped by human beings, but here I plan to make the case that the concept of justice can also be applied to earth others and illustrate how these legal concepts can be applied to literary studies. Noted ecocritics, such as Joni Adamson, Rachel Stein, T.J. Reed, or Julie Sze⁴ have clearly developed

⁴ Their articles, among others, can be found in *The Environmental Justice Reader* (Adamson et al.).

issues of environmental justice and racism and used them in their literary analyses, being at the core of the development of the second wave of Ecocriticism, but the notion of ecological justice, applied to earth others is still in the making, both from a legal point of view and from a literary one.

Given the importance of the concept of justice, one must turn to the disciplines of law and political science to understand the underpinnings. The concept of justice, according to David Schlosberg,⁵ is based on four principles: distribution, recognition, capabilities and participation. In other words, if there is no equality in these four areas we have a legal case of injustice. Distribution refers to the equal availability of resources (water, minerals, food) but also of risks (toxics, polluted air, hurricanes, floods). While no one can control a hurricane, Katrina clearly illustrated how it affected the poor more than the wealthy. However, for equal distribution to exist, one has to presuppose the recognition of equality and subjecthood. Thus, if the poor, marginalized and indigenous peoples are considered equal, then the unequal distribution of resources or risks constitutes injustice. History provides ample examples of the lack of recognition and subjecthood of different peoples. Slaves, colonized subjects, women, indigenous tribes have all suffered a lack of recognition or a mis-recognition, to the extent of their humanity being denied. If they were not considered human, then they were not equal and thus there was no injustice. Despite the many efforts to consider recognition and subjecthood as something individual and psychological, often based on language, social customs, culture, rationality or sentience, social recognition is crucial. Today we clearly perceive women, African Americans, or Native Americans as human and equal, thus rational, sentient, language bearers, although their social and cultural traditions may be different. But this has not always been the case. Therefore, social recognition as subject is necessary to be able to apply any legal concept. The third basic principle is the right to develop one's capabilities and potential. Thus, today we find the legal and political struggles for access to education or the efforts to attend persons who are mentally or physically challenged. The fourth parameter is that of the right to participate in the decision-making process, a keystone in democracy which has triggered numerous revolutions. If a group or person is silenced, then injustice exists. These four guiding principles establish the conditions needed for moral consideration.

Now, can these four principles be applied to earth others, awarding nature a moral consideration, which would warrant the right to justice? This is the current extension of the debate. Is the concept of ecological justice, the biocentric side of environmental justice, viable? Drawing from Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, David Schlosberg claims that the four principles can be extended to earth others. For example, all beings have need of resources that should be equally distributed. Animals, like humans, need food, water and a specific habitat. Plants need soil and water with nutrients. And, if we look back to Aldo Leopold's famous essay, "Thinking like a Mountain," even mountains need things such as wolves to control the

⁵ This legal discussion is based on Schlosberg's *Defining Environmental Justice*.

deer population that might overgraze the mountain, destroying the plants needed to hold the soil and deter erosion. Likewise, earth others suffer from the distribution of risks such as acid rain, flooding, polluted rivers, deforestation or climate change. Many environmental and conservation efforts are devoted to preserve habitats and species, usually in our own interest, but, could we acknowledge that earth others have the *right* to an equal distribution of resources and risks?

This brings us to the issue of recognition and subjecthood: Are earth others considered as mere objects or resources, or as subjects? Many environmental groups, primarily animal rights groups, are advocating some rights for certain animals based on their *similarity* with humans, such as the Great Ape Project. Although this is undoubtedly a positive step forward, it hinges on the similarity with humans (sentience, intelligence, social organization, communication) and thus runs into the same fallacy as historically with other human beings. When women's rationality was finally accepted, in other words, their similarity with men, women were recognized as subjects. Native Americans were forced to adapt to Anglo-American customs (Christianity, landownership, etc) to be recognized. In Spielberg's film, *Amistad*, it is not until Cinque dresses in European fashion, "reads" the Bible and constructs an intelligible narrative that he is recognized as a human being, rather than "goods," and thus given the option of being a moral subject and the right to ask for justice. Thus, as many philosophers, such as Val Plumwood, claim we need to recognize the diversity of all being, all identities being equally of value, not based on their similarity with humans. If we take the third principle, the right to develop one's capabilities, its application to nature is not impossible. Martha Nussbaum develops a list of capabilities for animals, which is similar to that of humans (392-401). Likewise, a minimum list of capabilities could also be established for plants. All plants and animals should have the possibility to develop their potential: the potential to grow, reproduce, react in the case of adversity, adapt to change and so forth. That each earth being has different capabilities is not relevant—so do different human beings. It is not an issue of giving them equal treatment (such as education) but of allowing each identity, human or non-human, to reach its own potential. Again, the moral consideration rests on recognizing all identities, within their diversity, as being valuable in themselves.

The fourth principle may seem more problematic, participation in the decision-making process. Earth others are not language-bearing actors and are unable to communicate with *our* language. But that does not mean that they can't communicate or articulate messages. Donna Haraway comments that "Nature may be speechless, without language, in the human sense; but nature is highly articulate. Discourse is only one process of articulation" (324). When a plant needs water, its drooping leaves are certainly communicating their need. Schlosberg suggests that earth others could participate by way of proxy, through guardians, lawyers and other stakeholders, much in the manner that children, people that are mentally challenged, or other persons that require representation via lawyers or interpreters (Chap. 8). Much of this, ultimately, is a question of human willingness to recognize our earth others and approach nature with a different attitude, in a dialogical manner, as "communicative project[s] to explore the more-than-human as a source of



wonder and wisdom in a revelatory framework of mutual discovery and disclosure” (Plumwood 233). The key here is reciprocity and respect. Communication with earth others is possible, but we humans need to learn to be attentive to the needs and articulations of nature.⁶

Clearly linked to this debate is the one on agency. Do we recognize the agency of nature? Plumwood suggests that we try to view the “world as another agent or player” (227). Agency lies at the heart of another current philosophical and ecocritical debate. For example, physicist and philosopher Karen Barad, speaks of a “posthumanist performative reformulation” of the notion of discursive practices and materiality (126) and presents her theory of “agential realism.” She claims that “[a]gency is not aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity. Nor does it merely entail resignification or other specific kinds of moves with a social geometry of anti-humanism. Agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has... Agency is not an attribute whatsoever—it is “doing” / “being” in its intra-activity” (144). If agency is divested of the concept of intentionality, then it becomes much easier to see that nature has agency. This debate is at the center of new theories of material feminism and material ecocriticism, which would require an extensive exploration.⁷

And finally, how are these philosophical, legal and political theories applied in environmental justice literary criticism? What is literature’s role? Schlosberg, when he addresses the right to participation, cites Black feminist Patricia Hill Collins and her phrase of “coming to voice” referring to the breaking of silence, developing a self-reflexive speech and confronting the oppressor (65). In the same manner that many minority peoples found a voice through literature, writers, by using their “empathizing imagination” (Malamud 9) can interpret earth others in breaking the silence. As the previous section has discussed, Postcolonial theory has addressed these issues of speaking for the subaltern, in this case, nature and its risks. Many ontological theories of environmental ethics state that humans must acknowledge that they are “interest carriers” any time that they try to attribute subject status to animals or “inanimate” entities such as rocks or rivers. Yet, we as humans make sense of things through words, and as such, in order to understand the non-human, we need words. Literature and that “empathizing imagination” might be one way to attempt to understand and make sense of our relationships in and with the world: as Malamud states, literature has the potential to present a “valuable (if not complete and flawless) account of what it is like to be a different animal from ourselves” (7). In this manner, stories can attribute subject status to the non-human and vividly explore the implications of doing so and what our relationship to earth others might be. Through fiction, writers use their imagination to translate and interpret non-human articulations in terms that humans can understand. Undoubtedly, as Malamud suggests, the aesthetic ethics requires that

⁶ For an illustration of this attitude in Linda Hogan’s fiction, see Flys, “Un(mapping).”

⁷ See the articles by Karen Barad and Stacy Alaimo in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Alaimo and Hekman.

a human and humane response to a “cultural encounter of any kind involving animal subjects, is the development of the consciousness that [humans], as a species, have behaved badly, inexcusably, toward our fellow creatures.” We need to accord non-humans respect and “develop a deeper sense of their integrity, their wisdom and importance on their own terms—not as judged by the criteria of human utility or aesthetics” (43).⁸ Literature, through the imagination, can thus explore how non-humans are exposed to an unjust distribution of resources and risks, how their capabilities might be stunted by human action and illustrate their agency and subjecthood, providing an indirect way for writers to act as “guardians,” defending the interests of non-language bearing beings. And this might be a first step into recognizing the identity and subjecthood of the more-than-human world and its ethical consideration.

CONCLUSION

If Ecocriticism began with a certain theoretical phobia, in the first decade of the 21st century, it has developed into an authentic theoretical biosphere. Serpil Opperman, in discussing the early ecocritical rejection of constructivism and theory, argues for the need of a coherent ecocritical theory, reminding us that theory does not imply not recognizing “the independent ontological existence of nature” but rather that “we should revise our conceptualizations that are highly responsible for our ecological problems. To find rational remedies to the ecological challenges we need both theory and praxis, both activism and philosophizing, both laws (effective public policy) and environmental education” (769). The current directions of ecocritical theory today are multiple: ecocritical studies are engaging with globalism and transnationalism, with postmodern subjectivities and posthumanism. This article has only traced a few of these theoretical engagements, but they illustrate not only the dynamics of the field but also its clear relevance to some of the most pressing issues of our contemporary world. The field is truly interdisciplinary, as the above debates suggest, diverse and eclectic in the readings, open to new ideas and approaches. This continuous cross-fertilization is providing a new critical biosphere where everything is related to everything else, the first principle of ecology, and multiple readings shed new light on our conceptualizations about the relationship between the human and more-than-human in our common habitat.

⁸ For discussions of giving voice to the non-human, see Le Guin; Murphy; Flys “Dissolving.”

WORKS CITED

- ADAMSON, Joni, and Scott SLOVIC, eds. *Ethnicity and Ecocriticism*. Spec. issue of *MELUS* 34.2 (2009).
- ADAMSON, Joni, Mei Mei EVANS, and Rachel STEIN, eds. *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics and Pedagogy*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2002.
- ALAIMO, Stacy, and Susan Hekman, eds. *Material Feminisms*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2008.
- ALPERS, P. *What Is Pastoral?* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996.
- BARAD, Karen. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Material Feminisms*. Ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2008. 120-154.
- BARRELL, J., and Bull, J. *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982.
- BARRY, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009.
- BATE, Jonathan. *The Song of the Earth*. London: Picador, 2000.
- BERMAN, M. *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.
- BHABHA, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- BORLICK, T.A. *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- BUELL, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995.
- . *The Future of Environmental Criticism*. London: Blackwell, 2005.
- . "Toxic Discourse." *Critical Inquiry* 24.3 (1998): 639-665.
- CHAVIS, Benjamin F., Jr. *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*. 1987. 13 Jan. 2012 <<http://www.ucc.org/about-us/archives/pdfs/toxwrace87.pdf>> .
- DELOUGHREY, Elizabeth, and George B. HANDLEY, eds. *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011.
- Ecozon@*. *European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment*. 18 Jan. 2012 <www.ecozona.eu>.
- EMPSON, William. *Some Versions of Pastoral*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1935.
- FLYS JUNQUERA, Carmen. "Dissolving the False Divide: Literary Strategies for Re-situating Humans Ecologically and Non-humans Ethically." *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 63 (November 2011): 21-39.
- . "Ethnicity and Nature: Ethnic Literature and Environmental Ethics." *Ethics and Ethnicity in the Literature of the United States*. Ed. Maria Frías, José Liste y Begoña Simal. Valencia: Universidad de Valencia 2006. 203-233.
- . "(Un)mapping (Ir)rational Geographies: Linda Hogan's Communicative Places." *The Future of Ecocriticism: New Horizons*. Ed. S. Slovic, U. Ozdag, S. Opperman, and N. Ozkan. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2011. 244-255.
- GARRARD, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011.
- GERHARDT, Christine. "The Greening of African-American Landscapes: Where Ecocriticism Meets Post-Colonial Theory." *The Mississippi Quarterly* 55.4 (Fall 2002): 515-533.
- GIFFORD, Terry. *Pastoral*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1999.
- . *Reconnecting with John Muir: Essays in Post-Pastoral Practice*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2006.



- HARAWAY, Donna. "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others." *Cultural Studies*. Ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paulas Treichler. New York: Routledge, 1992. 295-337.
- HUGGAN, Graham, and Helen TIFFIN. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. Oxon: Routledge, 2010.
- LE GUIN, Ursula K. *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences*. New York: New American Library, 1988.
- LEOPOLD, Aldo. "Thinking Like a Mountain." 1949. 16 Jan. 2012. <<http://library.fws.gov/wildread/thinking-like-a-mountain.pdf>>.
- LENER, Lawrence. "The Pastoral World: Arcadia and the Golden Age." *The Pastoral Mode: A Casebook*. Ed. Brian Loughrey. London: Macmillan, 1984. 133-154.
- MALAMUD, Randy. *Poetic Animals and Animal Souls*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- MARINELLI, P. V. *Pastoral*. London: Methuen, 1971.
- MARTÍNEZ-Alier, Xoan. *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation*. Cheltenham: Elgar, 2002.
- MARX, L. *The Machine In The Garden*. New York: Oxford UP, 1964.
- MAXWELL, Anne. "Postcolonial Criticism, Ecocriticism and Climate Change." *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 45.1 (2009): 15-26.
- MURPHY, Patrick. *Literature, Nature, and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1995.
- NUSSBAUM, Martha. *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*. Cambridge: Belknap, 2006.
- OPPERMAN, Serpil. "Ecocriticism's Phobic Relations with Theory." *ISLE* 17.4 (2010): 768-770.
- PHILIPS, Dana. "Don DeLillo's Postmodern Pastoral." *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and Environment*. . Ed. Scott Slovic, Michael P. Branch, Daniel Patterson, and Rochelle Johnson. Moscow: U of Idaho P, 1998. 235-246.
- PLUMWOOD, Val. *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- PULIDO, Laura. *Environmentalism and Social Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1996.
- ROORDA, Randall. *Dramas of Solitude*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1998.
- ROOS, Bonnie, and Alex HUNT, eds. *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia Press, 2010.
- RUECKERT, William. "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1996. 105-123.
- SCHLOSBERG, David. *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.
- SNYDER, Gary. *No Nature: New and Selected Poems*. New York: Pantheon, 1992.
- SPIELBERG, Steven, Dir. *Amistad*. 1977. DVD.
- TAYLOR, Dorceta. "Race, Class, Gender, and American Environmentalism." USDA Forest Service. General Technical Report PNW-GTR-534. April 2002.
- TUAN, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2011.



- *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. New York: Columbia UP, 1990.
- VITAL, Anthony, and Hans-Georg ERNEY, eds. *Postcolonial Studies and Ecocriticism*. Spec. issue of *The Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 13.2-14.1 (2006-2007).
- WA THIONG'O, Ngũgĩ. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literatures*. London: Heinemann, 1986.
- WILLIAMS, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1973.

