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EDITORIAL**Ecocriticism: Old and New Challenges**

Since the publication of the foundational *The Ecocriticism Reader* edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, in 1996, that helped define the field's commitment to challenging anthropocentrism and recognizing the cultural meaning of nature, ecocriticism has traveled a long way and has continually expanded and branched out. In the 1990s and 2000s, the field rapidly broadened, moving beyond traditional nature writing and starting to address issues such as environmental justice, colonial land exploitation, and global ecological crises, under the influence of concepts such as Rob Nixon's "slow violence."

As digital methods have grown and diversified, ecocriticism has come to incorporate computational text analysis and material critiques of the footprint of technology, while also turning toward more-than-human and posthuman frameworks. More recently, the field has shifted towards climate fiction studies, multi-species ethics, and planetary media systems, exploring virtual worlds in video games and engaging public eco-discourse on platforms such as Bluesky. Today, ecocriticism stands as an interdisciplinary environmental humanities field that reads culture as ecosystem, combining ethical critique with new empirical, cognitive, and digital approaches in order to understand how stories shape – and are shaped by – the planet.

Ecocritical ethics has also undergone profound changes, moving from human centered ethics to multispecies and hybrid ethics that argue that moral concern must extend beyond humans to include animals, plants, fungi, rivers, forests, microbes, and even

human–technology–nature relations. Thus, multispecies ethics recommends, according to Donna Haraway, treating non-human life not as scenery or metaphor but as subjects with their own lifeworlds, needs, and agency, deserving care, rights, and representation (128). Hybrid ethics goes a step further by recognizing that today’s environments are rarely purely “natural” or “human” – they are entangled systems where cultures, species, infrastructures, and machines co-produce ecological realities (Heisse 209). This thinking reshapes the issue of responsibility: ethics is no longer a one-directional human duty to protect a passive nature, but a reciprocal negotiation within cross-species communities and socio-technical ecologies.

A foundational influence on these ideas has come from Haraway who framed relationships between humans, animals, and technologies as kinship networks rather than hierarchies. In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway urges readers to cultivate more responsible ways of living on a damaged planet, emphasizing that survival depends on making-kin – forging collaborative, reciprocal relationships across species and systems rather than treating humans, animals, and technologies as ranked categories. The book is a call to practice care, curiosity, and accountability in interdependent worlds, suggesting that livable futures emerge from coexistence, imagination, and cooperation with the many beings – organic and technological – who shape life together.

Furthermore, the Australian philosopher Peter Singer impacted ecocriticism indirectly, by shifting the ethical ground of the environmental humanities and by foregrounding the moral status of animals and the way in which humans ought to treat them. In *Animal Liberation*, he expanded the moral community beyond humans, helping scholars in the humanities challenge anthropocentrism – one of the central targets of ecocriticism. He argues that the capacity to suffer and feel well-being, not intelligence or species membership, is the key basis for moral consideration. His approach is grounded in utilitarianism, which evaluates actions by their consequences for all beings, promoting the idea of expanding the moral circle to include animals equally

and opposing speciesism – the belief that human interests automatically outweigh non-human ones. He also encouraged literary critics to view ecological degradation not only as cultural or aesthetic loss but also as material harm and suffering.

Other influential theories include rights-based and dignity approaches, most notably advanced by Tom Regan, who argued in *The Case for Animal Rights* that many animals are “subjects-of-a-life” (380), and, therefore, possess inherent rights that should not be violated, even if doing so could produce overall benefit. In *Frontiers of Justice*, Martha Nussbaum contributed a capabilities perspective, proposing that justice means enabling animals to flourish according to species-specific capacities (movement, play, affiliation, bodily health, etc.), rather than reducing ethics to harm avoidance alone (93). Across these approaches, the field has moved from seeing morality as a human privilege to seeing it as a practical negotiation about harm, rights, flourishing, and responsibility among beings with overlapping but different lifeworlds.

The shifts in ecocritical discourse are noticeable in the articles featuring in this special issue entitled *Ecocriticism: Old and New Challenges*, which approach Indigenous knowledge systems, non-Western cultural perspectives and local histories, thereby challenging earlier Western-centric ecocritical frameworks. The articles point to the mutations in the field, which has evolved into a global, ethically engaged, methodologically diverse field that responds to urgent planetary crises and social inequalities through literature – this will be our focus –, but also through media, culture and interdisciplinary research.

Thus, in his article on New Nature writing, Stefano Bracci Testasecca reevaluates it from the perspective of the tension between the traditionalist writers who voluntarily engage with an earlier, rediscovered canon of nature writing, and the opposing group that feels that new, unprecedented circumstances – aptly characterized by the term “Anthropocene” – call for new sensibilities. Testasecca foregrounds the legacy of poet and essayist Edward Thomas, who had a significant impact on Robert MacFarlane’s work and the Romantic Ecology approach to non-

fiction writing, reflecting the conflict between the first and second waves of ecocriticism. The article examines how MacFarlane's popular trilogy *Landscape and the Human Heart* was influenced by Thomas' essay writing and understanding of nature. The article also goes into reactions to his work, especially those related to what has recently been dubbed "the Self-Conscious Anthropocene."

Shoshannah Ganz explores women's participation in the forestry sector via Canadian writer Madge Macbeth's *The Patterson Limit* (1923). Ganz discusses feminism and ecology in relation to *The Patterson Limit*, examining the feminist, eco-feminine, and ecofeminist viewpoints expressed or anticipated by Macbeth's literature. Ganz also touches on the imbrications between the feminist theories developed in the 1920s, prior to women's enfranchisement, by authors such as Nellie McClung, and the ecofeminist depictions that Macbeth anticipated. Macbeth's pioneering work and her influence on the later development of women writers' understanding of their connection to nature, is also given ample space, showing how women, forestry, and forestry-related industries are presented in 21st-century non-fiction works by Elizabeth May and Charlotte Gill.

Neda Mozaffari and Marius Kahakeu Deffo analyze the way in which *Julie or the New Heloise* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau foreshadows important issues in modern ecocriticism. The article demonstrates, through a critical reading of gardens, mountain landscapes, and lake beaches, how Rousseau views environment as an active agent that influences human identity and moral development. The authors read the scenes of private contemplation as illustrations of what Zev Trachtenberg calls the "environmentalism of the man." The "environmentalism of the citizen" is also demonstrated in Rousseau's ecological micro-republic. By placing *Julie* in early modern ecological thought, the article establishes Rousseau as a trailblazing figure in the environmental humanities and a forerunner to ecocriticism's focus on non-human agency.

Ovidiu Matiu analyzes Cormac McCarthy against the background of current discussions on the Anthropocene,

highlighting the way in which *Blood Meridian, or the Evening Redness in the West* (1985) and *The Road* (2006) chart the course of American ecological violence from its nineteenth-century beginnings to its post-apocalyptic finale. Matiu contends that McCarthy shifts from an anthropocentric vision of human dominance over nature in *Blood Meridian* to a biocentric perspective in *The Road*, where nature is portrayed as a neutral, completely indifferent, post-human force. Through critical readings of landscape, character, and imagery, the article demonstrates how nineteenth-century “mindless” frontier violence against nature and mankind in *Blood Meridian* serves as a historical precondition for the ash-covered, post-apocalyptic wasteland of *The Road*. McCarthy’s post-apocalyptic and desert environments in the two novels actively reveal the boundaries of human “suzerainty” on the planet, as well as the moral ramifications of ecological devastation.

Postcolonial ecocriticism as a critical framework is foregrounded by Marwa Boubaker in her examination of Tony Hillerman’s 1978 detective book *Listening Woman*. Boubaker refutes scholarly rejections of popular genre fiction as well as anthropocentrism, illustrating how *Listening Woman* offers an ecocentric environmental ethic that emphasizes the sentience, dynamism, and close relationship to human life characteristic of the American Southwestern natural environment. The article sheds light on the Navajo worldview, which emphasizes interconnectedness and the value of respecting the natural world, while also attesting to the fact that detective fiction is much more than just a form of entertainment. It has the potential to be an effective cultural tool that increases ecological consciousness.

Manoj Rajbanshi and Nagendra Kumar extend discussions of ecocriticism by analyzing climate fiction produced in India. Three Indian speculative climate fiction works are analyzed and placed within the broader canon of climate fiction: Veena Nagpal’s *Radius 200* (2014), Varun Thomas Mathew’s *The Black Dwarves of the Good Little Bay* (2019), and Prayaag Akbar’s *Leila* (2017). The article looks into how the texts incorporate the water crisis into their stories and how climate catastrophe is used to create dystopian

and post-apocalyptic worlds. The unique characteristics of Indian speculative fiction are meticulously analyzed. The authors engage with the ongoing academic debate over the best way to depict climate fiction – the speculative vs. reality argument. The study concludes by arguing that Indian speculative climate fiction is more successful in addressing the climate catastrophe by portraying the “futuristic climate-changed worlds” as a continuation of the current crisis rather than as a break from the present.

Speculative fiction also features in Seren Taştekin’s article, which compares, in ecocritical terms, two dystopian climate fiction works – *The Drowned World* (1962) by J. G. Ballard and *New York 2140* (2017) by K. S. Robinson –, that speculate on the 22nd century from parallel angles, engaging in meaningful dialogues with the Anthropocene. The author’s focus is on what the two novels reveal about anthropocentrism, as well as their conjectures about what may emerge in its wake, in an inundated London and a half-inundated New York, respectively. The investigation of the realistic portrayal of climate change and its effects on society goes hand in hand with the exploration of human resilience and the possibility of technological and societal transformation.

Oleksandr Kapranov also explores speculative fiction, offering a qualitative analysis of Megan Hunter’s apocalyptic novel *The End We Start From* (2017), in an attempt to shed light on sensory lexica that are involved in the manifestation and interpretation of such categories as hearing, smell, taste, touch, and vision. The study identifies and classifies the sensory lexica in the novel, in order to get an insight into the protagonist’s actual experiences of the flooded London of the not-so-distant dystopian future. Kapranov argues that the sensory lexica in the story may increase the readers’ awareness of the protagonist’s sensations, emotions and perceptions. The results of the qualitative analysis indicate that the sensory lexica in Hunter’s novel are skilfully employed in order to portray the protagonist’s encounters with the negative consequences of climate change in a realistic and, at the same time, relatable manner.

The volume transitions to explorations of the difficulties minority groups encounter when assimilating into American society. Soumaya Bouacida and Zeyneb Benhenda analyze lupine metaphors in Karen Russell's "St. Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves," pointing out the way in which the story challenges the American Dream myth, that frequently marginalizes and erases minority identities while promising equality and opportunity. The portrayal of the wolf females, who were brought up in a culturally unique lupine setting before being forced to adopt human civilization by nuns, is comparable to the experiences of minorities under pressure to conform to prevailing norms. Their different trajectories highlight the difficulties of cultural displacement. The article, which places the short story in the context of larger conversations about assimilation and the rejection of the "other," contends that Russell destroys the appearance of peaceful multiculturalism by exposing how forced assimilation results in alienation rather than genuine inclusion.

The same issue of "the other" in relation to ethnic minorities takes central stage in Anca-Luminița Iancu's article, which focuses on Monica Krawczyk, the first Polish-American author whose tales of Polish-American immigrants appeared in prestigious American magazines in the 1930s and 1940s, as well as in a collection titled *If the Branch Blossoms and Other Stories* in 1950. In order to show how gender, ethnicity, and social class intersect in the ethnic and American spaces that Krawczyk's characters navigate and how they affect the female protagonists' identities as women, wives, and mothers, Iancu comes up with a close reading of two short stories from the collection, which point to differences between first- and second-generation immigrants with regard to views on assimilation and ethnic values.

The focus shifts from assimilation and multicultural issues to contemporary discussions of memes. Thus, Ina-Alice Dănilă tracks the cultural life of the Doge meme, from a simple internet meme to a meme coin and to the abbreviation of an unofficial U.S. government organization. Dănilă contends that DOGE is cruelly ironic in that its history demonstrates how financial and political

discourses appropriate jointly produced vernacular signifiers, exposing the intricate relationship between political power and finance in platform capitalism. The author also argues that the DOGE trajectory exemplifies a top-down memeification of politics and governance, whereby memes and vernacular aesthetics permeate institutional identity and the relationship between institutions and citizens in order to mask harmful politics.

Discussions of political power give way to explorations of the symbolic power held by translators. Maria-Teodora Creangă contends that theorists in translation studies have yet to successfully incorporate the idea of translation as power into the new theoretical framework produced by this sociological perspective, despite the fact that the topic of translation as power has been the focus of numerous studies in recent years, some of them being based on Pierre Bourdieu's work on "symbolic power" and its underlying principles. Creangă argues that, since linguistics has already effectively incorporated the idea of "symbolic power," signaling the emergence of a new understanding of language as a symbolic system, translation studies, as an interdisciplinary field, ought to do the same and reap the benefits that such an approach may provide on both a theoretical and practical level.

Thus, this issue raises important questions related to the various types of power and forces that shape modern life. The most pressing question, however, seems to remain the one related to the urgency of considering the numerous implications of climate change, and addressing them in such a way as to safeguard life on this planet for many years to come.

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