

A Report Card on Ecocriticism

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It all began with a bit of a panic to describe itself, and even now, the question about what constitutes ecocriticism remains a priority.[1] Although ecocriticism began in the 1990s,[2] its roots stretch far down into the soil of history. From ancient times to the present, various people at various times and for various reasons have voiced concerns about the natural world. Ecocriticism's unease about its nature derives from precisely this history. How does ecocriticism distinguish itself from other varieties of environmentally oriented reading? What are its goals, methodologies, and objects of study? Where did it come from? Where is it now? And where is it going? Certainly, in the primary literature on the subject,[3] as I will show, ecocriticism has distinguished itself, debates notwithstanding, first by the ethical stand it takes, its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study, and, secondly, by its commitment to making connections. Ecocriticism may be many other things besides, but it is always at least these two. It is also very young, and the rapid growth of this theoretical youngster needs to be evaluated: as Kathleen R. Wallace and Karla Armbruster so aptly put it, "the time has come for ecocritics to review the field critically and ask what directions it might best take in the future." [4] It is report card time.

Ecocritical Ethics

In *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryll Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii)[5] and compares it with other activist methodologies such as Marxist and feminist criticisms. *The Ecocriticism Reader* was the first of its kind--an anthology of ecocritical essays devoted to organizing an area of study whose efforts had, until the early 1990s, not been "recognized as belonging to a distinct critical school or movement" (xvi-xvii). Rather, as Glotfelty points out in the introduction, many of the twenty-five essays collected in the reader had appeared under headings as varied "as American Studies, regionalism, pastoralism, the frontier, human ecology, science and literature, nature in literature, landscape in literature" (xvii), and so on. Implied throughout the introduction, and whispering behind almost every essay in the collection, is the idea that "literary studies in an age of environmental crisis" (xv) conceivably may do some good, may in some way ameliorate the crisis. William Rueckert's essay, for example, compares biological and literary activities, suggesting that poems, like plants, store energy from their respective communities and that this energy can be used in the world outside of where it is stored. The problem, in Rueckert's opinion, is in figuring out how to turn the stored energy of literature into effective political action in the real world. Sueellen Campbell's piece in the collection is also concerned with effective and direct action, and her identification of important similarities and differences between poststructuralism and deep ecology argues that "both [literary] theorists and ecologists ... are at core revolutionary" (127).[6]

In the same year that Glotfelty's collection came out, Lawrence Buell published *The Environmental Imagination*, where he defines "'ecocriticism' as [a] study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (430 n.20). Buell acknowledges that there is some uncertainty about what the term exactly covers but argues that

if one thinks of it ... as a multiform inquiry extending to a variety of environmentally focused perspectives more expressive of concern to explore environmental issues searchingly than of fixed dogmas about political solutions, then the neologism becomes a useful omnibus term for subsuming a large and growing scholarly field. (430 n.20)

Buell's definition is valid, as far as it goes, and it continues both in the increasingly interdisciplinary tradition of inclusiveness and making connections and in maintaining an ethical stand for effecting change.

The 1998 collection entitled *Reading the Earth* goes a bit further and is more specific in the matter of ethical commitment. As Michael P. Branch et al explain,

Implicit (and often explicit) in much of this new criticism is a call for cultural change. Ecocriticism is not just a means of analyzing nature in literature; it implies a move toward a more biocentric world-view, an extension of ethics, a broadening of humans' conception of global community to include nonhuman life forms and the physical environment. Just as feminist and African American literary criticism call for a change in culture--that is, they attempt to move the culture toward a broader world-view by exposing an earlier narrowness of view--so too does ecological literary criticism advocate for cultural change by examining how the narrowness of our culture's assumptions about the natural world has limited our ability to envision an ecologically sustainable human society. (xiii)

In the following year, Michael Cohen asserts that "by definition, ecological literary criticism must be engaged. It wants to know but also wants to do. ... Ecocriticism needs to inform personal and political actions, in the same way that feminist criticism was able to do only a few decades ago." [7]

Like any recently born thing, ecocriticism is experiencing tremendous growth and development in these early years of its existence. In the short time since it first appeared as a movement, some of the initial concerns that marked its inaugural moments have already been answered. Given the veritable explosion of interest in the field, Glotfelty's concern in 1996 with the traditional failure of the literary profession to address "green" issues, for instance, now seems something of a non-issue. Glen Love, paraphrasing Glotfelty's point, argued in his contribution to *The Ecocriticism Reader* that

race, class, and gender are words which we see and hear everywhere at our professional meetings and in our current publications ... [but] the English profession has failed to respond in any significant way to the issue of the environment. (226)[8]

That was then, and, as Love knows, things are changing: the English profession is responding. Love has recently noted that "the study of literature and the environment and the practice of ecocriticism has begun to assume an active place in the profession" (65).[9] Indeed, the changes in the way that ecocriticism is received are so dramatic that it emboldens Patrick Murphy to write in 1999 that "every department in which MLA members hold tenure ought to include an ecocritic among its ranks" (1099). [10]

Of course, and it is almost tedious to make such an insipid comment, some things haven't changed over the years. One of these is the relationship between literature and world, the age-old business of the Ivory Tower. If the matter of applying social history to literature is, at best, problematic, a constant sore spot for serious New Historicism, then doing it the other way around is no less difficult: petitioning real world issues with literary theory, in fact, seems even more demanding. Though ecocritics with the very best intentions want to change things, there are important questions waiting for our answers about how literary theory might cause such changes.

"Without Spinning Off": Balancing Theory And Practice

Although, as John Tallmadge and Henry Harrington correctly point out in *Reading Under the Sign of Nature*, theory has taken the front seat in early ecocritical writing (largely because theory, it seems, can authorize and validate the approach), there are some misgivings about and distrust of theory among ecocritics. Hence, we hear Tallmadge and Harrington promising to give adequate theory but "without spinning off into obscurantism or idiosyncrasy" (xv), and Lawrence Buell pledging to avoid what he terms "mesmerization by literary theory" (111). Given that ecocriticism is something that is supposed to change things, a healthy scepticism toward theory of the sort that spins off madly or that mesmerizes, theory that would, in a word, neuter ecocriticism, seems perfectly valid.

Buell's approach, however, is to avoid the complexities of theory entirely, it seems, and to bridge the gap between what he does, in fact, acknowledge as a theoretical problem: the relationship between text on the one hand and world on the other. He calls this bridge an "aesthetics of dual accountability" (98), which will satisfy "the mind and the ethological facts" (93). The way to achieve it, he maintains, is through a revival of the claims of realism. "The claims of realism," he argues, "merit reviving ... so as to enable one to reimagine textual representations as having a dual accountability to matter and to discursive mentation" (92). One has to wonder, though, if there is no more productive way of dealing with poststructuralist challenges to the transparency of language than simply ignoring them and falling back on problematic suppositions about the merits of realism.

One of the more promising examples of such an attempt to deal directly with the problems of representation comes from Gretchen Legler's essay in the 1998 anthology, *Writing the Environment*. [11] Legler raises a number of deconstructionist questions about the markings of language in *Walden* that strike me as being fairly important--at least, if we are to make the kinds of interconnections among structures of oppression that ecocriticism seeks to make. There are a number of ugly threads hanging behind *Walden* that Buell simply does not offer to view. To

reverse the tapestry, as Terry Eagleton remarks in *Against the Grain*, "to expose in all its unglamorously dishevelled tangle the threads constituting the well heeled image it presents to the world," is to deconstruct a text.[12] Legler deconstructs *Walden* briefly but effectively by noting how Thoreau represents the natural environment:

Nature in Thoreau's work is constructed as a place that nurtures [the] white masculine aesthetic and as a place that is not suitable for the nurturance of other bodies--the bodies of Native Americans, immigrants and white women. (75)

Legler helps to connect issues such as race, class, gender, and sexuality in theoretical terms with questions about the environment.[13]

Nonetheless, Tallmadge and Harrington are certainly accurate in observing a defensiveness toward theory that characterizes early ecocritical monographs.[14] The presumption of "a skeptical, if not hostile, reader" (ix) largely remains with ecocritical monographs, partly because ecocriticism has still not found its own voice and continues to speak through the mouths of other theories, continues, as Tallmadge and Harrington argue, to be "less a method than an attitude, an angle of vision, and a mode of critique" (ix). Glen Love, too, voices a concern about the theoretical standing of ecocriticism. He seems to feel some unease about "what that place [of ecocriticism in the profession] is to be, particularly in its theoretical and methodological base" ("Science" 65). Stephanie Sarver goes even further in expressing her worries about ecocriticism's theoretical viability.

Sarver contends that ecocriticism is not a theory at all but is more than anything a focus:

"Ecocriticism" is ... an unfortunate term because it suggests a new kind of critical theory. The emerging body of work that might be labeled ecocritical is united not by a theory, but by a focus: the environment. This ecocritical work draws on a variety of theories, such as feminist, Marxist, post-structuralist, psychoanalytic and historicist.[15]

In a sense, Sarver has a point, but it is a point that may be applied to any kind of theory, indeed, the very theories she mentions as being theories per se: feminism, Marxism, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and historicism. All of these draw heavily on other theories that preceded them. Such borrowing, however, is exactly what goes on in the articulation of a new critical practice. All theories are a synthesis, and Sarver fails to recognize this fact. Still, the argument Sarver is making is valid in so far as it calls ecocriticism to task for not being theorized enough and for being heavily thematic.

We need to understand why ecocriticism has had problems in getting its theoretical footing. Richard Kerridge perceptively suggests that one reason is that

unlike feminism, with which it otherwise has points in common, environmentalism has difficulty in being a politics of personal liberation or social mobility ... environmentalism has a political weakness in comparison with feminism: it is much harder for environmentalists to make the connection between global threats and individual lives.[16]

Perhaps one of the reasons for this problematic is that the terms of engagement are less defined with environmental issues than they are with social ones. If we are going to talk about terms of engagement, then we need first to recognize at least two reasons why such well-established terms as misogyny, racism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism provide enabling frames of discussion in literary criticism: first, in each case the estranged and disaffected subjects are concrete things that we can name with increasing confidence, things that walk among (often as a threat to) fully franchised subjects; and second, the terms themselves (by the very fact that they offer a name) authorize discussion and description of a recognized topic--"misogyny" is hatred of women; "racism," of racial difference; "homophobia," of non-procreative sexualities; and "anti-Semitism," of Jewishness and Jews. But what should we call a fear and contempt for the environment? We have terms to describe what we perceive as hostile geographies--Horace's *terras domibus negata* (1.22.22),[17] for instance--but we do not have any terms describing the mechanism for the fear that produces such environments. We have a litany of terms to describe socially oppressive systems of thinking and the social objects of fear and hatred they produce, but when the object is the natural world, there is no single term with which we can begin an organized and informed discussion. A term such as "ecophobia"[18] would allow us to label fear and loathing toward the environment in much the same way that the term "homophobia" marks fear and loathing toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. Admittedly, there is too much jargon polluting the world of theory, but some kind of terminology and theorization is necessary; otherwise, ecocriticism risks becoming just an empty buzzword.

It is probably accurate to claim that no one has done more in helping ecocriticism onto solid theoretical ground than Patrick D. Murphy, whether or not we agree with his kind of theory. As Murphy complains, the problem with ecocriticism is that too much of it "remains theoretically unsophisticated. Too often, there remains an anti-theoretical, naive, realist attitude expressed in" the work of ecocritics. [19] Arguably, the criticism is as valid today as when it was first made in 1995. In place of theoretically unsophisticated stances, Murphy offers a Bakhtinian "dialogical orientation," which, he maintains, "reinforces the ecofeminist recognition of interdependence and the natural need for diversity" (22).[20] Sarver would argue that this is simply not good enough. In her own words,

Literary scholars who are environmentalists seem not to be creating a new critical theory; rather, they are drawing on existing theories to illuminate our understanding of how human interactions with nature are reflected in literature.

A dialogic answer might be that such borrowing is exactly what goes on in the articulation of a new critical practice. If nothing else, Murphy succeeds in taking ecocriticism out of the hands of the theoretically unsophisticated. Yet if Murphy is to be critiqued, it is for the theory he chooses rather than for the choosing of theory. We might debate the usefulness of Bakhtinian dialogics, for instance, but that is not part of my project here.

In his most recent book, Murphy discusses the differences between ecofeminist literary criticism and what he calls "postmodernist negative critique," arguing that the former offers "a viable theory of agency" (*Farther Afield* 94) and that the latter does not. Murphy also stresses the idea that the diversity and heterarchy that characterize healthy ecosystems also characterize ecofeminist practice and thinking. As far as it goes, the theory is fine, but it does not add very

much to the existing theory or take us much beyond what we already know. Nonetheless, it is explicitly and unreservedly feminist, and that is a positive start.

(Feminist) Ecocriticisms

[T]he hatred of women and the hatred of nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing. Ynestra King [21]

Since there are, as Karen Warren (among many others [22]) cogently notes, "important connections between how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other" ("Introduction" xi), it seems senseless to conduct ecocritical investigations outside of feminist frameworks, especially when ecocriticism prides itself on making connections. Again, however, terminological questions arise. Noël Sturgeon's question about "what's in a name" remains germane,[23] as does her suggestion for a plurality of ecofeminisms. Nevertheless, one is tempted to agree that the very term "ecofeminism," whether plural or singular, might "only be transiently useful within our history" (Sturgeon 168), though I would hesitate to suggest that we are anywhere near having exhausted its usefulness.

Granting that there are ecofeminisms and ecocriticisms, we might venture some broad generalizations about the two spheres of investigation.[24] Both often do very much the same work, but they are not synonymous terms. Why no scholars have taken the time and effort to explain the differences at length is, perhaps, a matter for some speculation, but we may be certain that there are very real consequences that we need to be aware of when we do consider the differences. One of these consequences is that in drawing a distinction between ecocriticism and ecofeminism, we immediately seem to establish an agonistic discourse that sets ecofeminism and ecocriticism against each other as competing voices, perhaps even as a sort of gender war writ small in the rarefied airs of competing theoretical discourses. It is not an argument that I particularly want to develop, since it is far less productive than building on the strengths of each approach, looking at ways that they complement each other, and working toward defining more fully what each approach envisions. Another problem is that differentiating between ecofeminism and ecocriticism lands us in a bit of a Catch-22: in choosing ecofeminist approaches, we privilege the social; in choosing ecocritical approaches, we subordinate feminism and make it a topic for inclusion rather than a primary topic. Nevertheless, there remain unexamined differences between the two approaches.

When Ynestra King argues that "in ecofeminism, nature is the central category of analysis" ("Healing" 117), she is surely mistaken. Mary Mellor explains that "although ecofeminists may differ in their focus, sex/gender differences are *at the centre* of their analysis" (69; emphasis added). Most ecofeminist scholars agree in the primacy of sex/gender differences over nature as "the central category of analysis." It is more the case that nature is included in the discussion. In spite of prioritizing nature in ecofeminism, King seems to agree with this position when she argues that "ecofeminist movement politics and culture must show the connection between all forms of domination, including the domination of nonhuman nature" ("Toward" 119; emphasis

added)--including, but not beginning with it. As Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphy observe, this inclusionary view has been "generally embraced as a sound orientation" ("Introduction" 3).

So even though "eco" comes first in both terms, in "ecofeminism" it is the second part of the term that has ontological priority. This emphasis means that ecofeminism is first a social theory, a human-centred approach; ecocriticism tries to be something else, to move away from homocentric models, to put the puzzle of which humans are part before the piece. I would also propose that ecocriticism done well is always a feminist issue: as Warren argues, "what makes something a feminist issue is that an understanding of it contributes in some important way to an understanding of the subordination of women" ("Toward" 142). Ecocriticism that does not look at the relationship between the domination of women and the domination of the natural environment quite simply fails in its mandate to "make connections" and is quite simply not ecocriticism. What Murphy calls "nonfeminist ecological criticism" (*Farther Afield* 92) is simply that: nonfeminist ecological criticism. It isn't ecocriticism, and the distinction needs to be made and maintained.

Expansions And Connections

Bringing together many diverse and important themes and issues of ecocritical research, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, the first major collection of ecocriticism, was a tremendous accomplishment, and it is not an exaggeration for Glotfelty to claim that "these are the essays with which anyone wishing to undertake ecocritical scholarship ought to be familiar" (xxvi). The comment is as true now as it was in 1996. Still, as with all things in an imperfect world, the collection is not without flaws. It suffers from a slightly narrow, Americanist focus and a strong partiality for texts about nature and the natural.

By 1998, though, while the commitment to praxis remains strong, the parameters of ecocriticism are expanding rapidly, as evidenced in the collection by Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells, entitled *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*. In the introduction, Kerridge writes,

the ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations *wherever* they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis. (5; emphasis added)

Indeed, *Writing the Environment* shows a refreshing extension of the scope and possibilities of ecocriticism, with essay discussions ranging from biblical to children's literature, thus opening important ecocritical opportunities for research well outside of the genre of nature writing. This was a surprisingly rapid development in ecocriticism.

Two years later, the collection, *Reading under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in Ecocriticism*, documents a continued commitment to critical and cultural diversity. The approaches include postmodern, feminist, bioregional, and phenomenological methodologies that are informed by a

healthy mix of racial, ethnic, and cultural perspectives, and offer material ranging from Pueblo and Navajo wisdom to Buddhist understandings of the world. Undeniably, ecocriticism is maturing,[25] but it is still very young: it has a lot of growing yet to do, and the diversity in a book such as *Reading under the Sign of Nature* is not reflected in the sea of mostly white faces at the ASLE meetings.[26]

Still, the unflagging vigor of ecocriticism's development is wildly encouraging. Armbruster and Wallace's *Beyond Nature Writing* is the most recent example. This twenty-essay collection takes up the call for expanding the boundaries of ecocriticism to include works not necessarily interested in the natural world, a call voiced repeatedly in the 1999 PMLA "Forum on Literatures of the Environment." [27]

One thing that distinguishes *Beyond Nature Writing* from books on ecocriticism published earlier is the zest and consistency with which it examines writing that falls outside of the fairly well defined contours of "nature writing." The reason why this is such difficult work, why it hasn't been done to any great degree relative to the work that has been done on writing that has "environmentally focused perspectives," is that, from a theoretical standpoint, the goals and visions of ecocriticism have been fairly loose and inclusive. I do not mean to imply that this is a bad thing, and, assuredly, "a vast amount of work," as Cheryll Glotfelty has remarked, "remains to be done ... theoretical, activist-oriented, AND thematic." [28] Moreover, examining nature writing is one of the things ecocriticism does, and does well; but when nature writing constitutes the sole purview of ecocriticism, the lack of diversity in the theoretical gene pool, conceptual inbreeding, and a weakening of contacts with the wider literary world will spell disaster for the approach. Focusing exclusively on nature writing wrongly suggests an essential link between ecocriticism as a methodology and nature writing as the object of its inquiry. Thematicism, though it may provide an important base from which to begin ecocritical discussions, cannot be the goal of informed ecocriticism. Thematicism runs against the grain of ecocriticism. It buttresses "nature studies" and ecological literary criticism, neither of which is, technically speaking, ecocriticism. This point brings us back to the question: what is ecocriticism?

Beyond

Images of nature, or aspects of the natural environment, have been the topic of scores of treatises on such canonical favorites as Shakespeare and Chaucer, but one might wonder at exactly what point cluster counting or commenting on an author's dexterity at weaving together image patterns and themes becomes ecocritical.

Though a great variety of voices do not always speak about ecocriticism in complete harmony, there is substantial agreement on some key issues. One of these, as I have mentioned, is that ecocriticism is committed to changing things. Another is that it makes connections. It is in its ability to make connections that ecocritical readings of, say, Shakespeare would distinguish themselves from other readings of Shakespeare that have looked at nature, the natural, and so on. [29] Ecocriticism at its best seeks understandings about the ways that dynamics of subjugation, persecution, and tyranny are mutually reinforcing, the ways that racism, sexism,

homophobia, speciesism, and so on work together and are, to use Ania Loomba's term, interlocking.[30] This is not conspiracy theory; it is the logic of complementarity, and ecocriticism can be instrumental in helping us to understand it and to do something about the crises we have created.

We have been moving toward those kinds of understandings with each new book on ecocriticism that has come out since 1996, but the latest, *Beyond Nature Writing*, takes us the closest so far. *Beyond Nature Writing*, with its startlingly diverse mix of commentaries that expand the boundaries of ecocriticism (both in terms of the applications that it offers and the theory that it develops), unfurls into brave new worlds--Chaucer, Milton, Johnson, Hardy, Morrison, Nevada test sites, scifi, cyber spaces--and broadens our understandings of "how," as Lisa J. Kiser explains in her contribution, "modern cultural assumptions about the environment have developed from their originary ... roots." [31] As it continues to unfurl, ecocriticism promises to offer more connections, deeper scholarship, and, if we do it properly, better effect in this troubled world.

Notes

[1] The topic came up in a number of panels at the 2001 ASLE conference in Flagstaff, Arizona. In one, the ASLE-Overseas panel, the discussion grew into a debate about whether or not ecocriticism has to be based on personal commitment to environmental matters. The debate was inconclusive. What was surprising was that there even was a debate. It is difficult to imagine an ecocriticism that lacks personal and political (however we define these terms) commitment.

[2] "Ecocriticism" really has three birthdays: one for the term, one for the critical school, and one for the beginning of ecocritical publishing. William Rueckert coined the term "ecocriticism" in "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," *Iowa Review* 9.1 (Winter 1978): 71-86; rpt. in Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, ed. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 105-23. With the establishment of *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* in 1993 by Patrick Murphy, "ecological literary study," Glotfelty contends, "had emerged as a recognizable critical school" (*Ecocriticism Reader* xviii). In 1996, with the appearance of *The Ecocriticism Reader* and Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination*, the term and the school began to receive serious attention among scholars.

[3] In this essay, I offer partial and provisional comments that in no way aspire to totalizing visions nor pretend to cover all of the important topics raised in primary sources I discuss. These sources include Glotfelty and Fromm, ed. *The Ecocriticism Reader*; Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995); Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells, ed. *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1998); Michael P. Branch et al, ed. *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and the Environment* (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1998); Patrick Murphy, *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2000); John Talmadge and Henry

Harrington, ed. *Reading Under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in Ecocriticism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000); and Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace, ed. *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2001). When necessary, of course, I draw on the healthy and growing library of material outside of these primary objects of concern.

[4] Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace, "Introduction: Why Go Beyond Nature Writing, and Where To?" in *Beyond Nature Writing*, 1.

[5] "Introduction: literary studies in an age of environmental crisis," in *Ecocriticism Reader*, xv-xxxvii.

[6] "The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Poststructuralism Meet," in *Ecocriticism Reader*, 124-36.

[7] "Letter," *PMLA* 114.5 (October 1999): 1092-93.

[8] "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism," in *Ecocriticism Reader*, 225-40.

[9] "Science, Anti-Science, and Ecocriticism," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* 6.1 (Winter 1999): 65-81.

[10] "Letter," *PMLA* 114.5 (October 1999): 1098-99.

[11] "Body Politics in American Nature Writing: 'Who may contest for what the body of nature will be?'" in *Writing the Environment*, 71-87.

[12] *Against the Grain: Essays 1975-1985* (London: Verso, 1986), 80.

[13] In addition to what the essays cover in this *AUMLA* Special Issue, there has been much progress made elsewhere connecting environmentally oppressive structures with social ones. Discussions looking at dynamic similarities between the representation of women and animals are extensive. See particularly Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan, ed. *Animals and Women: Theoretical Explorations* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995); Carol J. Adams, ed., *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (New York: Continuum, 1993); Carol J. Adams, *Neither Man Nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals* (New York: Continuum, 1995); Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 1991); and Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991). There is also a growing body of work that looks at women and geography: Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); and Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975). A flurry of greatly diversified discussion has recently appeared linking racism and fear and contempt for the natural environment; see Buell 53-82; Gretchen Legler; Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the Twentieth Century: A History* (New Haven: Yale

University Press, 1989); Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995); and Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Discussions that draw links between ecophobia (see note 18) and homophobia, on the other hand, are more difficult to locate; see Barbara White, "Acts of God: Providence, the Jeremiad and Environmental Crisis," in *Writing the Environment*, 91-109; and Greta Gaard, "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism," *Hypatia* 12.1 (Winter 1997): 114-37. Links between geographies of exclusion and dissident sexualities are raised by many of the essays in David Bell and Gill Valentine, ed. *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995). Despite all of this, mountains of work remain. As Jonathan Levin succinctly observes, "nature and culture are mutually entangled in complex and inherently elusive ways": "Letter," *PMLA* 114.5 (October 1999): 1098. If ecocriticism is to stand on its own, clearly distinguishable from "nature studies," then how it relates to social matters matters.

[14] Tallmadge and Harrington include Joseph Meeker's *Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic*, 3rd ed. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997) and John Elder's *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985) among these early monographs. I would propose a clarification of terms and suggest that anything before 1996 is proto-ecocritical; otherwise, we run the risk of being anachronistic.

[15] ["What is Ecocriticism?"](#) . Further references to Sarver's work are to this paper.

[16] "Introduction," in *Writing the Environment*, 2, 6.

[17] *The Odes and Epodes of Horace*, ed. and trans. Joseph P. Clancy (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

[18] I first used the term in "Environmental Implications of the Writing and Policing of the Early Modern Body: Dismemberment and Monstrosity in Shakespearean Drama," *Shakespeare Review* 33 (Spring 1998): 135. By "ecophobia," I mean irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world, or aspects of it. A comparison with misogyny makes the term clearer. Rape, as an example of misogyny, has more to do with violence than sexuality. Sexualization of landscapes has more to do with visualizing power and indifference than with allegorizing sexuality or desire. The experience of early American landscapes, Annette Kolodny argues, is variously expressed through an entire range of images, each of which details one of the many elements of that experience, including eroticism, penetration, raping, embrace, enclosure, and nurture, to cite only a few (150). In conceptual terms, there is a kind of equation between women and the land; in material terms, women are raped and butchered like the land. The mentality that sees women as environmental commodities is one that does not blanch at prospects of violence to either the natural world or the women who live in it. As rape implies misogyny, sexualized landscapes imply ecophobia. But we can take this a bit further. I was cited and fined in 1995 by the city sanitation board for not cutting my grass. Their logic (and I lost on appeal) was that long grass causes a public menace by allowing introduction of "vermin" and "pests" into the city. It didn't make sense to me, and I thought I might soon be cited and fined for my hair (which was relatively long at the time). My clean long grass posed no threat to anyone. The mania for cutting grass strikes me as ecophobic, as do notions about personal cleanliness, the military passion for

cutting hair, the preference for perfumes over natural bodily odours, and so on. Ecophobia is a subtle thing that takes many forms, and it is time we started to look at it.

[19] *Literature, Nature, and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 165.

[20] See also Murphy's "Anotherness and Inhabitation in Recent Multicultural American Literature," in *Writing the Environment*, 42.

[21] "Toward an Ecological Feminism and a Feminist Ecology," in *Machina Ex Dea: Feminist Perspectives on Technology*, ed. Joan Rothschild (New York: Pergamon, 1983), 118.

[22] The body of ecofeminist theory and commentary is vast, and a thorough bibliography of it would constitute a manuscript-length volume. Some of the influential titles include Noël Sturgeon, *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); Françoise d'Eaubonne, "The Time for Ecofeminism" (trans. Ruth Hottell), in *Key Concepts in Critical Theory: Ecology*, ed. Carolyn Merchant (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994), 174-97; Ynestra King, "Feminism and the Revolt of Nature," in *Key Concepts in Critical Theory*, 198-206; Ynestra King, "Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and the Nature/Culture Dualism," in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1990), 106-21; Ynestra King, "Toward an Ecological Feminism" and Val Plumwood, "Ecofeminism: An overview and discussion of positions and arguments," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplement to Vol. 64 (June 1986): 120-39; Val Plumwood, "Ecosocial Feminism as a General Theory of Oppression," in *Key Concepts in Critical Theory*, 207-19; Val Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism," *Hypatia* 6.1 (Spring 1991): 3-27; Elizabeth Carlassare, "Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse" in *Key Concepts in Critical Theory*, 220-34; Lee Quinby, "Ecofeminism and the politics of resistance," in *Reweaving the World*, 122-27; Marti Kheel, "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology: Reflections on Identity and Difference," in *Reweaving the World*, 128-37; Michael E. Zimmerman, "Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism: The Emerging Dialogue," in *Reweaving the World*, 138-54; Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphy, "Introduction," in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphy (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 1-13; Patrick Murphy, *Literature, Nature, and Other; Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva*, ed. Ecofeminism (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1993); Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990); Carolyn Merchant, "Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory," in *Reweaving the World*, 100-5; Mary Mellor, *Feminism and Ecology* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Judith Plant, "Searching for Common Ground: Ecofeminism and Bioregionalism," in *Reweaving the World*, 155-61; Freya Mathews, "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology," in *Key Concepts in Critical Theory*, 235-45; Karen Green, "Freud, Wollstonecraft, and Ecofeminism: A Defense of Liberal Feminism," *Environmental Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Journal Dedicated to the Philosophical Aspects of Environmental Problems* 16.2 (Summer 1994): 116-34; Rebecca Raglon and Marian Scholtmeijer, "Shifting Ground: Metanarratives, Epistemology, and the Stories of Nature," *Environmental Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Journal Dedicated to the Philosophical Aspects of Environmental Problems* 18.1 (Spring 1996): 18-38; Deborah Slicer, "Is There an Ecofeminism-Deep Ecology 'Debate'?" *Environmental Ethics: An Interdisciplinary*

Journal Dedicated to the Philosophical Aspects of Environmental Problems 17.2 (Summer 1995): 150-69; Connie Bullis, "Retalking Environmental Discourses from a Feminist Perspective: The Radical Potential of Ecofeminism," in *The Symbolic Earth: Discourse and Our Creation of the Environment*, ed. James G. Cantrill and Christine L. Ovarac (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 123-48; Josephine Donovan, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Reading the Orange," *Hypatia* 11.2 (Spring 1996): 161-184; Ariel Salleh, "Class, Race, and Gender Discourse in the Ecofeminism/Deep Ecology Debate," *Environmental Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Journal Dedicated to the Philosophical Aspects of Environmental Problems* 15 (Fall 1993): 225-44; Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern* (New York and London: Zed Books, 1997); Karen J. Warren "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections," *Environmental Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Journal Dedicated to the Philosophical Aspects of Environmental Problems* 9.1 (1987): 3-20; Karen J. Warren, "Introduction," in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, eds. Karen J. Warren and Nisvan Erkal (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), xi-xvi; Karen J. Warren, "Toward an Ecofeminist Ethic," *Studies in the Humanities* 15.2 (December 1988): 140-56; Karen J. Warren and Jim Cheney, "Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology," *Hypatia* 6.1 (Spring 1991): 179-197; Douglas J. Buege, "Rethinking Again: A defense of ecofeminist philosophy," in *Ecological Feminism*, ed. Karen J. Warren and Barbara Wells-Howe (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 42-63; David Kenneth Johnson and Kathleen R. Johnson, "The Limits of Partiality: Ecofeminism, Animal Rights, and Environmental Concern," in *Ecological Feminism*, 106-119; Jim Cheney, "Nature/Theory/Difference: Ecofeminism and the reconstruction of environmental ethics," in *Ecological Feminism*, 158-178; and Kolodny. Many other texts could be added to this list.

[23] See Sturgeon 167-96.

[24] While we must, of course, be wary of making generalizations, we also do well to consider arguments Jean Howard puts forward in a forthcoming collection of essays, claiming that "an almost obsessive fear of falling prey to a reductive 'master narrative' has severely inhibited the range and character of narrative being written about the [early modern] period": "Material Shakespeare/Materialist Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare Matters: History, Teaching, Performance*, ed. Lloyd Davis (Newark: University of Delaware Press, forthcoming 2002). Howard goes on to maintain that a narrative of interconnections is not necessarily a "master narrative," in the sense of aspiring to universal truth claims of the sort discredited by critiques of Enlightenment epistemologies. Rather, narratives of interconnection can be offered as alternatives to local and topical analyses, but alternatives whose usefulness can be judged only in terms of their greater explanatory power and fidelity to the facts as they are known than in terms of their absolute, supra-historical truth claims. This kind of argument can apply to discussions about methods of inquiry as much as to discussions about historical periods, at least in its disavowal of aspirations to reductivism and totalizing explanations. My purpose is to provide the partial and provisional comments Howard discusses, but for two general theoretical camps: ecofeminism and ecocriticism.

[25] I would suggest that the "maturation of the field" (x) of which the editors speak is perhaps best seen as a process of maturation rather than as a state of completion following a long journey of development. I do not mean to imply that the editors meant otherwise by the phrase.

[26] At the third biennial ASLE conference in Kalamazoo, a group of ASLE members got together on June 4, 1999 to address the lack of diversity within the membership. The result was that we formed the Caucus for Diversity. Lack of diversity, however, remains a problem.

[27] As Elizabeth Dodd correctly notes, "Ecocritics have dedicated much of their attention to nature writing," and this has precluded attention to cultural diversity among the authors considered: "Letter," *PMLA* 114.5 (October 1999): 1094. My own piece argues that a singular focus on American nature writing will lead to a disciplinary xenophobia that could ultimately ruin ecocriticism (or, at the minimum, prevent it from effecting wider social changes) and that ecocriticism and nature studies are not necessarily the same thing: "Letter," *PMLA* 114.5 (October 1999): 1095-96. Ursula K. Heise argues in a similar vein that "ecocriticism has nothing specifically to do with American literature ... [with] nature writing ... [or with] literature: "Letter," *PMLA* 114.5 (October 1999): 1097. When ecocriticism does lift its head outside of environmentally-oriented writings, the results are inspiring, as Louise Westling remarks: "The new fields of environmental literature and ecocriticism are already exploring the possibilities of ... [textual] reevaluation, and they provide immensely fruitful results that intersect with feminist theory, postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and indeed basic readings of every kind of literary text: "Letter," *PMLA* 114.5 (October 1999): 1104.

[28] Cheryll Glotfelty, "Re: CFP: The Nature of Shakespeare (11/3; 3/1/01-3/3/01) (fwd)," personal email (14 July 2000).

[29] There is no shortage of books and articles that look at the representations of natural environments in Shakespeare. In general, these books and articles fall under two categories: the formalist camp and what I would call the proto-ecocritical group. The formalists have looked at birds, plants (especially flowers), gardens, the relationship between Nature (as a general theme) and genre, the way the natural environment could be seen to fit into cosmic patterns, and so on. The difference between the group I am calling proto-ecocritical and the earlier group is in the kind of analysis that is being undertaken. While the former is structuralist (concerned primarily with enumerating instances of thematic clusters, with comparing such clusters, with trying to get idealist pictures of the English Renaissance, and so on), the latter is poststructuralist in its various movements toward theoretical analysis of the ways that thinking and talking about the natural world interrelate with other early modern discourses. Jeanne Addison Roberts in *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus, and Gender* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), "marks the stages in the evolution of Shakespeare's ideas" about the Wild (84), in a largely formalist attempt to analyse discursive relationships, "how the construction of Culture and Wild [in Shakespearean literature] shapes our perceptions of females" (12). John Gillies, in *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), relying heavily on detailed discussions about the influence of classical texts on Shakespeare, elegantly maps the coordinates linking geographical difference with social exclusion and otherness; Richard Marienstras, a proto-new historicist, tries, among other things, to unearth early modern environmental laws, the background against which Shakespeare wrote; see his *New Perspectives on the Shakespearean World*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1985). Linda Woodbridge looks at interconnected representations of land and body, penetration and pollution, at how sexualized landscapes form part of semiotic systems she calls "the discourse of fertility" (159), and at ways

that this discourse overlaps and interacts with discourses of magic; in particular, see "Protection and Pollution: Palisading the Elizabethan Body Politic," and "Green Shakespeare," in *The Scythe of Saturn: Shakespeare and Magical Thinking* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 45-85, 152-205. Certainly a lot has been written about the environment in Shakespeare, and while none of it explicitly aims at offering ecocritical readings, much of it provides very useful bases on which such criticism might find itself. The most promising recent gesture vowing to link ecocritical approaches and Shakespeare texts came in March 2001 in Toledo, Ohio at the "Ohio Shakespeare Conference." This conference, entitled "The Nature of Shakespeare," took as its focus the relationships between "Nature" and Shakespeare and showed a remarkable openness to discussions that ranged far outside the thematicism that has so long dominated other similar discussions.

[30] On the very first page of her influential *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), Loomba promises to talk about the "interlocking of these various [race, class, and gender] structures of oppression" (emphasis in original), and it is a promise that the rest of the book largely keeps. Queer theory complicates the trinity of race, class, and gender by adding another angle: sexual behaviour/identity. Any serious queer theory will always look at issues of class or gender or race or all three of them. Ecocriticism complicates the nexus of race, class, gender, and sexuality by adding a new angle: views toward the natural world. My point here is a simple one: oppressive social structures are often dynamically intertwined with our views about the natural world. We know this intuitively when we hear men equating women with nonhuman animals (bitch, cow, chick, bunny, and so on); when we hear environmental behaviour defined in violent sexual (usually heterosexual) terms (raping the land, ploughing the virgin field); when we hear anti-Semites calling Shylock a dog, thirty-nine times; when we hear the urban poor referred to as dirt; and so on. But if we know these things on a gut level, being able to talk about them on a theoretical level is a completely different matter.

[31] "Chaucer and the politics of nature," in *Beyond Nature Writing*, 41.

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