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Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley (eds.), *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2013), liv+569 pp.



In his short entry on “Ecocriticism” in the *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*, Laurie Ricou notes that “Canadian literary studies, with their long-standing interest in nature, wilderness, and landscape, might be said to have always been ecocritical” (324). His assertion is directly addressed in the editors’ introduction to this anthology, and to some extent *Greening the Maple* may be deemed a substantiation of Ricou’s claim. Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley describe the aim of the anthology as providing a “retrospective, curatorial account of the field” (xiv) by tracing “the past and present of Canadian ecocriticism” (xv). In bringing together essays that deal with the environment and literature from specifically Canadian perspectives, including essays that long predate first wave ecocriticism *per se*, the anthology embeds Canadian ecocriticism in a historical context, thereby convincingly showing Canadian literary and critical concerns with various aspects of the representation of nature to be more than just a widely-spread stereotype. Indeed, the editors demonstrate that Canadian literature and Canadian literary studies have been informed by what could be deemed ecocritical ideas well before the institutionalisation of ecocriticism from the 1990s onward. By framing Canadian ecocriticism as a development from the thematic criticism that dominated literary studies in Canada during the 1960s and 1970s (xxvii), Soper and Bradley detail an ecocritical lineage which diverts from the usual narratives that habitually trace the institutional recognition of ecocriticism as a discipline to publications on the Romantics and Transcendentalists, such as Jonathan Bate’s *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991), Karl Kroeber’s *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (1994), or Lawrence Buell’s *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995). This alone makes *Greening the Maple* an important contribution to diversifying the history of the field.

*Greening the Maple* is a substantial volume, and is available as an open access e-book from the University of Calgary Press. In addition to twenty-four anthologised texts organised in six sections, it contains a comprehensive introduction, a short afterword, and an appendix authored by Lisa Szabo-Jones, editor of *The Goose*, the journal of the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada (ALECC). Some of the essays have been reprinted or excerpted from longer works, while others have been revised since their original publication. Additionally, a few have been specifically written for this collection. The first section, “Nature and Nation: Before and Beyond Thematic Criticism,” commences with an extract by Northrop Frye dating from 1941. This section is followed by another grouping of early ecocritical texts, all originally published in the

1990s, entitled “The Emergence of Ecocriticism in Canada.” By opening their anthology with criticism by Frye and Margaret Atwood, the editors strengthen their argument that a concern with the environment is intertwined with Canadian literary criticism and with the establishment of CanLit as a field. The pedigree of Canadian ecocriticism is further underlined by the republication of an essay by Linda Hutcheon in the second section. Sections three, four, and five are grouped thematically rather than chronologically: chapters have been organised under the headings “Reading Canadian Landscapes,” “Environments and Cross-Cultural Encounters,” and “Neighbours Unknown: Animals in Canadian Literature.” As might be expected, the last section, entitled “In Full Bloom: New Directions in Canadian Theory” and afterword are oriented towards the present and future of ecocriticism in Canada.

As it is impossible to comment in detail on the included essays in a review of this length, I here focus on an overarching theme of the anthology, namely borders (just one of the various themes through which the assembled essays echo, supplement, and contest each other). First, there are the national borders of Canada. Many of the essays deal explicitly or implicitly with the question of national identity. Some of the questions this anthology seeks to answer include: What is distinctively Canadian about Canadian ecocriticism? Or, as Frye puts it: “Where is here?” (7). Is criticism north of the forty-ninth parallel necessarily different to the critical practices and traditions followed south of the border? Canada does not exist in isolation; its spatial continuity with the United States and current and historical links to Europe exert profound influence on the field of ecocriticism. In the anthology Canadian ecocriticism is frequently compared to that of the United States, and, to a lesser extent British ecocriticism: “Canadian ecocriticism has, it may be said, a somewhat ironic relation to its American and British equivalents: it is as Canadian as possible, under the circumstances” (xxii), the editors write. Many of the essays explore what being “as Canadian as possible” could mean, or which circumstances could be deemed *Canadian*.

Moreover, Canada still bears the legacy of colonialism, and visible and invisible internal borders are prominent – these can take the form of administrative boundaries or distinctive bioregions, of course, but also comprise linguistic, ethnic, gender and class barriers that to a large extent determine access to or mediate contact with the more-than-human world. Although most of the collected essays deal with literary ecocriticism of English Canadian texts, there are some exceptions, including an essay on ecocriticism in Quebec, written for *Greening the Maple* by Stephanie Posthumus and Élise Salaün, and essays analysing French Canadian works alongside Anglophone texts, such as Sherrill E. Grace’s juxtaposition of urban and rural codes in the work of Gabrielle Roy, Margaret Laurence, and Margaret Atwood.

Other essays cross disciplinary or generic borders, as ought to be expected in an interdisciplinary field such as ecocriticism. Catriona Sandilands’s discussion of the ambivalent conservational impacts of orchid enthusiasm, for example, straddles creative nonfiction and criticism in its form, and traverses a variety of subjects (including conservation, policymaking, and nature writing). Adam Dickinson’s essay explores the conjunction of pataphysics and biosemiotics, while the ecocritical potential of geology is

examined by Travis V. Mason. Quite a few of the chapters negotiate the murky borderlands of indigeneity and cultural appropriation, such as an essay on the visual art and writing of Emily Carr by Linda Morra, Nelson Gray's essay on the notion of dwelling in Canadian drama which centres on the work of Métis and First Nations playwrights, and Carrie Dawson's consideration of the often-overlooked positive conservational effects of Grey Owl's indigenous identification. Rita Wong explores how the experiences of First Nation communities and those of more recent immigrants to Canada may be similar from a postcolonial point of view. Also included are a number of engaging essays on the porous borders between human and more-than-human nature. The most thought-provoking of these, for me at least, is Pamela Banting's exploration of knowing through walking, in the light of Karsten Heuer and Leanne Allison's cinematic and written accounts of the five months they spent following migrating caribou on foot.

The selection of essays and the concerns they address place ecocriticism or varieties thereof at the centre rather than at the fringes of Canadian letters. Many of the essays grapple with the legacy of Frye and Atwood's criticism, and show how Canadian literature and literary criticism is about more than just depictions of a vast, terrifying wilderness. When compiling an anthology texts are necessarily left out, and the editors give an informative account of their selection criteria and constraints in the introduction: in the main, the focus is on Anglophone Canadian criticism, essays that concentrate on the genres privileged by Canadian ecocriticism (lyric poetry and realist fiction, xxxviii), essays that discuss more than one primary source and thereby give a broader overview of Canadian literature, as well as, with the notable exception of Atwood, essays produced by academics, rather than writers, poets and artists. It seems a pity that some of the diversity of Canadian ecocriticism is lost in this way: French and indigenous perspectives are underrepresented in *Greening the Maple*, although quite a few of the essays refer to these large, heterogeneous bodies of relevant work.

*Greening the Maple* never pretends to be anything but a history of the field of ecocriticism in Canada, and the editors fully acknowledge that further work needs to be done. Having read the entire collection, I remain unable to produce a concise definition of "Canadian ecocriticism," and that seems to be precisely the point: it is a field as diverse as the place from which it hails. In providing a fascinating overview of Canadian critical engagement with nature, the anthology leaves the reader with many intriguing questions and ideas that merit further exploration.

## Works Cited

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