

The State of Ecocriticism in Europe: panel discussion

Carmen L. Flys

Universidad de Alcalá

The following pages are a digest of the opinions and ideas expressed in a panel discussion held at the conference "New Grounds: Ecocriticism, Globalization and Cultural Memory" at Radboud University, Nijmegen, in January 2010. The panel was convened and moderated by Carmen Flys Junquera, with the participation of the following scholars: Axel Goodbody (Great Britain), Serenella Iovino (Italy), José Manuel Marrero Henríquez (Spain), Henning Fjørtoft (Norway), and Astrid Bracke (Netherlands). Participants from countries and fields where ecocriticism is less well known were deliberately included, and the panel was also made up so as to represent, alongside well-known ecocritics, established scholars who until recently were not in the "ecocritical" ring but working on literature and environment under a different name, and younger scholars starting their academic careers in ecocriticism. These last are, more often than not, pioneers in their departments. The panel was structured around a series of questions which all participants answered, and then opened to the floor.

To begin, a brief introduction of the panellists is in order. Professor Axel Goodbody is Director of Research in the Department of European Studies and Modern Languages at the University of Bath, former president of EASLCE, series editor of *Nature, Literature and Culture* (Rodopi, Amsterdam) and associate editor of the journal *Ecozon@*. His research lies in the area of 20th-century German literature in the socio-political context and ecocritical theory. Associate Professor José Manuel Marrero Hénriquez teaches literary theory at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and is a member of the Spanish ecocritical research group, GIECO (Franklin Institute, University of Alcalá). He works primarily on representations of landscapes in Spanish and Latin American literatures and on the impact of tourism and environmental policy in literary landscapes. Serenella Iovino is a Professor of Ethics in the Department of Education at the University of Torino and current President of EASLCE. Henning Fjortort is Assistant Professor in Literacy and a PhD candidate in Scandinavian Studies at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Astrid Bracke is a PhD candidate at Radboud University with a project on ecocriticism and cultural memory in contemporary British fiction. Carmen Flys Junquera is Associate Professor of American Literature and Coordinator of the Spanish ecocritical research group, GIECO of the Franklin Institute, both at the University of Alcalá. She is currently the Vice-President of EASLCE and General Editor of the journal *Ecozon@*.

Until recently, Ecocriticism was limited largely to the US, and in Europe, to the UK. However, shoots are now springing up all over the planet, and numerous buds have already

flowered. Chapters of ASLE have been founded in Japan, the UK, Australia/New Zealand, Korea, India, and Taiwan, with affiliated associations in Europe and Canada. ASLE held its first conference outside the US last June in Victoria, British Columbia. Moreover, there has been a significant increase in conferences touching on the theme of the environment organised by groups outside self-styled ecocritical studies. A list of recent and current conferences solely in Europe would include the following (and certainly some are missing): last year the Spanish Association for American Studies convened a conference focused on “Water” (3/2009); two Turkish universities hosted a major international conference “The Future of Ecocriticism” (11/2009); and the Nordic Network for Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies held a symposium on “Counter Nature(s): Revising Nature in an Era of Environmental Crisis” in Uppsala (11/2009). Events announced for 2010 include (as well as this conference in the Netherlands) a seminar on “Literature and Sustainability” and another on “Et in Arcadia Ego? Nature, Landscape and Identity”, both in the Canary Islands (3/2010); a Chicano conference in Leon on "Writing the Landscape / Landscapes of Writing" (5/2010), an exhibition and accompanying conference on “Insects and Texts: Spinning Webs of Wonder” in Toulouse (5/2010); “Ireland and Ecocriticism: An Interdisciplinary Conference” in Limerick (6/2010); a large international conference on "Ecology and Life Writing" at the University of Mainz, Germany (6/2010); an interdisciplinary symposium "Culture and Climate Change" at Bath Spa University (7/2010); an interdisciplinary workshop on "Ecological Transformations and Literary Representation" at the University of Göttingen (7/2010); and the joint ASLE-UK and EASLCE conference "Environmental Change – Cultural Change," in Bath (9/2010). Not to mention other smaller research seminars and gatherings. Such a flowering! What is happening? We used to have only 1-2 specific conferences to attend; now we have too many.

However, many issues loom large. Undoubtedly, we ecocritics would all agree that the spread of Ecocriticism to Europe and the rest of the world is positive; yet there are a number of underlying questions to be addressed. Among these are the following:

- Is ecocritical theory and practice understood the same way in Europe as in the United States?
- Do key concepts such as nature, pastoral, and wilderness mean the same in Europe and the United States?
- What challenges does translating terminology and concepts into different languages and cultures pose?
- Many European ecocritics are working in either American or British studies/literature. In Western Europe, the ecocritics in non-English literary and cultural traditions seem to be relatively absent. Is Europe lagging behind in the development of ecocritical analysis?
- Are European scholars more driven by theory than American ecocritics?

- Some Eastern European ecocritics seem to be going in new directions. What new trends in Ecocriticism might be emerging in Europe?
- What can be done to develop a distinctively European form of ecocriticism not tethered to the English language and Anglo-American literary and cultural paradigms?

The fact that in Europe, other than the UK, the association is not national but continental, and with a different name (not ASLE-Europe, rather EASLCE – European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment – and including the word “culture”), suggests there may be something different in our attitudes and discourse. However, the identity of European ecocriticism has yet to emerge out of this aspiration for autonomy. Among the most difficult issues the potential community of European ecocritics will have to face is that of language. In nearly all the conferences mentioned, English dominates as a medium of communication. There are a few exceptions: the conferences in Spain tend to accept both Spanish and English, and one is solely in Spanish, while the Göttingen workshop will be in German. But there do not seem to be any French ecocritical conferences (the language of the Toulouse event is English). What about those ecocritics who do not speak English? Is any ecocriticism actually carried out in other languages?

The linguistic barrier, a very European reality, is certainly an issue for European ecocritics to address. This panel discussion, which was also conducted in English, appears in the first issue of *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment*, which may be the first ecocritical journal to accept articles in languages other than English. Some scholars have submitted essays written in other languages, but the majority are in English. As the first issue consists of contributions solicited from established ecocritics, it is probably not surprising that English is the main language. But in future, will more scholars submit articles in other languages, and will they be read? Will Ecocriticism then spread to the non-English speaking world? "Unity in Diversity" is the EU slogan. The question how to square safeguarding cultural diversity with creating equality of access to debates is among the trickiest thrown up by the internationalization of ecocriticism.

Carmen Flys (CF): *Is ecocritical theory and practice understood the same way in Europe as in the United States? Is the difference (if there is one) merely a question of labelling, and of differing shades of cultural interpretation of keywords? Or are there more deeply rooted differences? Do concepts such as nature, pastoral, sense of place, and wilderness mean the same in Europe and the United States? What challenges does translating terminology and concepts into different languages and cultures pose, and how does this affect ecocritical practice?*

Axel Goodbody (AG): Ecocritical theory and practice are actually understood in a range of different ways in the States, and within individual European countries, so it is problematic to generalise about differences between American and European ecocriticism. However, it is true to say that some issues in ecocriticism are addressed in different ways in Europe: debates are shaped by different geographical conditions, collective experiences and cultural traditions. In the largely domesticated environment of our continent, wilderness is less important than pastoral. The American association of nature with national identity (“nature’s nation”) is less strong in Germany (because of the Nazis’ ideology of Blood and Soil) and France (because of the French tradition of Enlightenment technophilia). Words in individual languages have different resonances and encapsulate differing worldviews. The term ‘ecocriticism’, for instance, is not popular in Germany: the ‘öko-’ prefix sounds ugly, and is associated with a purely thematic approach, one reinforcing the instrumentalisation of culture for political ends. There is no ready German translation for ‘sense of place’ either. However, ecocritical concern with place, belonging, identification and commitment to environmental protection finds expression in debates on ‘Heimat’ (homeland). Engaging with debate in literary and cultural studies in French, German, Italian, Spanish and other languages and countries is therefore challenging. But it is hugely important and potentially rewarding. English has emerged in our lifetime as the language of international scholarship, but debates in English will be poorer if they neglect the resources of ecological theorising and critical analysis in other languages and cultures.

José Manuel Marrero Henríquez (JM): As far as those European scholars are concerned who accept the ecocritical label for their research and publications, ecocritical theory and practice are understood in much the same way in Europe as in the United States. For in this case Europeans are accepting the American origin of ecocriticism. However, it is possible to find European scholars with ecological interests who make little or no reference to “ecocriticism” in their work. Such an attitude might reflect ignorance of ecocriticism, yet at the same time draw on a variety of other important theoretical sources; it might show just indifference to American ecocriticism, or it might signify a conscious and healthy effort to keep criticism away from the waves of fashionable trends that from time to time reach academic coasts. I myself tend to write ecocritical analysis without saying that I am doing so. There is a danger of devaluing the term through excessive use. However, the importance of the term should not be denied, for “ecocriticism” as a label has allowed the creation of a network of scholars, writers, artists, and people in general whose activities are driven by similar principles and goals. Besides, different approaches to common topics may derive from different traditions, and a space for confluence ought to be found. American ecocriticism is frequently associated with

nature writing, feminism, social justice movements, the denunciation of concrete acts of contamination, and so on. Spanish ecocriticism should look for roots in its own cultural tradition. Translation studies are also an excellent entryway into the different national traditions in Europe, and into comparing European and American perspectives. There is a fruitful field of research here waiting to be explored.

Henning Fjortoft (HF): There are undoubtedly differences between America and Europe. The entanglement of critics with activism and deep ecology, for example, seems much stronger in US Ecocriticism than in the European countries. But I think it is a misconception to believe that US Ecocriticism is an established body of theories and practices. Much like other theoretical schools – new historicism, postcolonialism and posthumanism – ecocriticism is an umbrella term covering a large and varied set of critical practices. I hesitate to call the differences between European and American criticism “deeply rooted”, but they are embedded in different knowledge networks as well as cultural, institutional and political settings. However, these settings seem to vary within US institutions just as much as they do between European countries. So while translating concepts is important, it is perhaps wrong to think of America and Europe as two opposing blocs.

Serenella Iovino (SI): Clearly generalizing, it can be said that in the United States ecocriticism is still mostly practiced by literary scholars, and more specifically by Americanists and Anglicists. In Europe, perhaps due to the multiplicity of cultural traditions and identities, the scope of ecocritical analysis seems to be broader. There is in fact a great vitality in the field of “peripheral” national literatures (to my eyes, especially in the Mediterranean basin and in some eastern countries: Turkey, Estonia, and Spain can serve as examples). This justifies the difference of approaches, which are often manifold and strongly characterized by the “local” level. Let me just cite the biosemiotic analysis practiced in Estonia by Timo Maran and Kadri Tüür; or the ecocritical research into cultural landscape in Spain promoted by José Manuel Marrero Henríquez and others; or, again, the re-appraisal of Mediterranean literature, culture and traditions in Turkey.

This leads to the question about terminology and key concepts: cultural landscape, for example, is more extensively researched in Europe than the concept of place. Place exists of course, but it is, in my opinion, more susceptible to interpretation in philosophical, sociological, or anthropological terms (I am thinking for example of Augé, Barthes, Bauman, and Beck) than a typical literary category. As to the concept of wilderness, it is a commonplace to say that it has been long surpassed in European imagery, with few exceptions (I think of the Northern expressions of nature writing, clearly influenced by

Arne Naess's deep-ecological vision). In this last case, especially with mountaineering literature, wilderness comes closer to the idea of the aesthetic sublime. But I think that, in the American experience, from Thoreau on, wilderness is an "ethical" rather than an "aesthetic" sublime.

As to the other concepts you mentioned, there are many differences. These are rooted in our cultural and conceptual premises, as well in the diversity of landscapes and land uses. "Nature" is one of the most ancient philosophical concepts, and it is quite normal that European scholars (Raymond Williams, for example) could not help but engage with this legacy. For Europeans the concept of nature still has a "Greek" background. US scholars (I am clearly generalizing) seem to be less concerned with dealing with this tradition (or at least, less "obsessed" by it).

There is also another interesting difference I would like to emphasize. Your starting question is whether ecocritical theory and practice is understood the same way in Europe as in the United States. If we talk about ecocritical "practice," I think that we cannot ignore the fact that this word involves not only interpretative practice, but also the practical (i.e. social, political, educational) activities strictly connected to ecocriticism. American ecocritics (who are, anyway, much more numerous and diverse than their European colleagues) sometimes couple ecocriticism with political activism or open-air activities, and they tend to involve their students in such "concrete" aspects of ecocriticism. I have the feeling that in Europe this still happens less frequently.

Astrid Bracke (AB): As far as I can tell, there seems to be a bigger stress in American criticism on nature as a place of solace, whereas European/UK ecocriticism appears to be more concerned with apocalyptic narratives, with environmental degradation rather than the celebration of nature. Concepts such as nature, pastoral, sense of place and wilderness are culturally and ideologically determined. Pastoral is much more concerned with colonization in the US than in Europe.

As far as translation is concerned, I think that ecocriticism is already fairly flexible, precisely because it is still being defined. This gives scholars working in other subjects/languages the chance to adapt concepts to their needs. Since concepts such as nature are culturally and ideologically determined, they do not so much need to be translated as to be made to fit the needs of scholars in different countries.

CF: *Many European ecocritics work either in American or in British studies/literature. In much of Europe, the ecocritics in non-English literary and cultural traditions seem to be scarce. Why?*

AG: The genre whose analysis launched first wave ecocriticism in the United States was Nature Writing. Yet there is no strong tradition of such writing in the German-speaking countries: the very concept does not exist. Another reason is that although younger German, Austrian and Swiss scholars of German literature are often (like their Scandinavian and Dutch counterparts) fluent in English, older researchers are not necessarily familiar with Anglophone debates. Language remains more of a barrier in the study of national literatures than in Cultural Studies, Cultural Anthropology, or Film Studies.

JM: There are several factors involved in this. American nature writing has no equivalent in Spanish literature. And the very term “ecocriticism” derives from an American scholar, William Rueckert, who devoted much of his work to an American philosopher, Kenneth Burke. They may be reductionist, but these are two powerful reasons for having few or no ecocritics in the non-English literary and cultural traditions. I would nevertheless argue that, in spite of the American origin of the term “ecocriticism,” there are strong reasons for Europeans to consider ecocritical principles and goals as a part of their own tradition. Ecocriticism as such would have never been possible without Humboldt’s geography, Haeckel’s ecology, Stuart Mill’s idea of a stationary state of the economy, or Spinoza’s ethics. Serenella Iovino’s works on European philosophers of nature, or her speech on material and cultural waste at this conference are examples of a non-American ecocriticism rooted in European culture.

HF: Researchers in English and American studies are more likely to read journals and visit conferences where ecocritical thinking is presented. Researchers in other fields also work on questions regarding nature, animals, pastoral and so on, but they do not necessarily regard themselves as ecocritics. It isn’t necessary for a researcher to openly declare allegiance with ecocriticism in order to write about ecocritical topics. Environmental history and environmental justice are examples of neighbouring fields where quite similar research is produced without any connection with ecocriticism whatsoever.

SI: Ecocritics are not scarce in Europe. They are only less visible, but this is normal: ecocriticism is still mostly practised in Departments of English and/or American Literature. Nonetheless, there is an insurgence of different national voices and languages in literary ecocriticism, as Patrick Murphy’s *Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook* shows. EASLCE is playing its part in stirring up awareness of this geographically expanding perspective: I think of the involvement of Eastern European

scholars, but also of the presence of German studies scholars, or scholars from Northern Europe and the Mediterranean area (Italy, Turkey, Spain—with GIECO as a unique ecocritical research group, and so forth). Not all these people are Anglicists or Americanists. If my individual case is worth mentioning, I am a scholar of ethics with a background in German classical philosophy. My ecocritical practice aims, not at connecting with, or emphasizing the ecological dimension of a literary tradition. Rather, I tend to explore the philosophical aspects of literary and artistic texts and make them functional in a discourse of ecological culture and education. Cases like mine might still be marginal, but interest in the philosophical aspects of ecocriticism is becoming increasingly common.

AB: I suppose this bias has to do with the development of ecocriticism and the fact that it started in American literature (Western Literature Association). Concepts and theories can be transported more easily from American to British literature/studies than to other literatures. This might have to do with the fact that many departments/disciplines in universities are essentially isolated islands that don't communicate a lot with other disciplines/subjects.

CF: *Are European scholars more driven by theory than American ecocritics? Does this affect the perception of the field by academic institutions in Europe? Is ecocriticism present in higher education?*

AB: I can't really tell, although perhaps so-called narrative scholarship (which seeks to draw the reader in to the process of discovery and analysis as experienced by the author) is more accepted among American ecocritics than in Europe. As far as ecocriticism's presence in higher education is concerned, there are introductions to literary theory that include it (such as Barry's *Beginning Theory* and the *Oxford Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*) and students can access these.

SI: In the US ecocriticism is more rooted in specific regions and institutions, and more multifaceted. For this reason, the "theoretical" voices within the debate are much more differentiated in the US than in Europe (e.g.: the approach of Lawrence Buell is clearly different from that of Scott Slovic). In Europe ecocriticism is still a recent phenomenon. For this reason, the urge toward a definition of theoretical premises is maybe more lively in our continent. As a consequence, interest in philosophical and theoretical aspects of ecocriticism is rather frequent. As an example I would like to mention the collection edited by Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer, *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies:*

Transatlantic Perspectives on Ecocriticism (2006). This book has a strong theoretical focus, and features articles like that by Hubert Zapf on cultural ecology (whose main sources are Bateson and Hegel – Zapf is himself a major ecocritical theorist); or the chapter by Thomas Claviez on otherness read in the perspective of environmental ethics and Levinas' philosophy; or Timo Maran's focus on biosemiotics; or Axel Goodbody's article on nature and morality in German contemporary writing. It is also interesting to note that among the "transatlantic" authors included in the book are two of the more philosophical or "theory-oriented" American ecocritics: Louise Westling and Patrick Murphy. I recently became acquainted with the articles of Turkish ecocritic Serpil Opperman. Serpil's approach brilliantly combines postmodern theory and quantum mechanics: this is certainly a new theoretical direction.

As to the perception of the field by academic institutions, I guess that a visibly strong theoretical approach is required, at this stage of development of ecocriticism. The European academic world is perhaps more "conservative" than the American. And a shift of paradigm involves also, most of the time, an intergenerational struggle. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is clear in this respect. In order to minimize the risk of academic marginalization, it is always useful to avoid a dramatic change of vocabulary when a new discipline (or an innovative perspective) is introduced. But this apparent "parasitism" is functional to the success of the new "organism." Such a "mild" strategy would also help ecocriticism be more acceptable and present in higher education. In fact, the environmental curricula of some European universities already include ecocriticism (maybe calling it differently). But not every country can offer eco-oriented curricula. In Italy, for example, there are very few cases, and environmental literature is not yet contemplated as a subject of study.

HF: The prominence of theory seems to affect the perception of the discipline, considering some of the reactions I get from older colleagues in Scandinavia. Few have any knowledge of Ecocriticism at all. Those who do, generally associate a type of thematic and appreciative criticism with the term.

JM: Just as American ecocritics are more involved in activism, clearly Europeans are more theory-driven. However, I am not a politician, nor am I an activist, I am a university professor, and it could be said that practising ecocriticism is my way of activism, an academic kind of activism that entails bearing in mind current environmental issues when analysing and interpreting literary texts. This is without any doubt a challenge to those scholars who study literary texts exclusively within established literary traditions. I am organising a seminar on "Literature and Sustainability" that will take place in Las Palmas

de Gran Canaria, March 2010, and soon after I will be teaching a course on ecocriticism at the University Ibn Zohr Agadir, Morocco; I wonder about its reception in a Muslim country, and I also hope to enrich my western approach with the point of view the students will show when commenting on European and American theoretical texts and Spanish and Spanish American literary texts.

AG: The hagiographic approach initially associated with ecocriticism in the US has been less prominent in European research. But here too I see a progression from theoretically relatively unsophisticated beginnings (e.g. Jost Hermand's book on 'Green Utopias in Germany' or Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology*) to more extensively theorised analyses (for instance Bate's *Song of the Earth* or Hubert Zapf's recent writing on Cultural Ecology). In German schools, literature and film are I think mainly used as thematic starting point for discussion of environmental issues. Literature of the environment was, however, introduced as a module on the University of Rostock's distance-learning Masters in Environmental Education over a decade ago, and it is beginning to appear sporadically in the undergraduate programmes of literature departments at German-speaking universities (Berlin, Konstanz, Vienna, Zurich). For the first time, a strand at the 2010 International Germanists' Conference will be devoted to an ecocritical theme: 'Climate Chaos and Natural Catastrophes in German Literature'.

CF: *What is happening in Ecocriticism in your country/field? What new trends of ecocriticism are being developed in Europe?*

AB: Very little in the Netherlands as far as I know – people seem to be interested, but few of them are actually writing anything. The link between ecocriticism and cultural memory that I make in my own research seems to be typically European (see also Axel Goodbody's work/articles on this topic).

SI: Sadly, almost nothing is happening in Italy. In spite of some interesting initiatives and good intentions (e.g. an international conference in Rome in 2007), ecocriticism in Italy is still underrepresented. In fact, there are only two internationally acknowledged ecocritics: Anna Re, a Milanese Americanist who studied at the UN Reno, a very brilliant scholar; and myself. In both our cases, due to the fact that our academic "power" is very limited, it is extremely difficult to build a real research group.

Generally speaking, there is in Italy a deep gap between public awareness, needs and national environmental policy. Our environmental problems still receive very little

consideration on a political level. Nevertheless, non-governmental organizations are playing a very active role. The phenomenon of ecomafia (unauthorized building, animal racketeering, illegal trade of archaeological items, of endangered plant and animal species, illegal recycling of waste), for example, has been officially recognised as a crime thanks to the reports of Legambiente. I mention this because there has been a very interesting editorial initiative which can be considered ecocritically relevant: Since 2007 Legambiente has been sponsoring a series of “eco-noirs” called “VerdeNero,” published by Edizioni Ambiente, the leading eco-publisher in Italy. Famous Italian “noir” authors have agreed to write short stories on ecomafia, contributing to raising awareness of these issues. In Italy, ecocritical issues are, however, still mostly “unconscious,” despite numerous more or less recent literary works that can be taken as case-studies (from Italo Calvino’s *Marcovaldo* to Roberto Saviano’s *Gomorra*).

As for European theoretical trends, besides those I have already mentioned, I believe that Zapf’s idea of “literature as cultural ecology” can be considered as the most elaborate and structured form of current ecocritical theory in our continent.

HF: Explicit Ecocritical research is scarce to non-existent in Norway, but there is a large body of research discussing nature, politics and literature. This is partly related to the special status nature holds in the everyday life of ordinary people, and partly related to the emergence of nation-states during the Romantic era of the 19th Century.

JM: Due to the animism of land attachment in Indian and African cosmogonies of American culture, I see much more ecocritical interest in the study of Latin American Literature than in the study of Spanish Literature. Christianity, capitalism, and industrial progress seem to be, in theory and in practice, against environmental care. However, it is possible to rescue environmental consciousness from Christian values, liberal economists, and advanced technology. Is it not technology that has made possible global knowledge of the earth? I mean, it is technology, with the world wide web, the view of the earth from the moon, or with its future global view of climate change, which has given us a holistic vision of planet earth in the last few decades. That is the reason why it is possible to find in Spanish Literature young writers whose works use environmental issues as main topics without recurring to alien, obscure, or remote senses of spirituality. Besides, it is also possible to turn to the past, to Spanish canonical authors and works, and try to enrich their exegesis by reading them ecologically. I am thinking of the so-called “Regenerationists” of the late 19th and early 20th centuries or in the “Generation of 1898,” for example. And it is also possible to discover forgotten authors with an ecological view *avant la lettre*: I think of Francisco González Díaz, a great Spanish essayist who devoted much time to environmental

issues, and whose *Cultura y turismo* (1910) still shows a very appealing way of interweaving the concepts of nation, cultural crossbreeding, economic development, and environmental care.

AG: Pioneers in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s included Jost Hermand (who might be characterised as a Green Marxist), Hartmut Böhme (a leading figure in cultural studies whose work is informed by phenomenology), and Heinrich Detering (one of the most distinguished scholars working in modern German [and Scandinavian] literature today). Hubert Zapf's already mentioned theory of Cultural Ecology is the most significant theoretical development in Germany, but other approaches such as systems theory have also been explored.

CF: *What can be done to expand a European trend of ecocriticism not tethered to the English language and Anglo-American literary and cultural paradigms?*

AB: I suppose more or less doing what we do now: organizing conferences to which we also invite our colleagues who do not work in American/British literature, sharing our research with colleagues from other departments and trying to publish our articles in journals that are not exclusively environmental/ecocritical.

SI: A lot can be done. To carry out a project of regional or "allonational" anthologies and readers could be an interesting idea, although not particularly innovative. More original would be to compile a multilingual ecocritical glossary. Here again, EASLCE could play a role by initiating projects involving teams including scholars from across the continent and beyond. This would give more prestige and authority to our organization, at the same time contributing to better defining the role and features of European ecocriticism.

JM: Since the environmental problems will accompany us in this 21st century, I think that European ecocriticism will expand as a need of the century. Emile Zola considered positivism the driver of the novel of his century. In a similar way, ecological consciousness is a *must* of our time. A European development of ecocriticism requires, as do national variants, the creation of a tradition. Conferences such as this will surely contribute to creating contacts among different scholars from different European countries, and promote comparative knowledge of different national traditions. They provide the opportunity to discover European authors and works from different periods, sharing ethical and aesthetic goals that could be considered either ecological, or susceptible to ecocritical readings.

AG: Conferences, workshops, journals, edited volumes, networks and collaborative research projects (e.g. on nature and national identity, and linguistic aspects of environmental communication) all have a role to play. A collection of essays I have been working on together with Kate Rigby (*Ecocritical Theory – New European Approaches* – to appear in 2010) examines the potential of European thinkers including Bakhtin and von Uexküll, Deleuze and Levinas, Elias and Irigaray, to inform textual analysis. There is scope for further work developing ideas from writers ranging from Agamben to Zizek, and approaches from New Materialism to Nomadism.

CF: *Can the audience provide more ideas for expanding European ecocriticism?*

Hannes Bergthaller: One of the ways to stimulate a more varied perspective on ecocriticism is by writing book reviews for *Ecozon@*. This new journal needs reviewers. Ignorance of ecocriticism in other EU countries is largely due to the relative isolation of national journals and linguistic barriers. It would be great to have book reviews in English summarizing books for people who don't read the original languages in which books are written. A multilingual book review section could help to develop a continental European ecocriticism.

Greg Garrard: Here are some practical suggestions for increasing the visibility of European ecocriticism. There is an ASLE bibliography online, but we need to add European books to it. In other ways too, using the internet is central to gaining an international presence. (Incidentally, it is crucial that websites are as interactive as possible.) The establishment of online journals also helps. Also, wikipedia. The wiki page on ecocriticism is only half a page long. It would be helpful if people from all over the EU would add to that. Students go there, so by adding different perspectives you acquaint them with various approaches. Pedagogy is also important. National and institutional constraints, however, limit our opportunities. We all need to think about how to improve this.

We have spent much time talking about our relationship with American ecocriticism, but the relation between the UK and EASLCE is also important. How do we perceive the British myth that the UK isn't in Europe, as if an ocean lay between them? The Bath conference in September 2010 will, I hope, be an opportunity to demonstrate that British ecocriticism is European ecocriticism. And what about Ireland? Where are the Irish? A conference on ecocriticism is due to take place in Limerick in June, and a collection of ecocritical essays on Irish literature is planned. What has impressed and encouraged me

recently is the eastward expansion of ecocriticism, to Turkey and beyond. The extent to which ecocriticism has developed in India, Taiwan, Korea and China, as well as Japan, is extraordinary and humbling for Westerners. And not at all as a colonial effort – which would be like an alien plant dropping seeds in a foreign country. There are, moreover, departments in China writing ecocriticism about Chinese literature. An initiative has been started in Beijing to set up a global umbrella organisation. China's role in climate change negotiations cannot be exaggerated, and it is heartening to see the emergence of a strong environmental movement there. China could become central player in international ecocriticism.

Begoña Simal-González: One answer to the question of community-building is to look outside our departments. At my university in Spain, we decided to put together a human ecology programme. Outside the American Studies department nobody knew or cared. So we were mostly American Studies scholars. The next step was to try and break down the barriers between departments. We organised an interdisciplinary seminar on eco-activism in 2007, with round tables on practical issues of activism and social change. There is also an upcoming conference at the end of September on the ecology of utopia.

Alexa Weik: At my university in Switzerland, I have been given permission to teach a seminar on global environment, climate change and film. Another welcome development is the founding of the “Rachel Carson Centre” in Munich. It has just been decided that we will have a film series with environmental documentaries, some of which will also be shown at the Munich film festival. Moreover, a CFP for a special issue of the *European Journal of English Studies*, on dislocation and ecology, will be out in the next two or three weeks.

Because time was up, the discussion was drawn to a close at this point. However, the following contribution was subsequently submitted by e-mail.

Terry Gifford: A European ecocriticism is first and foremost a collection of national ecocriticisms. This prompts the following reflections:

1. What is the national environmental threat about which your nation should be debating: water, energy sources, industrial pollution, environmental justice issues, sea-level rise, for example, or even the carbon footprint of ecocritics? A national ecocriticism should seek to engage with the issue of the day. European Americanists might make comparative studies of cultural representations, both historical and contemporary. My favourite definition of ‘ecocriticism’ is that provided by Glen Love in 1990: ‘Why are the activities aboard the Titanic so fascinating to us that we give no heed to the waters

through which we pass, or to that iceberg on the horizon?’ (*The Ecocriticism Reader*, p. 229) In Europe the already advanced glacial retreat in the Alps and Pyrenees means that the shrinking ‘water towers’ of Europe invite a restatement: ‘Why are the activities of the postmodern band aboard the Titanic so fascinating to us that we give no heed to the declining waters that pass through us, or to the shrinking of those glaciers on the horizon?’ Public debate is inscribed by national culture. Try asking your students, ‘What is the iceberg on your national horizon?’

2. What is the most taught canonical text in your education system? What questions might ecocriticism offer students and teachers of that text? For the Americans it’s easy, because the answer is *Walden*. But if in Spain it’s *Don Quixote*, isn’t there an inroad for ecocritics there? What a metaphor for Spain’s approach to its long-term and long-established water crisis. Don’t start from the margins; start from the centre with a canonical text/course/film. Again be at the centre of the central cultural debate.
3. The most popular textbooks (and courses) of literary theory should now include ecocriticism. At Nijmegen the importance of the inclusion of ecocriticism in the latest editions of Peter Barry’s *Introducing Theory* was mentioned. But you need one in your national language – a national reader in ecocriticism. In Spain a volume is in preparation which will include translations of key chapters and papers from elsewhere, plus contributions from national ecocritics and writers. This tool for teaching and learning (by colleagues) in the national language is a brilliant move.
4. What are the themes that get funding from government sources in higher education? What might be the ecocritical angles on them? In the UK calls for proposals on ‘landscape’ and ‘migration’ were launched by the national humanities research funding body, but less obvious and less explicitly environmental themes might be addressed by imaginative ecocritics. Here and elsewhere, it is important for ecocritics to take part in national research debates, get themselves represented on humanities research bodies, and draw attention to European ecocriticism by reviewing books in the nationally important journals.

CF: I thank the conference organizers for making this panel discussion possible, and both the panellists and the audience for their participation. *Ecozon@* can become a significant forum for debate for European and international ecocriticism, and I would like to encourage everyone to contribute to the journal by submitting articles, book reviews and creative work. Likewise, may I encourage membership in EASLCE, not least because the association is setting up a discussion list which can assist in establishing links between scholars, and furthering debates on ecocritical theory.