

From Ecocriticism to Environmental Humanities: A Brief Overview of Publications in Spain

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Flys Junquera, Carmen; José Manuel Marrero Henríquez and Julia Barella Vigal (eds.) *Ecocríticas. Literatura y medio ambiente*. Madrid/Frankfurt, Iberoamericana /Vervuert, 2010, 422p.

López Mújica, Montserrat and María Antonia Mezquita Fernández (eds.) *Visiones ecocríticas del mar en la literatura*. Alcalá de Henares, Instituto Franklin de Estudios Norteamericanos - Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alcalá, 2016, 198p.

Albelda, José; José Manuel Marrero Henríquez and José María Parreño (eds.) *Humanidades ambientales: pensamiento, arte y relatos para el siglo de la gran prueba*. Madrid, Catarata, 2018, 256p.

Since its beginnings in the 1990s, ecocriticism has undoubtedly been a constantly evolving academic field that addresses one of the most relevant topics of recent years: human relationship to/with the environment, or the lack thereof. This review essay offers an overview of relevant publications regarding ecocriticism, and its corollary, environmental humanities, with a specific focus on Spain, through three main publications that cover a period of ten years. Starting with *Ecocríticas. Literatura y medio ambiente* published in 2010, going through *Visiones ecocríticas del mar en la literatura* in 2016, to finish with *Humanidades ambientales: pensamiento, arte y relatos para el siglo de la gran prueba*, published in 2018. This review essay will moreover mention other relevant publications, most of which have been reviewed in this journal.

Edited by Carmen Flys Junquera, José Manuel Marrero Henríquez and Julia Barella Vigal, the main objective of *Ecocríticas* (2010) at the time was to open the doors of ecocriticism to the Spanish-speaking world—a subject barely known beyond English-speaking countries back then—and establish the foundation of this field in a language other than English.¹ This volume was the first major publication by GIECO², a research group devoted to investigating the interconnections among literature, culture, and the

¹ For a more thorough review see *Ecozon@* vol. 2, no. 2.

² GIECO (Grupo de Investigación en Ecocrítica) is a research group that focuses on ecocriticism and environmental humanities, based in Alcalá de Henares, Madrid, Spain.

environment. Divided into five sections, this publication reviews different aspects of ecocriticism: definition and state of the art, environmental justice, ecofeminism, literary criticism focused on American, Spanish and Francophone literature; poetry, mythology as well as children's literature, to end with a glossary of specialized terms. After a preface that acts as an introduction to the volume, the reader is introduced to a first section that establishes the theoretical basis and historical evolution of this academic field and the contemporary debate. The first three chapters review the beginnings of ecocriticism as a field of research in the 1990s—which came to be with the creation of ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) in the United States. The second section of the volume analyses ecofeminism—one of the most active branches of ecocriticism, not only ten years ago, when this volume was published, but also nowadays. It is divided into three chapters that examine the origins of ecofeminism and define it as a tool for literary analysis. The third and fourth sections of *Ecocríticas* leave the ecocritical theoretical discussion behind and opt for a more practical approach, where the reader finds literary analyses, of Spanish as well as American and Francophone texts. The book is completed with an appendix containing a basic glossary of terms English/Spanish where the reader can find keywords in relation to ecocriticism and their translation into Spanish. Although *Ecocríticas. Literatura y medio ambiente* was published ten years ago, it still remains relevant for those starting in or revisiting the field of ecocriticism. It is without question an introduction to the basis of a research field in constant evolution, that explores the most significant ecocritical trends at the time.

The six years between 2010 and 2016—when *Visiones ecocríticas del mar en la literatura* was published—were extremely productive for Spanish academics within the field of ecocriticism. In 2010, the Proceedings of the 3rd EASLCE Conference, held by the University of Alcalá, Spain, in October 2008, were published in DVD format. Edited by Carmen Flys Junquera, Irene Sanz Alonso, Montserrat López Mújica and Esther Laso y León, *Cultural Landscapes: Heritage and Conservation* (2010) conveys the significance of landscapes in our lives and the importance of preserving them. Moreover, that year Carmen Flys Junquera and Juan Ignacio Oliva edited a monographic issue published in the journal *Nerter*. It comprises fifteen articles and three poems, all in Spanish, and serves as an introductory issue to this field of research. In 2011, José Manuel Marrero Henríquez edited *Literatura y sostenibilidad en la era del Antropoceno*, a volume that studies the repercussions of our geological age, so-called the Anthropocene, through a variety of disciplines such as the arts, literary criticism, and philosophy. Two years later, in 2012, two relevant ecocritical works were published. On the one hand, Juan Ignacio Oliva and Carmen Flys Junquera edited another monographic issue for the journal *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*. This issue focuses on more specialized aspects of ecocriticism such as feminism and post-colonial theory, environmental justice, or science fiction and, unlike the previous one, it is written in English in its entirety.³ On the other hand, Juan Ignacio

³ Both monographic issues, the one published in *Nerter* in 2010 and the one in *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, from 2011, constitute two perfect complementary works to *Ecocríticas*.

Oliva edited *Realidad y simbología de la montaña*, the first volume in the CLYMA series,⁴ focusing on effects and affects of human impact on mountains. Three years later, in 2015, Alicia Puleo edited a collection of essays, *Ecología y género en diálogo interdisciplinar*, with a clear focus: ecology and gender. Also in 2015, Tonia Raquejo and José María Parreño published *Arte y Ecología*, a compilation volume that explores a transdisciplinary proposal: the need of linking art and ecology to propel a new ecological paradigm. Interestingly enough, between 2015 and 2016 two more books were published not in Spain but by Hispanists in the United States: Katarzyna Olga Beilin's *In Search of an Alternative Biopolitics: Anti-Bullfighting, Animality, and the Environment in Contemporary Spain* (2015), which explores bullfighting, and how it contributes to the human/animal divide; and Katarzyna Olga Beilin and William Viestenz's *Ethics of Life: Contemporary Iberian Debates* (2016), which examines a wide range of topics such as the preservation of ecosystems, bio-technology, environmental justice, and food production in the Iberian peninsula, to name a few.

The fourth volume in the CLYMA series, *Visiones ecocríticas del mar en la literatura*, was published in 2016, edited by Montserrat López Mújica and María Antonia Mezquita. Unlike *Ecocríticas*, this volume has a more specific focus and a common thread: literatures that have the sea and the ocean as the central symbol. It consists of a collection of essays that stemmed from a research seminar organized by GIECO in San Vicente de la Barquera, a town by the sea in Cantabria, Spain. In this book, the reader can find thirteen essays divided in five sections, each of them bringing attention to a specific perspective. After an introduction by the editors and a poem written by Julia Barella, the first section of this volume analyses the evolution of the sea as a symbol from ancient Greece to the Romantic period, from a comparative perspective, the influence of the sea on Dylan Thomas' poetry, and English-speaking Canadian poetry linking Jungian symbology and ecocriticism. The second section attempts to give voice to less studied cultures through a variety of disciplines. This section focuses on oral traditions of the Inuit and Torres Strait islanders; on Canadian poetry produced by migrants for whom the sea acts as a vehicle to express their emotions and life stories; and a last chapter focusing on Ananda Devi's novel *Pagli* (2002)—an author from the Republic of Mauritius—where the sea directly influences the characters. The fourth section pays attention to science fiction as a tool for environmental awareness by imagining alternative realities, or even possible post-apocalyptic futures caused by human exploitation of natural resources. In this section the reader finds the analysis of novels such as *The Water Rising* (2011) by Sheri S. Tepper analysed from the perspective of environmental justice; *A Door to Ocean* (2008) by Joan Slonczewski analysed from an ecofeminist perspective; and the French novel *L'eau est là* (2005) by Hugo Verlomme, a more realistic take on the ramifications of climate change. The volume also includes a section about the process of writing and translating; a chapter that examines *how* and *why* the sea is represented in certain literary works, with special attention to Ecopoetry; and a final chapter that links translation theory with ecocriticism,

⁴ CLYMA constitutes a book series dedicated to culture, literature, and the environment, that belongs to the Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin, from the University of Alcalá, Madrid, Spain.

emphasizing the importance of the linguistic factors contained in the process. While *Ecocríticas. Literatura y medio ambiente* can be considered an introductory volume to the field of ecocriticism, *Visiones ecocríticas del mar en la literatura* has a more specific focus, applying ecocritical theories to the literary analysis of the sea: a universally recognized symbol throughout history. This volume helps readers expand their knowledge about the sea from the perspective of several different cultures, through a variety of literary genres such as realist fiction, science fiction, and poetry. That same year, and also as part of the CLYMA series, *Sense of Place: Transatlantic Perspectives / Sentido del arraigo: perspectivas transatlánticas* (2016) was published. Axel H. Goodbody and Carmen Flys Junquera compiled twelve essays in Spanish and English focusing on the concepts of sense of place, alienation and attachment represented in contemporary literature.

Lastly, in 2018, another prolific year, Luis I. Prádanos published *Postgrowth Imaginaries: New Ecologies and Counterhegemonic Culture in Post-2008 Spain*, with Liverpool University Press. This book fills an academic-philosophic void: the lack of discussion regarding environmental issues after the Spanish economic crisis from 2008. Juan Ignacio Oliva and Carmen Flys edited one more special issue in the journal *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*. “*Natura Loquens, Natura Agens: In Dialogue and Interaction with the Environment*” (2018), stemming from the 5th EASLCE conference held in Tenerife, Spain, and discussing different understandings of the agency of nature/matter. Furthermore, Margarita Carretero González and José Marchena Domínguez published a compilation volume: *Cultural Representations of Other-than-Human Nature* (2018). Divided into six sections and twenty-two chapters, this volume examines how the human species perceives itself in its own environment and how it relates to other-than-human nature. *Humanidades ambientales: pensamiento, arte y relatos para el siglo de la gran prueba* was also published that year. Edited by José Albelda, José María Parreño y José Manuel Marrero Henríquez, this volume is the resulting product of the financed research project *Humanidades ambientales. Estrategias para la empatía ecológica y la transición hacia sociedades sostenibles*,⁵ a project divided into three main research areas: ethics, art and ecology, and ecocriticism and literature. Consisting of thirteen chapters, it attempts to study the role of the humanities (literature, the arts, and human science) in view of the environmental crisis. After a short introduction to the volume, the first chapter traces the origins of the field of environmental humanities and its vital role in communicating possible solutions to achieve social and environmental justice. The following three chapters advocate for values such as simplicity, diversity, and functionality as cornerstones for the creation of a new aesthetic. It also discusses progress, growth, development, and modernity in our current capitalist and anthropocentric society, and summarizes the main ideas of deep ecology from a political and philosophical perspective, encouraging the reader to take a step toward an ecological transition. The next four chapters focus on art, artistic practice, and ecology. First, tracing the connections between art and ecology to the origins of what is called *land art*; second, emphasizing on the

⁵ *Environmental humanities. Strategies for ecological empathy and the transition towards sustainable societies* (HAR2015-67472-C2-1 R MINECO/FEDER, UE). <http://ecohumanidades.webs.upv.es/>

capacity of ecological art to visualize concepts and adding an emotional component to scientific knowledge; third, asserting the value of collaborative artistic practice exploring the aesthetic and social tendencies that lead to these forms of art; and finally, considering *transitional art* a conduit to achieve sustainability. The following chapter takes as focal point the audiovisual format, discussing the impact films can have on the viewer. The last four chapters of the volume move away from the visual and plastic artistic field, and give way to other relevant areas of research by stressing the necessity of stories to help us understand and relate to the world that surrounds us and by imagining future versions of Móstoles (Madrid, Spain) in 2030, showing the reader a glimpse of a realistic utopian sustainable city. In the last two chapters of this volume, the reader can find a discussion of recent publications that regard veganism as a form of ecofeminist activism; and a presentation of a theoretical framework that studies strategies to communicate the environmental crisis. This volume sheds light to find possible solutions through collaborative work by creating new artistic, literary and visual narratives. By tackling environmental challenges through the humanities, it discusses possible paths toward an ecosocial transition. This book is not only oriented to academic readers, but it can be very useful to all types of readers who wish to better understand the current crisis from a humanistic perspective.

Over twenty years ago, in the introduction to her compiling volume *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) Cheryll Glotfelty expressed that “In the future we can expect to see ecocritical scholarship becoming even more interdisciplinary, multicultural and international” (xxv). Certainly, Glotfelty’s wish has come to pass: ecocriticism *is* more and more multidisciplinary, multicultural, and international. As we have seen through these publications, ecocriticism was conceived as a field of research focused on the representation of the environment in literature; and, although it still dwells principally in departments of literature at universities, it is no longer limited to them. Ecocriticism—now framed under the umbrella of environmental humanities—has expanded worldwide to a multitude of research areas such as the arts, history, geography, neuroscience, cognitive science, psychology, film studies, and videogame studies, to name just a few. This review essay offers a brief but overarching outline of the relevant publications published about Spanish ecocriticism in Spain and abroad, and there is more to come in the near future (members of the research group GIECO, for instance, are currently working on future publications that will most likely see the light this year). A growing concern for the future—not only for us, humans, but for the planet—has propelled this academic movement into every direction.

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