

## LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Robert T. Tally Jr and Christine M. Battista (eds) (2016) *Ecocriticism and Geocriticism: Overlapping Territories in Environmental and Literary Studies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. xii + 214pp., £58 (hardback), ISBN 981137553676.

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley published *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*, in 1818 as the landscapes of the Industrial Revolution were emerging to signal that human agency possessed a monstrous potential to transform and unleash itself as a natural, if not geological force. The detonation of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, inaugurated the full Promethean horror of the Anthropocene. In doing so, it embedded an indelible human imprint within the earth's sediments, to rest like the fossilized remains of a paleological fish skeleton, or the gentle tendrils of a pre-historic flora discovered by Victorian antiquarians. The editors of this brave volume, *Ecocriticism and Geocriticism*, Robert T. Tally and Christine M. Battista argue that Western modernity and Cartesian dualism conspired in the 'radical splitting off of the mind from the human body and the body of the earth' causing the latter to become an ecological subaltern. As a result of the global *res cogitans* of the Anthropocene, fossils are harvested and burned as fuel, jetting rivers of CO<sub>2</sub> into the sky, raising the temperature of the atmosphere, creating cascading climatic and environmental effects that spread unevenly across the face of our planet. It is within these dimensions of global environmental change, that the editors attempt to weave the relatively new fields of eco-criticism and geocriticism into critical 'new ways of seeing literature, ecology and geography, as well as the world that necessarily subsumes and contains them' (4). To the editors, the Exxon Valdez oil spill and Deepwater Horizon disaster serve as biopsies of the Anthropocene cancer metastasizing over the past century,

. . . the long arc of history demonstrates the degree to which natural-versus-human distinction is untenable at best; worse, it is an intentionally obfuscatory tactic designed to prevent meaningful consideration of the inextricably intertwined fates of natural and social spaces (5).

It is arguable whether the chapters in this three-part volume create 'new ways of seeing' as the editors suggest — the dear reader, given their disciplinary perspective must decide for themselves. But given the global breadth and stakes of the problem that Tally and Battista are attempting to address, the assembled chapters do cover a fair bit of ground in teasing and plotting out ways forward. Eric Prieto's opening piece in Part I, *Trans-Theoretical Practices*, provides a potted overview of Bertrand Westphal's 'Geocritical' theory on the literary representation of space and place (seemingly a Continental twist on Anglo-American literary and critical geography practices of the past quarter century.) Noting 'Geocriticism' says less about nature writing and environmental politics, Prieto strives to more deeply define the French literary scholar's work, so it can be to diverted into an eco-critical stream where the

two perspectives can ‘complement, correct and inspire each other’ (19). With its ‘Deleuzian emphasis on molecular thinking and de-territorialization,’ Prieto argues that Geocriticism offers a sense of ecological realism that can be wielded to shift the tenor of public discourse on relations between humans and nature.

Another interesting chapter in Part I is Ted Geir’s parsing of Yannick Murphy’s *The Call*, Patricia Grace’s *Politiki*, and Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Through The Arc of the Rainforest* into a call for a new type of interspecies politics that will both de-familiarize a reader’s literary experience on normative framings of nature, and suggest that there exist a variety of redemptive planetary senses of place to consider. Part II opens with Tom Bristow’s observation in *Affective Edgelands* that cultural geographers often frame liminal landscapes lurking and drifting between urban and rural settings with ambivalence. Literary scholars on the other hand he suggests, interpret such interfacial zones as dialogical evidence of the new environmental consciousness that is spreading in literary fiction. Juxtaposing epistemological perspectives, Bristow employs geographical and literary tropes to explore the histories, technologies and ‘wildness’ of Britain’s post-industrial and post-natural topographies. Louise Chamberlain’s chapter discusses the presence of the Severn Estuary and the Bristol Channel in Philip Gross’ *The Water Table* (2009) and Robert Minhinnick’s *After the Hurricane* (2002). By employing a Derridean framing of *aporia*, Chamberlain’s study of waterways and shorelines dissects the ‘porous’ quality of aquatic and metaphorical borders between poetic and natural landscapes as paradoxical limits and crossings. In *Black Jungle, Beautiful Forest* Luca Raimondi interrogates the works of Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh and Italian literary ‘armchair explorer’ Emilio Salgari to conduct a green geo-critical post-colonial reading of eco-activism in respective literary portrayals of the Sundarbans, a vast forest running across the coastal region of the Bay of Bengal.

Part III *Ecocritical Explorations* touches a selection of textual, historical and geographical touchstones. Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* (1940) is the focus of Stanka Radović exegesis on the tropes of ecology and space. Engaging du Maurier’s novel, Radović illustrates how spatial theories are often uncertain and silent regarding natural landscapes. By denuding the organic from the physical environment, she argues that spatial theories are often engaged in Quixotic quests for a utopian ideal of human architectural and emotional symmetry. Dan Mill’s chapter parses Bishop Joseph Hall’s *Mundus Alter et Idem* (*A New World, and Yet the Same*) a seventeenth century dystopian satire. Purported to be written by a Mercurious Britannicus, Mill argues that Hall’s work is ‘burlesque’ piece of travel written to satirize English colonial expansion during the succession of James I, after Elizabeth I’s defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Mimicking the ‘entire apparatus of the travel book- including maps, pictures of foreign inscriptions . . . and lists of foreign words’ (158), the early modern sensibility that conflates climate and human disposition is parodied by Hall and ascribed to the atlas’ four imaginary dystopias: ‘Gluttonia, Letcheritania, Fooliana, and Hungerland’ (158). Hall’s satire of the appetite shown by England’s early colonial expansion, is underscored Mills contends, by his belief that James I was incapable of maintaining the naval superiority required to feed the imperial hunger for natural resources. Silvia Schultermandl’s ecofeminist lens is trained on Nora Okja Keller’s novels *Comfort Woman* (1997) and *Fox Girl* (2002). South Korean sex camps and strip clubs are parsed as landscapes of resistance against the militarism and colonialism of the Second World War and the Korean War.

In the volume's concluding chapter Judith Rauscher explores the Caribbean poetry of Derek Walcott and the works of Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali. Their works elide the abstract language of displacement, by rooting migrants' experiences in the sensibilities of a concrete and natural world. In doing so, environment is critically and aesthetically invoked as a grounding, as well as guiding trope to lead a reader's perception beyond simply a uni-directional trajectory of migration (displacement > passage > arrival.) To Rauscher, Walcott and Ali's works exemplify complex and transnational shifting senses of place experienced and held in common by migrants and displaced people, regardless of origin, destination or location.

Collectively, the chapters in this volume frame a certain Anglo-American and Commonwealth discourse in literature, which often, without intention (or dare I say awareness), elides the truly environmentally illiterate audience of the Anthropocene in the West. However, the volume does create one of many starting points for a deeper, more engaged trans-disciplinary conversation. It is through such articulations that the consideration of creating ontological and epistemological bridges to span the abyss between the humanities and the sciences observed by C.P. Snow in his seminal 1959 'two cultures' lecture, must begin.

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