Ecocriticism at Twenty-five

It’s convenient but not exactly spot-on to say that the literary movement known as ecocriticism is now, in 2013, about twenty-five years old. A good case could be made for its origination with Hesiod or with Virgil’s *Georgics* more than two thousand years ago, working its way through European literature from *Beowulf* to Virginia Woolf, though not just in English alone. Indeed, in 1970 in this very journal, a prescient Frederick Morgan, then the sole editor, introduced an issue with the theme of “Poetry and Ecology.” Ecology, he wrote, is an idea whose time has come,

. . . the idea that if the species is to survive, man must recognize his dependence on nature and live in cooperation with her as her friend, rather than in opposition to her as her conqueror. Here in the United States, and throughout the industrialized, western world, the realization is at last beginning to dawn on us that we are living on the brink of an enormous catastrophe, and that civilization may be totally undermined, and possibly the human race itself wiped out, or reduced to a suffering fragment, within the next half-century. And not through nuclear war, though that remains as a terrible possibility, but through the uncontrolled degradation and exploitation of the natural environment and the consequent destruction of the biological underpinnings of life. . . . As of 1970, ecology is not, as some naive commentators have suggested, a passing craze or political red herring, but humanity’s inevitable and lasting concern.¹

What can one say about remarks such as these from more than forty years ago, except that the more things change, the more they remain the same? The issue then proceeded with essays and poems by Wendell Berry, A. R. Ammons, Gary Snyder, W. S. Merwin, Dorothy Roberts, John D. Rosenberg, and William Stafford. Now, with a bit of *mutatis mutandis* tinkering, we’re all set for another round.

But what we mean by “ecocriticism” could be said to have surfaced in 1978 when William Rueckert published his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.”²

begetters could be cited, but Rueckert is now fixed in the origination mythology although he went on to write a good deal on the poetics of Kenneth Burke.

For me and most members of my ecocritical cohort, the only true begetter is Cheryll Glotfelty, now professor of Literature and Environment at the University of Nevada, Reno. But in 1989, as Cheryll Burgess, she was just a grad student in English at Cornell finishing a dissertation on American women writers while hatching utopian empires. Little did she know how reality-based they would turn out to be. The story is now legendary and, as a matter of fact, has been canonized, so to speak, in the May and October 2012 issues of PMLA, in the guise of an interview with Cheryll by a former grad student of her own and a response from me, to which Cheryll then wrote a supplementary reply.

The seeds of a new academic order were sown by a resonant letter that Cheryll sent out via U.S. mail (what else was there in 1989?) to about two hundred writers, largely in the humanities, who had produced books and articles with some degree of ecological or environmental spin. Tracking down their writings was a feat of industrious graduate student research in the prehistoric days before Google, before even the general spread of personal computers and printers. With special emphasis on feminism, Cheryll alludes to the various radical movements of the sixties and seventies that made a dent in literary studies, but she then laments that “the Environmental movement of the same era left almost no trace in our field (no MLA divisions or even discussion groups, no journals, no jargon, no jobs).” She notes that most of the writers on her list of addressees had little or no idea that there were others crying in the same wilderness. So she asked her recipients to reply, to tell her what they thought about all this, what advice or help they could offer. And, most important and to the point, she suggested that an inaugurating anthology of already published ecocritical writings would be a good first step. Concluding with her own “personal dream,” she writes, “I’d like to be the nation’s first professor of Literature and the Environment,” which would “represent a significant political milestone.”

As I have already revealed, that part of her wish came to pass, even with her first and only job—at the University of Nevada, Reno—where she has risen through the ranks ever since. Today, as full professor, she deserves most of the credit for instigating procedures that have made her campus a virtual headquarters for ecocritical studies. Moreover, as we can see from the somewhat extraordinary event of her interview in a scholarly journal not known for interviews, the Modern Language Association has made environmental studies into just what Cheryll Burgess/Glotfelty had hoped for.

But more than twenty years had to elapse between the date of her letter and the mainstreaming of ecocriticism as recognized today. To

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8 This letter was reproduced from my personal copy in the aforementioned May 2012 issue of PMLA as part of the interview with Cheryll Glotfelty.
begin with, Cheryll’s letter yielded a substantial bibliography derived from the ecocritical writings of its addressees, many of which we would now call literary criticism and theory. Among the manifold items, she had found three early essays of mine having to do with air pollution that I probably couldn’t have located myself if I hadn’t known I was the author. They were hardly written as “ecocriticism” (I had never even heard the word before Bill Rueckert’s coinage) but rather as a cri de coeur from someone caught in the toxic environment of the steel mills of Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana, just as the EPA was about to be born. (There’s an exchange somewhere in my files between me and William D. Ruckeshaus, the first director of that office, in the early 1970s.) Nor could I have failed to reply to Cheryll’s request for help, a reply that generated yet another request: would I be willing to coedit the putative anthology along with her, since she was only a graduate student? As one of her advisers pointed out, a more senior adjutant would help to grease the rails. Recognizing that she had already done all the heavy lifting, I agreed.

After only one or two rejections by publishers, we found the University of Georgia Press eager to publish our book, and we liked their suggestion for an alteration of our proposed title. Thus was born, in 1996, The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology.

Ecocriticism, having eluded the constricting essentialist nets of dogmatic academic “theory,” has developed beyond its early focus on literary nature writing into an all-encompassing category of intellectual understanding. Science, evolution, sociology, biology, philosophy, ethics, religion, aesthetics, the arts have all been afforded yet another enriching point of view, so that even writing not explicitly produced as ecocriticism can be understood ecocritically. As Loretta Johnson put it in a comprehensive overview she produced in 2009 for Choice (Vol. 47, No. 4), “Since 1990, ecocriticism has burgeoned.” The original sense of eco from the Greek oikos, meaning “house,” started out in the nineteenth century to refer basically to the so-called “environment” in which we dwell, an environment that “surrounds” us but is not us. (“Ecology,” according to the OED, first appeared in 1876.) In the years since then, Johnson points out, the “environment” has come to include more and more to the point at which the distinction between ourselves and the environment has just about vanished. Everything on the planet is made of the same substances, and we have no special privileges in that regard. Dust really does return to dust.

To sample the current scene and to hint at the quality and range of ecocriticism, I look at several recent books, below. And with a nod to the genre’s phylogeny, the first two are expertly realized performances of literary nature writing, which remains a highly sophisticated, obliquely philosophical, genre.

If Paul Lindholdt’s literary output were as large as Thoreau’s or Wendell Berry’s, his new book, In Earshot of Water: Notes from the Columbia
Plateau,⁴ might at least have made it to the pages of the Times or one of the elite book reviews to achieve some share of classic status. But it has not gone entirely unrecognized for its merits, having won a highly esteemed Washington State Book Award for 2012 and has been reviewed appreciatively in less bruited journals. Lindholdt, a professor of English at Eastern Washington University, was born and raised in the Seattle area but gravitated to the eastern side of the state as a result of his professional life.

These essays, then, are a collective sigh for the trials and less evident pleasures of living in the rural Pacific Northwest. I left behind the temperate climes and the political liberalism of western Washington where I was born. I chose a rustic region, and that choice has made all the difference. It has its challenges, and I confess I sometimes wish I still were singing in the choir whose voices echo around Puget Sound and make Washington a blue state. Still, the trade-offs in wild nature just beyond my doorway make the sacrifice worthwhile.

Although this is taken from the introduction, even here the weaving of literary echoes and verbatims (as in the phrase from Robert Frost) found throughout the essays is part of the varied fabric, a mixed voice, from earthy, blue collar, to subtle literariness. Themes like the death of his oldest son by drowning recur as leitmotifs generating the emotional power behind accounts of pollution, toxicity, the destruction of salmon spawning by dams, and the cover-ups by government of multiple environmental dangers. Raised by a family more acquainted with farming, hunting, and fishing than the arts, but retaining some of the sportsman's blood, Lindholdt reports on being taken out for a bear hunting adventure by his father but psychologically unable to press the trigger on a potential kill directly in his sights. "I lowered the gun, I fiddled with its safety lock for a few seconds, flicking it on and off, trying to decide what to do, what to say. Then I turned away, headed back . . . my entire being made lighter by the lifting of my gutless doubt." Here, whether consciously intended or not, Lindholdt's sensorium seems to recall the famed remorseful passage from Aldo Leopold years after he has killed a wolf: Later on, when he takes his own young son out on wilderness adventures in a quasi-display of sportsman's bravado, he is more pleased than not by the pacific nature and receptivity of his son to his own aesthetic interests.

There's an essay about Lindholdt's grungy teenage job with an industrial waste disposal company and his insider's experience of the shocking toxicity of its activities and their effect on the health of the workers. He writes elsewhere about the abandoned silver mines in the greater Spokane area and their legacy of diseases and deaths of the local

⁴ IN EARSHOT OF WATER: Notes from the Columbia Plateau, by Paul Lindholdt. University of Iowa Press. $19.00p.
residents. His divided sensibility describes a visit to the rodeo, a big business in the Northwest, that expresses both enjoyment and disapproval at the same time, while his young son is similarly both gripped and bored by the bizarre characters that populate the show. Indeed, almost everything in this often haunting book reflects the conflicted consciousness and sensibility of the author.

Attempting the almost hopeless task of cleaning out the piles of debris, dead animal carcasses, and birds' nests from the attic of his old house, whose previous owner had killed himself, he reflects on how the tiny corpse of a hatchling he found there must have choked on a little feather from his mother's nest, and then,

On the outer wall of the house a nuthatch hammered, as if summoning me to open a locked door. All of a sudden I needed brighter light and purer air. At once I found the attic too confining. I felt woozy and wanted to escape, needed to get away. But with a combination of grief and relief I acknowledged to myself that there is no away, that the death of this little hatchling was playing out across the planet a thousand times in the instant it took me to blink, and that our old home's last owner had exercised the same free will we all enjoy.

But to quote from *In Earshot of Water* is a dilemma. While easy to supply brief soundbites from the journalistic moments, it's a real challenge to catch the lyrical, almost musical, preconsciousness that underlies the lengthier, aboveground movement and structures of a discourse held together by rivers, salmon, Indian tribes, nuthatches, spotted knapweed (an invasive plant), and the emotional vectors linking parents and offspring. Interviewed on the occasion of his book award, Lindholdt remarked that his impetus was to effect social change. He adds, "If you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, lyricism might sway more people away from trashing the planet." But writing of this sort can't be achieved through mere conscious intent. It's always those unwitting neurons that run the show. Lindholdt remarks to his interlocutor that as an undergrad he studied with Annie Dillard and fell so deeply under the spell of John McPhee that he had to stop reading him. "But I'm not worthy to carry their lunch," he too modestly insists. In the final analysis, he's pretty much his own man.

Ken Lamberton's *Dry River: Stories of Life, Death, and Redemption on the Santa Cruz*, another work that could be described as nature writing, represents a very different aesthetic from Lindholdt's. Through-written as a unified and carefully constructed literary edifice (contrary to the implication of "stories" in his subtitle), Lamberton's book could be re-categorized as natural history, Southwest exploration, selective autobiography, or philosophical meditation. The dry river of the title, the

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Santa Cruz, is the string on which a multitude of geographical and historical beads have been strung with remarkable success. Rivers in the Southwest tend to run dry for long stretches, recovering water only if there is sufficient rain and a congenial geology. The Santa Cruz is a particularly stop-and-go affair, making Lamberton’s track circuitous and difficult. Starting out in Tucson, his home, Lamberton heads down to Nogales in northern Sonora, Mexico (a sister city of sorts to Nogales, Arizona), to begin a trek both on wheels and on foot that takes him 210 “river miles” and several years until he reaches the river’s point of final dissolution just south of Phoenix. Often accompanied by his wife Karen and one or more of their three gifted daughters, along with various informal experts in natural and Southwestern history picked up on the way, Lamberton had as his goal nothing less than a complex record of the Sonoran Desert and its historic settlements, derived from the earliest surviving geological traces and, more substantially, written texts from the time of the Spanish conquests to the present. His knowledge of the flora and fauna, the geography, the scholarship, and the very spirit of Southwestern life is dazzling, enriched by a familiarity with evolutionary themes and archaeological/anthropological discoveries and hypotheses. Although the character and quality of Lamberton’s prose are extraordinary, the unreflective reader may read this book for the “plot” and its “meanings,” scarcely aware that these are carried by a vehicle of language unlike that of ordinary careless speech, even as its prosody is the opposite of showy or ostentatious. Lamberton’s vehicle, however—the words, their etymologies, their history, their sensuousness, the syntax, the rhythms, the sentences, the structures of the paragraphs—is unobtrusively powerful, in contrast to so much conventional popular or academic prose, with their boilerplate expressions, their modules of plug-in clichés, their repetitious verbal tics, monotonous syntax and connectives.

Lamberton received a bachelor’s degree in biology from the University of Arizona in 1980, but by 1987, after teaching science for five years in public school, he was sentenced to what amounted to a shocking twelve years in prison for a nonviolent offense. His life underwent radical transformations, not the least of which was his fortunate participation in a prison writing workshop conducted by Richard Shelton, a poet and professor from the University. By the year 2000, with his return to civil society and his family, he completed an MFA in creative writing back at the University and ever since has had a growing and prolific career. Having written several times about his years of incarceration, he avoids any explicit reference to them in this latest of his books, but the “Redemption” in its subtitle and the repeated use of that and related words in its text are indelible traces of his prison years and their profound effect on his subsequent vita nuova.

This fluent but discursive narrative prose, different from Paul Lindholdt’s more lyric style, makes it only too easy to provide sample quotations but too difficult to select them from the abundance of its
various subgenres. The changes in landscape, the remains of old Spanish and Mexican settlements, and the destruction and slaughter resulting from attacks by the Apaches are described in detail, punctuated at stopping points by rich historical sketches from a bibliography of documents and books ancient and modern. There are accounts of Father Eusebio Kino, the seventeenth-century Italian Jesuit, an emigrant to the “New Spain” of Mexico, and the establisher of missions throughout what we now call the U.S. Southwest. And all of this is artfully intertwined with autobiography:

Downstream from the mouth of Sonoita Creek, Melissa and I search for a place to cross the river. Neither one of us wants to remove our boots and wet our feet. The sun has left a bloody hemorrhage low in the western sky, and shadows deepen to the color of gravestone... We finally find a possible crossing where a thin cottonwood has fallen across the river. Melissa makes it easily, walking the log like a gymnast on a balance beam, slender arms lifted, blonde hair flying. I throw her all my gear: knapsack, notebook, wallet, hat, and sunglasses. My right foot plunges in with my first step, and Melissa says, “Careful. I’m not rescuing you if you take a swim.”

Melissa’s youth shouts in defiance of her mortality, as it is with all newcomers who step above the membrane of soil. I, however, am closer to the other side, to joining the multitude of witnesses who wait beneath our feet. Here, they remind me of it. In my bones aching from exertion. In my throbbing vessels. In my thin and sun-creased skin. In this place of communion I walk to the edge of myself.

Juan Bautista de Anza’s expedition of San Francisco Bay colonists passed this way on October 15, 1775 on a 1,200-mile heroic journey, mostly on foot, starting at Tubac, south of Tucson. Together, father and daughter are searching for the thread of the Anza Trail. This is picked up a few pages later:

While Father Pedro Font recovered his strength at Tumacácori, Tubac thronged with activity. Adding to the 177-member expedition out of Horcasitas, another 63 people joined on. Some, like Sergeant Juan Pablo Grijalva, whom Anza had chosen to serve at the new presidio in San Francisco, had to travel with his wife and three children from Santa Cruz de Terrenate, the presidio on the San Pedro River more than fifty miles away. (In four years, unable to complete the garrison, the Spanish would abandon the site to the Apaches.) Others gathering at Tubac included muleteers, vaqueros, Indian interpreters, servants of the priests and Anza, and some thirty families (of both soldiers and colonists) with 114 children. Not only did the yearlong expedition require provisions for all these people, but the new settlement would need supplies as well. Pack mules, horses, burros, and cattle numbered nearly a thousand. The mules
would carry six tons of flour, beans, cornmeal, sugar, and chocolate, a
ton of cooking kettles, tools, munitions, and iron for horseshoes, and
another ton of blankets, spare clothing, and tents—all of it packed
and unpacked each day. This was the life support for a new and
distant colony, much of it bled from the tenuous community of
Tubac. Anza certainly already knew that before his return from
California, Tubac would suffer the presidio’s relocation to Tucson
and that in this it was necessary for the tiny settlement on the Santa
Cruz River to give its heart to the people destined for San Francisco.

Shortly after writing the above account of Lamberton’s exploration
of the dry Santa Cruz, I received the following coincidental newsletter
about another dry Tucson river, the Rillito, from the University of
Arizona, where I am a member of the Institute of the Environment.

The culmination of years of community-based collaboration and
artistic initiatives is Ground/Water: The Art, Design and Science of a Dry
River, a new book being published this month by Confluencenter for
Creative Inquiry and distributed by the UA Press, the University’s
nonprofit publishing house.6

“We need the arts and humanities now more than ever to help us
to filter, sort and absorb the flood of information about global envi-
ronmental issues brought to us by advances in science and tech-
nology,” said [Ellen] McMahon [a professor in the School of Art at
the university and also a Fulbright Scholar]. “We wanted to increase
our own understanding of local water and its relationship to global
climate and pass that on to our students.”

This was a pretty felix comiunctio coming right after my rereading
of Lamberton’s book. I immediately obtained a copy of Ground/Water and
found myself holding an artifact that is as ecocritical as one could
envision, right down to its physical substance produced and contracted
for entirely by writers, artists, and print artisans on eco-friendly mate-
rials, ranging from the recycled paper to the vegetable inks, an elegant
miscellany of text, essays, photos, drawings all pertaining to the Rillito as
it runs through the metro area. Whereas Ken Lamberton used the dry
Santa Cruz bed as the trail he followed to engage with Southwest
history, the contributors to Ground/Water used the Rillito as a drainage
confluence revealing an ecological history of the Sonoran Desert. These
rivers became dry as a result of the pumping of ground water for an
exploding population produced by extraordinary “development” of the
land for inhabitation. Most of the time one sees equestrians, kids on
bikes, and varied citizens out for the day, using the wide but dry riverbed
for alternate purposes, explored in this book. But during the summer
monsoon, as the torrential rain runs off the mountains that surround

6 GROUND|WATER: The Art, Design and Science of a Dry River, ed. by Ellen McMahon,
Andr Monson, and Beth Weinstein. The University of Arizona Press. $48.00.
the Tucson basin, the inrush of water can reach the level of the roadway bridges over the riverbed, sometimes so sudden and raging that no escape is possible for the unfortunate people who drown. These rivers, it appears, are literally “inscribed” geological and cultural histories of a vast geographical area.

To segue from Lindholdt and Lamberton and dry rivers to Bird on Fire: Lessons From the World’s Least Sustainable City is to enter another ecocritical genre altogether, where the reader can see how a population was able to explode up to the point of subprime mortgages. Andrew Ross, a prolific professor of social and cultural analysis at NYU, has moved on from some of his earlier, more freewheeling, often unpersuasive, writings to produce an impressive tour de force about the social, political, and environmental conditions of the city of Phoenix and the surrounding metro area of Maricopa County, Arizona. For all practical purposes a New Yorker, he ended up spending two years in the Phoenix environs as a result of an invitation from Future Arts Research, an institute at Arizona State University in Tempe, “to come and do research of my choosing in Phoenix.” What started as an immersion in the relationship between downtown Phoenix and various arts organizations grew into an overarching project driven by what could be called environmental sociology (which has all along been one of Ross’s major interests). When it expanded, with environmental green “sustainability” as the theme, his researches entailed interviewing 200 of Maricopa County’s “more thoughtful, influential, active citizens.” His project eventually ranged through politics, economics, water scarcity, industrial pollution, wildcat real estate speculation, and the underlying prehistoric settlements of the Hohokam precursors of the greater Phoenix metro area, now growing as vast as metro Los Angeles, with freeways and collar cities of major proportions. Among his interviewees...

... were downtown activists for whom a compact vibrant core had become an evangelical cause, and business advocates who saw a profitable silver lining in this same vision. But I also interviewed affluent, quality-of-life suburbanites in North Phoenix, Scottsdale, and other East Valley cities, for whom green living meant a very private blend of solar roofs, open space conservation, and desert gardening (xeriscaping); low-income casualties of toxic pollution in South Phoenix, who fought dirty industry and government inaction as a matter of physical survival; big-dog developers who saw green features in their master-planned communities as a selling point to jump-start the growth machine on the urban fringe; GOP lawmakers and libertarians whose loyalty to the Tea Party ethos took the form of conservation based on private property rights; ASU administrators and academics for whom the public buzz about sustainability was an opportunity to make scientific research a basis for public policymak-

ing; Anglo nativists whose fixation on chasing off immigrants was driven by the belief that border-crossers were threatening the region's ecosystem; and tribal activists trying to reconcile their quest for decent livelihoods with the roles allotted to them by others as traditional stewards of the land.

As I read his report from the front, myself a transplant from NYC and the Midwest to the Tucson environs for the past fifteen years, I was in a position to appreciate Ross's vast amalgam of people, places, problems, history, and scholarship to produce this contrapuntal and highly motivated assessment. The immense sprawl of attractive and initially modestly priced houses rapidly built by developers on the all-too-available land surrounding the Phoenix core was at the top of the list of disasters when the subprime mortgage and investment company collapses took place, these moderate prices having escalated unrealistically. Built as if there were no tomorrow, with little concern about water, automobile traffic, and pollution, they have given rise to what Ross's subtitle, with admittedly some hyperbole, refers to as the world's least sustainable city. The south side of Phoenix, which people like me have little or no occasion to pass through on the I-10 freeway or back roads from Tucson, is given an entire chapter to itself, "Living Downstream," epigraphed with a quote from Andrew Kopkind: "Apartheid is complete. The two cities [Phoenix and South Phoenix] look at each other across a golf course." As in so many other big cities, the slums and toxics tend to be at the south end, while the north, in this case, North Scottsdale, Paradise Valley, Carefree, Cave Creek, Fountain Hills, feature opulent multimillion-dollar houses on highly landscaped large lots. In the eyes of Tucsonans like me, who never see grassy lawns except on golf courses because nobody here grows them, the standard yards in Phoenix metro are lawns requiring lots and lots of water to combat summer temperatures of 110°F and upward. How it has come about that Tucson has "lawns" of crushed stone with pin-pointed drip systems conducting water directly to each plant has not been sufficiently explained. But Tucson and Phoenix have little in common altogether as rival satellites of the planet known as the Sonoran Desert.

Ross's account of the pollution and toxic industrial effluents in South Phoenix is densely and feelingly instantiated. We learn concretely why zip code 85040 is considered the dirtiest in the nation, and why environmental injustice is so particularly great there. Ross quotes Bob Bolin, an ASU geographer and expert on environmental inequities, who reports that "A big business and right-wing political culture driven with a pre-growth booster machine that is dominated by Anglos had not been conducive to large scale, collaborative minority movements for anything." Yet most readers will be surprised to learn that the core city of Phoenix is predominantly Democratic with a Democrat for mayor. Once you move slightly away from that core, you encounter the altogether more representative—in all senses—Arizona Legislature, referred to by its
opponents as the Kookocracy, which may actually be too moderate a pejorative. "Contenders for the kookiest of all would include state senator Sylvia Allen (R-Snowflake), who rewrote Geology 101 while arguing for a 2009 bill to allow more uranium mining. 'This earth,' she declared, 'has been here for 6,000 years, long before anyone had any environmental laws, and somehow it hasn't been done away with. We need to get the uranium here in Arizona so that this state can get the revenue from it. . . .'" The New York Times gingerly referred to the Arizona Legislature recently as "dim." Ross also explains how NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) has worsened the immigration problem by destroying small farms and businesses in Mexico and providing incentives to brave death crossing the Sonoran Desert in burning summer sun only to face Joe Arpaio, "the toughest sheriff in the West," for imprisonment and deportation.

These three highly skilled books are just a narrow slice of the ecocriticism spectrum after twenty-five years. For a broad sweep over much of this genre, Greg Garrard's Ecocriticism can serve as an industrious attempt to cover, if not definitively represent, an ever-changing kaleidoscope. Garrard, a senior lecturer in English literature at Bath Spa University in the U.K., has updated his original publication of 2004 with this new edition of 2011.8 This revised second edition," he writes on his website, "includes a completely rewritten chapter on animals, as well as discussions of postcolonial ecocriticism and globalisation." And in the introduction itself, he writes, "So these are the basic propositions of this book: environmental problems require analysis in cultural as well as scientific terms, because they are the outcome of an interaction between ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflection. This will involve interdisciplinary scholarship that draws on literary and cultural theory, philosophy, sociology, psychology and environmental history, as well as ecology."

A brief look at the contents of this tour guide, which is more or less aimed at professors, students, and university courses in ecocriticism, will give a better sense of the range of an undisciplined discipline than my highly selective focus above. Starting with an introductory look at the growing awareness of pollution and toxicity predating Rachel Carson's Silent Spring (whose fiftieth anniversary is being celebrated as I write), Garrard locates some of the major tracks emanating from Carson's environmental Grand Central Station. Pairing the not-to-worry deniers of eco-problems with prescient early Cassandras whose knowledge of fifty years ago inevitably understated (rather than overstated) the looming problems, Garrard looks at basic positions: Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, Social Ecology, Eco-Marxism, and what he calls "Heideggerian ecophilosophy," which is somewhat desperately on life support in academia today. A whole chapter is devoted to types of pastoral, going back to Theocritus and Virgil, following the clues to Wordsworth and John Clare, Thoreau and American pastoral, with excerpts from the

8 ECOCRITICISM (The New Critical Idiom), by Greg Garrard. Routledge. $105.00; $24.95.
commentaries of critics such as Raymond Williams, Leo Marx, Jonathan Bate, and Lawrence Buell.

"Wilderness," Garrard's umbrella term for "nature," ranges from early European treatments of the sublime, through nature writing—Mary Austin, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Edward Abbey, and others more recent and contemporary—to social and philosophical critics such as William Cronon and Bill McKibben, as well as academic critics associated with the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE). Much territory is covered. There are also sections on apocalyptic writing, on dwelling and place, on the planet, on animals.

But there's more that ought to be said. The books by Lindholdt, Lamberton, and Ross that I have praised so highly are within the basic founding parameters of early ecocriticism, so a brief addendum is in order about the latest so-called cutting edge. Since he plays a role in it, Garrard can serve as a convenient bridge here to the latest issue of *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment.* The issue is dedicated to the phenomenon of "Material Ecocriticism," though this sounds more radical than it really can claim to be. Two of the more in-your-face titles of these essays by diverse hands are: "Material Ecocriticism: Dirt, Waste, Bodies, Food, and Other Matter" and "Dirt Theory and Material Ecocriticism." The latter, by Heather I. Sullivan, begins as follows:

This essay speaks for dirty aesthetics. Although aesthetic landscapes readily inspire environmental thinking, a case can be made for grappling with the truly local dirty matter right at hand. Dirt, soil, earth, and dust surround us at all scales: we find them on our shoes, bodies, and computer screens; in forests, and floating in the air. They are the stuff of geological structures, of the rocky Earth itself, and are mobile like our bodies.

When "green thinking" neglects the less glamorous and less colorful components of dirt in both the built environment and other landscapes, it risks contributing to the dichotomy dividing our material surroundings into a place of "pure, clean nature" and the dirty human sphere. After all, we live on Earth, are dependent on earth and soil for most of our sustenance, and are surrounded by dust. This dust emerges from our bodies, the particulate matter of air pollution, the stuff in buildings, and the desiccated landscapes of a warming world.

There is nothing unreasonable or shocking about all this, which is more banal than radical. The surprise of this essay and all the others is that what they are calling "material ecocriticism" has been present all along under more commonplace rubrics. Scrape away the neologisms, and if my own earliest writings on air pollution from the 1970s (and much that followed from me and lots of others) are not examples of "material ecocriticism," I don't know what is. Now more than ever, the insights of
science are being recognized as the intellectual microbiota, not only of ecocriticism, as reflected in the five books discussed above, but of many other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences.

Ecocriticism comes out of the humanities. There is a literary quality to much of it, given its founding motivation as "literary ecology," but as it has developed over the years, its ecological elements have moved more to the forefront while its literary focus has ceded much to the physical and social sciences. Today, Ecocriticism could more accurately be described as "Humanistic Ecology." Some sense of its range, from "literary" to "sociological," can be gathered from the five books discussed above, though they are all quite mixed in their genres. Ecocriticism has tried to become a new instauration, well aware, before the academy's vaunted "material ecocriticism," that the humanities are generated from below, not from on high. Or as the great Francis Bacon said of his own aims (in the third person) in 1620:

Being convinced that the human intellect makes its own difficulties, not using the true helps which are at man's disposal soberly and judiciously—whence follows manifold ignorance of things, and by reason of that ignorance mischiefs innumerable—he [Bacon] thought all trial should be made, whether that commerce between the mind of man and the nature of things, which is more precious than anything on earth, or at least than anything that is of the earth, might by any means be restored to its perfect and original condition, or if that may not be, yet reduced to a better condition than that in which it now is.

But in 2013, Bacon's distinction between "the mind of man," "the nature of things," and "the earth" is getting harder to insist upon, as every food, every quality of the air and water, every drug, every social, political, and personal event, every tweaked gene and birth defect, every transient "normality," every video and tweet, undermines the notion of an independent default spooky "person" without qualities that underlies them all. Far from being just a literary conceit, the environment really is us, along with everything else.