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Garrard, Greg, ed., *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies* (Basingstoke: PalgraveMacmillan, 2012), xiii+174pp.

The ties of ecocritical literary and cultural studies to the field of education and didactics have always been remarkably strong. This cannot come as a surprise, given the outstanding role of education for environmental crisis, and the general didactical impetus of numerous ecocritical works. The recent increase in publications devoted to ecocriticism from the angle of pedagogical research is therefore much welcome – a scholarly field such as ecocriticism, concerned with nothing less than the more-than-human-world, often defined by an environmentalist or other ethical agenda, radically critical of customary academic praxes and therefore supportive of ideas such as a an “outdoor *practicum* [...] *in situ*” (Buell 6) for literature classes, is well advised to constantly reflect its own didactical presuppositions.

Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies, edited by Greg Garrard, has therefore been eagerly anticipated. Not only is Garrard’s work in the field of ecocriticism outstanding and much discussed; the fact that he shows a similar interest in the hands-on aspects of ecocritical didactics makes clear that Garrard understands well how closely theoretical and pedagogical questions are interrelated. From that perspective, this book not only offers insights into ecocritical-pedagogical research, but into the situation of the humanities at large: as Garrard writes in the introduction, the humanities “require passionate advocacy in the face of renewed attack by institutional managerialism and narrow economic calculations of the ‘value’ of a degree” (3). This is a vast focus indeed, and though it may be impressively comprehensive, the wide range of perspectives that need to be negotiated pose a serious challenge. He suggests embracing this challenge head-on and proposes that “ecocritical pedagogy can be broken down into ways of dealing with that scale, coping with interdisciplinarity, and developing strategies for non-literary media” (3).

The variety of essays from renowned scholars as well as young researchers does in fact succeed in doing so. In line with Garrard’s approach to dealing with the complexity of the issues at stake, the book is divided into three sections. The first one, “Scoping Scales,” discusses various approaches to ecocritical theory and practice and is complemented by section two, “Interdisciplinary Encounters,” which continues the ecocritical project of interrogating other scholarly praxes in an interdisciplinary dialogue. The last section, “Green Cultural Studies,” discusses new media, cinema and a proposal to “practice deconstruction” in the classroom. These three sections are preceded not only by Garrard’s general introduction but also by an illuminating essay by Richard Kerridge.

In “Ecocriticism and the Mission of ‘English’,” Kerridge discusses the challenge of ecocritical pedagogy in the larger context of the didactical debate on English. In particular, he asks what exactly environmentalism has to offer for the study of English and what, in turn, English can offer environmentalism. “English,” he claims, “defines and holds a space of opposition to industrial instrumentalist rationality” (14) and thus is well capable of resisting and disturbing the development of commercial commodification that seems to affect and, ultimately, threaten, our society as well as the planet. He concludes that the role of English studies is both to become more aware of its “niche” as a locus of resistance and to make sure there is no retreat into this very niche. By applying Timothy Morton’s concept of the “ecological thought” and outlining the potential of ecocritical readings to “confront various dichotomies and find provisional, shifting solutions” (22), he offers an illuminating and challenging introduction to the field.

Just as Kerridge’s essay presents a rather broad perspective, Adrienne Cassel’s “Walking in the Weathered World” proposes to “help students understand that many of the problems they face are not just personal or local; instead, that they are part of larger problem of the consumer culture in which they live” (27). This form of critique is anything but new, yet Cassel adds an ecocritical twist by suggesting the practice of walking as a means of pedagogy. Students are asked to take walks, but not in order to establish a contemplative love for nature, but rather in order to make them actually see their neighbourhoods and environments. This, she hopes, will help making students “aware of their behaviour and its impact on others” (34). While this is without doubt a respectable objective, one may question whether it really lives up to the expectation of transcending one’s “personal or local” focus.

In “Teaching an Environmental Writing and Literature Course,” Elizabeth Giddens recounts her encounters with social-constructivist thinking. She cites a student who anxiously asked one day: “What are we reading next time? *Not* another walk in the woods, I hope?” (37). She reflects on the reluctance of her student and expounds the problems and challenges of a one-sided ‘nature orientation’ in ecocritical education: in our thoroughly linguistic, interconnected world, too many strolls and too much retreat into sylvan idylls may indeed turn into a joke, as it did in Giddens’ class. She then outlines an approach that understands environments as social-constructivist texts and demonstrates the adaptability and utility of this approach by discussing some of the avenues of perception this approach was able to offer her students.

The next essay by Kevin Hutchings not only offers a challenging and fascinating view on ecocritical readings of “place-based” Romantic literature from British writers in the environments of Northern Canada. It also presents an interesting and thorough ecocritical syllabus that, through discussions of concepts such as ecology, nature’s economy, and environmentalism today and during the Romantic period, offers means to discuss one of the most challenging quandaries of a literary criticism that values ‘ecocentrism’ over anthropocentrism: “Does Romanticism,” Hutchings asks (and one could easily expand this question so as to cover literature in general), “provide an ethical

alternative to traditional anthropocentric concepts of nature, or is the literature's emphasis upon imagination itself thoroughly human-centred?" (49). The texts and assignments Hutchins suggests are enriching for this debate, and I have no doubts that this debate is crucial to ecocriticism, as well as to green pedagogy.

Erin James discusses the intersection of postcolonial and ecocritical approaches, and she discusses some of the questions I personally find absolutely pivotal for a theoretically refined ecocriticism and, hence, for any approach to teaching green issues. The question how "the formal aspects of a text can encode in them a specific understanding of that text's environment(s) via language and narrative structures" (65-6) is not only central to my own research; because it emphasises the textuality and constructedness of the textual artefacts under scrutiny, and because the mutual dialogue between postcolonial and ecocritical approaches throw into sharp relief the respective blind spots of each approach, James's suggestions certainly generate a fruitful discussion of a "nature outside of language" (66) that nevertheless comes in linguistic and artistic mediations.

The interdisciplinary section is opened by Louise Westling's essay on "Literature and Ecology," which offers a fresh perspective on an almost traditional ecocritical concern. Westling asks what ecocritical debates on possible intersections between ecological science and literary or cultural studies mean for "us as educators" (81), and instead of praising science as a role model for ecocritical research, she stresses the fact that "[w]e must understand the provisional and culturally inflected quality of scientific research at the same time that we acknowledge its indisputable power" (81). This is a balanced if challenging claim indeed, but it is important to understand how difficult it is to put it into pedagogical practice. It not only assumes that it is possible to teach the most abstract findings of science studies but also presupposes an intimate knowledge of the sciences on the side of the instructors as well. Therefore, I find it helpful that Westling suggests a new focus: "Ecocriticism's very sense of itself is shaped by the life sciences, but it is not practical to attempt to restrain ourselves as scientific specialists. We must rely on the kinds of books [...] written for lay audiences by working scientists and historians of science" (82). Thus, "[e]cocriticism participates in the popular meaning of ecology more than it does in the scientific definition" (85) – but this is not a bad thing. On the contrary, it radically and fruitfully expands ecological discussions.

Ursula K. Heise's contribution discusses the role of a "sense of planet" in the context of a globalised society that of course also affects the classroom. She suggests that the meaning of the term "globalisation" be discussed and interrogated (one may think of Donna Haraway's proposal for *autre-mondialisation*) and goes on to argue that in this context, the various meanings and realities of environmentalism can best be scrutinised. One of the main questions is "Is it possible to care for the world as a whole?" (92-3), and in discussing the role and mediatedness of abstract entities, from the nation state to a global network, Heise offers numerous exciting and stimulating examples for such eco-cosmopolitan pedagogies.

“The Return of the Animal” by Bart H. Welling and Scottie Kapel delineates the complex field of critical animal studies and posthumanism in the context of teaching practices. While they propose teaching seminars on animality by “presenting animals to students in the sense of making them *present* in literal, literary, bioregional and scientific terms” (105, emphasis in the original), Welling and Kapel constantly stress the constructedness of the animals’ alterity, consequently promoting a sense of disorientation as a teaching objective. This proposal is rounded up by a list of possible tasks that simultaneously address the knowledge that animals do in fact exist and the fact that representations of them are always constructed. For me, the questions Welling and Kapel raise are even more interesting than their suggested answers because they show that ecocriticism and critical animal studies cannot be restricted to issues of content – animal stories, for instance – but must, if taken seriously, be understood as a force that eventually transforms the whole field of humanist teaching.

Another serious challenge to the imagination and practices of representation in culture and art is discussed by Hayden Gabriel and Greg Garrard: climate change. Instead of a currently dominant focus on mimetic and exhortatory writing on the issue, they claim that “a much wider range of critical and creative responses is both possible and desirable” in order to establish literary writing as a viable form of critique (117). The problems and questions are of course numerous – Gabriel and Garrard name “the problems of science and scepticism; apocalypse and apathy; the limitations and possibilities of existing cultural genres; and the imaginative difficulties posed by the spatial and temporal scale of climate change” (118) – but the authors conclude by stating that “seeing climate change as a pedagogical *opportunity* provides ecocriticism with much more generous remit than providing PR for the IPCC” (120; emphasis in the original). The detailed list of aspects that accordingly would have to inform a syllabus concerned with the issues raised in this essay sums up the findings and provides first, tentative but promising answers.

The final section of the book, dedicated to “Green Cultural Studies” once more opens the field of interest so as to include media other than literary fiction. Anthony Lioi discusses the role of new media such as graphic novels with regard to their mass-cultural appeal and ecocritical effectiveness. I absolutely agree that the question of quality and discussions of the literary canon are important; however, I disagree with Lioi’s claim that “new media and popular culture have been given scant attention because it is impossible to defend even the best video game against the charge that it is less respectable [...] than Dostoyevski, Woolf and Stendhal” (135), which to me seems to be a quite superficial dichotomy. His discussion of Joni Adamson’s concept of “nesting” – the recontextualisation of traditional literary material in contemporary media – is interesting, however. Clearly, if one is interested in questions of a common environmentalist or ecological conscience, mass media must be considered.

The same can be said with regard to the cinema. Adrian Ivakhiv accordingly engages with the task of “Teaching Ecocriticism and Cinema,” and he proposes a “process-relational ecophilosophy of cinema” (147). The discussion of responses to

filmic representation and the experience of visual media such as films are doubtless worthy of closer analysis, and Ivakhiv presents interesting examples for avenues of thinking about these issues.

The final contribution is by Timothy Morton, who writes about “Practising Deconstruction in the Age of Ecological Emergency.” His essay is an urgent plea for ecocritics to embrace deconstruction as well as – maybe surprisingly in this context – meditation. Part of his argument is clearly strategic – ecocritics “need a way of proceeding that is as fast and as smart as the cynicism” of modern literary and cultural studies; in order to find a hearing for ecological thinking in academia, “[n]o amount of bludgeoning will work – you will be laughed at for being anti-intellectual. You need to dazzle the cynics with a smarter, more alluring game. Deconstruction with a contemplative heart is just the ticket” (163). Even if one does not share Morton’s penchant for deconstruction, one will want to agree to his call for a higher level of theoretical engagement and sophistication – if as an ecocritic, one does not want to be accused of the naiveté of academics who’d ‘rather be hiking’. But the second part of Morton’s argument is even more compelling. In linking the practice of deconstructionist readings and the practice of meditation, Morton stresses the significance of deceleration and – beware! – close-reading as an attempt to accept and even welcome “strangeness” (164). Indeed, he argues, this stance can be found in Derrida as well as in writings on yoga, and Morton certainly has a point when he links slow-reading to approaches such as the slow food movement which also in one way or the other seek to bring back the actual experience, the reality of the real, into our hearts and minds. “The essence of deconstruction,” Morton concludes, “is realising you don’t have to believe everything you think. At the same time you realise that you are stuck in your reality” (165). This tension must not be resolved, it must be embraced.

Although teachers interested in the field of green teaching might see it as a disadvantage, the fact that *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies* does not, in the end, advocate a limited set of teaching practices but rather reflects on didactical objectives generally works to the book’s advantage. It is made clear repeatedly that the teaching objectives in question require a thorough and ongoing theoretical reflection and a constant questioning of their presuppositions. Instead of turning the classroom into a site of environmentalist propaganda, ecocritical didactics have a great potential for turning traditional pedagogy into a zone of profound negotiations – of questions about the human place in this world, about our relationship to the more-than-human-world, but particularly about the role of teaching in philosophical and ethical terms. The unagitated tone of the contributions makes it easy to overlook the radicalism of some of the suggestions; Westling’s demand that ecocriticism be concerned with popular science books rather than aspire to become ecological science proper, for instance, is an example for this. Not that it is entirely new – in fact, this is exactly what ecocritics have been doing for years (without necessarily admitting it) – but in the context of a discussion of pedagogical theory, the proposal takes on a new quality as it deliberately shifts one’s theoretical focus. Another example is Welling’s and Kapel’s claim for

disorientation in the context of teaching 'the animal': while it nicely accommodates the findings and objectives of posthumanist animal studies, it is easy to imagine the outrage such a teaching objective would cause in a primary or high school context where animals are mostly encountered, appropriated and ticked off one's list of concerns after discussion of beast fables and the like.

For me, the greatest and most fruitful disturbance is the advocacy of both Garrard and Morton for close-and-slow reading. Not only does it have the potential to enrich ecocritical reading practices by linking the objectives of this paradigm with New Critical and deconstructivist approaches. It also challenges nothing less than the academic and educational developments of the last decades, which have focused literary and cultural education repeatedly and one-dimensionally on skills such as scanning and reading-for-information, totally neglecting the experience of reading as such. And if time does not allow for reading, Wikipedia will do. But it won't, ultimately, and ecocritical approaches to the environmental *and* imaginative crisis emphasise this. That these approaches can and must at the same time challenge the practice of teaching in general only underlines the profound impact and theoretical relevance of contemporary ecocritical research – both for literary and cultural and for pedagogical research.

Works Cited

Buell, Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental Criticism. Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.