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Roman Bartosch and Sieglinde Grimm, *Teaching Environments. Ecocritical Encounters* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014), 265pp.



Teaching Environments is a collection of papers that were presented at the “Transdisciplinary Perspectives” conference held at the University of Cologne in September 2012. Following a foreword by Greg Garrard, the volume presents 15 contributions discussing environmental discourse in everyday teaching. The collection thus focuses on a topic which, while long acknowledged within ecocriticism as Greg Garrard points out (8), still appears to be neglected by many other fields of study. After Roman Bartosch and Sieglinde Grimm’s introduction, Uwe K uchler’s paper not only discusses the role of the environment in foreign language teaching in Germany, but also outlines the responsibility of the humanities within the debate about the environment (30). He claims that the English as foreign language (EFL) classroom should play a prominent role when teaching about the environment: it provides a contact zone of language, culture, literature, and other media, while learners acquire communicative skills at the same time, offering an environment of inter- and transcultural discourse which seems ideal for the introduction of ecological topics.

The following section, “Beginnings: From Picture Books to Young Adult Fiction and Film,” presents four papers with examples of how teaching the environment can be realized. Bettina K ummerling-Meibauer’s contribution focuses on the role of insects in children’s literature since the beginning of the 19th century. She argues that children’s fascination with ants, bugs and bees is not only due to the insects’ size and the similarity in perspective when seeing the world from the point of view of a small creature, but that adopting an insect’s perspective in literature plays an important role in establishing empathy with insects and understanding their life conditions. The human-animal relationship in literature is also the topic of Roman Bartosch’s paper. His argument, however, goes beyond the animals’ perspective and discusses anthropomorphisms which are often characteristic for the depiction of animals in literature (59). Anthropomorphism, he claims, is only of limited use when creating identification with nature in general and with animals in particular, since it will ultimately always “arrive at a point where [human] identity relies on the difference, the ‘contrast with animals.’” (61). Experiencing the divide between human and animal, following Bartosch’s

argument, can help the reader to approach nature's otherness, assess human-animal encounters from a distance and relate to the other "in its alterity" (71) instead of trying to identify with the anthropomorphic. In her contribution on children's picture books, Janice Bland emphasizes the use of multimodal sources when competing with race, class and gender studies within the EFL classroom. She argues for the use of children's picture books in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) for students to interact with images and texts in order to begin learning about environmental topics at a very early stage of learning. Her example of Rafe Martin's "The Rough Faced Girl," however, indicates that the advantages of being able to introduce young learners to environmental studies can come at a price: while the imagery and content of "The Rough Faced Girl" may communicate some understanding of the relationship between the human and nature, it also could be argued that they, at the same time, communicate postcolonial and ethnic stereotypes to young learners. Seen in the context of the competition between postcolonial, ethnic and environmental studies within teaching curricula, Bland's example indicates the risk of successful teaching in one area while simultaneously fostering stereotypes and colonial thinking in another. Adding film to the examples discussed in this section, Kylie Crane's paper demonstrates convincingly that issues such as animal ethics and human-animal relationships can also be addressed by films such as *Babe*. Her paper argues that the film provides numerous opportunities to enter classroom discussions about the treatment of animals or the production of meat and to facilitate discussions about the human-animal-relationship and students' everyday life.

In the section "Transdisciplinary Encounters I: Approaching the 'Two Cultures,' Adrian Rainbow and Celestine Caruso present past and ongoing debates about the interrelationship and dualism between the sciences and the humanities in the context of teaching the environment. Both authors demonstrate how this dualism provides an obstacle for the teaching of environmental studies in general. Adrian Rainbow, using novels by Barbara Kingsolver and Margaret Atwood, discusses the central role of science in environmental fiction and how fiction is able to "fuse the dichotomy between nature and humanity" (132) and to create a "Third Culture," a hybrid space overcoming the traditional boundaries dividing the two disciplines. Celestine Caruso follows a similar line of argument in her paper, claiming that the "two cultures" (150) have been interacting within art and literature for quite a while. Analyzing examples from science fiction and dystopian literature, Caruso demonstrates that science fiction can be used within a classroom environment to overcome the traditional divide, depending on whether this form of fiction will receive its deserved position within the literary canon of teaching in the future.

The section "Transdisciplinary Encounters II: Historicizing Environmental Discourse" discusses exemplary historical analyses of the relationship between the environment and teaching. Haiko Wandhoff argues for broadening the historical

perspective and moving beyond what appears to have become the accepted beginning of environmental discourse, i.e. early industrialization in Europe. Wandhoff discusses ecological thinking in a much earlier period via the 13th century epic poem “Der Welsche Gast.” Reworking the religious narrative of original sin and redemption, the poem’s “narrative patterns and [...] organization” (168) display proto-environmentalist sensibility. Dominik Ohrem discusses the reciprocal relationships between the human and nature via the examples of wilderness, conceptions of gender and race, and the construction of a (white and male) national identity in the US during the nineteenth century. His contribution shows how discourses of nature contributed to the construction of a social order under a white, male hegemony and how the historical perspective can enrich a discussion about environmental education in the present. This perspective encourages students to focus on a local and personal context, but also introduces the deep entanglement of “race, gender, and other axes of difference [...] with nature” (192). Sieglinde Grimm employs examples from E.T.A. Hoffmann, Gottfried Keller and W.G. Sebald in her study of environmental writing in German literature. Her paper successfully traces aspects of environmental discourse in works covering nearly three centuries. Claiming that teaching students about the connection between the human and nature requires an understanding not only of its present state but also of its historical genesis, Grimm argues that this understanding can help students to analyze and reflect on their own growing and learning processes.

The volume concludes with a “Debate” section focusing on the difficult dichotomy between traditional academic discourse and the urgency of acting against climate change. Roman Bartosch and Greg Garrard respond to criticism of the Cologne conference as a “prime example of ‘humanist boosterism’” (219) and argue that the topics discussed at the conference indeed contribute to acting against destructive

environmental change via developing how human interaction with the environment is approached in education. The authors argue that ecocritical studies can provide practical results “once they are free from apocalypticism and confinement” (222), while environmental discourse must be based on humanist principles such as thorough analysis and constant critical re-negotiation. The response paper by Major and McMurry, who initiated the debate via an earlier article, re-emphasizes the antagonism between academic discourse and practical action in which, as they put it, Bartosch and Garrard refuse the “the discourse of apocalypticism” (227) and prefer “the go-slow approach of traditional literary inquiry” (227). Teaching about the environment requires that “pedagogy [...] must come to terms with the urgency of the catastrophe” (233). Pamela Swanigan argues that agenda-biased teaching is “unnecessary” (235) since students naturally develop questions and critical thinking when offered suitable content in the classroom; they rather need to be offered with opportunities to “develop their

critical faculties and independent judgement” (238). In her concluding contribution, Sieglinde Grimm also addresses the dichotomy between theoretical discourse and the urgency of action within ecocritical discourse: “[D]ifferent traditions of teaching literary texts [...] in Germany and the Anglophone world” (257), the long absence of applied knowledge, and the German tradition of “Bildung” have only recently allowed for the introduction of ecocritical thought into teaching. The approach of the Cologne Conference, thus, aimed at discussing the status quo and the future of the ecocritical discipline in teaching in Germany, rather than championing an ivory-tower agenda over practical action.

Teaching Environments provides an inspiring collection of essays and debates offering useful impulses for teachers of languages and literatures (as well as the sciences) on how to include the environment and ecocritical thought into their teaching. The volume indicates that a discussion about teaching and the environment in Germany is still at its beginning and leaves the reader with numerous ideas and questions which will hopefully be addressed by future research.