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BRUDIN BORG, Camilla – WINGÅRD, Rikard – BRUHN, Jørgen, eds.: CONTEMPORARY ECOCRITICAL METHODS: ECOCRITICAL THEORY AND PRACTICE. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2024. 289 pp.

Martin Pavlov

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ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5214-9173

The edited book *Contemporary Ecocritical Methods: Ecocritical Theory and Practice*, published in 2024 by Lexington Books, presents an expanded English version of the original Swedish edition *Ekokritiska metoder* from 2022. The book focuses on a methodological evaluation of ecocriticism, which is a research field located at the intersection of literary studies, cultural studies, and environmental humanities. Within the context of the transversal and eclectic nature of ecocriticism, it is an important contribution to the discussion of how to read literature ecocritically today. Scholars from various countries and research environments offer diverse methodological approaches over fourteen chapters, providing both classical literary frameworks and experimental forms such as empirical ecocriticism and approaches from the digital humanities. The book is presented as "a toolbox that showcases how one does ecocritical analysis – and not just why one should do it" (p. 3).

In the precisely prepared introduction, the editors explain the basic premises of ecocriticism and its development. They also investigate the reasons for the long-lasting absence of methodological discussion, which is found in the dynamic development of Anglo-American literary studies – be it New Criticism through to branches of literary criticism and post-structuralism and deconstruction – and which has questioned the idea of stability of meaning and objectivity of research. In response to this development, they emphasize the need for systematic methodological contemplation and point out that various forms of in-depth critical reading are a legitimate part of methodology. The editors create space for a plurality of ecocritical approaches (and for their creative configurations) which the book then presents in the subsequent chapters.

Although the chapter by Erik van Ooijen, entitled "Timothy Morton's Ambient Poetics: Swedish Romanticism Without Nature", is the second one in the book, it can be seen as a starting point for reading the other contributions. Van Ooijen explains the key terms of the environmental humanities – the Anthropocene, hyperobject, and object-oriented science.

The validity of ecocritical research of (older) literature is explained as follows: "Once we accept the historical reality of the Anthropocene, we must accept that literary history, too, manifests these processes. The traces of global warming and the sixth mass extinction are found not only in the atmosphere or the crust of the Earth but also in our cultural archives" (p. 135).

In the context of Swedish Romantic poetry, the chapter maps the methodological and interpretative possibilities of theoretical concepts put forward by Timothy Morton, focusing on the materiality of the text, which allows for a critical reassessment of humankind's erroneous conception of nature.

A more classical approach is found in the text by Johanna Lindbo entitled "Econarratology and Metaphor Analysis". By combining an analysis of metaphors with an econarratological approach, it observes "how spatial, temporal, and sensory aspects of storytelling and the poetic composition of language challenge an anthropocentric notion of humans as separate from the more-than-human world" (pp. 145–146). It emphasizes the need for careful reading through sensory metaphors that form a binding link between language and matter. The chapter concludes with the assertion that "there is room for aesthetic, thematic, and narrative studies in ecocritical analysis" (p. 158).

The use of metaphor is also taken up by Amelie Björck, but, in contrast to Lindbo, she views it critically within ecocritical discourse. In her contribution entitled "Animal Studies: Metonymic and Zoopoetic Ways of Reading", Björck explains that while metaphor is based on a vertical relationship (the image of the animal as a symbol of the human), the principle of metonymy rests on a horizontal relationship between parts of the same whole (the literary animal as a real one). The chapter presents metonymic reading as a means of deconstructing power hierarchies and zoopoetic reading as being focused on the analysis of formal textual aspects through which the scholarly reader can seek common elements of human and natural language (e.g. onomatopoeia, rhythm, and sonority). Even though Björck critically reappraises traditional interpretive methods, she nonetheless states that "starting from earlier, established interpretations of classical works and then complicating and supplementing them with an animal studies perspective can be a viable analytical approach" (p. 166).

Rebecca Duncan's "Post- and Decolonial Ecocriticism: How to Read on an Unequal Planet" builds on the tradition of approaches in literary criticism by linking ecocriticism with other theoretical paradigms. Through post- and decolonial criticism, she seeks to reveal "the disproportionate distribution of the effects of climate breakdown across the world's former colonies" (p. 93). In conclusion, however, her chapter critically reflects on the position of the researcher as a potential "colonizer" and considers the possibilities of post-critical concepts, as formulated by Rita Felski, and neo-phenomenological approaches that bring the active reader back into the act of interpretation.

In "Power, Resistance, and More-than-Anthropocentric Leakages", Ann-Sofie Lönngren's core premise concerning posthumanism is that the boundary between the human and the nonhuman is "historically and geographically as changing categories that organize themselves in relation to each other according to the principles of hierarchy and dichotomy" (p. 64). In ecocritical discourse, it is therefore important to make visible and challenge the anthropocentric paradigm that structures the literary text and the very way of interpretation. Lönngren formulates a critical stance towards ecocriticism, which is dependent on specific conditions, and attempts to demonstrate this through an ecocritical interpretation of a text that is explicitly non-ecocritical by employing a queer perspective.

Rikard Wingård's chapter, entitled "Holistic Method as an Ecocritical Quest", is one of few contributions that is not an interpretation of a specific work. Rather, it has the character of a broader reflection on the necessity to critically reassess the practices of ecocriticism. Based on ideas put forward by the physicist David Bohm, Wingård questions the Cartesian subject–object distinction which reinforces the apparent separation of humans from nature. Critical theories (including ecocriticism) "are all interested in one or several parts of the whole of a literary

work according to an abstract system that does not belong to the work itself" (p. 44). Instead, he highlights post-critical approaches, which "also strive to understand literary works based on the premises of the literary works themselves rather than a predefined theory" (p. 44). Wingård supports the development of holistic thinking about literature and the world based on phenomenological hermeneutics.

A similar change in perspective – from the local to the planetary – is suggested by Björn Billing in "Zooming Out to the Anthropocene". The method of zooming out means abandoning the anthropocentric perception of time and space and adopting a planetary perspective. Billing refers to the concept of hyperobjects, as put forward by Morton, and he regards climate fiction as a genre that is promising for research precisely because of its ability to depict the Earth from the perspective of a distant future.

In "Critical Utopia or Climate Change Dystopia?" Katarina Leppänen shows that the climate and environmental crisis can be reflected upon in ways that are not dystopian. In the introduction of her contribution, Leppänen presents a method of analysing the critical utopias presented by Tom Moylan which consists of a critical analysis of the functioning of an alternative society, an analysis of the protagonist, and subsequent ideological questioning that emphasizes aspects of the real world that the alternative society criticizes. She applies Moylan's approach to uncover critical utopian impulses in two contemporary climate novels, *Flight Behavior* (2012) and *Memory of Water* (2014), with the aim being "to grasp the political potential of utopian stories that could ignite political change in the real world" (p. 78). Based on such interpretations, she refutes the prevailing view that contemporary climate fiction is exclusively dystopian. Indeed, she concludes that the increasingly frequent critical utopia – as a genre and method – has genuine potential to change humankind's attitude towards nature.

Climate fiction is also at the centre of attention for Woyciech Malecki and Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, but, unlike Leppänen's genre-based approach, they demonstrate innovative methods of empirical ecocriticism that explore the receptive field of literature. They build on the basic premises of ecocriticism that environmentally engaged texts do "matter – socially, culturally, politically" (p. 189) and that their reading can positively influence people's attitudes towards the environment. Malecki and Schneider-Mayerson validate their assertions through various social science methods. In several experiments, they show to what extent climate fiction influences the attitudes and behaviour of readers and whether "narrative empathy can make readers care about the plight of nonhuman species" (p. 190).

Applied research is also presented by Martin Hellström, who describes the method of co-researching literature conversations. Similarly to the other authors, Hellström explores the ways in which literature can build environmental awareness. Interestingly, he addresses the child reader; children are not the subject of his research but do "participate as interlocutors and co-researchers" (p. 182). In several examples of children's literature, he looks at how the reader is engaged in the text and whether the work motivates the reader to certain actions.

Per Israelson and Jesper Olsson indicate that ecocritical research can also find overlaps in the digital humanities. In their chapter, entitled "Overstories: Reading, Digital, Media, Ecologies", the question is raised about what can still be considered as reading and writing about the environment and how nature contributes to this. The answer is sought in three case studies where they apply various methodological approaches of media ecology to the novel, experimental poetry, and comics. Based on their findings – e.g. that the text functions from a cybernetic perspective as an autonomous ecosystem – they call for new ways of reading that connect tech-

nologies with nature. Israelson and Olsson argue that while science does offer a wealth of facts about the climate crisis, "the question remains on how to imagine, represent, and make felt these changes in order to explore other ways of living and acting on the planet" (p. 207). They assert that the digital humanities allow for a combination of different types of media to create more sophisticated representations of natural phenomena.

With similar starting points, Niklas Salmose and Jørgen Bruhn in "Intermedial Ecocriticism" emphasize the importance of the media sphere in the Anthropocene era. Their chapter states that "the ecological crisis reaches nonnatural scientists through nonscientific media products in many different genres or, as we term them according to intermedial terminology, media types" (p. 224). They look at the possibilities of merging different types of media in order to create a holistic view of the ecological crisis as well as at the possibilities of analysing the intermedial shifts that occur when transferring form and content from one type of media to another.

The previous two contributions focusing on the media highlighted the importance of a polysensory approach to natural phenomena, which also plays a key role in the chapter entitled "Ecocritical Spatial Analysis Methods" by Camilla Brudin Borg. In an effort to understand the interconnection between people and the environment, the chapter draws on the method of spatial mapping and links ecocriticism with spatial theories and geocriticism. It deals with the questions "How do the places in the story relate to the chronology of the narrative?" and "Are there any discrepancies when the text's environment is compared with the world?" (p. 261). Thanks to the presented research, Brudin Borg shows what role specific places and nonhuman beings play in building narrative worlds.

Cecilia Åsberg's chapter "Storying Exposure with the Transversal Methods of Eco-Critique" appears as the last chapter of the publication, but it is not actually a contribution in the true sense of the word. The text has a summarizing, synthesizing character and serves more as a final reflective assessment than as a standalone study. In the original Swedish version of the publication (2022), from which the English edition is derived, this text is labelled as "Afterword", and, perhaps due to an editorial oversight, the same label also appears in the methodological introduction to the English version (p. 12). The original and formal compositional structure of the text, which clearly frames it as an afterword, appears to be more appropriate given its function in this book.

Contemporary Ecocritical Methods presents a wide range of interdisciplinary methodological approaches, including the more traditional tools of literary analysis (econarratology, thematic analysis, phenomenology, and close reading; established critical frameworks of feminist, queer, postcolonial, and posthumanist theory; and studies of the Anthropocene and experimental forms of media and empirical ecocriticism). Although all these approaches present inspiring concepts, some analyses (such as those by Lönngren, Brudin Borg, and Billing) appear interpretatively less convincing either due to a significant distance from the specific textual material or because of their distinctly abstract nature without any deeper connection to a specific ecological context. In this regard, it would be worthwhile to further develop these approaches on a different corpus of texts or bring them into dialogue with the European literary context, which the book addresses rather marginally. The concept of the book, however, deserves recognition; there is a rehabilitation of classical methodological frameworks and a willingness to compare diametrically opposed approaches (e.g. in Lindbo and Björck). This opens up space for critical discussion. The editorial work done on the book is valuable; there is a clear structure, a good formal quality in the texts, and,

most importantly, a significant intertextual continuity in the chapters which is supported by systematic references to the other contributions. The whole book reveals a growing tendency towards post-critical reading, shifting attention from a suspicious "uncovering" to a thoughtful and understanding reading as well as to the renewal of the relationship between the reader and the text and between the text and the world. The book highlights a need to develop a new form of attention: one that could transcend anthropocentric limits and open literature to voices that have so far remained silent or unreadable.

Translation John Peter Butler Barrer

Mgr. Martin Pavlov
Institute of Slovak Literature of the Slovak Academy of Sciences
Dúbravská cesta 9
841 04 Bratislava
Slovak Republic
E-mail: Martin.Pavlov@savba.sk