

Fixxion n°11

“Ecopoetics”

Alain Romestaing, Pierre Schoentjes and Anne Simon eds.

Dwindling natural resources, pollution resulting from our consumerism, and the threat of extinction weighing on many species have led writers to incorporate these issues into their work and to consider nature and our ways of inhabiting the world from a different perspective. Such explorers of the margins, including the margins of a literature considered to be hermetic before the 1980s, opened themselves up to a rapidly evolving environment – whether wild, rural, or urban – and their surveying is often the result of reverie and of excess, of their wanderings through wasteland and zones that are only considered “non-places” by bureaucratic registries. These writers are also mobile at the level of literary genre, oscillating between novels and essays, autobiographies, journals, and other nomadic notebooks.

While Romain Gary and Jean-Marie G. Le Clézio are considered precursors, numerous authors have explored these issues since the 1980s. From Pierre Bergounioux, who examines the French countryside, to Éric Chevillard, who imagines the extinction of the great apes, the breadth of individual approaches limits our ability to list them all. It is worth noting such tireless travelers as the Rolins, who express rather ironically their sympathy for distant countries that are often symptomatic of world-scale disaster; Jacques Lacarrière and Pierre Patroin, who crossed France on foot or by swimming... And while Olivia Rosenthal, Isabelle Sorente or Joy Sorman question human and animal conditions, Jean-Christophe Rufin and DOA engage the theme of ecoterrorism.

Nature writing also involves major foreign influences: Sylvain Tesson and Arno Bertina enter into dialogue with Thoreau, André Bucher draws inspiration from the Montana school, while Rigoni-Stern can be read between the lines of a number of authors, especially Maryline Desbiolles. The question of belonging to a place, to the “country,” appears in numerous works whose authors flatly reject the vagaries of nationalism and regionalism, like Marie Darrieussecq, Jean-Christophe Bailly, or Jean-Loup Trassard who reinvents the prehistoric novel to represent Norman forests. This agricultural writer, also a photographer, suggests that ecopoetics enters naturally into dialogue with other aesthetic practices: some novels evoke Land Art, while the rurality observed by Marie-Hélène Lafon echoes the films of Raymond Depardon. The debate surrounding the preservation of nature is growing, and publishers such as Gallmeister and Wildproject offer greater access to a foreign corpus that was long unfamiliar to many readers.

All of the places where the French language is used and created are concerned. Jean-Marc Lovay and Blaise Hoffman no longer limit themselves to portraying the beauty of the Swiss Alps, but, following in the footsteps of American nature writing, they confront the immensity of untamed space; the Québécois writer Julien Gravelle brings forth the harshness of the far North while the Guadeloupean writer Daniel Maximin relies on the threat of a cyclone to evoke the power of the elements. The true cataclysm is nonetheless rooted in human activity; accordingly, many writers consider the consequences and lingering effects of the colonial system – Togo as seen by Kossi Efoui – , explore the relationship to nature in indigenous societies or, like Patrick Chamoiseau and Alain Mabanckou, they associate the creation of novels with an oral tradition caught up in the abundant expression of life.

With the rise of an environmental consciousness, today there is no longer any question of reducing nature to a static décor, to a mirror of psychology or to a symbolic space. Since the 1980s, the Anglo-Saxon university community, curious about wilderness (USA) or country

(GB), has relayed the rise of ecology by using ecocriticism to study the interaction between literature and the natural environment. Nonetheless, the inscription of this discipline within cultural studies, the often axiological perspective of the analyses and an historically different relationship to nature have slowed its development in France.

Marking the specific nature of the francophone world, the term *écopoétique* has gained traction. This term places greater emphasis on literary activity, through the etymology of the word *poiein*. The term also shares a root with *écologie* [ecology], a word constructed from the term *oikos* which designated a household that incorporated home, land holdings with their wildlife inhabitants, the members of the family, and even their slaves. Today, it refers to a line of thought that takes into account the interconnectedness of all living creatures and displays concern for the ecosystem.

Human responsibility for the environment translates into ethical and aesthetic choices that differ considerably according to the region in question (metropolitan France or the various francophone spaces). But the texts are united in their authors' decision to participate in contemporary debates while turning toward the future.

This issue of *Fixxion* welcomes contributions addressing literary works that reflect various problematics: the articulation of the local and the global, the concrete experience of wildness, literary strategies that allow us to experience "inhabitation" or proximity to nature, the relationship between literature and the natural sciences, new perspectives on the lives and rights of animals, metamorphoses of landscapes, the rediscovery of the rural, the ways in which the environment engages with social issues, the problem of waste, or the dystopias of environmental apocalypse. The goal expressed through this issue dedicated to the plurality of ecopoetics is to observe the many ways in which literary creation explores and works through the most crucial issues of our world today.

The majority of the critical bibliography is Anglo-Saxon, although in some respects the geopoetics of Kenneth White or the geocriticism of Michel Callot and Bertrand Westphal share the concerns of ecopoetics.

Leo Marx's study is seminal (*The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000 [1964]) and Lawrence Buell's body of work forms the foundations of the discipline (*The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*, Cambridge/ London, Harvard University Press, 1995 ; ---, *Writing for an Endangered World. Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 2001 ; ---, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

Alongside articles that cut a path through this field in extreme-contemporary French literature, let us cite a few of the essay collections, introductory works, and major contributions to the field:

The Ecocriticism Reader. Landmarks in Literary Ecology, Ch. Glotfelty & H. Fromm édés, Athens/ Londres, University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Écrire l'animal aujourd'hui, L. Desblache éd., Clermont-Ferrand, PU Blaise Pascal, 2006.

Littérature et écologie. Vers une écopoétique, N. Blanc, D. Chartier & Th. Pughe édés, *Écologie et politique*, 36, 2008.

Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Roger-Pol Droit, « Chez soi ou chez les autres. Variations autour de l'*oïkos* », *Figures de l'altérité*, Roger-Pol Droit dir., Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2014.

Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, New York, Routledge, 2004, <The New Critical Idiom>.

- Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, New York, Routledge, 1999, <The New Critical Idiom>.
- Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Richard Kerridge & Neil Sammells, *Writing the Environment. Ecocriticism and Literature*, New York, Zed Books, 1998.
- Anne Mairesse, Anne Simon éd(s), *L'Esprit créateur*, « Face aux bêtes / Facing Animals », 51.4, 2011.
- Alain Romestaing, « Jean-Loup Trassard, ou l'éloge du lien domestique », in *Jean-Loup Trassard. Une Ethnologie Poétique*, D. Vaugeois et J.-Y. Casanova (dirs), Bazas, Le Temps qu'il fait, 2014.
- Pierre Schoentjes, « Littérature et environnement : écrire la nature », in *Narrations d'un nouveau siècle*, B. Blanckeman & B. Havercroft éd(s), Paris, Presses Sorbonne nouvelle, 2013, p. 117-129.
- , « Texte de la nature et nature du texte : Jean-Loup Trassard et les enjeux de l'écopoétique en France », *Poétique*, 164, 2010, p. 477-494.
- Anne Simon, « Déterritorialisations de Marie Darrieussecq », in *Women and Space*, Marie-Claire Barnet et Shirley Jordan (dirs), *Dalhousie French Studies*, 93, 2011, p. 17-26.
- Alain Suberchicot, *Littérature et environnement. Pour une écocritique comparée*, Paris, Champion, 2012, <Unichamp-Essentiel>.

Proposals for articles, of approximately 300 words in length, in French or English, should be sent to [Alain Romestaing](#), [Pierre Schoentjes](#) and [Anne Simon](#) by November 15, 2014. Acceptance decisions will be sent out in mid-December.

Final versions of articles are due to the site by May 15, 2015 for evaluation by the editorial committee of the Revue critique de fiction française contemporaine. Articles outside the scope of the issue's theme will also be considered for publication.