

Introduction

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An encounter with nature, ecocriticism taps into a sense that literary questions have a peculiarly intense relation to the (to borrow David Abram's term) "more-than-human world" (1996). Famously defined by Cheryll Glotfelty as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty 1996, xviii) ecocriticism sought to disentangle "nature" as an analytical category from social-constructivist approaches that conceptualized nature (similar to other categories like class, gender, or race) as a cultural fiction deeply enmeshed in social, economic, and political strategies. Recovering nature from functionalism, ecocriticism both registered nature's aesthetic dimension as well as its presence in and impact on cultural practices. In many ways, early ecocriticism can be compared to the project of a "literary archaeology" sketched out in Toni Morrison's influential essay "Playing in the Dark," which sought to rediscover the "presence of (. . .) Africans and then African-Americans in the United States" (Morrison 1992, 4). In her essay, Morrison criticized a form of "knowledge" which held "that the characteristics of our national [i.e. American] literature emanate from a particular "Americanness" that is separate from and unaccountable to this presence" (4–5). As she argued, "The contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding" of American literature and "should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination" (5). This is not the place where to stretch the analogy too far, but similar to Morrison, who illustrated how some of the defining "characteristics" of American literature are "in fact responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence" (ibid.), ecocriticism set out to show how nature was never only the background to cultural processes of symbolic meaning-making, but was central to any literary exploration of the world. Paraphrasing Morrison, one could say that the human impulse to make meaning of that which surrounds us is a response to

the presence of nature and that its “real or fabricated (. . .) presence” is crucial to our sense of being human (6). Ecocriticism articulated this sentiment and gave it an analytical framework.

Engrained in this sentiment is a cultural anthropological impulse which presupposes that humankind’s reflection on the environment began as soon as the first meaning-making sign systems evolved tens of thousands of years ago. For instance, Louise Westling opens a recent introduction into the field with the following observation: “For as long as humans have been recording images of the world around them, they have been wondering about its meaning and their own status” (Westling 2014, 1). One might add that the self-reflective inquiry into the modes of those material-semiotic worlds is comparably younger. The development of environmental literary criticism only began in the middle of the 1970s with Joseph Meeker’s monograph study *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1972) as well as William Rueckert’s essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” (1978). The latter forged the term “ecocriticism,” which became an umbrella term for those modes of literary criticism that deal with nature-culture relations in a critical perspective. Since the 1990s, when ecocriticism was institutionalized, first with the help of Anglo-American journals and associations and later with a more international outlook, it has branched out into an interdisciplinary field of scholarly inquiry that encompasses a plethora of approaches, subjects, and students all around the world. No longer solely concerned with the representation of concepts of “wilderness” and “nature” in literary texts—a focus of early ecocriticism—it is now increasingly dealing with more inclusive conceptualizations of the term “environment” and has included posthuman, postcolonial, and queer theories (among many others) into its programmatic fabrics. That our present moment sees a consolidation of the field as well as an outlook for new perspectives and a broader visibility across disciplinary borders can be seen in the plethora of handbooks and collections that have either recently been published or will come out soon.¹

If we look into these handbooks, another observation can be made: while they all give testament to the ever-increasing field of the “Environmental Humanities” and show that the interrelationship between culture and nature has come to the fore as a central subject in literary and cultural studies, their focus clearly lies on early modern and modern times. On the one hand, this has to do with the fact that literary critics found a lot of material whose environmental aspect had long been neglected during the heyday of structuralism and post-structuralism when “nature” was predominantly seen as a socio-cultural construct; it also had to do with a new sensitivity to issues of environmental decline and degradation in the second half of the twentieth century, which led to heated debates across a wide sociopolitical spectrum and to a renewed cultural interest in humanity’s place in the world. Thereby,

a lot of the perspectives invoked were either prehistoric or posthistoric: while the environmental movement has harbored the Romantic dream of restoring nature to a state untouched by human hands, there is also the pessimistic vision of a postapocalyptic world, exhausted by humanity's consumption of natural resources—a vision that can be increasingly found in modern dystopian novels. Against this background, the decline of nature has become a narrative template quite common among the public environmental discourse and environmental scientists alike. However, the historical deep perspective has often been missing from these approaches. Notably, the premodern and ancient world has been left out of the scope of ecocritical exploration. Where antiquity is present, it is often only in an aside or footnote, but so far there has not been any real effort to extensively deal with premodern environmental perspectives from an ecocritical or cultural ecological vantage point.

The current volume seeks to address this blind spot in our environmental epistemology and to pave the way for an integration of the cultures of antiquity into our current ecocritical theory and practice. On the one hand, the volume aims at a reevaluation of ancient texts and traditions in the light of present-day environmental concerns; on the other hand, it tries to reconsider our contemporary outlook on and cultural concepts of the more-than-human world in the light of cultures far removed from our own. There are dangers involved in this project: there is the risk of approaching the distant worlds of antiquity anachronistically and to impose our own standards and concepts all too freely on societies with different technological, religious, and social backgrounds. So, while it is important to acknowledge the long tradition of thinking about the environment and of intellectually engaging with environmental problems, “an awareness of the differences between distinct histories and cultures of knowledge is equally necessary” (Zapf 2016a, 4). In this context, ecology is used metaphorically as a mode of reflection that allows for a blending of contrasting methodologies and leaps across vast domains of knowledge—and time. As Hubert Zapf sums up in the introduction to his recent *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*: “Two basic axioms of an ecological epistemology, connectivity *and* diversity, need to be taken seriously both in the ways in which ecocritical issues and subjects are explored and in the ways in which ecocriticism positions itself within the wider spectrum of contemporary academic disciplines” (ibid.; emphasis original). To come back to Morrison's essay cited at the outset, we could say that long literary traditions inform our cultural ideas and concepts of the environment: antiquity is a hidden presence in our own cultural fabrics to which we are inextricably connected. However, like the Greek sea-divinity Proteus, it is a shape-shifting presence that has given way to highly heterogeneous and diversified incarnations. It is no wonder that almost half of the essays of this volume deal with aspects of classical reception. They all

give an impression of the dynamic inherent in reception processes as well as their dialectic between remembering and forgetting, absence and presence, sameness and difference. This volume can be seen as an attempt at navigating between these opposing poles and bridging the divide between them. Necessarily, selections had to be made and it is clear that this book is only a first step in bringing modern environmental discourse together with the ancient world. The different methodologies employed are not signs of incoherence, but rather reflect the broad spectrum now characteristic of the Environmental Humanities as well as the heterogeneity and distinctiveness of antiquity itself. It attests to the rich diversity of the cultures of antiquity, spanning hundreds of years and encompassing vastly different times, places, and human experiences.

There is one last issue I would like to address in this context and that is the question of relevance. Since its first implementation, ecocriticism has been characterized by a highly political agenda. Often practiced with the goal of presenting a corrective to social and political developments that were seen as root causes of the environmental crisis, ecocriticism is itself a historical phenomenon with specific characteristics. Connected to this is a need increasingly felt by humanities disciplines to position themselves in a competitive academic framework where cost-benefit-calculations gain an ever-increasing priority—and where the humanities are under competitive pressure from the natural and life sciences. In general, we have to accept this situation and make the best of it. Yet, it is my impression that it was also this claim to relevance that led to a marginalization of the premodern and ancient worlds in the Environmental Humanities. Again, “we are right to be wary of straitjacketing ancient Greco-Roman approaches to nature and ethics into the terms of relatively recent debates, not only as historians but also as interested participants in contemporary debates about nature and value” (Holmes 2014, 570). “But,” as Brooke Holmes further argues, “there is a risk, too, that in our enthusiasm for radical historicization we cut ourselves off from a “premodern” past too abruptly, a risk felt all the more acutely as the horizon of interest in the past has moved steadily closer to the present” (ibid.). It is one of the (hopefully) enduring achievements of a humanistic education that the study of worlds far removed from our own has value in itself. While we cannot escape our own realities, we can at least momentarily engage in an understanding of an alien world—in our case, the cultures of antiquity. And although this understanding can only be partial, to project oneself into otherness is an invaluable and highly relevant resource.

It is my hope that this collection will offer an avenue into this other world. Before I briefly summarize the contents of this volume, let me highlight some intersections between ecocriticism, ecology, and classical studies and outline some perspectives for future research.

ECOCRITICISM, ECOLOGY, AND THE CULTURES OF ANTIQUITY

As Alice Jenkins observes in her discussion of Alexander von Humboldt's magisterial multivolume work *Kosmos*: "Writing falling into the modern category "ecocriticism" was being produced at least a century before the invention of that term" (Jenkins 2007, 89). What could be termed "ecocritical thought" is certainly even older, but Humboldt's *Kosmos* is a good starting point for a discussion of the interaction between ancient culture and modern environmental discourse. Already the title of Humboldt's grand oeuvre invites this connection: the ancient Greek notion "kosmos," used by philosophers like Plato or Aristotle, referred to the order of the universe, but there was an even older meaning found in the Homeric epics, namely "ornament" or "adornment" (the root, *kosmeō*, meant "to arrange" or "to set in an order"). In a cultural anthropological sense, the concept of humankind as a species which needs narrative and fiction in order to make meaning of the plethora of sensual perceptions that shape reality is already engrained in Humboldt's use of the term, just like the beauty of natural creation onto which this symbolic order is imposed. In his book, Humboldt traced the interaction of various disciplines, including literary criticism, in humankind's scientific exploration and poetic elevation of nature. To Humboldt, both science and imaginative world-making constitute two corresponding modes of knowledge, whose productive interplay can be outlined in a historical perspective (Jenkins 2007, 90). Although his holistic approach was rooted in Romantic natural philosophy, his conceptualization of nature "as an actual phenomenon" and subjective projection "as it is reflected in the feelings of mankind" (Humboldt 1852 [1847], 417) challenged common epistemologies of his time. Volume II of *Kosmos* looks at the history of nature writing from antiquity up to the end of the eighteenth century. It includes an extensive discussion of ancient texts, which are laid out chronologically and whose aesthetic quality is judged according to whether these texts accord an autonomous presence to nonhuman nature. Distinguishing "between different kinds and degrees of cultural engagement with natural forms, always preferring those which foreground representations of the detailed workings of nonhuman nature" (Jenkins 2007, 92), Humboldt also tends to see the discussed artworks as the product of an entire cultural group. With regard to ancient Greek literature, he writes: "The description of nature in its manifold richness of form, as a distinct branch of poetic literature, was wholly unknown to the Greeks. The landscape appears among them merely as the background of the picture of which human figures constitute the main subject" (Humboldt 1852 [1848], 373). It is hard to neatly integrate Humboldt's statement into contemporary ecocritical perspectives, which have long abandoned the notion that a work can only be counted as

environmental when it explicitly foregrounds nature. Nor is it easy to support Humboldt's claim in close readings of ancient Greek texts, where landscapes and nonhuman presences abound, whose autonomous agency is far outside of human influence. Still, Humboldt's discussion of ancient texts is productive, because of its diachronic and comparative scope as well as the room it gives to a reflection on how historical contexts can shape the imaginative exploration of nonhuman nature—and because it invites an ecocritical self-reflection on how modern readings of ancient texts can be overwrought with aesthetic and moral judgements that are themselves the product of a distinct day and age.

Humboldt was certainly right in proclaiming that a historical deep perspective was part of our cultural imaginations of the environment. As the earlier discussion of “cosmos” shows, our common lexicon of how to talk about the environment is part of a tradition that reaches back to antiquity. “Nature,” “culture,” “climate,” all of these terms and many more stem from ancient Western traditions and have undergone significant changes in a long history of ideas. The geographer Clarence J. Glacken who, like Humboldt has failed to enter the ecocritical canon (both are mentioned but hardly ever read), dealt with this history in his 1967 book *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century*. Like Humboldt's *Kosmos*, Glacken's book focuses on interactions between nature and culture, relating social and natural phenomena to the supposed dichotomy between humankind and nonhuman world. The triad of “the idea of a designed earth, the idea of environmental influence, and the idea of man as a geographical agent” (Glacken 1967, vii) sets the tone of Glacken's discussion of the relationship between cultural interpretation and natural environment. Where Humboldt (whom Glacken recognized as a major influence [12]) had drawn on imaginative literature, Glacken incorporates the whole canon of ancient literature including poetry, geography, historiography, and especially philosophy in order to weave his portrait of ancient cultural thought concerning environmental conditions and change. In this context, Glacken deals with ideas that have become prevalent in modern environmental debates and ecocritical theory: one is the understanding of an anthropogenic impact on the Earth, a second the imagination of “terrestrial unity” (17), the ancient Greek concept of *oikumenē* (most commonly translated as “inhabited world”), in which every human is implicated in and affected by a global ecosystem. To be sure, ancient cultures did not have satellite images or statistical projections that depicted long-term human impacts on soils and climate, but Glacken nevertheless shows how modern notions of environmental change and anthropogenic alterations of the biosphere were already prefigured in ancient times. And although his text was written three decades before Stoermer and Crutzen (2000) came up with their concept of the “Anthropocene,” which holds that humankind has evolved into a meteorological agent

since the Industrial Revolution, it is curious to note that Glacken's discussion ends at the point which Stoermer and Crutzen perceive as a historical watershed, namely around 1800. While there have been attempts to reset this watershed and to move it forward and backward in time, Glacken's study makes clear that from a cultural viewpoint alone, "the epoch of man in the history of nature" (Glacken 1967, 655) is far older. Cultural texts cannot be equated with actual environmental actions or realities, but they nevertheless reflect on and give testament to cultural evolutionary processes that are similar to those found in nature. In tracing the cultural evolution of environmental thinking since ancient times, Glacken suggests that from a cultural viewpoint alone, the "Anthropocene" may have begun during the neolithic revolution when ancient scribal culture created evermore complex symbolic meaning-making systems.

A third idea extensively discussed by Glacken can also be found in contemporary environmental thought, namely that premodern or ancient cultures had lived harmoniously with their natural surroundings (at least when compared to the modern epoch) and that the ancient ecosystem was characterized by a peaceful equilibrium. As Glacken shows the "notion of order" (Glacken 1967, 3) was one of the central philosophical tenets incorporated into modern environmental thinking from antiquity. Like Humboldt, he critically engaged with it, uncovering the unease felt by ancient thinkers when they perceived the gulf between cultural projection and natural reality. Evoking this gulf is indeed one of the central rhetorical strategies of modern environmental discourse. One only needs to think of a key text of modern environmentalism, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). In "A Fable for Tomorrow" that opens Carson's text, the author fuses ancient ways of imagining nature with the description of the consequences of modern toxic pollution. Invoking the ancient pastoral tradition, Carson paints a vivid image of an unchanged nature in harmony with the high degree of biodiversity and the human-built "prosperous farms" (Carson 1999 [1967], 21) that characterize the idyllic countryside. It is against the background of this ecological equilibrium that Carson's text goes on to develop the harrowing imagination of environmental destruction. Probably no other ancient tradition has shaped modern environmentalism stronger than the pastoral and it is no wonder that many early staple texts of the environmental humanities like Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) or Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* (1973) extensively deal with it. As Greg Garrard puts it in his discussion of the field: "No other trope is so deeply entrenched in Western culture, or so deeply problematic for environmentalism. With its roots in the classical period, pastoral has shown itself to be infinitely malleable for differing political ends, and potentially harmful in its tensions and evasions" (Garrard 2012, 37). As Garrard further points out, "Classical pastoral was disposed (. . .) to distort or mystify social

and environmental history, whilst at the same time providing a locus legitimated by tradition, for the feelings of loss and alienation from nature to be produced by the Industrial Revolution” (44). So while it is worthwhile to look at the reception of pastoral thought in modern environmental discourse and to uncover how pastoral ideas still shape that field (and popular images of classical civilizations), it is absolutely vital to further explore the classical texts that created the cultural imaginary still used when talking about the environment.

I do not mean to suggest that modern environmentalism in general holds a Romantic image of antiquity. There has been the opposite tendency of projecting modern environmental problems back in time and to argue that the ancient Greeks and Romans were also faced with severe environmental problems like environmental degradation, anthropogenic deforestation, or proto-industrial pollution.² While these observations certainly hold a grain of truth, they have also been used as a rhetorical strategy to provide contemporary environmental discussions with a (seemingly) historical background and impulse.³ And although it is important to keep a historical deep perspective in mind, it is nonetheless problematic to instrumentalize or to appropriate ancient thought all too uncritically for present concerns. Overall, recent years have seen a more moderate approach to ancient environmental history and ecology. These approaches do not only stress similarities and differences between antiquity and modernity in a comparative manner, but also underline the alterity of ancient times that cannot be neatly integrated into contemporary environmental frameworks (Sonnabend 2005, 119). Within historical ecology, there has been a tendency of avoiding generalizing conclusions with regard to antiquity as a whole and rather to look at distinct epochs and microecologies. For instance, in their book *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (2000), Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell conceptualize what they refer to as a “history of”—in opposition to a “history in”—approach to premodern times that makes use of a dialectic between a “history either of the whole Mediterranean or of an aspect of it to which the whole is an indispensable framework” (Horden and Purcell 2004 [2000], 2). Their ecologizing outlook underlines the interconnection between different human societies (and their respective geographies) and the Mediterranean environment as a whole in a grand sweep that looks at feedback loops and interactional frameworks. And although their study does not avoid the pitfall of generalization altogether and does not explain contingent events, it has certainly helped in reconceptualizing that “most resonant of Mediterranean images—that of the region as the homeland of culture” (27) as one of a history of interactions—both between humankind and nature as well as between different peoples who shaped that culture in processes of communication and transfer. Their approach has paved the way for further studies that incorporate a stronger ecological or scientific impulse into environmental history (Harris

2013). These studies show that the “Mediterranean countries *as a whole* cannot be described as either a ruined or as an unchanged landscape” (Sallares 2007, 23; emphasis original). Recently, this ecological approach was also taken up in the concept of a “Mediterranean Ecocriticism,” which undertakes “an exploration of the Mediterranean world as a natural-cultural compound, trying to connect stories and ideas, natures and discourses about this unique place which is at the same time a geographical site and a territory of imagination” (Iovino 2013, 2). In its insistence on permeability, porosity, and change and its understanding of the Mediterranean as the site of a dynamic encounter between nonhuman world and human meaning-making practices (Past 2016), Mediterranean Ecocriticism could well lead to a renewed engagement with ancient culture from an environmental perspective.

The same is true for literary ecology. The last few years have seen a remarkable increase in classical studies that integrate posthumanist, new materialist, and object-oriented philosophy into their respective agendas. It has often been noted that the study of “ecology” itself is a modern invention (the term was coined by Ernst Haeckel), but that the ancient civilizations nonetheless developed ideas that could be well referred to as ecological: the balance-of-nature concept of Greek and Eastern philosophies (Herren 2002), botany, zoology, Roman natural history, all of these fields helped shape, as Frank Egerton puts it, the “critical mind” of proto-science and philosophy that overcame a more archaic worldview “locked into the mythopoetic mind that interpreted all causation with anthropocentric myths” (Egerton 2012, 1). The story might be a little bit more complex than Egerton’s history of ecological thought suggests, and it has been noted that the development of natural philosophy did not lead to ecocentric positions, but remained part of an anthropocentric framework in which notions of control and mastery (Foxhall, Jones and Forbes 2012, 91) as well as of commodified cultural landscapes played an integral role (Vögler 2000, 251–53; Sallares 2007, 27–34).⁴ Again, generalizations should be avoided, but instead of imposing modern conceptions of ecology all too uncritically on ancient thought, it would be worthwhile to reread the ancient texts from a perspective that reevaluates the presence of the nonhuman as an actant in its own right. Close reading is an indispensable tool in this context and there have been numerous studies that integrate posthumanist methodologies into their respective approaches. The (eco)feminist reading of Aristotelian philosophy and the prominence it gives to “aleatory matter” (Bianchi) the study of how matter shapes the idea of the human body in Greek thought (Holmes), the comparative approach to animal studies (Payne), and the exploration of symbolic ties that connect the human and the nonhuman in the project of a “historical anthrozoology” (Franco 2014, 179)—all of these studies show how common hierarchies between humankind and the natural environment were unsettled in ancient thought and how the ancient thinkers struggled

in reestablishing the outline of a pyramid of coexistence with humankind on top. In innovative and often surprising close readings they also show how the literary ecology of ancient texts brought forth an interplay of epistemology, ontology and ethics that is often only a short step from contemporary posthuman or postmodern philosophy.⁵ Moreover, it brings these approaches closer to the material turn that is currently reshaping the Environmental Humanities (Iovino and Oppermann 2014). As Iovino and Oppermann outline the concept of a Material Ecocriticism: “The agency of matter, the interplay between the human and the nonhuman in a field of distributed effectuality and of in-built material-discursive dynamics, are concepts that influence deeply the ideas of narrativity and text. If matter is agentic,” they continue, “every material configuration (. . .) can be the object of a critical analysis aimed at discovering its stories, its material and discursive interplays” (Iovino and Oppermann 2012, 79).⁶ This does entail a focus on how nonhuman matter is presented in a text but also in what way matter brings forth “configurations of meaning” and “[enters] with human lives into a field of co-emerging interactions” (ibid.). The topic of how ancient authors dealt with these interactions in their respective texts could be a fruitful area of research that would lead to further interdisciplinary exchange between classical studies and modern environmental philosophy. By starting from a close reading of the intricate rhetorical and linguistic structures of the ancient texts themselves, this approach cannot only evade the danger of replicating modern environmental concepts, but could uncover the ancient discursive modes of literary ecology. This will help in highlighting lines of continuation that shape humanistic thinking today; it will also bring to light a posthuman antiquity whose signs we only begin to understand.

The present volume is only a first step into this direction. It invites new readings of ancient texts and a reconsideration of the traditions that shape our Environmental Humanities. To be sure, our volume only deals with a handful of examples and there is much more to discover. The rich cultural heritage of ancient cultures and civilizations outside of Greek or Roman cultural traditions is a desiderate we are painfully aware of. Nonetheless, by incorporating Latin and Ancient Greek into the linguistic field of ecocriticism, the volume not only broadens ecocriticism’s environmental semantics, but also its geographic and chronological scope.⁷

CONTENTS OF THIS VOLUME

Taken together, the essays in this collection indicate the wide range of sources, themes, and theoretical approaches in the rapidly developing field of the Environmental Humanities as well as the way in which the cultures of

antiquity relate to our ecocritical debates in shaping traditions and offering new avenues into thinking about culture-nature interactions.

The first part of the volume, "Environmental (Hi)stories: Negotiating Human-Nature Interactions" looks at three examples of dealing with nonhuman surroundings in antiquity and their discursive exploration in landscape planning and ancient literature. In his opening essay "Environmental Mosaics Natural and Imposed," J. Donald Hughes uses the ancient art form of mosaic as a metaphor for analyzing patterns of land use organization from antiquity to the present. As he shows, the desire for order led to the imposition of artificial schemes of organization on the natural landscape. In this way, landscape mosaics embody the interpenetration of nature and culture, and Hughes discusses different examples with either harmful or beneficial effects on the biosphere. He illustrates how the Japanese *satoyama* as an ancient landscape mosaic may serve as an organizing principle for sustainable habitation. Justine Walter's essay "Poseidon's Wrath and the End of Helike: Notions about the Anthropogenic Character of Disasters in Antiquity" looks at the destruction of the Greek polis Helike in 373 BCE and traces its aftermath. Walter uses Helike as a case study for analyzing the mechanisms of perception, interpretation, and representation of natural hazards within their historical context. Thereby, she uncovers the cultural factors that contributed to the interpretation of an extreme natural event as a major disaster and how these interpretations, in turn, led to both risk adjustment and victimization. This also serves to outline parallels with modern notions of the anthropogenic character of extreme natural events. Aneta Kliszcz and Joanna Komorowska revisit a popular *topos* in Roman literature, namely that of the forest, in their article "Glades of Dread: Ecology and Aesthetics of *loca horrida*." Looking at various examples from the Roman literary tradition, Kliszcz and Komorowska discuss the aesthetic of the forest, situated at the crossroads of culturally coded polarities: between freedom and constraint, light and darkness, culture and nature. Focusing on the interactions between the untamed nature of the forest and Roman civilization in texts like Seneca's *Thebaid*, Kliszcz and Komorowska examine the underlying preconceptions of the natural in literary depictions of forests as well as the subversive potential they could entail.

Part Two, "Close Readings: Literary Ecologies and the More-than-Human World," offers four essays that underline the agentic role and the prominent place of the nonhuman in ancient literature. In "Eroticised Environments: Ancient Greek Natural Philosophy and the Roots of Erotic Ecocritical Contemplation," Thomas Sharkie and Marguerite Johnson examine the centrality of Eros to presocratic natural philosophy and the presocratic conceptualization of the composition and origin of matter and the universe. By bringing Hesiod and Aratus together with the theories of modern environmental

philosophers like Gernot Böhme, Sharkie and Johnson demonstrate the environmental quality of erotic experience. As they argue, the characterization of nature as erotic suggests a deep connection to the natural world, offering a platform from which new considerations of the concept of “human” and the “other” can be made. In “Interspecies Ethics and Collaborative Survival in Lucretius,” Richard Hutchins presents an insightful reading of the so-called “animal contract” in Book Five of the Roman Epicurean’s didactic poem. Hutchins illustrates how the human-animal codwelling as described in Lucretius’ text creates community through reciprocal giving and lays the groundwork for a relational interspecies ethics. As Hutchins shows, the animal contract in Lucretius offers a nonanthropocentric outlook that does not evade epistemological violence altogether, but that is highly innovative in its focus on reciprocity and its evocation of a horizontal framework. In his essay “The Ecological Highway: Environmental Ekphrasis in Statius, *Silvae* 4.3,” Christopher Chinn deals with the discursive realism of Statius’ poem about the road along the coast from Sinuessa to Puteoli. Chinn connects traditional interpretations of the poem, which see it as praise of the emperor Domitian (not least for exerting of control over nature through the highway construction project), with an environmental perspective that also entails critique and subversion. Chinn concludes that the ambiguity inherent in Statius’ environmental ekphrasis is not so much a trope of epideictic praise; rather it is to be seen as a reflection on the confluence of politics, ethics, and interest in nature. Vittoria Prencipe revisits ancient literature and its take on human-nature interaction in “Impervious Nature as a Path to Virtue: Cato in the Ninth Book of *Bellum Civile*.” Prencipe lays out how nature was presented with different features as well as different roles in ancient times: in ethics, nature was often conceptualized as a “guide” for human beings which helped them fulfil their destiny. In her close reading of Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, Prencipe demonstrates how Cato chooses to cross the Libyan desert in order to attain *virtus*. While this may seem like an anthropocentric impulse, Prencipe makes clear that nature has to be seen as an independent agent in this context.

“Green Genres’: The Pastoral and Georgic Tradition” includes three essays that explore two ancient literary genres that have lastingly shaped environmental thinking. In “The Environmental Humanities and the Pastoral Tradition,” Terry Gifford surveys the recent reception of this ancient genre. Gifford’s essay traces the sources of unease about the pastoral tradition in the emergence of the environmental humanities and identifies misunderstandings about the complexities in the tradition’s founding texts in the ancient world. Gifford suggests that many ecocritical explorations of pastoral derive entirely from reception rather than a reading of the founding texts. He discusses two of the foundational texts of the environmental humanities, namely Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden* and Raymond Williams’ *The Country and the City*

and sketches out their influence on North-American and British ecocriticism respectively, before turning to a transnational take on the genre. Laura Sayre's essay "'How/to make fields fertile': Ecocritical Lessons from the History of Virgil's *Georgics* in Translation" provides an overview of the critical reception of the georgic across history, paying particular attention to translations into English of Virgil's poem and to the discussions of the georgic associated with those translations. Sayre argues that the translation history of the *Georgics* offers another means of assessing the impact of the georgic tradition, one that is necessarily directly engaged with the classical model and yet at the same time bridges scholarly and popular interest in the form. Tracing this history from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century, she opens up a new ecocritical space for interpreting the relationship between culture and agriculture, poet and farmer, and for assessing the continued attention to and interest in the georgic as a form of practical and literary engagement with the natural world, from ecological restoration to urban farming and the locavore memoir. In their essay "*Nec provident futuro tempore, sed quasi plane in diem vivant*—Sustainable Business in Columella's *De Re Rustica*?," Lars Keßler and Konrad Ott discuss patterns of sustainable thought in Columella's eloquent compendium on how to work the land. Comparing selected modern sustainability concepts with Columella's text, Keßler and Ott adapt a comparative approach that highlights similarities as well as differences between ancient and modern approaches to "sustainable" development in agriculture. Although Columella was not motivated by ecological or sustainable motives, giving preponderance to economic ones, his belief in the regenerative potential of the soil opened up new avenues in farming that strike a powerful chord today.

"Classical Reception: Presence, Absence, and the Afterlives of Ancient Culture" offers four essays that examine different examples of the reception of ancient texts and traditions throughout the centuries and assesses their respective environmental outlook. Anna Banks' "The Myth of Rhiannon: An Ecofeminist Perspective" puts focus on the ways the Welsh horse deity Rhiannon's story, first recorded in the medieval texts known as *The Mabinogion*, emerged in the oral storytelling tradition and how this story still speaks to us. Banks' reading considers the ancient context in which the stories of *The Mabinogion* evolved and their relevance in a contemporary posthumanist environment. She recasts the stories through a contemporary ecofeminist reading that explores the agency and subjectivity of Rhiannon whose shape-shifting, role-blending performances held both spiritual and political meaning to audiences a thousand years ago. Lucy Mercer's and Laurence Grove's essay on "Emblems and Antiquity: An Exploration of Speculative Emblematics" proposes a speculative reading methodology applied to emblems. Focusing on how the remnants of antiquity are buried within medieval emblems, notably those in Andrea Alciato's once widely popular book the *Emblematum*

Liber, Mercer and Grove unearth the form's "ecological poetics." Drawing on speculative realist philosophies of Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, and Jane Bennett, they show how the allegorical mode of thinking as found in the *Emblematum Liber* is not only perpetuated by the elements of antiquity, but also that these memories are generated to form an environmental memory of the past. My own essay "The Sustainability of Texts: Transcultural Ecology and Classical Reception" uses the concept of "sustainability" in a metaphorical way to convey the idea that culture can be seen as a discursive force field whose contents and media can be (re-)activated based on present concerns. Starting from a functional approach to the study of literature, the essay fuses cultural ecology and classical reception studies. It uses the cultural reception of ancient texts as an example of a sustainable cultural process in which a past artifact is stored and finally reactivated through processes of cultural transfer and where the interaction with a medium of the cultural memory can spark new creative work. The reading of various textual examples highlights the transcultural quality of the classical tradition and argues that our current discussions of environmental issues and sustainable practice can benefit from a renewed sense of the long cultural history of our species, whose ancient cultural sign systems can help in the ethical negotiation of our present and future natures. Jingcheng Xu's essay on "Daoist Spiritual Ecology in the 'Anthropocene'" brings this volume to a close and argues for the integration of ancient Eastern philosophies into contemporary ecocriticism. Discussing the anthropocentrism inherent to the "Anthropocene," Jingcheng Xu reminds us that ancient Chinese philosophers have offered us many solutions to address environmental problems and to raise environmental awareness. He argues that Daoism as a cosmological and nonanthropocentric environmental ethics should be reactivated and integrated in our environmental philosophies. The canonical *Dao de jing* of Laozi is thereby discussed in detail as a text that did not only evolve from a time of crisis in ancient China, but also as a text that is highly relevant—despite different cultural registers and frameworks—to our own day and age.

The relevance and topicality of the main themes and subjects of our volume is also reflected on in the respective response essays by Hannes Bergthaller, Katharina Donn, Roman Bartosch, and Kate Rigby. Taken together, these essays provide innovative readings of the individual parts of the volume and use them as starting points for a meditation on interdisciplinary thinking in the "Anthropocene," literary ethics and chronotopes, as well as the pitfalls of Romanticist classical reception and its chances for future Environmental Humanities. The response essays function as "discursive hinges," providing connecting corridors and links between the different parts of the book and between the contents of the volume and the wider ecocritical (or historical) frameworks in which it is situated. Brooke Holmes' foreword and Serenella

Iovino's afterword sketch out these frameworks from two angles that resonate all throughout the volume: on the one hand, the insistence on the alterity of ancient concepts and, on the other, the illustration of the connecting patterns that still resonate so strongly in our own day and age. The book is an invitation to retrace the steps that connect us to ancient pasts, to reflect on the temporal and spatial borders in-between; we may not be able to transcend them, for better or worse, but we may be able to ponder anew the disciplinary borders that demarcate our respective scholarly frameworks. Like the Environmental Humanities themselves, the book is also an invitation to collaborate and think across disciplines—it shows how traditions, stories, and history have shaped our ideas of, and hence our practical engagement with, the more-than-human world.

NOTES

1. Cf. Garrard 2014; Hiltner 2014; Zapf 2016b; forthcoming: Heise and Christensen 2016.

2. A small selection of studies dealing with ancient environmental problems must suffice at this point: Fedeli 1990; Hughes 1975 and 1994; Longo 1988; Meiggs 1982; Vögler 1997; Weeber 1990.

3. For a critical discussion cf. Sonnabend 2005, 118–19.

4. The relationship between concepts of the natural world and “civilization” as well as its influence on notions of rulership, control and imperial ambition has been a prominent focus of environmental history. Cf. Weeber 1990, 156; Vögler 2000, 249; Sonnabend 2005, 223–26.

5. Cf. Holmes 2012 on how Gilles Deleuze, one of the philosophical forethinkers of posthumanism, was influenced by Lucretius.

6. Although it does not include a discussion of the new materialisms, Mark Bradley's edited volume on pollution, dirt theory and the city of Rome (2012) shows certain parallels to *Material Ecocriticism's* agenda.

7. Cf. for a critique of ecocriticism's monolingualism and Western focus Heise 2015 [2006], 173.