

An Essay on Ecocriticism in “the Century of Restoring the Earth”

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A powerful admonition: ecocritics ... need contact not just with literature and not just with each other, but with the physical world.

Scott Slovic

The larger system is the biosphere, and the subsystem is the economy. The economy is geared for growth...whereas the parent system doesn't grow. It remains the same size. So as the economy grows...it encroaches upon the biosphere, and this is the fundamental cost...

Herman Daly

I went to the land of sagebrush, towering pine trees, and clear blue skies, in 2010, to spend my sabbatical year in the English Department at the University of Nevada, Reno, which has the major graduate program in the U.S. devoted to Literature and Environment.¹ In the future, when I look back to this year, I will remember it as a meaningful time that gave me a unique opportunity to explore the dedicated literary activities of American ecocritics in saving the planet from ongoing environmental injustices. I will also remember it as the time when the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded and blighted the Earth, devastating the Gulf of Mexico.

Paradoxes akin to my own experience are frequently recast in American environmental writing: on the one hand, an attitude of dominion over the land, and on the other, the strong attitude of the committed writers and the

1 The program, offering both MA and PhD degrees in English with an emphasis in Literature and Environment, was established in 1996. See <http://www.unr.edu/cla/lande/main.html>

literary establishment to save the land from any further attempts to devour it; on the one hand, the forces of a growth-based economy leading to deepening unsustainability in local environments, and on the other, tremendous generation of creative writing and literary criticism advocating, in the words of Aldo Leopold, “living on a piece of land without spoiling it.” The net result, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, was the creation of a brand new field of literary study, spearheaded by American scholars, which they preferred to call “ecocriticism.”² For American ecocritics, “[n]othing could be more salutary at [that] stage than a little healthy contempt for a plethora of material blessings.”³

Ecocriticism has been gaining increasing recognition around the world. Many will agree that this is a milestone in the history of literary studies, for the growing numbers of literary scholars stepping into this interdisciplinary field are making an attempt to become self-taught in at least some aspects of environmental sciences. Their aim is to forge a change in the apocalyptic direction of the world and foster “a culture of conservation”⁴ that will relearn the moral benefits rather than the material benefits of a world in decline. The movement is an *exciting* one for those scholars in the English-speaking world and in the West already exposed to and acquainted with its basic tenets, but the movement is a *challenging* one for international scholars who are just beginning to find their way into the field, for their self-appointed entry into the field means they need to master a whole array of studies from the movement’s first, second, and third “waves”⁵ during its first three decades.

In the U.S., where the movement first emerged, some giant steps have been taken over the past two decades: early or neglected environmental texts and writers have been rediscovered⁶; canonical literatures have been reexamined

2 The field’s name, ecocriticism, coined by William Rueckert in his “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in 1978, has at present assumed other names, such as environmental literary criticism and green studies.

3 I borrow these words from Aldo Leopold’s “Foreword” to *A Sand County Almanac* (xix).

4 See Scott Russell Sanders’s “A Conservationist Manifesto,” in the book that bears the same title, for references to “a culture of conservation” (211-19).

5 For a discussion of first and second wave ecocriticism, see Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (17-28). For Scott Slovic’s overview of the field’s newest developments, see his essay, “The Third Wave of Ecocriticism: North American Reflections on the Current Phase of the Discipline” (4-10).

6 See Cheryll Glotfelty’s comparison of the evolving stages of ecocriticism to feminist criticism in “Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis” (xxii-xxiv).

from an environmental perspective; the sense of place in literary texts, neglected for centuries, has successfully been integrated into critical analysis; anthologies of all sorts in the area of place-based education have been compiled for a green pedagogical renaissance; various approaches to the study of physical place in literary texts have been established; and edited theory and praxis volumes have filled entire bookshelves. This literary activism has led to some on-the-ground activism, which in turn has led to important conservation accomplishments; various environmental organizations and nature centers have been founded following the earlier examples.⁷ And, to continue these advancements, a number of post-graduate programs at universities have been established. In the rest of the world, where the movement is just emerging, all this pioneering work that has already been done for the past two decades is creating a sense of urgency to catch up with the movement's many accomplishments. But the sense of urgency is not only to catch up with the western accomplishments, but also to discover unique schools of ecocriticism drawing ideas from other cultures.

In this regard, we, the literary scholars in Turkey (and elsewhere in the world), need to discover how our ecocritical approaches will be different from and also complement the already existing ecocriticisms of the western world. Perhaps, the first challenge would be to figure out why ecocriticism came late to Turkey or to other parts of the world.

Today, for the question what fueled the emergence of ecocriticism as a new field of study in the U.S., one comes across a number of summarizing efforts for "its institutional formation"⁸ with the front-page environmental problems at their base. But today what is less voiced is that the environmental problems leading to such a formation were only a by-product of a growth economy that created an excess of consumerism and a wasteful kind of living which has permeated American life in the past several decades—a life style that went on until 2008 when global capitalism came to a crisis (although many certainly continue to live as if the current economic crisis has no connection

7 See the chart in Daniel J. Philippon's *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement*, for the evolution of early environmental organizations (3).

8 See the list of reference for these summarizing attempts in Ursula Heise's "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism" in *PMLA* 121.2 (March 2006): 504-05. In this essay, Heise conceptualizes the delay of the "academic interest" in environmentalism to "the development of literary theory [under the influence of mostly French philosophies of language] between the late 1960s and the early 1990s."

to excessive consumerism). In the words of James Gustave Speth, “[f]or all the material blessings economic progress has provided, for all the disease and destitution avoided, for all the glories that shine in the best of our civilization, the costs to the natural world, the costs to the glories of nature, have been huge and must be counted in the balance as tragic loss” (1). In the 1980s when literary scholars started paying attention to nature’s degradation, the social order based on the systematic fostering of consumption in a growth economy (which, according to Herman Daly, “has become uneconomic”⁹) was going full force. So, it seems to me that what was more alarming for the American literary scholars, who would soon create the “literary and political renaissance,”¹⁰ was not, perhaps, the environmental problems, per se, but the growing consumerism that peaked in the 1980s, during the Reagan years. Thus, various individuals and groups consciously sought an alternative lifestyle, such as the “simple living” that American nature writers in the Thoreauvian tradition had long been articulating. One only needs to remember, for example, Alan Durning’s *How Much is Enough: The Consumer Society and the Future of the Earth*, published in 1992, the same year the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was founded, and Donald Worster’s prophetic call for “a new post-materialist economics” (219) in *The Wealth of Nature*, published in 1993. It was around this same time that some radical economists started deconstructing neoclassical economics and promoting more forcefully for the need to forge a new economy based on natural systems, on sustainability, on green businesses in service to the environment, to the communities, and to future generations; Daly, the founding father of ecological economics, extensively explained his idea of an alternative economy—a steady-state economy that takes the carrying capacity of the environment into account—in his *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development* (1996), the publication of which coincided with *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. As a matter of fact, during these early years American ecocritics, with their publications, were giving implicit support to the emerging field of “ecological economics” that was fueled by the publication of Daly’s *Steady-State Economics* in 1977. I think this explains more fully the rise of interest

9 See Herman Daly, “A Steady-state Economy,” Sustainable Development Commission, UK April 24, 2008, <<http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=775>>. Daly in this work argues that “[e]cological economists have offered empirical evidence that growth is already uneconomic in high consumption countries.”

10 I borrow the phrase from John Tallmadge in “Foreword” to *Teaching North American Environmental Literature* (2).

and the unprecedented enthusiasm in American nature writing and various environmental texts that lay a heavy emphasis on “simple living,” fueling the emergence of ecocriticism—a field of study whose founders may not have guessed, at the time, the path of its progression and expansion in the following decades. Now, they might also provide the foundation for a reorganization of American economic thought.¹¹

During the years when ecocriticism started emerging in the U.S., environmental problems were likewise front page news in Turkey: Chernobyl had exploded in Ukraine with serious impact on our Black Sea coastal areas; wetlands spanning an area as large as the Marmara Sea were being drained; wide expanses of woodlands were being clear-cut across the country, leading to increased soil erosion; the sea ecosystems were collapsing due to harmful fishing methods, and the seas were becoming “cross” in the words of our Yaşar Kemal.¹² There were ongoing announcements on public radio and two or three TV channels, saying elderly people should not go outdoors as air pollution was a life-threatening health hazard. Our demoiselle and eurasian cranes, legendary birds of Turkish cultural and literary imagination that once came in flocks of thousands, had disappeared from our skies; our cities lacked proper garbage disposal methods; we could not swim in our once crystal clear seas due to dumping of waste in the waters ... the list can go on endlessly. And yet, despite these environmental ills that permeated every corner of the country, literary scholars in Turkey were not yet showing an interest in the ecocritical movement that was emerging in the U.S. because consumerism, which fostered the ecocritical movement in the U.S., was not yet a fact of life in Turkey: Turks, during these years—apart from a small minority—did not have a wasteful style of living; consumerism had not been welcomed at our doors; we did not yet have huge glittering shopping malls in every corner. Turkey was unaware of ecocriticism in these early years because Turkey was not a part of the global consumerist culture yet; the economic policies had not yet placed emphasis on consumption. This is not the case anymore: Turks, within two-decades, have created a systematic culture of consumption and have now embraced a wasteful style of living.

11 My words here echo Barry Lopez’s statement: “I suppose this is a conceit, but I believe this area of writing will not only one day produce a major and lasting body of American literature, but that it might also provide the foundation for a reorganization of American political thought.” See Lopez, “On Nature” (297).

12 The reference is to Yaşar Kemal’s novel, *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* (1978), in which one of the central characters says, “the seas became cross” because of massive dolphin harvesting in the Turkish coastal waters.

Turkish economic policies began to change in the late 1980s with Turgut Özal¹³—a fan of American consumerism. As prime minister, he radically changed the economy of Turkey by the privatization of many state enterprises. When he passed away in 1993, a year after ASLE was founded, the shift from state-dominated to privatized economy had already been established, and Özal’s dream of transforming Turkey into a “little America” had started showing its first signs. The effects of the policies he initiated for the advancement of modern capitalism are full force now, and our literary scholars are alarmed about the new set of values afflicting more people every day. I think this might be the reason why ecocriticism is arriving in Turkey. An umbilical cord exists between ecocriticism and the growth economy; thus, now we, Turkish ecocritics, need the wisdom of a “steady-state economics.”

Ecocriticism is, in fact, arriving in Turkey, but basic questions remain: how is the literary scholar just stepping into the field of ecocriticism going to bridge the gap with the western ecocritical world that has gone through its first and second waves and is currently trying to define its third wave? How are the academics in our country going to speedily produce the pedagogical anthologies to be taught in all educational levels in the school system? How are we to spread ecocriticism urgently in an expanding economy, so that ensuing academic activities and publications hopefully will affect decision makers, local land managers, natural resource managers, local governments, governmental agencies and NGOs, in their adoption of environmentally secure policies for the greening of entire landscapes?

For me, one of the most basic needs is to convey the richness of ecocritical practices to as many Turkish literary scholars as possible so that an army of dedicated ecocritics will embrace all phases of the movement and begin offering, in their home institutions, literature and environment classes both at the graduate and undergraduate levels, guiding future ecocritics. For this very reason I went to Reno, to spend my sabbatical as a participant in UNR’s Literature and Environment Program. My goal was clear: I was going to get a first-hand experience of this major program and also get a good chance to audit the prominent ecocritic Scott Slovic’s ENG 745 “Ecocriticism and Theory” graduate class; I was going to update myself on current trends and also discover how the professor was guiding young ecocritics in their learning processes and various projects. Although I’d been teaching and publishing on American nature

13 Turgut Özal (1927–1993), Turkish prime minister and the eighth President of Turkey, is known as the leader who procured the transformation from state-dominated to privatized economy; capitalism.

writers for the past several years, I knew that breathing this air would make a tremendous difference; I needed all the input and recharging I could get in a few months time so that I could try to put this unique experience into words.

A number of definitions exist for the term “ecocriticism”; let me attempt one for the “ecocritic”: my impression is that ecocritics are literary scholars who feel kinship with nature (whether they admit this or not), and are determined to transfer, through their writing, teaching endeavors, and activities, this life-concern, as well as the issues they feel compelled to speak about, to as many people as possible, with whatever literary, artistic, aesthetic, and rhetorical means available, for deep down they feel the ultimate needs of the earth. Earlier in his career, in his inspiring essay on “Ecocriticism: Storytelling, Values, Communication, Contact,” Professor Slovic listed several ideas/strategies that he thought were “essential for ecocritics to keep in mind, essential to the vitality and meaningfulness of what we’re doing.”¹⁴ Narrating a significant moment in his encounter with the Japanese philosopher Masanobu Fukuoka in 1994, Slovic stated: “... those of us who work at universities might be able to contribute to society’s understanding of nature if we remember to pay attention to nature itself, if we don’t lose ourselves in lectures, theories, texts, laboratories... [E]cocritics need contact not just with literature and not just with each other, but with the physical world.” I find this to be significant advice, for, after all, my understanding of ecocriticism is that the field is helping to restore the world into the one we were born into (not more than half a century ago).

Due to spatial constraints, my experience of “contact” in ENG 745¹⁵ is expressed here in compressed form in the light of my observations – a meaningful span of time for myself, for the rest of the international scholars and the nine graduate students, who the professor in his first class teaching urged to “contribute to the cutting-edge of the discipline of ecocriticism.”

The first thing I explored in “Ecocriticism and Theory” class was that the class contents had embraced Professor Slovic’s “third wave” definition of the movement, a new wave of ecocriticism “which recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries; this third wave explores all facets of human experience from an environmental viewpoint.”¹⁶ In

14 See Slovic, *Going Away to Think* (27-30).

15 The course syllabus, along with 30 essays by prominent ecocritics (provided as electronic reserves), listed 17 books, many of which were bringing to the forefront the need for this very “contact” with the physical world.

16 See “Guest editors’ Introduction: The Shoulders We Stand On,” in *MELUS* 34.2 (2009)

other words, the class contents embraced both the first and the second waves of the movement and was reaching out into a third wave. Professor Slovic, in addition to nine MA and PhD students taking his class, had invited seven international scholars to audit his class. The first day of his class, he'd provided a nine-page-long syllabus and requested that the international auditing group keep up with the reading assignments and contribute to the class discussions. The course description stated:

This graduate seminar will provide students with a broad foundation in one of the avant-garde movements in contemporary literary studies. Major focuses of the course will be new theories of place (including globalist and neo-bioregionalist thinking); comparatist approaches (cross-cultural, cross-ethnic); social and environmental justice in relation to ecocriticism; ecocritical approaches to visual culture and popular culture; ideas of animality; new approaches to gender and the body; and the relationship between ecocriticism and environmental aesthetics.

The first class meeting was held on January 19th; this day coincided with the anniversary of an important environmental disaster: on this day, the North Cape spill, which took place off the coast of Rhode Island in 1996, had released an estimated 828,000 gallons of home heating oil into the coastal waters and had caused enormous destruction to the physical environment. In this first meeting, the class discussed various definitions of ecocriticism, which led me to think what an important literary historical moment arose when Professor Cheryll Glotfelty defined ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.”¹⁷ During the class meeting, students discussed various Western Literature Association position papers from the mid-1990s, as well as PMLA letters that emphasized not only theoretical aspects of the field, but its relevance to practical dimensions of human experience, such as national borders, economics, and environmental and social justice.

The second class was held on January 26th, three days after the Port Arthur oil spill in the Sabine-Neches Waterway at Port Arthur, Texas. On this date, two vessels [the oil tanker *Eagle Otome* and a barge being pushed by the towboat *Dixie Vengeance*] collided, and 462,000 gallons of crude oil escaped through a hole in

for Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic's definition of third wave ecocriticism (6-7).

17 See Glotfelty, “Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis” in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (xviii).

the side of the tanker. So it was meaningful to talk about a “metacritical grounding of ecocriticism” in reference to many essays in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996). Professor Glotfelty’s “Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” and other essays, in this groundbreaking book, the book that created a turn in the academic interests of numerous literary scholars including mine, was now influencing the MA and PhD students. During the three-and-a-half-hour class, Professor Slovic gave particular emphasis to Timothy Morton’s essay “Introduction: Toward a Theory of Ecological Criticism,” published in his *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), to see “whether we have a viable new form of ecocriticism developing,”¹⁸ which led me to think that we Turkish ecocritics need to master the “old” ones urgently so that we can appreciate the new forms that seem to be emerging.

The third class was held on February 2nd; this was the anniversary of the 2007 oil pipeline spill in Rusk County in northern Wisconsin, a major environmental disaster in state history that contaminated the local waters of this bioregion—the accident resulted in the release of 176,000 gallons of Canadian crude oil. This class hour brought the discussion of “new applications of bioregional thinking.” The class discussed Tom Lynch’s *Xerophilia*, particularly his view of bioregionalism, one that “promotes the maintenance of at least some degree of local self-reliance against increasing dependence upon inter-regional and global trade.”¹⁹ The class also put some thought into the question in the syllabus, “Is it still appropriate to think in terms of specific places in the age of globalization?” A first group of students presented position papers on experimental ecocritical readings of Thoreau’s *Walden*, the only American nature writing text to date that has been translated into Turkish. While listening to the position papers and knowing the enormous influence of American nature writing on the emergence of ecocriticism, I kept thinking of some ways in which at least a number of important nature writing texts could be translated into Turkish. I also thought about the ways in which the important UNR English Department course offering on nonfiction writing that focuses on nature writing could be initiated in our literature departments as well.

When the class met for the fourth time on February 9th, China Investment Corp, the world’s richest sovereign wealth fund, was revealing that it is the No. #4 investor in the US Oil Fund. In this class session, our topics were deterritorialization, eco-cosmopolitanism, and the discourse of globalization.

18 These words are from Professor Slovic’s class syllabus.

19 See Tom Lynch, *Xerophilia* (19).

The class discussed Ursula Heise's *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008), especially her emphasis on the "task of ecocriticism with a cosmopolitan perspective" (62).²⁰ The limitations as well as rewards of the imagination of the global community [as opposed to the commitment to the local community] in understanding the concept of place came to the fore. We all had a clear understanding of what it means to "think globally" and concluded "we need new scholarly terminology and paradigms in order to understand *global interconnectedness*."²¹

The fifth class was held on February 16th, three days after the impressive movement, Hands Across the Sand, the largest gathering in the history of Florida, to oppose offshore oil drilling. Thousands of Floridians, representing 60 towns and cities and over 90 beaches had joined hands to protect their coastal economies, oceans, marine wildlife, and fishing industry, and to cherish clean energy and renewables. On this day, the class talked about *Arab/American: Landscape, Culture, and Cuisine in Two Great Deserts* (2008), the important work of Gary Paul Nabhan, the ethnobotanist committed to recovering native food traditions²² and to validating local knowledge, with a close look at postcolonial and comparatist approaches to ecocriticism. A second group of students presented position papers on Nabhan's book. During the class hour, students also discussed Patrick D. Murphy's influential essay, "Refining through Redefining Our Sensibilities: Nature-Oriented Literature as an International and Multicultural Movement" in his *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature* (2000), a book that much contributed to the expansion of the field of ecocriticism. The questions to tackle were: "What are the opportunities and pitfalls of cross-cultural comparison? Is comparative ecocriticism an appropriate response to our growing awareness of global citizenship?"

The sixth class was held on February 23rd. This was the anniversary of the 1980 oil tanker explosion off the island of Pilos, Greece, that had caused a 37-million-gallon spill. On this day, the class discussed the essays in the collection *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*

20 In Professor Heise's book, see especially the chapter, "From the Blue Planet to Google Earth: Environmentalism, Ecocriticism, and the Imagination of the Global" (17-67).

21 I borrow the words from Professor Slovic's class syllabus.

22 Gary Paul Nabhan, during a recent talk in Wisconsin, stated that "despite economic downturn, there is a resurgence of healthy food farming, and that local food sales have had rapid growth even while the globalized economy has been collapsing." September 28, 2010.

(2005),²³ “with a focus on the theorizing of postcolonial ecocriticism.” On this day, we learned how colonial presence created violence in the landscapes and changed the environments in the Caribbean. Many writings related to the postcolonial ecocritical dialogue came to the fore, including Rob Nixon’s essay “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism.”²⁴ During this class meeting, Professor Erin D. James joined us and clarified why Caribbean literature is important for post-colonial scholars. She stated that there is no place on earth altered as much as the Caribbean, and that post-colonial themes are very much environmental.

The class met for the seventh time on March 2nd, the anniversary of the 1982 oil disaster in Uzbekistan, known as the largest inland oil disaster in history, which caused 88 million gallons of oil to spill from an oil well at Fergana Valley. On this day, the class discussed the future of ecocriticism, with a focus on Lawrence Buell’s *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005). Buell’s writing on the impact that environmental justice movement had on environmental criticism led me to think of the numerous past environmental injustices in Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan, and a wishful thought that the future of environmental criticism will see a great deal of literary activism from this vast area as well. During this class meeting, the students also explored Buell’s concept of the ecocritical movement as a sequence of first and second waves and agreed with his concept of the field as a “palimpsest” (consisting of overlapping phases) rather than a strictly consecutive sequence of one wave followed by another.

The eighth class was held on March 9th, when the 30,000 Ecuadorians were suffering because of Chevron’s massive contamination, the dumping of billions of gallons of wastewater from oil operations into the rainforest and the abandoning of nearly 1,000 open, unlined pits containing crude oil. During this class meeting, the students began discussing social justice, environmental justice, and ethnicity as ecocritical paradigms. The major text of this week was *The Environmental Justice Reader* (2002),²⁵ published six years after *The Ecocriticism Reader*. The class discussed environmental justice as the area of study that minority [and also low-income] communities should not be exposed to environmental hazards and

23 Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey et al., eds. *Caribbean Literature and the Environment* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2005).

24 For Nixon’s essay, see the collection edited by Ania Loomba et al., *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005) 233-51.

25 Joni Adamson et al., eds. *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics & Pedagogy* (Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2002).

that they should take part in the decisions affecting their own environments; discussions led to the important conclusion that environmental justice proposes an ethic of restraint, which extends not only to the land, but also to the world's waters. On this day, a third group of students presented position papers on Linda Hogan's novel, *People of the Whale* (2008).

Following the Spring Break, the class met on March 23rd, one day earlier to the anniversary of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill that occurred in Prince William Sound, Alaska in 1989, and spilled hundreds of thousands of barrels of crude oil. The event is considered to be one of the most devastating environmental disasters, and various studies have found that ethnic groups like Native Alaskans were the most devastated of all groups affected by the spill. On this day, the class discussed the contents of the special issue (Summer 2009) of *MELUS: Multi-ethnic Literature of the United States*, the issue devoted to ethnicity and ecocriticism. Essays by T. V. Reed and Annette Kolodny were at the forefront during the class meeting. A central question to tackle for this class meeting was "How might the focus on ethnicity help ecocritics to tease out new meanings from literature (and other texts) and contribute in new ways to practical discussions of environment and society."²⁶

The following class meeting was on March 30th. On this class day, President Obama announced plans to open up vast new areas to offshore oil drilling. Only three weeks before the burning images of Deepwater Horizon oil rig appeared in the news, the class discussed the collection *Ecosee: Image, Rhetoric, Nature* (2009),²⁷ an important book on visual rhetoric that wants us to be aware of the power of images in the ongoing domination of nature. The class meeting focused on the contribution of rhetorical analysis studies to ecocriticism. Among other issues connected to analyzing a text rhetorically, W. J. T. Mitchell's 1994 book *Picture Theory* came to the fore and helped clarify the connections between the role of the visual image and environmentalism. I much admired the cover design of *Ecosee*: the blue planet a blue human-eye-pupil. I saw that this blue-eye of the book was not only seeing the environments from a Western perspective, but also opening up fresh ideas to see the environments on a global scale. The class also considered Al Gore's book *An Inconvenient Truth*,²⁸ filled with visual

26 From the class syllabus.

27 Sidney I. Dobrin and Sean Morey, eds. *Ecosee: Image, Rhetoric, Nature* (Albany: SUNY P, 2009).

28 Al Gore states, "the truth about the climate crisis is an inconvenient one that means we are going to have to change the way we live our lives" (284).

images of the worsening global warming, and the lively class discussions led me to think what could be some of the ways in which politicians across the world can be made more environmentally aware.

On April 6th, the class met again. One year earlier, on this day, the U.S. Department of the Interior had exempted BP's Gulf of Mexico drilling operation from a detailed environmental impact study. BP had indicated in their permit application that an oil spill was "unlikely," and had stated that if an oil spill did occur it would cause "no significant adverse impacts." On this class day, the primary text was *Environmentalism in Popular Culture* (2009),²⁹ a book that exposes the ways in which popular culture shows environmental injustices as "natural." The class discussed Noël Sturgeon's "strategies for connecting texts ranging from advertisements to children's cartoons to today's essential political concerns,"³⁰ and appreciated the way Sturgeon systematically brings feminism and environmental justice into connection with one another. During the class meeting, Professor Michael P. Branch joined us and gave a talk on the role of humor in environmental studies.

The next class meeting was on April 13th. On this day, Bill McKibben, the important environmentalist and author was interviewed³¹ on his latest book, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* (2010). As a way to explain the unconventional spelling of "eaarth," McKibben stated, "The conceit is that we really have built a new planet. Substantially different enough from the one that we were born onto to warrant a new name." He went to say: "We need to do two things. One, put a price on carbon so that we really begin to ween ourselves aggressively from fossil fuel. Even when we do that we'd be very wise to re-examine our economic life. Stop thinking constantly about expansion, and start thinking more about security. That implies getting away from too-big-to-fail, not just in banking, but in energy, in agriculture, and in almost everything we do." During the interview, McKibben pointed at a grave misunderstanding in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*: "[Smith] didn't say that [the economy] is to grow forever getting bigger. In fact, he was pretty clear that there was a place at which that no longer made sense. What economists have failed to realize from the beginning, the economy is a subset of something else, and that something else is the natural

29 Noël Sturgeon. *Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of the Natural* (Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2009).

30 From the class syllabus.

31 Interview can be reached at: <http://marketplace.publicradio.org/display/web/2010/04/13/pm-earth-new-reality-q/>

world. There comes a point in which infinite growth no longer works. This is the moment finally when those limits are at hand.” On this day, the class discussed the book, *Animal Rites* (2003).³² As we talked about the fate of the animal in Cary Wolfe’s book, the use of fossil fuels was wreaking havoc on animal habitats across the world. A fifth group of students presented position papers on New Zealand author Witi Ihimaera’s *The Whale Rider* (2003), the story of a Maori girl who traveled the seas astride a whale. Elsewhere, during the presentations, people of the world were denying their kinship and interdependence with creatures of the oceans polluting and overfishing earth’s vital waters.

April 20th, on the very day when Deepwater Horizon exploded—the worst environmental disaster in the history of the world to date—the class met again. Only two days to Earth Day, after the blowout and rig fire, oil started gushing into the Gulf and went on for 86 days, destroying the ecologically sensitive coastal regions. On this day when Mother Earth saw a tremendous assault on its body, the class talked about “ecocriticism and the body.” The discussion of Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman’s *Material Feminisms* (2008)³³ (a book that critiques the retreat from materiality) in relation to Val Plumwood’s *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* was a timely topic, indeed. The class gave particular attention to Alaimo’s essay on “Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature” for its emphasis on “the material turn in feminist theory.” In addition to this, one student presented a position paper on Terry Tempest Williams’s *Finding Beauty in a Broken World* (2008).

The last class meeting was held on April 27 when more oil was gushing into the Gulf. With incessant news in the media, we became more aware of the reality of the global oil spill phenomenon, that, for instance, the people who live in the Niger delta—the region that contains fragile wetlands—have had to live with Shell oil spill catastrophes for decades, that massive spills are no longer news in this vast land, and that the world is simply blind to the oil spills here.³⁴ On this class day, students discussed Timothy Morton’s *Ecology Without Nature* (2007) in relation to excerpts from various books on environmental aesthetics by philosophers Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant. During the meeting, the

32 Cary Wolfe. *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003).

33 Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, eds. *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2008).

34 For information on oil spills in the Niger Delta, see, Susan Comfort, “Struggle in Ogoniland: Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Cultural Politics of Environmental Justice” (229-46).

class also paid attention to the “Ecocriticism” chapter in Peter Barry’s *Beginning Theory* (2002); and I remembered how Barry’s insightful ecocritical reading of Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” (with a focus on the “black and lurid tarn . . . by the dwelling,” pointing at “an eco-system damaged beyond repair”) once clarified to me what ecocriticism was.

By the end of the semester, the graduate students—Meredith, Shaun, Keira, Kyle, George, Katja, Beau, Coral, Tamara—the future ecocritics, had mastered ecocritical theory from all facets of human experience. Most important of all, from my perspective, their various projects reflected the need for “contact” with the physical world. At the end of the term, PhD candidate Kyle Bladow rephrased the deepening role of the ecocritic, as well as that of future ecocritics:

*I think it’s crucial that scholars in the humanities continue to prioritize how humanity interprets, understands, and celebrates the more-than-human world, so that we can continue to learn how the stories we tell and the metaphors we use influence how we impact this world in a time of so much anthropogenic ecological degradation.*³⁵

The lines above ultimately show we are in a conundrum. So much anthropogenic ecological degradation. To this, I would like to add Speth’s observation: “[G]lobal-scale environmental problems . . . are constantly interacting with one another, typically worsening the situation” (39). After a semester of *bringing the biosphere home*,³⁶ and studying texts on various environmental issues [a semester under the signs of planetary ruin], we all had a renewed understanding of the need to “think globally” before we “act locally.”

Turkish ecocriticism. The delegates of the Sixth World Wilderness Congress resolved that the 21st century be declared “the Century of Restoring

35 Personal communication with Kyle A. Bladow, PhD student in the Graduate Program in Literature and Environment, University of Nevada, Reno. June 1, 2010.

36 Mitchell Thomashow, in *Bringing the Biosphere Home*, the book that gives us “guidelines for learning how to practice biospheric perception,” states: “[f]rom wherever you are, the biosphere is there too” (217). Earlier in the book, Thomashow writes: “What happens thousands of miles away across the globe may dramatically affect your neighborhood. And the local development project just down the road from you may prompt a wave of ecological and political changes that will reverberate in communities you’ve never even heard of. Wherever you live, whatever you think about, developing an understanding of global environmental change dramatically expands your scope and vision” (3).

the Earth.” Restoration of degraded lands and diminished wildlife populations is the grand legacy of Aldo Leopold. Scott Russell Sanders, in his “A Conservationist Manifesto,” has made a forceful call for land restoration, saying “[c]onservation means not only protecting the relatively unscathed natural areas that survive, but also mending, so far as possible, what has been damaged” (211). Therefore, I envision embracing what I would like to call a restoration ecocriticism, in “the Century of Restoring the Earth.” This will give rise to not only conserving lands but also restoring damaged lands.³⁷ I envision a Turkish ecocriticism that will give rise to a healthy skepticism for our new corporate culture, consumerism, and commercialism so that we contribute to re-ecologizing our economy; I envision a Turkish ecocriticism that will highlight the merits of local natural histories and ecologies embedded in their literatures, a movement that will create interest in “wanting to learn the stories of [one’s place]” and teaching this very literature, on location.³⁸ Wendell Berry, in a recent lecture, made an important projection for the future: the need to prepare students for “local adaptation.” I envision a Turkish ecocriticism that will contribute to filling in a gap in the education system, teaching, in Berry’s terms, local biology/ecology, so that young people, having acquired the “loyalty,” do not seek jobs in “great corporations.”³⁹ I envision a new Turkish ecocriticism that will light the fire for a nature writing mania in our country, for “narrative expressions” of local lands tell us best “what constitutes an environmental value.”⁴⁰ The wealth of information and inspiration for the Turkish ecocritic is available both in Western ecocritical texts and in our own heritage. One only needs to explore, patiently and committedly,

37 For a case study on restoration ecocriticism, see Ufuk Özdağ, “Keeping Alive the Memory of the Amik: Environmental Aesthetics and Land Restoration.” *Facing the Past, Facing the Future: History, Memory, Literature*. Ed. A.C. Hoff. (Istanbul: Bahçeşehir UP, 2011). Forthcoming.

38 See Cheryl Glotfelty, “Finding Home in Nevada? Teaching the Literature of Place, on Location” (346). Also see *Literary Nevada* (2008), edited by Glotfelty, a valuable anthology that “enables readers to discover Nevada through stories and poems” (Preface xxviii), and will inspire Turkish literary scholars for compiling such collections on Turkey’s landscapes.

39 Wendell Berry, in a recent speech, has pointed at a lack in the education system, that “without loyalty to any place,” students have sought jobs in “great corporations.” See Works Cited.

40 See Satterfield and Slovic, “Introduction: What’s Nature Worth?” (11). For a discussion of the significance of environmental writing on a keener perception of the lands, and on environmental laws and policies, also see Slovic, “There’s Something About Your Voice I Cannot Hear: Environmental Literature, Public Policy and Ecocriticism” (59-68).

the literary output of the centuries long Central Asian ancestors of the present day Turks, the Anatolian and Central Asian Turks' shamanistic past, the Orhon inscriptions [the oldest written documents of the Turkish language], the myths of the Oguz Turks, Anatolian Sufism, and Anatolian people's literary heritage, past and present, embedded in our *Toprak Ana*⁴¹ to bring out the ecological impulse at the root of them all and to bring back engagement with our lands. For me, these should occupy a central place for the school of ecocriticism in Turkey.

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41 The reference is to our culture of a harmonious co-existence with Mother Earth.

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