

How are Spanish cultural studies responding to rapidly changing environmental and social conditions? How can Spanish environmental cultural studies promote alternative narratives and practices that encourage sustainable responses to the current ecological crisis? How are dominant cultural practices related to inequality as well as processes of extinction, energy decline, toxification, and climate disruption?

Focussing on Spain, this book delves into the power relations, material practices and social imaginaries underpinning the global economic system to uncover its unaffordable human and non-human costs. From the scars left by Franco's dams and mines to the toxic waste dumped in Equatorial Guinea, from the cruelty of the modern pork industry to the ravages of mass tourism in the Balearic Islands, chapters show how writers, artists, and filmmakers have illuminated and contested the growth-oriented and neo-colonialist assumptions of the current Capitalocene era. Guiding the reader through the rapidly emerging field of Spanish environmental cultural studies, with chapters on such topics as extractivism, animal studies, food studies, ecofeminism, decoloniality, critical race studies, tourism, and waste studies, the volume also provides models for exploring the socioecological implications of cultural manifestations in other parts of the world.

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A COMPANION TO SPANISH ENVIRONMENTAL CULTURAL STUDIES

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Edited by **LUIS I. PRÁDANOS**

Ecopoetics

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Introduction

Ecopoetics is, *sensu stricto*, the theory that underpins any poetic practice and any other literary form that makes ecology and environmental consciousness its foundation and starting point. As a true aesthetic speculation, and under the rubric of "Poetics of Breathing", I have constructed a general ecocritical theory with the aim of making the metaphor of breathing agglutinate the different and even contending literary and critical tendencies within Hispanism that pay attention to the ecosystemic flows of life (Marrero Henríquez, 2019; Skowronsky, 2015).¹ But theoretical developments are an exception; most ecopoetics are not to be found in speculative hypotheses but implicitly in the practices of literary criticism of Spanish and Hispanic literatures, and of Iberian cultural studies that involve environmental issues of literary interest. Most ecopoetics take the form of specific ecocritical studies on the voices of the Earth that some poets hide (Gala),² on the narratives of abandoned rural enclaves and migrations to cities (Álvarez Mendez),³ and on the wide range of approaches to animals in literature (Carretero-González; Kerslake; Lope; Subercaseaux; Marrero Henríquez, 2021).⁴ Ecopoetics also

¹ José Manuel Marrero Henríquez, "Ecocriticism of the Anthropocene and the Poetics of Breathing", *Hispanic Ecocriticism*, ed. José Manuel Marrero Henríquez, (Berlin, New York: Peter Lang, 2019), pp. 19-48; Ellen Skowronski, "Words that Breathe. An Interview with José Manuel Marrero Henríquez", *Ecozon@. European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* 6.1 (2015), 107-117.

² Candelas Gala, *Ecopoéticas. Voces de la tierra en ocho poetas de la España actual*, (Salamanca: Ediciones de la Universidad, 2020).

³ Natalia Álvarez Mendez, "Subject and landscapes: Encounters with Nature in Contemporary Spanish Narrative", *Hispanic Ecocriticism*, ed. José Manuel Marrero Henríquez, (New York, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019), pp. 113-136.

⁴ Margarita Carretero-González (ed.), *Spanish Thinking about Animals*, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2020); Lorraine Kerslake Young, "From Aesop to Arcadia: Raising Ecocritical Awareness through Talking Animals in Children's Literature", *Transatlantic Landscapes: Environmental Awareness, Literature and the Arts*, ed. José Manuel Marrero Henríquez, (Madrid: UAH-Franklin Institute, 2016), pp. 209-222; Hans-Joachim Lope, "La racionalidad de los brutos. El Padre Feijoo ante el problema de la vivisección", *Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas vol. 2*, coord. Antonio Vilanova, (Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1992), pp. 1185-1192;

permeates arts theory and practice when embedded in environmental concerns (Albelda et al. eds.).⁵ In a broad sense, ecopoetics affects cultural studies that analyze post-growth imaginaries to question capitalism and its metabolic destruction of biological and epistemological diversity (Prádanos, 2018, 2019),⁶ the devastation of landscapes under the effect of the tourist industry (Santa Ana), national regulation of biopolitical issues such as bullfighting (Beilin),⁷ and cultural understandings of nature and legal texts on landscape and hunting (Ares-López).⁸ In a much broader sense, ecopoetics have an important presence in the many academic research practices that address the woes of economic "development", animal ethics, the food industry, the role of nature in education, landscapes and ideology, minorities and law, gender and values, post-carbon societies, and other related topics, as these are all cultural issues of great significance for ecologically engaged narratives and poetics.

Ecopoetics responds to the current ecological crisis of planetary dimension and is the poetics of the Anthropocene and the future to come. Nevertheless, and as noted above, there are four main areas in which ecopoetics acquires a relevant role, all of them related, in descending order, to the original literary and theoretical foundations of the classical understanding of the word "poetics" as "a treatise on poetry or aesthetics" (*Merriam-Webster*): literary theory, literary criticism, environmental humanities, and cultural studies.

B. Subercaseaux et al., *El mundo de los perros y la literatura (condición humana y condición animal)*, (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales, 2014); José Manuel Marrero Henríquez, "Vegan Cervantes: Meat Consumption and Social Degradation in *Dialogue of the Dogs*", *The Routledge Handbook of Vegan Studies*, ed. Laura Wright, (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 89-100.

⁵ José Albelda, José María Parreño y José Manuel Marrero Henríquez (eds.), *Humanidades ambientales. Pensamiento, arte y relatos para el Siglo de la Gran Prueba*, (Madrid: Catarata, 2018).

⁶ Luis I. Prádanos, "Ecología y estudios culturales ibéricos en el siglo XXI", *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 23 (2019), 133-144; Luis I. Prádanos, *Postgrowth Imaginaries. New Ecologies and Counterhegemonic Culture in Post-2008 Spain*, (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2018).

⁷ Katarzyna Beilin, *In Search of an Alternative Biopolitics: Anti-Bullfighting, Animality, and the Environment in Contemporary Spain*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015.

⁸ Daniel Ares-López, "Culturas de la naturaleza y naturalezas-culturas: hacia una redefinición de los estudios culturales desde el antropoceno", *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 23 (2019), 215-234.

Literary theory

Ecopoetics is, strictly speaking, a specific eco-understanding of poetics, a particular theory of poetic and literary practices or, in other words, an aesthetics of literature. In this restrictive understanding of the term, ecopoetics is to be found neither in literary criticism on this or that Spanish author, nor in general speculations on the visual arts, nor in any study on the cultural toxicity of a product in fashion. As a general hypothesis about the nature and purpose of literature, ecopoetics is not going to be dressed in the form of literary and cultural interpretations of specific works, but in the form of theoretical essays on the role of literature in the Anthropocene era of global ecological crisis, for ecopoetics is a theory of literature.

In previous publications, I have outlined an environmental hypothesis on poetics to adapt the nature and purpose of literature in today's anthropocenic times. "Poetics of Breathing" is the name given to this ecopoetics which is not only a poetics aimed at the realm of Spanish and Hispanic literatures but also a general ecocritical literary theory. Accordingly, the era of the Anthropocene requires a poetics capable of responding to the global environmental challenges of the present and the coming future. Inspired by Jorge Wagensberg's speculations on the rhythmic and harmonic regularities shared by Nature and Arts,⁹ the Poetics of Breathing, with declared will, considers literary works as belonging to the homeostatic ecosystem of pervasive culture, whether they belong to Hispanic, Latin American or Western European cultures, whether they relate to indigenous cosmogonies, Christian lineage or avowed atheism, or whether they come from oral, written or virtual digital roots (Marrero Henríquez, 2019; Skowronsky, 2015).

⁹ Jorge Wagensberg, "Beauty and Intelligibility", *Fernando Casás. Arqueología del no-lugar*, eds. Mina Marx y Manuel Sevilla, (Madrid: Círculo de Bellas Artes, 2004), pp. 187-194.

In the Poetics of Breathing, literature is the sophisticated result of the instinct of life or, in other words, of the search for a beauty that is understood both as a basic tool for discovering meaningful aesthetic recurrences, and as a property of Nature, for beauty is found everywhere in natural life, which flows quietly in breath, in cycles and repetitions, in biological forms characterized by patterns of order in time and space. The beauty of the fractal structure of plants and the vascular system of animals is omnipresent in life, because biology needs regularities to successfully achieve the goal of life. The ecocritical encounter of these regularities, sometimes difficult to grasp, depends on aesthetic skills that are “the essence of [a] mental pleasure [that when reading searches for and exhibits...] the same quantity of rhythm and harmony [that] nature [has]” (Wagensberg, p. 190).

With the advent of literary literacy, and even with the advent of digital and multimedia literacy that nourishes cyberpoetry, the Poetics of Breathing considers that criticism should not forget the itinerary of orality towards literate society, at least if criticism is to be ecologically relevant. Both Latin American literature, which is nourished by the diverse imaginaries and traditions of the original peoples of America and the ideologies or cosmovisions they sustain, and Spanish, European and Latin American literary works based on Western-rooted imaginaries and traditions, breathe. Words breathe, and ecocriticism has a duty to seek, analyze and interpret the procedures through which texts breathe or, in other words, are linked to rhythmic patterns of nature, regardless of the tradition they belong to.

Literary Criticism

Ecopoetics, Landscape and Literary Tradition

Spanish modern interest in landscape goes back to Carlos de Haes, who obtained the first chair of landscape painting in 1857 at the Escuela Superior de la Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, and whose school had a great influence on the political and nationalist reading of the landscape of Castile by the intellectuals and writers of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza and later by the impressionist writings of authors of the Generation of '98 such as Unamuno, Machado and Azorín. Francisco González Díaz (1866-1945), a Spanish islander from the Canary Islands, an ecologist *avant la lettre* who considered Nature his first homeland and thought that the true measure of a nation's culture and civilization is revealed in the way in which trees and animals are socially considered and legally protected, played a major role in the transformation of impressionism from a political and nationalist vision of landscape to an ecological one (Marrero Henríquez, p. 2011).¹⁰ González Díaz's ecopoetics is a pioneer in the Spanish panorama, and not only permeates his own writings, a kind of pagan Gospel of the man who was called "apostle of the trees", but also affects his critics, as they end up assuming González Díaz's ideas about landscapes and animals as literary topics and critical mirrors in which to observe reality through the lens of an ecological conscience.¹¹

Rubén Naranjo has studied the works of González Díaz in order to situate them in an ecological tradition that continues to build the ecological sensitive literature published in recent years.¹² Rubén Naranjo circumscribes González Díaz's ideas on the state of Nature as a symptom of the state of civilization within the development of ecological thought in the Canary Islands. Marrero Henríquez (González Díaz, 2005)

¹⁰ José Manuel Marrero Henríquez, "Literary Waters in a Dry Spain", *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 18.2 (2011), 413-429.

¹¹ Francisco González Díaz, *Árboles. Una campaña periodística*, (Las Palmas: Tipografía de la calle Buenos Aires, 1906; ed. José Manuel Marrero Henríquez [Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Ediciones del Cabildo, 2005]).

¹² Rubén Naranjo, *Ecologismo y educación ambiental en Canarias. La acción conservacionista de Francisco González Díaz en el primer tercio del siglo XX*, (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Anroart, 2007).

extends Naranjo's scope, as he starts from González Díaz's ecopoetics to trace a cultural and literary tradition of ecological foundations that transcends the islands to reach mainland Spain and, beyond Modernism, the wider sphere of Hispanism.

The impulse to trace a history of ecopoetics in literature, a Spanish literary tradition of ecological sensitivity, which is both an academic discovery and an intellectual creation, is reflected in the book that can be considered the official presentation of ecocriticism to Spanish readers: *Ecocríticas. Literatura y medio ambiente* (Flys et al. eds).¹³ Julia Barella Bigal's contribution is a revision of the Spanish canon in the light of ecological awareness.¹⁴ Barella Bigal gives an ecological reading of Spanish literature from the Renaissance Garcilaso and San Juan de la Cruz, through the Romantics and naturalists Bécquer and Pardo Bazán, from the Generation of '98' Azorín and Machado to contemporary novelists such as Raúl Guerra Garrido and Rafael Chirbes, and from poets such as José Hierro, Jesús López Pacheco, César Antonio Molina, to contemporary figures such as Miguel Ángel Bernat, Manuel Vilas and Juan Carlos Mestre. In Barella Bigal, diachronic ecopoetics is the basis for tracing a historical line that takes environmental awareness as a guide for the reading of some canonical figures of Spanish literature along with other contemporary ones.

Ecopoetics and the Voices of the Earth

Jonathan Bate applies in his studies of English Romanticism an ecopoetics that Candelas Gala takes as a starting point in her literary search for the specific ecopoetics of eight contemporary Spanish poets.¹⁵ Bate considers that criticism founded on ecopoetics seeks to see “what happens when we regard poems as imaginary parks in

¹³ Carmen Flys Junquera, José Manuel Marrero Henríquez y Julia Barella Vigal (eds), *Ecocríticas. Literatura y medio ambiente*, (Frankfurt, Madrid: Iberoamericana: 2010).

¹⁴ Julia Barella Vigal, “Naturaleza y paisaje en la literatura española”, *Ecocríticas. Literatura y medio ambiente*, eds. Carmen Flys, José Manuel Marrero Henríquez y Julia Barella Vigal (eds), (Frankfurt, Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2010), pp. 219-234.

¹⁵ Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

which we may breathe an air that is not toxic and accommodate ourselves to a mode of dwelling that is not alienated” (p. 64). Gala uses Bate's metaphor to study the way in which Juana Castro, Juan Carlos Mestre, Jorge Riechmann, Jesús López Pacheco, César Antonio Molina, Manuel Vilas, Vicente Valero and Erika Martínez are able to articulate Nature in all its materiality in their poems, whether denouncing ecologically harmful cultural and religious systems or recovering the sense of natural vitalism so depleted by the hegemony of a culture of alienation, whether using humor to fill the gaps between humans and nature or turning the poems into a figurative home, a defiant *oikos* where a healthy poetic Nature is allowed to dwell.

Ecopoetics and rural enclaves

Sometimes melancholic, sometimes vindictive, the visions of rural lands abandoned or on the verge of disappearing under the pressure of urban or industrial developments are places where ecopoetics grows in the form of resistance narratives. Although Spanish narrative has situated most recent plots in an indisputably urban setting, it is striking to note the number of works that pay special attention to rural landscapes, proposing a return to the rural as a response to the environmental crisis, both economic and moral, of contemporary society. The failures of modernity, affirms Natalia Álvarez Méndez, lead to the reestablishment of ties with the rural, the communal space and the forgotten memory of the natural roots of life. Renowned authors, such as Julio Llamazares, Luis Mateo Díez and José María Merino, and younger ones, such as Jenn Díaz, Ginés Sánchez, Jesús Carrasco, Manuel Darriba, Lara Moreno, Iván Repila and Alberto Olmos, among many others, disassociate the rural from capitalist consumerism, recover the agricultural landscape, recreate life in small villages, point out the adversities of the climate and the land, portray a harsh and hostile environment, and denounce the ecological destruction of nature. The ecopoetic power of rurality turns the

environmental crisis into a literary theme that evidences the need to recover the homeostatic existence of human beings within nature, to conceive real landscapes and their literary counterpart as biological beings threatened by capitalism, consumerism and the destructive industrialization of modern times.

Ecopoetics and the animals we also are

Margarita Carretero-González states that, although the study of the cultural representation of animals is nothing new, especially in literature and other artistic discourses, Spanish thinking about animals has recently shifted its focus from animals as objects to animals as subjects. This shift in the consideration of animals inspires the ecopoetics present in the interdisciplinary works included in the volume edited by Carretero-González, *Spanish Thinking about Animals*. In line with the prologue in which Jorge Riechman questions the reasons why humans have arrogated to themselves the right to occupy and monopolize the centre of life, all the essays engage deeply with animal ethics to study in literature and arts animals as ornaments, the representation of animal suffering, the relationship between female characters and animal abuse, the forms of empathy and the ways in which this empathy can transform the law for the benefit of animal rights and for the downfall of the ideology of speciesism.

Ecopoetics in *Spanish Thinking about Animals* and in any study on the representation of animals in literature and arts inspired by animal ethics fights against the idea of human exceptionalism that runs through the Western tradition as posited in the biblical account of creation, defended in Pico della Mirandola's *On Human Dignity* and in Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, and which is based on the petrified Western cultural link between language and rationality. Notwithstanding the above, and despite the fact that anthropomorphism is an obvious manifestation of human arrogance, Lorraine Kerslake Young warns that in the field of pedagogy anthropomorphism could

be considered one of the reasons why fables are a benefit to children. In a sort of paradoxical move, anthropomorphic representations of animals in fables prove to be a useful tool for eradicating anthropomorphism and an impetus for fostering environmental imagination and empathy with animals.

Environmental humanities

Environmental approaches to Arts and Humanities are also tinged with ecopoetics, for as Albelda, Parreño and Marrero Henríquez state, there is an artistic urgency to challenge the Futurist Manifesto of 1910 that sang of fabrics hanging from clouds by swathes of smoke. Challenging speed, machines, industry and smoke is so necessary that arts reveal themselves as a tool to eradicate economy as a measure of everything and to increase environmental perception and abolish toxic attitudes against it. It can be stated without hesitation that ecopoetics is moving arts and humanities from the social and political commitment of the 1960s to the environmental commitment of the 21st century.

Despite widespread knowledge of climate change, there is a universal tendency to do nothing about it. Knowing is not the same as acting, and according to José María Parreño, art must move people to action. Art allow us to visualize concepts, phenomena and emotions, and is a powerful vehicle for opening the way to new sensibilities, attitudes and ideas. In the environmental commitment of arts and humanities there is an ecopoetics that reconfigures the traditional consideration of beauty and turns it into an aesthetic impulse for action. Among the multiple initiatives in which this activist ecopoetics can be found, Parreño considers most relevant "Weather Report. Climate Change and Visual Arts" (CAAM, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2007), "Cape Farewell.

Climate Art" (Canal Foundation, Madrid, 2008) and "Climate Change. After the end of the world" (CCCCB, Barcelona, 2017).

Cultural studies

Ecopoetics not only transcends its philological roots to reach other arts besides literature, but also delves into cultural studies of the Spanish crisis and various analyses of Spanish academic research, literature, cinema, television programs, socio-ecological movements, manifestos, legislation and websites. From these sources, Luis I. Prádanos gives a detailed account of Spanish reactions against an economic system that has failed to benefit Spanish society, but has instead produced political corruption, unemployment, low-paid jobs and rampant inequality (2018). Prádanos confronts these problems not only within the immediate limits of the Spanish financial collapse and the bursting of the so-called "real estate bubble," but also from a global crisis whose ecological, political, economic and cultural dimensions are a consequence of the general and systemic failure of the neoliberal concept of progress and development.

Unlimited growth in a limited biosphere is a contradiction in terms, a source of unsolvable problems and a source of unrealistic promises of happiness. In the face of the dominant growth discourse, counter-hegemonic reactions in Spain are reflected in their global counterparts and reverberate worldwide in the new eco-poetic imaginaries that emerge describing challenging approaches to progress, the common good, quality of life and a better future. These imaginaries contribute to an active consciousness that challenges growth narratives and their allies, i.e., catastrophist narratives that promote conformism or ignore the structural ills of development, or outright climate change denialist narratives.

Ecopoetics in Iberian cultural studies serves to analyze the Spanish crisis in the global context of ecological deterioration and neoliberal crisis. Urban ecocriticism, the question of waste and social injustice, the debate on catastrophist fictions that ignore the causes of the global crisis, projects committed to the realization of a post-growth future fill the new post-growth narratives proliferating in post-2008 Spain. These post-growth ecopoetics that are also carbon-free are found in a variety of cultural manifestations that Prádanos selects; texts by Amaia Pérez Orozco, Yayo Herrero, Ramón Fernández Durán, Jorge Riechmann, Joan Martínez Alier, Alicia Puleo and Carlos Taibo; documentaries *Sobre ruedas: El sueño del automóvil* by Óscar Clemente and *Mercado de Futuros* by Mercedes Álvarez, and the experimental film *Gente en Sitios* by Juan Cavestany; novels such as *El peso del corazón* by Rosa Montero and *Por si se va la luz* by Lara Moreno; *Palabras Mayores: Un viaje por la memoria rural* by Emilio Gancedo and the webseries *Libres* by Alex Rodrigo; the graphic novel *Memorias de la Tierra* by Miguel Brieva; several urban projects and collectives, and short narratives generated by the movement Ciudades en Transición; *Nunca fue tan hermosa la basura* by philosopher José Luis Pardo; a street mural by Boamistura in Madrid; an installation by Basurama; a song by Sr. Chinarro; a cartoon by Miguel Brieva; and the website consumchastamorir.com.

Conclusion

Ecopoetics, originally an aesthetics of poetry, has extended its area of influence from its philological roots to different academic fields, from literary theory and criticism to environmental humanities and animal and cultural studies. Nonconformism with the ideology and practices of capitalism, a system destined to collapse, is at the basis of an ecopoetics that in Spain has found a rich intellectual soil in which to explore a variety of

themes that are key to understanding the environmental crisis and the anthropocenic condition of the 21st century: a literary theory for a decarbonized future, the reconstruction of a Spanish literary and cultural tradition with ecological roots, animal ethics and animal representation in Spanish literature and arts, real and cultural landscapes as subjects of rights, social justice and animal ethics, imaginaries of growth and post-growth, rurality as a narrative of resistance. Any cultural manifestation can be seen through the lens of an ecopoetics for the coming future that is designed to appeal to readers, viewers and individuals to make them reflect on their place in the homeostatic system of planet Earth and act accordingly.

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