Ecology and Literatures in English

Ecology and Literatures in English:

Writing to Save the Planet

By

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To my parents and grandparents
who showed me the beauty of nature and the sense of connections between the human and nonhuman worlds; who showed me the fragile strength of a flower and the loving eyes of a dog or a cat; who made me listen to the voices of the world; who guide me on the way to wonder, to awareness and to fight.

To my teachers, pupils and students, to my colleagues and friends, who guided me on the paths of the literary world; to my mountain and ecocritical friends throughout the world, from France to Kent and from the United States of America to Brazil, who illuminated my path; and to all the authors — poets, botanists or shepherds —, from Southern France to Canada and to Nigeria, from New Mexico to Montana, who showed me the weight of words, the strength of imagination and the power of dreams.

To all our animal companions who, since the first day of my life, have taught me the meaning of love and trust—healing presences even in their physical absence. To all those trustful friends who are always sure that we can save them and show us the way.

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FOREWORD

THE BUTTERFLY, THE RHODODENDRON AND THE STAR

"*That thou canst not stir a flower*
Without troubling a star."

Francis Thompson[1]

In two lines, the English poet Francis Thompson shows the relationship existing between the smallest gesture made on the earth and the cosmos. Everything is connected as asserted in another way through the now famous phrase "the butterfly effect" first pronounced by the meteorologist Edward Lorenz.[2] A butterfly's flutter in one place can provoke an earthquake at the other end of the planet.[3] The smallest gesture can have terrible consequences. Merrill Gilfillan's "Rhododendrons trail[ing] their fingers / in the river"[4] draw a natural link uniting the earth and water, the colours of the flowers and the transparency of the river and, last but not least, the world of nature and the human body since the branches of rhododendrons become fingers. Those vegetable fingers point to human lives and nature, from the flower to the star, from the butterfly to the rhododendron and from the rhododendron to the river. Poets and writers, in connection with scientists, show us ways to follow, like the rhododendrons pointing their fingers to the river as if to show the direction to take, a direction having the fluidity and transparency of water, showing

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[1] Francis Thompson, "The Mistress of Vision," in *New Poems*, London: Burns and Oates, 1907, Gutenberg.org.

[2] Lorenz spoke about it in a conference in 1972. See Edward N. Lorenz, (March 1963). "Deterministic Nonperiodic Flow." *Journal of the Atmospheric Sciences*. 20 (2): 130–141.

[3] We can also think about Ray Bradbury's short story "A Sound of Thunder" (1952), in which the gesture of a time traveller inadvertently crushing a butterfly during the Jurassic period provokes a series of disasters 60 million years later.

[4] "Beech Gap" in *Red Mavis*, 2014.

us the sense of life, the sense of the link uniting the human being and the nonhuman world.

Man and Gaia, or the last couple to be saved on the symbolical Ark that is our universe. Through this double reference to Noah and the biblical Ark and to a science fiction novel by Mary Shelley,[5] the present book would like to add a small stone to the cairn built day after day by writers, activists and ecocritics. One more book … neither claiming to be exhaustive nor new, it would just like to give an idea of the role of literature in the preservation of the planet at a time when both the planet and literature are attacked and threatened. It is the point of view of a woman who is lucky enough to be at the same time a nature-lover, a mountaineer, a poet, an environmentalist and an academic and who, through that multiple relationship to nature and its inhabitants and to literature, would like to go on with the dialogue started years ago by writers and ecocritics all over the world. Nothing original in it; but as long as Gaia is raped and its inhabitants killed, as long as literature is regarded by some statesmen as a danger to be erased, this lack of originality will be necessary. The green colour must not become an original element on this Earth to justify original writing. Its defence through writing is fundamental; sometimes imagination becomes reality as shown by Jean Giono's shepherd planting imaginary trees in Provence and whose work took life in the person of Wangari Maathai and hundreds of women planting trees in Kenya.

The aim of this book is to lead people to realize that literature reveals a fundamental idea that everything is connected and that it is only when most people are aware of that connection that the world can change. Exactly as a tree is connected with all the animal life in and around it, as it prevents erosion and floods, as it offers food and shade, as it allows a community to live in peace, texts show that nothing should be separated.

There are negative connections that have changed the world: wars and terrorism are linked with the exploitation of resources, and the exploitation

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[5] *The Last Man*, published in 1823. This title was taken up by Wallace G. West for a short story published in 1929. It is also the title of several films (by Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau in 1924, Charles L. Bitsch in 1970). And an early title of George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, if the publisher had not been opposed to it, should have been *The Last Man in Europe*. "The last man" is also the phrase used by Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathoustra* to evoke the antithesis of the imagined "Übermensch," the last man seeking only comfort and security and being what the Western society has produced for itself. Margaret Atwood's dystopia, *Oryx and Crake*, has been translated into French as *Le dernier homme*. This notion of the end of mankind has preoccupied writers, artists and philosophers for a long time.

of natural resources by industrialized countries is linked with poverty in the rest of the world. The excess of gases polluting the atmosphere, because of more and more polluting factories and more and more cars, increases global warming and brings about the melting of Arctic ice, which generates the disappearance of some species as it threatens the life of the emblematic white bear among others. To transform things and stop those devastating connections, we should just be aware of all the connections shown by nature, as Wangari Maathai's fig tree shows us (see xxiv). We should be aware of the fact that animal preservation does not only preserve animal life but can transform men's lives. A beautiful true story like James Bowen's *Street Cat Named Bob* not only tells an individual life story. It is not a story meant solely for animal lovers, even if it is also that. It reveals the reciprocal relationship between a formerly homeless man and a wounded street cat, a relationship based on love and responsibility, a relationship changing people's way of looking at the street musician. Bob the cat gave James Bowen his love and the opportunity to feel responsible and useful; James Bowen offered the wounded animal the love he needed. Whereas both were invisible to the eyes of society when they were apart, they became the centre of people's attention when they were together, because people love to see that kind of connection. Deep within each individual, there is the awareness that he/she is connected to the rest of the world, human and nonhuman as well. A cat on a street musician's shoulder may reveal to every man or woman their own belonging to the same world. As a street cat in London can show us our own way of looking at homeless people and what a little animal can do to change things, a dog living with nature preservers in the African bush is the opportunity to make us realize the damage done to African wildlife and what some people of goodwill do, what everybody in the world can do, or rather not do, by refusing to buy objects carved from death. Animal preservers do not hate humans as some people say: they try to save them, with the help of animals: this is what lots of literary or documentary texts show.

The variety of literary genres dealing with the painting or defence of the planet, with ecology as a science, as a feeling or as a fight, made it necessary to choose examples to show that any text, any form of writing, any literary genre can become a way of fighting for the planet. This book mingles literary texts, academic references and personal experiences without any separation, as in a meadow there is no separation between the soil where the grass grows, the various species of flowers, trees, insects and other animals and the water allowing everything to live. At a period when quantity and numbers are keywords, when the virtual shows us

reality separated from us by a screen, I have chosen to write about a relatively small number of texts evoking man's connections with the nonhuman world, actions through texts and texts as actions. It's up to readers to choose more texts, to think about their own experiences with animals, plants, mountains, rivers, seas and deserts; it's up to them to prolong this book, which is not a book but rather a walking forest, a forest in disguise, which tries to attack, in a peaceful way, the castle of growing, growing at any price, which seems to be gradually murdering Gaia. Like cairns placed on this paper path, some people, often women, who fought to show us the way, will come back from time to time, Rachel Carson, Dian Fossey, Peter Matthiessen, Linda Hogan, Wangari Maathai, N. Scott Momaday… and a line by John Keats, another one by Rainer Maria Rilke will recur like a warning burden. It's up to us to listen to them and prevent the silencing of birds from replacing the music of nature.

When I started teaching in France, the pupils' handbook was entitled *It's Up to You*… It's up to you, it's up to all of us to listen to the world as all writers in the world invite us to, it's up to you, it's up to us to be aware of the connections shown in the weaving of texts. Only then can the world change.

In all latitudes, writers hold out a mirror to us, they lead us to awareness by telling real or imaginary stories about all the people of goodwill who just try to save what can be saved, they speak about animals showing us the way to follow; they say that in spite of all destructions and tragedies, if we are just aware and connected, not to our smartphones only, not to the virtual worlds invading us only, but to the real world around us, to the blade of grass at our feet and the star above our heads, to the homeless man's eyes at our door and the peasant's gesture at the other end of the world, to the insect on the flower and the bird in the tree, there is hope. Around Chernobyl, poets remind us that plants are growing again and birds sing in a renewed nature.

Toulouse, April 2017; March 2018

INTRODUCTION

CAN LITERATURE SAVE THE EARTH?

"Can Poetry Save the Earth?" This is the question asked by John Felstiner in his beautiful book, where the preface starts with a line by John Keats, the introduction opens on a prayer by a Yokuts shaman in the Yokuts tongue and offers a survey of the "poetry of earth,"[1] from the Bible to John Clare and William Carlos Williams, from Emily Dickinson to N. Scott Momaday. If ecocritical studies have taken on such great importance in only two decades, it is probably because, when seeing the deterioration of the planet, the natural world and the human population depending on it, more and more people listen more deeply both to the voice of nature and to all the poetic voices who, by singing its beauty, show us the way to the awareness of our connection with the natural world. This is what the Yokuts shaman's prayer says:

> My words are tied in one
> With the great mountains
> With the great rocks
> With the great trees
> In one with my body
> And my heart.[2]

Mingling the Yokuts tongue of the shaman and the Hebrew of the Bible from the first page, Felstiner leads us to the conscience of this sharing of the earth through the poetic word being in those two cases associated with spirituality and stories of Creation. The word "poetry" itself comes from a Greek word meaning "to create" and thus it may be significant to see poetry as the best genre to evoke nature and all its creatures as it is perhaps the genre that uses most the sense of connections either in its themes or in its form.

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[1] "The poetry of earth is never dead," John Keats in Felstiner xiii.

[2] "Around 1900 a tribal shaman chanted that prayer, in the Yokuts tongue:
nim yèt.au t.ikexo texal
maiayiu lomto…" in Felstiner 1.

We could prolong Felstiner's question and see whether this "environmental imagination" evoked in Laurence Buell's seminal book exists in all literary genres. The other word for literature is "letters." Letters are all the letters sent by citizens all over the world, following the initiatives of a non-governmental organization[3] to prevent an oil company from destroying a part of the Amazonian forest and the Native Americans living there; they are also the letters of a gigantic poem written by a Chilean poet[4] on the desert of Atacama; they are the letters of a Canadian alphabet book teaching children to read and also to be aware of the danger threatening the white bear; they are the literature through which writers all over the world tell the story of the Earth and of man on the Earth, of beauty and devastation, to reverse the movement and try to make people aware of the fact that each of them can participate in the rescuing of the planet and its human and nonhuman inhabitants.

To paraphrase Felstiner, we might say: can literature save the world? This seems to be a naive question, not all that naive in fact. If in totalitarian systems poets and writers are the first people to be executed, it is probably because dictators know that they are more powerful than all their violence, which has always been the weapon of the weak, weak because they can only express their ideas by destroying people instead of convincing them. Poets are probably the most powerful people in the world and years after Garcia Lorca and Ken Saro-Wiwa were executed, their texts go on expressing their ideas, their voices will be heard until the end of the world, when all dictators have passed.

All over the world, writers have felt and feel more and more the necessity to remind the whole world of the wonders of the Earth and of the dangers threatening them in an era when man's impact is such that scientists consider the influence of human beings on the biosphere to be so great that it has become a major "geological force" that can mark the lithosphere. That period, our period, has been called the Anthropocene, a word popularized at the end of the 20th century by the meteorologist and atmospheric chemist Paul Josef Crutzen,[5] who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1995 with Mario J. Molina and F. Sherwood

[3] Survival International.

[4] Raul Zurita.

[5] About the Anthropocene, see https://www.futura-sciences.com/planete/definitions/climatologie-anthropocene-16008/, accessed May 18, 2018; Erle Ellis, *Anthropocene: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Also see Stéphane Lojkine's web-magazine, http://cielam.univ-amu.fr/la-parole-aux-humanites, accessed May 19, 2018. *La Parole aux humanités* n° 13, "Anthropocène," March 27, 2018.

Rowland. According to him, the Anthropocene is a new geological period starting at the end of the 18th century with the industrial revolution and it would follow the Holocene. In this era dominated by man's will of growing at any price, writers show that this new human power of destruction over the whole nonhuman world can be changed into a power of life through the awareness of a sense of connections so present in tales and stories told by storytellers in the countries where storytellers have not disappeared yet. Writers are the modern storytellers and the palaver trees under which storytellers told stories to make their listeners aware of their link with their soil, with nature, with the others, are now trees changed into books; they can also be electronic waves, if they are used as a modern artificial tree meant to save the real ones and not as weapons with an unlimited range.

Everybody, every creature always has a choice to make. That choice not only influences the course of their lives but also the lives of all those they are going to meet. Mikal Gilmore, in his introduction to Neil Gaiman's *Black Orchid*, writes: "That choice gives you the chance to remake not just yourself, but sometimes the world around you as well."[6] Anybody's change of behaviour indeed can change the world and whenever an author or an artist creates imaginary and fictitious worlds to speak about the world's reality, he/she guides readers towards a better awareness of the beauty of the world and of the necessary reciprocal relationship between all the elements composing it.

In their introduction to the collective book *Literature and the Environment*, George Hart and Scott Slovic write:

> For the most part, Thoreau tended to look toward wild nature as an antidote to the ills and excesses of human civilization. In his famous essay "Walking," he stated, "In Wilderness is the preservation of the World" (112). He did not say much about the potential diminishment of nature. However, between the 1870s and the second decade of the twentieth century, the writer and activist John Muir helped to launch the tradition of American environmental activism and showed that writers could be artists and social activists at the same time. (Hart and Slovic, 3-4)

Literature is an important part of people's education to awareness and this education to our relationships with the nonhuman world should start from an early age. Those who create ecological puppet shows have understood that role. Many educative projects linked with ecological awareness or

[6] Mikal Gilmore, Introduction to Neil Gaiman's *Black Orchid* (illustrated by Dave McKean, Lettred by Todd Klein), New York: DC Comics, 2012, 3rd page of the introduction.

sustainability are led all around the world. In India, plays on ecological themes are staged in high schools. In France, at the beginning of the 1990s, a long-term project of ecology at school helped by a not-for-profit organization opened onto the publishing of a little book on animal protection[7] in which information about the damage to animal life was associated with famous writers' texts and quotations, as if literature gave more reality to the presentation of the real world. In a secondary school situated in Northern France, in the 1980s, a project of publication of a small journal devoted to the relationship between North and South countries allowed the pupils to publish five issues of this journal, significantly entitled *Terre de tous*, between 1986 and 1990.[8] Of course the first way of making children aware of their relationship with nature and other creatures including human creatures, is to take them into nature. As botanist Linnaeus did as early as the eighteenth century around Uppsala in Sweden, taking his students to natural places to show them plants in their ecosystems, like botanist and researcher Marcel Delpoux in France, nowadays, in the United States of America, the ecocritic researcher and writer Scott Slovic also takes students to the mountains and makes them discover ecocritical texts in a natural context. This is what hundreds of primary school teachers do as well. In Senegal, an experimental agro-ecological farm was created to train young farmers. Its name, *Kaydara*, is originally the title of a didactic narrative, which is part of Fulani's African traditional teaching; it was reported by the African historian and storyteller Aladou Hampaté Bâ.[9] The fact that such a project should have been given the name of a tale shows to what extent some populations can see the close link between literature and ecological agriculture. This farm, which proposes an alternative teaching to children who have dropped out of the school system, also proposes to fight against GMO by keeping the farm's own

[7] Jacqueline Kelen. *Protégeons les animaux*, Paris: L'Ecole de Noé, 1991. Helped by the organization "L'école de Noé."

[8] *Terre de tous* was published at the Collège Paul Langevin, in Rouvroy, thanks to the head of the school, Michel Debruyne, who trusted the project and devoted his life to help others, humans and nonhumans as well. It could be made thanks to the help of several people from the organization *Frères des Hommes*, particularly to a member of the organization and agronomist, Jean Besson, to Karyl Serrurier, to pupils and colleagues and also thanks to the participation of some artists, like Müss, specialized in caricatures linked with the relationship between Northern countries' wealth and Southern countries' poverty. A drawing by Plantu was used and this is the opportunity to thank all of them and to say that even when violence physically kills artists, their works live on.

[9] http://repta.net/odpi/telechargements/fichiers/fiche_senegal_1_ferme_agro_ecolo.pdf, accessed March 28, 2017.

seeds. As Gora N'Diaye, its co-founder and teacher of agro-ecology at the farm says: "we are going to keep our own seeds, we are going to multiply and share them between us, not to be invaded by GMO. If you let yourself be invaded by GMO, you lose your life."[10] This is also a way of preventing those young people from becoming landless peasants. That kind of project, uniting agricultural competences, ecological awareness, a will of making things progress by fighting against an international system *and* a traditional tale, reveals the importance of reuniting everything to make things progress instead of opposing them.

Those educational projects or teaching methods appear in many other places and their aim is to show children or young adults what Native populations have always said: that everything is linked. Poets, like Victor Hugo and Francis Thompson, summed up the idea of the relationship between the cutting of a flower and stars.[11] Literature is not only an entertainment; it is a lens allowing us to see things more clearly and to become more easily aware.

It is from the angle of the preservation of the planet that I would like to demonstrate how writers, through poetry, fiction, theatre, essays or any form of writing—even the simplest book teaching children how to read and write, an alphabet book—give us the key to the preservation of the natural world, hence the preservation of man in the world. Thousands of texts could be quoted to show the intimate relationship between writers' creation and a clear vision of our world. Thousands of texts could be quoted to show the close connection existing between all the threads constituting the huge web that is the cosmos and the small web that is the Earth. Some people think that ecology is not the major problem in the world. Yet it *is*. Everything stems from the environment, including wars and terrorism. The preservation of the planet and of peace is intimately linked. As Michel Serres put it: "Nous devons décider la paix entre nous pour sauvegarder le monde et la paix avec le monde pour nous sauvegarder."[12] Whenever armed conflicts appear on the surface of the Earth, it is because land or natural resources are at stake. It is because Ken Saro-Wiwa and his companions defended Nigerian lands against an oil

[10] http://www.diawara.org/2013/07/04/prenons-en-main-notre-propre-sante-alimentaire-nos-villes-et-villages-sont-envahis-de-semences-ogm-made-in-mosanto/, accessed 28 March 2017.
[11] See further on p. 17.
[12] "We must decide to make peace between one another to safeguard the world and to make peace with the world to safeguard ourselves." (Michel Serres, *Le contrat naturel*, 47, translation mine).

company that they were executed by the dictatorial government of their country. This is one tragic example among many others.

All ecological problems are linked with man's cohabitation with the rest of the world and, in the end, with his own survival. Even luminous pollution, which might seem secondary, takes another dimension when it is alluded to by poets, perhaps because poets know how to show its link with our relationship to the cosmos. In a 1986 interview with Louis Owens, the American Indian writer and intellectual N. Scott Momaday argued that "increasing light pollution in the U.S. desert southwest is not only a scientific problem for ecologists or astronomers but also a moral dilemma for all citizens. Will future generations be able to *see* the stars glittering above them? And, through the vehicle of those bright and distant stars—and through the stories that anchor their provocative arrangements in the night sky to the ongoing histories of human communities—will future generations be able to *imagine* their kinship with each other and with the larger cosmos?"[13] Louis Owens, in another interview with Momaday conducted that same year, saw the relationship between that pollution and the loss of myths: "Given your own sense of relationship that you bring out so well when you discuss the Kiowa myth of the sisters who ascended to the sky to become the stars of the dipper, there would seem to be a kind of dangerous 'mythic' loss in being cut off from the stars;" and Momaday answered: "Oh yes. I see it that way, too. It's something that threatens me at my centre. The stars are very important to me mythically. To think of losing the stars represents to me a very deep wound."[14] This echoes Rainer Maria Rilke's line, quoted as an epigraph both by Peter Matthiessen in *The Snow Leopard* and by David Abram in his chapter "Coda: Turning Inside Out" of *The Spell of the Sensuous*: "Ah, not to be cut off, not through the slightest partition, shut out from the law of the stars. The inner—what is it? If not intensified sky, hurled through with birds and deep with the winds of homecoming" (in Abram 1997, 261). And David Abram thus comments upon the poet's words:

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[13] N. Scott Momaday, quoted in Chadwick Allen. "Siting Earthworks, Navigating Waka: Patterns of Indigenous Settlement in Allison Hedge Coke's *Blood Run* and Robert Sullivan's *Star Waka*." *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*, University of Minnesota Press, 2012, 193–248, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt2jcckc.9.

[14] Louis Owens, "N. Scott Momaday", from *This is About Vision: Interviews with Southwestern Writers*, eds. William Balassi, John F. Crawford, and Annie O. Eysturoy, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990. In *Conversations with N. Scott Momaday*, ed. Matthias Schubnell, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997, 182.

> Not to be cut off, as Rilke says. And yet we seem today so estranged from the stars, so utterly cut off from the world of hawk and otter and stone. This book has traced some of the ways whereby the human mind came to renounce its sensuous bearings, isolating itself from the other animals and the animate earth. By writing these pages I have hoped, as well, to renew some of those bearings, to begin to recall and reestablish the rootedness of human awareness in the larger ecology. (Abram 1997, 261)[15]

The dialogue between great writers, Native American poets and novelists, a German poet and an American philosopher, lays emphasis on our rootedness in the element of nature, of the relationship between that natural origin and our remote mythical memory. Their conversations or dialogue through books remind us of the link existing between the economic and scientific element of light pollution and myths, that is to say collective memory carried by imagination figured by elements from nature, a rock on the Earth—Devil's Tower[16]—and a constellation in the sky—The Big Dipper. It emphasizes the necessity for human people to be aware of the "rootedness" of their awareness "in the larger ecology," as Abram put it. Owens and Momaday's conversation throws light on the interconnection between everything. Momaday refutes the idea that his writing is political but his messages about the beauty of nature and the connection between the elements of the landscape and man's history, his multiple warnings about ecological problems, tell his readers about the necessity of preserving the planet and the cosmos. If some writers like Ken Saro-Wiwa make a clearly political use of literature, others may deny their political intention but their words are political in the etymological sense of the word, insofar as they lead readers towards a better understanding of the "life of the city," the city having in this case the dimensions of the cosmos.

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[15] I am indebted to Céline Rolland Nabuco who ended her beautiful article "Le récit de voyage sur la piste d'un animal prédateur : *The Snow Leopard* de Peter Matthiessen (1978), *Grizzly Years : In Search of the American Wilderness* de Doug Peacock (1990) et *On the Wing : to the Edge of the Earth with the Peregrine Falcon* d'Alan Tennant (2004)" on this quotation, in *Caliban* n° 59, *Les Rencontres de l'humain et du non-humain dans la littérature de voyage et d'exploration anglophone / Anglophone Travel and Exploration Writing: Meetings Between the Human and Non-Human*, 2018.

[16] According to the Kiowa Myth, Devil's Tower is the stump of the mythical tree that called the seven sisters chased by their brother who was becoming a bear. The tree took them to the sky where they became the stars of the Big Dipper while on the earth there remained the stump of the tree with striations appearing as the marks of the bear-boy's claws.

Literature might give the nonhuman world an opportunity to hold out a mirror to us since we are unable to see the mirror animals and plants hold out in reality. Shall we understand Jules Supervielle's bear sadly playing with a little ball that is "the more and more reduced sphere of a midnight sun?" While the poet asks if we can make the bear understand, shall we realize that *we* do not understand what real bears say to us?

Le pôle est sans soupirs.
Un ours tourne et retourne
Une boule plus blanche
Que la neige et que lui.
Comment lui faire entendre
Du fond de ce Paris
Que c'est l'ancienne sphère
De plus en plus réduite
D'un soleil de minuit
Quand cet ours est si loin
De cette chambre close
Qu'il est si différent
Des bêtes familières
Qui passent à ma porte,
Ours penché sans comprendre
Sur son petit soleil
Qu'il voudrait peu à peu
Réchauffer de son souffle
Et de sa langue obscure
Comme s'il le prenait pour
Un ourson frileux
Qui fait le mort en boule
Et ferme fort les yeux.[17]

[17] "A bear turns and turns again / A ball, whiter/ Than the snow / And than him. / How can we make him understand / From the far end of this Paris/ That it is the old sphere, / More and more reduced, / Of a midnight sun / When that bear is so far / From that closed room / That he is so different / From the familiar beasts / Passing at my door, / Bear who does not understand, leaning / On his small sun / That he would like, little by little, / To warm up with his breath / And with his obscure tongue / As if he took it / For a shivery bear cub / Pretending to be dead, curled up in a ball / And strongly closes his eyes." "The pole is sightless." Jules Supervielle, "L'ours", ["The Bear"] from *Les amis inconnus* [1934], translation mine.
http://www.acnice.fr/ienvalsiagne/admin/projetsclasse/cabrieres_animaux%20en%20peril/04-ours/ours%20poesie.htm, accessed 29 March 2017. The poem can be read on an internet site, which is a class project; pupils wrote poems, acrostics, on the white bear, in the wake of Jules Supervielle.

Three balls warn us about what happens to the Earth: the ball with which the bear plays, a toy, which is the Earth, which is "the small sun," compared to a small bear, curled in a ball to pretend to be dead. The poet makes the animal try to make this "little sun" live again, reversing things and making the sun the child of the bear, aware of the necessity of instilling life again into the shrinking Sun and Earth.

Italo Calvino quoted by Alison Hawthorne Deming thus defines the political use of literature:

> Literature is necessary to politics above all when it gives a voice to what is without a voice, when it gives a name to what as yet has no name, especially to what the language of politics excludes or attempts to exclude. […] Literature is like an ear that can hear things beyond the understanding of the language of politics; it is like an eye that can see beyond the colour spectrum perceived by politics. Simply because of the solitary business of his work, the writer may happen to explore areas that no one explored before, within himself or outside, and to make discoveries that sooner or later turn out to be vital areas of collective awareness (Calvino, 98).

Calvino's words raise a fundamental problem but also pose a question. When he says that literature "gives a voice to what is without a voice," we can wonder whether it only "gives a voice to what is without a voice" or if it also makes the human world aware that everything *has* a voice.

Literature has always had the double function of entertaining and educating readers. And sometimes the most entertaining literary genres are those that make us aware of the deepest troubles concerning man's life and man's relationship with the world. Adventure novels like Jules Verne's *Voyage au centre de la terre* (1864) in France, Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912) in England or James de Mille's *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* (1888) in Canada situate the action in forests suggesting mystery on a first level but they also suggest man's deep relationship with the forests thus described. Jacques Brosse explains it:

> La peur de ces immenses territoires que l'imagination et l'inconscient peuplent encore de monstres n'a point cessé d'être actuelle, elle s'est cristallisée autour de quelques tribus d'Indiens qui y survivent à grand-peine, voués à une malédiction dont l'homme blanc est seul responsable. La terreur que peut provoquer l'apparition soudaine des Indiens de l'Amazonie, les derniers véritables "hommes sauvages" puisqu'ils vivent de la forêt, dans laquelle ils demeurent presque invisibles, se confondant avec les arbres et les lianes d'où ils émergent soudain à l'effroi du voyageur, n'a pas cessé de hanter les esprits, ce que montre encore le film récent, *La Forêt d'émeraude* (1985). Plus que des motifs cyniques, c'est au fond la

> peur qui engendre la destruction systématique des Indiens au Brésil, une des hontes de notre temps. (Brosse, 258-259)[18]

Jacques Brosse shows to what extent the fear of an unknown world concealed in the mysteries of the forest is far from being a mere imaginary device. On the contrary it reveals a form of fright dating back to times immemorial and prolonging itself down to the 21st century. The destruction of the Amazonian forest reveals that economic motivations meet the desire of rejecting the other, of chasing the stranger frightening a society only reassured by the norm.

If the three novels mentioned above and written at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, all stage characters lost in a world where the number of tree ferns is impressive, it is because the novelists see in those trees coming from the prehistoric past and still found nowadays in some countries, a link between our past, our present and the past of the world. Those gigantic tree ferns protecting an unknown world and apparently being the shelter of monstrosity may be a mirror held out to those who enter them or read about them. In that late nineteenth century, do they not reveal a monstrosity to come, a kind of monstrosity ruthlessly eradicating those who do not look like us? Those tree ferns living in novelists' adventure books tell about the end of all the trees, woods and forests that have disappeared, cut by men who wanted to make a profit on them, thus also destroying the peoples living around them. In those adventure novels, tree ferns are the sign of a meeting with the stranger, with the Other, that being that differs from what we know. Their great size is the visible image of otherness, a kind of otherness leading us back to our origins and awakening some ancestral fears conveyed by novelists.

Trees speak about our relationship to the past and hold out a mirror in which we could see our link with all the nonhuman elements of the world exactly as the tree reveals its connection with the earth and the sky, with

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[18] "The fear of those huge territories, which imagination and the unconscious still people with monsters, has not stopped being topical, it has crystallized around a few tribes of Native Americans who survive there with great difficulty, condemned to a curse for which the white man is the only responsible person. The terror that can be provoked by the sudden apparition of Amazonian Indians, the last genuine "wild men" since they live on the forest in which they remain nearly unseen, melting with trees and creepers from which they suddenly emerge, frightening the traveller, did not stop haunting people's minds, which is still shown by the film, *The Emerald Forest* (1985). More than cynical motives, all things considered, it is fear that generates the systematical destruction of Indians in Brazil, one of the shames of our age" (translation mine).

the water and animals, while giving man its shadow. The old English tree from Kent, which opens this book, shows ramifications in every direction. Its green leaves speak about life, the holes in its trunk are the dwelling places of birds and insects, and its roots, while allowing it to live, fix the water in the soil. Wangari Maathai, speaking about the fig tree, shows the ecological role of a tree:

> I later learned that there was a connection between the fig tree's root system and the underground water reservoirs. The roots burrowed deep into the ground, breaking through the rocks beneath the surface soil and diving into the underground water table. The water travelled up along the root until it hit a depression or weak place in the ground, and gushed out as a spring. Indeed wherever these trees stood, there were likely to be streams. The reverence the community had for the fig tree helped preserve the stream and the tadpoles that so captivated me. The trees also held the soil together, reducing erosion and land slides. In such ways, without conscious or deliberate effort, these cultural or spiritual practices contributed to the conservation of biodiversity. (Maathai, 46)

Can books save beeches? Can the book that etymologically comes from the beech, protect the threatened living beech? Literature, whatever its genre, can help us to become aware. But among all works, some have been defined as belonging to ecological writing, a formula that, like ecocriticism, is quite recent. Gabriel Egan considers that "the term ecocriticism was first used in the essay 'Literature and Ecology: an Experiment in Ecocriticism'" published by Williams Rueckert in the *Iowa Review* in 1978. Ecological writing is defined by Lawrence Buell according to four criteria that "distinguish the tradition of nature writing from that of literature inspired by environmental and ecological concerns:"[19]

> "environmental writing, in contrast to nature writing, assumes the presence of natural history in human history.
> [Environmental texts] "open spaces for the nonhuman[20] and its 'interests', sometimes privileging a non-androcentred world and its distinct evolution and history."

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[19] The term "ecology" was invented in 1874 by a German zoologist, Ernst Haeckel, who applied the term "œkologie" to the "relation of the animal both to its organic and non organic environment." The word comes from the Greek *oikos* meaning: "house," "habitat" *(Encyclopaedia Britannica,* electronic version, http://www.britannica.com/).

[20] Throughout this book, I will use the term "nonhuman" rather than more-than-human, used by David Abram and others, because of the negative prefix of

> "Environmental writing imports into the text an ethical orientation that makes human beings responsible for the environment and accountable for its health and continuation."
> "The environmental text assumes the processual order of nature and critiques or avoids a static model of natural change and ecological transformations." (Buell, 7-8)

This means that all literary works speaking about nature are not environmental texts. The distinction can also be made between a writer as an ecologist and an ecological writer. Yves-Charles Grandjeat writes about that:

> L'écrivain écologiste proclame son adhésion à un ensemble de principes et d'idées–à une idéologie, au sens non péjoratif du terme, au service de laquelle se met son l'écriture. L'écrivain écologique, lui, ne se contente pas d'énoncer le bien-fondé de ces principes. Il va plus loin et cherche à mettre en pratique, dans son écriture même, les principes de l'écologiste. […] [|L]a question de la représentation de la nature, par exemple, se pose en même temps que celle de son exploitation. [21]

All the texts evoking nature are not ecological texts or ecologists' texts but whenever nature is used in literary genres, it questions readers.

Metaphysical poems or the Elizabethan theatre widely use nature in a metaphorical, symbolical and allegorical way and we cannot say that they belong to environmental literature. Yet some academics link classical poetry with ecology, like Diane Kelsey McColley who published *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell.* This raises the question of whether we could give any mention of nature in a literary text some ecological dimension. Can we consider the metaphorical allusion to a plant or the ornamental description of a natural landscape only as a metaphor or an ornament? In the mere mention of nature can't we read the awareness of man's close link to the natural world and this ethical sense of responsibility that is obvious in what is asserted as environmental literature? Of course, a

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"nonhuman" making the human the centre of all things. Yet the ambiguity of the phrase "more-than-human," also used in fantasy literature, makes me choose the non-ambiguous word "nonhuman." I also chose it rather than Hallowell's phrase "other-than-human person," which also includes supernatural and mythical beings.

[21] Yves-Charles Grandjeat, "Quelques propositions sur la littérature écologique américaine," *Ecrire la nature*, *RFEA* 106 (décembre 2005): 20. "The writer as an ecologist claims his support to a group of principles and ideas—to a kind of ideology, in a non-pejorative sense, served by his writing. As for the ecological writer, he does not content himself with saying the soundness of those principles. He goes further and tries to put into practice, in his very writing, the ecologist's principles. […] the question of the representation of nature, for example, is raised together with the question of its exploitation" (translation mine).

metaphor remains a metaphor, that is a stylistic device meant to evoke something in the reader and to guide him / her on the way to the knowledge of mankind. Yet there is the mention, the name of the plant or of the animal. For example, Shakespeare's wide use of the semantic field of nature, his numerous allusions to various plants, is also a way for the spectator to be aware of the diversity of the vegetable world. Besides if mere metaphors have led some men, several centuries later, to create botanical gardens exclusively designed from Shakespeare's botanical metaphors, it is because those people have read in Shakespeare's text the necessity to preserve that diversity that is a way of discovering the text. Things are not that simple and nature in texts, whatever the text, may lead readers or spectators to become aware of the role of nature and of their responsibility to nature.

A sample of texts taken from Anglophone literature will be tackled here to show to what extent Anglophone writers, from Shakespeare to Ken Saro-Wiwa and from Romantic poets to First Nations writers, show that literature guides us on the way to awareness and can even save the planet. It is up to readers to prolong this literary journey and to see this path to awareness in the texts they will read (or hear). Literature can appear as a way of speaking about environmental problems as some theoreticians as well as poets say it. To see Shakespeare's plays and sonnets as a guide to an ecological reading of the world is not obvious at first sight. And yet, through his keen perception of the human soul and mind depicted through natural metaphors, Shakespeare gave us signs of the close relationship existing between man and nature and of the necessity to read nature to know one's own place in the world. Darwin and all naturalists read nature to interpret it. Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle* is filled with references to his readings, to the library that was onboard *The Beagle* and to the reader's active role in the scientist's interpretation of the world. But together with this bookish reading, there is the reading of natural life.

Even if the term "ecology" only appeared recently, at the end of the 19th century, poets, from the Metaphysical to the Romantic poets, gave signs of some awareness of our relationship to nature; and Romantic poets can be seen as the precursors of an ecological vision of the world. Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is first and foremost a philosophical poem about man's relationship with nature, and the break of the harmony of the world from the moment when the central bird was killed shows how the destruction of the most fragile creature somewhere in the world can break the harmony of the whole universe and condemn men. Poetry, including songs, and particularly ecological poetry, guides us towards awareness. Each literary genre, from the most complex theatrical form of Shakespeare's

theatre to songs or detective novels, can be read as environmental action when the authors give their readers or listeners some cues leading them to understand that a word can convey a fight.

Even the beauty of textual landscape paintings and the colours of the world as travellers or naturalists depict them can appear as a fight: a fight to make readers acknowledge the beauty of the world, to show them why it is worth defending. Travel books, even if they present readers with factual descriptions of the countries visited, reveal the travellers' sense of observation and their awareness of the transformations of the world and the destruction of some species. The colonizing vision appearing in some of those texts disappears behind the awareness of destruction and they show readers a real map of biodiversity, which may also be seen in the painting of the beauty of nature and particularly its colours. Visual imagination with graphic novelists like Neil Gaiman or Alan Moore can also give birth to ecological allegories meant for any audience and the visual dimension added to the written text increases the visibility of the message.

Literature leads people to awareness because it depicts all the damage to all parts of the planet and its inhabitants, both being totally linked. Those who do not understand that ecology is the first problem in the world and that everything depends on man's conception of the land and of all its inhabitants, might be guided by a haiku, a naturalist's autobiography, fantastic literature or children's books. The extinction of species, deforestation, water pollution, any kind of poisoning of the earth are tackled in literature. Deforestation is dealt with in plays as well as novels in African literature but some positive experiences like the Green Belt reconstituted by Wangari Maathai who, with hundreds of Kenyan women, replanted trees in Kenya whose forests had been destroyed by colonization, give us hope. The 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner told her story in *A Memoir*, *Unbowed*. She gave reality to Jean Giono's text (for the English translation of which she wrote a preface), *The Man who Planted Trees*. Even the fantastic may be a tool used by some writers to denounce the wild exploitation of resources. The First Nations perhaps have a deeper perception of the preservation of the earth than those who have colonized them. From the Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday, to some Aboriginal writings from Canada and Australia, we shall see how those writers lead us on the way to awareness.

And perhaps the key is given by animals' voices as animals so often show us the way to awareness. Real animals studied by scientists like Dian Fossey or Jane Goodall depict the threat against some species and the huge amount of work done by those women and men and even children to preserve those creatures by first teaching the world to make their acquaintance. Fiction also speaks about animals as threatened species. The

nonhuman world may give us the solution to preserve the planet, a solution that dwells perhaps simply in the fact of listening to the other, either the human one or the nonhuman one, the Earth and the universe at large. Children's books are also a way of educating human children through animal discovery. From Kipling's *Jungle Book* to Tomson Highway's illustrated children's books, writers open children's eyes and hearts to their relationship with animals.

Literature is a means of resistance and this resistance may be expressed either through the theatre, which gives nature a voice, or through Native languages included in texts to resist the dominating language. Literature is an answer to the violence done to lands and men, as appears in texts taken from Nigerian, Tuareg or Native American literatures among others.

To write about ecological literature, two options were possible: either choosing a precise corpus with a reasonable number of works; or refusing the idea of a corpus and preferring to travel all over the Anglophone—and even taking some non-Anglophone by-ways—world's literature. This totally unreasonable option led me to be non-exhaustive, but readers may feel like completing this journey and find many more examples. I chose this approach which is somewhat like a walk in a mountain forest where you do not know, when you start, which trees, flowers and animals you are going to meet and, as you progress, you deepen your knowledge of this forest. I would like to go on with the dialogue launched by poets and ecocritics throughout the world and suggest that literature, whatever its genre, may bring about deep changes in the world as far as ecology is concerned and, if there are deep ecological changes, this will necessarily bring about deep changes in human pacified relationships. Is it utopia? Maybe, but in the sense that utopia, "the place that does not exist," is our world, our universe. That place that does not exist yet is still to be invented.

Our reality is made of too many illusions not to deduce from them that we should give more credit to the reality of illusion: colours are an illusion, or at least they are the result of a connection between our perception and wave lengths; the blue colour of the sky is an illusion and the result of the density of the air; star lights are an illusion since when we see a star light, it is a light that shone several centuries ago. So, what is real? Our present time in which we can see the star shining in front of our eyes or the past when this star was shining in reality? Our perception of the beauty of a starry sky puts us in the presence of a face to face between two times in the tiny spots of shining stars representing the hugeness of the cosmos. The appearance of things is not their reality. The French philosopher Jean-Christophe Bailly says that "every animal lives in the network of appearances in his own way, that is to say, he hides in it" (Bailly *La question animale*, 27, translation

mine). This face to face between illusion and reality, appearance and reality, past and present, the instant of our perception here and now and the eternity of the universe, might be an immaterial cairn placed on our paths to let us understand on the one hand the relativity of perception and on the other hand, the depth of our relationship with the nonhuman. It is towards that conscience that writers, artists and ecocritics try to lead us. Is it enough to save the world? Can this increasing sense of awareness save the planet and its inhabitants? Scott Slovic quotes Rebecca Solnit's perception of the notion of saving and prolongs it in *Going Away to Think*:

> As activist and author Rebecca Solnit states, "A game of checkers ends. The weather never does. That's why you can't save anything. Saving is the wrong word, one invoked over and over again, for almost every cause […]. Saving suggests a laying up where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt; it imagines an extraction from the dangerous, unstable, ever-changing process called life on earth" (*Hope* 59) […]. Solnit's criticism of the word "save" has a lot to do with her sense of what it takes to motivate activists to take to the streets—and the woods and courtrooms—day after day. If you think you're supposed to achieve permanent victories and yet you recognize that you've only managed a series of modest, tenuous, short-lived successes, you could easily be demoralized. Species can be protected from year to year, but not removed entirely from the possibility of extinction. Air and water can be made cleaner through legislation and lifestyle changes, but never removed entirely from the thread of future degradation—never "saved" once and for all. Nonetheless, with the understanding that all "saves" are contingent and temporary, the urge to help and protect is a forceful one. (*Going Away,* 2)

There is something else in "the urge to help and protect" the nonhuman and thus the human world—for the latter depends on the former and for the moment the latter destroys the former, sawing the branch on which both are sitting, to use a familiar metaphor leading us to trees again. All short-lived successes are steps to make people aware of the necessity of insisting. Something that may not lead to an immediate saving but to the feeling of a connection, as Kev Reynolds put it in a lecture given in Toulouse.[22] A mountaineer and author of guidebooks, who proposes connections between places of social life and places of nature, he has a deep sense of connection and can thus guide his readers and listeners to awareness. Scott Slovic travelling around the world to give lectures on ecocriticism, and giving

[22] Kev Reynolds, "Making the Connection," a lecture given at the conference "Anglophone Mountain and Exploration Writing: Meetings Between the Human and Nonhuman," 14 October 2016. https://www.canal-u.tv/video/universite_toulouse_ii_le_mirail/making_the_connection_kev_reynolds.25041. Published in *Caliban* n° 59 (Irina Kantarbaeva-Bill ed.), Toulouse: PUM, 2018.

classes on the mountain, and Kev Reynolds, who gives lectures all over the British Isles to speak about the mountains of the world he has climbed for decades, and who writes guidebooks on the Himalayas as well as the Pyrenees or Kent, both place cairns on our paths. Kev Reynolds shows his audiences and readers the beauty of nature and particularly of mountains and quotes writers who painted that beauty of nature. Scott Slovic shows his students, audiences and readers the weight of literature by analysing literary texts in the light of nature protection. Both of them and so many others lead us to see the connection between the human and nonhuman worlds either by celebrating the beauty of the world or by listening to its songs relayed by writers. Only the capacity of wonder may lead to respect.

Rivers join, sometimes they allow nature and mythology to meet—Coppermine River in Canada, or in France, the Garonne river, whose name comes from the Celtic god Gar, who is also present in English quarries and Celtic ker and cairns. Like rivers, literature and nature may be united by a confluence of thoughts and ethics leading us simply to perceive and enjoy the living world.