

Indrē Žakevičienē

**NEW INSTRUMENTS OF LITERARY RESEARCH:  
INTERDISCIPLINARY CHALLENGES**



*The aim of the article is to reveal the new possibilities of interdisciplinary studies and to ponder upon possible contribution of the researchers of the humanities into the work of environmentalists and ecologists while seeking effective solutions, concerning the whole biosphere and ecosystem, to discuss the possibilities of cooperation of the researchers of different fields of interest (linguists, psychologists, philosophers) while analysing literary texts, to emphasise the role of literature trying to revive the so-called ecological sub-consciousness of an individual, and changing one's attitude towards the environment, to introduce the Reception*

*Theory and the Cognitive Poetics as specific literary tools, basic to modern literary analysis because of their emphasis on readers' reactions and their particular cognitive processes, experiencing literary texts.*

**JAUNI LITERATŪRAS PĒTNIECĪBAS RĪKI:  
STARPNOZARU SAREŽĢĪTIE UZDEVUMI**

*Šā raksta galvenais mērķis ir iztīrīt jautājumu par mūsdienu literatūras analīzes īpašiem rīkiem un meklēt zinātniskās saziņas jaunus veidus; pētījuma galvenie iztīrājamie jautājumi būs par dažiem teorētiskajiem rīkiem, instrumentiem, kurus varētu uztvert kā ļoti atšķirīgus un tai pašā laikā kā tādus, kuriem ir daudz kopīga – ekokritika, ekopsiholoģija, bioreģionālisms, uztveres teorija un kognitīvā poētika.*

*Ekokritikas teorētiskā analītiskā aina un jēdzieni, par kuriem tā vedina domāt, varētu tikt uzskatīti par acīmredzamu norādi uz starpnozaru pētniecību un gluži jaunu pieeju literārajam tekstam; ekokritikas galvenās aplūkojamās tēmas ir diezgan vienkāršas: 1) „cilvēka saistība ar citām dzīvības formām, jo īpaši augstākattīstītajiem dzīvniekiem; 2) mijaistības ar dabas pasauli, ko gandrīz visur šodien pazīst kā ekoloģiju, pētīšana; 3) cilvēka darbības radīta dabas pārveidošana, un tās izrietošās interpretācijas un tās radītās idejas; 4) subjektīva, emocionāla un estētiska reakcija uz dabu“ (Glakens [Glacken] 1999: 2). Interpretējot Bārta [Barthes], Fuko [Foucault], Deridā [Derrida], Lakāna [Lacan] un citu iegūtos rezultātus, ekokritiķi (Hjūzs [Hughes], Rūkerts [Rueckert], Bjils [Buell], Gifords [Gifford], Lavs [Love], Glakens [Glacken], Hauvarts [Howarth] u. c.) mēģina iedzīvināt jaunu viedokli, pamatojoties uz diskutējamiem jautājumiem, kas ir labvēlīgi ekoloģijai. Ekopsiholoģija ir svarīga ekokritikas nozare, un tās galvenais uzdevums ir meklēt veidus, kā atmodināt ekoloģisko zemapziņu, kura laika gaitā ir tikusi apklusināta. Literatūru varētu uzskatīt par vienu no rīkiem, ar kuras palīdzību ekoloģiskais ego varētu tikt atdzīvināts. Ekopsihologi runā par dažādiem transpersonāliem veidiem un dziedināšanas seansiem neskartajā dabā, bet literatūras pētnieki varētu meklēt īpašus ekotekstus, kas vismaz daļēji spēj veikt dziedināšanas seansu funkcijas pirmatnējā dabā. Šādu ekotekstu galvenās pazīmes ir raksturojis Lorens Bjuls [Lawrence Buell].*

*Bioreģionālisma jēdziens tika formulēts 1973. gadā Amerikas Savienotajās Valstīs un kā konkrēts termins 1976. gadā tika iekļauts P. Berga [P. Berg] un R. Dasmana [R. Dasmann] rakstā „Atkal apdzīvojot Kaliforniju” [“Reinhabiting California”]. Bioreģionālās attieksmes būtība – cilvēka un viņa vietas vienotība; bioreģionu varētu definēt no kultūras un garīgā*

*svarīguma viedokļa. Iztirzājot šo problēmu pasaules mērogā, bioreģionu ikviens varētu uzskatīt par savu valsti, bet, aplūkojot lokāli – kā savas lauku mājas vai daudzdzīvokļu māju. Viss būs atkarīgs no jūsu spējas solidarizēties ar vidi un to darīt pienācīgā vides zināšanu līmenī.*

*Abi nākamie iepriekš minētie literatūras pētījumu rīki – uztveres teorija un kognitīvā poētika – ir atšķirīgi un vērsti uz īpašiem izziņas procesiem, kas raksturīgi visiem lasītājiem neatkarīgi no viņu individuālās literārās gaumes vai attieksmes pret ekoloģiju, vidi un uz labākas saskarsmes veidu meklēšanu ar dabu. Lasītājs un teksts ir vissvarīgākie šajā gadījumā, tādēļ galvenie akcenti ir jāliek uz izziņas procesiem, individuālo pieredzi un empīriskiem aspektiem. Uztveres teorijas un kognitīvās poētikas jomas ir cieši saistītas, jo abām ir tas pats galvenais izpētes priekšmets – cilvēka prāts un indivīda reakcija uz literāro tekstu sūtītiem signāliem; tāpēc kognitīvo pētījumu jomu varētu uzskatīt par vienu no jomām, kurā literatūras pētnieki un valodnieki varētu sadarboties visefektīvāk. Ņemot palīgā situatīvā modeļa, vietējās un globālās saskaņotības jēdzienus, izdarīto secinājumu dažādus veidus, konceptuālās metaforas un ikoniskuma definīcijas, ir iespējams izskaidrot verbālo protokolu informāciju, kas varētu būt ļoti vērtīga, mēģinot atminēt bestselleru „noslēpumus“ vai izskaidrot literatūras neveiksmes. Šā raksta autore ir veikusi šādu pētījumu par lietuviešu dzejnieka Mairoņa dzeju (pētījuma rezultāti tiks publicēti Lietuviešu literatūras un folkloras institūta literatūras pētniecības žurnālā).*

*Šajā rakstā galvenais pieņēmums jeb hipotēze varētu derēt kā secinājums: ekokritika un tās nozares, proti, uztveres teorija un kognitīvā poētika, ir īpašas starpnozaru zinātnisko ideju mācības, kuras varētu tikt uztvertas kā daudzspektu attieksmes pret literatūru un labi cilvēka spēju piemēri, kā interesantas perspektīvas doktorantiem un viņu pasniedzējiem, kurus vilina konkrētu atbilžu un iedvesmojošu atklājumu meklējumi.*

## **Introduction**

Modern literary studies tend to unite different spheres of the humanities and trespass the boundaries of particular literary texts: wide cultural and literary contexts provoke different branches of interdisciplinary research, stipulating various possibilities for polemics and quest for different points of view. The main aim of this article is to ponder upon the question of specific instruments of modern literary analysis and to look for new ways of scientific communication: interdisciplinary point of view prompts broader scale of the means of literary studies; contemporary linguists, literary researchers, philosophers and psychologists seek to expand the realms of their research and to look for new horizons in their professional fields, therefore the main objects of this article will be some theoretical tools, which could be grasped as extremely different and at the same time having a lot in common – Ecocriticism, Ecopsychology, Bioregionalism, Reception Theory and Cognitive Poetics.

Theoretical insights of ecocritics and the concepts they suggest could be treated as quite a new approach to literary text; unbelievers might be right – by using ecocritical postulates it would be difficult to evaluate the poetics of the text, to characterize the text having in mind particular cultural context, to look for different ways of interpretation, while, on the other hand, Ecocriticism and Ecopsychology reveal the influence of the text on the reader, show the role of literature while solving urgent ecological problems: sensitive readers may experience the power of ecotext and let his or her environment come closer. Bioregionalism opens the gate for discussions on identity and abilities to experience the rethinking of environment: the notions of place, space and territory; the main questions, which could be answered with the help of literary texts, are very simple (does particular space (urban/rural) stipulate particular themes or subjects? When does the concept of bioregionalism occur? How could the concept of “nonbioregional” state of mind be treated?), but at the same time

provoke further quests for the solutions for more serious problems. Reception Theory and Cognitive Poetics are closely related, but are of slightly different scope than Ecocriticism; nevertheless all those theories could be used when trying to explain specific reactions of the readers and the influence of literary texts on particular cognitive processes experienced by the readers. So it would be useful to discuss in short all those promising theories mentioned above.

### **Ecoideas and literary research**

Ecocriticism – a relatively new branch of literary research – could be understood as a link between “eco” and “ego”, between our ecosystem and its literary representations and interpretations. The first time literature was observed from the ecological point of view was in 1974, when Joseph Meeker’s book “The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology” appeared. According to J. Meeker, a human being is a specific “literary creature”; the capacity to create (to write and to read) distinguishes him from other species: “Human beings are the earth’s only literary creatures... If the creation of literature is an important characteristic of the human species, it should be examined carefully and honestly to discover its influence upon human behaviour and the natural environment. (...) Is it an activity which adapts us better to the world or one which estranges us from it?” (Meeker 1974: 3–4) This question Joseph Meeker emphasises could be crucial not only for those, interested in Ecocriticism, but for the experts of Reception Theory and Cognitive Poetics as well; and what could be in common between ecology and literary research? Ecology analyses correlations of unanimated and organized nature, interrelations between different organisms and the environment they inhabit. Literature encompasses everything – creative powers, psychological processes, historical and cultural realia, in other words – inner and outer environment, complicated individual reactions and cognitive movements, correlations of outer and inner stimuli, so it is obvious, that ecology and literary research have one common background – the notion of “correlation”. Literary research could be treated as ecology of literature and literary researchers – as literary ecologists, looking for harmonious interrelations between the text and the reader. During two decades the issues of J. Meeker have been contracted into simple statements, indicating the main focus of Ecocriticism: 1) “the relationship of the human race to other forms of life, particularly to the higher animals; 2) the study of interrelationships in the natural world, almost universally known today as ecology; 3) the transformation of nature by human agency, interpretations that have been made of it, and the ideas it has engendered; 4) subjective, emotional, and aesthetic reactions to nature” (Glacken 1999: 2). While interpreting the findings of R. Barthes, M. Foucault, J. Derrida, J. Lacan and others, the ecocritics (T. Hughes, W. Rueckert, L. Buell, T. Gifford, G. A. Love, C. J. Glacken, W. Howarth, etc.) try to embed a new point of view, based on the issues beneficial to ecology. Those main ecocritical issues can’t be discussed without specific literary texts, but not every text can be analysed with the means of ecocriticism. Lawrence Buell claims, that literary text (so called “ecotext”) should satisfy four items or reflect certain ecocritical aspects: “the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history; the human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest; human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation; some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text.” (Buell 1995: 4) At first sight Lithuanian literature could be really good material or source for ecocritical research (it’s hardly possible to find any literary text without landscape or concrete space depicted, without any episodes of nature), but after looking more closely one could start thinking quite to the contrary. The examples of some fragments of poetical texts by Albinas Baranauskas and Bernardas Brazdžionis could illustrate the latter statement.

The jar of unfading quiver, the mirror  
Of ancient, never changed reflections.  
That's a cold clock in the lime tree,  
Which shows even the slightest breath of the fields.

It would be nice to think of that! But not a single one,  
Even the subtlest wizard of his heart...  
Look, there's the fog sneaking through the yellow oats,  
Ant the moon pours its cool wisdom mid the beds.<sup>1</sup>

(Baranauskas 1994: 19; from the poem "Mėnulio išmintis" (*The Wisdom of the Moon*))

Clusters of currents droop like strings of pure amber,  
Flowers die and melancholy tears the leaves in the forests.  
Naked sticks... Naked sticks... And the sky like bright diamond and sacred.  
Winter marches the Earth like a merchant enriched from Damascus.  
And the heart settles down, extraneous to dreams and to joy...<sup>2</sup>

(Brazdžionis 1989: 423; from the poem "Gyvenimo karuselė" (*The Carousel of Life*))

Though the text by Brazdžionis is full of so-called "natural" images, the main message of the poem is deeply connected with human feelings and emotions and the text itself does not correspond to the items formulated by Buell. Baranauskas' poem clearly illustrates the main postulates of ecocriticism and undoubtedly could be treated as a pure ecotext. May be we could make the assumption, that while reading such ecotexts a human being should experience certain emotions, which could provoke particular thoughts, and this complex percept – ecosystem and all its elements – could be drawn closer. Therefore so-called ecoliterature could be treated as a really influential one, while speaking about the cooperation of literary researchers and ecologists.

Ecocritical insights, provoked by literary texts, could be associated with the problems of constant nervous state of mind, rush and anxiety, characteristic to modern individual. One of the sources of our anxiety and haste, as we can conclude from Buell's ideas, is our everyday existence in "non-places"; while "place entails spatial location, entails a spatial container of some sort, [...] is inseparable from the concrete region in which it is found and defined by physical markers as well as social consensus, [...] is seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered" (Buell 2005: 160), the "non-place" is experienced as a peculiar state of being, stipulating new feelings, which usually are not very pleasant.

<sup>1</sup> Here is the original Lithuanian text:

Ąsotis neišblėstančio virpėjimo, veidrodis  
Pasenusių, per amžius neatmainytų atspindžių.  
Liepoje tarp lapų kabo šaltas laikrodis,  
Kuris parodo net mažiausią padvelkimą iš suartų laukų.

Kad taip galėtum sugalvot žmogus! Tačiau nė vienas,  
Net nė pats jautriausias klausytojas savos širdies...  
Va, atslenka prie vyšnių rūkas per geltoną avižieną,  
Tarpplisviais mėnulis lieja savo vėsią vagą išminties.

<sup>2</sup> Lithuanian original text:

Tyro gintaro kekėm nusvyra prinokę serbentos,  
Miršta gėlės, ir girios lapus melancholijoj drasko.  
Stagarai... Stagarai... Ir dangus deimantinis ir šventas.  
Žengia žemėn žiema kaip turtingas pirklys iš Damasko.  
Ir nurimsta širdis meilei, džiaugsmui, svajoms svetima...

The experience of “non-places” is deeply connected with the dimension of time, the wane of which is being experienced even by children. Because of their constant alterations the “non-places” don’t let us feel the environment fully, therefore we can experience the space, but not the place, which eventually turns into a virtual one – rather often we return home only to sleep, therefore (because of the lack of time) we must be satisfied only with the possibility to contemplate the idea of our own place.

### **In quest of ecological subconsciousness**

Ecopsychology, one of the branches of Ecocriticism, reveals the phenomenon of healing cooperation between an individual and the nature or the environment and shows the variety of ways for such communication. According to the Ecocriticism expert Scott Slovic, “both nature and writing (the former being an external presence, the latter a process of verbalizing personal experience) demand and contribute to an author’s awareness of self and non-self. By confronting “face to face“ the separate realm of nature, by becoming aware of its “otherness“, the writer implicitly becomes more deeply aware of his or her own dimension, limitations of form and understanding, and processes of grappling with the unknown.” (Slovic 1996: 325). Step by step „the unknown“ reveals itself and makes the comprehendor more tolerant to everybody and everything, more empathic and responsible for his place.

Theodore Roszak has formulated some main principles of Ecopsychology, which summarise the essence of this ecocritical branch: “the core of the mind is the ecological unconscious; the contents of the ecological unconscious represent the living record of cosmic evolution, tracing back to distant initial conditions in the history of time (...); the goal of Ecopsychology is to awaken the inherent sense of environmental reciprocity that lies within the ecological unconscious; the ecological ego matures toward a sense of ethical responsibility to the planet that is as vividly experienced as our ethical responsibility to other people; Ecopsychology draws significantly on the insights of ecofeminism with a view to demystifying the sexual stereotypes; Ecopsychology is *post*-industrial, not *anti*-industrial in its social orientation; (...) the needs of the planet are the needs of the person, the rights of the person are the rights of the planet.” (Roszak 1992: 52) So the only unsolved question is – how to awake this ”ecological unconscious” or ecological ego. Literature could be one of the ways, but it is important to define, what texts should be named as the best catalysts animating the ecological sub-consciousness.

### **Bioregion: spiritually inhabited place**

The concept of Bioregionalism was formulated in 1973, in the United States, and as a concrete term was incorporated in the article written by Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann “Reinhabiting California” in 1976. The essence of a bioregional attitude – the unity of a human-being and his place; and this place is not provincial, but enrooted into the global system of earth (Marshall 2009: 6). As it was mentioned before, the place is much more informative than the space. The expert of bioregional studies Peter Berg tries to define the concept of bioregion: “What is a bioregion? This idea doesn't come from pure natural science. Bioregionalism is a cultural idea. It's an attempt to answer, "Who am I, what am I, and what am I going to do about it?" It's a way for people to look at the place where they live in terms of fitting into natural characteristics.” (Berg 1990: 35) It could be rather complicated to define the meaning of “bioregion”, because it constantly changes depending on our different criteria. Bioregion could be defined from the perspective of cultural and spiritual resonance. While pondering upon the problem globally, bioregion could be treated as your country; while looking locally – as your homestead or your block. Everything will depend on your ability to identify yourself with the environment and on the level of the

knowledge about the environment. Thomas Berry describes a set of “functions” which are necessary for bioregional living emphasising that we should “recognize the rights of each species to its habitat, to its migratory routes, to its place in the community. The bioregion is the domestic setting of the community just as the home is the domestic setting of the family”. The community of the bioregion “is fulfilled in each of its components: in the flowering fields, in the great oak trees, in the flight of the sparrow, in the surfacing of the whale, and in any of the other expressions of the natural world.” (Berry 1988: 4) It appears that Bioregionalism can suggest new assumptions and solutions while solving the problem of identity.

### **Towards the reception processes**

The next two instruments of literary research mentioned above – Reception Theory and Cognitive Poetics – are different and focused on specific cognitive processes, characteristic to all the readers, without reference to their individual literary taste or attitude towards ecology, environment and search of the ways for better communication with nature. According to David S. Miall, the expert of Reader Response research, “literature invokes processes in the reader somewhat as a migrating bird depends on its navigational system. The bird does not set out with a fixed goal that it aims to reach: its orientation is guided by reference to such environmental signals as geographical landmarks, terrestrial magnetism, the sun, and stars, all of which provide the bird with a goal-tracking system. It is this content-knowledge that modulates the migratory process of the bird, but in order to understand that process we need to know not what the bird understands about magnetism or the sun but how its systematic use of this information creates a guidance system. Similarly, the literary reader, while knowing there may be a goal to be reached (i.e., an interpretation of a text that is appropriate for that reader), cannot set out knowing in advance what that goal is, in the way that the reader of a repair manual or a chemistry textbook can be goal-oriented; moreover, interpretation may not even be a goal for the reader who reads for the pleasurable experience of reading rather than for meaning. Literary reading is guided, like the migrating bird, by an array of navigational markers, such as the palette of phonetic features, significant tropes, or narrative cues, and it is these that enable readers to attain their goal. Readers do not need knowledge of phonetic tone colours, or even need to be aware of their role during reading.” (Miall 1994: 337) The reader and the text are the most important here, therefore the main accents have to be put on cognitive processes, individual experiences and empirical aspects. The fields of Reception Theory and Cognitive Poetics are closely related because of the same central object – human mind and individual reactions to the signals sent by literary texts; therefore the realm of cognitive research could be treated as one of the best spheres where literary researchers and linguists could cooperate most effectively.

To measure empirical experience and to explain the mechanism of inference generation the researchers use so-called ‘three-pronged method’; “inferences are not directly manifested in the text, so there needs to be a method of exposing the inferences and testing whether they are generated during normal reading. A three-pronged method has been advocated for studies of inference generation (Graesser et al. 1994; Magliano and Graesser 1991; Suh and Trabasso 1993; Trabasso and Magliano 1996). The three prongs are (1) theoretical predictions, (2) collection of verbal protocols, and (3) collection of on-line behavioural measures.” (Graesser, Wiemer-Hastings 2001: 8) With the help of the notions of situational model, local and global connections, different kinds of generated inferences, definitions of conceptual metaphor and iconicity, it is possible to explain the information of verbal protocols, which could be extremely valuable when trying to unriddle the “mysteries” of bestsellers or to explain literary failures.

### Instead of conclusions

It is obvious, that modern literary studies require somewhat different means for getting results and that it's not enough to stay enframed on a purely textual level. Laboratory findings are as important as the capacity of the researchers to get solid insights and well-founded assumptions only with some books at hand. Ecocriticism and its branches or Cognitive Poetics – specific interdisciplinary theories – could be grasped as nice examples of multidimensional attitude towards literature and human abilities, as interesting perspectives for doctoral students and their teachers, streaming for concrete answers and inspiring conclusions.

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