and had little, if anything, to do with nature writing, the originating genre of the ecocritical movement, now vastly expanded into multiple disciplines. Lurking under the surface of those early writings were intimations of Darwinian evolution, the force of the environment on the human body, and the nature of consciousness. Today a proliferation of fields, such as behavioral ecology, treats subjects like these. In June 2001 Joseph Carroll's talk at the ASLE conference at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, "Adaptation, Environment, and Literary Study," gathered up some of the ecocritical threads woven through his already influential book *Evolution and Literary Theory* and offered life-changing epiphanies for the humanities. What there began as a Darwinian ecology opened doors from the humanities into the sciences—most recently, into paleoanthropology and archaeology—and, in my case, into consciousness studies. This trajectory can be seen in my 2009 book *The Nature of Being Human: From Environmentalism to Consciousness*. After the book's final chapter, "My Life as a Robot," I pursued its theme—"eco" with a vengeance!—even further in my essay "Free As We Need to Be." Few readers of that overview will fail to notice the extent to which "[t]he old order changeth, yielding place to new." My article "How We Became So Beautiful and Bright: Deep History and Evolutionary Anthropology" entails still broader perspectives (see http://hfromm.net/professional). Most of these writings would not exist without the generative force of ecocriticism, extending well beyond the earlier social challenges of ecofeminism, environmental justice, capitalist critique, environmental law, and subaltern-cultures studies, among other disciplines.

Indeed, as I write this letter, *Science*, *Nature*, and the news media dependent on them are reporting on the trillions of microbes constituting a microbiome in our guts and on our skins. These almost invisible life-forms (our own personal Higgs bosons), like the more visible, biologically diverse animals from whom we derive, dissolve the traditional, humanist boundaries between an imperial "us" and a merely ancillary "environment." Even a discipline as modest as ecocriticism, having expanded so greatly over the past twenty-five years, can be sure that infinite worlds remain for exploration.

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Reply:

I appreciate Harold Fromm's emphasis on the diverse approaches found in the ecocritical field and on the relevance of ecocriticism to the goals and activities of the MLA because this was the future envisioned by the early scholars. Ecocriticism is an expansive, interdisciplinary field of study that arose from a shared desire for a new literary theory and practice. This shared interest has made ecocriticism a robust field that continues to grow, as seen in the newest ecocriticism program in the United States: the literature-and-environment program that started in the fall of 2012 in the English department at the University of Idaho, spearheaded by Scott Slovic, Jennifer Ladino, Erin James, Janis Johnson, and Jodie Nicotra. The field is also becoming rooted as an academic discipline around the world, in countries such as China, India, Brazil, and Australia, to name only a few.

Although it may be enticing to try to pinpoint the exact second when ecocriticism was born, the formation of a discipline is never that clean. The field grew out of a community of scholars interested in the wide relations between peoples and places, society and nature, literature and the environment. The ecocritical field was building across conferences, disciplines, and institutions over several decades to gain a critical momentum in the early 1990s that led to the founding of ASLE in 1992.

In foraging in the ecocritical past to find stories of the field's origins, I chose to start with Cheryll Glotfelty, who initiated the idea for the first ecocritical anthology in the 1989 letter that she wrote as a graduate student. My longer project entails a series of interviews of the major ecocritical scholars who were active in

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the formative years of the field, which will accompany my interview with Glotfelty. Her letter and the ideas brought forth in it, along with the anthology she coedited with Fromm, helped catalyze the public recognition of a field. In this old, wrinkled letter (complete with handwriting in the margins), Glotfelty invites others to help develop ecocriticism as a discipline, collaborate with her on an ecocritical anthology, and circulate an ecocritical bibliography (she attached her own twenty-page bibliography). The collaborative spirit that pervades her letter is a characteristic element that defines not only the historical formation of ecocriticism in America but also the interdisciplinarity across traditionally separated fields that continues to define ecocriticism. In addition, Glotfelty's letter expresses a type of sustainable intellectual ethos that inquires how we as scholars can preserve and expand a critical practice, as well as how we might make our work matter in the world.

This latter concern has been contained by the term *social activism*, but it can also be understood as the extension of a literary criticism that connects the meanings inside and outside of texts. Glotfelty's question "How can one, as a literary critic and teacher, contribute to the ecological health of the planet?" is a pivotal concern that ties together the spheres of the personal and public, the individual and society (610). While ecocriticism places this concern at the forefront of its practice, the question of how academic scholarship relates to the wider world always underlies literary criticism.

The ability to cross traditional borders, innovate, diversify, and collaborate that characterizes ecocriticism also defines many principles of literary criticism today. Literary criticism is by nature theoretically and practically dependent on different systems of knowledge and types of interpretation that elucidate meaning, value, and form. To a certain degree, literary theory and criticism are necessarily invested in exploring the problem of the connection between the personal and political, the theoretical and practical. Perhaps the term *social activism* is a misnomer because literary theory and criticism are anchored in the trade winds of language and experience that produce ethical dilemmas arising from the relation between ideas and actions.

The question remains for literary criticism as it does for society: "What is the connection between the text and world, ideas and actions?" In thinking of the relation between scholarship and activism that seems most urgent in ecocriticism, I am reminded of a poem by Adrienne Rich (1929–2012), entitled simply "18," that addresses this question of connection between inner and outer worlds. The poem's speaker explains:

> The problem is
> to connect, without hysteria, the pain
> of any one's body with the pain of the body's
> world
> For it is the body's world
> they are trying to destroy forever
>
> (*Your Native Land, Your Life*; New York: Norton, 1986; print; 100)

The full poem expresses a tragic view of existence that imagines the individual as disconnected from her own body, other individuals, society, and nature. Yet the speaker articulates the need to reconnect the broken ties between self and other, mind and body, and human beings and nature in order to fully inhabit one's life. The disparate self exists in the desire to return to the *other*—body, society, environment. This attempt to harmonize self and other can also be understood as the effort to interpret existence, which is a view traced back through the historical development of literary theory and criticism. As found in Rich's poem, the act of locating knowledge in the relations between two worlds of meaning, a gesture of connecting parts to the whole that ties the individual to society and to nature, speaks to the linking of diverse disciplinary worlds that accompanies literary analysis. One of the refreshing elements of ecocriticism that has allowed it to thrive in different parts of the world is its ability to situate the problem of interpretation in the relational dynamic between theory and social action.

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