of Glotfelty, Fromm, and many others in bringing so many teachers and students together in a vital and directed endeavor. That the effectiveness of this endeavor and nature of its goals can be openly debated in forums such as *PMLA* reflects ecocriticism's influence and success.

Fred Waage
East Tennessee State University

Reply:

I am thrilled to see more interest in the origins of the ecocritical field, a field that has become housed in English departments of universities across America. Fred Waage's 1976 special session on literature and the environment reinforces my earlier point about the MLA's long support of academic innovation in literary theory and criticism. I invite more scholars to contact me with information about their work in ecocriticism as I compose my book of interviews in an effort to record a history of the field (michellebalaev@gmail.com). The interest generated by my article on ecocriticism reflects the continued relevance of a literary theory and criticism that are here to stay.

Although Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's anthology *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (U of Georgia P, 1996) was not the first to address the topic of environmental literature, it was the first collection of (ecological) literary criticism to use *ecocriticism* in its title and to deliberately outline the parameters of the field with a theoretical vision for a new type of literary criticism. The anthology begins with Glotfelty's clarion call for organizing the field in an introductory chapter (which also refers to Waage). It contains twenty-nine contributions, from twenty-seven literary scholars and two creative writers, and is organized into three sections: "Ecotheory: Reflections on Nature and Culture," "Ecocritical Considerations of Fiction and Drama," and "Critical Studies of Environmental Literature" (which includes a chapter by Glen Love).

Glen and Rhoda Love's anthology, *Ecological Crisis: Readings for Survival* (1970), is important for its focus on pollution and preservation issues as well as for its apocalyptic urgency, which sought to encourage social action. The urgency to act was a prevalent environmental theme in society and literature during a period that saw the enactment of the Clear Air Act (1963) and Clean Water Act (1972). This anthology addressed environmental literature, but it would be difficult to read as ecocriticism because its focus is not literary criticism. Rather, it gathered primarily scientists and social scientists; of the twenty-two contributors, only one was a literary scholar. However, the anthology was preceded by much earlier American collections that addressed environmental literature, nature writing, or literature about nature.

The early- to mid-twentieth-century predecessors of ecocriticism are too numerous to name here, but significant examples of environmental literature or nature writing from this period include the pioneering work of Anna Botsford Comstock (a professor of "nature study" at Cornell University) in her *Handbook of Nature-Study* (Cornell UP, 1911), Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford UP, 1949), Joseph Wood Krutch's *Great American Nature Writing* (Sloane, 1950), and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (Houghton, 1962). Additional contributions made to the field before the 1990s, among many others, include Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (Scribner, 1974), Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (U of North Carolina P, 1975), and Vera Norwood and Janice Monk's *The Desert Is No Lady: Southwestern Landscape in Women's Writing and Art* (Yale UP, 1987).

Much like a major river that has no single source but is composed of multiple feeder streams in the headwaters and joined by many more streams along its course, ecocriticism is formed by the work of multiple scholars

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produced over a large expanse of time. Instead of trying to fix the exact starting point of a massive body of ecological literary criticism, my work will record the multiple sources that have shaped this important field. Although my initial interview focused on one person and one book, the book would not have been possible without the work of many other scholars, which both the book and interview attempt to record. Indeed, Glotfelty emphatically said several times in the interview that she is one among many ecocritical scholars who made the field possible—she wanted to make sure that the collective efforts of others were recognized.

I see Glotfelty and Fromm's *Ecocriticism Reader* as a type of data portal for looking back to understand how the field originated and peering forward to discern its future developments. In the last decade we have seen new literature-and-environment programs emerge in many English departments. Two prominent programs with strong faculty support are at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and Washington State University. Now that ecocriticism has become nationally established, a next step might be its internationalization. The national society for ecocritical scholarship, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), already has branches in different countries, but an international ASLE (IASLE) has yet to be formed. The internationalization of ecocriticism is important because environmental issues have global sources and solutions. Creating a network of ecocritical scholars working across borders through an international organization might also elicit more immediate connections between the academy and society in ways that influence global social change.

Still, a question lurks at the heart of ecocriticism: can this literary theory and criticism influence society? It is a question that pulls at the edges of my scholarship and the humanities in general. Do the humanities have the capacity to provoke debate, dialogue, and change in societies? The evocative nature of literature provides enjoyment and individual enrichment. But beyond pleasure, can literature motivate and mobilize communities to create positive social and environmental change? If so, then studying the processes by which literature fosters social change is an important task for ecocritics.

Michelle Balaev
Wake Forest University

Reply:

I welcome Fred Waage's letter to the Forum. It points out that before any serendipitous consolidating event such as a special session at the MLA convention or a groundbreaking anthology or monograph, there has been a widely disseminated sprinkling of what appear to be unrelated charged particles lying in wait for a rousing magnet. Then, with the unforeseen groundbreaking event (such as President Obama's speaking out about same-sex marriage), the particles magically cohere.

The 1991 MLA convention session Ecocriticism: The Greening of Literary Studies triggered a series of repercussions that Waage's 1976 session regrettably did not, though his 1985 book *Teaching Environmental Literature* increased the magnetic charge. Blame the treacherous fates. Cheryll Glotfelty and I were not endowed with unique sensors of the socio-intellectual pulse. We were as surprised as anybody by the effect of our session, reinforced as it was by the Western Literature Association's success in establishing the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) and its journal, *ISLE*, shortly thereafter.

Once one starts looking for *the* triggering ecocritical event, one could go back far into the past to make a case for Vergil and Hesiod as true begetters.

In passing, I would like to point out that Frederick Morgan, who edited the *Hudson Review* for many years, produced an ecology issue in 1970, introduced by his prescient description of the environmental scene of forty years ago. In

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