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BIOREGIONALISM AS A LITERARY THEORY: PLACE, ECOLOGY, BELONGING, AND THE BIOREGIONAL IMAGINATION

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ABSTRACT

Bioregionalism has become a powerful way of thinking about ecology that takes aim at mainstream political, economic and cultural constructs of geographical space by focusing on the ecology of specific places and the connections that can be forged between human populations, non-human biota, landscapes, watersheds, climates and material environments. The conceptual vocabulary of bioregionalism has been adopted increasingly in literary and cultural studies although bioregionalism is a primarily environmental and cultural movement. This essay suggests that bioregionalism is more than a kind of complementary ecocriticism: it is an alternative literary-theoretical model that could reshape the study of literature as a process of reading, rewriting, and rethinking within specific landscapes, in relation to the ecological embeddedness of those landscapes, their inhabitants, their knowledge, their memory, and their interactions with more-than-human elements. The essay explores the development, theoretical underpinnings, methodological implications and current applications of bioregional literary theory in the work of Peter Berg, Raymond Dasmann, Kirkpatrick Sale, Gary Snyder, Doug Aberley, Robert Thayer, and others. It claims that bioregional literary criticism moves away from the landscape as a mere backstory towards the place as an active ecology and culture. It also illustrates how literature can become a means of bioregional knowledge, perpetuating ecological memory, articulating a sense of attachment to place, recovering marginalized relationships with land, challenging extractive economies and imagining alternative modes of inhabiting. Simultaneously, the essay addresses salient critiques of romanticism, localism, cultural exclusion, Indigenous appropriation, and local ecological specificity vs. planetary environmental crisis. Finally, bioregionalism provides a robust conceptual approach to explaining literature as a form of "situated ecological imagination" and to rethinking the nature of human culture and its dependency on living places.

Keywords: *bioregionalism, bioregional literary theory, place, ecocriticism, ecological imagination, reinhabitation, environmental humanities, more-than-human, literary geography, ecological identity*

1. Introduction

Over the course of literary theory, the concept of the world of literature has been expanded upon many times. Previous strategies tended to emphasize language, form, authorial intention, ideology, psychology, social structures and reader response, while later theoretical developments increasingly focused upon material environments, bodies, ecological systems, technologies, animals, plants and planetary processes. The ecological turn in literary studies was particularly significant since it cast doubt on the possibility of interpreting literature without taking into account the material environments in which human life occurs. As a result of this intellectual change, the field of ecocriticism grew from the study of literature and the

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physical environment (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). However, the ecological turn has also led to more localized questions regarding the nature of literature, such as "how does literature represent nature," but also, "how is literature produced from, responds to, remembers, and imaginatively reconstructs particular places? One of the most important of these is bioregionalism.

Bioregionalism starts with the idea that people are living creatures in an ecological space, not a political space. The boundaries of a nation, province or district may be historical and political in importance, but may not align with the patterns that organize life through water, climate, soils, flora, fauna and geological formations. Bioregionalism thus makes the call for a rethinking of geographical identity, based on ecological particularity. Kirkpatrick Sale is among the founding theorists of the movement, and he proposes a new kind of understanding of a human community, one that is not necessarily political and one that is more than just territorial (Sale. 1985). His understanding of the bioregion focuses on ecological and cultural diversity, watershed systems, local economies, and types of community responsibility.

Bioregionalism is particularly important for literary theory when literature is viewed as one of the main cultural practices for imagining and remembering their relationships to place. There's more to literature than just geographical places. It names rivers, recalls forests, tells migrations, chronicles seasons, envisions landscapes, fabricates regional identities, holds ecological knowledge, and imparts emotional and symbolic value to landscapes. A literary text can then serve as a documentation of a community's perceptions of its role in a broader ecological context. The publication of The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place was an important development in this respect, as it explicitly attempted to outline the principles of bioregional literary criticism and show their application to reading, writing, understanding, and teaching literature (Lynch et al., 2012).

Bioregionalism as literary theory is then a shift away from abstract space towards lived place, from scenery towards an ecological relationship, and from detached observation towards situated inhabitation. It's a basic inquiry as to not only where a piece of literature is set, but what ecological, cultural, historical, and material relationships define that place. The bioregional approach invites the reader to reflect on the ways in which literature contributes to the ways of “meaningful” place, “inhabiting” community, cultural memory of ecological devastation, and literature's potential to envision sustainable inhabiting. In this essay, I suggest that bioregionalism is a noteworthy literary-theoretical approach, as it provides a unified perspective on literature, place, ecosystems, and cultural identity, and on more-than-human relations. Its value is not to supplant ecocriticism or other more modern theories, but rather to give a unique focus to ecological locality and living relationship. Bioregional literary theory does not occur merely as a backdrop or a symbolic entity. Rather, it is a dynamic material-cultural formation, in which human and nonhuman life meet.

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The Intellectual Genealogy of Bioregionalism

The intellectual roots of bioregionalism are spread out amongst various fields of environmental philosophy and ecological science, regionalism, community activism, geography, Indigenous thought, nature writing, and alternative political theory. The term bioregion, which now refers to the geographical or landscape aspect of the human environment in conjunction with human consciousness, is closely linked to the essays of Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann "Reinhabiting California" in 1977. Berg's formulation was important in that it did not distinguish between the physical environment and cultural perception. The bioregion was not just a place on the map but also a consciousness landscape, where one learned to know one's place and how to interact with the ecology one inhabited. The original essay also mentions the related concept of "reinhabitation" – learning to live in a damaged environment in ways that embrace ecological limits and relationships (Berg & Dasmann, 1977).

This notion was a significant departure from the traditional environmentalism. Bioregionalism focused on local knowledge and participation as an integral part of environmental protection, rather than on distant governmental bodies. The resident should be aware of the watersheds, soils, weather, native species, agricultural practices and ecological cycles. The intent was not just to retain a wilderness that was thought to exist outside of human society, but to change the way people lived within inhabited landscapes.

The bioregional vision was elaborated in a more systematic way in Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision by Sale. He envisioned a bioregionalism as a means of alternative social organization rather than being limited to national and political ones. Natural, not political boundaries, such as climate, water, soils, flora, fauna and landforms can offer more ecologically relevant bases for human organisation than political boundaries. His argument was also based on decentralization, local economies, ecology, and a critique of industrial systems that insulate people from environmental impacts of consumption (Sale; 1985).

Gary Snyder (1990) brought bioregional thinking to the realm of poetry, nature writing, Buddhism, cultural criticism, and ecological philosophy. The Practice of the Wild celebrates human culture, wildness, place, community and ecological awareness. He's especially significant in literary theory in this regard because he has shown how bioregional consciousness could be a literature itself. Poems and prose can help readers to perceive the ecological distinctiveness of a landscape and the human body as a part of other bodies.

In this sense, mapping is also a bioregional practice as emphasised in work. Boundaries of Home is a mapping project that seeks to revive local ecological knowledge and to represent the relationships between water, air, species, transportation, history and human settlement. The notion has important ramifications for literature, as maps, narratives, place names, oral history,

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and literary representations can all be seen as cultural artifacts that enable communities to make their environment legible Doug Aberley's (1993).

The mapping of bioregions is an important theme in Doug Aberley's work. In Boundaries of Home, mapping is used to gain access to local ecological knowledge and to illustrate relationships between water, air, species, transportation, history, and human settlement. This concept has important implications for literature studies as all sorts of maps, narratives, place-names, oral histories, and literary representations are all cultural products that make the environment legible to communities.

Robert Thayer expanded the idea of LifePlace later, where people can find out where they are by visiting the "natural" space, as opposed to the "political" space. His work is a testament that bioregionalism is not just a political ideology, but a way of living — a way of eating, a way of working, a way of playing, a way of living, a way of being aware of ecological processes. One of the key intellectual shifts that can be used as the foundation for bioregional literary criticism is from “where am I politically?” to “where am I ecologically?” (University of California Press)

Place as a Theoretical Category

Relevant from the perspective of bioregional literary theory is a sophisticated understanding of place. There is no place in terms of geographical coordinates or physical location. It is experienced, remembered, imagined, narrated, lived. It is helpful here to refer to the distinction between space and place made by Yi-Fu Tuan (1977). Space is about openness and possibility, place is about experience, attachment, familiarity and emotional investment. Phenomenological geography as it is represented in Tuan's work shows how the surroundings can be transformed into places as a result of human perception and experience.

Edward Casey (1993) advances his philosophical reflection on place with a compelling argument for the primal importance of place in human experience. Place is orientation, belonging, memory and embodied situatedness. This is very similar to bioregionalism, as a bioregion is a meaningful space not only as an ecological category but as a lived one.

Place is consequently both material and cultural. The meaning of a river can be created by stories, religious beliefs, economic activities, childhood memories, migration histories, political conflicts, and literary depictions–but it is physically present. A mountain can be a geological formation, a sacred place, an ecological home, a political border, an aesthetic object, and a storehouse of collective memory. The use of bioregional literary theory combines these without diminishing any of them.

Doreen Massey's (1994) understanding of space as relational is also very useful as it avoids the danger of bioregionalism being too static as a theory of place. No place is a separate container. They are created as flows, movements, encounters, migrations, economies, technologies, and

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histories. A bioregion is then a living construct, an evolving process, rather than an ecological island. This insight is particularly relevant in today's world of globalization and climate change.

The notion of rootedness and movement is further complicated by Tim Cresswell's work on place and mobility. But not being mobile doesn't have to mean place. Migration, travel, displacement, and transnational circulation can be a part of the production of place. An advanced theory of literature about bioregion clearly needs to acknowledge the concept of rootedness as well as mobility (Cresswell's (2004).

From Regionalism to Bioregionalism

Bioregionalism has some overlaps with literary regionalism, but it is important that the approaches should not be mixed up. Traditionally, regionalism has been about the cultural, social, linguistic, historical and geographical traits of specific regions. Dialect, local traditions, social structure, topography, and community identity are sometimes emphasized in the regional literature. Bioregionalism takes this interest further by inquiring into the relationship between the cultural characteristics and ecological systems.

It is thus a matter of emphasis. A regionalist reading might focus on the novel as a depiction of a specific province or rural community; a bioregionalist reading might look at the novel's relationship to watershed and climate, agricultural cycles and animals, soil and vegetation and the lines of resource use. Bioregionalism thus adds an ecological ontology to regional literary criticism.

Tom Lynch's (2008) Xerophilia is a valuable illustration. His ecocritical analysis of American Southwest literature shows how to change the nature of literary analysis by focusing on the particularities of the environment. Lynch foregrounds the arid texture of the landscape and the culture of desert environments, shifting the critical focus from abstract concepts of “nature” to a particular ecological world.

The question of bioregional literary criticism is not simply "Does a literary work have nature in it?". Questions how the ecological specificities of place shape narrative, imagery, character, memory, conflict, identity and imagination.

Bioregionalism and Ecocriticism

Bioregionalism is allied to ecocriticism but definitely not an aspect of it. Traditionally, the study of literature and the physical environment, and more recently the works of climate change, animals, environmental justice, material ecocriticism, energy humanities and the Anthropocene have all been the topics of ecocriticism (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996; Garrard, 2012). Within this larger area, bioregionalism adds a specific spatial and ecological perspective. Scale and emphasis may help explain the difference. There are many ways of using ecocriticism to look

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at issues of global environmental crisis, planetary climate systems, environmental ethics, or representations of wilderness. Bioregional criticism starts more methodically from specific sites. It poses questions about local experiences of ecological systems, and the mediation of those experiences in literary texts.

Lynch et al. make this connection explicit by suggesting that bioregional literary criticism can be used to expand and invigorate place-based environmental literary studies. Their work shows how bioregionalism can serve as a tool to read and reread, to see new ecological facets of texts, and to create new perspectives on literary pedagogy. It is thus, not a competitive relationship. Ecocriticism offers a wide environmental context, while bioregionalism focuses deeper on the ecological locality, inhabitation and place attachment.

The Bioregional Imagination

The bioregional imagination is the central concept of literary bioregionalism. It is a term used to refer to a way of imaginative engagement that can allow literature to make ecological place perceptible and meaningful. A bioregional imagination is not photo-receptive. Rather, it generates the stories of ecological relations.

Literature can help readers to learn how to look at a river, not as scenery but as a vector of time, change, and life; how to look at a forest not just as timber, but as the home of a family of bears and a stream of salmon; how to look at a field, not as agricultural land but as a reservoir of wildflower seeds, a birthplace for cows and horses, a sanctuary for birds; how to look at an animal, not as an object in a human narrative but as a creature that was once alive. Literary imagination can thus serve as an instrument of "ecological perception.

Lynch et al. (2012) maintain that literature and literary research plays an important part in rethinking human relationships with the localities where they live. The volume brings together their inquiries on the “reinhabiting,” the “rereading,” the “reimagining,” and the “renewal” of modes of inquiry, showcasing the methodological scope of bioregional literature writing.

The bioregional imagination is consequently neither purely descriptive nor purely aesthetic. It has epistemological and ethical dimensions. It can generate knowledge about place, challenge destructive modes of inhabitation, and encourage forms of ecological attentiveness.

Literature as Bioregional Knowledge

Another aspect of the importance of mapping as a bioregional practice is highlighted by Doug Aberley's work. Boundaries of Home is an attempt at the recovery of local ecological knowledge and an attempt to map relationships between water, air, species, transportation, history, and human settlement. This idea has far reaching implications for literary studies, as

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maps, narratives, place names, oral histories, and literary representations are all forms of culture that make environments legible to communities.

Later Robert Thayer expanded the concept of LifePlace, urging people to find out, "Where are we?" by paying attention to what is going on in a more natural setting than in a politically drawn setting. His work shows that bioregionalism is not just a generalized political program, it is a way of life with regard to food, work, recreation, settlement, ecological awareness and beyond. A major shift in thinking that can form the basis of bioregional literary criticism is from “where am I politically?” to “where am I ecologically?”

A complex and advanced notion of place is essential to bioregional literary theory. Geographical coordinates or physical location are not the same as place. It is experienced, recalled, envisioned, told, and acted out. The concepts of space and place, as developed by Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), are important in this context. Space is about openness and possibility; place is created through experience, attachment, familiarity and emotional investment. Through his phenomenological geography, Tuan shows how environments become places, experienced and perceived by people.

Edward Casey builds upon this philosophical discussion on place by proposing that place is central to human experience. Place provides orientation, belonging, memory, and embodied situatedness. This sort of understanding is very similar to bioregionalism, as a bioregion is not just a classification of ecology, but a world lived within.

Place is thus a material and a cultural phenomenon. The river may be a physical place, but it can also be a place for stories, religions, economy, memories from childhood, migration experiences, political battles, and literature. A mountain can be a geological feature, a sacred place, an ecosystem, a political border, an artwork, and a memory of a community. Bioregional literary theory synthesizes these aspects without making one aspect the other. What is also important about Doreen Massey's idea of space being relational is that it does not allow bioregionalism to become too theoretical an idea of place. No place is a stand-alone box. They are formed by flows and movements, encounters and migrations, economies and technologies, and histories. A bioregion is not, then, an ecologically closed and isolated “island,” but a living organism. This understanding is particularly crucial in today's globalized and climate-changing world.

The connection between rootedness and mobility is further complicated by work by Tim Cresswell that focuses on place and mobility. Not everything is immobile by nature, such as places. The making of place can also be a consequence of migration, travel, displacement and transnational circulation. A sophisticated bioregional literary theory must, therefore, be able to account for rootedness and mobility.

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While there are some parallels, bioregionalism does not conflate with literary regionalism, and the two should not be confused or mixed together. Traditionally, regionalism has been used to refer to the cultural, social, linguistic, historical and geographical traits of a given region. Dialect, local practice, social structures, environments, and identities are frequently emphasized in regional literature. Bioregionalism takes this interest further and looks to the relationship between those cultural traits and an ecological system. A key idea, which bioregionalism has given to literary theory, is that literature is a knowledge of the environment. Literary texts may provide information that is not found in scientific reports such as local names for places, seasonal memory, oral history, agriculture, animal relationships, drought/flood accounts, or environmental change stories.

Literature need not supplant the scientific knowledge. But literary knowledge is different, however. It offers experiential, affective, cultural and narrative modes of understanding. A novel can convey what it is like to lose a river, to live in a landscape of droughts, to be displaced after the destruction of the environment, to remember a forest that never existed. Lawrence Buell (1995) counters with his argument that the literature that is environmentally oriented is a challenge to the idea that human concerns should dominate the picture in literature. The setting can be an active presence instead of a passive setting. Bioregionalism deepens this awareness by prompting readers to recognize the specific ecological contexts in which this “environmental presence” is significant.

In the same vein Patrick Curry (2011) highlights the need for ecological thinking in contrast to instrumental rationalities that focus on the natural as a resource. Bioregional literary criticism can make this ethical concern manifest in the text by focusing on how literary texts depict bioregional relations of care, exploitation, reciprocity, and dependence.

Reinhabitation and Literary Interpretation

Reinhabiting is a key idea of bioregionalism. Berg and Dasmann's (1977) idea is about how to live in an ecologically disturbed place. Reinhabitation is not only a process of settlement in space, but also the process of cultivation of ecological literacy and responsibility. (Planet Drum Foundation). Literature can be involved in reinhabitation since places are remembered through literature. A literary work can restore lost landscapes, document ecological shifts, keep local names alive, and document human-environmental connections. In this regard, literary memory is an ecological practice.

An important parallel is to be found in the writings of Wendell Berry. Throughout a series of books (Berry 1977, 1990), Berry has repeatedly explored the ramifications of industrial agriculture, displacement, and the destruction of local communities. His fiction and essays maintain that ecological responsibility must pay regard to the particular places where people

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live and work. His literary practice in the process is representative of a consciousness of bioregion, even if not always with bioregional terminology.

But there is also a temporal aspect to reinhabitation. A responsible inhabitation of a place involves an understanding of its past ecological circumstances and an imagination of its future. Literature can connect past and present, and past and future, by telling stories of the changes in the environment over the course of generations.

Language, Naming, and Ecological Memory

Language is the basic building block of bioregional literary theory because place is partly a product of place-name. A river can have a scientific name, a governmental name, an Indigenous name, the local name and many other names in literature and oral tradition. Different relationships to place can be encoded in each name. Bioregional criticism thus seeks to ask what literary language does: How does it create an ecological identity? Naming of plants, animals, rivers, mountains and seasons can reflect intimate knowledge of place, while lack of names can reflect colonial domination or cultural displacement.

David Abram (1996) focuses upon aspects of language in relation to human life that are embodied and perceptual, as well as the human relationship with the more-than-human world. From a bioregional viewpoint, language is a vehicle for humans to learn to pay attention to the ecological uniqueness of their environment. This is especially important when it comes to poetry. Poetic language often abbreviates ecological perception in the form of names, rhythms, images, sounds, and metaphors. The poem can then serve a purpose beyond aesthetics in the case of a river. It can be a repository for an ecologic vocabulary and a place to feel the river as a living presence.

Bioregionalism, Indigenous Knowledge, and Decolonization

The issue of Indigenous knowledge is one that a modern theory of bioregionalism needs to address. Many bioregional formulations arose in North American environmental movements and, as such, can potentially become a form of place-based consciousness being claimed as newly discovered by modern environmentalists. There are complex histories of relationship between particular lands and waters which date back thousands of years before the emergence of the theoretical concept of bioregionalism.

Gregory Cajete (2000) shows the extent of Indigenous knowledge of the land, a sense of community, and a relational sense of responsibility. Vine Deloria Jr. also addresses the abstract Western methodologies for knowledge in favor of the importance of place, experience, and Indigenous spatiality. Vine Deloria Jr. (1973) argues that it is necessary, then, for bioregional literary theory to differentiate between appropriating Indigenous ecological ideas and engaging in respectful dialogue with Indigenous traditions. The concept of a 'decolonial' bioregionalism

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must address issues of sovereignty, historical dispossession, colonial land use and the ongoing struggle of Indigenous peoples.

This is also a problem with the sense of belonging. Whose are the rights to a home? May recent settlers have a legitimate claim to ecological belonging based on living in a region for a few generations? Here, it is worth rethinking Berg and Dasmann's notion of reinhabitation, as responsible inhabitation asks for accountability to histories of dispossession rather than romanticized notions of timeless belonging. Theoretically, bioregionalism can then be enriched with postcolonial and Indigenous lenses. Theoretically, bioregionalism can then be enriched by postcolonial and Indigenous lenses. It can question not only who belongs to where but who belongs to colonial power.

Bioregionalism and Postcolonial Literary Studies

The link between bioregionalism and post-colonialism is becoming more significant. Plantations, the extraction of resources, dams, railways, administrative boundaries, urban planning and mines are all common ways that colonialism restructured landscapes. Political boundaries often ignored ecological systems and the cultural relationships with the land. Thus, a postcolonial bioregional literary criticism may well explore how literature depicts the ecological effects of the colonial transformation. It can question how characters mediate between the inherited local relations to place and political/economic relations that are imposed.

This has been clearly exemplified in recent scholarship in literature. A study of Tayeb Salih's (2024) *Season of Migration to the North* places bioregionalism in conversation with postcolonialism in looking at place-based and out-of-place behaviors in a colonial and post-colonial context. This is significant, as it shows that bioregional literary theory does not have to be limited to American environmental writing. The African, South Asian, Caribbean and other postcolonial literatures offer particularly rich resources for bioregional analysis, where issues of land, displacement, ecological exploitation, migration and colonial boundaries often overlap.

Environmental Justice and the Politics of Place

Another way in which bioregionalism can help with environmental justice is that environmental harm does not fall evenly across the board. Economically and politically vulnerable communities are the ones that are most affected by industrial pollution, mining, deforestation, water scarcity and toxic waste and climate related disasters. A literary bioregionalism that is concerned with justice thus asks, who is in the landscape, who suffers, who knows the landscape, and whose interests shape the use of land and water. This takes regionalist criticism away from the romanticism of the local landscape.

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This is especially true in urban areas. Bioregions are not necessarily wilderness areas. Cities are ecosystems within ecosystems that are part of watersheds, energy systems, food webs, transport and neighboring ecosystems. Urban bioregional identity and environmental justice, both matters of urgent theorisation, are explicitly included in the Bioregional Imagination. Literary representations of cities can then be analysed bioregionally, following the rivers, waste, food, energy, pollution, people, infrastructure and connections to other ecosystems (Lynch et al., 2012). This reading process makes the traditional dichotomy of nature writing and urban writing more complicated.

The More-than-Human Bioregion

When bioregionalism transcends anthropocentric notions of place, it becomes even more powerful. A bioregion is not just a group of people living within a region Jane Bennet (2010). A group of living and nonliving things, processes and relationships. Vibrant matter is a theory of Jane Bennett that opposes the notion that matter is passive and inert. In the same vein, Bruno Latour (2025) highlights networks of human and nonhuman actors, and Donna Haraway (2008) looks at multispecies relations whereby worlds are manufactured. Additionally, the movement of substances between human and nonhuman bodies is highlighted by Stacy Alaimo's (2010) idea of trans-corporeality.

These theories are extensions of bioregional literary criticism. River is not just a resource that is utilized by people, but a material actor in ecologic relations. Soil is a living entity, not just a source of agricultural production, but a community of microorganisms, nutrients, roots, insects, water and human activity. To be sure, forests are not just a group of trees, but a multi-species community.

Material ecocriticism also focuses on the ability of matter to engage in a narrative or a meaning. Bioregionalism can feed off of this insight, and consider literary landscapes as material environments with agency beyond the human, where literary landscapes are not merely ‘places’ but also ‘living environments' (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014).

Bioregionalism and Climate Change

Climate change is a challenge and opportunity to bioregional literary theory. Climate change is a global phenomenon, but its impacts are felt at the local level, including drought, flooding, heat, wildfire, shifting crop cycles, loss of species, erosion of the coast, and changing weather patterns.

Climate change has been a dominant theme in recent literary and literary/science publications, and has produced climate fiction, climate poems and fresh modes of ecocritique, as noted by Adeline Johns-Putra (2016). Bioregionalism contributes an additional layer to this debate by exploring how planetary climate processes are manifest in particular places.

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A bioregional interpretation of climate fiction may thus consider the changing definitions of home in the face of climate change. The ecological shift/change is also a shift/change in cultural identity when the coastline gets wiped, when the river dries up, when the agricultural seasons become uncertain, when a forest burns repeatedly.

Climate change therefore shows that there is no scale smaller than planetary scale. The bioregional perspective requires the planetary perspective and vice versa. The planetary describes the greater system in which local transformations are taking place, and the bioregional the places in which planetary change becomes lived experience.

Bioregionalism and the Concept of Home

Home is at the heart of bioregional literary theory. Home is not just a single house. It can be a watershed, a valley, a forest, a coastline, an island, an agricultural area or an urban ecological system. Thayer (2003) believes that uncovering “where we are” will help counteract the alienation caused by modern life. Also, Tuan (1977) shows how attachment turns geographical space into significant place. Bioregional criticism is so important because of such theories which help explain literary narratives of home.

However, the notion of home should continue to be "open," critical. Home can be divided and/or denied for migrants, refugees, colonised residents, and diasporic subjects. If place-based identity is defined as “permanent residence,” then a bioregional literary theory might just leave out exactly the communities that have been affected by displacement. A more flexible notion of "home" in a bioregion acknowledges multiple attachment levels. Individuals may belong to several sites and hold memories for past landscapes and form new ecological ties without displacing the older ones. Thus, bioregional identity can be dynamic and relational, not static.

Bioregionalism, Migration, and Mobility

However, the strong emphasis on place at first sight seems to be in conflict with migration.It is initially surprising that the emphasis on place is not at odds with migration, but it is a mistaken impression. Investigates how places are created by movement. Flowing rivers, flying birds, moving people, circulating commodities, changing cultures. The relationality of spatial identity is stressed by Massey (1994) and the mobility is shown to be a geographical and cultural practice by Cresswell (2004). With these orientations, bioregional literary criticism can transcend the literal, idealized notion of permanent rootedness.

Migration literature can then take on a bioregional meaning, relating to what takes place when humans meet new ecological systems. New climates, foods, landscapes, species, agriculture and urban environments are learned by migrants. Concurrently, they have ecological memories from other locations. The bioregional imagination can then be a literature of rootedness and

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movement. It can question people on how they learn to live in new environments without losing the memories of their old ones.

Bioregionalism and Literary Form

Bioregionalism has an impact on the content of literature, but it can also have an impact on the structure of literature. Narrative structure, imagery, temporality, genre, voice and rhythm might be influenced by place. The temporality of narratives can be affected by seasonal cycles, for instance. Plot development could be organised according to agricultural calendars. Frequent themes of river in river narratives. Spatial movement can be organized by mountains. Drought can influence character psychology and conflict in the story. Ecological succession can be a metaphor for historical change.

The bioregional approach thus calls for formal and thematic analysis. It explores the relationship between place and the way stories are told based on the materials that make up that place. Rhythm, sound, imagery and repetition can 'recapture' environmental patterns which make poetry particularly amenable to such analysis. Ecological worlds can also be created in prose fiction by developing detailed descriptions of species, weather, food, geography, and material practices.

Bioregionalism and Literary Cartography

The mapping is another aspect of bioregional literary theory. Maps can be tools of empowerment as communities can see the ecological relationships and histories that are contained within them, as shown by Aberley (1993). The literary texts can do the same work by the narrative cartography.

Here, the novel charts a area by means of characters' action. A poem can trace a river, by using repeated place names. Memoir can recreate a vanished landscape in memory. In a travel narrative, there can be a conflict between official geographical images and an actual environment.

Textual maps and ‘counter-maps' can then be explored in bioregional literary criticism. Which map is shown? What are some of the locations mentioned? Which are invisible? Who or what are the ecological boundaries for the narrative? Which political borders are challenged by the ecological relationships? These questions could link the theories of bioregional literature and spatial theory, postcolonial theory, digital humanities, and critical geography.

Bioregionalism and Food

Another important place of entry into the bioregional literary interpretation is in the food. Food is a bridge that links land, climate, agriculture, water, labor, culture, economy and migration with bodies. The ethical relationships to place and agricultural practices are always connected

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in Wendell Berry's work. Cultivated food can become culturally significant to an area, and industrial food systems can erode local ecological knowledge.

A bioregional reading of literature can then look at food types, where food comes from, who produces food, and how food practices mirror ecological relationships. Bioregional identity can be found in literary depictions of farming, hunting, fishing, cooking, markets and eating. Inequality is also reflected in food. Politically, access to land, water, healthy food, and agricultural resources are structured. Thus, bioregional literary criticism can overlap with environmental justice and political ecology.

Bioregionalism and the Ethics of Inhabitation

The deepest aspect of bioregionalism is an ethical theory of inhabitation. It asks what the meaning of living responsibly in a place is. It's this moral aspect of bioregionalism that sets it apart from simply critiquing the region descriptively. Description of beautiful landscapes, without questioning their damaging social practices. The Bioregional reading asks, is the story uncovering or hiding the ecological effects of human activities?

The moral responsibilities of belonging to specific communities and locations were highlighted by Berry (1990). Snyder (1990) also makes a link between the concept of ecological awareness and the disciplined attention to the natural world. Literature can make these ethical relationships visible by narrating consequences. Pollution becomes a story of bodies and communities. Deforestation becomes a story of species loss and cultural memory. Water extraction becomes a story of conflict. Climate change becomes a story of altered homes. The literary imagination can thus function as an ethical laboratory in which readers encounter the consequences of different forms of inhabitation.

Critiques and Limitations of Bioregionalism

Although it has great promise, bioregionalism has its challenges. Romanticism has been one of the biggest criticisms. Reversion to the local ecological community is sometimes romanticizing rural life, and neglecting social inequality, technological complexity, migration, urbanization, and even historical violence.

Cronon (1995) cautions against simple definitions of wilderness that divorce “nature” from history. The same warning should apply to bioregionalism. The bioregion is not a plain vanilla ecological zone without politics, culture and history. The second issue is one of cultural exclusion. The stronger the identification of a bioregion with long-term residence, the more likely that migrants and newcomers will be marginalized. There may be more than one historical or identity layer in a region.

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A third issue is one of Indigenous appropriation. As mentioned before, contemporary bioregionalism cannot claim to be the creators of place-based ecological consciousness. Indigenous peoples have their own intellectual traditions, legal relations and responsibilities with respect to land. The fourth issue is scale. Localism is insufficient to halt climate change, global capitalism and transnational corporations, nor to tackle atmospheric pollution. A bioregional perspective then needs to be expressed in the context of planetary perspectives. Lastly, bioregions are not necessarily distinct and can vary in location. Ecosystems are interwoven and dynamic. The boundaries of different watersheds, habitats, cultural regions and economic regions can be different. The bioregion is therefore a category that can change, not a geographical reality.

Toward a Critical Bioregional Literary Theory

Rather than give up on bioregional literary theory, it is important to address these limitations. A critical bioregionalism must be about place but not about the local. It should provide understanding of ecological specificity and of mobility and globalization. It must be based on a respect for local knowledge and Indigenous sovereignty. It should pay attention to human attachment to place and acknowledge more-than-human agency. Bioregionalism has the potential to be a relational theory in this sense. A place is not a discrete unit but a node in the wider ecological, cultural, economic, historical and planetary network. A theory like this would also enable bioregionalism to engage with posthumanism, the new materialism, multispecies studies, feminist environmental humanities, and the planetary humanities. Haraway (2016) reminds us how much we need to make kin across species and across ecologies, and Braidotti (2013) calls into question the human-centered notions of subjectivity. While Chakrabarty calls for a planetary humanities that pays attention to planetary processes and human histories, this is not a return to a human-centric humanities. This is not a human-centric humanities, however, and Chakrabarty (2022) calls for a "planetary humanities" that attends to the relationship between planetary processes and human histories. Bioregional literary theory can be a component of this intellectual landscape that brings the spatial sense which planetary theory may sometimes lack. Particular places are used to encounter the planet. Climate change has a real meaning when it comes to specific rivers, forests, cities, farms, islands, coasts and communities.

Bioregionalism in the Twenty-First Century

Bioregionalism has much to be rethought in the twenty first century. Climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, soil degradation, deforestation, and extreme weather events are all signs and symptoms of ecological crises. Globalisation has also enhanced economic and cultural trends that have dissociated consumers from the ecological impacts of production. Bioregionalism addresses this condition by promoting ecological literacy and "situated"

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knowledge. It invites individuals to get to know the watersheds, species, seasons, soils, histories, and cultural practices of the places they live.

This is the case in literary studies, where the archive of literature can be reread in terms of ecological locality. Bioregional revision of canonical texts can be undertaken, and analysis of contemporary texts can be done for representations of environmental change. The Bioregional Imagination illustrates the scope of this project, for it is composed of literary studies from various bioregions, such as the Arctic, Australian Outback, British Columbia, Italy, Africa, Ireland, and other contexts of ecology. Bioregional literary research can thus be global without being placeless (Lynch et al., 2012). The comparative possibilities occur just because ecological and cultural relationships are different in different places.

Bioregionalism and the Future of Literary Theory

Bioregionalism has theoretical implications that go beyond literary criticism of the environment. It contributes to the broader shift in literary theory from the exclusive focus on language and representation to materiality, relationality, embodiment, ecology, and more-than-human. However, bioregionalism has its unique contribution by bringing these theoretical issues to a place. Materiality is in a place at all times. Bodies inhabit environments. Species occupy habitats. Landscapes are the birthplace of cultural memories. Political conflicts are fought for land and water. Literary narratives take place in ecological systems.

The bioregional literary theory is thus a means of synthesizing some recent developments in contemporary theory. It can be new materialism and the ecological focus of ecocriticism, the relational approach of posthumanism and the spatial awareness of geographical studies, the ethical approach of environmental justice and the cultural perspective of literary studies. It may be more of a conceptual than methodological contribution. It sparks literary scholars to rethink how to live in a world.

Bioregionalism originated as a movement questioning the ecological and cultural impacts of the process of centralization and separation from place, both linked to industrial development and the centralized political organization. It grew a bioregional language with Peter Berg, Raymond Dasmann, Kirkpatrick Sale, Gary Snyder, Doug Aberley, Robert Thayer and others; a vocabulary of reinhabitation, ecological literacy, local knowledge and place-based responsibility. As it has progressed into literary studies, it has also begun to create an important theoretical space in which the literature can be read in relation to the ecological and cultural relationship of specific places.

Conclusion

Bioregionalism is a literary theory in which the concept of place is elevated. The place is no longer just the context in which human stories take place. It turns into an active formation, an

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ecological, cultural and historical entity and a visionary. Rivers, forests, mountains, deserts, cities, farms, coastlines and watersheds are not merely backgrounds. They turn into producers of meaning. The bioregional approach also redefines the concept of literary knowledge. Literature can help hold onto ecological memory, convey sense of place, reclaim marginalized land uses, reveal environmental injustice and envision alternative ways of inhabiting the land. The bioregional imagination then is a kind of ecological consciousness.

But critical self-reflection is also essential for the future of bioregional literary theory. It should not romanticize 'localism' or exclude migrants, not appropriate Indigenous knowledge, and not think of bioregions as fixed and homogeneous spaces. It needs to understand the colonial past, the capitalist economy, migration, technology, and the planet, as forces that form places. The most productive bioregionalism will then be relational, plural, and historically aware and decolonizing. So the relevance of bioregionalism is in the very idea of linking the local with the planetary. Climate change is a global phenomenon, but it's felt somewhere. Biodiversity loss takes place on the planet, but species are lost from a specific habitat. Water crises are encountered by communities through specific rivers, aquifers, lakes and watersheds, and these crises are worldwide. One of the most potent forms of culture, in which these changes can be remembered and imagined, is literature.

Bioregionalism then, makes for an important ethical and methodological proposition for literary theory: human beings are not merely in place, but in relation with others to create place. Reading literature bioregionally is thus to read for those relations. To be present to the histories of the ecology, the landscapes of the identity, the waters of the culture, the species of the narrative and the material worlds that make the human imagination possible. The movement from representation to relationship may be the future of bioregional literary theory. Literature is not simply a world of a bioregion. It can enable readers to experience, recall, explore and recreate the social networks that hold that world together. In the era of environmental problems, interpretation of the literary becomes a more than academic issue. It is a practice of ‘ecological attention'. Bioregionalism makes itself a meaningful literary theory for the 21st century by posing one of the most basic questions that literature can ask: What is it to belong to a living place? How might stories teach us to inhabit that place differently?

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