



Caminero-Santangelo, Byron, and Garth Andrew. Myers. *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa*. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2011. Print.

Marginalized environments are crucial to the ecocritical discourse and thoroughly explored in the collection *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa*, edited by Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers. Caminero-Santangelo and Myers introduce the text by proposing that “we need to acknowledge not only that language shapes our perception and understanding of the environment rather than giving us a transparent view of the environment but also the language itself is the product of social process” (5). This clearly sets the tone for their collection, which the editors seamlessly carry throughout the text. Each chapter in the collection has a unique focus, but they all discuss the ways in which language and environment are based on the social discourse and history of the continent of Africa. To truly look upon the landscape and environment of Africa through a critical lens, one must first consider the colonial and post-colonial forces that have shaped the continent. As global environmental problems gain in prominence, exploration of Africa is imperative for the field of ecocriticism.

Marginalized cultures and environments must be explored, respected, and considered in order to facilitate a more meaningful and significant discussion. In Chapter Ten, “Inventing Tradition and Colonizing the Plants,” Laura Wright suggests, “Cultural hybridization is equally problematic, as is symbolically manifest in indigenous characters’ attempts to eradicate invasive plant species or re-create precolonial symbolic meaning” (236). The treatment of indigenous peoples mirrors the treatment and appreciation of indigenous environments. The focus cannot remain solely on traditional topics of humanitarian inequality; to salvage and preserve the environment of Africa, the global community must realize Africa’s environment is ultimately a humanitarian concern, just as significant as any other. Often times, when discussing Africa, the commodification of the African people is given prime consideration, but *Environment at the Margins* offers a multi-faceted illustration of the fact that the African environment is also a victim of commodification, and has been for generations. By acknowledging this, the audience is then empowered to consider the reasons why the environment of Africa was treated this way and the implications of these actions both on Africa and on its global neighbors.

The chapters in this collection emphasize the importance of exploring the environmental ramifications of the colonized history of Africa as well as how the global population has responded: “Global environmental problems – global warming, overfishing of oceans, disposal of toxic waste – have already deeply affected many Africans. Yet most Africans are not the primary sources of these problems, nor do many Africans generally benefit from the resource exploitation that engenders them” (9). Being a global citizen means understanding and respecting the global environment. The African environment has suffered at the hands of its global neighbors, and this collection illuminates how the history of Africa’s environment hinges upon the environmental history of the West. To save the African environment, these connections need to be acknowledged and immediately amended so as to prevent a catastrophic environmental future in Africa.

Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa skillfully and accessibly takes the reader on an environmental journey through Africa’s history, including wartime narratives and Theodore Roosevelt’s travels around the continent. By looking at Africa’s environment over the years,

as well as its multiple literary representations, readers are able to derive the global significance of Africa and appreciate that it is not just the African people who have been victimized for generations, but the environment as well. This text brings to the forefront the need for a greater discussion about marginalized environments, exposing these environments as untapped resources in the ecocritical discussion.

- Megan Cannella - Bradley University