

Global Problems, Local Theory: Moving beyond Particularity and Eco-exceptionalism to Action in Ecocriticism

Simon C. Estok

Abstract: This paper reviews what has been written specifically about activism within ecocriticism and shows firstly how ecocritical theory conceptualizes a form of ideological critique that is alive both to historicist and presentist concerns (which is important for praxis); secondly, how if, as Richard Kerridge so eloquently puts it, the present crises we face are “the preoccupation that is the starting-point” of what we do as ecocritics, then there are specific ways that praxis translates from page to world, that there are specific things praxis does/could mean (ranging from matters of food and its meshy inter-relations, to matters of gender and environment, to matters of race, of sexuality, of class, and so on—each an archeology that ecocriticism uncovers, each an archeology of dynamic inter-connections); and thirdly how both the naïve preference for reviving the claims of realism and the traditional contempt for theory that have each characterized ecocriticism are enormously counter-productive for ecocritical activism. The broad goal of this article is to look at the promise of the spate of films and best-selling books on climate change and environmental crisis that have appeared over the past several years and how and why that promise has been and is being betrayed and clouded—and at what we can do about it, how we can blow the smoke away.

Key words: ecocriticism activism ecophobia apocalypticism

Author: Simon C. Estok is professor at Sungkyunkwan University, Seoul, South Korea. He has published extensively on ecocriticism and Shakespeare in such journals as *PMLA*, *Mosaic*, *Configurations*, *English Studies in Canada*, *ISLE*, and others. Part of his research resulted in the award-winning book *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia*, published through Palgrave Macmillan in 2011. Estok’s current project is a book entitled *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Landscape and Tragedy*. Email:estok@skku.edu

标题: 全球问题与本土理论: 超越特殊性和生态例外论, 将生态批评付诸行动

内容摘要: 本论文回顾了生态批评范畴内有关行动主义的文章的具体内容, 并揭示了一下三个问题: 首先是一个历史学家和当下的批评者所关心的问题, 即生态批评理论如何使意识形态批评的形式概念化; 其次是我们目前所面临的危机如何成为理查德·凯里奇所说的我们作为生态批评者付诸行动的“当务之急”和“起点”, 我们要如何通过一些具体的方法从书面知识转化为实践行为, 去实践确实意味着也能够蕴含某些具体的东西(从食物及

其网状的内在关系，到性别和环境，到种族、性、阶级及其它——每一种都是生态批评所揭示的考古学，都是关于内在联系的动态的考古学）；第三，曾经作为生态批评特征的对现实主义主张复兴的天真偏好以及对理论的一贯鄙夷，如何对生态批评的行动主义产生巨大的反作用。本论文的主要目标是讨论过去几年内的大量电影和畅销书有关气候变化和环境危机所做的承诺及其如何并且为何被背叛、被掩盖，讨论我们能为此做些什么，如何吹散这雾霾。

关键词：生态批评 行动主义 生态恐惧症 启示论

作者简介：西蒙·C·埃斯托克，韩国成均馆大学教授。曾在 *PMLA*、《马赛克》、*ISLE* 等杂志中发表大量关于生态批评和莎士比亚的论文，其部分研究成果被收录于获奖图书《生态批评和莎士比亚：阅读生态恐惧症》（Palgrave Macmillan, 2011）。

The boom ecocriticism has enjoyed since its inception in the mid-1990s, like all other booms, is unsustainable in its current mode. One of the things that needs to happen is a change in the way that academics think in relation to the world upon which they comment. One does not want to be a nay-sayer, a pessimist, or a cynic, and, indeed, ecocriticism has done remarkable and good work; at the same time, however, if this good work is to continue, ecocritics will need to address the personal as well as the political, will need to assess how our individual involvement within the profession contributes to the very things under discussion, will need to look, for instance, at the sexism that underpins so much of our work, will need to act on the unsustainable practices of inter-continental flights, and will need to be far more conscientious. In short, for those of us working within the environmental humanities, we will need to stop kidding ourselves about our exemptions. We will need to stop practicing eco-exceptionalism. And we will need to recognize that the cards are stacked heavily against us in this task.

When Timothy Morton argues in *PMLA* (March 2010) that “Much American ecocriticism is a vector for various masculinity memes, including rugged individualism, a phallic authoritarian sublime, and an allergy to femininity in all its forms (as sheer appearance, as the signifier, as display)” (274), it seems shocking. After all, ecocriticism has its roots in the soils of ecofeminism. These are struggles fought and won. Ecofeminism has come and gone. We’ve been there, bought that t-shirt, and finished with it. None of us want to hear that we haven’t. The sober reality, however, is indeed shocking, and, as Greta Gaard has recently pointed out in “Ecofeminism Revisited,” ecofeminist (and indeed feminist) positions are at risk of erasure now. Even progressive publications self-consciously aware of the necessity for feminist, activist, anti-racist, and anti-essentialist positions are increasingly in danger, if Jodey Castricano’s “Introduction” to *An Ethical Reader in a Posthuman World: Animal Subjects* is any indication. Here we find the right hand not seeing what the left is doing, one paragraph talking unproblematically about “calling into question the boundaries that divide the animal kingdom from humanity” (1-2), and the very next claiming to support “critiques of racism, sexism(s) and classism” (2). That support seems dubious with the notion of an “animal kingdom” patterning the writer’s perceptions. Kingdom?!! What will it take to break the hold that sexism has, a hold that restricts our imagination and

perceptions? And what are the effects of gendering nature in this way? And if sexism implies a certain ethical position about women, what ethical position does gendering nature imply? And what does that position say about space? What does sexism imply about the social production of space?

A patriarchy has everything to gain from keeping intact sexist ontologies that determine the production of space. There is money involved, and in these difficult times, no one *wants* to lose money; yet, changing any system is going to cost. The changes we need in environmental ethics are also going to cost, and the resistance is, in this sense, not (or should not be) surprising. It is fierce resistance from moneyed positions, and it is a pattern of resistance with which we are all very familiar—think about the tobacco industry.

The environmentalist movement shares many things with the anti-smoking movement. It is hindered by mammoth companies (most notably oil companies, meat production companies, and agriculture companies) that benefit from unsustainable lifestyles. Hired researchers blow smoke in our eyes about the causes of climate change and environmental degradation being outside of our influence, no less than tobacco companies have blown smoke in people's eyes about how smoking was *not* the cause of cancer, was *not* harmful, and was actually *beneficial* in many ways (“Watch your nerves... let up—light a Camel,” a cigarette advertisement ran in the 1930s), having spent years and years and billions of dollars in the process. In North America, fifty percent of the men and thirty-three percent of the women smoked in the year that I was born; eventually, however, people *did* finally get it that tobacco was lethal.

It took various kinds of legislation against smoking, which many people saw as an infringement on personal liberty. It took appeals to emotion, to reason, and to financial sensibility. It took a broad-based change in ethics. It took sacrifices. It took years. And when the tobacco industry was thriving, no one would have thought it possible or ethically defensible to bring these behemoths down. Many people would have lost work, and, anyway, there was little felt need for shutting down these businesses.

We flatter ourselves as academics on our abilities to produce and dispense knowledge, as if this were enough. Knowledge, in itself, however, simply isn't enough to cause change. The average smoker is testament to this. If those behemoths that seemed so unassailable have been overwhelmed to some degree, then it was through an enormous amount of effort, not simply through the dissemination of knowledge. If knowledge were enough to cause change, then we'd have problems explaining the average air passenger, or driver of a car, or meat eater—indeed, my presence at the conference in France that spawned this essay. The question is simple: what will it take to cause change? The answer is disturbing. As with movements against tobacco industries, it will take various kinds of legislation against things that we like doing, which many people will see as an infringement on personal liberty. It will take appeals to emotion, to reason, and to financial sensibility. It will take a broad-based change in ethics. It will take sacrifices. It will take years. We may not have as many years as we need, yet there is good reason to continue to hope.

Deep ethical rumblings under ecocritical soils are afoot. Some of these rumblings have been in the area of material ecocriticism and theories about corporeality. Stacy Alaimo recently

commented (citing in the process Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III) that “If the predominant understanding of environmental ethics has been that of a circle that has expanded in such a way as to grant ‘moral consideration to animals, to plants, to [nonhuman] species, even to ecosystems and the Earth’ [Light and Rolston 7], trans-corporeality denies the human subject the sovereign, central position” (16). We can take this to the next logical step and argue that if capacities for agency prove not to be the sole privilege of the *cogito*, then, changing our relationships with the material world is probably a good idea. Yet, we have never really seen it in our best interests to rock the boat, to change our environmental ethics, since these have served us so well—except, of course, when we consider that our environmental ethics are toxic, acidic, and very nasty, that those environmental ethics have burned a giant hole in the boat we are wanting not to rock, and that we’re going down fast.

We take agency outside of ourselves as threats. It is precisely these nonhuman agentic forces that determine so very much of our environmental ethics: the felt or imagined material effects of these forces, the felt or imagined material threats, the felt or imagined challenges to our existence (and forget the obverse side, for a moment: the good, the sustenance, the pleasure, and so on that the material world offers), the felt dangers of material agencies beyond us simply don’t fit into any friendly epistemological familial mesh we may design, and history speaks to this: we have a history of what Freud called “the will to mastery, or the will to power” (418), a history of hostility to agentic forces outside of ourselves, variously articulated as a will to live, as a pleasure principle, as ecophobia.

In order to talk meaningfully about material ecocriticisms, at this point, we obviously need to say a few words about ecophobia and what it is (which I will do shortly below). Indeed, as the CFP Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann for *Material Ecocriticism* (Indiana 2013) put it:

In regard to a highly technologized posthuman world, this [material approaches to ecocriticism] also implies rediscussing the boundaries between human and more than human world. Ecocriticism, in such a context, can also enable us to formulate effective responses to the vexing question of ecophobia in all its forms: the irrational fear of the natural world and its entities, and groundless hatred for the unpredictable climactic and natural patterns around us (for instance, earthquakes, volcano eruptions, flooding, hurricanes), as well as anxiety produced by doomsday scenarios.

There it is: ecophobia. Indeed—and I couldn’t have put it better myself—theorizing ecophobia seems both a precondition and forebear of serious “material ecocriticism.” But what exactly is ecophobia: how can we define it?

Ecocriticism needs a very broad scope for the term ecophobia. Clinical psychology uses the same term to designate an irrational fear of home; in ecocriticism, the term is independent of and in no way derived from the manner in which it is used in psychology and psychiatry. Broadly speaking, we may define ecophobia as an irrational and groundless fear or hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature as homophobia and racism and sexism.

It plays out in many spheres; it sustains the personal hygiene and cosmetics industries (which cite nature's "flaws" and "blemishes" as objects of their work); it supports city sanitation boards that issue fines seeking to keep out "pests" and "vermin" associated in municipal mentalities with long grass; it keeps beauticians and barbers in business; it is behind landscaped gardens and trimmed poodles in women's handbags on the Seoul subway system; it is about power and control; it is what makes looting and plundering of animal and nonanimal resources possible. Self-starvation and self-mutilation imply ecophobia no less than lynching implies racism. If ecocriticism is committed to making connections, then it is committed to recognizing that control of the natural environment, understood as a god-given right in Western culture, implies ecophobia, just as the use of African slaves implies racism, as rape implies misogyny, as "fag-bashing" implies homophobia, and as animal exploitation implies speciesism.

Theorizing ecophobia does not mean offering a new perspective, one that ecocritics have somehow missed; of course, ecocritics have long theorized on matters of anthropocentrism. While the contempt and fear we call ecophobia does not represent the *sole* trait that characterizes our relationship with the natural world, it is as yet a remarkably unattended one. Its opposite would, to some extent, be the biophilia Edward O. Wilson defines as "the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms" (31). Certainly Scott Slovic is accurate to note that "ecocriticism is actually motivated by biophilia" (Personal correspondence, "Re: LIKELY SPAM" 16 September 2008). Admittedly, biophilia indeed seems to be the *motivation* but not the *object* of ecocritical inquiry. The object of such inquiry certainly must centrally include ecophobia and how it patterns our relationship with nature. We can clearly see that ecophobia is winning out over biophilia. The "rapid disappearance" (Wilson 40) of species of which Wilson speaks so eloquently and persuasively has a cause: it is ecophobia, surely, not biophilia. Theorizing ecophobia does not dismiss but rather builds on that history, offering a vocabulary that is new, a vocabulary for conceptualizing something we do (and have been doing for a long time) and for which we haven't had appropriate descriptive or theoretical words.

Ecophobia is, among other things, the fear of material agencies outside of ourselves within the natural world. Indeed, these very agencies are often the imagined site and source of tragedy. If material agencies (human and nonhuman) outside of the suffering individual are the source of tragedy, and if tragedy then presumes a revulsion for uncontrolled and uncontrollable agencies, for agencies that disrupt orders presumed inviolable, and for anything that advocates against humanism, then addressing human exceptionalism is vitally necessary. Within literary studies, the results are unusual and unexpected.

One of the things that becomes very clear is that anxieties about human puniness and mortality inhere in the genre of tragedy. Such is certainly a position with which Terry Eagleton would seem to agree: "perhaps the form satisfies our desire for immortality, leading us to a sense of being indestructible as long as this magnificent poetry pulses on," Eagleton suggests in his comments on Shakespeare's *King Lear* (26). This anxiety about natural cycles and contempt for its constituent parts (death being one of them) resonates deeply in tragedy; Stephen Greenblatt, however, might respond: "But nothing—from our own species to the planet on which we live to

the sun that lights our days—lasts forever. Only atoms are immortal” (*The Swerve* 6). It is these atoms that have recently caught the eye of ecocritics.

The current theorizing in quantum physics marks a radical—indeed, paradigmatic—break, in some ways, from previous notions about the material world, how we relate with it, and how it relates with our bodies. A comparable event was in the early modern period with anatomies. The revolutionary break with the pre-modern, the ancient, and the classical—initiated by Andreas Vesalius—is a pivotal re-defining in Europe with relationships toward the body, among people, and with nature at large. It is a pivotal move toward the Enlightenment with a collapsing of certainties in the old hierarchies that organized previous ways of thinking, a collapse that heralded enormous new regimes of control over Nature. The image that the period inherited of nature, noted environmental historian Carolyn Merchant observes, “was that of a disorderly and chaotic realm to be subdued and controlled” (127), and with the advent of science, it became mandatory to re-write the hierarchies in a different discourse and through a different paradigm, to extend control, deepen exploitation, and normalize power relations. At the same time that we have a real drive in science to seeing how systems work, we also have an equally strong pull toward anatomies and anatomization, and what is particularly noteworthy at this juncture is that between anatomies and atoms (and the attendant theories of each), there is at least one point of intersection: a focus on the body.^①

While pain is obviously the essence of embodiment, scant attention has been focused within ecocritical circles on theorizing the placement and displacement of pain as constitutive of our ontological and material boundaries and realities (and the processes sustaining them). Judith Butler proposed in 1993 “a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as a *process* of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (9, *emphasis added*). Assuming that Butler isn’t talking in vague abstractions about matter but is concerned about how matter relates with humanity, then part of this process of materialization must involve discussions of pain. Fear of pain determines how we organize materials, both conceptually and physically. Fear of pain makes us value materials differentially. Fear of (or at least the desire to avoid) pain unseats us from our privileged place: we avoid pain no less than do nonhuman animals. We tend to forget—would like to forget—this bond.

We tend to forget—would like to forget—many inconvenient truths. We tend to believe—would like to believe—that the ontological realities outside of us are somehow not personal, that we are somehow not part of and not in discourse with them. We tend to forget—would like to forget—that our conjugal relationships with toxic lifestyles and practices are here, among us, the readers and the contributors to this journal, and indeed among all of us. Our participation in toxic lifestyles, our enmeshment with matters of death, pain, and suffering, is something that we’d like to have ethical exception from, this, what I’ve called toxicity amnesia and eco-exceptionalism, and we do a pretty good job of falling into both. We do a pretty good job of falling into a sense of toxicity amnesia and eco-exceptionalism because we’ve created regimes of displacement that allow us distance from matter. Perhaps we’ve become so blinded by the enormity of what we do, the theft without compensation, the wholesale robbery on an enormous

scale, the aggravated violence and torture, the colossal profit we take from the world, that we've simply lost perspective on our capacities. Cormac McCarthy's Anton Chigurh comes to mind. Psychopath or not, it seems that he has it right in saying that "The prospect of outsized profits leads people to exaggerate their own capacities. In their minds. They pretend to themselves that they are in control of events where perhaps they are not" (McCarthy 253). They are we, and we've become stupid. We over-estimate our abilities, as David Ehrenfeld so poignantly explains: "Now, when the suspicion of limits has become certainty, the great bulk of educated people still believe that there is no trap we cannot puzzle our way out of as surely and noisily as we blundered into it. Visions of utopia still jostle one another in the tainted air, and every fresh disaster is met with fresh plans of power and still more power" (12). We have become stupid. It is no exaggeration for Pete Postlethwaite to say that we are living in the Age of Stupid. Within the environmental humanities, ecocriticism has always fancied itself "activist," but what this means has remained problematical. From Lawrence Buell claiming that ecocriticism must work "from commitments deeper than professionalism" (*The Future* 97) to Michael Cohen insisting that it "must be engaged . . . [and] needs to inform personal and political actions" (7); from David Mazel seeking "empirical research" to prove that ecocritical pedagogy produces "more thoughtful and effective environmentalists" (42) to David Orton seeing the need "to have some direct relevancy," praxis has been front-and-center of ecocritical concerns. In this sense, ecocriticism has set itself up for a fall, promising something it has not yet delivered: an ability to cause material change in the world, to move from theory to practice. One of the problems, clearly, must be in defining what it is that "practice" actually means. Does what we are doing—say, as ecocritics or environmentally concerned scholars—mean that in principle that we shun unnecessary flights, and, if so, what is necessary? Does it mean that we shun meat, or driving, or plastic, and what does that mean or not mean?

"I began with the desire to speak with the dead," thus spoke Stephen Greenblatt in the opening moves of what was to initiate New Historicism (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 1). I begin with a slightly different set of concerns: I begin with a desire to speak with the living and all that this implies.

Ecocritics are by no means in agreement on the matter of activism. Greg Garrard's recent posting of his non-peer reviewed *The Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory* for 2009 speaks directly to what he calls ecocriticism's "hectoring about 'activism.'" He is responding in part to an article that calls for expanding the conceptual basis of ecocriticism to include discussion of ecophobia, an article which sought to theorize possibilities for activist engagement by offering the term "ecophobia" as a starting point—as feminist theory has a term to describe hatred of women, as postcolonial theory has a term to describe hatred of racial difference, as queer theory has a term to describe hatred of sexual minorities ... nothing radical here. Indeed, such a term for the contempt and subsequent ethical positions toward the natural environment were, by 2009, long overdue. From theorizing about ecophobia, it is plausible to look at non-monolithic ways of proceeding *toward* action *from* theory, to look at what vistas even something so simple as a terminology might enable.

Recent border defying work takes down the walls and borders that have ossified between ecocriticism and ecofeminism, and it is border-defying work that both investigates and challenges the knee-jerk reactions to the very mention of “ecofeminism” that often characterize ecocriticism. My guess is that the “belligerent attitude towards critical theory” about which John Parham has so eloquently spoken will not serve us well in the long-run.

One of the problems ecocriticism is facing is, in fact, its own success. Ecocriticism is making history in many senses, but it is troublingly appropriating its histories in its writing of itself. Ecocritical histories that ignore the feminist roots of the movement, as we have seen, not only produce dishonest scholarship but also produce substantially compromised and diminished capacities for ecocriticism. The affective ethics in the feminist environmental humanities is in some ways incompatible with what goes on when ecocriticism goes mainstream. So eager have we been to consolidate the field that we’ve not noticed how much of its history we’ve been erasing. To be blunt, we have already begun to see the omissions, misrepresentations, gendered amnesia, hysterical resistance to theory, and dull torpor of intellectual deterioration and retreat that comes at times to characterize our field when it ignores the theory and practice of feminism. To be blunt, we have already begun to see the threats of violent resistance (a threatening 2009 article in *ISLE* by wolf scholar Kip Robisch is a good case in point) that have appeared in response to theorizing about connections among environmental domination, homophobia, sexism, and heterosexism. To be blunt, we have already seen the initial stream of promise and hope that bore ecocriticism so high and fast run low and dry. Even so, good and sometimes theoretically sophisticated work is being done (indeed, much).

Ecocritical theory ideally conceptualizes a form of ideological critique that is alive both to historicist and presentist concerns (which is important for praxis). Traditionally, ecocriticism has spurned theory. Many ecocritical scholars have been very clear indeed about their disdain for theory, their desire to “get on with it,” scholars who see “making contact” (book titles such as *Coming into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice* reflect this desire for contact) as vital, who see an urgency of the here and now (The Fifth Biennial Conference of ASLE—the 2003 conference entitled “the solid earth! the actual world!”—springs to mind) and a “resurgence of the real” (the phrase “resurgence of the real” comes from the title of Charlene Spretnak’s 1999 book) scholars who wish to avoid “wrangling over what it means” (Buell *The Future* 3) to do ecocriticism, who fantasize about “escaping from the esoteric abstractness that afflicts current theorizing about literature” (Kroeber 1), and who want to remain free from the “post-structuralist nihilism” (236) Glen Love fears. John Tallmadge and the late Henry Harrington very succinctly warn about theory that goes “spinning off into obscurantism or idiosyncrasy” (xv), while Lawrence Buell worries about what he terms “mesmerization by literary theory” (*The Environmental Imagination* 111). This disdain for theory seemed to come to a head with Kip Robisch’s attack on an article about ecophobia three years ago, an attack that really had an effect opposite to its clearly stated desire. Instead of driving eco-scholars away from theory, it pushed them toward it—and this, I think, is a good thing. The reason it is a good thing is that there are many things that are simply not visible without the theory. Theory has a way sometimes

of making things apparent. Moreover, although there has been a conflict developing among ecocritics, theorizing ecophobia may very well in fact lead to confluent theorizing and thus toward the kinds of methodological and structural definition some ecocritics seek.

Much of the very good theoretical work that has been done in the field began not in theory but with poetry. In the provocatively entitled 2009 book *Can Poetry Save the Earth*, John Felstiner talks about the “urgent hope” that characterizes much of what has come to be known as “nature poetry.” The imagined or perceived proximity and access of poetry both to the senses and to the real is among the main bases of the thrust behind the new ecological sensibility within the literary humanities that has come to be known as ecocriticism. While it is dubious whether or not we can compellingly argue that poetry can save the earth, but it does seem safe to proceed on the assumption that, as Bill McKibben comments in a review on the backflap of the book, while “It may not save the earth ... it will surely help.”

Yet, if it all began with poetry in ecocriticism, we have certainly moved well beyond it now in the kinds of theory that we see. The year 2010 was a phenomenal one for ecocriticism, in some senses. It was the year that *ISLE*, the flagship journal of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), ran a special issue on ecocriticism and theory (though the division itself is problematical, reinforcing the idea that there is ecocriticism on the one hand and theory on the other—it is a false dichotomy). It was a lovely gesture, especially after so many years of mainstream ecocritical resistance to theory—even so, gestures don’t save trees.

It was 2010 that also saw the publication of books such as Stacy Alaimo’s *Bodily Natures*, David Abram’s *Becoming Animal*, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost’s *New Materialisms*, and Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter*, each in their own way testifying to the growing importance of seeing interconnections among the material bodies of our world. Indeed, as Oppermann and Iovino put it in the Material Ecocriticism CFP, “the material dealing with inhabitation on Earth, in its plural entanglements of bodies and natures, has become increasingly important in ecocritical studies.”

This is a key question not only of ecocriticism but indeed of all theory: indeed, how do we translate theory into practice? It is an especially vexing question for literary theorists. University of Central Florida professor Patrick Murphy, who has written many books on ecocritical theory, has commented that “Those of us engaged in teaching and critiquing literature who intend to encourage social transformation need to provide models and sources that seem flexibly realizable by many, rather than by only a few of our students” (19). The question is... how? Ecocritics have been struggling with this for fifteen years now. And in all that time, we’ve offered a variety of evasive and exceptionalist answers, arguing for our need to attend conferences and about the “trickle-down” approach, and so on.

If 2010 was a phenomenal year for taking ecocriticism closer to praxis, then what makes it more so is the special issue the journal *Configurations* ran on ecocriticism and science, a special issue that shows that the dialogue between the humanities and the sciences (a key concern of people such as W. O. Wilson, Stephen Jay Gould, and many others) is much more important than we think. If, as Richard Kerridge so eloquently puts it, the present crises we face are “the preoccupation that is the starting-point” (208) of what we do as ecocritics, then this dialogue

between the humanities and the science is vital.

It becomes very significant in light of Scott Slovic and Terre Satterfield's *What's Nature Worth? – Narrative Expressions of Environmental Values*, a book that looks at the relationship between how literature might affect policy and decisions governments make about the natural world. One of its central purposes “is to find a way to bring the concept of ‘narrative expressions of value’ into the realm of stakeholder discussions of value and policy” (2-3). A collection of interviews with twelve prominent environmental writers, this book investigates the relationship between moral conviction and emotional attachment on the one hand and market pricing on the other. This book identifies both the strengths and weaknesses of narrative as a vehicle for the expression of value. For example, as Satterfield comments in the interview with Terry Tempest Williams, “ambiguity isn’t a very comfortable premise” for the research world, and “decision makers want to know clearly, and with some stability, what people think” (71), yet there is wisdom and effectiveness, as both editors note, in “presenting technical information in narrative form” (22). This is, perhaps, the primary contradiction of narrative. It works because, as William Kittredge explains during his interview, it “helps readers [and listeners] to internalize values, making them their own, emotionally, as necessary to life rather than simply interesting or distracting, as platforms from which to act” (25). It doesn’t, however, seem to make much of a difference in the world of people like Bush, and we can’t really quantify what narrative does in terms of how value translates into policy. President Clinton brandishing a copy of *Testimony* with the announcement that “This made a difference” (62) is certainly an exception. Most narrative doesn’t work quite so directly, and many writers and story-tellers who are serious about making a difference probably can’t help but feeling some of the “eco-despair” Scott Slovic mentions in his Foreword to *The Greening of Literary Scholarship* and to wonder as Alison Hawthorne Deming does, “what good is a poem or an essay when nature is dying and we are to blame?” (117)

My guess, and it is a wildly optimistic one, is that Alison Hawthorne Deming is correct in pointing out that, “legislation, information, and instruction cannot effect change at [the] emotional level—though they can play a significant role. Art is necessary because it gives us a new way of thinking and speaking, shows us what we are and what we have been blind to, and gives us new knowledge and forms in which to see ourselves” (122). Perhaps a few final words on the need for us to continue doing some of what we do are in order here. Nature writer David Quammen wrote an email to Scott Slovic in 1998, a part of which read as follows:

... a writer who wants to influence how humans interact with landscape and nature should strive to reach as large an audience as possible and NOT preach to the converted. That means, for me, flavoring my work with entertainment-value, wrapping my convictions subversively within packages that might amuse and engage a large unconverted audience, and placing my work whenever possible in publications that reach the great unwashed. (Quammen qtd. in Slovic, “Foreword” viii)

We need to continue our work, not with the naïve assumption that “spreading the word” justifies

our flights all over the place, as though the *un-measurable* good we can potentially do from such travel exempts us from the clearly measurable bad that we *do* do. We need to be honest about how we participate. Unsustainable living is unsustainable, and whether it is fashionable (as the spate of films and best-selling books on climate change and environmental crisis seems to suggest it is) or whether it is unfashionable (fashion changes), we can't let up. Fighting the businesses that benefit from unsustainable practices is a long and hard one. In spite of this, as with tobacco, eventually people *are* finally getting it that unsustainable living is lethal. The promise of the spate of films and best-selling books on climate change and environmental crisis that have appeared over the past several years has been and is being betrayed and clouded—and what we can do about it, and how we can blow the smoke away begins here, now.

【Note】

① The word “atom” (*a*—not + *tomos*—cutting) does not come from “anatomy” (*ana*—up + *tomos*—cutting), though they share a common parent (*tomos*—cutting).

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