

Discourses of Nation, National Ecopoetics, and Ecocriticism in the face of the US: Canada and Korea as Case Studies¹

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While the dimensions of the ‘environmental crisis’ are clearly global, ecocriticism grows out of local systems with varying cultural valencies, meaning that an American ecocriticism will differ significantly in its material implications from, say, a Korean or a Canadian ecocriticism. The flow of environmental literature has generally been one-way, from America out, albeit with hybridized and Americanized versions of Taoist and Buddhist ecological precepts here and there, the odd nod to ecocritical communities outside the US, and numerous titles about ‘expanding the boundaries’, ‘going further afield’, and so on. Yet, there remains a clear and disproportionate imbalance weighing heavily toward celebrating American landscapes, American poetry, and American ecocriticism. This personal and polemic essay discusses colonialist implications of the fact that American geographies tend to become matters of global interest. One of the key issues that this article argues is that a continuing alliance between postcolonial and ecocritical studies can help us to look profitably at what are very important interconnections — ones with environmental effects and postcolonial implications — between discourses of nation, on the one hand, and national ecopoetics on the other.

KEYWORDS Activism, Canadian ecocriticism, Comparative ecocriticism, Ecocritical theory, Ecophobia, Ecopoetry, Korean ecocriticism, Postcolonial ecocriticism

‘We have generally avoided using the term “ecocriticism” [...] because of its neo-colonialist potential to dominate this burgeoning field’ (Tiffin, 2007: xxvi), Helen Tiffin recently explained, referring to a book she edited dealing with ‘environment and empire’. Back in the mid-1990s, in a review of *The Ecocriticism Reader*, I wrote rather more timidly about the ‘uniformly Americanist slant’ of ecocriticism — a

remark that undoubtedly went unnoticed and probably unread (see Estok, 1996). Currently, there is a flurry of activity on this topic, of which both Tiffin's comment and my own are each a part, and to which the reflection that follows is also committed. The growing concern among ecocritics about how the *organizational biases* of ecocriticism participate in discourses of nation — a concern not coincidentally higher *outside of* than *within* the United States, in places such as Canada, Korea, and Australia, for instance — is, in part, a response to feelings of discomfort about the unidirectional flow of theory, of literature, and of cultural capital from the US out. Investigations into the important intersections among questions relating to national identity, transnational theory, and national ecopoetics could not be more timely.

Within the Korean context, the unidirectionality of cultural capital no doubt has a lot to do with what Jonathan Arac has called a 'global hegemony of the English language' (Arac, 2007: 20). Along a very similar line of reasoning, Ursula Heise has observed that

monolingualism is currently one of ecocriticism's most serious limitations. The environmentalist ambition is to think globally, but doing so in terms of a single language is inconceivable — even and especially when that language is a hegemonic one. (Heise, 2008: 513)

Within the Korean context, thus, the colonialist implications of an increasingly global English linguistic hegemony prove to be the key — but by no means the single — issue. Indeed, the fact that newly emergent economies such as postcolonial Korea still work within sets of narrowly colonialist agendas, in which the narratives (new and old) of America still fill the educational curricula to the almost complete exclusion of other voices from other places, suggests that linguistic hegemony is really only part of a larger problem. In the simplest of terms, cultural cringe² is probably *the* defining barrier to a fully vocalized national ecopoetry in Korea, a country in some ways 'stuck' in a position of playing 'catch-up'. As regards Korean ecopoetry/poetics, a kind of self-erasure is indeed one of the obvious effects of valuing foreign national ecopoetry/poetics in a 'breathless effort to catch up with the industrialized world' (Wu, 2005: xi), while being transfixed by the headlights of cultural superpowers.

The Canadian context, though, obviously, somewhat different, effectively has Canada no less dwarfed and erased before the cultural and economic giant bordering south of the 49th parallel. No less than Korea, Canada is lacking in the kind of international audience for ecocriticism and ecopoetry that the United States enjoys. The late Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau once likened living beside the United States to 'sleeping with an elephant', explaining that 'no matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt' (Trudeau, 1969). The elephant may (or may not) be well-intentioned and benevolent, but, as one blogger recently put it, 'you still watch out for any move it makes — its sheer size and weight mea[n] even its accidental or good-hearted movements will cause more damage than you want to put up with' (J., 2008). In the eyes of many Canadians, this too easy accommodation of American interests is incurred at tremendous costs.

Certainly Canada has not sought to play 'catch-up' as much as other colonial countries have, with so much of America foisted on it through television and the

cross-border flow of culture, materials, and technologies; yet the legacies of colonialism are perhaps no less a part of the equation for Canada than for Korea, though these legacies may materialize in different ways. It is worth reiterating here what Susie O'Brien (one of the relatively few critics to have written about the relationship between ecocritical theory and questions relating to Canadian national identity) asserted a decade ago now: that the flag on the ecocritical vessel has, indeed, been decidedly red, white, and blue, and that one of the reasons for the relative failure of Canadian ecocriticism proves in part deeply rooted in the 'legacies of colonialism, both internally, in the conflict between French and English Canadians, and externally, in the nation's deference to the imperial authority, first of England, then of the United States' (O'Brien, 1998: 24). Little really has changed since that time.

What this means in practical terms is that while the United States markets its geographies of pride *as* American, Canada has often been more in the position of a 'pimp' lured by American dollars, erasing its own identity and selling its own geographies to Hollywood. These words of mine may seem harsh, but I have seen my hometown of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland play host to *The X-Files*, faking American cities through the GVRD³; I have walked out of the University of British Columbia Main Library to find (to my astonishment) Pennsylvania State Troopers surrounding me and to hear a voice hollering (apparently because of me) to 'Cut!'; and I have seen 'Rumble in the Bronx' pawn Vancouver off as New York and Jet Li doing 'Romeo Must Die' in a Vancouver that was supposed to be Oakland, besides having had to endure innumerable castings — too many to cite here — of Vancouver as Seattle. Moreover, in a handful of dollars, I have seen our Alberta Badlands dub in for Montana, as well as Winnipeg with its old buildings cast as Chicago and big-city bright-lights Toronto sub in for Boston. Finally, I have also seen — with, I confess, a somewhat growing nationalist twinge — TV producers who pretend our home and native land to be some American FBI or CIA or 4400 setting.⁴ The *erasure of place* is a serious issue as well as a form of *ecophobia*, a term one blogger has perhaps prematurely called a 'paradigm'.⁵ Erasure of Canada in filmic representations produced in Canadian spaces pretending to be American conveys as much a fear of and contempt for the Canadian landscape as it expresses contempt for the cultural inferiority or lack of cultural capital associated with Canada in the US (as readily suggested by the many mocking references to Canada and Canadians in American comedies).

Of course, the glorification of landscapes in the United States is understandable. No doubt, anyone who has ever travelled to the American Southwest can probably easily grasp the magnetism of the land that seems to draw out all our efforts to express it, to represent it and capture it in our own human voices, whether these be voices of literary art, painting, song, or business. The taste of the desert, Bruce Berger writes, 'is a taste for ultimates, and death is the backdrop against which all we know comes to brilliance' (Berger, 2004: 246). The startling realities of extreme opposites like heat and cold, flat land and mountain, and life and death probably go far to explain why so much ecocritical effort is so heavily invested in those American landscapes. But does this mean that Canada lacks such spectacular geographies, such brilliant displays of opposites? Does not Canada, in fact, house more of them, from *our* 'sea to shining sea', from the flamboyantly dramatic tides in the Bay of Fundy in

the east to the seemingly endless prairies in the middle and breath-stopping Rocky Mountains of British Columbia, from the magnificence and mass of Niagara Falls at our southern border to the horrors of ice, snow and driving cold way up north in Nunavut? It is not that Canada lacks spectacular geographies; rather, the US as a nation has been more adept at marketing itself and at popularizing its geographies of pride.

In a much earlier version of this essay jointly delivered on a conference floor with a Korean student, there was a double discomfort: for myself, that of being a Canadian ecocritic, and for my co-presenter, that of being a Korean (eco)scholar.⁶ The common source of our discomfort was, broadly speaking, 'America'. Our topic proved tricky in intense ways because it is difficult to say directly and without riling people that Canada and Korea lack cultural 'swat' internationally, a lack that is evidenced in the media, in business, in academia — virtually everywhere. Unsurprisingly, therefore, American ecopoetry and the work that has been done with it remain, to a large extent, 'painted red, white, and blue'. Of course, no one will deny that there is good ecopoetry in the US, and that equally good theory about that work has been and is being done in both South Korea and Canada. As members of the international ecocritical community, however, for my co-presenter and myself, that was not the point: for us, as Korean and Canadian ecocritics respectively, the point is that Canada and South Korea both, to varying degrees, live in the shadow of a giant.

In its earlier drafts, this essay also made several other assumptions. It assumed that, with very few exceptions, the almost uniformly Americanist slant of ecocriticism — from the flagship *Reader*⁷ in the field to the many publishing houses that accept ecocritical manuscripts and the very topics of scholarly articles themselves — effectively functions as a form of colonization, which turns out to be very problematic for a discipline such as ecocriticism. Yet, the flow of ecocriticism has generally been one-way, from America out, albeit with hybridized and Americanized versions of Taoist and Buddhist ecological precepts here and there, the odd nod to ASLE-affiliates abroad,⁸ and numerous titles about 'expanding the boundaries', 'going further afield',⁹ and so on, titles which in themselves constitute metaphors of a kind of colonialist expansion. One does not want to 'bash' ecocriticism, but neither does one want to be naïve about it.

Earlier drafts of this essay also assumed, therefore, that what governs the course of ecocriticism also certainly governs, in part, the course of a given national ecopoetry/poetics. The colonialist metaphors with which ecocriticism seems so infatuated are grounded in the reality that the theories and geographies of America have indeed become matters of global interest in ways that Portage and Main or Myeongdong have not. If we suppose that, by definition, ecopoetry in part pursues what ecocriticism seeks in terms of effect, then we are assuming that ecopoetry seeks at its core to be activist. This is certainly what is implied by J. Scott Bryson's preface to *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*, when he asserts that 'we know we are encountering a poem essentially different from the nature poem when we read ecopoetry' (Bryson, 2002: 3). Theorizing about ecopoetry, then, must look at and respond to nationalist renderings that have become fetishistic — at least, it must do so if ecocriticism has any pretensions to activist intents.

Exactly what is meant, though, by the term ‘activist’? Moreover, does such a term really adequately define ecocritical endeavours? Not all ecocritics are in agreement on this matter, and yet the community of ecocritical scholars needs to be very clear on this point, all the more so as, from the beginning, ecocriticism has fashioned itself as activist. Indeed, back in 1995, Lawrence Buell defined *praxis* as being central to ecocriticism, arguing that it constitutes the ‘study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis’ (Buell, 1995: 430 n. 20). A solid decade later, he continued to maintain that ‘criticism worthy of its name arises from commitments deeper than professionalism’ (Buell, 2005: 97). Michael Cohen has similarly asserted that ‘by definition, ecological literary criticism must be engaged. It wants to know but also wants to do [...] Ecocriticism needs to inform personal and political actions, in the same way that feminist criticism was able to do only a few decades ago’ (Cohen, 2004: 7). And we may cite many more perhaps less prominent scholars who assert similar ideas, myself included. The notion that ecocriticism is, at its core, activist in intent, proves so pervasive that it hardly seems to need arguing. However, when I pose the question at conferences about whether ecocriticism is, at its core, activist in vision, usually less than half of the conference delegates agree. At any rate, the people in the Literature and the Environment Program at the University of California, Santa Barbara have observed, though, that ‘many, if not most, ecocritics may think of themselves as environmental activists’ (UC Santa Barbara English Department, 2008). Whatever the ‘theory tourists’ may think, it is the activist intentions that have generated the discourses of immediacy and what we might call the aesthetics of contact¹⁰ that have come to characterize multiple strands of ecocriticism since its inception. It is the activist impulse and ambitions that have given urgency to our words and flavour to our meetings and that have also, some would go as far as to contend, differentiated us from the legions of staid thematicists who uselessly muse as the world smoulders to an end.

For a critical endeavour that fashions itself as activist, however, ecocriticism has avoided the sensitive topic of activism for far too long: indeed, it has ironically fallen victim to a version of the ‘obscurity and inaccessibility’ Glen Love warns against (Love, 1996: 236), not by theorizing but by *not* doing so. A failure to deal either theoretically or practically with the activist challenges of ecocriticism bodes well neither for the field nor for the environment. There are several core elements, ‘must haves’, that an activist ecocriticism will need to include: such an ecocriticism will need

- 1) to lead to heightened awareness;
- 2) to do what feminist criticism does, namely, as so aptly expressed by Toril Moi, ‘it seeks to expose, not to perpetuate’ (Moi, 1985: xiv) — which ultimately means either an implicit or explicit call for broad changes in behaviour;
- 3) to have, as David Orton has argued, ‘some direct relevancy for environmental and green activists who embrace changing industrial capitalist society’ (Orton, 2005);
- 4) to practise what it preaches, i.e. to look seriously at anthropocentrism and speciesism and at how these inform the daily choices we make, from the food we eat to the clothes we wear, as well as our daily engagement with other sentient beings, both human and non-human.

Ecocriticism and ecopoetry both, by definition, are activist and seek change, and things *are* changing; still, ecocriticism has been recalcitrant about theory, and we do well perhaps to reiterate that if we labour under the delusion that theory is incompatible with praxis, that theory cannot lead to changes in public policy, that theory is no good for the ‘real world’, then the future of ecocriticism will be insular, constrained by the limitations of a purely academic field of play.

In a 2003 Call for Papers, Hans-Georg Erney posed a question that seems not only relevant but, indeed, definitional in some ways of our topic: ‘How can the tensions between scholarship and activism, which are inherent in both postcolonialism and ecocriticism, be negotiated?’ (Erney, 2003). If contact with the world is the central preoccupation of ecocriticism and ecopoetry, then negotiating the tension between scholarship and activism will necessarily mean re-visiting the question of mediation, of acknowledging that there is *no unmediated* ‘nature’ in anything we produce, and that ‘nature has both an ontological existence outside the realm of language and rather problematic textualized versions within the human discourses that are ordered according to ideological and social practices’ (Oppermann, 2006: 120). Susie O’Brien’s article, ‘“Back to the World”: Reading Ecocriticism in a Postcolonial Context’, explicitly discusses this matter with regard to the issue of the close relationship that there has traditionally been between poetry and ecocriticism. In response to Lawrence Buell’s question about why ‘literature always lead[s] us away from the physical world, never back to it’ (Buell, 1995: 11), O’Brien explains that desires for (and sometimes a naïve belief in the possibilities of) unmediated and authentic encounters with the natural world go a long way to explaining the generic preferences of ecocriticism for poetry. It is not surprising that ecocriticism should prefer poetry, O’Brien maintains, since it has the ‘capacity to produce the illusory impression of an unmediated reflection of the world’ (O’Brien, 2007: 184). Nor, perhaps, is it surprising that the only full length published manuscript (aside from dissertations) that bears the words ‘ecocritical’ and ‘Canadian’ in the title concerns poetry, Diana Relke’s *Greenwor(l)ds*, about which I will speak more below.

The most serious challenge ecocriticism has faced, then, has been the conflict (perceived and real) between theory and practice, theory often losing out to ‘an aesthetics of contact’, an aesthetics informed by a naïve belief in the possibilities of unmediated and ‘real’ encounters, again getting back to poetry’s place in the profession. Ecocriticism — to produce viable theory that *is* practical rather than watered-down theory that *seems* practical — will need to take account of itself as a piece of the postcolonial puzzle. It needs, as O’Brien so forcefully states, ‘to get back to theory, if it is to negotiate the difficult cultural place in which it now finds itself’ (O’Brien, 2007: 194). If ‘the process of colonialism was fuelled by a desire for an unmediated possession of the world’ (p. 194), as O’Brien claims, to varying degrees, poetry and ecocriticism have also been fuelled by this desire. This calls for serious theoretical attention; yet relationships between discourses of nation, on the one hand, and national ecopoetics, on the other, remain profoundly under-theorized.

There are many possible reasons for this, but one has been a perceived incommensurability between postcolonial and ecocritical theories — discussed most notably and recently by O’Brien (2007) and Huggan and Tiffin (2007). Generally speaking, the ‘post-colonial’ has rejected the idea of ‘the natural’, of ‘nature’ as anything *but* a

social construct, while ecocriticism has tended to reject the idea of nature *as* a social construct. So it is not surprising that ecocriticism and postcolonialism have failed to work together. While there may very well be some truth to the suggestion that Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have recently made — namely, that ‘the two fields [of ecocriticism and postcolonialism] are most alike in suffering from a seemingly congenital inability to account for themselves’ and that for both, definitions seem an ‘insuperable problem’ (Huggan and Tiffin, 2007: 8) — an alliance between the two is, nevertheless, necessary.

Recognizing that representations of ‘nature’ are obviously constructs *within* the documents we make allows us to do several things. One of these is to look at what the vectors of various constructs of ‘nature’ are in our documents. Such, it would seem, should really be *the* basic feature of ecocriticism, at least at present, since it becomes very clear very quickly that *nature* and *nation* are written together, simultaneously.

‘[C]hallenging the nationalist and monolingual enclosure toward which American studies has tended’ (Arac, 2007: 20) means, of course, looking at how things such as ecopoetry and ecocriticism are disseminated from an American neocolonial source, as it were; it also, however, and more importantly, means at the very least becoming more interested in the globally muted voices. A more ambitious dream would be for greater literacy outside of Anglophone literature and theory. In any case, the point is that if contact with the world is the central preoccupation of ecocriticism and ecopoetry, no less is contact with each other key to our ecological awareness and activism, which partly implies listening to and promoting other voices from other places as the only way to stop the engine that is muting us.

명확히 말해서, 무언가를 읽을 수 없다는 것은 그 글에 포함된 정보를 얻을 수 없다는 것이다.¹¹ Certainly, an inability to read something means an inability to receive the information contained in that writing, as the previous sentence suggests, but the unidirectionality of cultural capital is surely not simply a matter of monolingualism. Indeed, even within Korea (where, obviously, the official language is Korean), certain statistics make for staggering reading. To date, the work on ecopoetic matters within the flagship journal of ASLE-Korea is very telling: twenty or so articles on American authors, four on British authors, two on German authors, one on a South African author, one on a German-Swiss author, one on an American-Canadian author, and seven articles on Korean landscapes. It may sound xenophobic to comment that the bulk of the commentary in the ASLE-Korea journal is on foreign authors and landscapes (rather than on domestic Korean authors and landscapes), but it would be, conversely, remiss not to mention it at all. It may seem like finger-pointing also to mention that the bulk of the scholarship deals with men (Thoreau and Gary Snyder taking the top spots), without a single female eco-writer from Korea discussed anywhere. Even so, even within this narrow and often Americanist focus, there is still work that is being and has been done in Korea outside of American influences; yet it does not seem to have attracted the interest of very many mainstream American ecocritics.

Though one would be hard pressed to find materials on Korean ecopoets outside of Korea, material — in English — certainly is available. The language barrier has, for instance, been lessened by Won-Chung Kim’s *Cracking the Shell: Three Korean*

Ecopoets (2006), which offers a translation of major Korean ecopoetry into English. The works of Seungho Choi (characterized by a critique of global capitalist culture and disillusionment), Chiha Kim (who was imprisoned for his poems during Korea's military dictatorship), and Hyonjong Chong (whose poetic vision rests on a version of the Gaia thesis) are thus available in English, but the interest in this ecopoetry — even within Korea itself — is dwarfed by interests in American ecopoetry and ecocriticism.

As much a pity is the faint interest in Canadian ecopoetry, ecocriticism, and literature generally in Korea, where I live. Seoul is a city of 13 million, but there is just no market for Canadiana here, and while it may be very true indeed that 'many academics in Germany, France, Sweden, Poland, Austria, Croatia, and the Czech Republic [...] have students happy to take courses in and write graduate theses on Canadian literature' (as one anonymous editor defensively pointed out to me last year), it may come as a surprise to many that among the 181 universities in South Korea, only six in this country of 50 million have Canadian studies (politics and policy, mind you, not literature), and not one of these six has courses dedicated strictly to Canadian literature in its curricula. Japan — with its 128 million residents — is proportionally worse, with only nine of its 806 universities having Canadian studies, though just over half of these nine actually do have courses dedicated to more than social conditions, multiculturalism, politics, social policy, and so on: five universities in Japan teach courses on Canadian literature. Compare these kinds of numbers about Canadian studies (and literature) to the numbers of courses being taught on American literature (and culture) in South Korea and Japan, to name only two countries, and it starts to look foolish and naïve for anyone to argue against the claim that Canadian literature enjoys a puny stature on the world scene.

Korea at least has a book with 'Korean' and 'ecopoet' in its title (and it really does seem here as if I were pointing chiding fingers at Canada), but there is no book anywhere that has 'Canadian ecopoetry' in its title. There was a proposed volume a few years back by Kevin Hutchings and Robert Budde that would have been called *The Writing Tree: Canadian Ecopoetry*, but the book never materialized. About the closest to a book on Canadian ecopoetry is Diana Relke's *Greenwor(l)ds: Ecocritical Readings of Canadian Women's Poetry* (1999).

Greenwor(l)ds is a remarkable, though sometimes theoretically dated, book whose ambitious reach (at least in part) seeks to refute the claims Northrop Frye makes in his influential 'Conclusion' to the three-volume *Literary History of Canada*, namely that there is 'a tone of deep terror in regard to nature' in Canadian poetry (Frye, 1965: 830). Relke's book remains the first and only of its kind. It deals directly with some of the kinds of questions about nation and ecological writing that are at the core of my reflection here. It places discussions of nation front and centre with discussions of ecologically-oriented poetry and critiques a tradition that sees the writing and experience of nature as an exclusively male domain.¹² Yet this book is virtually inaccessible outside of a small circle of Canadianists; has never appeared at an international ASLE conference; and simply put, through no fault of its own, has not triggered the sort of reciprocal flow about which this essay is concerned.

The Canadian academic community has, from the outset, been aware of the national identity problems and postcolonial issues Canada faces with ecocriticism

(Estok, 1996; O'Brien, 1998; Banting, 1998). Nature has been present — has, as Laurie Ricou puts it, 'loomed large in the Canadian consciousness' — and ecocriticism has been no less present in Canada, though 'almost [as] an underground phenomenon' (Ricou, 1991: 3). Obviously, Canada has cultivated a different relationship with nature than the United States. So, too, has South Korea. While American ecocriticism has focused heavily on male writers, this is far less the case in Canadian ecocriticism; secondly, Canadians also tend to record the environment as more inimical (which does not imply that American writers do not also, at times, write about hostile environments, but it is, as Margaret Atwood and Northrop Frye have noted, more a tendency and defining feature of Canadian literature — and this inevitably affects the kind of ecocritical inquiry we make). American landscapes have more often been written as frontiers to be conquered; the Canadian tendency, as David Stouck has so admirably noted, is to write its geographies as 'threatening', as a 'space [that] is punitive' (Stouck, 1974: 142), a land that must be survived. There is a big difference between a conquering mentality, on the one hand, and a surviving mentality, on the other. Despite Canada's entrance onto the ecocritical stage, there subsists a — *je ne sais quoi* — a lack of presence, a hyphenation, an under-rated, under-valued, and under-representedness attached to Canadian ecocriticism, like so much else that is Canadian (at least in relation to the more culturally dominant and dominating 'elephant' neighbour).

Similarly, South Korea, with a long tradition of Buddhist and Taoist ideas about harmonious integration, has historically entertained a very different relationship with the land than America and defies wholesale importation of nation-based ecological discourses. While one is loath to make generalizations, it would be negligent not to mention that the single most definitional cultural difference between East and West has to do with notions about the relative importance of the individual. In the West, humanity is a special creation quite apart from Nature. Not so in Asia, where ideas about an integration of humanity and Nature stated by Taoist philosophers 2500 years ago remain very much a part of the cultural formation. If it is 'I' in the West, it is 'we' in Asia. The car — perhaps the ultimate symbol of twentieth-century individualism — is a Western invention that came out of a long set of cultural and historical circumstances. In contrast to this *individualism*, one of the things that characterizes indigenous (if I may use that word) Korean ecological thinking and theory is the notion of the *embeddedness* of the individual, not only in society but in the natural world.

Still, as with Canada, the legacies of colonialism in Korea (direct ones in the case of Japan, implied ones in relation to the American 'liberators') have in large part determined the kinds of theory being done in Korean ecocriticism. An ecocriticism exclusively focused on American relationships with the land responds to a very specific set of needs, and to import this theory wholesale onto other nations characterized by different sets of relationships and needs will continue the neocolonialism of 'this burgeoning field' about which Helen Tiffin speaks in the quotation with which I began this essay. The obliviousness to diverse global spaces is serious enough, but the out-and-out erasure of such spaces (cf. Vancouver's film industry) becomes downright alarming, for erasure cannot ever be quite dissociated from silencing.

Conclusions

It seems ironic, of course, to be talking about the undervalued status of Canadian ecocriticism in the year that ASLE-US is holding its biennial conference for the first time in a Canadian city, with a host of powerful Canadian names topping the list of plenary and keynote speakers. It seems ironic to be talking about American name-value internationally after the financial crisis that began in 2008 generated a US national debt that would put every American citizen \$40,000 in the red if spread evenly among the population. It seems ironic to be talking about the undervaluing and under-representation of South Korea, when Korean electronics products fill every American household, when Korean automobiles line the streets of America, and when so much of the animation US children watch is the product of the unsung toil of Korea hands. Yet, at our academic meetings, it is very clear that Canada and Korea are each under-represented, under-rated, under-heard. The problem is not that we are not talking; the problem is that the listening has been a one-sided affair.

The question of valuation of geographies remains a difficult one, and the aim of my reflection has been less to solve than to sketch the parameters and implications of this problem. The geographies valorized on TV, in film, or in ecocriticism are American landscapes, particularly of the south, and it is they which receive the most intense scrutiny, attention, and representational focus. Yet Canada has regions that arguably warrant ecocritical attention, as does South Korea. With Canada, one thinks of the Prairies — an open field, as it were, for ecocritical attention. With Korea, one might think of the 154 mile long, 2.5 mile wide virtual wildlife sanctuary (mine-studded though it is) that the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) has become.

It seems poor style to end with questions, but how can we appraise undervalued geographies in literature, and what are the implications of so doing? Moreover, if ‘an imperative toward humility in relationships with both human and nonhuman nature’ (Bryson, 2002: 3) is part of what defines ecopoetry, then — no anti-Americanism intended — what shall we do about the lack of humility inherent in the hegemonic flow of cultural representations from the US out?

Things are changing, and indeed it is astonishing how much material has already appeared since the first words of this article were penned as an abstract for the 2008 ‘Poetic Ecologies’ Conference in Brussels. Still, I would argue, the causes and implications of the clear and disproportionate imbalances weighing heavily toward celebrating American landscapes, American ecopoetry/poetics, and American ecocriticism need continuing discussion from at once postcolonial and ecocritical perspectives.

Notes

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² In a 1958 essay entitled ‘The Cultural Cringe’, A. A. Phillips (2006) coined this term to describe feelings

of inferiority in Australia about local talent compared with the counterparts of Britain and (Continental) Europe. The term describes a devaluing of one’s own culture and background in favour of a nation with stronger international cultural capital (a colonialist or neocolonialist nation).

³ Guest-editor’s note: GVRD stands for the Greater Vancouver Regional District.

⁴ For a very comprehensive list of television series and movies filmed in Vancouver, see the ‘List of

- Filming Locations in Metro Vancouver' in the References.
- ⁵ See Stolz (2005). We may define ecophobia as a pathological aversion toward nature, an aggravated form of anthropocentrism expressed variously as fear of, hatred of, or hostility toward nature, at least in part motivated by a sense of nature's imagined unpredictability. It is necessary to introduce the new term ecophobia because there simply exists no appropriate word for the concept it seeks to describe. The term opens opportunities for the study of nature in ways similar to the ones opened up by terms such as misogyny, racism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism in studies of the representations of women, race, sexuality, and Jewishness respectively. I have elsewhere defined the word extensively. See, for instance, Estok (2008).
- ⁶ My co-presenter on this occasion was Lee Young-Hyun. Part of this discomfort is 1) in having been born and credentialed in Canada only to be drained out, a statistic of the 'brain drain' (of which I heard much whilst growing up); and 2) in living now in a country that has historically been the victim of colonialist regimes and suffers today from that past, notwithstanding the 'Korean wave' (a wave of profound interest in Korean culture, primarily in East Asian countries — Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and some of mainland China).
- ⁷ The reference here is, of course, to Glotfelty and Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996).
- ⁸ ASLE stands for the US-based Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment.
- ⁹ See, for example, Murphy (2000) and Armbruster and Wallace (2001).
- ¹⁰ Current titles — for instance *Coming into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice* (Ingram et al., 2007), and the title of the Fifth Biennial ASLE-US Conference held in 2003 in Boston, 'the *solid* earth! the *actual* world!' — reflect this desire for contact.
- ¹¹ I am indebted to Lee Young-Hyun for this sentence.
- ¹² Relke explains that the problem with Northrop Frye's conclusions about Canadian nature poetry is that they stem from 'perceptions [...] based upon the experience of poetry written almost exclusively by men' (Relke, 1999: 25). One of the results of Frye's famous essay, according to Relke, is that 'the work of women poets [often] remained on the peripheries of Canadian myth' (p. 25). While it certainly remains debatable how much Relke succeeds in refuting Frye's terror thesis, there is no question that she foregrounds the experience and nature poetry of Canadian women. Moreover, while it seems dangerously essentialist for her to go on to suggest a theoretical position that might account for the experience of the self 'as constructed by a system other than the system of signs' and that 'biological nature has as much of a hand in "constructing" us as do the signs that stand in for it' (p. 321), Relke's contribution to a Canadian ecocriticism is impressive.

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