Pedagogical Literary Environmental Activism and "The Dream of the Rood"

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Abstract Ecocritics hired to deliver English language and literature courses in universities and other post-secondary education institutes confront at many junctures in their careers social and political imperatives to teach English language and literature by actively bringing into their teaching and research content that is related to environmental activism, or by committing to what will be called here pedagogical literary environmental activism. In this article, I discuss an ongoing project aimed at contributing to this kind of activism as the latter is reflecting the opening out of English language and literature to concerns that once were considered separate from these two subject areas. The project ecocritically relates work by environmental activists situated outside of English and the humanities to the work of scholars who analyze literary texts and it does so by addressing one of the most pressing issues confronting humans and other planetary species today: the loss of tree species and the ecosystems that they contribute to and depend upon. The literary text that is discussed is the anonymous Old English poem, "The Dream of the Rood" (ca. 700-1000 CE). I argue that it addresses deforestation in the specific ecological and environmental contexts of massive planetary deforestation caused by humans in the current so-called anthropocene era. In making this argument I draw on definitions of ecocriticism by Lawrence Buell, J. Scott Bryson, and Ursula K. Heise. I also make some brief but necessary remarks on ecofeminism and I refer to biosemiotic theory (Wendy Wheeler) and to an argument that Sharon O'Dair makes in defense of reading and teaching texts from "presentist" perspectives.

Key words "The Dream of the Rood"; biosemiotic theory; deforestation; ecocriticism; presentism

"Foot-bound uplooking at this lovely tree."
— Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book XI

Ecocritics hired to deliver English language and literature courses in universities and other post-secondary education institutes confront at many junctures in their careers social and political imperatives to teach English language and literature by actively bringing into their teaching and research content that is related to environmental activism, or by committing to what will be called here pedagogical literary environmental activism. This kind of activism is widening the disciplinary boundaries of English in many instances and in many other cases it is drawing the disciplinary boundaries in around disciplinary-specific critical and theoretical questions about what is the natural world and about relations between the many species that populate the planet. In this article, I discuss an ongoing project aimed at contributing to this kind of activism as the latter is reflecting the opening out of English language and literature to concerns that once were considered separate from these two subject areas. The project ecocritically relates work by environmental activists situated outside of English and the humanities to the work of scholars who analyze literary texts and it does so by addressing one of the most pressing issues confronting humans and other planetary species today: the loss of tree species and the ecosystems that they contribute to and depend upon. The literary text that is discussed is the anonymous Old English poem, "The Dream of the Rood" (ca. 700-1000 CE). It is well known to scholars according to its identity as one of a small number of records that survive of an early dialect of the English language, spoken in the British isles in the early centuries of the first millennium of the Common Era when northern Germanic pagan culture and Judaic-Christian culture were still discernible as distinct cultures. The poem addresses the death of trees in the specific ecological and environmental contexts of massive ecocidal planetary deforestation caused by humans in the current so-called anthropocene era. This "presentist" ecocritical reading is provoked by reason especially of the representation of the poem's central character of "the Rood," a tree that talks and suffers and a being that tells the poem's human narrator how its life is figuratively and materially tied to the life of another (a human being henceforth worshipped as a god under the religion of Christianity). The larger central figure of the poem of the dismembered body of the Rood materially and figuratively bound to the broken body of a human, a cyborg and trans-species figure, is also one of the most recognizable and iconic figures of western culture and art.

Before launching into an ecocritical analysis of "The Dream of the Rood" and pedagogically, literarily, and actively forging ties between its content and environmental activists' efforts to halt and reverse the ongoing deforestation of the planet, I will briefly provide and comment on several definitions and terms associated with "ecocriticism" that have helped ecocritics to define the discipline of ecocriticism itself. They include foremost the term ecofeminism, a term and concept referring

to a particular critical practice of ecocriticism and indispensable to ecocriticism as a whole. As Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok, and Serpil Oppermann point out in a recent essay, an introduction to an ecofeminist anthology entitled *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*, ecofeminism, which as a term is more or less coterminous with "feminist ecocriticism" and as a practice intersects with or overlaps with feminist ecocriticism, has a substantial history (3). An early key figure in this history particularly as it refers to literary theory and criticism is Annette Kolodny who, in a 1975 study *The Lay of the Land* and a 1984 study *The Land Before Her*, "exposed the ways that the dominant perspective in environmental literary narratives had been that of the white, heterosexual male, who regularly feminized the land and used that feminization as a rationale for subordinating nature" (Gaard, Estok, and Oppermann 4). Slightly later figures include Cheryll Glotfelty, Patrick D. Murphy, Greta Gaard, Josephine Donovan, and Louise H. Westling. These figures are followed or joined by Val Plumwood, Rachel Stein, Karen J. Warren, Catriona Sandilands, and Stacy Alaimo.[1] What these writers emphasize in their ecofeminist projects is that the widespread speciesist dismissal of the belief (and evidence for the belief) that nonhuman species possess language, knowledge, capacity for suffering, and ability to empathize with members of their own species as well as members of other than their own species, is ideologically linked to the subordination and oppression of women and violence against women under patriarchal conceptual frameworks and institutions. It is also linked to longstanding assumptions about the inferiority of women. Their work prompts questions as to why the only or most common representational form given to the deity worshipped under Christianity is that of a male figure (as well as a human figure). Their work also draws attention to the question why, of the three god figures or "consubstantial persons" according to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, this particular figure, Christ, is represented in the most feminized (and corporeal) terms relative to the other two figures of the Trinity. The figure of God "the Father" is a masculinised and paternal figure; the figure of the Holy Ghost commonly is not given a human form at all. Christ is gentle. His body on the Cross is sinuous, and his figure is a bleeding figure. According to the logic of patriarchy, the male figure cannot be sacrificed even symbolically, or it must be feminized (and corporealized) in order for the symbolic sacrifice to be tolerated.

Lawrence Buell, another early scholar (along with Scott Slovic) to establish ecocriticism as a sub-discipline of English (Anglophone) literature especially as this literature was being taught in English departments in universities and other post-secondary education colleges in the United States, did so with the publication of *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995). He defines the term and concept "the environmental imagination" as a

kind of thinking, found in texts, in which

> 1. "the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history"
> 2. "the human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest"
> 3. "human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation"
> 4. "some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text" (7-8)

Less than a decade later, in *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (2001), Buell proposed another useful concept and term for the still new discipline of ecocriticism. Here, he referred to "environmental acts," or acts (namely textual acts) that

> 1. connect readers vicariously "with *others' experience, suffering, pain*: *that of nonhumans as well as humans*" [emphasis added]
> 2. connect readers "with places [to which] they have been" and send readers "where they would otherwise never physically go"
> 3. direct thought "toward alternative futures"
> 4. "*affect* one's caring for the physical world; *make it feel more or less precious or endangered or disposable*" [emphasis added] (2)

I note Buell's two definitions because they are well known or quite familiar to ecocritics today who came of age in terms of their academic careers in the 1970s and 1980s when ecocriticism was first emerging as a discipline, and because the definitions help to illustrate that between the time of Buell's first and second books (or time between the first drafts of Buell's first and second books, which were followed by a third book in 2005), a small but significant shift in ecocritical practice had taken place: from the call to ecocritically engage with literary texts and promote literary texts that carry a strong environmental message, to the call to use literary texts as stepping stones to real environments. In another ecocritical study, a collection of essays edited by J. Scott Bryson entitled *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (2002), published a year after Buell's *Writing for an Endangered World*, Bryson offers a definition of ecocriticism that reinforces Buell's call to reconnect with the worlds outside of texts by underscoring the "interdependent" relationship between those worlds and texts. Emphasizing earth-centered (ecocentric) as opposed to human-

centered (anthropocentric) perspectives, his definition also registered his and others' notice of technology and their criticism of the argument that technology can solve environmental problems that are inadvertently or deliberately caused by humans. Bryson defines ecocritical responses to and engagements with the world by the term "the ecocentric perspective." This perspective

1. "recognizes the interdependent nature of the world"
2. expresses "an imperative toward humility in relationships with both human and nonhuman nature"
3. holds "an intense skepticism concerning hyperrationality…indictment of an over technologized modern world and a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe" (5-6)

Bryson's criticism of humans' over-confidence in technology is one that the U.K.-based ecocritic Greg Garrard also comments on in his monograph *Ecocriticism*. Garrard refers to the fundamentalist and ideological faith in technology as the "cornucopian" position (16). This position is often reflected in the arguments of free-market economists and demographers who insist that environmentalists exaggerate environmental problems and engage in "scare" tactics to limit individuals' freedom of choices and actions (Garrard 16). Cornucopians endeavor to persuade people that life on the planet Earth has greatly improved and will continue to do so because "human welfare, as measured by statistics such as life expectancy or local pollutions, has demonstrably increased along with population, economic growth and technological progress" (Garrard16-17). Garrard claims that this argument "suffers from a major inconsistency" in that it does not acknowledge that the increase in benefits to many people on the planet has been achieved not only by "moving damaging industries to developing countries" but also by "the political agitation of the environmental campaigners cornucopians now claim are obstructing economic and technological progress" (18).

As Simon C. Estok points out in an essay titled "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia," environmental activism, or what Garrard calls "political agitation of…environmental campaigners," was the main motivation for scholars who were practicing what is now called ecocriticism in the 1970s, but it lost steam in the 1980s at the height of poststructuralism, which divided scholars between those who argued that postructuralism denied material realities and imprisoned academics in language and those who defended poststructuralism as very productive for understanding the ideological formations and constructions that humans relied on to rationalize ethically questionable uses of the planet (Estok 204-

5).[2] A quarter of a decade or so later, environmental activism is again being taken seriously by many English language and literature ecocritics working in universities and post-secondary education institutes, in both their teaching and their research. We are obliged not only to know about the physical environments outside of the literary texts that represent these environments but also to actively defend many of these environments through our own work of pedagogical literary environmental activism. Ursula K. Heise, an ecocritic who has significantly contributed to ecocriticism under the broad interdisciplinary area of the environmental humanities, points to this obligation in her definition of ecocriticism. In a 2006 essay titled "Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism," she defines ecocriticism, in its origins a sub-disciplinary area of English literary theory and criticism, as "a field of inquiry and praxis" now extending across the humanities and the sciences and held together by "the triple allegiance to the scientific study of nature, the scholarly analysis of cultural representations, *and the political struggle for more sustainable ways of inhabiting the natural world*" (506, emphasis added).

Heise's definition asks a lot from ecocritics who work and live in regions of the world where to be branded as "political," "activist," or "political activist" is to face very real and serious risks including charges of criminality, imprisonment, rape, torture, and execution. The Nigerian environmental activist-writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, "Africa's first environmental martyr" (Nixon 233), was so-branded, and subsequently unfairly tried and executed in 1995 along with eight other Ogoni for his efforts to end both the political oppression of his people under the "tyrannical Nigerian state" (that aimed at "nothing less" than the extermination of the Ogoni people") and the environmental injustices against his people by the Nigerian-based multinational oil companies, principally SPDC (Shell Petroleum Development Company) and Chevron, which had caused "irreparable damage to Ogoni farmland and fishing waters" (Huggan and Tiffin 35). Notwithstanding the aforementioned kinds of risks, as well as the great odds that ecocritics come up against when prevailing upon their governments to implement stronger environmental laws, many ecocritics and the environmental rights organizations to which they belong or are affiliated with continue to engage in "the political struggle for more sustainable ways of inhabiting the world" (Heise 506). Many other ecocritics, including myself, do not face (at least not in the foreseeable future) the aforementioned risks but nonetheless recognize the urgency of the environmental problems for which others are risking their lives. They include such individuals as Jane Goodall, famous for her primatology research on chimpanzees in Tanzania and the founder of a recent "Roots and Shoots" program in Taipei, Taiwan, and a mobile phone recycling program in Melbourne, Australia; grass-roots activist Wangari Maathai', recipient of a Nobel Peace prize for her Green Belt

tree planting movement in Kenya; environmental justice activist and scholar Vandana Shiva, recognized for her prodigious environmental activism, including founding the Navdanya ("Nine Seeds") tree planting movement in India. Ecocritics who teach English literature and language today are finding it actually very difficult to teach any poem or prose writing without commenting on their and others' environmental activism, or without teaching poetry and prose as pedagogical literary environmental activism.

Goodall's "Roots and Shoots program" began in 1991 in Tanzania and now operates in 132 countries. In Taiwan, where it was started up in 2012 as a cooperative project between the Forestry Bureau and the Jane Goodall Institute, it encourages and supports students to plant indigenous plants on school campuses and to learn about nature conservation (I-Chia). It is now being implemented in twenty schools in the north of Taiwan (I-Chia). Goodall also recently started up a program in cooperation with the Melbourne Zoo in Australia to establish a mobile phone recycling program. The program seeks to bring public attention specifically to deforestation and gorilla poaching.[3] A far less famous but no less inspiring tree activist whom I recently became aware of from reports in the local news media is the Taiwanese tree-sitter activist, Han-chiang Pan. Inspired by the American environmental activist Julia Butterfly Hill, who lived in a redwood tree in Humboldt County, California for more than two years between 1997 and 1999 to protest logging of redwood and other old growth forests, Pan set up the Greater Taipei tree protection movement in Taiwan after joining and serving as deputy secretary-general for the Taiwan Environmental Protection Union in 2000 (Tu and Pan). The purpose of Pan's movement is to raise awareness of and save the few trees around the heavily urbanized Greater Taipei area. These trees are minimally or not at all protected under existing legislation. In an interview of Han-chiang Pan by the *Taipei Times* journalists Chu-min Tu and Jason Pan, (Han-chiang) Pan remarked, "I never understood why cutting down trees is only given a minor penalty, while those protecting trees are often found guilty of serious charges" (qtd. in Tu and Pan). Pan's activism is part of and supported by Green Party Taiwan and by many other organizations in Taiwan and mainland China including Greenpeace East Asia. He is far from alone in working to promote greater respect for trees and reverse relatively recent anthropocene-era assumptions about the right of humans as a species to use the planet Earth without giving adequate moral consideration or subject rights to its many other species.

The issue of humans' dismissal, oversight, and ecocide of trees ties to and is reflected by scholarly oversights of the ecocritical significance of the central "tree" figure, "the Rood," in the poem "The Dream of the Rood." More so perhaps than any other poem in the canon of English literature, it speaks for intertwined

relations between humans and trees in its extraordinarily unique representation and recounting of the story of the crucifixion of a major deity in Christian religion. As with the poem's more famous and until recently more frequently anthologized peer *Beowulf*, "The Dream of the Rood" is mostly introduced in anthologies as one of the few surviving written records of the clash between two civilizations and cultures between the fifth and ninth centuries in the British isles. A distant outpost of the Roman Empire up through at least the fifth century, the British isles were conquered and settled by northern European pagan peoples beginning in the fifth century and continuing up through the ninth century. Many converted to Christianity, a religion introduced into England in the first centuries of the first millennium by Roman soldiers, administrators, and missionaries when England (or Brittany as it was called by the Romans) was still a province of the Roman Empire. By the end of the seventh century, most people in England were Christian or were greatly influenced by it, a consequence largely due to the influence of St. Augustine, who in 1597 had been sent as a missionary to England by the papal authorities in Rome. Today "The Dream of the Rood" might be read, as I read it here, not only as a record of this pronouncedly human history, but also as a record of a history that is both human and environmental, especially so because in the poem, the cross (the Rood) is acknowledged as something that once was a tree. It also might be read as an "ecosemiotic" argument for language as an attribute, faculty, or condition that is not unique to humans, an argument that I will tie to the poem according to the central and powerful speaking part given to the Rood and taking up more than two-thirds of the poem, or 43 out of 156 lines (lines 28-121).

The first "first 'person'" narrator, a convert to Christianity, recounts a dream the central human event of which is the crucifixion of Jesus and the central environmental event of which is the felling of a tree for use as a gibbet. As noted by the editors of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, the narrator's descriptions of the cross in the opening lines of the poem as "the most splendid tree looming aloft" and "That bright tree…covered with gold; gemstones gleamed / fairly fashioned down to its foot," possibly allude to an actual cross that the Roman emperor and Christian convert Constantine (306-337 CE) erected at the site of Jesus' death in the fourth century (Greenblatt 33, 4n). A similar description appears in lines 14-17: "I beheld Glory's trunk…all plated with gold… precious gemstones / had gloriously graced [it]." The first eight lines of the poem are as follows:

> Attend to what I intend to tell you
> a marvelous dream that moved me at night
> when human voices are veiled in sleep.

> In my dream I espied the most splendid tree.
> looming aloft with light all around,
> the most brilliant beam. That bright tree was
> covered with gold; gemstones gleamed
> fairly fashioned down to its foot…

In the early centuries of the Common Era, wooden crosses were a common sight. Known as "the Roman 'felon's gallows,'" they were thus used, as gibbets or gallows for executing criminals (Greenblatt 33, 4n). As the editors of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* also note, by Constantine's act the original cross, "a symbol of ignominy and shame," was transformed into a "universal icon of Christian art" (33, 4n). Responding to Constantine's act from a contemporary anthropocene-era, ecocritical perspective, one could argue that Constantine's act represents an anthropocentric oversight of the cross as a sacrificed being; responding to the poem from the same perspective, one could argue that the poem functions as the foreshadowing of humans' ecocide of entire populations of trees, including so-called old growth trees or trees more than one hundred years old. This ecocide has been conducted on a scale such that there are few such populations of trees still standing in the world. Even if one includes the vast acreages of commercial plantations of trees that are harvested for their wood — cut down after reaching between ten and twenty years of age — tree coverage of the planet has greatly diminished in the last two hundred years or so. Their attrition might be illustrated by citing a recent study of trees conducted in Jerusalem. Researchers found that only sixty trees more than eighty years old still stand in this ancient city ("The Jerusalem Tree Survey"). Some of these trees are distant descendants of the trees that populated the surrounding region in the first millennium, trees that were perhaps used (because of their strength or height or both) as gibbets for the execution of criminals: the Jerusalem Pine (*Pinus halepensis*), the Mediterranean Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*) (also known as the Italian, Tuscan, Graveyard Cypress or Pencil Pine), and the Olive Tree (*Olea europaea*).[4]

The speaking part given to the Rood, the second "first 'person' narrator," also draws attention to the poem as a text carrying extraordinary environmental significance with respect to Buell's definition of "environmental acts." The speaking part connects the reader "with others' experience, suffering, pain: that of nonhumans as well as humans" and it affects "one's caring for the physical world; make[s] it feel more or less precious or endangered or disposable" (*Writing for an Endangered World* 2). The Rood first begins to speak when it appears before the dreamer no longer as a "splendid" figure "decked in treasure" but as nightmarish figure "drenched with streaming blood" (lines 21-23). Addressing the dreamer, it explains:

> That was years ago — I yet remember —
> that I was cut down at the edge of the forest
> torn up from my truck. There powerful enemies took me,
> put me up to make a circus-play to lift up and parade their criminals.
> (lines 28-30)

In a equally affecting speech, the tree exhibits capacity for self-identification with another's suffering–in this case, that of the other-than-nonhuman being executed upon its (the tree's) own body. Here, the Rood uses both the first person singular nominative form ("I") and the first person plural or collective nominative forms "we" and "us" when it recounts the final moments of Jesus' death, feeling itself the suffering of the other-than-nonhuman being that is pinioned on it and being itself grieved by this being's suffering:

> They [soldiers] drove dark nails into me; the dints of those wounds can still be seen,
> open marks of malice; but I did not dare maul any of them in return.
> *They mocked both of us.*
> ...
> *I was badly burdened with grief*
> …
> *We, grieving there for a good while*,
> Stood still in place; the soldiers' voices
> Faded away. Finally men brought axes
> To fell us to earth. (lines 46-8; 59; 71-74; emphasis added)

Speaking nonhuman characters are common in ancient world literatures and ancient oral traditions including Greek and Roman myth. They also are common in Old English literature and Middle English literature; however, by the Middle English period, they mostly appear in beast fables and, as the name of this literary genre reflects, they typically are nonhuman animal characters.[5] Today, talking flora, or the notion that plants possess or use language, is being seriously addressed by all sorts of thinkers. Botanists, biosemioticians, ecologists, and so forth are finding that language is not limited to the speech and writing of humans. For ecocritics, one of the most important studies in this regard is Wendy Wheeler's *The Whole Creature: Complexity, biosemiotics and the evolution of culture*.[6] Wheeler argues that the "words and discourses" of human language, or humans' "articulate discourses" are very powerful

but "only one aspect of...communication amongst other, unconscious and 'gestural,'" kinds of human communication, and all of these aspects of human communication are "semiotic" and biologically based (17), or shared across other biological species. Her implied argument is that because human verbal language is biosemiotic, or inseparable from or constituted by the "biological language of the immune system and its conversations with the nervous system and the brain, and the endocrine system," it crosses over into other-than-human worlds or shares with the sign systems of other species (Wheeler 142). In giving an actual speaking part to the character of the Rood, is the poem's anonymous author remembering and preserving pagan beliefs in and respect for the speech of the nonhuman world including its trees? Also, in creating a dialogue between a human and a tree, is the anonymous author speaking for what in current biosemotic theory is recognized as the fundamental "social nature" of humans according to "an account of evolution that sees [sociality] as a process of symbio-genetic co-operative communication" (Wheeler 13)?

"The Dream of the Rood" can continue to be taught primarily as a text that is a record of one of our own species' unique and irreplaceable histories, identities, and languages (the introduction of Christianity to the British isles, the early English language of Anglo-Saxon preserved in a late tenth-century medieval manuscript found in Vercelli in northern Italy, the collision and reconciliation between Germanic and Christian culture in the British isles in the first millennium). However, it also can be read and taught based on ecocritical perspectives, either "historicist" or "presentist." When we use the latter, we acknowledge, or we should, that the authors of the texts to which we are applying our "presentist" approaches may not have invited or could not possibly have invited some of these approaches. But by reading texts according to problems or conditions that did not exist when the texts first appeared in oral or written form, we are not devaluing these texts. As Sharon O'Dair argues, presentist ecocritical readings are inspired not prohibited by these texts. She makes the case for presentism, specifically the case for teaching Shakespeare ecocritically by engaging with current or "present" environmental issues in an essay titled "Is it Shakespearean Ecocriticism if it isn't Presentist?"[7] Observing that "presentists" often are erroneously "coded as unscholarly," she argues that the most successful presentist scholars, as with their "purist" and "historicist" peers, are deeply committed to their area of disciplinary expertise and are deeply informed by and knowledgeable about it (75). She defines and focuses on one of two kinds of presentism. This presentism, "professional" (as opposed to "popular") presentism, "insists on a methodology by which scholars 'interpret…the past in terms of present concerns,' including race, gender, sexuality, imperialism, the environment, economic development, and so on" (O'Dair 72-3). As she also argues, "for all its hauteur, historicist Shakespeare rides

on the back of presentist Shakespeare" not by reason that scholars are "unavoidably situated in the present" but rather by reason that it is "presentist, not historicist Shakespeare that draws multitudes of undergraduates into these classes that are not required classes, classes that ensure our ability to pursue research, however we define or describe it" (73). As O'Dair also argues, new historicism and cultural materialism studies, which "liberated" the discipline of literature from "supposedly ahistorical (and thus arguably presentist) forms of new criticism," in turn were "subject to critique in the mid-1990s for indulging in" the same kinds of narcissistic scholarship that new historicists and cultural materialists accused the new critics (and before them the formalists) of displaying (74).Thus, she points out that the activity of being "scholarly" does not mean that one must be only "historicist": if one wants to be more "historical," one might want to consider dropping out of literature and pursuing history, the discipline that specifically trains scholars in historical methods (74).

Most ecocritics who engage in presentist approaches to literary texts do so primarily because of the urgency and graveness of environmental problems in the world today not because presentist scholarship is easier than historicist scholarship. Based on my own experience, I would claim that many ecocritics also probably jettison a great amount of their research when preparing it for publication not because it is not scholarly enough but because it is not presentist enough. Ecocritics also recognize the importance of teaching literary texts according to presentist perspectives that connect to local environmental issues. In East Asia, where I live and teach, tree loss is as serious a problem as it is in other parts of the world. Every two seconds today, an area of forest that is equal to the "the size of a football pitch" is lost to logging or destructive practices ("The Problems of Deforestation in Asia"). In China, only 2% of forests "remain intact," and only 0.1 percent of these surviving forests "are properly protected" ("The Problems of Deforestation in Asia"). Most of the intact forests are scattered throughout China: in the southwest (Western Sichuan, the Nu-Salween River valley, around the Myanmar border in Yunnan, and the Yarlung Tsampo River canyon); in the northeast (the Daxing'an mountains in northern Inner Mongolia); and in the northwest (the northernmost area of Xinjiang) ("China's Remaining Forests"). In Hainan and Yunnan, for example, indigenous trees are being logged "to make way for fast-growing eucalyptus plantations, which are used to make paper pulp" ("The Problems of Deforestation in Asia"). The demand in China for palm oil (widely used in cosmetics and as a vegetable oil in food products), soy, and beef also is contributing to the problem of global deforestation. China is now the world's second largest importer of palm oil (a commodity produced in Indonesia and other countries where old growth forests are being replaced with palm oil tree plantations) ("The Problems of Deforestation in Asia"). English literature and language

pedagogues in China and other countries in East Asia can teach texts such as "The Dream of the Rood" using ecocritical presentist perspectives in ways that contribute to other East Asian-based environmentalists' efforts to draw attention to local as well as global problems of deforestation, and they do so by respecting and promoting those texts not by slighting them.

Any literary text potentially can be addressed according to pedagogical literary environmental activism. For the project that I engaged in that included this present writing, I researched a small handful of poems including "Petrified Tree" by the contemporary Australian poet Miriel Lenore, "Native Trees" by the North American poet laureate W. S. Merwin, several lines from Book XI ("Cambridge and the Alps") of *The Prelude* by British Romantic William Wordsworth that memorialize an elm tree, "To Penshurst" from *The Forest* by Ben Jonson, and the anonymous Old English poem "The Dream of the Rood." These explicitly address the subject of trees. Thousands of other poems do not but they demand no less attention from ecocritics who are committed to teaching literature in ways that do not encourage students to passively interpret or accept texts as separate from the regions of the worlds where the texts are studied and read or dislocated from the social and political conditions under which the texts are studied and read. Pedagogical literary environmental activism engages with literature in order to address very real environmental crises that affect us in almost every aspect of our lives today. We may always put our species first but we are now beginning to recognize that when we elevate our species far higher than any other planetary species by completely disregarding and even decimating entire species, including entire tree species, we are ignoring or not recognizing that our relations as a species with other planetary species is informed by ethics. To abandon or dismiss the ethical, affective, and social component of our interactions as a species with other species is to cut off our own limbs and truncate our own selves as a species.

Notes

1. For an excellent annotated bibliography of these writers, see Gaard, Estok, and Oppermann.

2. Two ecocritics who might be used to represent this polarization in ecocriticism in the late decades of the last century are Leonard M. Scigaj and Mark Long, a scholar who is represented in Bryson's anthology. In *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets* (1999), inspired by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Scigaj argues that phenomenological theory is "the most promising philosophical response…to poststructuralism and philosophical dualism" (65) and he applies it to "ecological poets" (Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, A. R. Ammons, and W. S. Merwin) who emphasize that consciousness is always "embodied" (66) and the "referential origin" of "all language" is "extralinguistic" (38, 36). Mark Long respectfully counters or mitigates this argument in an essay

titled "William Carlos Williams, Ecocriticism, and Contemporary American Nature Poetry."

3. The world's supply of coltan, a mineral used in the manufacture of mobile phones, is located mostly in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Legal and illegal mining of the mineral has decimated gorilla populations and the forests that are these animals' homes (Cauchi).

4. There are far fewer trees over a thousand years old in this region of the world. One incredible survivor from ancient times, the oldest surviving tree the Middle East and in all of Asia, is "the cypress of Abarqu," over 4000 years old.

5. By the fourteenth century, the beast fable had become an undistinguished genre, used mostly to teach Latin to schoolboys. Only a handful of writers including Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1343-1400) and Robert Henryson (ca. 1425-ca. 1500) would transform the "simplistic moralizing characteristic" of the fable tradition as it survived in Middle English into a sophisticated form (Greenblatt 500).

6. Critical studies that address trees as they appear in literary representation include, for example, Laura Auricchio, Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook and Giulia Pacini's edited collection, *Invaluable Trees: Cultures of Nature, 1660-1830* (2012); Diana Beresford-Kroeger's study *The Global Forest* (2010); and Robert Pogue Harrison's *Forests: the Shadow of Civilization* (1992). For a review of Auricchio, Cook, and Pacini's edited collection, see Lora E. Geriguis's essay published in *ISLE*.

7. As Simon C. Estok notes, Hugh Grady is one of the "leading voices" in the articulation of presentist concerns (*Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia* 9). See Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes' edited collection entitled *Presentist Shakespeares.*

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