

Towards a Comparative Ecocriticism

Representations of Tropical Forest Ecologies in Indonesian and Nicaraguan Poetry



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Overview

- 1) Introduction: Comparative Ecocriticism and Environmental Affect
- 2) Representations of Tropical Forest Ecologies in the Poetry of Taufik Ismail and Micky Hidayat (Indonesia)
- 3) Pablo Antonio Cuandra and the Affective Forest (Nicaragua)
- 4) The Ethnobotanical Poetry of Esthela Calderón (Nicaragua)
- 5) Conclusion: Ecocriticism and Affect Across Regions, Cultures and Languages

1). Introduction: Comparative Ecocriticism and Environmental Affect

- In *Ecoambiguity*, Karen Thornber calls for “a *deeper planetary consciousness* enhanced by comparative ecocritical scholarship.” (2012, p. 30)
- For Thornber, “the *ubiquity of environmental problems* and the *interdependence of all life* make it especially vital that creative articulations of environmental degradation be read not only as part of national literatures but also in terms of *intercultural thematic and conceptual networks*.” (2012, p. 30)
- Ursula K. Heise argues that the global pervasiveness of environmental crisis informs a comparative ecocriticism that seeks to identify “similarities that the confrontation with *shared crisis scenarios generates*.” (2014, p. 25)

1). Introduction: Comparative Ecocriticism and Environmental Affect

- Affect has been defined as “modulated intensities” and “embodied capacities—phenomena that arise and circulate as intensities among assemblages.” (Ahern 1, Bladow and Ladino 6)
- Affect refers to the sensations, senses, corporeality, emotions, agency and relationality of living and non-living things.
- Environmental affect encompasses the *negative emotions* associated with ecological loss but also reasserts our *embodied interdependencies* with non-human life such as trees.

2).What Ecological Issues Are Depicted in Ismail's and Hidayat's Poetry?

- Ismail's poem, "Lingkungan Mati" ("The Dead Environment") mostly discusses the distinction between what the authorities say about the use of environment as a resource and the immediate reality of ecological degradation
- Hidayat's poem, "Hutan di Mataku" ("The Forest in My Eyes") particularly addresses the issue of deforestation.

2). What Do the Poems Say About Environmental Damage?

- The bitter, angry and sad tone of these poems can be seen by the dominance of alliteration (in particular, the repetition of consonants 'l, m, p, r, ng')

Kau bercerita orang bicara tentang serangga dan fisika tanah,
unggas dan kimia udara, ikan dan habitat lautan,
manusia dan tetangganya, bumi dan klimatologi,
Tapi yang terdengar oleh telingaku adalah serangkai lagu
dimainkan lewat instrumen tua sudah, dan bertabur debu
(Ismail, 1990, 6)

sebuah hutan
menjerit-jerit
melolong-lolong
mengerang-erang
meraung-raung
merintih-rintih
terkapar di lorong
jiwaku
(Hidayat, 2010, 184)

2). How Do the Poets Express Environmental Concern?

In Ismail's:

- His diction develops a critique of the authorities who manipulate nature and humans for the sake of their position and wealth.
- Diction related to nature describes the natural wealth of the Indonesian regions.
- Diction related to technology describes the impacts of technology and military power on tropical forest environments.
- Diction related to society describes the abuse of power by the authorities.

In Hidayat's:

- Hidayat employs diction related to nature to express the emotional emptiness resulting from witnessing deforestation.
- The forest is personified by Hidayat to communicate how it is wounded by the irresponsible actions of humans.

2). The Visual and Auditory Images of Ismail's and Hidayat's Poetry

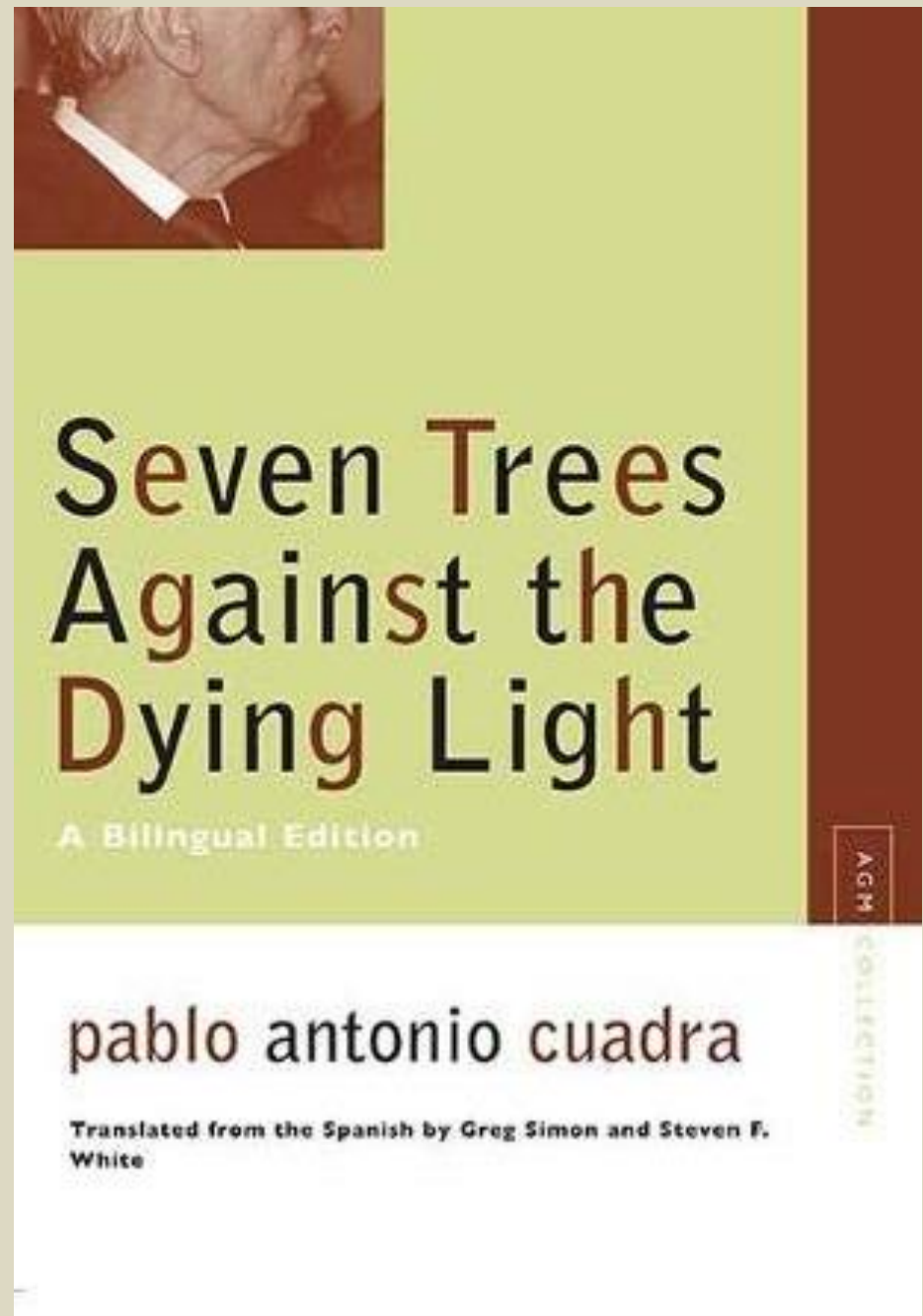
- Ismail and Hidayat provide a visual record of the environmental damage that has occurred in Indonesia.
- Readers of Ismail's poetry are invited to listen to the voices of the authorities who lie about the exploitation of nature for human welfare.
- Meanwhile, through Hidayat's poetry, readers can feel how the forest has been hurt, crying, because of the irresponsible actions and behaviors of humans.

2). What Can We Learn From Ismail's and Hidayat's Poetry

- The existence of the environment is very meaningful for human life and well-being, not only for the survival of plants, animals and other organisms.
- The damaging of tropical environments can also develop into a problem for human existence.

3). Pablo Antonio Cuandra and the Affective Forest (Nicaragua)





From Cuandra's "The Mango Tree"

They are one invisible step
ahead of civilization.
You know about trees. You know
the native trees that helped to lift the land. *River shepherds*.
Trees that are so deeply Nicaraguan, like the *pochotes*,
which, even when slashed for kindling, sprout up again from the land.
And you know the strangers to this place
such as Senegal's abundant *icaco tree*,
or Algeria's *pomegranate*, or the immense breadfruit tree from the
Moluccas,
or *the mango* that arrived in Nicaragua from distant Hindustan.

- "The Mango Tree" (p. 41)

From Cuandra's "The Mango Tree"

The mango tree also *burned its story in time*:
and now you consider it from this place.
It *professes* a familiar green,
was born in your islands,
accompanies you in rows along both sides of your roads,
grows in the courtyard at home,
takes in
your native birds
as it *interlaces* breezes and the drone of locusts
like a hammock
for your siesta.

- "The Mango Tree" (p. 47)



From Cuandra's "The Cacao Tree"

Quetzalcoatl told us, "We are people who wander."
And he gave us a drink called *pinol*, made from corn.
And he gave us *tiste*, a drink made from cacao and corn.
Drinks for the pilgrims.
Because ours is the land of the uprooted.
We are the people whose only country is called freedom.

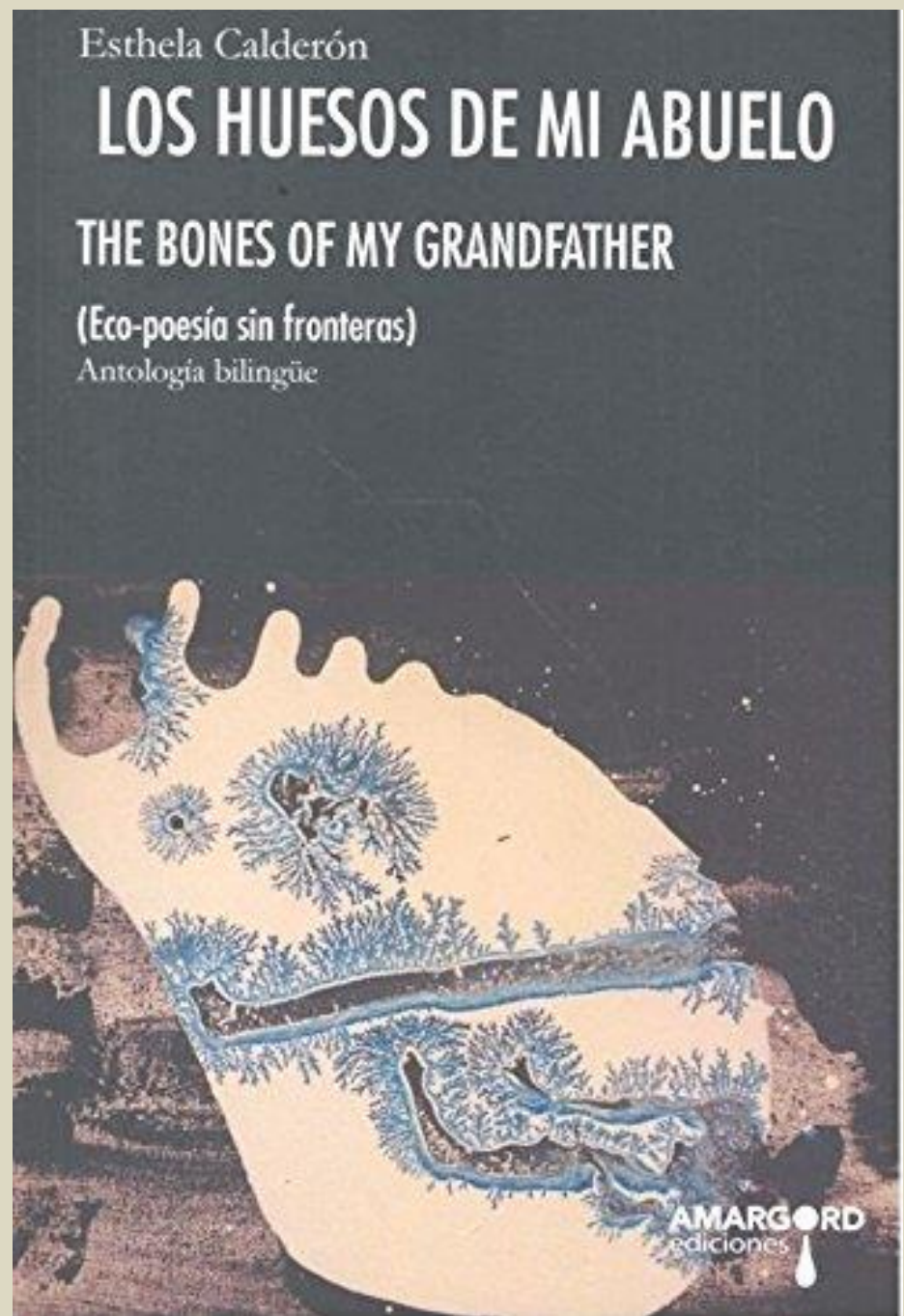
[...]

And they took the best of our lands from us—all the cacao trees in
the south!
And as soon as they were the owners of these trees
they used the seeds as money.
The people no longer drank cocoa—
only the *teytes*, the landowners,
Only the rich lords and the warrior chiefs.

- "The Cacao Tree" (pp. 31, 35)

4). The Ethnobotanical Poetry of Esthela Calderón (Nicaragua)





From Calderón's "Madrone"

Dressed in your curtain of perfume,
my voice, together with yours, grew in December,
increasing the magnificence of other names in your name.

[...]

Roads overtake you, and the furrow of your family
sinks hooks of ash into the insane mourning,
whose only gift to you is death
beneath the mask of progress.

- "Madrone" (pp. 178, ll. 4–6, 19–22)

Conclusion

- The decline of tropical forests in Indonesia and Nicaragua entails complex biological and ecological as well as cultural and social consequences.
- The four poets narrativize the biocultural—that is, the integrated natural and cultural—costs of environmental change.
- Environmental poetry of trees and forests underscores the “similarities that the confrontation with shared crisis scenarios generates” especially in terms of shared affective states (Ursula K. Heise 25)





Thank you...

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