

Cannibalism, Ecocriticism, and Portraying the Journey

Simon C. Estok

Sungkyunkwan University

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Simon C. Estok,

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Ed. I-Chun Wang

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Abstract: In his article "Cannibalism, Ecocriticism, and Portraying the Journey" Simon Estok discusses the ways early modern preoccupation with cannibalism is at once rooted in and reflective of an ecophobic environmental ethics. Looking both at descriptions of metaphoric and literal cannibalism, Estok shows that imagining cannibalism was central to the travel narrative and to its investments in writing the center and the periphery, the human and the nonhuman, the acceptable and the repugnant — binaries which reveal ethical positions, not only toward people, but, more broadly, toward the natural environment. Estok argues that it is relevant to discuss the discourse of cannibalism through an ecocritical perspective because it allows for the analysis of important interconnections of the writing of cannibalism with discourses of race, sexuality, and class. In many ways central to the imagining of "newly discovered" lands, the discourse of cannibalism is thoroughly soaked into the literature of the early modern period, and though cannibalism has long been a topic of literary scholars, little work has yet been done looking at cannibalism from an ecocritical perspective.

Simon C. ESTOK

Cannibalism, Ecocriticism, and Portraying the Journey

Central to the imagining of the brave new worlds which were explored by old world powers is a semiotics of cannibalism. Indeed, the cannibal is an integral part of the travel narrative, at once an excitingly exotic new world figure, yet a horrifying old world locus of terrifying difference and dislocation, a simultaneous blurring and affirmation of boundaries which call into question our ethical positions about the natural environment. What people actually do in an anthropophagic sense is as much a question as what the very concept of cannibalism does: cannibalism, Peter Hulme explains, "exists as a term within colonial discourse to describe the ferocious devouring of human flesh supposedly practiced by some savages. That existence, within discourse, is no less historical whether or not the term cannibalism describes an extant or attested social custom" (4). While ethnographic and anthropological questions about what people do are clearly important and complicated, my concerns are more with the discursive functions of cannibalism in a period of extraordinary and unprecedented journeying. In many ways, cannibalism specifically (and culinary ethics generally) is a vital indicator of an early modern environmental ethics that mobilizes discourses of race, sexuality, and class in xenophobic response to the new visions early modern exploration and imperialism afforded.

Cannibalism evokes horror — and fascination — on many levels. The horror Herman Melville's Ishmael registers is that there really might not be so much difference between the meat of a nonhuman animal and the meat of a human one: "Go to the meatmarket of a Saturday night and see the crowds of live bipeds staring up at the long rows of dead quadrupeds. Does not that sight take a tooth out of the cannibal's jaw? Cannibals? Who is not a cannibal?" (270). Animal rights advocates, notably ethicist Peter Singer, have observed that the vocabulary of carnivorousness ("meat" rather than "flesh") seeks to keep the division between human and nonhuman animal sacrosanct. When Maggie Kilgour argues that cannibalism is central to "definitions of identity, either individual, textual, sexual, national, or social" (Kilgour, *From Communion* 256), we have to wonder about adding "species" to this list. Many theorists, including Kilgour, have, in fact, noted this function of cannibalism. Merrall L. Price, for instance, has argued that "At the same time as the allegation of cannibalism functions to divest the accused of their humanity, however, it invariably and ironically also functions to reaffirm it, since membership in the human species is a prerequisite for the eater of human flesh to be considered a cannibal" (88). Or, as Geoffrey Sanborn puts it, "Cannibalism is constitutive of humanity, then, because it is the limit that humanity requires in order to know itself *as itself*" (194). If one of the clear and deliberate functions of cannibalism is to endorse a binary opposition of animal and human, edible and edibly inappropriate, then no less does this very binary create the very proximity that it seeks to be done with. It is such a proximity that prompts Georges Bataille to note that "man is never looked upon as butchers' meat, but he is frequently eaten ritually. The man who eats human flesh knows full well that this is a forbidden act; knowing this taboo to be fundamental he will religiously violate it sometimes" (71). Moreover, it is significant that in ethno-historical terms, as Gananath Obeyesekere has shown, "the animal can be a substitute for the human being as indeed the human being might be a substitute for the animal. Human sacrifice when it is eaten is the more awesome one because it violates a normal taboo against eating fellow humans and more generally against violence" (260). "Indeed," Kristen Guest notes, "the idea of cannibalism prompts a visceral reaction among people precisely *because* it activates our horror of consuming others like ourselves" (3; emphasis in the original), a horror that is absent when we eat steak or a hamburger — and it is precisely this horror that brings into such stark focus ethical questions of eating meat, questions that are increasingly becoming central to the environmental humanities.

The moment we mention ecocriticism, we are talking about the present in the sense that British ecocritic Richard Kerridge eloquently puts it: the present crises we face are "the preoccupation that is the starting-point" of what we do as ecocritics (208). Since ecocriticism is any theory that is committed to effecting change by analyzing the function — thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical, or otherwise — of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in

documents (literary or other) which contribute to the practices we maintain in the present, in the material world, the relevance of something so ancient as cannibalism to a concept so current as species-ism can hardly be over-stated. In many ways, the discourse of cannibalism participates in carnivorousness by positing a difference between human and nonhuman, forbidding consumption of the former while permitting consumption of the latter. A play such as Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* is particularly rich in the light it sheds on this matter, both in terms of the implicit critique of meat it makes and in the co-location of the cannibal within a highly charged sexual atmosphere that it presents.

Whenever I teach this play, I show the 1999 Julie Taymor film *Titus* and I pause the film at the crucial moment — an up-close of Saturninus, the newly-crowned emperor of Rome, putting a forkful of food into his mouth (on *Titus*, see, e.g., Ghita). It is a forkful from one of the two pasties Titus has made for the Emperor and Tamora, Queen of the Goths and new bride to the Emperor. The pasties are made of Tamora's two sons, Chiron and Demetrius. Titus has chopped them up and cooked them as revenge for their raping and mutilating of his daughter, Lavinia. I pause the film at this crucial moment, remind my students that this innocent-looking meat pie is human meat, and I then urge my students to go out and have a meat pie after class — and the overwhelming response is one of uniform disgust. The play co-locates the human and the nonhuman on the dinner table, and surely something must happen the next time we eat a meat pie. It is not just the blurring of the human and the non-human and the implicit critique of meat that this produces but also the writing of a hostile geography that is part-and-parcel with the writing of the cannibal. If the plate before Saturninus blurs human and non-human animals as consumable commodities, no less does the act of cannibalism blur the ontological status of the cannibal.

Semiotically, cannibalism makes people beasts, associates them with a Nature that the early modern imagination preferred to keep separate from the human sphere. The "reduction of human beings to comestibles," as Anthony J. Lewis describes, cannibalism, is a "reduction" of human beings to the natural world, a "reduction" that overlooks differences between people on the one hand and floral or faunal commodities on the other (155). Lewis is speaking of Shakespeare's *Pericles*, and he argues that the play itself makes the comparison. We hear of young women being "ripe for marriage" (4.17; all references to Shakespeare are *The Riverside Shakespeare*) at the age of fourteen! We hear of the daughter of King Antiochus, unnamed in *Pericles*, being described as a fructal commodity, a precious "fruit of yon celestial tree" (1.1.21), "a golden fruit, but dangerous to be touched" (1.1.28). This fourteen year old is, we learn, "an eater of her mother's flesh" (1.1.130) and has been happily having an incestuous relationship with her father for some time before the action begins. Touching everything, it is a corruption that has ecological implications. The land itself is corrupted: Antioch is a troubled place, an "earth throng'd / By man's oppression" (1.1.101-2), a place of pollution. This pollution scripted as incest/cannibalism, triumphs and presents, at least for a non-incestuous audience, a loathsome, horrifying, and disgusting place. The underlying concept flies in the face of what both early moderns and we today imagine to be the way of a natural order. Spatialized and mapped to provide at times a residence for monstrosity and at others an escape route from it, competing geographies flash through the play like a surreal slide show of corrupted commodities, polluted natural resources, and very strange shores.

Of course, the staging of monstrosity we see in the metaphoric cannibalism of *Pericles* was very much a part of the travel narrative and its investments in writing the center and the periphery, the human and the nonhuman, the acceptable and the repugnant. Donna Haraway maintains that "monsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations" (180) and that "nature and culture are reworked" by monsters and cyborgs (151), while Keith Thomas argues that "monstrous births caused such horror [in the early modern period in part because] ... they threatened the firm dividing-line between men and animals" (39). Although often pitted putatively against Nature, monsters are the embodiment of the broken boundaries, confusion, and chaos that defines fearful conceptions of Nature. Indeed, to cite Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, the monster is "a kind of a third term that problematizes the clash of extremes" (6), a border-crosser whose "very existence is a rebuke to boundary and enclosure" (7). And we need to be clear that these observations are not anachronistic: from the early modern period, Ambroise Paré explains that "monsters appear outside the course of

Nature" while "prodigies are completely against Nature" (3). Paré puts the monster outside of and in conflict with Nature. Paré's theory writes Nature as an enforcer of strictly defined aesthetic and moral parameters. Within such parameters, Nature either rejects certain beings and behaviors or endorses them. Tolerable nowhere, abjected, monsters are unassimilable: Julia Kristeva argues that "the unassimilable alien, the monster ... strays on the territories of *animal*" (12-13). "Strays" is a good word, since, as "aberrations in the natural order" (Park and Daston 22), they cannot reside within those territories. The cannibal is the perfect monster.

The monstrous relations in *Pericles* — and we must remember that sexual acts were thought to cause actual physical monstrosity in the early modern period — has not only environmental implications but economic ones also. Cannibalism, incest, and the "reduction of human beings" in this play end up making women (not men) edible commodities. In a sense, this offers some degree of exculpation to the men while conferring greater culpability on girls and women. Whether it is children eating their mother's flesh, or mothers who "eat up those little darlings whom they lov'd" (1.4.44), we have, as Constance Jordan comments, "a present generation consuming its future" (345), a phrase that sounds familiar to us with our contemporary environmentalist critiques of unsustainable appetites. Such is certainly what Crystal Bartolovich has in mind in her critique of consumerism. Conceptually inseparable from the land, the cannibal bespeaks a fetishization of the natural world, one that was central to the early modern travel narrative but one that also crucially endorses the ideological conditions, as Bartolovich argues, necessary for "the primitive accumulation of — the establishment of the conditions of possibility for — capital" (210). Often a trope marking "absolute saturation" (Bartolovich 208), the cannibal lives in a dangerous space of absolute unsustainability and of unsustainable appetites, a dynamic similar to contemporary capitalism: Bartolovich points out that "contemporary capital evokes more appetite than it can satisfy" (236).

In one sense, Jordan's comment is an apt description of the biological unsustainability of cannibalism. A species has no future, environmental biologist Laurel R. Fox explains, "if the cannibal destroys its own progeny or genotype" (98). It seems an obvious comment, but, given the history of cannibalism, it is one worth repeating. In a wide-ranging discussion about the historical uses of the cannibal as an object of theoretical discourse in Western history, for instance, Cătălin Avramescu observes that imperiled populations certainly have been historical examples of cannibalism, that cannibalism may be "insular in origin" and may have arisen in non-permeable ecosystems "in order to halt unsustainable population growth" (1) within those closed systems. But if, as Avramescu argues, the cannibal is historically a response to unsustainable growth, then the response itself is unsustainable. At any rate, this insatiable appetite of capitalism begins in the early modern period with citations of the cannibal in the literature of the time as warnings, as "a recognition of, and attempt to contain, a crisis in appetite" (Bartolovich 236). At the same time that we say this, however, we do well to recognize that there are problems with the metaphor that equates capitalism with cannibalism. Bartolovich is brief and clear in noting that "To criticize capitalism by declaring it a form of cannibalism might seem tempting in certain ways, but to do so is to miss the point. It *must* be parasitic rather than cannibalistic" (214), a point, Bartolovich goes on to add, that was consistent with Marx's thinking. Even so, Bartolovich retains the utility of the metaphor, and one important implication of it is that the imagined insatiability that defines cannibalism (an appetite that — much like unbridled desire for the accumulation of capital — grows the more it is fed) is part of a commodity (the geographies of the New World) that is itself a consuming entity. If the New World is a commodity for the Old, then no less is it one that constantly threatens to swallow up all that comes to it. And it does so through the figure of the cannibal.

With the land itself a site of danger, hostile geographies of difference, along with their cannibals, become ethically inconsiderable, open to whatever regimes are necessary for control — and an important part of this control was linguistic. The semiotics of cannibalism reiterate a set of spatial and environmental assumptions that often constitute the very core of early modern travel writing. Stephen Slemon's "Bones of Contention" comes close to discussing how "the discourse of cannibalism" (165) is significant to the writing of a hostile environment. Slemon argues that the discourse of cannibalism "necessarily designates an absolute negation of 'civilized' self-fashioning in a place that is no place,

and is always 'out there'" (165). It is a fashioning that offers a demonized geography that is to be both feared and despised.

Within ecocriticism — the term that describes this kind of fear and hatred for Nature as "ecophobia" — it is useful to our purposes to take a brief diversion into this term. As I have noted elsewhere, clinical psychology uses the term "ecophobia" 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 (Estok 208). Broadly speaking, ecophobia is 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 both 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. Ecophobia is a big thing. Ecophobia is a spectrum condition. No less are sexism, homophobia, racism, classism, and speciesism. We all stand somewhere in these spectra.

In the schema Slemon describes — where both the land and the people threaten to consume the travellers (163) — the viral overlap among ecophobic ethics and oppressive sexist, heterosexist, and racist ideologies become enabled and interchangeable. While Slemon is aware of the spatial importance of topography and of the fact that colonialist discourse articulates a "managed *difference* in the field of 'nature'" through the discourse of cannibalism (165; emphasis in the original), the significance of environment as it is configured in the conceptualization of otherness here remains unattended in Slemon's discussion. Indeed, much of the work with cannibalism takes post-colonialist approaches that largely overlook interrelationships between ecophobia and colonialism.

It is now a well-acknowledged fact that cannibalism is often a myth constructed to "justify hatred and aggression" (Kilgour, "Foreword" vii); to authorize, as Maggie Kilgour has argued, the extermination of cultures subsumed to (most often) western imperialism; to define western ideals by establishing radical differences; and to define the limits of "the human." Both ecocriticism and postcolonial theory stand to profit from looking at how the semiotics of cannibalism participates in the writing of early modern natural environments and, certainly, cannibalism is a race and environment issue, but there is far more going on in the writing of fantasies and idealizations of the original inhabitants of colonized lands as "cannibal" than simply an association of the people with the land. For one thing, "the fear of cannibalism ran both ways, with Africans often convinced that whites were buying them in order to eat them" (Hulme 35). William Pierson notes also that "As a mythopoeic analogy it does not seem farfetched to portray chattel slavery as a kind of economic cannibalism; and in that sense, a mythic sense, stories of white man-eaters were true enough" (17). For another thing, the very gesture of demarcation that the discourse of cannibalism performs in terms of defining the human affirms precisely the opposite, precisely the inclusion of the cannibal within the category of "the human."

Ishmael's question about "who is not a cannibal" again springs to mind, and it is important to recognize that there is danger in the relativism that the question implies. Indeed, as Kilgour shows, this kind of relativism permits a Hannibal Lecter such unrestricted growth as he enjoys: "he is a deeper moral evil unleashed by a relativistic world which reads good and evil only in terms of social conditioning. He is a monster that is created by and feeds upon a society which no longer believes in stable absolute differences" (Kilgour, *From Communion* 254). The value of the binary is that it allows us to speak intelligibly. In their book *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin make such an argument, stating that "Human cannibalism turns people into "animals" or "beasts," but without jeopardizing human distinctiveness, since the deed has already been categorized as "animal": humans can thus behave like animals or beasts while at the same time the species boundary, with its operational distinction between animals and non-animals, is kept firmly in place" (173). Yet, even in this apparently clear exposition, things remain fuzzy: a material act (human cannibalism) causes a conceptual shift (turns people into "animals" or "beasts").

This disjunction between material and metaphor was the site of a debate between Myra Jehlen and Peter Hulme in *Critical Inquiry* in 1993 about the degree to which the discourse is purely metaphoric on the one hand and ethnographic reportage on the other. Of course, the reality (if we can speak of such things these days) is that the discourse is a bit of both. It reveals as much about Europeans as about the people Europeans are describing, and it is a fundamental component of colonial discourse. Placing the discourse of cannibalism within the context of "colonial discourse," however, can lead us to think entirely in terms of "Europe and its others," to assume that the discourse set "others" outside of and not within Europe, to forget, in other words, the compulsive need for compulsive inscription and maintenance of values within Europe that pre-dates the colonial project (but nevertheless finds expression in it). In a compelling discussion of cannibalism in early modern culture, cannibalism not of foreign lands but of Europe, Louise Noble warns of the temptations "to adopt a position of cultural superiority," to project cannibalism as something distant in both time and place: "We are in many ways victims of epistemological seduction, of a pressing need to make sense of what seems unfamiliar and strange in literary texts, texts that we imagine mediate and thus — when sufficiently probed — reveal the thoughts, beliefs, and experiences of people of the past living within a particular cultural moment. The desire to recover what seems coded and indecipherable from a distant time and space is frequently tweaked by our desire to master what we do not fully understand" (7). This is not the same as saying that we are all cannibals but rather that no culture is exempt from cannibalistic practices — some historic, some contemporary. When Thomas Browne claims that we are all cannibals, he does so not with the intent to languor in a paralysis of relativistic mumbling but to effect changes in how we live in the material world: "we are what we all abhor, anthropophagi and cannibals, / devourers not only of men, but of ourselves; and that not in an / allegory, but a positive truth; for all this mass of flesh which we / behold, came in at our mouths: this frame wee look upon, hath / been upon our trenchers; In brief, we have devoured our selves" (74). Without sliding into unwieldy relativism, we can see that the ranking of terms such as "subhuman" (Kilgour's description of Hannibal Lecter), "savage beast" and "monster" wrapped up with the figure of the cannibal firmly places the cannibal in the sphere of nature, and, therefore, subject to only the moral considerability to which that nature is subject. And it is a space that is heavily sexualized.

The discursive linking and confusion of the categories "sodomite" and "cannibal" in early modern travel literature is noted (see, for instance, Jonathan Goldberg), but the heteronormalizing and masculinizing of meat is less so. The association of "meat" with a masculine heterosexuality, as Carol Adams shows in her *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, registers discursive associations of women with nonhuman animals and the real world effects such associations have (in terms of butchery of women, for instance). If some food choices masculinize, though, others emasculate and feminize. In the early modern period, the most emasculating and feminizing food choices were vegetarianism and cannibalism. If we recognize meat "consumption ... to be the final stage of male desire" (Adams 49), then vegetarianism is, in some sense, the most obvious subversion of masculinity. As an interesting — if macabre — aside here, the case of the Rotenburg Cannibal (*Der Metzgermeister* [The Master Butcher]) of 2001 is perhaps the ultimate expression of the thesis Adams puts forward. The case involves Armin Meiwes advertizing on the internet "for a well-built 18- to 30-year old to be slaughtered and then consumed" (see "German Cannibal"). Meiwes received a response, carried through on the deal, and is currently serving a life sentence. The sexual association of male desire with consumption is vivid in this case.

Male desire and masculinity, although not necessarily the same things, are often equated with each other, now as in the early modern period, and if consumption is masculinity, then failure to consume is often imagined as emasculating. We see this vividly in Shakespeare's *Henry the Second, Part 6*, where Henry is a weak king, and his weakness is ideologically inseparable from his expression of sympathy for animals. The king's lack of virility and potency, neither of which come off as desirable, taint and are tainted by his animal rights sympathies. The subversive promise but ultimate containment of the play's critique against meat is part of a larger tradition that silences popular radical vegetarian environmentalist ethics. Even so, as Joan Fitzpatrick notes, early modern vegetarians were not well-received and were even condemned as being heretical. The corollary of meaty maleness is that vegetarianism is, at best, weak and suspect. The idea that "vegetarian men are ... wimps and less

macho than those who like tucking into a steak" (MacRae <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1352393/Real-men-eat-meat-say-women-turn-noses-vegetarians.html#ixzz1svB5UgKC>>) is nothing new, and Matthew Byron Ruby argues that "throughout European history, meat has been closely associated with power and privilege" (12). Discursively positioned in travel writing as easily conquered, the vegetarian is more victimized than victimizer. Certainly such is the position of Caliban, whom we see to be vegetarian, in spite of his anagrammatically suggestive name (Caliban/cannibal). The sexual associations with dietary non-conformity are not lost on Caliban, who tries to rape Miranda (and is unapologetic about it). He is angry that Prospero prevented him: "I had," Caliban explains, "peopled else / This isle with Calibans" (1.2.350-51). From this play, the one which gave us the phrase "brave new world," we have in Caliban the meeting point of new world dreams and old world nightmares. Regardless of what he really eats in the play, he is a subhuman, sexually dangerous cannibal. Shakespeare's peculiar talent is in giving voice to him and thereby subverting the image of the New World man that was so very much a part of early modern travel writing.

It is tempting to demonize early modern writers and the apparent nonchalance of their characterizations of the New World, but description was taken very seriously indeed. It was central both to the proto-scientific method that was evolving as well as to an extraordinary enthusiasm for understanding and cataloguing new information that defined the times. As Joan-Pau Rubiés explains, "In Renaissance learning geography, or cosmography, acted as an encyclopaedic synthesis for the description of the world. Therefore, the description of peoples became the empirical foundation for a general rewriting of 'natural and moral history' within a new cosmography made possible by the navigations of the period" (242). Even so, while we may sympathize with the writers for the difficulties of their task, we may also see the limitations of these writers. One of these limitations has to do with assumptions about diet and sexuality. Whether we are talking about "a free and fraternal citizen of a back-to-nature utopia" that Frank Lestringant (110-11) sees in Montaigne or the more disturbing view "that the figure of the cannibal was created to support the cultural cannibalism of colonialism, through the projection of western imperialist appetites onto the cultures they then subsumed" (Kilgour, "Foreword" vii), there is undeniably a vast amount of material linking dietary and sexual matters in early modern travel writing.

Merrall Price comments that "the men of the New World were not only assumed to be inveterate man-eaters, positioning them on the outer limits of humanity, but their position on the spectrum of masculinity was also called into question" and "the link between allegations of sodomy and of cannibalism is a historical commonplace ... it was discovered that sodomy was rife all over the New World" (94-104). The "feminized," and therefore penetrable male body, is visually pictured in Theodore de Bry's *Americae* (<<http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/detail/FOLGERCM1~6~6~579978~140601:Americae-pars-quatra---->>), where not only is the sodomite disarticulated and anatomized discursively and visually as objects which share the same ontological status as the natural environment (with heads lying around as parts of the natural environment punitively ripped from the secure ontology of the human in the picture), but also, as Jonathan Goldberg notes, there is "the usual confusion of sodomy with bestiality ... also suggested by the ways in which the slaughter of so-called sodomites in this image looks like rape" (280). Of the four victims, two (one in the right hand corner, one in the centre) are in vulnerable (even erotic) positions, and the other two (on the left side of the woodcut) are, it appears, being kissed by the dogs — with some relish. The victim appearing in the lower left seems to be dead; the victim slightly above in the picture has his left arm around the dog's neck in what, in a different context, might be a lover's embrace. The two victims on the left (the lower one seeming, as I have mentioned, dead) each have one canine rapist/predator to fight against, while the other two victims each have two dogs on them — the one in the centre is being held by the paws and mouth of one dog and is vulnerable to the other dog's nosing around his buttocks. The victim on the far right is outnumbered similarly, vulnerable and exposed. It is difficult to distinguish the sexual from the culinary, the dog from the man, and, therefore, the cannibal predator from the canine predator.

There is, then, much going on with cannibalism that relates with matters of sexuality: Price explains that "It is not especially perplexing that early explorers should have sensationalized their accounts with the stuff of medieval bestsellers, but what is interesting here is the way in which proto-

colonialist narratives of New World cannibalism return obsessively to the intersecting terrains of gender, of sexuality, and of monstrosity" (88). One of the great strengths of ecocriticism is its willingness — indeed, its mandate — to connect. Over the past two decades, since its inception in the early 1990s, ecocriticism has defined itself as an area committed to the study of the natural world and Nature in literary and non-literary texts, particularly as these representations reflect or influence material practices in material worlds. It has been resolutely interdisciplinary, interested not in the isolated study of literature but in more fully contextualized analyses. Cannibalism is an unambiguously ecocritical issue. The journeying and the narratives that such journeys spawn in the early modern period connect worlds, Old and New, early modern and present, natural and human.

Without being simplistic, we can safely argue that the semiotics of cannibalism, one of the vitally overlapping areas between postcolonial theory and ecocriticism, has changed very little over the past four hundred years. A 1995 article in *Time* reports that "human fetus soup" (Dam, Emery, Lai 12) has become something of a delicacy in Shenzhen. The report plays into what seems a renewed anti-Asian trend in the West (the anti-import messages in car advertisements such as Renault's advertisement in 2000 for Scénic, which reads "Because Japanese cars all look the same" — a comment that resounds of the racist idea "they all look the same") and situates the alleged dietary trend "out there" in an exotic geography. Similarly, James Pringle's report in *The London Times* (13 April 1998) situates cannibalism in the isolated, sequestered, secretive Stalinist North Korea. Perhaps it is merely a coincidence that at the time of the Pringle article, there were increasing tensions between North Korea and the West, tensions which continue — as do the reports of cannibalism.

At times what we would recognize today as unambiguously racist, xenophobic, sexist, speciesist, and homophobic, the discourse of cannibalism is central to the narratives of early modern journeyers — and to all those they touched. It was not just writers of travel narratives who obsessed on cannibalism: it was the very culture of the journeyer who harbored an obsession with the cannibal, an obsession that spoke profoundly about ethical positions, not only toward people, but, more broadly, toward the natural environment. The discourse of cannibalism holds a plateful of implications for early modern environmental ethics — and it is dubious that much has really changed at all since then.

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Author's profile: Simon C. Estok <<http://sungkyunkwan.academia.edu/SimonEstok/CurriculumVitae>> teaches literary theory and Shakespearean literature at Sungkyunkwan University. His interests in research include ecocriticism and early modern European culture. Estok's single-authored book publications include *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia* (2011) and he has published articles on ecocriticism and Shakespeare in journals such as *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, *Configurations*, *English Studies in Canada*, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, etc. Estok is currently co-editing the collected volumes *East Asian Ecocriticisms* (with Won-Chung Kim, forthcoming 2013) and *Feminist Ecocriticism* (with Greta Gaard and Serpil Oppermann, forthcoming 2013). Email: <estok@skku.edu>