

# ECOCRITICISM

## An Environmental Approach to Literature and Local Wisdom



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**The 5<sup>th</sup> ICOLITE International Conference on Literature**

September 22, 2020, 2.00–2.50 pm



# Outline

## **1. Environmental Literature & Ecopoetics**

- a) Environmental Texts
- b) Ecocriticism (Comparative Ecocriticism)
- c) Animals and Literature
- d) Plants and Literature
- e) Ecopoetics (Environmental Poetry)

## **2. Ethnoliterature & Ethnopoetics**

- a) Ethnic Minority Literature
- b) Multi-Ethnic Literature
- c) Ethnographic Literature

## **3. Kakadu, Australia** (Bill Neidjie)

## **4. Kalimantan, Indonesia** (Khairani Barokka)

## **5. Meghalaya, India** (Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih)

## **6. Conclusion: Ecocriticism in Society 5.0**



*Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih  
Meghalaya, India*

*Khairani Barokka,  
Kalimantan, Indonesia*

*Bill Neidjie,  
Kakadu, Australia*

*A **comparative ecocriticism** that considers the literary, geographical and ecological connectivities between regions...*

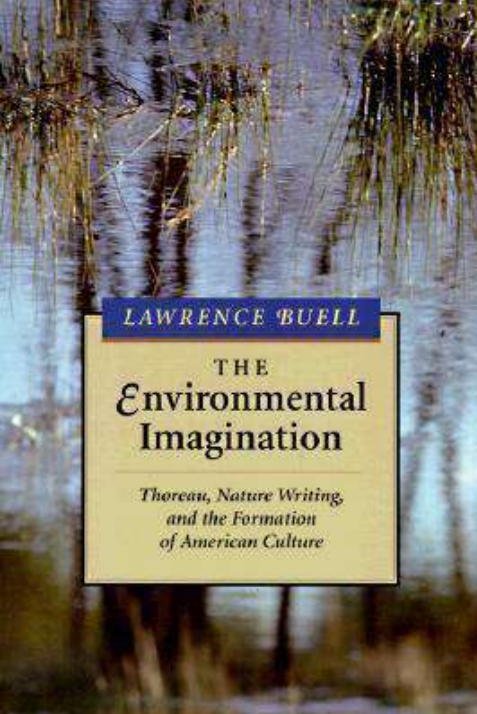
# 1. Environmental Literature & Ecopoetics



Sacred Banyan Tree, Candi Mendut, Indonesia. Photo by author (2019)

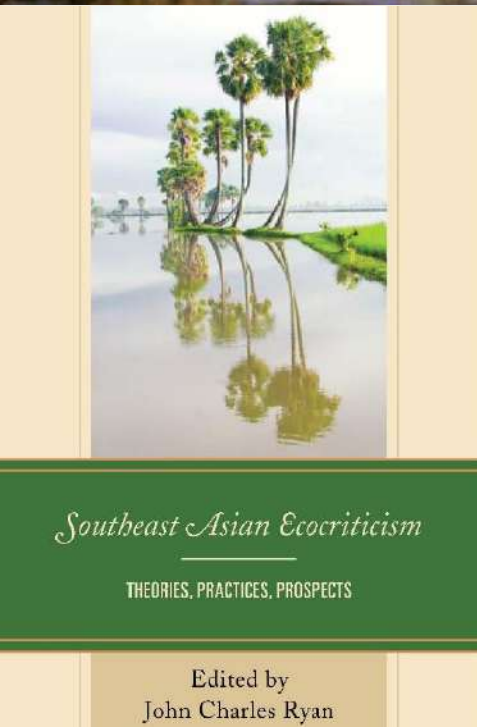
# 1a. Environmental Texts

- A “text” (novel, poem, film, website, television program, magazine article, advertisement, etc.) that represents the environment, ecological issues, and/or human-nature relations
- Defined by Lawrence Buell as a text in which “the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence” (1995, p. 7)



# 1b. Ecocriticism

- The literary and historical analysis of environmental texts
- “The study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment [demonstrating] an earth-centered approach to literary studies” (Glottfelty 1996)
- Since the 1990s, ecocriticism has diversified into specialisations such as postcolonial, affective, empirical, zoocentric (animal), and phytocentric (plant) studies



# 1b. Ecocriticism



## POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICISM

Literature, Animals, Environment

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin



## MATERIAL ecocriticism

Edited by  
SERENELLA IOVINO  
and SERPIL OPPERMANN

- **Postcolonial Ecocriticism**: integrates postcolonial and environmental concerns in the analysis of literature and culture (Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, 2010)
- **Affective Ecocriticism**: applies theories of affect, embodiment, and emotions to the analysis of environmental texts (Ladino and Bladow, eds., *Affective Ecocriticism*, 2018)
- **Material Ecocriticism**: focuses on material forces and substances as well as the agency of things, processes, narratives, and stories (Iovino and Oppermann, eds., *Material Ecocriticism*, 2014)
- **Empirical Ecocriticism**: examines empirically-grounded aspects of environmental narratives and their influence on various audiences (Schneider-Mayerson, et al. "Empirical Ecocriticism," *ISLE*, 2020)

Plants in Contemporary  
Poetry

Ecocriticism and the Botanical  
Imagination

John Ryan



THE LANGUAGE OF PLANTS  
SCIENCE, PHILOSOPHY, LITERATURE

MONICA GABLIANO, JOHN C. RYAN, PATRICIA VIEIRA, EDITORS

# 1c. Animals and Literature

- Animal texts as those representing animal life and human-animal relations
- Zoocriticism as the reading of literary texts through an animal-focused lens
- Emerged from animal ethics debates and the broader scholarly field of human-animal studies (HAS)

# 1d. Plants and Literature

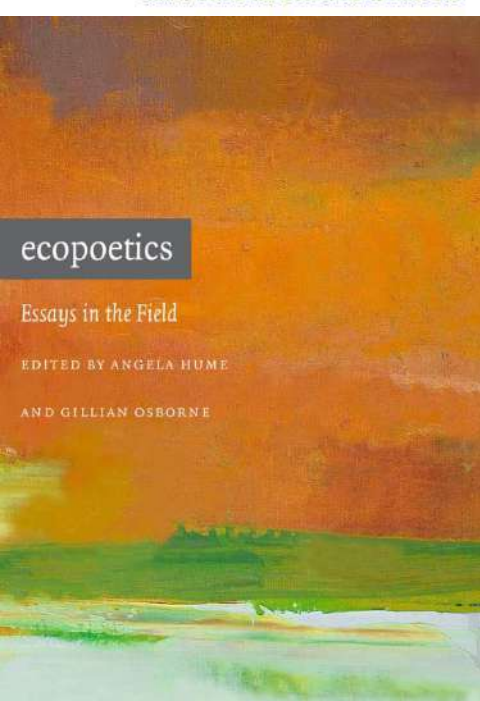
- Plant texts as those representing plant life and human-plant relations
- Phytocriticism as the reading of literary texts through a plant-focused lens
- Emerged from plant ethics debates and the broader scholarly field of human-plant studies (HPS)

# 1e. Ecopoetics

- A genre of poetry that expresses prominent ecological values, critiques environmental degradation, and upholds an ethics of the natural world
- Often associated with contemporary environmental activism and advocacy
- Distinct from *nature poetry* (related to British Romanticism and the pastoral tradition)
- Distinct from *landscape poetry* (related to aesthetic appreciation of the visual features of an environment)
- Also refers to a mode of literary analysis in which poetry is understood through an ecological lens (e.g. ecopoetic readings of poems)
- More recently the term has been used to characterise environmental activism projects focused on sustainability, conservation, and human-nature balance



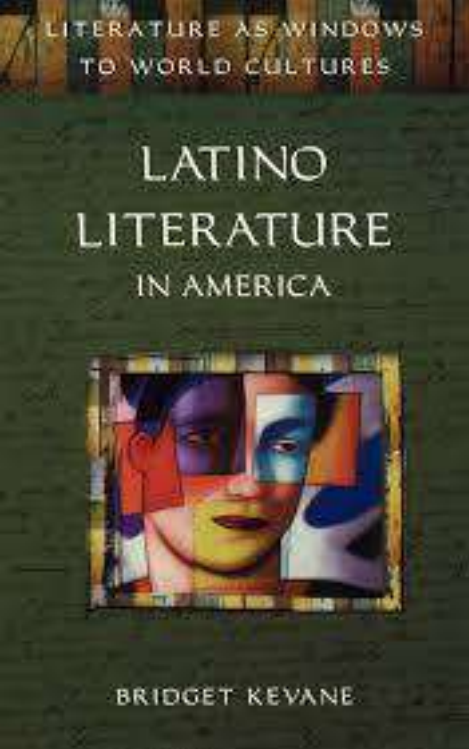
**ECOPOETICS AND THE  
GLOBAL LANDSCAPE**  
CRITICAL ESSAYS  
Edited by **ISABEL SOBRAL CAMPOS**



## 2. Ethnoliterature & Ethnopoetics

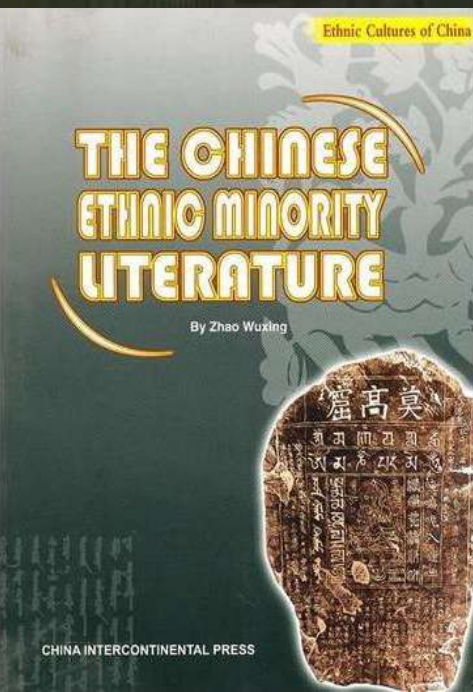


Aboriginal (Noongar) Elder Dr Noel Nannup Makes Traditional Message Sticks. Photo by author (2013)



## 2a. Ethnic Minority Literature

- Written by members of ethnic minority groups in contrast to writers of dominant social groups
- Reflects a common history, language, customs, area of inhabitation and livelihood
- *In USA*: Hispanic, Latino, African-American, Asian-American, Pacific Islander and Native American
- *In China*: Fifty-five recognized national minority groups



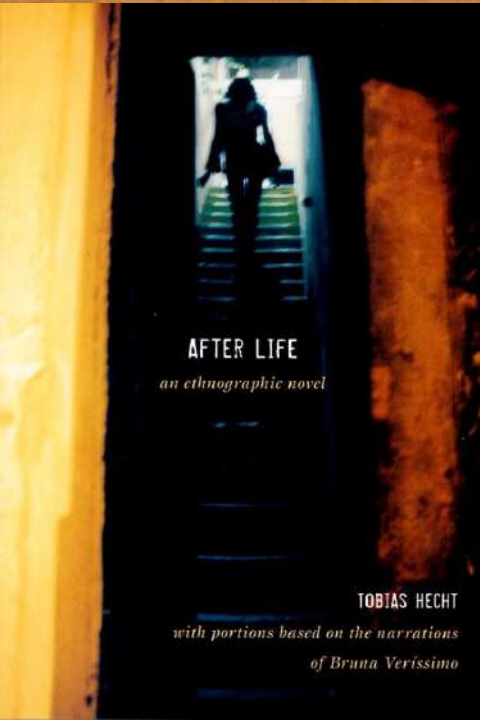
## 2b. Multi-Ethnic Literature

- Commonly used in American literary studies to refer to the diversity of ethnic minority literature
- Includes seminal publications such as Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eyes* (1970), Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977)

# REFUGE



POEMS BY ADRIE KUSSEROW



## 2c. Ethnographic Literature

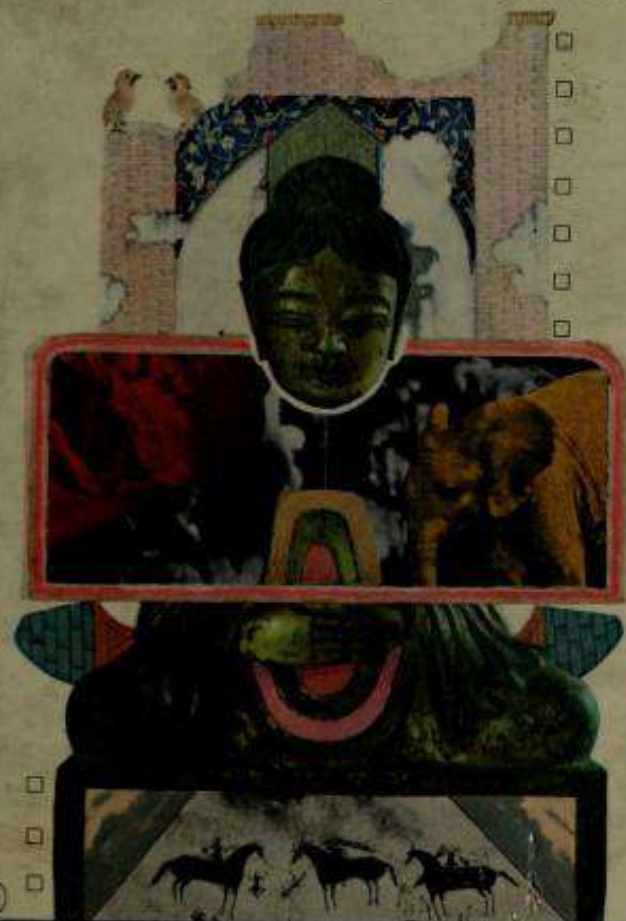
- *Ethnographic fiction*: evokes cultural experience and sense of place using literary techniques to craft conventional ethnographic materials—interviews, participant observation, surveys, fieldnotes, photographs—into a compelling story (Jacobson & Larsen 2014)
- *Ethnographic non-fiction*: works of literary non-fiction derived from ethnographic materials and common in the discipline of anthropology (e.g., Richard Nelson's *The Island Within* 1989)
- *Ethnographic poetry*: verse forms composed through crafting of conventional ethnographic materials listed above (Maynard 2009)
- *Ethnopoetics (or cultural poetics)*: non-Western, non-canonical poetries, often from ancient and autochthonous cultures
- See *Technicians of the Sacred: A Range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania* (1968)



31111003058599

# Technicians of the Sacred

A Range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia, & Oceania  
 Edited with Commentaries by Jerome Rothenberg



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### 3. Aboriginal Australian Ecopoetry



Gwion Gwion Figures Wearing Ornate Costumes. Wikimedia Commons (Tassel Bradshaw)

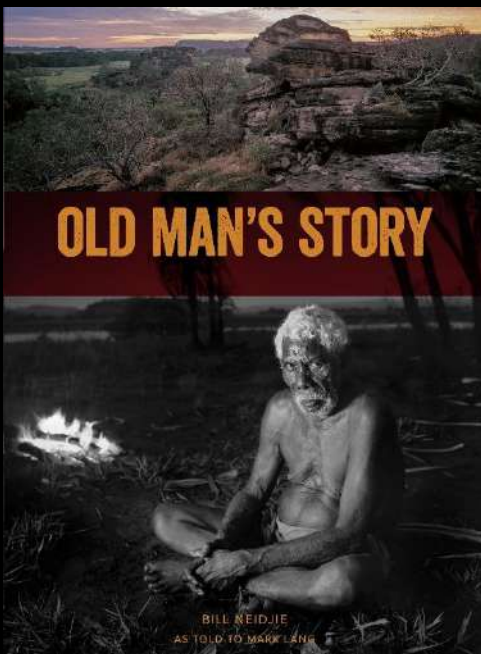


Bill Neidjie

## STORY ABOUT FEELING



Bill Neidjie



## OLD MAN'S STORY

BILL NEIDJIE  
AS TOLD TO MARK LANE



### 3. Bill Neidjie's *Story About Feeling* (1989)



- Senior Elder (or Senior Law Man) of Kakadu National Park and a **traditional owner** of Bunitj estate of northern Kakadu in Northern Territory, Australia
- **Verse-narratives** include *Story About Feeling* (1989) and *Old Man's Story* (2015)
- Demonstrates traditional Gaagadju views of plants as **kin**

### 3. From *Story About Feeling*

"I'm your old-man but I'm telling you!  
You dig yam?"

"Yes"

"Well one of your granny or mother  
you digging through the belly.  
You must cover im up, cover again.  
When you get yam you cover  
so no hole through there  
because you killing yam other thing.  
And you got to hang on..."



### 3. From *Story About Feeling*

So long yam e can dig up, e can eat raw  
and e can take im cook im if you want to.  
Because that mean, raw, e can eat...  
that flavour for you.

Make more blood and clean your body.

When you eat cook...same thing, clean your stomach.



## 4. Indonesian Ecopoetry





The remains of a peat forest in Indragiri Hulu, Riau Province, Indonesia after clearing for a oil palm plantation  
Wikimedia Commons (Aidenvironment, 2006)

**SOUTH  
CHINA SEA**

# BORNEO

**SULU  
SEA**

400 km



**MALAYSIA**

**SARAWAK**

**SABAH**

**CELEBES  
SEA**

**KALIMANTAN  
TIMUR**

**INDONESIA**

**KALIMANTAN  
TENGAH**

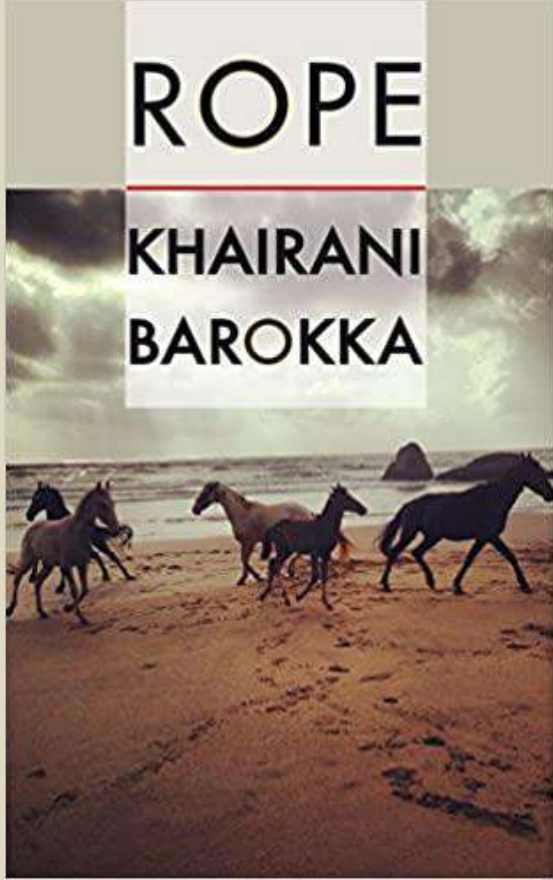
**KALIMANTAN  
BARAT**

**JAVA SEA**

**Makassar Strait**

**SULAWESI  
SELATAN**

## 4. Khairani Barokka



- A poet, performer, producer, interdisciplinary artist, editor, publisher and disability activist
- Most recent collection of poetry is *Rope* (2017), which calls urgent attention to human impacts on the biosphere
- Writer, performer and producer of a hearing-impaired accessible solo show, *Eve and Mary Are Having Coffee* (2014)
- First performed the long poem *Indigenous Species* in 2013 at Melbourne's Emerging Writers' Festival
- Published version of the poem innovatively weaves between verse, visual art and Braille
- *Indigenous Species* as an example of Indonesian ecopoetry

## 4. Barokka's *Indigenous Species*



### Indigenous Species



Words and art by  
Khairani Barokka

## 4. Barokka's *Indigenous Species*

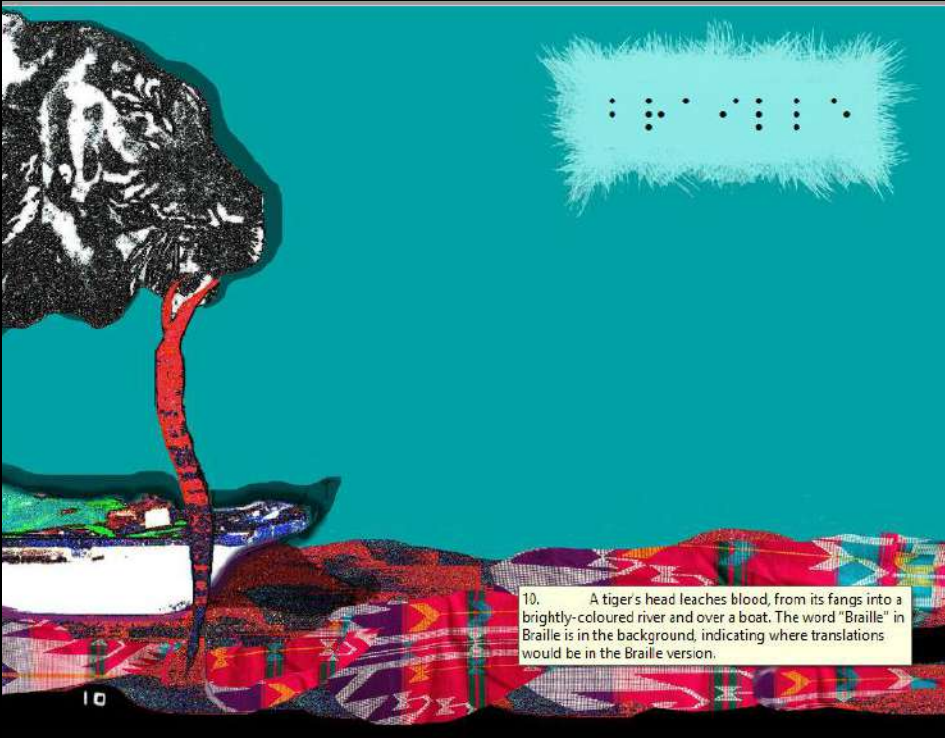


A young girl is abducted aboard a boat bound upstream on an Indonesian river, a landscape scarred by pollution and consumerism. But it is also a place from which she herself is indigenous, and if she can root herself back into its landscape and languages, she may yet save herself.

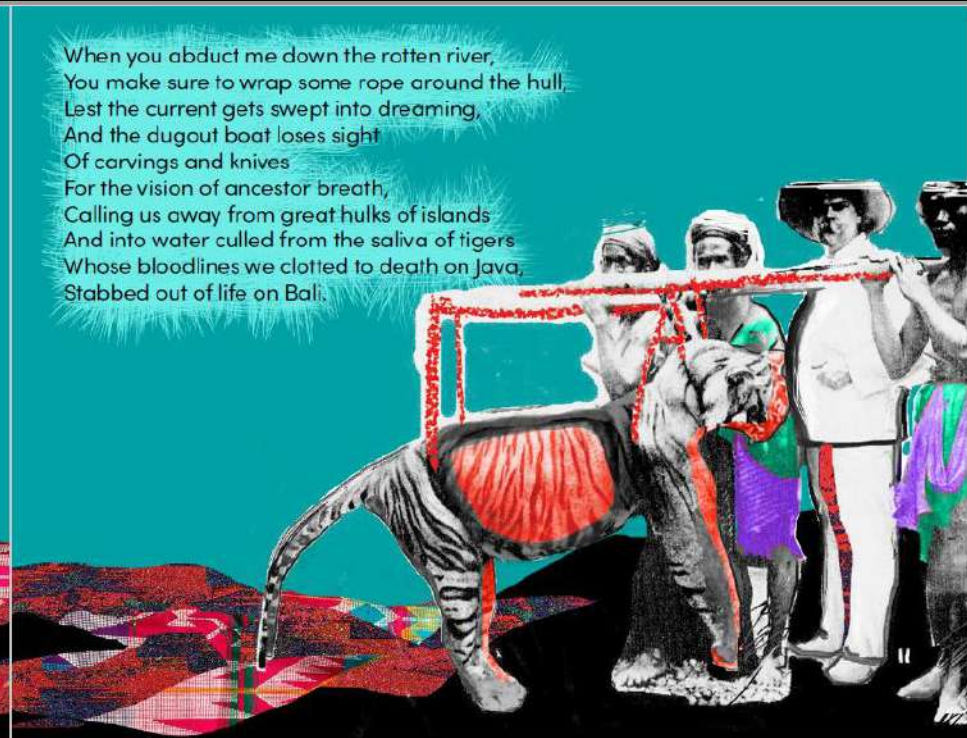
Frenetic neon artwork accompanies poised, rhythmic poetry in this debut from writer, performer and artist Khairani Barokka. *Indigenous Species* is also a bold and necessary experiment in making a sight-impaired-accessible art book: Tilted Axis is producing a separate edition which will feature Braille alongside text for sighted readers, and tactile imagery.



## 4. Barokka's *Indigenous Species*



10. A tiger's head leaches blood, from its fangs into a brightly-coloured river and over a boat. The word "Braille" in Braille is in the background, indicating where translations would be in the Braille version.



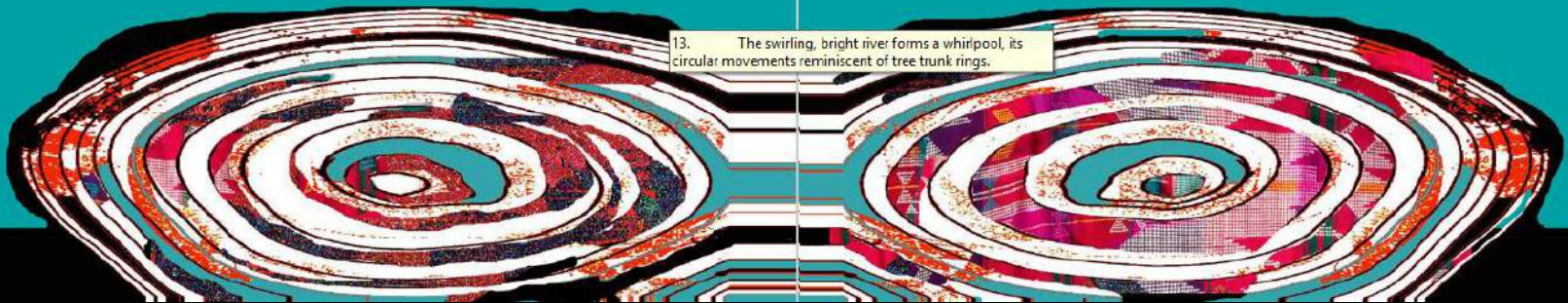
When you abduct me down the rotten river,  
You make sure to wrap some rope around the hull,  
Lest the current gets swept into dreaming,  
And the dugout boat loses sight  
Of carvings and knives  
For the vision of ancestor breath,  
Calling us away from great hulks of islands  
And into water culled from the saliva of tigers  
Whose bloodlines we clotted to death on Java,  
Stabbed out of life on Bali.

## 4. Barokka's *Indigenous Species*

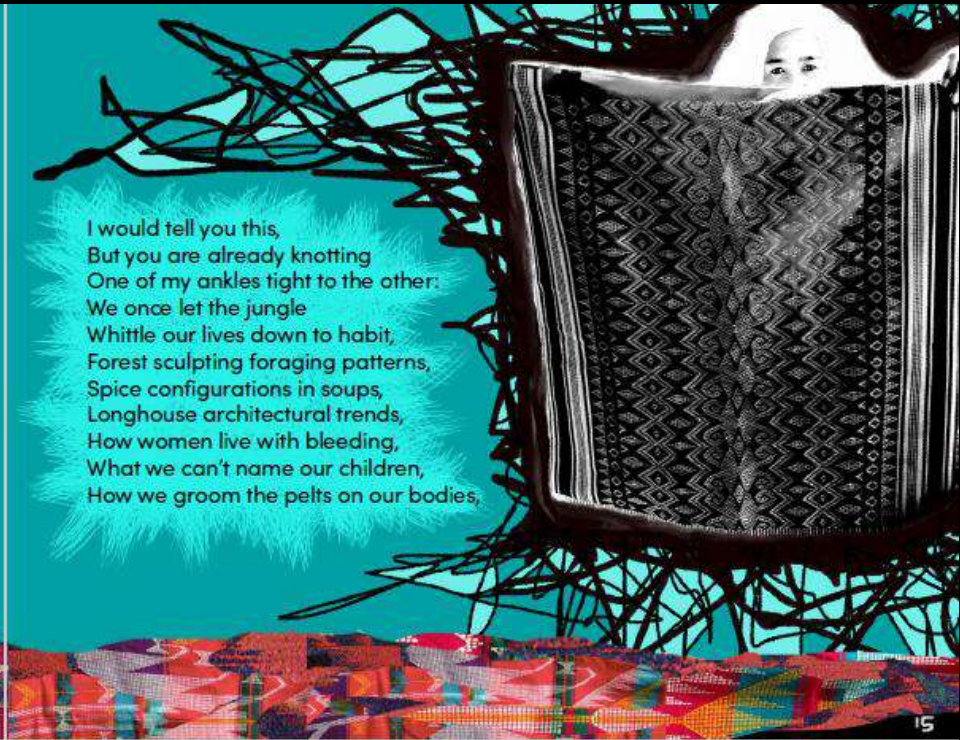
When you wrap chloroform in my mouth,  
We are drifting past open sores of forest,  
Pestilent red wounds in the trunks  
Exposing great-great-grandmotherly rings,  
The circumferences it takes for  
Rainforest to sprout its many legs of mystery,  
The soup of a complex resilience,  
Rustbucket water feeding ferocity as green gasps wide  
And devours canopy, the crazy lush of it tickling  
Away into the ocean.

: : : : : : : :

13. The swirling, bright river forms a whirlpool, its circular movements reminiscent of tree trunk rings.



## 4. Barokka's *Indigenous Species*

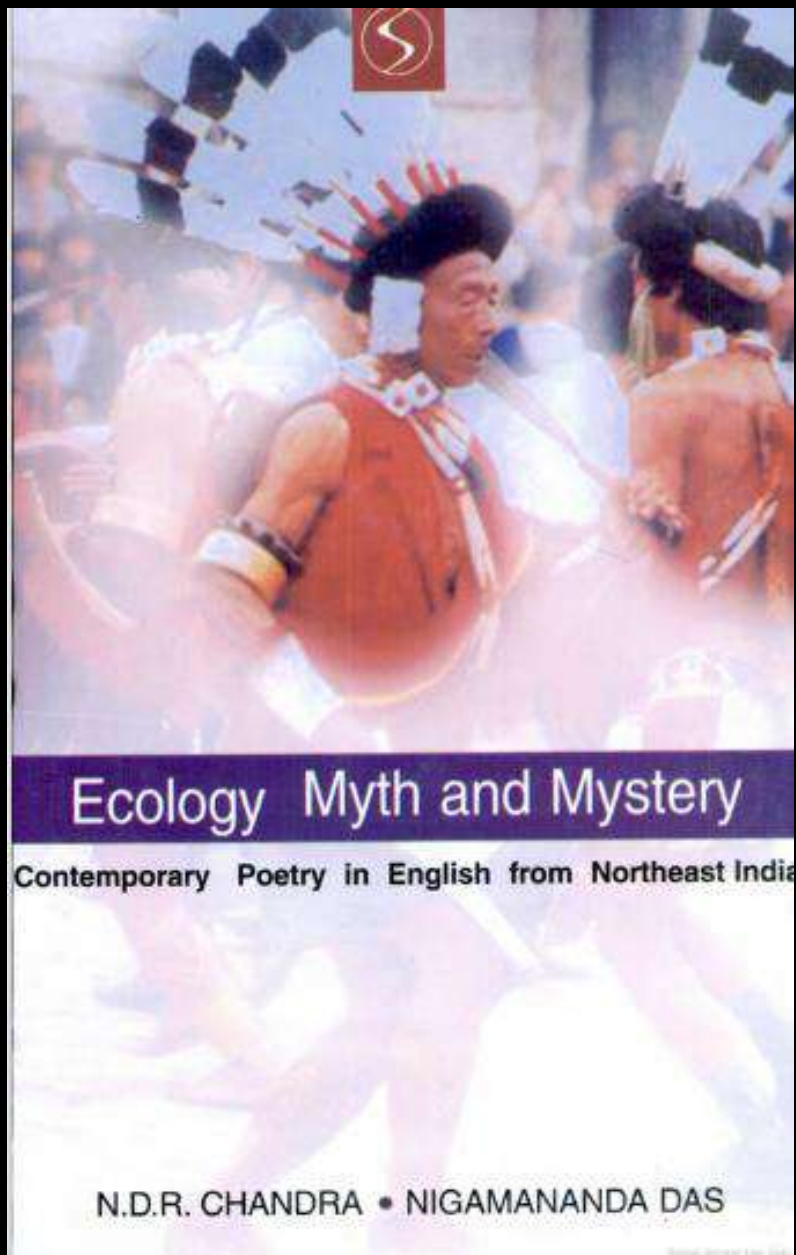


I would tell you this,  
But you are already knotting  
One of my ankles tight to the other:  
We once let the jungle  
Whittle our lives down to habit,  
Forest sculpting foraging patterns,  
Spice configurations in soups,  
Longhouse architectural trends,  
How women live with bleeding,  
What we can't name our children,  
How we groom the pelts on our bodies,

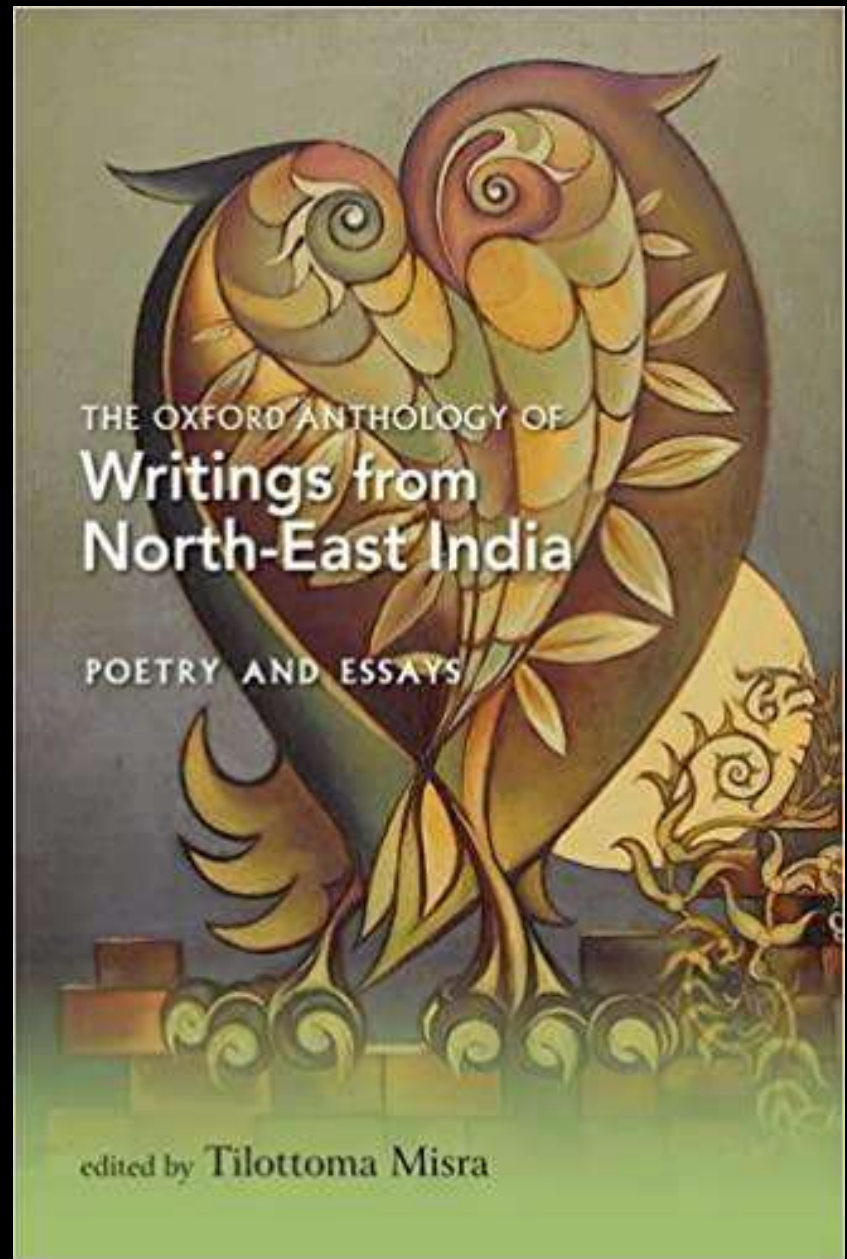
# 5. Northeast Indian (Meghalaya) Ecopoetry



Men dance during the Khasi festival of Shad Suk Mynsiem in Shillong, Meghalaya, India. Wikimedia Commons (Tymphew)



*Ecology, Myth, and Mystery* (2007), N.D.R. Chandra & N. Das



*Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India* (2010), ed. T. Misra

# MEGHALAYA



## LEGEND

- - - International Boundary
- - - State Boundary
- - - District Boundary
- National Highway
- Major Road
- Railway
- River/Lake
- State Capital
- ⊙ District Headquarter
- Town/Village

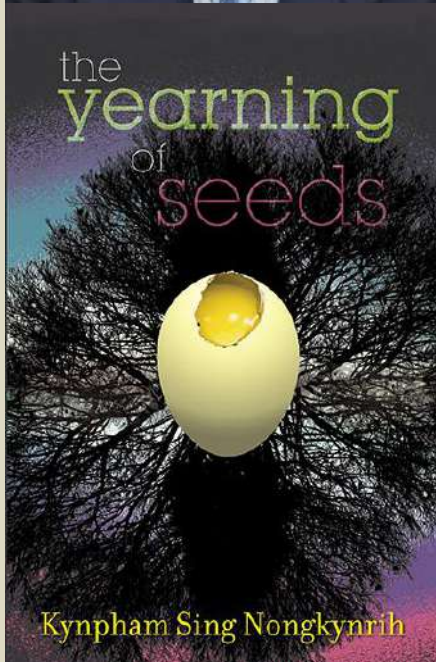
BANGLADESH

ASSAM

Map not to Scale

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# 5. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih



- Poet, novelist, editor, anthologist, folklorist, and academic (North-Eastern Hill University), born in Cherrapunji, lives in Shillong, Meghalaya, and writes in English and Khasi
- The matrilineal Khasi constitute about 48% of the population of Meghalaya
- Received the North-East Poetry Award (2004), Shankar Shah-Raghunath Award (2008), and other awards
- Publications include *Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends* (2007, folklore), *Funeral Nights: A Novel* (2019, fiction), and *Time's Barter: Haiku and Senryu* (2015, poetry)
- Respectful human-plant relations in "The Tree" (2015, poem) in which the speaker upholds an ethics of botanical life based on identification with non-human beings

## 5. Nongkynrih's "The Tree" (2015)

Sometime ago I planted **a friend** and **a brother** in the fallow field that was my workplace.

I **nurtured him daily**, watering, feeding him fresh soil and manure; pruning his leaves and branches and **even talking to him** morning and evening, as advised by *pundits*, so he would grow faster and healthier.

At the end of three years, he blossomed for the first time and people say, look, he is the best thing that has ever happened to this place.

## 5. Nongkynrih's "The Tree" (2015)

But before he could fructify, huge ugly ants nested on his trunk and caterpillars crawled about his branches. People say, **chop him off**, how can we live with insects crawling about us?

With unbelievable torment I fetched **the axe of anguish**.  
**I spoke to the tree that was my friend and my brother.**

Is it my fault that I mean to chop you off with the very hand that planted you? Is it your fault that insects are nesting in your heart and crawling about your limbs?

## 5. Nongkynrih's "The Tree" (2015)

*I spoke to him for a long time.*

But when I was done, I found my hand  
could no longer move.

Till today the hand and the axe  
are *still suspended in mid-air*.

## 6. Ecocriticism in Society 5.0

- **The environment** (nature, land, ecology, plants, animals, non-human life, human-nature relations) is an intrinsic element of literary works from various traditions.
- The poetry of **Nongkynrih, Barokka, and Neidjie** is interlaced with environmental values, meanings, and messages. There are common ecological concerns.
- A **comparative ecocritical approach** allows us to understand environmental concerns shared between writers in an era of climate change and species loss known as the Anthropocene.





*Thank you for your attention...*

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**Southern Cross  
University**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
NOTRE DAME  
AUSTRALIA  
BROOME CAMPUS