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Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok and Serpil Oppermann (eds.), *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2013), xvii + 290 pp.



In “New Directions for Ecofeminism: Toward a More Feminist Ecocriticism” (2010), and later in “Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism” (2011), Greta Gaard presented perceptive critiques of the current state of ecofeminism and openly denounced the disturbing effacement of ecofeminist thought from current ecocritical scholarship. In both critical surveys, Gaard lamented the omissions and misrepresentations of feminist literary criticism in the latest works of the most prominent ecocritics to date, and their obvious inability to come to terms with issues raised by feminist arguments and insights. *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism* is clearly designed to remedy that state of affairs: the editors have taken up the necessary task of exploring human relations with nature and nonhuman others from a feminist perspective, their professed aims being “to acknowledge not only the feminist roots of ecocriticism but also the centrality of feminist views, methods, and interpretations in building ecocriticism’s future” (3).

As some well-established ecocritics acknowledge in the blurbs, *International Perspectives* is a welcome contribution to the field of feminist ecocriticism, a giant step towards the goal of “reinforce(ing) our understanding of the reasons why feminist views, methods and interpretations must become more central to the field of ecocriticism” (Joni Adamson). This necessary advancement is ensured by the combined efforts of a diverse group of writers and researchers who bring together a diversity of perspectives central to the body of thought of feminist literary ecocriticism. As its title suggests, the volume also tackles intercultural issues, achieving a variety and depth of insight otherwise hard to accomplish.

What might readers hope for from this publication? To begin with, one may expect an integration of the latest theoretical impulses in the feminist ecocritical debate. This integrative effort should suffice to lay the foundations for a reassessment of the major streams of thought in feminism as well as a mapping out of its future territory. I believe that this goal has been successfully achieved. Moreover, it will not come as a surprise to those who have followed developments in the fields of feminism and ecocriticism, that its editors are Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok and Serpil Oppermann, all of whom have previously authored and edited studies in feminist ecocriticism, ecocritical theory, posthumanism and material feminism.

The volume opens up with a foreword by Linda Hogan and an introduction by the editors. It seems appropriate that Hogan—a celebrated poet, novelist and environmentalist who offers not only feminist, but also minority and indigenous

perspectives in her literary works—gets the first word in appraising the volume’s variety of approaches in the fields of “ecofeminist criticism, animal studies, multiple global cultures, and the reinvention of the human being” (xvii). This is followed by the introduction, in which the authors trace the origins and history of feminist ecocriticism, point out the key elements of this theoretical stance, and carefully present the essays by inscribing them inside a larger project of “climate justice, species justice, reproductive justice, food justice [...] and a larger movement for global justice” (15).

*International Perspectives* consists of four parts: “Feminist Ecocritical Theory”, “Feminist/Postcolonial/Environmental Justice, “Species, Sexualities and Eco-Activisms” and “Apocalyptic Visions”. The different essays included in each section reflect a well-balanced variety of trends within both feminism and environmentalism. They start from the more theoretical issues of Part I, which seems to have been designed to lay to rest the outdated notion that ecocriticism must avoid abstract theorizing. The fact that the editors have chosen to dedicate four theory-laden chapters to pursue thorough revisions of some ecocritical principles proves that a systematic reflection on existing practices has become not only pertinent nowadays, but absolutely necessary. The first essay concentrates on the alliance between feminist ecocriticism and posthumanism: Serpil Oppermann’s “Feminist Ecocriticism: A Posthumanist Direction in Ecocritical Trajectory” covers a field of literary criticism that the author has previously worked on. The political effects of material narratives and the potential use of a feminist epistemology to formulate an ethics of liberation are the issues discussed in Serenella Iovino’s “Toxic Epiphanies: Dioxin, Power, and Gendered Bodies in Laura Conti’s Narratives on Seveso.” In her discussion of the 1976 Seveso spill, Italy’s first widely-publicized ecological disaster, and its literary representation in Conti’s writings, Iovino places emphasis on issues of materialism, transcorporeality and the entanglement of matter and discourse. The issue of feminist essentialism is discussed in Timothy Morton’s “Treating Objects Like Women: Feminist Ontology and the Question of Essence,” which draws on Graham Harman’s object-oriented ontology to discuss the reductionism of process-based ontologies in relation to ecofeminism. The first part closes with Simon C. Estok’s “The Ecophobia Hypothesis: Re-memembering the Feminist Body of Ecocriticism,” which spells out the connections between the ecophobia hypothesis and the subjects and concerns of feminist and queer theory, as well as feminist ecocriticism.

Part II trains its sights on the more practical connections between feminist ecocriticism and colonialism and environmental justice. In “Streams of Violence: Colonialism, Modernization and Gender in María Cristina Mena’s ‘John of God, the Water Carrier,’” Chiyo Crawford underlines ecofeminism’s commitment to reflect on the life experiences of indigenous women, who frequently offer the most forceful resistance to environmental injustice. Regina Root’s chapter “Saving the Costa Rican Rainforest: Anacristina Rossi’s *Mad About Gandoca*” examines the autobiographical novel *La Loca de Gandoca*, which documents an ecological disaster caused by the Costa Rican government’s promotion of tourism in a traditionally protected area of Costa Rica. The section concludes with Laura White’s “Re-Imagining the Human: Ecofeminism, Affect,

and Postcolonial Narration”, a thought-provoking attempt to bring together ecofeminism, affect theory and postcolonial narratives.

Moving forward towards interspecies relations, queer sexualities, and eco-activism, part III opens with Chia-Ju Chang and Iris Ralph’s “Women and Interspecies Care: Dog Mothers in Taiwan,” and continues with Lauren Rae Hall’s exploration of the concept of species rights and queer sexualities in “The Queer Vegetarian: Understanding Alimentary Activism.” The issue of antinatalism is tackled in Nicole Seymour’s “Down with People: Queer Tendencies and Troubling Racial Politics in Antinatalist Discourse.” Part IV is dedicated to exploring the literary treatment of apocalypse in novels by Octavia Butler, Cormack McCarthy and Tony Kushner, among others.

The essays included in the four parts cover a wide range of strands within ecocriticism, from more traditional issues and well-known key thinkers such as Greta Gaard, Timothy Morton, Simon C. Estok, Kate Rigby and Rachel Stein, to more recently made connections with a variety of literary and non-literary texts, such as those presented by Serpil Oppermann, Serenella Iovino, Chiyo Crawford, Regina Root and Christa Grewe-Volpp. Among the stand-out pieces of the volume are Kate Rigby’s analysis of Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria*, in “The Poetics of Decolonization: Reading *Carpentaria* in a Feminist Ecocritical Frame” (in part II), where Rigby successfully navigates the always risky “confluence of postcolonialism and ecocriticism” (120); equally inspiring is Christa Grewe-Volpp’s reappraisal of Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and Cormack McCarthy’s *The Road* in “Keep Moving: Place and Gender in a Post-Apocalyptic Environment” (in part IV), which focuses on the relationship between place and gender in two imaginary post-apocalyptic worlds. Rachel Stein sheds new light on two of Margaret Atwood’s most recent novels, in “Sex, Population and Environmental Eugenics in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*” (in part III). An altogether different spin on the familiar issue of species and social justice is provided by Greta Gaard’s concluding chapter, “In(ter)dependence Day: A Feminist Ecocritical Perspective on Fireworks”, which takes a wide-ranging perspective on the phenomenon of fireworks, providing an ecocritical reading of them as symbols of the empire and national identity, as well as an assessment of their effects, both directly on diverse animal species and citizens of the US and indirectly on the third world countries where fireworks are produced.

All in all, *International Perspectives on Feminist Ecocriticism* offers insights into future developments not just for feminist ecocriticism, which it places firmly on the map, but for ecocriticism as a whole, and provides an example to literary scholarship of the way in which theory and practice can be accessibly yet rigorously presented. As the editors acknowledge, there is a sensitive issue at the heart of this edited collection: the need to reclaim ecocriticism’s feminist lineage and to bring ecocriticism into a closer alliance with feminist studies. While they give full credit to earlier ecofeminist theory and criticism, the editors also attain their goal of moving beyond it and offering “a new practice of feminist ecocriticism” (1), opening “new ethical pathways to contest [...] sexist, racist, speciesist, ecophobic, classist, nationalist and homophobic discourses” (2), and proving that the feminist roots, views and methods, which have been sometimes

neglected within canonical ecocriticism, are and will go on being central to the future of ecocriticism (3).

Altogether, the volume is a welcome and necessary addition to the ongoing debate on the future of feminist ecocriticism, as well as a refreshing contribution to the development of literary studies in general. Furthermore, it offers an encompassing horizon for future feminist studies and draws international critical attention to feminist ecocriticism as a critical methodology that cannot but acquire a long-due importance in the ever widening range of concerns in the field of ecocriticism.

### Works Cited

- Gaard, Greta. "New Directions for Ecofeminism: Toward a More Feminist Ecocriticism." *ISLE* 17.4 (2010): 643-665. Print.
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