

Bradshaw, Penelope (2017) Book review: Contemporary perspectives on ecofeminism. *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, 21 (2). pp. 228-230.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism, edited by Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens, Abingdon, Routledge, 2016, xvi + 234 pp., £90.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-138-01974-4

Both within the introductory essay and elsewhere in this new collection Karen Warren's (2000) metaphor of a patchwork quilt, 'made up of different "patches", constructed by different quilters in particular social, historical and materialist contexts', is introduced to describe ecofeminism and the metaphor is extended to suggest that the collection itself can be thought of as 'a selection of "patches" that represent contemporary thinking in ecofeminism' (1-2). If ecofeminism is indeed best represented by the motif of a patchwork then this collection is a fitting contribution, since it brings together a range of very different voices, discursive styles, critical approaches, topics, and perspectives. As in a patchwork, the coherence of the piece is reliant primarily on the linking threads rather than on any innate patterning or similarity of approach within the various 'patches'. What might be perceived as the threads stitching the various elements together are the urgency of climate change (what one contributor refers to as 'climate *chaos*', 114) and the need to find ways of challenging the mind set of global capitalism, the dualistic Western worldview, and the inertia of governments in finding effective ways of responding to the current crisis.

The collection is made up of eleven chapters and is divided into two 'thematically organized sections' (11): 'Theory' (chapters 1-5) and 'Practice' (chapters 6-11). Contributors are drawn from a wide range of academic backgrounds and contexts but, as the introduction notes, there are only a 'limited number of contributions from pro-ecofeminist male writers' – perhaps not very surprising given the claim that 'the pressing importance and salience of contemporary forms of ecofeminism is the chorus of criticism it directs towards the role of men and masculinities in perpetuating [...] missed opportunities and systems of domination and inequality' (11).

Within the 'Theory' section the selection of material covered is diverse. Niamh Moore discusses 'Eco/feminist genealogies' and reflects back on the history of conflict within ecofeminism and in particular the deeply damaging accusations of essentialism. Erika Cudworth explores 'Ecofeminism and the animal'. Adelheid Biesecker and Uta von Winterfield consider ecofeminist perspectives on political economy and on what is perceived as the 'multiple crisis' of capitalism. Mary Brydon-Miller and Anne Inga Hilsen, in what the introduction describes as a chapter which 'builds a bridge between theory and practice' (13), use instances of environmental issues relating to specific US rivers as starting points for an exploration of 'the confluence of ecofeminism, covenantal ethics and action research' (95). Mary Phillips, one of the co-editors of the collection, also includes her own chapter on 'Developing Ecofeminist Corporeality: Writing the Body as Activist Poetics' within this section. Having offered a compelling account of the contemporary disconnection from our bodies and nature as at the root of 'inertia' (57) to the current crisis, Phillips turns to the work of Hélène Cixous and calls for us to write 'creatively in and of the body' as a means of enabling us to 'reflect on our organic embeddedness' (59). Phillips argues that such writing 'is a form of activism' which can 'help overcome our current inertia' – a claim which

reinforces earlier ecocritical arguments that certain kinds of poetry ('ecopoetics') offer a means by which our understanding and attitudes can be altered; as Jonathan Bate suggests in *Song of the Earth* (2000) 'our survival as a species may be dependent on our capacity to dream it in the work of our imagination' (37-8). Though Phillips offers a powerful account of the importance of recovering our 'organic embeddedness' (63) through writing the body the chapter does spend disappointingly little time exploring this kind of poetics in practice. Phillips turns in the end to only one poem by Susan Richardson in which an anthropomorphised presentation of nature ('an iceberg with a migraine', 70) offers an interesting take on the idea of 'writing the body', but which would seem to offer limited potential for engendering awareness of our own 'embeddedness'.

The 'Theory' section taken as a whole brings a range of tools and perspectives to bear on the material under discussion, providing a rich sense of the diversity of ecofeminist perspectives being explored today, and the 'Practice' section of the volume is similarly varied. The section opens with Trish Glazebrook examining women's farming in Ghana in relation to the 'growing crisis of agriculture and food security in Africa' (111), a piece which makes some powerful claims (the Global North's continued 'refusal to reach a functional agreement' on climate change 'constitutes negligent genocide', 115) and posits 'women's farming of the Global south' as an alternative model which demonstrates a 'logics of care, rather than embodying destructive logics of capital' (126). Ida Sabelis, Tamarisk van Vliet and Harry Wels explore the by and large silenced voices and narrative accounts of game rangers' wives on a game reserve in South Africa. Laura Wright proposes 'A postcolonial ecofeminist theory for touring the new South Africa' and examines the 'performative nature' of 'township tourism' (150). Wright also profitably explores links between ecofeminism and the Zulu and Xhosa term *ubuntu* (meaning 'humanity towards others', 151) since both involve an alternative cultural perspective in which individuals 'view themselves as parts of a greater whole, an interconnected and interdependent species' (152).

Greta Gaard, perhaps the single most influential voice from ecofeminist circles to be included in the collection, offers a thought-provoking piece on ways of responding to climate change within science-fiction ('cli-fi') and other narratives. The collection of 'cli-fi' texts surveyed by Gaard is, however, fairly limited and is made up primarily of American writers. Claims such as 'feminist fiction confronting climate change is yet to be written' (170) could perhaps have been nuanced by the inclusion of work being done in this area by British writers (Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army*, for example, makes an important contribution to this body of work). Having by and large failed to find positive feminist literary interventions, Gaard turns to pop songs and music videos and suggests that 'climate justice musical narratives' are a medium which energize audiences and invite 'movement towards action and activism alike' (185). In her survey of this material Gaard offers important insights into the different approaches taken within 'cli-fi' and other climate change narratives and her central argument supports the idea (also suggested by Phillips) that art/literature has a key role to play in bringing about a change in the way we conceptualise our relationship with the environment. Nonetheless if well-known and popular singers like Bob Dylan couldn't change the world with their anti-war and civil-rights lyrics, it is difficult to feel convinced that the India Arie

lines cited here ('I know there's gotta be a better way, and we gotta find it – we gotta stand together, or we can fall apart', 184) are going to do the trick.

Christine Katz goes on in this section to consider 'Using gender theories to analyse nature resource management' with the German forestry sector functioning as her test case and in the concluding chapter Ali Young and Scott Taylor helpfully resituate the values informing ecofeminism within the counter-cultural context out of which they arose, utilising the motif of the web by way of challenging the Enlightenment concept of a 'chain of command from God to man to woman to nature' (214) and as an appropriate way of representing instead our mutual interconnectedness.

To return to the metaphor with which this collection opens, while the concept of a patchwork quilt does accommodate the many voices which make up the history of ecofeminism and while a new collection of essays offering a 'selection of "patches"' to represent 'contemporary thinking in ecofeminism' contributes in important ways to this history and narrative, it is worth perhaps drawing attention to the fact that elsewhere in this collection an alternative and rather more exciting metaphor is proposed. In Brydon-Miller and Hilsen's chapter they suggest that the 'confluence where rivers or streams join and where the living systems of each mingle and merge' (95) provides an 'apt metaphor' for ecofeminism. This alternative conceptualisation of ecofeminism as a 'confluence' in which various tributaries and streams come together in response to global environmental crisis does lead one to wonder whether ecofeminism – if it continues to conceptualise itself in terms of a patchwork of diverse voices and perspectives – will ever have the necessary sense of shared direction and collective power needed to bring about real change. Despite such long-term reservations the various 'patches' which are brought together here do make a valuable contribution to recent ecofeminist scholarship and offer many rewarding new perspectives on increasingly urgent environmental concerns.

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