International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism

Edited by Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok, and Serpil Oppermann
International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism

Exploring environmental literature from a feminist perspective, this volume presents a diversity of feminist ecocritical approaches to affirm the continuing contributions, relevance, and necessity of a feminist perspective in environmental literature, culture, and science. Feminist ecocriticism has a substantial history, with roots in second- and third-wave feminist literary criticism, women’s environmental writing and social change activisms, and eco-cultural critique, and yet both feminist and ecofeminist literary perspectives have been marginalized. The essays in this collection build on the belief that the repertoire of violence (conceptual and literal) toward nature and women comprising our daily lives must become central to our ecocritical discussions, and that basic literacy in theories about ethics are fundamental to these discussions. The book offers an international collection of scholarship that includes ecocritical theory, literary criticism, and ecocultural analyses, bringing a diversity of perspectives in terms of gender, sexuality, and race. Reconnecting with the histories of feminist and ecofeminist literary criticism, and utilizing new developments in postcolonial ecocriticism, animal studies, queer theory, feminist and gender studies, cross-cultural and international ecocriticism, this timely volume develops a continuing and international feminist ecocritical perspective on literature, language, and culture.

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This book is about culture-nature and human-nonhuman relations as they appear in the feminist ecocritical viewfinder, and was enriched by our lively dialogues with the contributors. We are grateful to our contributors whose essays variously manifest many aspects of this complex relationship, such as vegan sexualities, reproductive justice, toxic bodies, devalued humans (mostly women), species, and landscapes, and other related issues in feminist ecocriticism.

We extend our gratitude to College of Arts and Sciences Dean, Brad Caskey, at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, who generously provided funding for Greta Gaard’s travel and lodging at the Modern Language Association 2012 Convention, where the three co-editors were able to meet with various publishers and establish our volume’s contractual relationship with Routledge. The Getty Research Institute also provided reproducible copies of the images used in Gaard’s chapter. Serpil Oppermann’s work benefited from a Fulbright Research Grant for 2011–12, where she edited and wrote as a scholar-in-residence at the University of Nevada-Reno. We also thank Sungkyunkwan University for the Junior Fellowship it awarded Simon Estok, who offers special gratitude to Dr. Hong Dauk Seon, Dean of the Humanities, Provost Dr. Jun-Mo Cho, and President Jun Young Kim, each for their role in bestowing this honor. The funds and the generous course relief from this fellowship made Estok’s work and research for this book much more pleasant. We thank Tunç Özceber for granting us permission to use his photograph, “Feeding the Pigeons,” for our cover image. Special thanks go to Elizabeth Levine of Routledge for her invaluable assistance in the preparation of the manuscript.
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Foreword

Earthing History: International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism

Linda Hogan

This new book, *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*, is a significant collection of articles by a diverse group of writers, both established and new. These visionary writers offer new ways to imagine our world and to recreate models for those who have been trained in the Western system of cognition and perception. In this compendium, something important is in the process of change, and I celebrate these new ways of thought taking place across the globe.

This book especially appeals to me, a woman who grew as a wild medicine called a weed, originating from the indigenous earth of this continent, seeing the world through Indian eyes. I know what it means not to be liberated, for it was nothing we could have been. Weeds have their undesirable, unacknowledged place, and those of us who grew wild in manicured, domestic gardens know how it feels to be unworthy of respect or consideration. Humility and humiliation dwell within those of us at the bottom of a colonialist hierarchy that keeps us in our place. I was fortunate in having the wisdom to know there was an inviolable trust between the human and the rest of nature. I never thought my lack of privilege had anything to do with being female. I became more aware of race and class. Life below the poverty line meant that I was not one of “the privileged,” but one with few choices; it meant there would be no education, no opportunities for better living.

Like many women, I returned to school as an older student. Studying what is written in books was, and is, a difficult task for those of us who have had limited educational backgrounds. But I was fortunate. What I lacked was more than compensated for by my early years growing wild, at home with the creature brilliance of animals and plants, those who communicated great intelligences in their own ways. It was a powerful education and guided me later as a writer whose works focus primarily on environment and women. Not all the disenfranchised have had that gift.

As writers and scholars, it is important to reexamine and rewrite the grand narrative that has only belonged to the most privileged male writers in the past. That is the primary labor revealed here: redefining how that place of power so often still omits other lives. Exceptions have been one of the Chinese professors at a recent conference who spoke about the situation
of workers in China, their enslaved working conditions and high suicide rates, and yet the beautiful poetry women workers have written in all its yearning for the countryside from which the women came. The same can be said for a Korean writer who, with a book on her life as a laborer, managed to escape that world, and yet, I ask, did her book make a difference for the others? That would be my hope for the future in terms of class, writing, and change in cultural standards.

A foundation of women writers was at the forefront of creating these changes in the world. Earlier writers, thinkers, and environmentalists used their writing as part of their strategy for change—writers such as Rachel Carson, whose *Silent Spring* helped initiate the environmental movement, and Barbara McClintock, the Nobel Prize-winning scientist whose method was revealed as listening and knowing her subject intimately, made important changes in our world. Wangari Maathai, another Nobel winner, began the return of forests and trees in Africa, changing an entire environment for people, bringing water, animals, and a revitalized world with her Green Belt Movement of planting trees. These women set examples for what may be done with language and activism. Their work made a great difference.

A compassionate, sincere hope for change dwells within the words at work in this new ecocritical reader. These essays consider not only working conditions, class, and race, but also our human smallness in the world of complex networks with the other lives around us.

We have to believe in words. They are what we have to transform thinking and envision a greater narrative for ourselves. With an international perspective, this book opens our awareness of the governments and corporations that are behind the great imbalance enacted against people, animals, and the earth.

Still a weed, I am a writer who struggles daily to describe why we need the trees where I live and what is happening to our water. We need more than faith or hope to find the right words to change long-lived practices and out-lived ways of thinking. Along with a division between the language of the university and that of “the people” is often a knowledge none of us yet clearly have communicated. Even the oldest intelligences have been invaded by religion and our lack of education and knowledge in regard to the land and the other lives around us. Now this feminist perspective is a major new language of strength, and it is a most dedicated view that offers us a vibrancy and much needed life force.

We need new writing and thought because environmental literature has been dominated by white men, rarely offering a feminist, minority, or indigenous perspective. Annette Kolodny revealed how the narratives of white men spoke of the penetration and destruction of the land and of the first peoples, but no one has pointed out that when Thoreau and Muir and our other respected “fathers” of environmental writing were writing about the beauty of newly stolen lands, Native peoples were being removed from
those very lands that had been their own, and were not yet considered to be human beings in courts of law.

Diversity has only recently become a concern of scholars. The focus on white male writers, thinkers, and scientists influenced and defined how the world was seen, even though we have long histories and voices that might have been integrated into this perspective. The studies of Black, Latino, and indigenous writers have introduced rich new languages, revised histories, and exciting literatures to the university, all from people who keenly need to tell these stories and histories. The new studies emerge from those who have fought to find words with which to describe their critical eye on the world, and have been without the means to do so, not represented until recently in our classrooms.

When we consider the land as an extension of the body, and the body as a part of the earth, we have to consider deeply the feminist environmental thinkers who are making strong, caring contributions to environmental world thought. The articles in this book on feminist ecocriticism address poverty and environmental breakdown, gender, race, and the significance of each species on earth. They speak directly to the effects of oppression, and the notion of ecophobia itself.

As for the time we live in, we cannot guess at the hidden damage already done to this planet and its inhabitants, in all its layers and elemental poisonings and shatterings. Because of this, these critical circles of thought form a collection that is both diverse and challenging. This volume makes a place for the important creation of a destiny different from the one targeted by world events that travel in a straight line toward devastation. We need these words now. They move toward our survival here.

This book leans toward more than just new awareness. It brings a stronger, steadier foundation to the field and to the many weeds in the garden. New knowledge is offered here in new chapters of ecofeminist criticism, animal studies, multiple global cultures, and the reinventions of human being. This collection is a beginning of living possibilities.

Linda Hogan
Tishomingo, Oklahoma
Introduction

Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok, and Serpil Oppermann

As ecocriticism grows stronger through its intersections with the environmental sciences, environmental politics and philosophy, literary and cultural studies, postcolonial theory, globalization theories, and queer theory, reclaiming ecocriticism’s feminist lineage has become more and more urgent. In our attempt to “reassemble the ecocritical” (to borrow Bruno Latour’s book title, Reassembling the Social), we seek to bring ecocriticism into an even closer alliance with environmental feminist studies. Drawing upon the resources of ecofeminist theories and criticism, but going beyond their methodologies, we offer a new practice of feminist ecocriticism: here, ecocriticism speaks in multiple feminist voices that draw attention to such issues as sexual and environmental justice; women’s active roles in environmental, social, and interspecies justice issues; as well as questions around gendered bodies, postcolonial ecofeminist concerns, feminist re-working of affect theory, posthumanist analyses of power, gender, and ecology, and green queer theories. Our edited volume presents a diversity of feminist ecocritical approaches that affirm the continuing contributions, relevance, and necessity for a feminist perspective in environmental literature, culture, and science.

By attending to the interrelations among these diverse topics, the volume opens a critical pathway to the poetics and politics of feminist ecocriticism in order to reassess the material and discursive connections between human and nonhuman environments from feminist viewpoints. At the same time, acknowledging that feminist ecocritical visions necessitate more effective and sustainable discursive practices—ones that are non-phallogocentric and non-anthropocentric—enables us to develop and establish more responsible ethical positions that would take into account environmental/species/reproductive justice issues. Feminist ecocriticism advocates an ethics based on situated values, on the gender significance of embodiment both human and nonhuman, and considers the moral accountability of “erotic corporeal natures” (Alaimo 22). Karen Barad has forcefully argued that “ethics is not simply about the subsequent consequences of our ways of interacting with the world . . . Ethics is about mattering, about taking account of the entangled materialization of which we are a part, including new configurations,
new subjectivities, new possibilities . . .” (384). Affirming this ethical position, and paving the way for new possibilities, feminist ecocriticism advances what Stacy Alaimo calls “an ethical stance that insists that the activities and knowledge practices of the human are always part of, and accountable to, the wider world” (158). Feminist ecocriticism, then, fosters an ontological understanding of ethics, raising ethical awareness about bodily natures, and promoting an ecological-feminist discourse of hope and change. In a word, feminist ecocriticism opens up new ethical pathways to contest the sexist, racist, speciesist, ecophobic, classist, nationalist, and homophobic discourses of “nature,” which have served to perpetuate gendered dualities and bodily boundaries. De-essentializing “nature” as a problematic category, feminist ecocriticism shows how these approaches have been instrumental in the formation of master narratives of domination.

Anticipating the emergence of feminist ecocriticism, in her 2010 essay, “Sexual/Environmental Justice and Ecocriticism of the New Century,” Rachel Stein proposes that “in the new century, the field of ecocriticism will become more conscious of the need to think through our assumptions about sex and nature” (103). In this framework, feminist ecocriticism offers ecologically and culturally important perspectives for ecoliterary and ecocultural imagination, contesting heteromasculine assumptions that have informed ecocritical practices, and denaturalizing heteronormative thinking in environmental sciences and humanities. Although ecofeminism held similar promises, it proved to be “counterproductive to the larger enterprise of putting and keeping environmentalism on the feminist agenda and feminism on the environmental agenda” (Seager 949). Like those ecofeminists who have moved beyond ecofeminist labeling, feminist geographer Joni Seager suggests that if we

. . . mov[e] beyond the ecofeminist debates, we find that most feminists who pursue scholarship and activist work on the environment—whether from “ecofeminist” positions or not—share common interests, among them a commitment to illuminating the ways in which gender, class, and race mediate people’s lived experiences in local environments; an interest in examining the ways in which human-environment perceptions and values may be mediated through “gendered” lenses and shaped by gender roles and assumptions; an interest in examining the gendered nature of the constellation of political, economic, and ecological power in institutions that are instrumental players in the state of the environment; and an interest in exploring the interconnectedness of systems of oppression and domination. The best of the recent feminist environmental scholarship engages with and extends transnational, postcolonial, and poststructuralist deconstructions and challenges. (950)

As explained in Greta Gaard’s “Ecofeminism Revisited” (2011), feminists who formerly worked within the framework of ecofeminism have
continued their scholarship using other terms, such as “global feminist environmental justice” or “material feminisms” or “queer ecology” or simply “feminist environmentalism.” To reconnect with the histories of feminist and ecofeminist literary criticism, and to utilize new developments in postcolonial ecocriticism, animal studies, queer theory, feminist and gender studies, cross-cultural and international ecocriticism, our volume answers an important need: developing a continuing feminist ecocritical perspective on literature, language, and culture. By addressing the intimate relations between social, biological, gender, species, sexual, and environmental justice issues, feminist ecocriticism calls into question the very categories of gendered human and nonhuman bodies. In a vision that conjoins the textual and the biological, the material and the discursive, female and male, the categories of nature and culture also escape the dualism in which they are traditionally trapped.

Envisioning solutions to a global eco-justice crisis involves truly international, or rather transnational, teamwork as the contributors to this book have demonstrated. The feminist aspects of ecocriticism, the features that have been sometimes unintentionally neglected, are now demonstrably necessary, and their analyses close the hermeneutic gap created by their exclusion. Our aim is to acknowledge not only the feminist roots of ecocriticism but also the centrality of feminist views, methods, and interpretations in building ecocriticism’s future.

ORIGINS OF FEMINIST ECOCRITICISM

Feminist ecocriticism has a substantial history, with roots in women’s environmental writing and social change activisms, second-wave feminist literary criticism, and eco-cultural critique. Yet, as Greta Gaard observes in “New Directions for Ecofeminism” (2010), “in the two book-length introductions to ecocriticism to date, Lawrence Buell’s The Future of Environmental Criticism (2005) and Greg Garrard’s Ecocriticism (2004), the retelling of ecocritical roots and developments marginalizes both feminist and ecofeminist literary perspectives” (643). The fact that the label “ecofeminist” is, in Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands’s words “irretrievably tainted,”¹ does not entirely account for this marginalization. The initial idea of this volume was, therefore, conceived in our conversations over questions of why feminist and ecofeminist perspectives are not sufficiently addressed and explored in mainstream ecocritical discussions.² The essays in this collection re-situate ecocriticism in this feminist-ecocritical context, and the volume seeks to unearth ecocriticism’s feminist roots.

In North America, ecocriticism emerges equally from two roots—from literary studies of classical Euro-American male nature writers such as Audubon, Thoreau, Emerson, and Muir, and from feminist literary criticism. One of the most prominent feminists of the 1970s, Annette Kolodny was among the first literary critics to explore environmental literature from
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a feminist perspective. Her landmark studies, *The Lay of the Land* (1975) and *The Land Before Her* (1984), exposed the ways that the dominant perspective in environmental narratives had been that of the white, heterosexual male, who regularly feminized the land and used that feminization as a rationale for subordinating nature. Social constructions of “wilderness” as “empty” further authorized Euro-male pioneers, explorers, and colonists in clearcutting old-growth forests, damming rivers, hunting/trapping/shooting wild animals, and enslaving, infecting, relocating, murdering, and raping indigenous peoples. Kolodny’s critiques were among the earliest explorations of the field of environmental literary criticism (now known as “ecocriticism”), and her new feminist readings of previously unexamined terms such as “virgin forest” were soon followed by studies such as Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), Susan Griffin’s *Woman and Nature* (1978), Andréé Collard and Joyce Contrucci’s *Rape of the Wild* (1989), and Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature* (1980). These and other works established the importance of feminist perspectives on literary and cultural narratives about the environment.

When Cheryll Glotfelty (then Burgess) mailed her twenty-page bibliography of environmental literary criticism and letter of appeal to “about two hundred” scholars in 1989, attempting to create community, solicit additional sources, and recruit a co-editor “to publish an anthology of the best ‘ecocriticism’ to have appeared in the past few decades” (Balaev 611), she referenced Elaine Showalter’s model of feminist literary criticism’s emergence, and sought to replicate its success. In her letter of May 20, 1989 to Harold Fromm—who would become her future co-editor—Glotfelty noted that “current work in ecofeminism is only one example of what can be done” (Balaev 611). Shortly thereafter, Glotfelty met Alicia Nitecki, who launched the *American Nature Writing Newsletter* in Spring 1989, and made connections with Mike Branch, Scott Slovic, Glen Love, and David Robinson, all scholars interested in (predominantly Euro-American, male-authored) nature writing. When the field of ecocriticism was formally established at the Western Literature Association’s 1992 conference through the founding of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) and the launch of its scholarly journal, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* in Spring 1993, feminist perspectives were central: with Patrick D. Murphy as lead editor, and Cheryl Glotfelty as associate editor, the premier issue of *ISLE* carried three essays on women environmental writers and/or feminist perspectives on environmental literature, along with a special focus section on “Ecology, Feminism, and Thoreau.”

But with the first anthology to formalize this field’s foundation, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm’s *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), feminist perspectives were repositioned from foundational “ecotheory” to the more marginal status of “readings”: the volume is notable both for its privileging of a Deep Ecological perspective
on environmental history, literary theory, and culture-nature relations, and for its backgrounding of indigenous and feminist perspectives. Critical essays such as Ursula LeGuin’s “Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction,” Annette Kolodny’s “Unearthling History: An Introduction,” and Vera Norwood’s “Heroines of Nature: Four Women Respond to the American Landscape [Isabella Bird, Mary Austin, Rachel Carson, Annie Dillard]” along with Paula Gunn Allen’s “The Sacred Hoop” and Leslie Marmon Silko’s “Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination” form the five-essay stronghold of diversity amid a sea of twenty other non-feminist essays. Glotfelty and Fromm’s twenty-five-essay anthology provides a snapshot of ecocriticism at its initial institutionalization within the academy, offering a departure point and impetus for the later developments of environmental justice ecocriticism, postcolonial ecocriticism, African American ecocriticism, queer ecocriticism, and international ecocriticisms. Yet the backgrounding of feminist and ecofeminist perspectives preceding and developing concurrently with this canonized version of ecocriticism is harder to explain.

Particularly curious is the fact that in 1996—the same year as The Eco-criticism Reader’s publication—ISLE published a special themed issue on “Ecofeminist Literary Criticism” (Vol. 3, Issue 1), co-edited by Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, a volume that was later augmented and published as Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy (1998). The volume’s editors brought together ecofeminist political and activist perspectives (Gaard) with the more literary perspectives (Murphy) into a volume that acknowledged and built on the history of ecofeminist and feminist environmental activisms, using these as both impetus and context for more scholarly ecocritiques. Indeed, Murphy had already begun this articulation of specifically ecofeminist perspectives within ecocriticism with his earlier publication, Literature, Nature, Other: Ecofeminist Critiques (1995). The paradox for ecocriticism is that at the same time ecofeminist and feminist environmental ecocritiques were gaining visibility in the final decade of the twentieth century, they were simultaneously being backgrounded or separated from the mainstream of ecocritical theory and feminist theory alike.  

The blossoming of a specifically feminist ecocriticism in the late twentieth century both acknowledged Rachel Carson’s foundational interdisciplinary work as a scientist and a writer in launching the environmental movement of the 1970s, and sought to uncover other, earlier women environmental writers, scientists, artists, activists, and explorers who had preceded her. Examples of this endeavor include Vera Norwood and Janice Monk’s The Desert is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women’s Writing and Art (1987), Josephine Donovan’s New England Local Color Literature: A Woman’s Tradition (1988), Vera Norwood’s Made From This Earth: American Women and Nature (1993), Val Plumwood’s Feminism and the Mastery of Nature (1993), Greta Gaard’s edited collection Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature (1993), Louise H. Westling’s
The Green Breast of the New World: Landscape, Gender, and American Fiction (1996), Rachel Stein’s Shifting the Ground: American Women Writers’ Revisions of Nature, Gender, and Race (1997), Noël Sturgeon’s Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory, and Political Action (1997), Karen J. Warren’s edited volume Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature (1997), Barbara T. Gates’ Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World (1998), and Catriona Sandilands’s The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy (1999). At the same time that feminist ecocriticism was being articulated, anthologies such as Lorraine Anderson’s Sisters of the Earth: Women’s Prose and Poetry About Nature (1991; 2003), Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse’s American Women Regionalists, 1850–1910 (1992), Lorraine Anderson and Thomas S. Edwards’ At Home on This Earth: Two Centuries of U.S. Women’s Nature Writing (2002) were compiled to provide scholars and readers of environmental literature an easier way to access and analyze women’s writing about the environment. The publication of Glynis Carr’s edited volume, New Essays in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism (2000), expanded ecofeminist critiques through inquiries into new areas for ecocritical study, such as environmental justice literature, literary uses of language, ecocritical uses of the erotic, and Shakespearean plays.

By the turn of the century, ecocriticism had become more self-critical. At the 1999 ASLE biennial conference, feminist, ecofeminist, and environmental justice participants circulated a flyer critiquing the conference’s emphasis on predominantly Euro-American, male, and heterosexual nature writers, while women and indigenous writers were slotted into concurrent paper presentations or scheduled as the “entertainment” portions of the conference; out of this flyer, an impromptu meeting was called, and ASLE’s Diversity Caucus was formed to pursue and create spaces for a more racially, ethnically, and economically diverse membership and scholarship. This momentum was immediately visible in publications such as Stacy Alaimo’s Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space (2000), a book which identified the feminist resistance to environmental perspectives as a reasonable critique of essentialized mandates about femininity, childbearing, and caregiving, and brought feminist environmental theory into dialogue with postmodernism. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace’s Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism (2001) expressly transcended the Euro-American male canon of “nature writing” and the literature of wilderness to advance ecocritical approaches to multicultural literature, cultural studies, and urban environments. Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein edited The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy (2002), launching environmental justice ecocriticism as a definable field of study, providing both literary analyses and syllabi to serve as guidelines. Rachel Stein’s New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality, and Activism (2004) foregrounded a feminist/
genderqueer perspective within ecocriticism, emphasizing the necessary connections between ecocritical study, teaching, and activisms.


**FEMINIST ECOCRITICAL THEORY**

At diverse international ecocriticism conferences in Turkey, China, Taiwan, Korea, Canada, Germany, and the Canary Islands, ecocritics have noted the diverse streams of thought in ecocriticism, from the most specific to the most abstract. Beginning with close readings of individual or paired texts, ecocriticism moves to ecopedagogy, to eco-cultural approaches to
contermporary and historical phenomena as texts, to augmentations of ecocritical theories, and finally to reflexive interrogations of ecocriticism’s trajectories, methods, subjects, and interdisciplinary intersections. Aware of these multiple levels of ecocritical thinking, the editors sought to balance representation of scholars in terms of feminist ecocritical standpoint as well as academic rank, nationality, race, gender, and sexuality. Reluctant to impose a requisite set of topics, we listed a diversity of topics and chose the most coherently developed proposals, and from this open-ended approach, four clusters emerged: feminist ecocritical theory, postcolonial feminist and feminist environmental justice approaches, interrogations of sexualities and species in feminist eco-cultural criticism, and reflections on apocalypse of diverse kinds—overpopulation, overconsumption, technocracy, colonization. We also allowed for debate among the various contributions, and invited participants to post their essays on a shared website where we were able to read and respond to one another’s essays. Readers will notice some chapters using the term “ecofeminism” unproblematically, while others critique the term and use “feminist ecocriticism” instead. Some chapters emphasize new materialism’s emphasis on transcorporeality and the intra-acting subject, while other chapters strive to recuperate new understandings of essential being. Some chapters stress reproductive justice as crucial to a feminist ecological critique, while others acknowledge the sheer pressure of human overpopulation as requiring consideration within a feminist environmental justice ecocritique. These viewpoints are but a sampling of current debates among feminist ecocritics, and we do not attempt to foreclose them here; rather, we invite the readers to consider and continue these explorations.

We begin the volume with feminist ecocritical theory, exploring the shape of a contemporary feminist ecocriticism that inherits the legacies of feminist and ecofeminist literary criticisms, as well as the new material and postcolonial feminisms, and advances their analyses in new directions. In “Feminist Ecocriticism: A Posthumanist Direction in Ecocritical Trajectory,” Serpil Oppermann defines feminist ecocriticism as an anti-phallogocentric theory, more attentive to social matters and matter itself in its new conceptualization as being vibrant and alive. With its concentrated focus on women’s bodies, transcorporeality, and species justice, feminist ecocriticism has distinct posthumanist alliances, Oppermann suggests, as it offers a relational ontology, rethinking what it means to be human in a world still immersed in all forms of oppression, radical inequality, and environmental degradation. She argues that as such feminist ecocriticism offers a broader lens for understanding the more-than-human processes and their representations in literary and cultural narratives.

In “Toxic Epiphanies: Dioxin, Power, and Gendered Bodies in Laura Conti’s Narratives On Seveso,” Serenella Iovino explores the question of narrative agency and the political effects of material narratives by
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considering the case of Italy’s first big ecological disaster, which occurred in Seveso in 1976. A cloud of dioxins burst out from an industrial site, poisoning people and territory, killing livestock and domestic animals, causing miscarriages and fetal malformations, and producing strong political and ideological polemics over women, their bodies, and their right to self-determination. Analyzing the writings of Laura Conti (who witnessed and narrated the catastrophe), and focusing on dioxins as a posthuman narrative agency, Iovino explores how feminist ecocriticism may act as an epistemological tool for an ethics and politics of liberation. This study situates itself on the broader horizon of a feminist theory of material ecocriticism, one that investigates the representations of the body, of inter- and transcorporeality, multiple causality, complexity, and agentic entanglements of matter and discourse.

Timothy Morton’s “Treating Objects Like Women” argues that ecofeminism is not as well served by relationist and process-based ontologies as many think at present. Such ontologies cannot adequately account for novelty and change, and they reduce objects to other things—either undermining them into “deeper” things (particles, processes) or “overmining” them into affects bestowed on them by perception, appearance, and so on. Using the object-oriented ontology (OOO) developed by Graham Harman, Morton argues that seeing entities as a non-totalizable “not-all” set of unique beings is more congruent with ecofeminist praxis. Morton also invites the readers to re-think essentialism, or rather the concept of “essence,” in the light of OOO and other new forms of speculative realist philosophy. For him the real problem that feminist ecocriticism should consider is the metaphysics of presence, rather than essentialism.

The introductory section on feminist ecocritical theory is completed with Simon Estok’s “The Ecophobia Hypothesis: Re-membering the Feminist Body of Ecocriticism.” Estok builds on the claim that ecocritical histories ignoring feminist origins produce partial and incomplete scholarship, substantially compromised and diminished capacities for ecocriticism, and dilutions of the radical intent that characterized the formative moments of ecocriticism. Reading through “ecophobia” as a paradigm of environmental responses in ecocritical theory connects with the subjects and concerns of feminist theory and with the ecofeminist core and history of ecocriticism. The affective ethics of feminism, of feminist ecocriticism, and of queer theory offer visions of empowerment and resistance, and involve reading for those spoken and unspoken ontologies of violence that conscript and define our voices. Arguing against the notion that queer theory is intrinsically biophobic, Estok suggests that theory can change material practices when it is explicitly feminist, resolutely queer, and keenly aware of masculinity memes. It is this praxis-oriented connecting for which the ecophobia hypothesis is, as this chapter shows, most imminently suited.
In Part II, the volume offers feminist ecocritiques that illuminate the multiple intersections of feminist, postcolonial, and environmental justice ecocriticisms. Feminist and environmental justice analyses offer an important corrective to mainstream environmental experiences and aesthetics. Although these feminist and environmental justice interventions have served to raise awareness about alternative environmentalisms, there remains a dearth of work that explicitly offers intersectional and culturally specific tools for evaluating the cultural production by and about women and communities of color. These essays work to address that need.

Chiyo Crawford’s “Streams of Violence: Colonialism, Modernization, and Gender in María Cristina Mena’s ‘John of God, the Water-Carrier’” argues for an ecofeminism inspired by the antiracist tenets of environmental justice, with a particular focus on indigenous Mexican women in the works of María Cristina Mena. Stressing ecofeminism’s commitment to the daily lived reality of women of color, Crawford examines the intertwined narratives of colonization and environmental destruction that run in Mena’s stories, paying special attention to how indigenous women are relegated to unseen spaces in the texts. These women carry the greatest burden and offer the most resistance to environmental injustices. Crawford draws on work by materialist ecofeminist scholars such as Vandana Shiva and Ariel Salleh, and incorporates narratives and empirical data from the twentieth-century ecological crisis in Mexico City. Andrea Smith’s Conquest provides a theoretical framework for thinking about the intersection between colonial, ecological, and sexual violence.

The rhetoric of environmentalist discourse has long served as a viable means of protest and as a catalyst for social change in Latin America. Contemporary Latin American authors increasingly represent the emotional aspects of the environmental crisis, although some have long ago laid the groundwork. Regina Root’s chapter presents the work of Anacristina Rossi (Costa Rica, 1952-), an author well known for her environmental activism and novels that merge the poetics of biodiversity with the gendered politics of the mindscape. Specifically, Root analyzes Rossi’s autobiographical novel La loca de Gandoca [The Crazy Woman of Gandoca], which combines scientific and sometimes autobiographical detail to document a real ecological disaster that resulted when a government-endorsed venture promoted tourism and development in the Talamanca region of Costa Rica. The publication of this novel in 1992 drew such outrage that the government was forced to abandon its future plans for development of the Gandoca-Manzanillo refuge within this region. Today, only those who are respectful of the area’s biodiversity may visit the national treasure. In the end, Root reveals, Rossi’s portrayal of the search for the self and ecologically sustainable development, of crisis and healing, are part of a larger exploration of public memory in Costa Rica.
Kate Rigby’s “The Poetics of Decolonisation: Reading *Carpentaria* in a Feminist Ecocritical Frame” explores this award-winning novel by an acclaimed Australian indigenous author. Alexis Wright’s narrative strategy, use of language and imagined world are profoundly subversive of what Australian ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood has termed the “logic of colonization” with its highly gendered project of mastery. As well as returning to the landmark work of Plumwood, along with the decolonizing poetics of the earlier Australian author and essayist, Judith Wright, Rigby contextualizes her discussion of *Carpentaria* in relation to current discussions around the connectivities (and potential conflicts) between Indigenous culture, ecology and social justice. Drawing on recent work in the burgeoning field of the Australian ecological humanities, Rigby argues for the necessary, if tricky, bringing together of postcolonial, ecological, and feminist understandings in the encompassing horizon of an ethics and aesthetics of decolonization.

The section concludes with Laura White’s “Re-Imagining the Human: Ecofeminism, Affect, and Postcolonial Narration,” a chapter demonstrating how ecofeminist and affect scholarship can be brought into productive conversation with postcolonial narrative strategies. To provide an example, White investigates how Thea Astley’s novel *Drylands* challenges rationalist conceptions of the human and represents complicated, often contradictory experiences of postcolonial relations with the land. Narrating affective experiences provides postcolonial writers with a way to refuse the authority of the disembodied, imperial eye that oversees the realist novel. Rather than simply critiquing or reversing binaries, affective narration creates a foundation for a redefinition of the human; focusing on experiences that involve complex interaction between mind and body, or between human and environment, destroys the illusion of their separation and allows for considerations of human participation in dynamic relationships with non-human nature. Shifting narration across the lives of seven different townspeople, Astley’s novel preserves the particular experiences of raced, classed, aged, and gendered individuals, highlighting the operation of what ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood identifies as a “linked network of related dualisms” that works to justify the exploitation of nature, women, and subordinated men. Bringing ecofeminist and affect scholarship together enriches readings of Astley’s novel and the role that narrative plays in shaping and circulating understandings of the human.

**SPECIES, SEXUALITIES, ECO-ACTIVISMS**

The chapters collected in Part III explore intersections among discourses about species, sexualities, and eco-activisms. In “Women and Interspecies Care: Dog Mothers in Taiwan,” Chia-ju Chang and Iris Ralph examine the problem of abandoned dogs as a serious social and environmental concern
by focusing on the phenomenon of Taiwan’s ‘dog mothers’ or ‘gou mama.’ The victimization and marginalization of the women who look after Taiwan’s approximately one million stray dogs is one of the many untoward outcomes of Taiwan’s massively industrialized economy. Chang and Ralph argue that the hostility toward Taiwan’s dog mothers is driven by a trenchant, institutionalized, unspoken androcentrism. They identify and discuss alternative ecological-feminist attitudes and approaches to women and interspecies care in support of their main argument that species rights and women’s rights issues are inter-related, inseparable concerns.

Continuing the exploration of the concept of species in the context of sexualities, Lauren Hall’s “The Queer Vegetarian: Understanding Alimentary Activism” discusses recent ecofeminist theories through the lens of the burgeoning queer vegetarian movement. Analyzing texts from LGBTQ, vegetarian and queer vegetarian blogs, and online communities, Hall illustrates how the interconnectedness of oppressions highlighted by ecofeminist scholarship resonates in contemporary digital activism and discourse as well as in the day-to-day practices of animal rights and LGBTQ activists. While popular confluations of LGBTQ concerns and vegetarianism are nothing new, both organizations (such as Los Angeles’s Passion Fruits, New York’s VegOut, and the Queer Vegetarian Society of San Francisco) and individual activists employ the moniker “queer vegetarian” as a means of announcing solidarity among the marginalized, human and nonhuman, and highlighting the contingency of positions of power. This essay, like much recent work in ecofeminism, argues for the expansion of the ecocritical lens to sexuality and species as well as to gender, race, and class.

The final two chapters in this section address environmentally-couched population rhetoric and reproductive justice through a feminist ecocritical lens. Applying a sexual justice/reproductive justice framework to Margaret Atwood’s recent novels, Rachel Stein’s “Sex, Population, and Environmental Eugenics in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*” explores Atwood’s dystopian satire of environmental eugenics positions that blame sex, reproduction, and population for environmental crises and that regard the apocalyptic disappearance of humans as the only way to preserve nature. *Oryx and Crake* presents us with a scientist named Crake who takes eugenic environmentalism to its logical extreme, devising a two-pronged attack on sex by developing a plague that exterminates humans and then replacing them with transgenically modified hominids who only have sex when females are in estrus. *The Year of the Flood* takes place simultaneously to the first novel and features God’s Gardeners, a religious environmental-sustainability cult with similar views. Atwood exposes the horrifying repercussions of the beliefs that sex itself is an assault on nature and that nature can only survive and recover from human depredations in a world without us.

Nicole Seymour’s “Down with People: Queer Tendencies and Troubling Racial Politics in Antinatalist Discourse” both concurs with and counters
Stein’s approach, providing a queer feminist assessment of contemporary antinatalist discourse by examining primary texts such as Jim Crawford’s manifesto *Confessions of an Antinatalist* and the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement’s website, the History Channel series *Life after People* and Alan Weisman’s *The World Without Us*. Seymour reads this archive against the work of queer theorists such as Lee Edelman and Judith Halberstam, arguing that environmentally-oriented antinatalism builds on those theorists’ critique of “reproductive futurism,” presenting an alternative to mainstream environmentalist discourse and its sentimental exhortation that we save the planet for “our children.” Comparing these antinatalist texts to earlier feminist publications such as Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) and Irene Reti’s collection *Childless by Choice: A Feminist Anthology* (1992), Seymour argues that while the latter lack an explicit ecological consciousness, they account more fully (than do texts such as Crawford’s *Confessions* and the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement) for the material conditions that shape both childbearing and child rearing. Although antinatalism clearly fails to model a queer feminist environmentalism, it nonetheless showcases several intriguing considerations for such an agenda—including the insistence that we remap the ethical trajectory in ways that exceed the familial and the familiar.

**APOCALYPTIC VISIONS**

Our fourth and final section explores the apocalyptic visions of literary texts by Octavia Butler, Cormac McCarthy, dramatic narrative by Tony Kushner, and the apocalyptic cultural narrative implicit in fireworks—their production, performance, and eco-social impacts. Christa Grewe-Volpp’s “Keep Moving: Place and Gender in a Post-Apocalyptic Environment” opens the discussion by asking, “If places produce cultural meaning, and if geography matters to the construction of gender, then how does gender figure in specific relationships to place after an environmental meltdown?” Drawing on basic insights of ecofeminism and environmental justice as well as on globalization studies, Grewe-Volpp analyzes Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, both of which imagine a natural environment completely out of balance. Acknowledging the multiple ways that people of color and the poor are more severely affected by environmental catastrophes, Grewe-Volpp shows how the resulting attitude toward place is also simultaneously gendered: Butler chose a young woman as the main protagonist of her novel, while McCarthy chose a father and his son, each set of characters exemplifying care, hope, and survival differently through their gendered perspectives. Using these narratives as a lens into cultural practices, Grewe-Volpp argues that gender and race shape different ways of dealing with a post-apocalyptic world, one which has lost its conventional markers of meaning.
In “Queer Green Apocalypse,” Katie Hogan shows how Tony Kushner links environmental deterioration with AIDS, racism, sexism, and homophobia in his play, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*. *Angels* includes environmental references to global warming, the torn ozone layer, the ravages of Chernobyl, and a right-wing legal ruling on the environment—one based in the case of two women whose children were being blinded by smoke from a toothpaste factory. Using the all-encompassing genre of apocalypse—a form typically associated with heterosexual environmentalism and homophobic Christian fundamentalism—Kushner “queers” apocalypse, engages ecofeminism, and shows how the toxic closet harms everyone—including the earth. Evoking a queer ecofeminism, as Hogan argues, *Angels* reveals the hidden history of feminism and ecology as fundamental to post-Stonewall gay liberation theory. Not surprisingly, critics of the play miss this rich connection: James Miller has chastised the play for its ecofeminist sensibility, and Gregory W. Bredbeck has drawn on gay liberation theory to explain the play’s complex politics but ignored this theory’s feminist-gay focus on eradicating “straight gender.” With Hogan’s analysis, we are able to see Kushner’s unique feminist-inspired environmental queer literary commitments.

This section and the volume alike conclude with Greta Gaard’s “In(ter)dependence Day: A Feminist Ecocritical Perspective on 4th of July Fireworks, U.S.A.” Taking a wide-ranging perspective on the phenomenon of fireworks from Renaissance Europe through the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries in the U.S. and Canada, Gaard develops a feminist ecocritical reading of Independence Day Fireworks in the U.S., and their impact on wildlife, the finances they suction away from more dire needs for food/housing/health, and the cultural narrative they promote in celebrating warfare as a foundation for national identity. Her chapter uses historical and contemporary cultural artifacts, as well as literary and filmic narratives, to construct an ecocritical reading of fireworks as a performance of empire and nationalist identity, exposing the effects of this controlling narrative on diverse animal species, new immigrants and refugees, as well as on native-born and indigenous U.S. citizens and the third world children who produce these fireworks for U.S. consumption. Gaard rejects the dangerous exclusions of an independence that backgrounds species, gender, class, race, age, and sexuality in its imperialist construction of a nationalist and colonialist identity, arguing instead for a more ecologically just celebration of interdependence.

**WHY FEMINIST ECOCRITICISM NOW?**

During the three years that we have been working on this volume, the earth has been slowly warming; human and animal slavery have increased; wars have destroyed communities and families, leaving many refugees (primarily
women, children, and the elderly) vulnerable to starvation, sexual assault, illness, and death. Many earthquakes and floods have occurred in various parts of the world, leaving thousands of people (again often low-income families, women, children, and homeless) prone to contagious diseases; forests and rivers have been clearcut or dammed; the air and soil have been further poisoned by industrial chemicals, while oil spills, natural gas extraction via fracking, and nuclear power meltdowns have contaminated entire ecosystems. These same three years have also encompassed the rise of eco-justice social movements such as Arab Spring, Occupy Earth, the movement to block the Keystone Tar Sands pipeline from Alberta to the Gulf of Mexico, and the numerous climate justice actions at the United Nations Council of the Parties (“Conference of Polluters”) in Durban, South Africa. With the best of eco-criticism, this volume of feminist ecocriticism is offered as an intervention, however slight, into the ongoing cultural narrative authorizing the plunder of the planet—the people, animals, living beings and ecosystems. This book is a continuation and expansion of feminist environmental conversations that began long ago and have survived, despite being variously muffled, muted, marginalized, appropriated without acknowledgement or, conversely, wholly ignored. Our volume participates in larger sets of conversations and is, of course, incomplete: there is more to be written, spoken, acted on issues such as climate justice, species justice, reproductive justice, food justice, and the globally unbalanced and unsustainable interrelations of population / production / (over)consumption / waste.

We gain energy and the continued will to act—to write, teach, organize—from the knowledge that our work steps forward to join the efforts of ecologically-minded people around the world. As feminist ecocritics—scholars, writers, teachers—we are part of a larger movement for global justice. May our words, ideas and interventions contribute toward illuminating pathways for a more peaceful, just, and sustainable way of living on this one precious earth.

NOTES

1. Sandilands argues that ecofeminism is “tainted by precisely the kind of discourse that so much contemporary feminist politics has sought to de-nature: the idea . . . that women are ‘closer to nature’ than men and thus particularly attuned to environmental devastation” (“Eco/Feminism on the Edge” 306).

2. This volume took root in a confrontation at a conference in Taiwan, where Greta Gaard first presented the paper that would become her article, “New Directions for Ecofeminism.” Five months after the Taiwan conference, on a warm Mediterranean outdoor terrace in Antalya, during Turkey’s first international ecocriticism conference (co-organized by Serpil Oppermann), Simon Estok first proposed the idea of a co-edited volume on feminist ecocriticism. Immediately, Serpil was delighted and agreed with enthusiasm while Greta was dubious and agreed with reservations. And a month later, with Simon’s persistence, this volume was launched.
3. For a detailed exploration of this paradox as a backlash against feminism, see Greta Gaard, “Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism,” *Feminist Formations* 23.2 (Summer 2011): 26–53.

4. As this volume went to press, we were notified of other very recent publications—including Gail Grossman Freyne’s *Women, Nature and Care: Towards an Ecofeminist Model of Family Therapy* (2012). While this book seems a genuinely productive application of feminist ethics to matters of psychology in general and family therapy in particular, other current works also have the words “Feminist Ecocriticism” in their titles but seem to be doing different work than that with which our book is engaged.

**WORKS CITED**


Part I

Feminist Ecocritical Theory
1 Feminist Ecocriticism
A Posthumanist Direction in Ecocritical Trajectory

Serpil Oppermann

Transnationalism. Translocalism. Ecoglobalism. Ecocosmopoliticalism. Posthumanism. Postcolonial Ecologies. Queer Ecology. Trans-corporeality. New Materialisms. Material Feminisms. These are the new trends that noticeably characterize the current phase of ecocritical studies. They distinctively mark the field’s expansion into more politically and ethically inflected areas of concern, involving diverse but also disparate methodologies and perspectives which are often grouped together as aspects of a “third wave ecocriticism,” a rather controversial labeling coined by Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic in their introduction to the Summer 2009 special issue of MELUS. The wave metaphor that Adamson and Slovic have adopted from Lawrence Buell’s wave model of ecocritical developments directly echoes Ynestra King and Val Plumwood’s now problematic labeling of ecofeminism as a “third wave of the women’s movement,” and “third wave or stage of feminism” (Plumwood 39) respectively. In his 2010 essay, entitled “The Third Wave of Ecocriticism,” Slovic himself acknowledges that he and Adamson borrowed the wave metaphor “from the idea of first and second wave feminism” (5), but he also recognizes its shortcomings. “The wave metaphor,” he writes, “breaks down in the ecocritical context because the waves do not simply end when a new wave begins” (5). Greta Gaard, the first feminist ecocritic who has been overtly critical of the term, objects to its usage on historical grounds. Referring critically to Lawrence Buell’s use of the wave theory of ecocritical developments that inspired Adamson and Slovic to write their introduction, Gaard issues a significant warning about what is absent in this model and asks: “where are the analytical frameworks for gender, species, and sexuality? They do not appear” (“New Directions” 644). Gaard’s questioning enacts a yet unarticulated concern about ecocriticism’s polycentric focus and its rhizomatic trajectory that seems to be strategically all-inclusive but paradoxically exclusive of the implications of gender and sexuality for environmentalism. The current ecocritical exploration of such issues as global and local concepts of place, translocality and bioregionalism, human and animal subjectivities,
environmental justice, and posthumanist reinterpretations of such concepts as “agency,” “matter,” and “body,” as well as such issues as speciesism, ecophobia, biophilia, racism, and sexism within conceptions of the human and more-than-human world, have raised important questions on the expansion of the field and its multiple horizons. The exigencies of ecocriticism, to use Simon Estok’s phrase (“Reading” 77), also require engagement in the questions of gendered natures and sexuality, conceptual associations of nature with women, and queer sexualities among human and animal communities. Certainly incorporating feminist analyses of these issues into ecocritical scholarship more explicitly would enrich ecocriticism’s epistemic boundaries. That is why the correlations between ecocriticism and ecofeminism, or ecological feminism as it has been variously referred to, need to be re-articulated.

To understand the ways in which ecocriticism has grappled with environmental and social urgencies, and how it has elicited a wide array of standpoints and methods, one must first acknowledge ecological feminism as one of its primary roots. This recognition clarifies ecocriticism’s conceptual beginnings and its multivalent engagements across a broad range of disciplinary areas. It also sheds light on ecocriticism’s activist impulse as part of its ecofeminist heritage. Retaining the incisive force of ecofeminist thought, ecocritics on questions of ethics, green queer theory, postcolonial themes, and environmental justice models can effectively draw on the works of ecofeminist thinkers, who provide socially and culturally-informed models for critically engaging with ecological urgencies. That is why recuperating what has been—perhaps unwittingly—excluded from ecocriticism not only enriches its constituency but is also crucial in analyzing anthropocentric and androcentric discursive practices and socio-cultural formations in industrial societies. Such a feminist ecocritical approach exposes how human and more-than-human worlds have been discursively formulated to account for the ways in which anthropocentric (and also androcentric and phallogocentric) Western epistemologies have legitimated oppressive practices. It also stimulates adequate theoretical models to deconstruct the gendered dichotomies of nature/culture, body/mind, matter/discourse, and subject/object. Before I expand on the term feminist ecocriticism, it would be useful to briefly remember ecofeminism’s foundational assumptions that have paved the way for the emergence of ecocriticism and fostered its ethical, political, cultural, and literary projects.

ECOFEMINIST LINEAGE

In Ecofeminist Natures (1994), Noël Sturgeon defines ecofeminism as “a movement that makes connections between environmentalisms and feminisms” (23). Broadly speaking, as Catriona Sandilands also points out, “ecofeminism is a movement and a current analysis that attempts to link
feminist struggles with ecological struggles” (The Good Natured xvi). But a rather more comprehensive definition comes from Greta Gaard. In her 2001 article, “Women, Water, Energy: An Ecofeminist Approach,” Gaard writes: “More than a theory about feminism and environmentalism, or women and nature, as the name might imply, ecofeminism approaches the problems of environmental degradation and social injustice from the premise that how we treat nature and how we treat each other are inseparably linked” (158). Indeed as many prominent ecofeminists have variously theorized it (Shiva, 1988; King, 1989; Mies and Shiva, 1993; Warren, 1994, 2000; Sturgeon, 1997; Murphy, 1995; Adams, 1990, 1993; Merchant 1992; Gaard 1998), ecofeminism is founded on the assumption that ecological and feminist issues are inextricably intertwined.

In order to explain what makes ecological feminism both feminist and ecological, Karen Warren, whose work has been central to the development of ecofeminist thought, draws attention to the converging views of feminist and ecological thought. In her introduction to Ecological Feminism (1994), Warren notes that ecofeminism is feminist, because it is focused on developing practices, policies, and theories that help eliminate gender-bias; and it is ecological in its “commitment to the importance of valuing and preserving ecosystems” (2). Warren also maintains that ecological feminism effectively counters all social systems of domination, such as “racism, classism, ageism, ethnocentrism, imperialism, colonialism, as well as sexism” (2). As such, ecological feminism has been part of a larger social movement concerned with cultural and social issues while at the same time remaining a distinct environmental philosophy with compelling critiques of anthropocentrism, speciesism and dualist epistemologies. As Noël Sturgeon also contends, ecofeminism “articulates the theory that the ideologies that authorize injustice based on gender, race, and class are related to the ideologies that sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment” (Ecofeminist Natures 23). These definitions reveal that ecofeminism offers a viable intellectual-critical response to a wide range of ecological and social problems by illuminating the linkages among them. Ecofeminists have addressed these issues by drawing on many different feminist practices and theories. As Warren observes, ecofeminism “captures a variety of multicultural perspectives” (“Introduction” 1).

The genealogies of ecofeminism often refer to its classification in four different categories. The first category is liberal feminism which is “consistent with the objectives of reform environmentalism to alter human relations with nature from within existing structures of governance through the passage of new laws and regulations” (Merchant 184). Liberal feminism seeks gender equality in the existing economy and education. The second category is cultural ecofeminism, which celebrates femininity with the contention that women are more closely connected to nature than men. It is this strand of ecofeminism that has created a deep hostility to the field, especially in feminist circles. Noël Sturgeon, for example, has stated that many of her
colleagues turned away from ecofeminism “because of its purported essentialism” (Ecofeminist Natures 6). A chief proponent of feminist eco-socialist philosophy, Val Plumwood, explains it in detail: “The very idea of a feminine connection with nature seems to many to be regressive and insulting, summoning up images of women as earth mothers, as passive, reproductive animals . . . immersed in the body and in the unreflective experiencing of life” (20). Social ecofeminism is the third category with its emphasis on social ecology as developed by Murray Bookchin. “Social ecofeminism,” Carolyn Merchant maintains, “envisions a society of decentralized communities that would transcend the public-private dichotomy necessary to capitalist production and the bureaucratic state” (194). Many famous ecofeminists, such as Ynestra King and Val Plumwood, have adopted this position. The fourth category is socialist ecofeminism. It is “a critique of capitalist patriarchy that focuses on the dialectical relationships between production and reproduction, and between production and ecology” (Merchant 196). According to Merchant, both social and socialist ecofeminism are closely allied in grounding “their analyses in capitalist patriarchy” (184).

These categories, however, are not without problems. In her book The Good Natured Feminist (1999), Catriona Sandilands (also Mortimer-Sandilands) has criticized the social ecofeminist position in terms of its insistence on a unifying sort of “politics of identity.” According to Sandilands, despite its many variants, its proliferation and inclusion of different issues of race, colonialism, social structures, and despite its attempts to transcend dualisms of all sorts, it is this desire for an identity “to act as a focal point for all ecofeminist struggles” that created the basic problem for social ecofeminism, locking it “in a destructively essentialist mode of analysis and politics” (66). In her later work, Sandilands has sought for ways “out of the ultimately sterile essentialism trap” and has suggested that ecofeminists should “focus more intently on the specific relations and circumstances in which gender and nature are the connected subjects of eco-and feminist political thought and action” (“Ecofeminism on the Edge” 307). Since then, there have been various attempts to counter the essentialist accusations directed against the entire field. Stacy Alaimo, for instance, refutes the wholesale condemnation of ecofeminism as essentialist in her 2008 essay, “Ecofeminism without Nature?: “The charge of essentialism has been leveled most vociferously against any feminist movement or writing,” she concedes, “that connects ‘woman’ with ‘nature’, which makes a certain kind of sense given that, historically, a litany of misogynes have relied upon that very connection” (299). A similar critique is endorsed by Greta Gaard in her most recent article, “Ecofeminism’ Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism,” where she provides an illuminating overview of ecofeminism’s historical development from its beginnings to the present day. Gaard also offers a convincing ecofeminist corrective while questioning the legitimacy of the still lingering essentialist condemnations:
The charges against ecofeminists as essentialist, ethnocentric, anti-intellectual goddess-worshippers who mistakenly portray the Earth as female or issue totalizing and ahistorical mandates for worldwide veganism—these sweeping generalizations, often made without specific and supporting documentation, have been disproven again and again in the pages of academic and popular journals, at conferences and in conversations, yet the contamination lingers. Ecofeminism in the 1980s was indeed a broad umbrella for a variety of diversely inflected approaches, some of which were rooted in (cultural) feminisms, just as others grew out of liberal, social, Marxist, anarchist, and socialist feminisms (Gaard 1993b, 1998; Merchant 1995; Sturgeon 1997), and in the 1990s, ecofeminist theories continued to refine and ground their analyses, developing economic, material, international, and intersectional perspectives. Misrepresenting the part for the whole is a logical fallacy, a straw-woman argument that holds up an “outlier” position and uses it to discredit an entire body of thought. (32)

Indeed Gaard is correct in her statement that “The history of ecofeminism merits recuperation, both for the intellectual lineage it provides, and for the feminist force it gives to contemporary theory” (43). Since the time of its emergence in the 1970s to the last decade of the twentieth century—when it faced accusations for being essentialist—ecofeminism has made important contributions to ethics, philosophy, critical theory, literary criticism, ecocriticism, and social strands of ecological thought, and continues to do so under different labels.

Having found new conceptual frameworks, feminist scholars today offer auspicious accounts of how ecofeminist achievements have been compellingly translated into new models with new conceptual guides.

NEW THEORIES AND PRACTICES: FEMINIST ECOCRITICISM

Because of the unease about the usage of the name ecofeminism for its alleged essentialist transgressions that have foreclosed its path, many former ecofeminists have disavowed any debt or allegiance to ecofeminism and moved their gendered focus to new discursive areas of feminist research without abandoning their commitment to ending gender oppression and environmental degradation. Having thus distanced themselves from the ecofeminist label, they have proposed corporeal theories within which ecofeminism has been transformed into an ecocritical discipline with more theoretical rigor and stronger socio-political and ethical positioning, including material feminisms (Alaimo and Hekman 2008), queer ecologies (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010), trans-corporeality (Alaimo 2010) and feminist ecocriticism (Gaard 2010).
These studies emphasize the significance of embodied knowledge with regards to issues of sexuality, race, class, and gender, as well as environmental justice, health, risk, and activist issues. They also underline the crucial significance of seeing humans as ecological and embodied subjects reiterating the importance denied to the sphere of materiality and the body. The new theories emerging from this branch of feminism constitute a material turn in feminist thought, which, according to Alaimo and Hekman, “opens up many fundamental questions about ontology, epistemology, ethics, and politics” (7), as well as gender and identity. Foregrounding “the interaction of culture, history, discourse, technology, biology, and the ‘environment,’ without privileging any one of these elements,” material feminists “are redefining our understanding of the relationships among the natural, the human, and the nonhuman” (7). Matter is cast here, in Stacy Alaimo’s words, as “material-semiotic, inter-corporeal, performative, agential, and even literate” (“Trans-corporeal Feminisms” 244). The material turn in feminist theory is also called “new materialisms” to distinguish it from other various genres of materialist theory, such as neo-Marxist realist discourses dealing with production of social structures, post-structuralist materialist approaches that focus on materialization of bodies through discourses, phenomenological materialism investigating embodied consciousness and subjectivities, and socio-biological materialist approaches engaged in debates about biological determinants. The ontologies of new materialisms, or material feminisms, by contrast, envision matter as an “agentic force that interacts with and changes the other elements in the mix, including the human” (Alaimo and Hekman 7). Matter is theorized in terms of its “vitality” or “capacity of things” that “act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (Bennet, Vibrant Matter viii). This new reconceptualization of matter as a positive ontology, then, leads to more ecologically “sustainable modes of production and consumption” (Bennet, Vibrant Matter ix).

The renewed interest in corporeality and new conceptualizations of matter that came to the forefront of discussions with Karen Barad’s ground-breaking work Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning (2007), and Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman’s collection Material Feminisms (2008) have led to other important publications such as Stacy Alaimo’s Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self (2010), Susan Hekman’s The Material of Knowledge: Feminist Disclosures (2010), Jane Bennet’s Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things (2010), and Diane Coole and Samantha Frost’s edited collection New Materialisms (2010). These studies and a flow of essays published recently by such feminist scholars as Vicki Kirby, Nancy Tuana, Elizabeth Grosz, Elizabeth Wilson, and Myra J. Hird, just to name a few, have inaugurated the material turn in environmental philosophy and humanities with revolutionary perceptions of ontology, agency, epistemology, and ethics. Feminist ecocriticism will no doubt contribute to
the growing interest in the material turn in terms of its focus on what Myra J. Hird calls “embodied gender (corporeality)” (“Animal Trans” 232). The recent work of feminist science studies scholars such as Karen Barad proves particularly useful here.

Barad proposes an onto-epistemology to counter the dichotomy between discourse and reality and culture/nature dualism, which acknowledges the inseparability of materiality of natural objects and their discursive formulations. Barad’s concept of “intra-action” of matter and discourse explains how material and discursive practices produce an agential reality in which “matter is a dynamic expression/articulation of the world in its intra-active becoming” (392). Barad contends that all bodies “come to matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity—its performativity” (392). She gives a “posthumanist account of performativity that challenges the positioning of materiality as either a given or as a mere effect of human agency” (“Posthumanist” 145). The significance of Barad’s posthumanist approach in relation to feminist ecocriticism is that it provides a solid foundation for feminist discussions of the body that transcends the dualism of discourse and matter, as well as biological sex and gender as categories of cultural analysis. The gendered bodies are no longer disembodied discursive subjects, but emerge through their differential becoming as embodied subjects intra-acting with myriads of visible and invisible agents of the material world (bacteria, viruses, toxic chemicals, food, water, energy).

In what follows I will argue that new feminist movements within the environmental humanities can best be understood within the emerging discipline of a posthumanist studies that has brought about a profound epistemic shift with new configurations of intertwined physical and social, and material and discursive understandings of the relations between the human and the more-than-human-world. The posthuman approach recasts ethical, ontological, and epistemological concerns over the interconnections between both realms, as well the interchanges between them, to make a central place for a new relational ontology. It reviews what it means to be human in a world still immersed in all forms of oppression, radical inequality, binary thinking, and environmental degradation. When such polarizing forms are “mapped onto powerful basic systems like gender,” as Val Plumwood reminds us, “to become interwined with identity and the fabric of life, they become almost impossible to see, separate and question” (17–18). But the new posthumanist understanding that reveals the vitality and agency of matter offers a way out by demonstrating how to adopt the cultural mind to its material and ecological body, which points to the emergence of a new posthuman form of humanism. Posthumanism, therefore, entails what Serenella Iovino has called a project of “non-anthropocentric humanism” with a “broader system of interconnections which include the non-human world” (32). Iovino argues that “embedding humanism in an ecological paradigm means in fact giving humans not simply the feeling of their intellectual independence from dogmas and authorities, but most of...
all awareness of their ecological inter-dependence in a context subsistent on the difference of its elements” (32–33). This approach expresses a posthuman, or in Iovino’s words, “a post-ideological” worldview (38), rather than prompting apocalyptic accounts of the end of humanity as some popular versions of posthumanism do. Posthumanism in this sense not only affirms a break from anthropocentric thought, questioning the philosophical foundations of humanism, but also acknowledges, as Cary Wolfe succinctly points out, “the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world” (xv). According to Wolfe, opposing the ideas of human autonomy and disembodied subjectivity, posthumanism marks a historical moment in which the human is imbricated in medical, technological, and economic networks. He contends, “the nature of thought must change if it is to be posthumanist” (xvi). In other words, posthumanism involves a fundamental modification of the philosophical and ethical framework of our conceptualizations of the categories of human, nature, ecology, evolution, culture, society, and biology. Bart Simon, for example, maintains that the posthumanist project seeks to find a more potent analytics by weaving understandings of biotechnological practice, public discourse about biotechnology and informatics, and threads of critical and anti-posthumanist cultural theory. At the core of this critique is the problematic of the humanist subject with its traditional repercussions on questions of agency, identity, power, and resistance. (3)

As such, posthumanism is reconfiguring the disciplinary paradigms today. In particular, Cary Wolfe’s writings on posthumanism are immediately relevant to and coalesce with the feminist work of posthumanist theorizing in recontextualizing the human and non-human natures. Curiously, however, as Greta Gaard foregrounds it with perfect clarity in her 2010 essay, “New Directions for Ecofeminism: Toward a More Feminist Ecocriticism,” these new approaches in environmental humanities have been welcomed when presented “via non-feminist sources” but are often ignored when the same issues are raised by feminist scholarship (645). Gaard is right in seeing the situation as a “conceptual failure” in ecocritical scholarship. In support of her argument, she offers the example of animal studies groundwork of vegan feminists and ecofeminists, which, indeed as she perceptively observes, is minimally mentioned in the present posthumanist discussions of human/nonhuman relationships. In this regard, the work of many feminist ecocritics and of animal studies scholars within the burgeoning field of posthumanism is interchangeable with converging views on what Gaard calls “the gender/species/ecology connections” (“New Directions” 645). Simon Estok argues likewise that backgrounderd ecofeminism in ecocritical studies is not simply a purported
problem of ecocriticism; it is a defining one. Estok’s contemplation of eco-
criticism’s largely ignored alliance with ecofeminist perspectives on the
question of species and gender oppression is thus important to quote: “If
ecocriticism is committed to making connections, then it is committed to
recognizing that these issues (ecophobia, racism, misogyny, homophobia,
speciesism) are thoroughly interwoven with each other and must eventu-
ally be looked at together” (208). Estok’s point is that ecocriticism cannot
qualify as ecocriticism if it is sexist, racist, or homophobic. He advocates
a theorizing that should be “in confluence with other activist theories” (213).
For him a valid theory of ecocriticism should have its borders, by
which he means not allowing in “racists, misogynists, and homophobes”
(215). To elucidate his point further, Estok calls attention to Carol J.
Adams’s cogent argument “on the gendering of animals and the animal-
izing of gender,” on sexual violence, and on “the racializing and classing
of meat,” but above all to the fact that her work has been ignored “by
the ecocritical club” (216). He also criticizes the silence over vegetarian
eccritical work produced by feminist scholars.

All these critiques necessitate a rethinking of ecocriticism in the light of
feminist perspectives. If today we have such distinctive branches of ecocri-
icism as postcolonial ecocriticism and environmental justice ecocriticism,
it is time now to start talking about a new feminist ecocriticism as well,
which would connect literature with the insights of the nascent posthu-
manist philosophies. What feminist ecocriticism shares with these branches
of ecocriticism is a perspective that constantly reminds us of our “embe-
dedness within an increasingly endangered earth” and urges us to change
our “thinking about the relationship of culture and society to the natu-
ral world” (Rigby 152). What it brings as a new dimension is the posthu-
manist accounts of these relations, in particular the new material feminist
perspectives.

Material feminist epistemologies especially encourage studies of socio-
cultural, literary, and ethical dimensions of the new material paradigm,
offering a compelling model which casts matter (all physical substances
including toxic waste, dirt, garbage, bacteria, viruses, and machines) and
bodies (human and nonhuman) not as mere objects of knowledge, but as
agents with vitality of their own, and as interrelated forces mostly beyond
human control, linking human corporeality with nonhuman life processes.
In many respects, feminist ecocriticism fits well in this distinct new para-
digm with a concentrated focus on women’s bodies, trans-corporeality, and
species justice.

In fact, a vibrant feminist ecocriticism is being underwritten by over-
lapping revolutionary theoretical approaches in the field of environmental
humanities with its new posthumanist direction. The ontological theories
about matter in particular constitute a significant breakthrough, not only in
science studies, animal studies, and related disciplines, but also in ecocri-
tical thought. Their proponents do not identify themselves as ecofeminists,
or even as ecocritics, but advance the ideas inherited from their ecofeminist-ecocritical lineage. To answer the question Greta Gaard asks in the concluding paragraph of her article on “Ecofeminism Revisited”—“What shall we name this approach, so that future generations of feminists can find its history, its conceptual tools and activist strategies, its critique of economic imperialism, cultural and ecological colonialism, gender and species oppression?” (44)—one needs simply to look closely at the recent scholarship and say, we name it feminist ecocriticism with posthumanist alliances. It is certainly the case that the contemporary posthumanist logic of human-nonhuman relations is also the logic of feminist ecocritical studies. The primary functions of such logic are heterogeneity, within which difference and otherness (in the sense of race, class, sex, gender, species), are indexed on a non-hierarchical ideology and appear as non-disjunctive categories. Rosi Braidotti reminds us that the “changing roles of the former ‘others’ of modernity, namely women, natives and natural or earth others, have turned them into powerful sites of social and discursive transformation” (170). In posthumanist contexts, the concept of otherness, then, is no longer “defined on a hierarchical scale of pejorative differences” (Braidotti 170). Otherness instead marks “the sexualized bodies of women; the racialized bodies of ethnic or native others and the naturalised bodies of animals and earth others” (170). In Braidotti’s perspective, posthumanism is “a fast-growing new intersectional feminist alliance. It gathers the remains of post-structuralist anti-humanism and joins them with feminist re-appraisals of contemporary genetics and molecular biology in a non-deterministic frame” (178). This is the mode of posthumanism that has important resonances in feminist ecocritical thought, rather than the visions of dystopia and cybernetic notions generated by popular culture through such novels as Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and Don Siegel’s *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Although the posthuman fostering of the fundamental similarity between machines and humans evokes terror by calling forth fears of dehumanization and the conquest of humans by machines through the Western film industry,7 the notion of the posthuman has more significant possibilities for radical change in the sense that women’s bodies and animal subjectivities are no longer viewed as the ultimate other that can be colonized, oppressed, and subjugated.

In posthuman terms, agency, subjectivity, and intentionality are not the sole attributes of human beings. Hence, the most obvious manifestations of posthumanism are in movements against the exploitation of women, animals, and the natural environment. By blurring the boundaries between humanity and technological creations, or biological human body and technologically mediated human bodies, posthuman concepts of embodiment and corporeality offer a radical critique of the anthropocentric premises of traditional humanism. The resulting epistemological break with liberal humanism characterized by the human subject’s (mostly heterosexual
Western male) domination and control of the nonhuman others, opens up new critical pathways to effectively deconstruct “the racist, sexist and homophobic discourse of animality or an animalistic ‘nature’” (Rossini, “To the Dogs”) which served as a rhetorical strategy to associate non-white, female, and queer human beings with animals/nature. Manuela Rossini makes a strong point about this potential by calling attention to the still prevalent speciesist logic of dominance of humans over nonhuman animals: “If we fight racism and (hetero)sexism because we declare discrimination on the basis of specific and identifiable characteristics—such as ‘black,’ ‘woman’ or ‘lesbian’ to be wrong and unjust, then we should also vehemently oppose the exploitation, imprisoning, killings and eating of nonhuman animals on the basis of their species identity” (“To the Dogs”).

The renewed feminist interest in animal studies and biology in recent years has certainly informed posthumanist arguments on nonhuman species and led to the reconceptualization of all material agencies, including molecules and atoms alongside all living organisms. Feminist critical analyses, particularly of human-animal relationships, are made complicit with discussions of sex, gender, race, and sexuality. Karen Barad has called this “posthumanist performativity” which incorporates, as she puts it, “material and discursive, social and scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural factors” (“Posthumanist” 126). Donna Haraway’s Simians, Cyborgs and Women (1991) is one of the early path-breaking studies on such human-nonhuman naturecultures. Other early studies such as Greta Gaard’s edited collection Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature (1992), Lynda Birke’s Feminism, Animals, and Science: The Naming of the Shrew (1994), Carol J. Adams’s Neither Man nor Beast (1995), Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams’s edited books, Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations (1995) and Beyond Animal Rights: A Feminist Caring Ethic for the Treatment of Animals (1996), and Paola Cavalieri’s The Animal Question (2001) have been foundational for a rethinking of the divide between human and nonhuman species in both ethical and epistemological terms. Marti Kheel’s work in nature ethics, for instance, provides a significant critique of the holistic views of the environment, especially in regard to animals. Her recent book Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective (2008) enables us to perceive the undercurrent of patriarchal ideologies in environmental ethics and proposes a new, corporeally oriented, ethics of care.

It is not surprising, then, that the feminist theorists have taken the lead in effectively subverting the faulty logic of binary systems that have, for centuries, been pitting humans against animals, culture against nature, male against female, and mind against matter. Significantly, feminist theorists in science studies, transgender theory, and animal studies have radically transformed our understanding of the ontology of matter and bodies both human and nonhuman. The feminist analyses on the gendered construction of physical processes, corporeality, and new materialisms in the unfolding
posthumanist scholarship provide fertile ground for feminist ecocriticism for carrying their insights to the domain of literary studies in compelling ways. As Stacy Alaimo points out,

These emerging models of materiality are crucial for developing an ecocriticism that does not replicate nature/culture dualisms or reinscribe nature as a blank slate for the imaginings of culture, but instead, seeks to account for the ways in which nature and environment, as material forces, act, interact, and profoundly affect cultural systems, texts, and artifacts. Indeed, it becomes impossible to separate “nature” and “culture” when we focus on the intra-actions of discursive and material forces. Even as most science studies scholarship is not, itself environmentalist, it may provide theoretical and methodological models that foster the ethical and political project of ecocriticism—to do intellectual work that matters not only to humans, but to the more-than-human world. (“Material Engagements” 71)

This is exactly what feminist ecocriticism, as a vitally important branch of ecocriticism, will aim to do in its reappraisal of literary texts from this perspective. The feminist analyses of material/physical processes (particularly those of nonhuman animals) will significantly contribute to and offer a broader lens for understanding the nonhuman processes and their representations in literary and cultural narratives which is the main working domain of ecocriticism. As the discursive area where all these approaches are evidenced, ecocriticism establishes a convergence between the posthumanist thought and its reflections in literary-cultural narratives. The feminist component of ecocriticism makes it more emancipatory in relation to its ecology of literary knowledge.

To make my point clear, I do not mean to suggest that the social and cultural meanings of nonhuman processes can be analyzed only and exclusively in terms of feminist approaches, but to state that feminist approaches are indispensable to the visions and practices of posthuman thinking in profound ways. I also do not mean that feminist views reside within a binary that counterposes the work advanced by male and female scholars as oppositional. If feminism is brought back into the picture, ecocriticism does not necessarily become exclusively women-centered; instead a new category is produced that cannot be easily reduced to its components. In other words, what ensues is a generative convergence of both feminist and ecocritical discursive practices, one that can be classified as feminist ecocriticism. I define feminist ecocriticism as an ecocritical theory and practice that productively incorporates the material turn in corporeal feminism, animal studies, transgender theory, science studies, women’s global eco-activism for sustainable life, environmental justice, care ethics, sexual and interspecies justice, environmental health, and queer ecologies. Feminist ecocriticism considers matter and corporeality, discourse and language to be intricately interlaced. In other words, feminist
ecocriticism seeks to achieve an integrative approach working the notion of discourse and materiality through one another. Nature with biological bodies is the material site where we become aware of our embodiment in the earth processes; but without discursive formulations of this embodiment, nature remains mute because matter can only be invested with intelligible meanings at the site of discourse, hence the intra-activity between discourse and matter, nature and culture, and human and nonhuman natures. This conceptual framing of nature and culture offers a contestable but auspicious account of the earth, emphasizing humanity and nonhumanity as participants in its vitality.

Feminist ecocriticism is also a form of literary criticism that examines these issues in literary texts. Being more attentive to social matters and matter itself in its new conceptualization as being vibrant and alive, feminist ecocriticism produces more inclusive ecocritical interpretations of literary and cultural narratives. Feminist ecocriticism stands on a dyadic podium. It is *feminist*, because it is concerned with the issues of embodied gendering in discursive and material practices, agencies, sexual and interspecies justice, and queer animal morphology in socio-material and ecological contexts that entail feminist arguments alongside mainstream posthumanist ones. Thus, its emphasis on corporeality is inclusive of the categories of race, gender, and class in human eco-cultural environments, and the experience of gender and queer, transgenering in more-than-human environments. This particular feminist focus on queer elements in nonhuman nature, for example, not only provides “better accounts of the sexual diversity of natural creatures” as Stacy Alaimo deftly notes (“Eluding Capture” 54), but also provokes a rethinking of “our most basic sense of what nature and culture mean” (55). Feminist ecocriticism is *ecocritical* in its commitment to the ecological analyses and interpretations of literary texts and cultural narratives from all these perspectives. In other words, ecocritical interpretive methods are central to the project of feminist ecocriticism. It is necessary to emphasize this point because feminist ecocriticism is, after all, a form of literary-cultural criticism and theory. Feminist ecocriticism’s stylistic innovations in this regard lead to potentially radical approaches to form, genre, and method in literary studies. It won’t be rhetorically inaccurate, then, to call the ensuing textual practice feminist ecocriticism, because it has two converging registers. It functions as an anti-dualist, anti-phallogocentric theory, liberating literary studies from anthropocentric and phallogocentric colonization by history. It produces a set of disciplinary practices, which distinguishes ecocriticism from being unwittingly immersed in gender-immune praxis, and fosters an ecology of literary knowledge that is not stigmatized by gendered natures. In this sense, feminist ecocriticism has a vital contribution to make to the wider project of ecocritical studies. This suggests an emancipatory ecocritical theory that proceeds in a dialectical relation to practice. As such, feminist ecocriticism fosters ecocriticism’s distinct constitutive project.
Exploring how the ecocritical readings of specific literary texts where the reality of women's bodies—as well as the lived experience of all gendered bodies in the natural world—are inscribed deepens our understanding of how literature intersects with life itself. This is one of the strengths of feminist ecocriticism: addressing the new posthumanist material theory of onto-epistemology in literary studies. The body as a cultured gendered subject intra-actioning with the natural bodies as material agents suggests the possibility of a politics and poetics of nature through a broader perception of reality, extending theoretical viewpoints. Furthermore, exploring “the challenging of the human/machine (nature/culture) boundary” in contemporary literary imagination, “both theoretically and practically with advances in biotechnology,” or “discourses defining the ‘posthuman’ condition” (29) as Laura Bartlett and Thomas B. Byers call it, will be significant in the critical challenge of patriarchal ideologies.

The new critically posthuman fictional texts, such as Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* (2007), offer revealing examples to such challenges. In its material-feminist orientation, *The Stone Gods* constitutes a resolutely materialist engagement with the posthuman questioning of the human-machine and human-nonhuman relations, exploring their predominantly apocalyptic treatments by tracking the ways in which life gets biologically and non-biologically rendered significant. By presenting the body as materially constructed and embedded in biophysical and technological processes, this novel successfully defamiliarizes the concept of otherness. It enacts the malleability of bodily natures in a narrative that urges us to rethink biology, nature, and body. As opposed to other fictional renderings of artificial intelligence as a disembodied subject, Winterson writes the posthuman subject as an “embodied” consciousness in the figure of a gendered robot, Spike, whom she calls “robo-sapiens.” Spike blurs the boundary line between organic and technical, and challenges the strictly dualist male/female definition. The post-interspecies romance between the novel's narrator Billie and Spike opens the politically and ethically problematic question of interspecies justice issues to discussions of posthumanity, technology, environments, race, gender, species, affect, and alterity. Winterson questions the social constructions of gendered bodies, as well as biological sex and materiality of the body in its physiological and technological forms through Spike as an evolving robo-sapiens. She presents a clear feminist critique of bodily natures that also raises questions on the processes of trans-corporeality. Showing that a conjugated inquiry into the historical entanglements of human life and the natural world is pivotal to an analysis of posthuman perceptions of a future life, Winterson elaborates robo-sapiens as a literary-cultural metaphor for engaging this task. Other immediate examples that come to mind, such as Sarah Moss’s *Cold Earth* (2009), Yann Martel’s *Beatrice and Virgil* (2010), and Ian McEwan’s *Solar* (2010) also demonstrate what Jane Bennet calls, “our embeddedness in a natural-cultural-technological
assemblage” (“The Force” 361). They invite embodied feminist ecocritical readings as they successfully intersect with the new theoretical views about gender, materiality, sexuality, and subjecthood.

In light of such fictional examples, one immediate question relevant to the praxis of feminist ecocriticism is not just how the theoretical approaches can be pertinently explored in specific literary texts, but also how literary texts intersect in creative ways with the theoretical approaches to restate and reinstate the posthumanist new materialisms. Feminist ecocriticism, in this sense, recognizes what Nancy Tuana has called “the viscous porosity” that involves experiencing “the interaction of nature-culture, gene-environment in all phenomena, not just the phenomena of sex or of race” (209). As Tuana explains, “Nature/culture is a problematic ontology—not just for the human world, but for what is, as well as what might yet be” (209). It is precisely the last—“what might yet be”—that illuminates how the distinction of natural/artificial is imbricated in cultural constructions and how feminist ecocritical accounts transcend this problematic ontology by evoking queer sexualities, interspecies intra-actions, and trans-corpo-real entanglements of human and nonhuman agents. After all, as Louise Economides lucidly argues, the unprecedented “ecological decline in the earth’s physical biosphere” that we witness daily does necessitate “more sustainable constructions of ‘nature’ and materiality that do not simply construe the real as a domain that is wholly determined by human beings but that in turn has no appreciable effect on the evolution of culture” (87). Feminist ecocriticism, in this regard, occupies a central position in making more sustainable constructions.

NOTES

1. I borrowed the idea of a list from Myra Hird’s insightful essay “Feminist Engagements with Matter” (2009).
2. See “The Rhizomatic Trajectory of Ecocriticism” (2010), where I argue that the rhizome model “provides the best explanation for the current multiple trajectory of ecocriticism” (18).
3. After the Ecofeminist Perspectives Conference at the University of Montana in 1998, Plumwood rejected the label “ecofeminist,” and preferred the category “critical feminist eco-socialism” to describe her framework. See Noël Sturgeon’s “Considering Animals” (154).
4. According to Iovino, “such a worldview discloses a constructive and inventive form of ecology of mind, a project of natural history (namely, a narrative) which can be defined in human terms only in view of the fact that the human is itself a part of nature” (46).
5. The posthuman, as Katherine Hayles contends, must not be understood “as an apocalyptic break with the past” (134). Rather, posthumanism is a theoretical position in which the boundaries between the human and nonhuman natures are continually crossed, and in which the discursive constructions of nature and reality are seen as interrelated with their materiality. As a critical approach, posthumanism is also seen as an interdisciplinary perspective.
informed by postmodernism, deconstruction, feminist and postcolonial studies, and science and technology studies. (See Jill Didur, Teresa Heffernan, Neil Badmington, and Bart Simon, in *Cultural Critique* 53 [Winter 2003]).

6. Examples include Donna Haraway’s cyborg metaphor and companion species, Jill Didur’s enfolding of the binary distinction of nature and technology, Teresa Heffernan’s questioning of the boundary lines between the human and the nonhuman, Stacy Alaimo’s trans-corporeal account of the human and nonhuman bodies, Karen Barad’s intra-action of material and discursive forces, and Jane Bennet’s positive ontology of vibrant matter. These studies constitute what is currently termed as “critical posthumanism” as opposed to the versions referred to as “cybernetic” or “popular” posthumanism.


**WORKS CITED**


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