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Book Review: Feminist Ecocriticism: Environment, Women, Literature

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Feminist Ecocriticism: Environment, Women, Literature. 2012.
Edited by Douglas A. Vakoch. New York: Lexington books. 158 pages; Hardcover (\$46.40).
ISBN 978-0-7391-7682-5

Reviewed by Amukelani T Ngobeni¹

The book *Feminist Ecocriticism* is an edited volume by Douglas Vakoch about the different theories on feminism and environmentalism. These theories are tackled in every chapter identifying the weak and strong points as well as how these theories came into existence. The different contributors to the volume discuss their thoughts about feminism and environmentalism. The first chapter by Eric C. Otto draws from various books about ecofeminist theories of liberation. The chapter advocates for cultural ecofeminism, a term that describes women and societies that are influenced by the views of ecofeminism, those who fight against male domination and through their own personal as well as local experiences try to overcome oppression. Otto views ecofeminism as a transformational environmentalist movement, as well as a diverse body of critical thought. He (Otto) also discusses ecofeminism as an ecological spirituality while also criticising the role of anthropocentrism and also advocating for the freeing of politics that reject deep ecological principles. The cultural ecofeminism theory was widely criticized by the environmentalist of the late 1970s through the 1980s; who argued valuing the woman-nature connection was not an effective emancipatory strategy and that it failed to break the social, political and economic domination of woman.

In the second chapter Theda Wrede re-establishes the western, myth in order to test the construction views about the land, women as well as cultural minorities. Wrede views man as not as the only superior being on the planet and having the final say in whatever issue that has to do with culture as well as the environment. She (Wrede) emphasises that females and animals also have equal say and rights. Men's domination can change if they are willing to change their attitudes.

Richard M Magee, in chapter three, concentrates on the idea of reintegrating humans and nature. Magee's view on ecofeminism is that humans cannot survive without the environment. Humans and animals depend on each other for survival. Magee considers human emotions as a catalyst to human-beings being able to take care of the environment.

In chapter four, Marnie M Sullivan advocates for the environment and its inhabitants. According to Sullivan human beings must respect both plants and animals as they depend on them for survival. Sullivan urges the readers to respect those who share the world, both animals and human-beings. This chapter is similar to the third one in that all of the authors use a psychological approach as well as provocative literature to state their views. Sullivan also discusses about borders (border lives and border crossings). The author (Sullivan) perceives borders as linked to human social systems, whereas the border zone is where the sea meets land and where life emerged from the sea in the course of its leisurely evolution. She (Sullivan) seeks to identify the similarities between humans and their natural environment and in this chapter specifically the sea. Sullivan identifies various layers in the sea and relates them to how humans-

¹ Human Science Research Council

social systems. To explain her point, Sullivan draws on the example of the young eels which she claims lived in one layer of a whole series of horizontal communities that lay one below the other with the weed floating on the surface. These layers, in Sullivan's view, demonstrate a vision of interrelated communities.

The fifth chapter by Monique M LaRocque is based on the decadent era which was in the nineteenth century. The decadents were a group of English or French writers of the period of the latter part of the nineteenth century. Their work was characterized by aestheticism, which is the philosophy that deals with the fine arts. LaRocque views the era of the Decadents as a way of life for those people who were deeply attached to their aesthetic side. LaRocque believes that art must not be reduced to showcase everyday reality. LaRocque further argues that the English and French writers of the nineteenth century tried to move as far as possible from nature. The decadents, English and French writers deemed nature to be irrelevant and started focusing on man made things for their source of inspiration. The decadents, English and French writers rejected nature and isolated themselves as much as possible from natural surroundings and anything else that reminded them of their animal like nature. The English and French writers viewed themselves as superior to nature, while also separating them from everything that was not capable of overcoming nature.

Vicky L. Adams in chapter six discusses about the forthcoming apocalypse due to human negligence of the environment. The chapter reflects on the influence that music has on her (Adams) thoughts and how she views feminism. Adams inspiration was from listening to music. She (Adams) notes that the song 'paradise lost', was an expression about environmental degradation due to human negligence of the environment and that a major apocalypse would take place due to that negligence. Adams argues that human interaction with the environment has caused significant environmental changes. She (Adams) also views the environment as a female, who needs to take care of her children and if she (environment) is harmed then there is no way that she (environment) can take care of those children. What Adams means by this is that as humans the relationship with the environment is very crucial in determining the outcomes of any natural disasters. If the environment is damaged, trees cut down and animals killed then humans will not be able to survive in this world because the environment will revolt and global warming cause major catastrophes. Adams envisions an apocalyptic future because the environment has been damaged. She (Adams) views human activities as a catalyst for the apocalypse and that only a few will survive if only they take care of the environment.

In summary this book discusses the different environmental and feminist theories. Feminist and environmental theories have shaped the perspectives of how the current generation understand feminism as well as environmental problems. The book is difficult to understand for a beginner. There is a need for one to read it thoroughly in order to understand it. The author does not address ecofeminism in terms of Africa or Asia only the European and American perspectives are included in the text. The author could have tried to find a much more accessible way of advancing his arguments other than using other books and editing the work. Ecofeminism seeks to identify the relationship between women and nature. This point is clearly highlighted in all the chapters of the book; women are viewed as nurturing and loving towards the environment while men are shown as being only concerned about dominating the environment and caring about their own well-being.