



# BOOK REVIEWS

## ECOFEMINISM: WOMEN, ANIMALS, NATURE

Greta Gaard, ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993.

by Margot Larocque

The essays collected in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* continue the ecofeminist project of examining the links between the sex/gender system and the oppression of nature. As Gaard notes in her preface, one of the prime motivations behind the production of this book (which was initiated at the 1989 convention of U.S. National Women's Studies Association), was to create a much-needed "theoretical bridge for women working in the related movements of environmentalism, animal liberation, and feminism." The contributors to this volume, in order of appearance, are: Gaard, Janis Birkeland, Lori Gruen, Stephanie Lahar, Linda Vance, Ellen O'Loughlin, Josephine Donovan, Carol J. Adams, Chaia Heller, Marti Kheel, and Huey-li Li. All but one of the essays appear here in print for the first time.

Definitions of ecofeminism abound. As Linda Vance accurately remarks: "Ask a half-dozen self-proclaimed ecofeminists 'what ecofeminism is', and you'll get a half-dozen answers." Gaard's strategy for approaching such diversity is to celebrate it rather than suppress it. Nevertheless, most of the contributors to this volume seem to share the basic premise, articulated by Gaard, that "the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology

which sanctions the oppression of nature."

Gaard's collection is unique in that it is committed to locating animals as central to any discussion. Gruen's "Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of the Connection Between Women and Animals" explores the social construction of "women" and "animal" as Other. Donovan's "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory" surveys contemporary animal rights theory, and suggests that a feminist ethic based on human interconnectedness to all life offers a valuable departure from rights-based ethical systems. In "Feminist Traffic in Animals," Adams presents a challenging argument that a feminist meal must be a vegetarian meal. Unfortunately, the focus of these essays is on domestic, rather than wild, species. Vance's "Ecofeminism and the Politics of Reality" is an exception: written in a form not unlike a natural history essay, it is an eloquent re-visioning of women's place in the natural environment, composed around a hike through the woods.

Although ecofeminism is often criticized for its potential to be not only essentialist, but racist, a distinctive facet of this volume is that many of the contributors take up this problematic issue, and bring under suspicion the idea of an immutable connection between all women and nature. Ellen O'Loughlin's "Questioning Sour Grapes: Ecofeminism and the United Farm Workers Grape Boycott" suggests that ecofeminist analyses must be grounded in material and economic analyses. Huey-li Li's "A Cross-Cultural Critique of Ecofeminism" is especially important for its attentiveness to cross-cultural evidence from China which challenges ecofeminists to rethink the woman-

nature affinity. Along similar lines, Gaard's "Ecofeminism and Native American Cultures: Pushing the Limits of Cultural Imperialism?" points to the harmful implications of ecofeminist appropriations of Native American cultures.

Other issues addressed in this collection include the conflict between green politics and ecofeminism (Birkeland's "Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice"); the interrelationship between ecofeminist theory and environmental history (Lahar's "Roots: Rejoining Natural and Social History"); and the problematic woman-nature association in Western culture (Heller's "For the Lover of Nature: Ecology and the Cult of the Romantic"). Kheel's "From Heroic to Holistic Ethics: The Ecofeminist Challenge" continues the quest for an ecofeminist ethic.

With the exception of a brief footnote in Vance's essay, the contributors to this volume—though explicitly drawing on ecological theory to formulate their conceptions of ecofeminism—avoid recognizing the pitfalls of appealing to a vague and popular notion of "ecology" without a full awareness of the contrary history of ecology as a science. What is also missing in ecofeminist theory, as outlined by Gaard, is a sustained, deep awareness of the complex economic, political, and social forces which drive environmental destruction. While nature/culture and self/other dualisms may well provide the conceptual underpinnings of some human activity in the contemporary Western world, it is surely reductionist to claim "the root cause of all oppression...is based on difference."

Still, I would argue that the ecofeminist project, which attempts to facilitate con-

versations between academics and activists, and to forge coalitions amongst various social and environmental movements, is particularly important to this historical moment. The essays collected in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* are a stimulating and welcome addition to this burgeoning body of critical thought.

## **BREAKING THE BOUNDARIES: TOWARDS A FEMINIST GREEN SOCIALISM**

Mary Mellor. London: Virago Press. 1992.

*by Kim Hume*

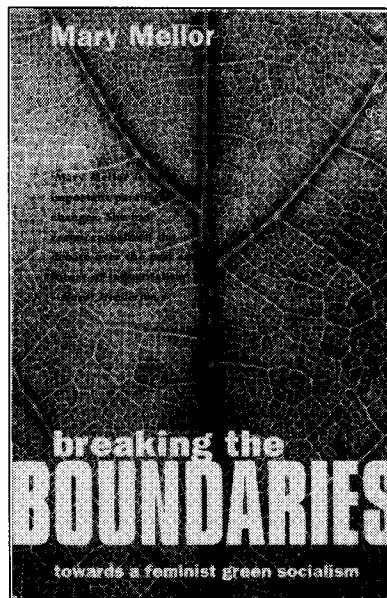
Our world is on a fast track towards self destruction. Women continue to be marginalized. The gaps between rich and poor are widening. The rape of our environment threatens individual lives and our collective existence. "We are linked into a destructive connectedness that is putting boundaries between people, but no boundary on our destruction of the planet."

In *Breaking the Boundaries*, Mary Mellor draws on feminist, green, and socialist thought in a convincing argument for the necessary integration of these three movements "if we are to achieve a sustainable future for both humanity and the planet."

Mellor's compelling enthusiasm for the future is the main strength of this book. Her conviction that her vision can address our global problems despite their magnitude and extent, is a testament both to her ideas and her writing.

She begins by asserting that capitalism, sexism, racism, industrialism, and militarism are male centred dominations that threaten our world. Citing historians, ecofeminists, and anthropologists, Mellor chronicles the emergence of patriarchy and male domination. She gains her point by contrasting the traditional male view of history with the more recent female-centred theories such as ecofeminism.

One of Mellor's stark examples illus-



trating the skewed priorities of a world run by men is the commitment of resources to military expenditure, which has meant that "nuclear missiles can go from Europe to Moscow in minutes, while a woman in Africa must walk several hours a day to fetch water."

Mellor does not believe that modifications of existing mechanisms are enough to arrest our self destruction: a new ideology is needed. While she admits there may be room for capitalism to "go green" in the long run, she points out with good reason that "in the long run we are all dead."

Ultimately, the boundaries that Mellor seeks to break are those that can be recognized at the global level, dividing race, culture, ethnicity and sex. Boundaries also exist between the feminist, green and socialist movements, which she illustrates both theoretically and from personal experience: as a feminist and a socialist, Mellor's original inspiration for this book arose out of her disillusionment with a male-oriented socialism "preoccupied with industrial and economic systems."

Breaking the boundaries between these movements makes sense, as they share a common interest in the future of our people and our planet. Feminism links socialism with green thought through women's connection to the earth. By breaking the boundaries between them, these movements will also gain a collective strength.

*Breaking the Boundaries* is an academic work with a popular focus; Mellor's argu-

ments are drawn from and supported by a large body of feminist, green, and socialist thought. As such, it can be heavy reading. It's made easier though, by the organization of the material. Subheadings divide each chapter into digestible pieces, and are listed in the table of contents for easy reference. Quotations from other writers intersperse and break up the text with succinct nuggets. A comprehensive bibliography and detailed index strengthen and substantiate Mellor's work.

Mellor doesn't make any policy recommendations, but clearly states that this was not her intention. Rather, she seeks a sustainable, egalitarian society. In broad terms, she is convincing in suggesting that this requires a paradigm shift "from men to women, from rich to poor, from North to South, from nature exploitation to nature stewardship." The world Mellor seeks and tangibly depicts is one worth striving for. This work provides the arguments and the inspiration inciting us to try. Our problems are significant, but they needn't overwhelm.

*Breaking the Boundaries* will find a wide audience in feminists, greens, and socialists who are concerned about our future as a planet. I'm not convinced that Mellor's vision of a feminist green socialism is the only path to a sustainable future, but she certainly goes far towards proving that the elements within her vision will be part of the solution.

## **RADICAL ECOLOGY: THE SEARCH FOR A LIVABLE WORLD**

Carolyn Merchant. New York: Routledge, 1992.

*by Jan Clarke*

In *Radical Ecology*, Carolyn Merchant carefully follows the threads of environmental politics to trace the historical, social, and ecological roots which shape contemporary radical ecology movements. While she discusses each branch of radical ecology in some detail, her particular