

fectly designed for the medium, and humans aren't—even with full diving apparatus, there's no way to match their speed and agility...." The page goes on (with digressions, of course!) to express mildly scientific questions about what differences in physics are involved when a human swims, compared to when a fish swims.

Was any of this specifically feminine? Well, back to those conversations over beer and chips, I began to

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## ELISAVIETTA RITCHIE

### Search Parties

I am out with lanterns,  
searching for myself.

—Emily Dickinson

For me, a candle should suffice,  
Barring that—a match.  
No lamp that burns too bright  
Or lasts—

Self, no angel,  
Disappoints, stuns—  
Mirrors yield danger,  
Leave us wrung.

Are more honest?  
In mirrors a flame  
Deceives, reflects,  
Flickers blame.

Truth is no spice cake—  
Love is crumbs—  
In walls, mice wait  
unseen, not dumb—

notice two distinct differences between the women's and the men's comments about their activities during the day. Firstly, men and women both went on the recreational fishing charters, but it was the men who detailed the killings of the fish. It was also only the men who mourned the fact that no spear-fishing ("primal hunting," as one man put it) is allowed in the area, since most of Ningaloo Reef is classified as a protected marine park.

Secondly, men and women were both attentive to the colours and markings of various fishes and corals, usually for identifying them, but the people rhapsodizing about the blues! the electric turquoise of that clam's mouth! that unusual section of bright purple brain coral! were women. It was the women who seemed most comfortable with experiencing the ocean as something that owes no responsibility to humanity.

It's not that the women weren't interested in fishing. I tried my turn at hand-line fishing, and it was the woman in a yellow bikini, just a few metres down the beach, who outdid the rest of us that sunset by catching three large fish. And it's not that the men didn't appreciate the colours: two of my male friends wrote poetic and detailed postcards about what they had seen underwater.

I gradually concluded that the female-male distinction I detected was about prioritization of observations. Generally, the men's first desire was to expose and hunt creatures they saw in the ocean; so enjoying the colours, or the sense of water as an unusual and non-human medium, was a secondary benefit. For the women, on the other hand, the main goal was to receive the variety of colours, to learn how the ocean and reef interact in and of themselves, and to append the human use of the ocean and its fauna as a secondary benefit.

I would like to emphasize this distinction because it is the second attitude, whether expressed by women or men, which births ecologically wise scientific exploration and application. It's an attitude which is *looking for*

interactions, for relationships, for processes and events that make up the patterns of how the ocean (for example) functions. It's about seeing things in connection, rather than in isolation. It's very far from the Victorian-hangover science that still asks students to segregate, catch, and kill "specimens" for laboratory exercises, ignoring the fact that living objects associate with their environments. And, ideally, it should be the attitude which teaches the human observer that s/he is part of a complex universe which in itself doesn't always acknowledge the human as the pinnacle of importance.

In my mind, the preceding paragraph is the basis of what feminism is about: developing understandings of both the societal and natural worlds as complex webs of events and relationships. I could be content, then, to answer the first part of my introductory question by calling my oceanic experience a feminist one, rather than a female one, as the desire for connective science is expressed by people of both genders.

The answer to the second part would therefore be that a feminist approach to science is by definition one which grows from lateral thinking, and that women who wish to ask nonlinear questions of the sciences should feel legitimate and comfortable to follow those questions.

To finish with a note of humour: we lateral-thinking women shouldn't be intimidated by linear thinking anyways, because we can always expand the picture and point out that any line on the globe is spiralling in a double circle, once on the earth's axis and once on our elliptical orbit, around the also-circling sun, in the spherically-motivated galaxy (in a continually spiralling universe).

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*Elisavietta Ritchie's poetry appears earlier in this volume.*