

Book Reviews



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Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism.
Judith Plant (ed.), Toronto: *Between the Lines*, 1989, Pp.
262 paperback.

"It will be either feminism or death." That was the warning Françoise d'Eaubonne gave in 1974 when she coined the label "ecofeminism" for the alliance between the two movements. In *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, editor Judith Plant collects thirty significant essays and poems on the relationship between feminism and planetary survival. The message remains the same: "*Ecologists must be feminists*," insists Sharon Doubiago in "Mama Coyote Talks to the Boys." (The "boys" are deep ecologists.) Susan Griffin is more rhapsodic but no less emphatic: "the singing in my body daily returns me to a love of this earth. ... [I]f I am to survive, I must learn to listen to this song" (p. 17). In the preface, German Green leader Petra Kelly picks up the refrain: "if I am to survive, I must learn to listen to this song..."

For editor Judith Plant, piecing together these essays is an act of "culture-building," parallel to the experiment she and her community carry out in the mountains of British Columbia. In one of the best chapters in the book, Plant describes the day-to-day obstacles to building an equitable, caring society. (By the way, that same community produces *The New Catalyst*, an inspirational quarterly for Green activists scattered all over Canada.) Judith Plant is a reconciler, inclined to throw in the towel "for collective well-being" (p. 249). That is the spirit she brings to her editorship. In *Healing the Wounds*, differences, even contradictions, are let stand side-by-side. The book is a model of Plant's ideal ecosystem: "a web of differences." One contributor, Pamela Philipose, captures this sense of community in a familiar ecofeminist metaphor: all women who take local action to preserve their land, air and water are working on a global quilt to save the world from perishing (p. 75).

Based on her own experience, Judith Plant is convinced that domestic virtues can be mobilized to change the pub-

lic sphere into a just and harmonic world. If ecologists are to clean up "the patriarchal mess," insists Judith Plant, both men and women must cultivate gentleness and caring. Ironically, women's traditional confinement to the private sphere turns out to be an asset. According to Dorothy Dinnerstein, women are not only less to blame for the crisis but also, because of our training in nurturing skills, more able to heal the earth than men. "We crazy feminists may well be the most sanely conscious little part of our ailing lifeweb" (p. 194). Classical feminism rejected woman's supposed special connection to nature. But Ynestra King assures us that, if women "consciously choose" the connection, it can be used "as a vantage point for creating a different kind of culture and politics" (p. 23). Only Anne Cameron wonders whether ecofeminists are just watering down their feminism "so it will be acceptable to the boys" (p. 64).

What is being advocated is the *radicalization*, not the adoption, of the "feminine" virtue of compassion. To start, many of the essayists in *Healing the Wounds* advise us to shun masculinist, reductionist modes of thinking. Instead, urges Rosemary Radford Ruether, we should convert our minds to the "more diffuse and relational logic of natural harmony" (p. 149). Women can "birth a new world," claims Charlene Spretnak, if we feed our "natural tendencies towards multilayered perceptions, empathy, compassion, unity, and harmony" (pp. 131-32). According to Deena Metzger, we need to go through stages, first abandoning our individual ego, then our cultural ego, next our gender ego and, finally, our species ego. Only then shall we achieve compassion — the "understanding of the absolute equality of all things" (pp. 122-23). As one way to cultivate compassion, Metzger recommends a meditation called "cradling the world" (p. 125). Joanna Macy quotes Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh to illustrate the "awakening to the ecological self":

I am the 12 year-old girl, refugee on a small boat,
who throws herself into the ocean
after being raped by a sea pirate.
I am also the pirate,
my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving... (p. 209)

(As I read this, I know I have a long way to go.) In spiritual matters, the ecofeminist strategy is to press ancient virtues — such as Buddhist compassion — into the service of feminism.

To exemplify compassion in action, *Healing the Wounds* includes three essays — by Radha Bhatt, Pamela Philipose, and Vandana Shiva — which celebrate the contributions of the village women in India. The most famous action was the *Chipko andolan* (the hug-the-trees movement) by which women saved forests — and livelihoods — from the ax. What is evident, however, in all three essays is the extent to which Indian women are motivated by their traditional religion and by the teachings of Gandhi. Even Shiva's touchstone quotation is from Gandhi: "There is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not for some people's greed" (p. 84). Eco-feminism in India seems less a question of culture building than of culture recovery.

In the West, finding roots for ecofeminism is more problematic. It is not only science and capitalism that are implicated in the destruction of the earth, but our Judaic-Christian tradition as well. As an alternative, Starhawk and others have recovered remnants of earth religions, which celebrate women's wisdom:

This is the story we like to
tell ourselves
in the night
when the fire seems nothing but dying embers wink-
ing out...
We like to tell ourselves
that we remember the First Mother... (p. 116)

And we like to create our own rituals. Take, for example, Dale Colleen Hamilton's poignant story of Emma, a doctor who undertakes the native custom of sleeping overnight in a hollow tree. Emma improvises and finds her own way to natural healing (p. 144). But surely the ecological significance of religious rituals is that they bind a culture together in a sustainable — or catastrophic — relationship with nature. It remains to be seen whether goddess spirituality can transform modern mass culture.

Healing the Wounds includes some challenging ideas from two native women, Gwaganad of the Haida and Marie Wilson of the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en. Substantial difficulties — as well as benefits — emerge when we appropriate selected bits of native religion for white culture's use. In an interview with Judith Plant, Wilson cautions that the native view of land use differs from that of ecologists: "when we are finished dealing with the courts and our land claims, we will then have to battle the environmentalists and they will not understand why" (p. 217). This reminds me of Buffy Sainte-Marie's attack against romanzers of her people. "We starve in our splendour," she sang. To disaffected whites "desperate" to

find meaning in the native tradition, Marie Wilson advises: "You will have to go back to your own history, as many Gitksan have had to do" (p. 218).

For centuries, Western culture has used the slogan "it's a matter of survival" to justify inequity and repression. Injustice is a law of nature — say the Malthusians. These days, it is easy to succumb to the numbing statistics. India still loses 1.3 million hectares of forest a year — despite the *Chipko andolan* (p. 70). It is easy to dismiss voices from the wilderness as powerless and irrelevant. It is easy to be crippled with cynicism and despair. But the women's voices in *Healing the Wounds* call us to collective hope and action. The old slogan has been turned upside down. It is now "a matter of survival" that we seek just alternatives. Judith Plant might say to her circle of readers what she says to her community in the mountains: "Where's the guidance on how to go about creating a whole world? There is none. Only us" (p. 242).

Sylvia Bowerbank
McMaster University

Women Philosophers: A Bio-Critical Source Book. Ethel M. Kersey, *Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1989. Pp. 241 hardcover.*

This is a welcome addition to the project of recovering women's past and will, I am sure, be very useful, not only to people wondering if there have been any women philosophers (the apparent genesis of the work [p. ix]), but also to people who know that there have been, but would like to know more about them.

As the title suggests, the author attempts to do several things. First of all, this is a reference book on the model of an encyclopedia, in that the entries are arranged in alphabetical order. The author tries to provide a comprehensive list of female philosophers prior to the 20th century. (She does not attempt to do the same for the 20th century.) Secondly, for each entry, she provides biographical detail, in terms of the philosopher's personal life, and in terms of her philosophical training and work. Finally, she provides some critical analysis of their work.

Unlike many works of this type, all of the entries are written by Kersey. This gives the work a rather idiosyncratic character, particularly in terms of the critical aspect of the entries. Although Kersey clearly tries to take into account, in the critical part of the entries, the views of other philosophers, it is clear that her own sympathy lies