Ground, Pivot, Motion: Ecofeminist Theory, Dialogics, and Literary Practice

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Ecofeminist philosophy and literary theory need mutually to enhance each other's critical praxis. Ecofeminism provides the grounding necessary to turn the Bakhtinian dialogic method into a critical theory applicable to all of one's lived experience, while dialogics provides a method for advancing the application of ecofeminist thought in terms of literature, the other as speaking subject, and the interanimation of human and nonhuman aspects of nature. In the first part of this paper the benefits of dialogics to feminism and ecofeminism are explored; in the second part dialogics as method is detailed; in the third part literary examples are discussed from a dialogical ecofeminist perspective.

Cheryll Burgess, in issuing a clarion call for an "ecological literary criticism," observes that "while other social movements, like the civil rights and women's liberation movements of the sixties and seventies, have had a significant impact in shaping literary studies, the environmental movement of the same era has not" (1989, 1). Having gathered momentum throughout the 1980s, the environmental movement, particularly as it is manifested by ecofeminism, will not only make its existence felt in literary studies in the 1990s but has the potential to alter such studies irrevocably. Does this mean, then, that since literary theory and criticism is coming belatedly to ecofeminism that the educational exchange must occur in a single direction? I don't think so. I would like to suggest here that, first, certain areas of literary theory, in particular the dialogic method adumbrated by the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin and its development by feminist critics, can be immensely beneficial to the further development and elaboration of ecofeminist philosophy; and, second, that a more forceful and integrated recognition of the role and place of literature as one element of ecofeminist activism can be gained.

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I.

The development of an ecofeminist dialogical method requires significant adaptation of the ideas of Bakhtin, since neither he nor his colleagues ever concerned themselves with ecology or feminism. An adapted dialogics can facilitate a differential unification—rather than a conflation (see Morson and Emerson 1989, 11)—of ecology and feminisms that will maintain the kind of self-consciously antidogmatic development that has been the hallmark of the major strands of feminist thought. At the same time it furthers the correctives to liberal, Marxist, and radical feminisms already under way in ecofeminism (see Warren 1987).

For one thing, Bakhtinian dialogics provides a method for entertaining debate and consideration of conflicting viewpoints without lapsing into liberal pluralism. Dale Bauer, by distinguishing between pluralism and "multivocality" in *Feminist Dialogics* (1988, xi), persuasively argues that for disagreement to accomplish anything, it requires genuine dialogue that leads to altered understanding rather than a verbal smorgasbord of perspectives. To date, Ellen Rooney in *Seductive Reasoning* (1989) has provided the most devastating critique of pluralism as a popular myth of U.S. politics and foreign policy, as well as an academic form of critical discourse that seeks to recuperate all other critics into a circle of unchanging chitchat. While allowing various "constituencies" to voice their objections, pluralism disavows any need for change other than minor reforms and eschews any theorizing "that would expose the systematic and concrete affiliations that bind critical and political pluralism together as the elements of a heterogeneous yet hegemonic discourse" (33-34). It is also important to note that pluralism has never included everybody: "our cultural discourse is a totality which does not contain everything—did not, for example, contain women, who were decisively not *only* the relative creatures the culture had imagined them to be" (Tarantelli 1986, 180); and continues to dispute whether to include in its purview nature as a subject rather than simply an object of its attention.

Feminists have been utilizing Bakhtin's ideas for some years now, and Bauer makes numerous references to such work. But the critical theory grounding *Feminist Dialogics* develops beyond those other authors who have seen Bakhtin's various dialogic essays as simply source material. Bauer understands Bakhtinian dialogics as a method by which to orchestrate and direct feminist theories of culture and literature. Repeatedly her literary analysis telescopes out from the aesthetic text to larger questions of cultural community and political and ideological power under patriarchy. But that is not surprising, since anyone employing dialogics as a method must find herself constantly shuttling back and forth between text and context, discourse and community, and personal and political (see Díaz-Diocaretz 1989, 136; Zavala, 58). Bauer argues that "what is missing from the dominant mode of Bakhtin scholarship

is any interest in gender theory or sexual difference in a materialist-feminist practice" (1988, xiii). Yet what also remains missing from Bauer's analysis is any attention to ecological issues.

Patricia Yaeger has passionately depicted in *Honey-Mad Women* (1988) some of the means by which women writers have employed "emancipatory strategies" within the boundaries of patriarchal norms and imposed exclusion, not only to give voice to the muted but also to challenge the illusion of "norms" that patriarchy persistently generates. It is time that literary critics more systematically begin to search for the "emancipatory strategies" that have been giving voice to ecological narratives and to recover those works that have realized such strategies, while critiquing the rest of the literary canon in terms of just such strategies as they appear or fail to appear in heretofore canonized "major" works. At the same time, feminist criteria must be brought to bear on the rapidly evolving "canon" of nature writing and environmental literature, which at least in the case of the new *Norton Book of Nature Writing* (1990) is being designed to make nature a province clearly dominated by white male authors. Feminist criteria for canonical debates, including conflicting ones, have been offered by numerous theorists; ecological criteria remain partial and dispersed, with efforts toward relative codification just under way (see Burgess 1989; Campbell 1989; Janik 1976; Kolodny 1975; Meeker 1972; Murphy, "Prolegomenon" and "Sex-Typing"; and Waage 1985).

The influence of Marxism on feminism has led to much attention to dialectical synthesis as a critical praxis. Dialogics, however, can take praxis further because it can encompass Marxist dialectics while at the same time correcting its mechanical progressivism by emphasizing the unity of opposites and their interanimating dynamic tension (see Lenin 1961, 192-28 and 359-63; Mao 1971, 117-25). And it does so without an idealist belief in the immediacy and facility of synthesis and without privileging class contradictions over all others. In both instances, Marxist practice has shown itself utterly insensitive to ecological issues and human/nonhuman relationships. A dialogic method can recognize that the most fundamental relationships are not resolvable through dialectical synthesis: humanity/nature, ignorance/knowledge, male/female, emotion/intellect, conscious/unconscious. Such recognitions are crucial for the development of ecological thought.

Integrated with ecofeminism, dialogics can enable philosophy to move beyond the limitations of the distinctions between things-in-themselves and things-for-us where Marxist theory tends to stop, and to recognize and celebrate the corollary concept of us-as-things-for-others (re: Bakhtin's "I for another," see Morson and Emerson 1989, 23). We need to recognize the existence of the "other" as a self-existent entity, a thing-in-itself (see Jung 1990, 8-9). And let me clarify this term by saying that it has nothing do with Kant's idealist anthropocentrism (see Morson and Emerson 1989, 8; Holquist 1989, 39); rather, "thing" for the purposes of my argument here means any

material entity, including humans, animals, and biospheres. At the same time, only by recognizing that humans are not only things-in-themselves and things-for-us but also things-for-others, including the stable evolution of the biosphere, can we begin to understand our appropriate ecological niche and attendant practices.

This is certainly an extremely complex process, and any rush to claim such understanding likely reveals only our own propensity toward reductionism. Such is the case with Dorion Sagan's *Biospheres: Reproducing Planet Earth* (1990). Sagan replicates the imperialist and masculinist ideology of late capitalism when he claims that our ecological purpose is to reproduce "biospheres," which on other planets "would act as a sort of settling propagule to establish an Earthlike environment" (207). He conceives of earth as a white European, which has the right to replicate itself anywhere it chooses. He also assumes that we need not fundamentally reorganize human interaction with the environment, since technology will provide all necessary solutions (206). Not suprisingly, neither capitalism nor feminism is listed in the index, and no ecofeminists, or for that matter any kind of feminists, are referred to in the text.

A dialogical orientation reinforces the ecofeminist recognition of interdependence and the natural necessity of diversity (King 1983b, 119-20; Warren 1987, 7-8). This recognition, then, requires a rethinking of the concepts of "other" and "otherness," which have been dominated in contemporary critical theory by psychoanalytic rather than ecological constructs. If the recognition of "otherness" and the status of "other" is applied only to women and/or the unconscious, for example, and the corollary notion of "anotherness," being another for others, is not recognized, then the ecological processes of interanimation—the ways in which humans and other entities develop, change, and learn through mutually influencing each other day to day, age by age—will go unacknowledged, and notions of female autonomy that have been useful to women in thinking through the characteristics of their social oppression will end up complicitous with the traditional American, patriarchal beliefs in autonomy and individualism. As Barbara Johnson has noted, only a romantic androcentrism can phallaciously raise autonomy over all other relationships: "Clearly, for Thoreau, pregnancy was not an essential fact of life. Yet for him as well as for every human being that has yet existed, someone else's pregnancy is the very *first* fact of life. How might the plot of human subjectivity be reconceived (so to speak) if pregnancy rather than autonomy is what raises the question of deliberateness?" (1987, 190). Such a question not only interrogates conceptions of autonomy but also affirms relationship. While the United States has been a culture that champions individualism as an ideology, it has consistently demonstrated an unwillingness to tolerate individuality whenever such behavior threatens "national security" or "the American way of life" (King, 1983a). An ecofeminist dialogics would

suggest that rather than their trying to imagine liberatory notions of autonomy, feminist theoreticians would more productively imagine responsible human behavior through working out the implications of a theory of *volitional interdependence* among human and nonhuman alike.

Johnson's analysis also privileges nurturing over engendering by implication, to the degree that these two wholly interrelated phases of parent/offspring relationship have been separated in Western culture since the time of the Greeks, with engendering having more status than nurturing. While slaves have always been thought capable of nurturing, they have never been officially delegated to engendering the wealthy classes. Johnson's privileging provides a necessary corrective to the androcentric-based difference between the definitions of "fathering" and "mothering," which in themselves have significant ecological implications, the former of begetting and unlimited expansion and the latter of sustaining and cultivating, as Kolodny discusses at some length in *The Lay of the Land* (1975).

Finally, Bakhtin's conception of centripetal/centrifugal tension provides a means of countering tendencies toward totalization that can arise within any effort at systemic analysis and critique (1981, 270-75). The centripetal tendency is toward centralizing, homogenizing, and rulebinding; the centrifugal toward decentering, differentiating, and innovating. For Bakhtin, any "totality" is continuously recognized as already a relativized, temporal centripetal entity in need of centrifugal destabilizing. That is to say, a dialogic method can expose the false dichotomy of "center" and "margin" that is utilized by oppositional groups yet in such use codifies the existing power structure's claims to centrality, legitimacy, and authority. There are unequal power relationships and structures that are spun out of such relationships, but if the natural model of mutual interdependence has any validity, then there can be no real "margins" except as ideological constructs. Nor can there be any "centers"; rather, there exist cultural and physical pivots that may or may not resist the inevitability of a next step.

II.

The Bakhtinian dialogical method is becoming widely recognized. But some character traits are less well known and more neglected than others. *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique* (1976), published under Vološinov's name, is the text least related to literature and literary theory per se, but one of crucial importance for Bakhtin's concept of the utterance as the basis for analyzing language-in-practice, *parole*, rather than language-as-system, *langue*. In opposition to what was perceived as Freudian psychoanalysis, *Freudianism* presents dialogical conceptions of the self, the psyche, and the "content of consciousness," which initiate the recognition of the constitution of the individual as a *chronotopic relationship*, i.e., a social/self construct developing within given

social, economic, political, historical, and environmental parameters of space and time (Bakhtin 1981, 85). The "other" in its various manifestations, therefore, including *parole*, culture, place, class, race, and gender, participates in the formation of self. The individual occurs as chronotope within the "story" of human interaction with the physical world, but that narrative is only a historical fiction organized by means of a limited perspective through which beginnings, middles, ends, and motivations are substituted for the predominantly non-human, contiguously structured story of the universe that allots us only episodes—the self in and as part of the "other." One can immediately see the connections here with the ecofeminist philosopher Jim Cheney's statement that "narrative is the key then, but it is narrative grounded in geography rather than in a linear, essentialized narrative self" (1989, 126). While Cheney emphasizes local geography in "Postmodern Environmental Ethics," a study of the ways in which narrative can contribute to developing a sensitivity to an ecofeminist bioregional ethics, I think he would agree that such geography participates in a larger, longer story extending beyond this one planet's biosphere.

Just as the "other" participates in the formation of the self, so too does the self as individual-in-the-world participate in the formation of the "other" in its various manifestations. And just as that self enters into language and the use of *parole*, so too does the "other" enter into language and have the potential, as does any entity, to become a "speaking subject," although centripetal structures and cultural forces hinder such a realization. The implications of this "other" as speaking subject need to be conceptualized as including more than humans and as potentially being constituted by a speaker/author who is not the speaking subject but a renderer of the "other" as speaking subject (Bakhtin 1984, 47-57). The pivotal questions here will be the degree to which language is recognized as one type of sign system, the degree to which volition is assumed as a prerequisite for becoming a speaking subject, and the degree to which the other speaking subjects who do not use the *parole* of human beings can "speak" in a sign system that can be understood by humans. Minimally, such considerations tend to take humans beyond the simplistic notion that only they communicate because they understand each other's languages but no other creatures, but leaves problematic the definition of "subject," since in the case of such entities as rocks and rivers humans must rely on imputed notions of their being "interest-carriers" (this remains an intense debate in the pages of *Environmental Ethics*).

Bakhtin emphasizes, from the opening of *Freudianism*, the significance in psychology of the conflicts between inner and outer speech and various levels of inner speech. Communication between the conscious and the unconscious consists of specific utterances that have a speaker and a respondent, a "self" and an other "self," which are not identical but are parts of the same mind (23-24). Even the articulation of the unconscious is a social interrelationship

by virtue of its minimal dynamic of being an utterance (79). Thus, the "other" is always implicated in psychical activities and indicates that the "self" itself is not singular or unified but multiple (see Smith 1988, chap.5). But does this have anything to teach us about feminism or ecology?

It is precisely this recognition of nonidentity and the need for inner dialogue, specifically between "masculine" and "feminine" aspects of the psyche, that the ecofeminist sociologist Ariel Kay Salleh sees missing from the propositions of deep ecology, an omission that seriously impairs its subversion of patriarchy's hegemony. As Freud recognized, "the unconscious speaks more than one dialect," i.e., it uses a variety of sign systems, verbal and nonverbal, to communicate (see Bruss 1976, 132-33). To the degree that we are able to articulate verbally the mental activities of our unconscious as well as conscious, these articulations are oriented toward the rest of the world and our position in that world, and they are to some degree, then, part of a "storied residence" (Cheney 1989, 125). I would argue that, like the unconscious, the nonhuman also articulates itself by means of various "dialects," and neither requires volition to do so (see Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 60-63).

If emotion and instinct arise from historical natural influences on the evolution of the species, then their exertions on our behavior, their entering into consciousness, are a form of the natural world "speaking" to us through signs that our conscious renders verbally. To deny "emotion" as feminine and/or "instinct" as primitive nature is to reserve the role of speaking subject only for the ego and to deny a voice to the "other," which is in reality a part of ourselves. Poet Gary Snyder has called for establishing "a kiva of elders" to represent the nonhuman within democratic institutions:

> The paintings of bison and bears in the caves of southern France were of that order. The animals were speaking through the people and making their point. And when, in the dances of the Pueblo Indians and other people, certain individuals became seized, as it were, by the spirit of the deer, and danced as a deer would dance, or danced the dance of the corn maidens, or impersonated the squash blossom, they were no longer speaking for humanity, they were taking it on themselves to interpret, through their humanity, what these other life-forms were. (1974, 109)

The point is not to speak for nature but to work to render the signification presented us by nature into a verbal depiction by means of speaking subjects, whether this is through characterization in the arts or through discursive prose. The test for whether such depictions seem accurate renderings of the speaking subjects will be the actions in the world that they call on humans to perform. Unless we believe that the earth is attempting to commit biospheric suicide, we cannot accept arguments based on instrumental reason as a rendering of nature

as a speaking subject, nor Ronald Reagan's infamous remarks about trees as polluters, nor Lovelock's assertions that "Gaia" will take care of industrial pollution.

Ursula K. Le Guin has been working on this project in both poetry and fiction for many years. In *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* (1987), she brings together stories and poems, many of which render the natural world as speaking subject. For example, in "Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight," she does this through a girl's dream vision of the mythical "coyote," who teaches her about the relationship of wild animals in the desert to urbanization. That these stories are part of a project to rethink human/nonhuman and self/other relationships is revealed by Le Guin's remarks about the feminist revisioning of myth in which she is engaged throughout so much of her recent work: "Very often the re-visioning consists in a 'simple' change of point of view. It is possible that the very concept of point-of-view may be changing, may have to change, or to be changed, so that our reality can be narrated" (1987, 75). Snyder argues that we must "incorporate the other people—what Sioux Indians called the creeping people, and the standing people, and the flying people, and the swimming people—into the councils of government. . . . If we don't do it, they will revolt against us. . . . We are beginning to get non-negotiable demands right now from the air, the water, the soil" (1974, 108). It comes as no surprise that such "people" are well represented in Le Guin's last adult novel, *Always Coming Home* (1985).

Snyder's last remark about "non-negotiable demands" takes us back to a question raised much earlier, whether or not volition is required for a speaking subject, for the existence of signs that can be transmitted by a nonhuman subject and understood and interpreted by humans. When a person cries out in pain, is it volitional? When selenium poisons groundwater, causes animal deformities, and reduces the ability of California farmers to continue to overcultivate, are these signs that we can read? And in reading such signs and integrating them into our texts, are we letting that land speak through us or are we only speaking for it? Nonhuman others can be constituted as speaking subjects, whether or not they are interest-carriers in our understanding of that concept, rather than merely objects of our speaking—although even the latter is preferable to silence—and we need to learn better how to tell such stories.

The analogy I would use to illustrate such learning is that of men adopting feminist theories and practices. Far too often men continue attempting to speak *for* women. It is possible, however, for men to render women as speaking subjects by means of their application of feminist theories, criticism, and scholarship (Heath 1987, 8-9 and 27-28). The feminists who have constituted themselves as speaking subjects have enabled some men to render that voicing. There will certainly always be two voices there, the feminist speaking subject and the rendering male author, just as there will be with the nonhuman speaking subject and the rendering human author, but in neither case does this excuse not waging the struggle for such rendering.

III.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has candidly observed that "one must fill the vision of literary form with its connections to what is being read: history, political economy—the world. And it is not merely a question of disciplinary formation. It is a question also of questioning the separation between the world of action and the world of the disciplines. There is a great deal in the way" (1987, 95). As Adrienne Rich expresses it, "I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history, within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist, I am created and trying to create" (1985, 8; see also Snyder, 1977, 63-64). Literature can certainly help with that understanding, but we need to refine our conception of ecofeminism's relationship to literature.

One approach would be to use ecofeminism as a ground for critiquing all of the literature that one reads. For literary critics in particular this would mean reevaluating the canon that constitutes the list of major works and texts to be taught, calling for a dialogue between critical evaluations based on humanistic criteria and ones based on de-homocentric criteria. This would require, for instance, reevaluating the poetic tradition of the "pastoral," which tends to be based on an idealization of nature rather than a genuine encounter with it. A brief example here would be that feminist critics have gradually begun pulling Dorothy Wordsworth out of her brother's shadow, looking at her writings and their influence on his poetry. What is needed now is criticism that can evaluate the differences between their writings in terms of ecological criteria, analyzing the implications of Dorothy's willingness to record rather than order nature and to efface the speaker of the text as a dominating, central observer.

Dorothy Wordsworth serves as an example of rescuing from obscurity an author whose writing demonstrates characteristics that could be labeled ecological, if not ecofeminist, because of its attention to nature as subject in its diversity as a thing-in-itself. Willa Cather, on the other hand, serves as an example of an author already famous whose works are being reevaluated in terms of relative merit, as a result of both feminist and ecological criticism. Over the past few years *The Song of the Lark* (1915) has received increasing attention primarily because of its feminist thematics and secondarily because of its ecological implications, which are revealed particularly by means of the protagonist's growth through her relationship with the Nebraska countryside and her aesthetic maturation as a result of immersion in a steep New Mexico ravine. The importance of these aspects of the novel have begun to be analyzed only as a result of changing critical criteria.

With Cather, the critic is not looking for an ecofeminist novel per se but is looking at an author's work in terms of the degrees to which it addresses ecological and feminist issues in positive or negative ways. And while we can certainly talk about feminist rather than protofeminist writing in the Anglo-American tradition as early as the eighteenth century if not earlier, we need

to clarify whether such is the case for ecological writing. Is there a difference between "nature" writing and ecological writing? If the Transcendentalists and Romantics are any indication, the answer is certainly yes. Self-conscious ecological writing must be defined as primarily a phenomenon of the late twentieth century, and what precedes it as mostly protoecological. From this perspective, ecologists can more easily explain their utilization of writers such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Robinson Jeffers, and John Muir for ecological inspiration without having to attempt to justify every aspect of their visions of nature.

Perhaps one of the first of the current generation of ecofeminist novels is Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972). A woman in an unhealthy heterosexual relationship, going home with her lover and another couple to search for her missing father and to mourn for her long dead mother, undergoes a metamorphosis. This transformation involves a clearly dialogical process in which the revelations that the woman initially has about the environmental destruction of her childhood Canadian locale are gradually translated into revelations about her oppression as a woman, and the intrinsic and indissoluble connection between these two unbalanced states of being. Near the end of the novel she experiences a rebirth through submersion in the lake, which causes a spiritual regression to a virtual animal state. Through the purification this involves and her decision to become pregnant, she purges the guilt she has felt for years over having an abortion, her complicity in the antiecological, technoindustrial state. At the end, her recognitions of nature's oppression and her own provide her not with a vision of an emancipatory future—Atwood seems always unwilling to offer this—but with an understanding that will sustain her when she returns to the city. The final chapter begins: "This above all, to refuse to be a victim" (222). Then it continues with the protagonist's recognition of relationship with her child, who will be armed with her new understanding of ecological interconnection, which includes human interconnection. At the end, as the protagonist prepares to return to "civilization," she thinks the final words of the novel: "The lake is quiet, the trees surround me, asking and giving nothing" (224).

Atwood has come to be known as a writer of fantastic or speculative rather than realistic prose. And it seems to be the case that the majority of the most daring ecological and feminist novels have been written in some other mode than realism, with almost all of the feminist utopias and dystopias written in the past two decades being predicated upon ecological disaster. While such works frequently do not address how to resolve the ecological crisis, since their focus is on resolving the oppression of women, they almost invariably tie the oppression of women to the degradation of the environment. In Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), the rise of a right-wing theocracy in New England results in part from devastation of the environment. Similarly, in Susy McKee Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) and *Motherlines* (1978), a

totalitarian patriarchy that attempts to enforce the utter domination of women follows upon the heels of the apocalyptic efforts of a seemingly less malignant patriarchy to dominate nature. In Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), the future utopian society of Mattapoisett that contrasts with the hell of contemporary North American society oppressing Connie Ramos, the novel's protagonist, is predicated upon ecological balance and equal nurturing of children. In Sally Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979), the ecological theme is foregrounded, but the women have abandoned the cities and their men, establishing a completely separate culture and, perhaps, a separate species. These latter two novels, as with Sheri Tepper's more recent *The Gate to Women's Country* (1989), remain highly problematic from an ecofeminist perspective because each is predicated upon some version of biological essentialism, a perception of reality adopted by some who consider themselves ecofeminists but severely criticized by others.

Somewhat different from the preceding utopian and dystopian novels, Kate Wilhelm's *Juniper Time* (1979) is a near future science fiction in which humanity is beset by two approaching apocalypses of its own making: worldwide drought and food shortages resulting from environmental pollution, and subsequent global tensions making nuclear war imminent. While the plot is complicated by an elaborate hoax to draw the peoples of earth together, the real story is that of Jean's development into an ecoactivist, who suffers through rape, despair, and then revitalization in the desert among a group of people relearning and adapting the old ways of the Native Americans to the changed environmental conditions. Unlike the previously mentioned novels, *Juniper Time* is primarily ecological and only secondarily feminist, yet it does not seem fortuitous that the hero is female or that she is raped, imprisoned, and oppressed during the course of her experiences. But like the other novels, *Juniper Time* assumes that the building of a new society must be learned through practice, not theories. In this way, the majority of contemporary feminist utopias maintain a dialogical, developmental approach to society building rather than the monological, closed-system approach that dominates much earlier and nonfeminist utopias.

The novel that balances and integrates ecology and feminism more evenly and successfully than any other that I have read is Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* (1985). It combines thematic and formal innovation to the point that it does not conform to the notions popularly associated with the idea of "novel" at all. Rather, it is a novel much more in the Bakhtinian sense of the term, that is, an open, evolving genre predicated upon change rather than stasis, innovation rather than convention. A work of cultural fiction, it provides a main plotted story that could be extracted and treated as a separate narrative. This inner narrative is a feminist bildungsroman detailing the experiences of a girl who chooses between her Father's patriarchal culture and her mother's matrifocal one. But around and throughout this narrative-within-

a-text Le Guin weaves a series of additional stories, as well as cultural information. She also includes a series of interchapters about herself, allegorically depicted as Pandora the anthropologist, visiting from the past these people of our far-distant future. Suffice it to say that anyone wishing to gain a comprehensive vision of a truly ecofeminist culture must read *Always Coming Home*. But at the same time Le Guin avoids blueprinting, in part by setting the work so far into the future that no immediate steps from here to there are suggested and by showing that the culture depicted remains in a process of development and change, internal debate, and external relationship with other cultures.

Le Guin has developed her ecofeminist themes in poetry as well as in prose. And here she joins company with a host of contemporary women poets. Like many of them, Le Guin's collections contain poems that are feminist but not explicitly ecological, ecological but not specifically feminist, and only very rarely a poem that explicitly combines the two. Yet when one reads an entire volume, such as *Hard Words* (1981) or *Wild Oats and Fireweed* (1988), recognition of the interrelationship of feminism and ecology becomes unavoidable. "At Three Rivers, April 80" (*Hard Words*, 33), for instance, takes a clear stand on nature as a thing-in-itself rather than a thing-for-us:

> A tree that blossoms in the wilderness
> in some April beyond history
> and farther west than all the pioneers
> is in no way less
> though there be none to bless
> and no woman stand in tears
> under the whitening flowers.
>
> Only the tears were ours.

Yet the poem does not stop at making a de-homocentric statement, reminiscent of the last sentence of *Surfacing*. The inclusion of the woman not as neutral observer but as passionate participant in the wonder of spring adds a very subtle feminist dimension in terms of her emotive recognition. On the other hand, poems such as "Danaë 46" (*Hard Words*, 5) critique patriarchy as part of a general revisioning of myth and also establish a series of connections among the women who repeatedly appear throughout the poems in *Hard Words*, including the woman as author, the woman as Native American water carrier, the woman as bearer of emotions (see Murphy, "High and Low" [1989]).

For many male writers, becoming an environmentalist has not necessarily led to reevaluating gender relationships. And it would seem that a number of women writers have submerged the gender question in their development of, or search for, a balanced relationship with the rest of the natural world. Mary Oliver, winner of the 1984 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry, has been recognized as a

preeminent nature poet. Is she also a feminist? In the early collection *Twelve Moons* (1979), the answer would seem to be no, or at least not explicitly. *American Primitive* (1983) continues in the same vein. Patricia Yaeger argues, however, that the freedom expressed through identification with the honey bear and with the whales sounding off the coast depicted in several poems indicates a feminist sensibility: "As Oliver's speaker goes honey-mad . . . [t]he tree filled with honey becomes the site of vision and of liberation for the woman writer—a bodily liberation that releases the tree energy, the honey energy into the 'rippling bark' of her poem" (1988, 7). But it is not really until *Dream Work* (1986) that we find an overtly ecofeminist poem, "The River" (20-21). Here sisterhood and human integration in nature, to be understood as "home," are yoked in opposition to "some cold city or other." Yet even so, the ecological awareness remains far more sophisticated than the feminist one, whereas in a poem such as "Resort" by Patricia Hampl (1983) the opposite is the case. For Hampl's protagonist in this long sequential poem structured as a dialogical engagement of self and analyst, nature remains secondary but vital for the process of psychic healing that occurs. Nature becomes crucial as a means for self-understanding. Yet the ecological dimensions of the speaker's understanding in Hampl's poem remain as unsophisticated as the feminist understanding of Oliver's speakers. Both could learn much from each other in terms of integrating ecological and feminist awareness. Yet the poems of Oliver and Hampl can serve as valuable literature for ecofeminism because of the relationships between consciousness and impulse that they represent.

If ecofeminists seek only for a literature that meets equally the criteria of ecological and feminist sophistication, they will be frequently disappointed. If, alternatively, they seek works that to some extent embody both dimensions they will find a vast array of writing that can provide inspiration and evidence of a developing consciousness of the imperatives for cultural change that have given rise to ecofeminism. Similarly, as literary theory and criticism is beginning to incorporate ecological criteria and to address not just feminisms but specifically ecofeminism, ecofeminist philosophy needs to attune itself to and help increase the sophistication of practitioners of such critical work. At the same time, if Bakhtinian dialogics is any indication, there exist aspects of literary theory that can be of benefit in the continued growth of ecofeminist thought and practice. For example, Bakhtinian theory provides valuable critical tools for analyzing the dialogical structure of one of the most well-known ecofeminist texts, Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature*. Dialogics is helpful in terms of articulating not only its organization but also the variety of double-voicing throughout that gives it so much power and that accounts for the significant tonal shifts as the debate of the text gradually resolves toward the voice of a community of women in nature.

Near the end of his long life Bakhtin wrote that "there is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context" (1986, 170). Such

a self-consciously maintained context can help keep the ground of ecofeminist theory from soldifying into a dogmatic hardpan. Dialogics reminds ecofeminist practitioners that every position is really a pivot by which to step and dance, to practice and develop, but not to stand or come to rest. Part of this continued motion needs to be greater ecofeminist attention to literature even as literary theory and criticism needs to integrate ecofeminist philosophy into its most basic practices. Many authors today demonstrate a significant awareness of current philosophical trends and efforts at integrating the insights of philosophical and literary theory into their writing. Ecofeminism is clearly becoming a part of that awareness, but so much more needs to be done in both the philosophy and the literature. Literary critics and philosophers alike need to enter into dialogue with ecofeminism in order to continue their own critical praxis and to evaluate the ways in which ecofeminism calls for changes in that praxis, since their work, as the feminist Dale Bauer argues, takes place not only within the classroom but also in "all of the other territories of [their] own lived experience" (1988, xvii).

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