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Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia[†]

What has popularized and expanded the hermeneutic range of ecocriticism has in some ways also made ecocriticism seem immune to the challenges presented by so much of poststructuralism. Propelled and positioned within a context of environments increasingly degraded and dangerous, direct effects of our and our ancestors' behaviors, ecocriticism—seeking and espousing an immediacy and directness; an aesthetics of contact; and a firm disavowal of obscurantism, dizzying spinnings off, and general ineffectiveness—has found a wide and largely enthusiastic audience.¹ The space of ecocriticism has indeed become one of considerable—though increasingly ambivalent—openness.² Theorizing within this space—one that Peter Quigley has termed a “dangerous space”—has become a bit of a risky business, one that potentially threatens the peace of ecocritical communities. When Terry Gifford perceptively noted that “ecocriticism has been remarkably free of theoretical infighting” and that it is “perhaps the absence of a methodology”³ that is accountable for this phenomenon (15), he was probably correct, though there have been more voices of discontent than one would think, voices often ignored or given less airtime by an increasingly orthodox ecocritical

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machinery.⁴ The more we talk about representations of nature, the more it becomes clear that there is a need not only for permeable borders but also for more definitive structure, methodological definition, and viable terminology. The more we talk about representations of nature, the more it becomes clear that there is a need to talk about how contempt for the natural world is a definable and recognizable discourse (what we may call “ecophobia,” a term one blogger has perhaps prematurely called a “paradigm”).⁵ Though there has been a conflict developing among ecocritics, theorizing ecophobia should not deepen that conflict but may very well in fact lead to confluent theorizing and thus toward the kinds of methodological and structural definition some ecocritics seek.

The relative peace within the ecocritical community is a strange phenomenon in an academic world where infighting has seemed to be the rule rather than the exception. If, as Gifford notes, there has been “a lack of radical internal debate in the decade since the first Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) conference at Fort Collins in 1995” (15), it is also essential to recognize that there is, in fact, a conflict that *has* developed. On one side are scholars who wish to “get on with it,” who see “making contact” as vital,⁶ who see an urgency of the here and now⁷ and a “resurgence of the real,”⁸ scholars who wish to avoid “wrangling over what it means” (Buell, *The Future* 3) to do ecocriticism, who fantasize about “escaping from the esoteric abstractness that afflicts current theorizing about literature” (Kroeber 1), and who want to remain free from the “post-structuralist nihilism” (236) Glen Love fears. On the other side are the growing number of scholars who see a history of resistance to theory in ecocriticism, of ecocriticism being something of a “praise-song” chorus (Cohen 20) harboring “some creaky old traditions” (Phillips, *The Truth* ix). Dana Phillips, often seen as abrasive, has recently argued that the resistance to theory “puts ecocritics in the theoretical and philosophical minority among their academic peers” (“Ecocriticism” 38).

Phillips is not alone in this kind of thinking. Susie O’Brien’s contemplation of ecocriticism’s failure to consider the dangers of fantasies about the mimetic capacities of literature (relative to the efforts exercised by postcolonial theory) is worth quoting at length here because it shows just how far we are from at least some of our academic peers:

Drawing on the insights of poststructuralism, postcolonial theory has undermined the cultural foundations of colonialism by highlighting the contradictions that inhere not just between, but also within, all putatively

representational discourses, thereby pointing up the dangers of heeding claims by *any* cultural structures (including postcolonialism and ecology) to reflect the world transparently. (194)

One wonders why ecocriticism has backed down from the challenge, when “nature, like anything else we talk about, is first and foremost an artifact of language [...] it can be anything but direct and literal” (Chaloupka and Cawley 5). Alan Liu’s famous (or infamous) 1993 comment that “There is no nature; there is only history” caused a storm but is really just an echo of Neil Evernden’s comment a year earlier that “one might even say that there is no ‘nature,’ and there never has been” (99). There is no doubt that Peter Quigley is justified in claiming in 1999 that “the academic environmental community in the USA has done a poor job of responding to the challenge of post-structuralism,” and that “after poststructuralism, it is impossible to take a term like ‘nature’ at face value; it is impossible not to see the fissures of contradiction and the fault-lines of history that criss-cross the term” (182). These claims continue to be valid, though I suspect that the reasons for ecocritical resistance to theory are less “the fear of falling into purely textualist, constructionist model [sic] of nature and thus moving away from addressing environmental issues in literature” about which Serpil Oppermann speaks than it is about avoidance of the prickly topic of activism (115). This gets to a basic problem in ecocriticism itself—specifically, its activist motivations and intentions.

Ecocriticism fashions itself activist. The people in the Literature and the Environment Program at the University of California, Santa Barbara, have observed that “many, if not most, ecocritics may think of themselves as environmental activists.”⁹ It is the activist intentions that have generated the discourses of immediacy and the aesthetics of contact that have come to characterize ecocriticism. It is the activist impulse that has given urgency to our words and flavor to our meetings. It is the activist ambitions that have differentiated us and what we seek to do from the legions of staid thematicists who muse uselessly as the world smolders to an end. Like so many other “political” theories before it, ecocriticism was radical in its embryonic stages but seems to be developing into something else. The strategic openness that characterizes early ecocriticism has become to a certain degree ambivalent, garnering success for ecocriticism in its bid to gain footing and credibility in academia, but also resulting in some uncertainty about what ecocriticism does or seeks to do, some sense that “we’ll work it all out as we go along,” to borrow a phrase from

Dr. Sarvis in Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang*.¹⁰ The edge seems to have become blunted. Certainly, if ecocriticism can be said to have begun to founder, it can be said to have done so for two main reasons: (1) its failures to theorize itself adequately and (2) its failures to live up to its initial activist promises. There is here a contradiction that Lance Newman has identified between ecocriticism's "idealist theory of social change and its materialist approach to the relation between literature and nature" (14). Our continued failure to deal either theoretically or practically with the activist challenges of ecocriticism bode well neither for the field nor for the environment. We labor under the delusion that theory is incompatible with praxis, that theory cannot lead to changes in public policy, that theory is no good for the "real world."

Philosophers have long theorized about difficult issues, have long grappled with questions about moral considerability and the natural environment, and yet some of the philosophical statements of the late twentieth century have—far from being divorced from pragmatism and activist effects—significantly changed the way we live. Peter Singer's work on extending moral considerability to animals has led to remarkable changes in how large corporations conduct business. Singer correctly points out that though "some people are skeptical about the impact of moral argument on real life" ("Ethics and Animals" 12), philosophers, in fact, have had profound effects, have "served as midwives of the animal rights movement" (Jasper and Nelkin 90), and "whole industries are being transformed because of the concern for the public welfare of [...] animals" ("Ethics and Animals" 16). It has become more the rule than the exception among cosmetics companies to seek alternatives to testing on animals, the public demand for fur has sharply fallen, and the issue of factory farming has moved from the lunatic fringes toward the popular center in North America and Europe.

Industries that use animals being such strong factors in environmental degradation, Singer has probably had more activist effect than all of the ecocritics combined, paving the way for environmentally friendly businesses, ethical consumerism, and, perhaps above all, extension of moral consideration beyond humanity in ways that have substantially influenced governmental policy decisions. An integral part of Singer's remarkable achievement is in formulating a vocabulary for "a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species" (*Animal Liberation* 15). He calls this prejudice "speciesism." Ecocriticism has yet to formulate a vocabulary for similar prejudices against the broader category of nature, and at least part of the

purpose of this article is to offer the term “ecophobia” to initiate dialogue about the further extension of moral consideration, beyond Singer’s position. Singer’s extension of moral consideration, though significant, is nevertheless marked and limited by anthropocentric biases that posit sentience as the border. It is a border within a hierarchy of increasingly complex organisms, “from plants to animals, [...] from ganglia to brains, from sentience to self-awareness” (Rolston 271), a border that privileges an anthropocentric ontology.

Yet, having said this, the anthropocentrism/ecocentrism debate is in some ways a distraction (perhaps even a nonissue), since a failure to engage in preservation of the natural world will invariably cause suffering to humanity—meaning, therefore, that “even within a human-centred moral framework, the preservation of our environment is a value of the greatest possible importance” (Singer *Practical Ethics* 268).¹¹ Citing Singer in this way, however, does not at all mean accepting his credo that the ability to suffer or the capacity for sentience should be held as touchstones for ethical considerability. Indeed, Singer’s preference utilitarianism rules out developing an environmental ethic because it relies on the very thing that has produced the problem in the first place—an ethically dubious endorsement of a hierarchy of life that places more developed forms of sentience at the top, less developed forms of sentience toward the bottom, and lack of sentience simply beyond considerability. Utilitarian philosophies in general have this weakness. Satisfaction of desires or of perceived needs is at the core of utilitarian philosophies; having these at the core of an ethical system necessarily excludes nonsentient entities from ethical considerability. There is no question that Singer is right in claiming that a “new ethic . . . is required” (286), but it is unlikely that he will ever provide or even accept such an ethic. Nevertheless, Singer’s arguments about the environmental needs “for a largely plant-based diet” (288) are very sound, though they are too often unheard or unheeded by ecocritics and environmentalists.

In the Spring of 2007, I had the pleasure of meeting and talking with Singer about precisely this issue, about the lack of an adequate vocabulary for prejudice and bias against the natural world in general, and about the need to further extend the boundaries of moral considerability, but his responses then and in the emails we exchanged thereafter were disappointing, his main point being that “it is dubious that this will happen.” Yet, the contempt and fear we feel for the agency of the natural environment needs theorizing.¹²

If ecocriticism is committed to making connections, then it is committed to recognizing that control of the natural environment,

understood as a god-given right in western culture, implies ecophobia, just as the use of African slaves implies racism, as rape implies misogyny, as “fag-bashing” implies homophobia, and as animal exploitation implies speciesism. If ecocriticism is committed to making connections, then it is committed to recognizing that these issues (ecophobia, racism, misogyny, homophobia, speciesism) are thoroughly interwoven with each other and must eventually be looked at together.

Theorizing ecophobia, however, in its own terms for the time being means looking at the constitutional moment in history that gives us the biblical imperative to control everything that lives. Control, of course, is the key word here. Ironically, the more control we seem to have over the natural environment, the less we actually have. As Neil Levy so aptly put it, “we are not in control of the non-human world, because we are unable to predict with any accuracy the effects of our actions upon it” (210). Increasingly, the effects of our actions are becoming more intense and less predictable, producing in turn, though, a very predictable storm of ecophobic rhetoric.

Ecocriticism needs a very broad scope for the term ecophobia.¹³ Clinical psychology uses the same term to designate an irrational fear of home;¹⁴ in ecocriticism, the term is independent of and in no way derived from the manner in which it is used in psychology and psychiatry. Ecophobia is an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature as homophobia and racism and sexism. It plays out in many spheres; it sustains the personal hygiene and cosmetics industries (which cite nature’s “flaws” and “blemishes” as objects of their work); it supports city sanitation boards that issue fines seeking to keep out “pests” and “vermin” associated in municipal mentalities with long grass; it keeps beauticians and barbers in business; it is behind landscaped gardens and trimmed poodles in women’s handbags on the Seoul subway system; it is about power and control; it is what makes looting and plundering of animal and nonanimal resources possible. Self-starvation and self-mutilation imply ecophobia no less than lynching implies racism.

Detailing ecophobia in a way that is philosophically grounded is both important and difficult. Theorizing about ecophobia in a way that is meaningful to an ecocritical project but not philosophically naïve means addressing the question of evil. Surprisingly little has been explored down this avenue of ecocritical discussion. Aldo Leopold, in his much-admired plea to develop a “land ethic” and to extend ethical consideration beyond humanity to the land, claims that “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability,

and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (224–25). This sounds good, but it is philosophically ungrounded and scientifically naïve. It forces us to rehash the problems associated with the term "beauty." It suggests that biotic systems are static when, in fact, they are not. It compels us to believe that nature is kind and good, when, in fact, it is morally neutral. Nature actively disrupts the integrity and stability of biotic communities all of the time, and this is neither good nor bad. Leopold's dictum forces us to accept his anthropocentric notions of good and bad and to foist these notions of good and bad onto nature.

The approach Holmes Rolston III takes is somewhat different in his 1992 article entitled "Disvalues in Nature." Rolston's philosophical discussion of the question of evil in nature is the first of its kind and has been (and continues to be) useful, very heavily discussed, and problematic. One of the most salient points that comes out of it is an articulation of the fact that what may be good *in toto* (i.e. on an ecosystemic scale) may be (and often is) bad on what he calls the "local" (individual) level: "it is bad to be eaten; death results" (253). There is much more bad at the individual level than there is on the systemic level. The utilitarian will argue the same: the good of the many outweighs the good of the few.

Historically, things have been thought to be right (if I may echo but modify Leopold) when they have allowed us to flourish and wrong when they have killed us or when they have (or when we have imagined them to have) hindered, threatened, or hurt us. Representations of nature as an opponent that hurts, hinders, threatens, or kills us—regardless of the philosophical value or disvalue of the ecosystemic functions of the dynamics being represented—are ecophobic. The question that has grown out of Rolston's work is about whether or not nature can be evil (or whether evil can be naturalized).¹⁵ Surely the answer to both of these questions is simply no. This goes right back to Augustine's notion that evil is a human construct, one relative to our imaginations.

Imagining badness in nature and marketing that imagination—in short, writing ecophobia—is such a multifaceted affair that it is difficult to know where to begin. To an audience such as the Elizabethans, who were very familiar with grain shortages, bad harvests, cold weather, and profound storms, we may easily see how someone such as Shakespeare writes ecophobia in a play such as *King Lear*. This play is vivid in its foregrounding of environmental unpredictability, its dramatization of a king powerless before nature, of a king who is victimized by the weather, unhoused, and alienated. To a global audience glued before flat screens of CNN, an audience

very familiar with polar ice sheets breaking off, global warming, and Katrina, we may easily see how our media daily writes nature as a hostile opponent who is responding angrily to our incursions and actions, an opponent to be feared and, with any luck, controlled.

Human history is a history of controlling the natural environment, of taking rocks and making them tools or weapons to modify or to kill parts of the natural environment, of building shelters to protect us from weather and predators, of maintaining personal hygiene to protect ourselves from diseases and parasites that can kill us, of first imagining agency and intent in nature and then quashing that imagined agency and intent. Nature becomes the hateful object in need of our control, the loathed and feared thing that can only result in tragedy if left in control (as in *King Lear* or Katrina). Control of nature means arguing on the biblical precedent, as Francis Bacon does, that nature exists for and because of mankind, that "Man, if we look to final causes, may be regarded as the centre of the world; insomuch that if man were taken away from the world, the rest would seem all astray, without aim or purpose" (270). As Keith Thomas has noted, "[F]or Bacon, the purpose of science was to restore to man that dominion over the creation which he had partly lost at the fall" (27). This is a far cry from the more recent positions that evaluate our relevance: Christopher Manes, for instance, arguing that "[i]f fungus, one of the 'lowliest' of forms on a humanistic scale of values, were to go extinct tomorrow, the effect on the rest of the biosphere would be catastrophic; in contrast, if *Homo sapiens* disappeared, the event would go virtually unnoticed by the vast majority of Earth's life forms" (24).¹⁶ If such "ecological humility," as Manes terms it, is one of the hallmarks of ecocriticism, though, ecophobia is one of the hallmarks of human progress (17).

Theorizing ecophobia requires at least some discussion of its history.¹⁷ While ecophobia has one of its most famous articulations in the Old Testament, it certainly does not begin there. It probably has roots that reach back to the evolution of the opposable thumb, which enabled hominids to make tools and to conscript "wheat, barley, peas, lentils, donkeys, sheep, pigs, and goats about 9,000 years ago" (Crosby 21). By the early modern period, obviously, there had been huge changes in humanity's relationship with the natural world, and, without a doubt, the crossing of the seas in the fifteenth century and the subsequent empire building that developed produced the most dramatic of those historical changes up to that point.

Imperialism indirectly offered the first big push to control of the natural environment since the Neolithic Revolution. The world was becoming smaller, mappable, predictable, and less diversified. With

the colonists came disease, extinctions, homogenization, and profound changes in humanity's control of the world. The romanticization of nature as a space of simplicity, innocence, and peace that Raymond Williams notes as characteristic of "the country" no more slowed the progress of ecophobia than did the notion of "the Noble Savage" slow the genocide of colonized peoples.

Not far behind the crossing of the seas and the colonialism that developed forthwith was, of course, the Industrial Revolution. Here, the control of nature was consolidated. Among the many paradigmatic shifts and lurches occasioned by the Industrial Revolution was the redefinition of nature from participative subject and organism in an organic community to the status of pure object, a machine that ideally could be intimately and infinitely controlled and forced to spit out products in the service of an increasingly utilitarian capitalist economy.

Although we can always find diggers and levelers and pockets of resistance that challenge the ecophobic hegemony of the West, and although there is undeniably a biophilic impulse somewhere inside humanity, history has not been kind to green thinkers and revisionists. Even now at what seems a new height of interest in environmental issues, we continue to hear a pathological inability to see connections in the language of ecophobia, the labeling—for instance—of the natural world as an angered Mother Nature; we continue to see the versatility of ecophobic positions that posit nature as the scapegoat for social problems; and we continue to see people who fashion themselves as part of the solution actively resisting the kinds of theory that might indeed help lead to the solutions that have been so persistently out of our reach.

Ecocriticism needs, as many have noted, more structural and methodological definition, less ambivalence and ambiguity, and more direction, although without a "single, dominant worldview" (Slovic, "Letter" 1102) dictating ecocritical practice. A viable ecocriticism has little future unless it deals with the ambivalence dragged in by its wide net—needs, in other words, to begin theorizing its central matter of concern: ecophobia. Similarly, the kind of future a feminist criticism would have had without theorization of sexism and misogyny would at best have been limited. Methodologically, this means that ecocritics begin their analyses of texts—literary and nonliterary—through nuanced discussions of the cultural, intellectual, and environmental history surrounding a given text, the environment its author daily breathed and smelled and ate and tasted, the difficulties and tragedies lived and caused. While this is certainly not the place to make an application of this kind of proposed methodology,

certainly at least a glimpse of what it would look like is appropriate here.

For *King Lear*, for instance, an ecocritical method would need to look at “The Little Ice Age” and at what it had done to dislocate humanity from its imagined role of authority and control. It would need to note that “Storm activity had increased by 85 percent in the second half of the sixteenth century,” according to archeologist Brian Fagan (91). It would need to describe the Little Ice Age (now very well-documented, indeed, especially outside of literary studies). It would need to register an understanding of the fact that “throughout Europe, the years from 1560 to 1600 were cooler and stormier, with later wine harvests and considerably stronger winds than those of the twentieth century,” and it would need to position this information in relation to Shakespeare’s text (Fagan 90). It would need to note also that “the weather had become decidedly more unpredictable, with sudden shifts and lower temperatures that culminated in the cold decades of the late sixteenth century” (Fagan xvi), that “as climate conditions deteriorated, a lethal mix of misfortunes descended on a growing European population” (Fagan 91), and that these were conditions that Shakespeare saw when he looked outside—a variation on Stephen Greenblatt’s idea that for this play’s central concerns, “Shakespeare simply looked around him at the everyday world” (*Will* 357). While Greenblatt does not actually make mention of the materially present weather ruffling and cooling Shakespeare’s diminishing hair and years, the intense foregrounding and characterization of weather in *Lear* certainly bear material implications pertinent to the period.

A viable ecocriticism has little future without, to some extent, closing some borders (whose unrestricted openness have become ambivalent, a liability) and, to some degree, restricting entry; similarly, the kind of future a feminist criticism would have by nominating Hugh Hefner a feminist would be at best questionable. Producing a viable ecocriticism means adopting a tacit intellectual understanding that if it is sexist, then it cannot qualify as ecocriticism, since sexism goes against the spirit, goals, and vision of ecocriticism. This need not mean that ecocriticism need always be actively feminist—it would be nice, but that might be asking a bit much. Similarly, if an environmentally oriented critique is demonstrably racist or homophobic, then, again, it cannot qualify as ecocriticism, for the same reasons—and, again, the criticism need not always be actively and demonstrably seeking an antiracist or antihomophobic project, but it does always need to be *not* promoting racism, or bigotry based on cultural, ethnic, religious, sexual, or geographic grounds. The more

that ecocriticism *does* theorize itself in confluence with other activist theories, the better off it will be.

Again, while this is certainly not the place to offer an extended example of how such confluent theorizing might go, again, a quick look at its possible contours is appropriate here—and, again, rather than choosing a text that is obviously “environmentally oriented,” a less likely Shakespearean candidate might be more convincing.

If ecocriticism helps to make sense of the startling fear of environmental unpredictability *King Lear* presents and to contextualize the ecophobia written into the play’s scripting of a profoundly hostile and frightening environment, no less does *Coriolanus*—embroiled in debates about voice, sexuality, and place—posit a crisis of identity as a crisis of environmental embeddedness. To briefly review, the play begins with an environmental crisis to which we have become all too familiar: famine. There are revolts, for which Caius Martius has no patience. Of course, the Enclosure Acts are an obvious starting point for the cultural, intellectual, and environmental history with which *Coriolanus* is enmeshed: as Kenneth Burke argued in 1966, “when *Coriolanus* appeared (1608), there had been considerable rioting due to the Enclosure Acts by which many tenants had been dispossessed of their traditional rights to the land, and were suffering great hardships” (130). Among these hardships was starvation, a direct result of the conversion of land from farming to sheep raising. From the very start of the play, surgical divisions in land and society are an implicit and running theme.

The outbreak of war makes Martius a hero to the plebians he finds so contemptible, and he returns victorious to Rome with the name Coriolanus. He campaigns reluctantly for—and gets—plebeian votes, although they are withdrawn on the advice of Brutus and Sicinius. Divisions remain, and Coriolanus responds impulsively, is branded a traitor, and is forced into exile, where he befriends Aufidius, his old enemy of war, in order to avenge himself on Rome. Aufidius and Coriolanus become close with each other, and it is only Volumnia who can prevail on her son to have mercy on Rome. Aufidius, offended by what he sees as disloyalty, has Coriolanus killed.

It is perhaps not wrong to claim, as Arthur Riss does, that “Coriolanus falls because he asserts himself as a private, absolutely enclosed, literal ‘body’ in a society that mandates he embrace an ideology of the body politic”; however, the type of space enclosed is crucial because it is not simply enclosure but the matter enclosed that determines all of the tragic action that follows (54). The play presents

on-again off-again enemies forever divided but united like the healed flesh of a surgical incision.

So close were they that their “double bosoms seem[ed] to wear one heart” (4.3.13).¹⁸ This is, of course, almost more than simple male friendship: indeed, the queer possibilities in *Coriolanus* are by now well noted. The space of same-sex love, significantly, becomes a no-place, a loathed and feared no-man’s land, somewhere between heterosexual marriage and same-sex friendship, between Rome and Corioles: a space that, in this play, cannot be inhabited or voiced. Coriolanus, fragmented from—a fragment of—a larger, fragmented social body, seeks “a world elsewhere” (3.3.135), but there is nowhere for him to go. The separation he draws between himself and everything else is ultimately impossible, and he becomes indistinguishable from the natural world, “a disease that must be cut away” (3.1.293), a foot “gangren’d” (1.305), an “infection [. . . that might] spread further” (11.308–09) and must be appropriately dealt with, a beast that angry (and hungry) opponents may “tear [. . .] to pieces” (5.6.120). He is a thing of the natural world, an object exploited and then disposed of when its utility has expired, an object accorded the same moral status of the natural world. He is a leader who becomes a dismembered carcass, having been consumed by his people. Having been consumed, he is, perhaps, the “disposable excess” Jonathan Goldberg speaks about by the end of the play—certainly, at any rate, a site of confusion of natural and unnatural, a commodity unfit for both social and natural economies, and thus disposable (262). He is the object of this play’s ecophobic fury.

Coriolanus demands both an ecocritical analysis and a queer reading, and it is very strange that there has yet to emerge a queer ecocriticism.¹⁹ Catriona Sandilands, who has become one of the few lone voices queering environmental politics, is all too correct in asserting “that environmentalists haven’t had much to say about heterosexism and homophobia” (“From Unnatural Passions” 31).²⁰ And there is much to be said. Queer ecocriticism situates us theoretically to understand that the commodification of nature and of sexual minorities are similar, each depending on a large consumer base that seeks a vicarious experience, rather than the thing itself. In twenty-first-century terms, this means zones of voyeurism offered by “queer” comic TV sites, or documentaries offering landscapes of ecotourism, all with little interest in subjectivities, identities, organizational potentials, and so on; in seventeenth-century terms, commodification of nature and of sexual minorities means othering difference and space. Queer theory voices silenced communities; queer ecocriticism voices “Nature” along with those communities,

“offers up the possibility of thinking of nature as an actor in the process of co-constructing the world” (Sandilands, *The Good-Natured Feminist* 196).

The confluence of queer and environmental issues in *Coriolanus* in ways that are at once rehearsals of ecophobia and of normative sexualities supports the argument that ecocriticism needs both confluent theorization and a viable terminology (“ecophobia” being a viable beginning) that will allow us such confluent theorization.

Rethinking the borders of ecocriticism is crucial, and it seems inevitable that such rethinking will lead to shutting some out, but this in itself must raise the question of limits. What are the limits to who are to be shut out? Living up to the ideals of openness that have so ambivalently characterized ecocriticism until now surely cannot mean allowing in racists, misogynists, and homophobes, but what about speciesists and meat eaters? Even asking is perhaps contentious, but living up to ecocriticism’s ideal of not only seeking out but seeing connections means recognizing that the ways in which Euro-Western history has stood in relation to nonhuman animals have more often than not been, to put it mildly, hurtful to the environment.

Yet, within the environmentalist movement, as well as among ecocritics, the topic of animals has remained on the fringes. Rebecca Raglon and Marian Scholtmeijer have recently offered a cogent review of just how separated animal advocacy and environmental advocacy have been, arguing that animal rights advocates “continue to have the status of outsiders in the Euro-Western context in spite of the fact that individuals have spoken up on behalf of animals for centuries” (137–38, n3).²¹ Ecocriticism is increasingly clear about its intentions, and when we include animals in ecocritical discussions, the activist intentions suggest several things. Perhaps the most immediate question ecocriticism can ask is about how our assumptions about animals affect the natural environment. If we assume that it is wrong to systematically exploit and kill nonhuman animals, then the ethics and implications of distinguishing between domestic and wild animals need to be addressed.

Barney Nelson’s *The Wild and the Domestic*, which explicitly aligns itself with an ecocritical line, focuses precisely on this dichotomy, arguing it to be a false one: “the more one really knows domestic animals, the less domestic they seem,” Nelson maintains (24). Surprisingly, though, Nelson stakes her ground not to argue against using animals but to argue against a dichotomy that results in restrictions on ranges of foraging for animals being exploited for human uses. Nelson’s *The Wild and the Domestic* needs to be taken to task for

tacitly endorsing an ethics of exploitation. And more broadly speaking, ecocritics on the whole (with very few exceptions) also need to be taken to task for not looking at how the continued use of animals for food, entertainment, forced labor, and so on, figures into environmental discussions.

Carol J. Adams, perhaps more than any single author, has argued on the gendering of animals and the animalizing of gender, on the “overlap of cultural images of sexual violence against women and the fragmentation and dismemberment of nature and the body in Western culture” (40), and on the racializing and classing of meat, but Adams is generally ignored by the ecocritical club. In Greg Garrard’s “accessible volume” on ecocriticism in *The New Critical Idiom* series, for instance, not a reference, not a footnote, not a single word about Adams appears. Not a single word.

Even someone such as Randy Malamud, whose writing is both engaging and convincing, articulates his animal-inclusive ecocritical aesthetic without mention of either diet or clothing, explaining that “the basic elements of my ecocritical aesthetic are: seeing animals without hurting them; seeing them in *their* contexts; teaching about animals; advocating respect for them; and finally *knowing* them, richly but also incompletely” (*Poetic Animals* 45). Radical for what it does articulate, the book is notable to political vegetarians for what it doesn’t. Of course, part of the activism of ecocriticism is in saying things that need to be said, and the attempt “to help make amends for past deficiencies among literary scholars” (Malamud, *Reading Zoos* 7) is itself a radical and progressive stance on animals. Yet, the arrow seems a bit wide of the mark.²² Surely it is in the clothes we wear and in the food we eat (as Erica Fudge has also argued—see “Saying Nothing” 70) that we have our most immediate day-to-day contact with animals.

Avowedly vegetarian critics rarely appear cited in avowedly ecocritical manuscripts, articles, or conference papers, and animal rights activists are only nominally less on the lunatic fringe among ecocritics than in society at large. The insanely contorted binaristic logic that separates us from them—in the process maintaining their object status and allowing us to eat and wear them, not to mention severely restricting the activist potentials of the theory—remains a topic of discussion that is very low on the ecocritical agenda.

A viable ecocritical methodology—a viable theory about how we think we are or intend to be activist, a theory that *is* practical rather than a watered-down theory that *seems* practical—must begin with discussions of ecophobia, must recognize that ecophobia is rooted in and dependent on anthropocentric arrogance and speciesism, on the

ethical position that humanity is outside of and exempt from the laws of nature.²³ An ecocriticism that takes ecophobia as its core (as feminism takes misogyny and sexism as core issues) will undoubtedly find itself moving toward methodology, will find itself in positions of confluent theorizing, will find itself productively continuing the discussion of environmental issues alongside discussions of race and gender and sexuality but with a terminology that works for the environmental aspects, will find itself looking at environmental history (alongside other aspects of cultural and environmental history) in its analyses of texts, and it will find itself both defining and performing activism.²⁴

For a critical endeavor that fashions itself activist, ecocriticism has avoided the sensitive topic of activism for far too long now, has ironically fallen victim to a version of the “obscurity and inaccessibility” Glen Love warns against, not by theorizing but by *not* doing so (211). Theorizing and using the term “ecophobia” removes some of that obscurity, clarifies what it is we are talking about, and potentially takes us toward the immediacy, the directness, the contact—in short, perhaps, the activism—that has so desperately characterized ecocriticism. There are several core things, “must haves,” that this activism will include: (1) ecocriticism will need to lead to heightened awareness, and this will be a direct result of the definitional clarity afforded by the “paradigm” of ecophobia; (2) ecocriticism will need to do what feminist criticism does, as Toril Moi so aptly expressed: “it seeks to expose, not to perpetuate,” which ultimately means either an implicit or explicit call for broad changes in behavior (xiv); (3) it will need, as David Orton has argued, “to have some direct relevancy for environmental and green activists who embrace changing industrial capitalist society”;²⁵ and (4) it will need practice from its preachers, will need to look seriously at anthropocentrism and speciesism and how these inform the daily choices we make, from the food we eat to the clothes we wear—in the same way that it would be difficult to take seriously a man who calls himself feminist at the two o’clock seminar but goes to strip clubs on weekends, so too is it difficult to take seriously big oil companies that spend millions advertizing their commitment to the environment, or the ecocritic who theorizes brilliantly on a stomach full of roast beef on rye, oblivious to how environmentally unsound meat production really is. Perhaps, too, as Scott Slovic has recently argued, another “must have” of activism and what he calls ecocritical responsibility is an openness to negotiating a personal balance between “various forms of engagement” (3), “life’s flavors and its risks” (100), between “aesthetic and emotional attachments and [. . .] politics,” and most importantly to accepting that this

balance “constantly shifts” (221). Certainly this balancing is consonant with ecocriticism’s resistance to culturally and theoretically monolithic versions of ecocriticism—these would no doubt give rise to ugly orthodoxy while lip-servicing diversity and praxis. Part of the difficult balancing act must be, as I have been arguing, in addressing the very topic of openness, in finding a balance between openness, on the one hand, and somewhat less permeable borders on the other, since surely not all that looks green *is* green.

It’s time for ecocriticism to realize that the openness that has been so productive for the field has become ambivalent, to take seriously the challenges ecocriticism has set itself, and to resist the orthodoxy that *does* seem to be settling on an ecocriticism that was so promisingly and excitingly radical in its embryonic stages. A very necessary part of this has to be in theorizing about ecophobia.

NOTES

1. John Tallmadge and the late Henry Harrington very succinctly warn about theory that goes “spinning off into obscurantism or idiosyncrasy” (xv), while Lawrence Buell worries about what he terms “mesmerization by literary theory” (*The Environmental Imagination* 111).

2. I draw the term “ambivalent openness” from Serpil Oppermann’s provocative “Theorizing Ecocriticism.”

3. We might note here that Lawrence Buell has also argued pointedly about the absence of an ecocritical methodology, claiming in 1999 that ecocriticism has not made “a paradigm-inaugurating statement like Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (for colonial discourse studies) or Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (for new historicism)” (“Letter” 1091).

4. Certainly, the feeling that ecocriticism has been free of infighting is not one unanimously shared, Jennifer Wallace remarking as early as 1997 in *The Times Higher Education* that ecocriticism “has provoked the inevitable academic squabbles.” In this case, it is Alan Liu’s comment that “There is no nature; there is only history” to which Wallace refers and which concerns us here, partly because the challenge Liu offers of recognizing and theorizing mediation remains, in many ways, unanswered in ecocritical theory.

5. See Stolz (http://achangeinthewind.typepad.com/achangeinthewind/2005/11/ecophobia_a_par.html).

6. Current titles—for instance, Ingram et al. (eds), *Coming into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice*—reflect this desire for contact.

7. The Fifth Biennial Conference of ASLE (the 2003 conference entitled “the solid earth! the actual world!”) springs to mind.

8. The phrase “resurgence of the real” comes from the title of Charlene Spretnak’s 1999 book.

9. See <http://lit-enviro.n.english.ucsb.edu/Questions,%20Literature%20and%20the%20Environment%20at%20UCSB.html>.

10. Scott Slovic also cites Abbey's phrase (see "Ecocriticism: Containing Multitudes" 161)—though somewhat more optimistically than I do—in his statement (about inclusivity and diversity) introducing the "Ecocritical Principles" section of Laurence Coupe's *The Green Studies Reader* (2000).

11. Eric Katz has argued convincingly that "the debate between anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism needs to be expressed in non-absolutist terms, i.e., in a language that permits compromise, flexibility, and a pluralism of values" (378). It is a reasonable position that is "highly contextual" and that eschews the absolutist positions that have sometimes characterized debates on the topic among ecocritics, certainly the debate between Lawrence Buell and Leo Marx at the 2003 ASLE Conference in Boston being one of these (379).

12. While this contempt and fear, which I am calling ecophobia, does not represent the sole trait that characterizes our relationship with the natural world, it is as yet a remarkably unattended one. Its opposite would, to some extent, be the biophilia Edward O. Wilson defines as "the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms" (31). Certainly Scott Slovic is accurate to note that "ecocriticism is actually motivated by biophilia" (Scott Slovic, e-mail to the author, September 16, 2008). Admittedly, biophilia indeed seems to be the *motivation* but not the *object* of ecocritical inquiry. The object of such inquiry certainly must centrally include ecophobia and how it patterns our relationship with nature. We can clearly see that ecophobia is winning out over biophilia. The "rapid disappearance" (Wilson 40) of species of which Wilson speaks so eloquently and persuasively has a cause: it is ecophobia, surely, not biophilia.

13. Portions of this paragraph have appeared in earlier forms in Simon Estok's "An Introduction to the Shakespeare and Ecocriticism." *ISLE* 12.2 (Summer 2005), 112–13; "Shakespeare and Ecocriticism." *AUMLA* 103 (May 2005): 17–19; "Ecocritical Theory and Pedagogy for Shakespeare: Teaching the Environment of *The Winter's Tale*," *Shakespeare Matters: History, Teaching, Performance* (2003): 196, n5; and "Conceptualizing the Other in Hostile Early Modern Geographies." *The Journal of English Language and Literature* 45 (Winter 1999), 878–90.

14. I first used the term "ecophobia" in my PhD dissertation in 1996. Three years later, I used it in an article entitled "Conceptualizing the Other in Hostile Early Modern Geographies." In the same year, Robert van Tine independently proposed a similar term ("gaeophobia"), which he defines as "a form of insanity characterized by extreme destructive behavior towards the natural environment and a pathological denial of the effects of that destructive behavior" (<<http://www.ecopsychology.org/journal/gatherings2/robin.htm>>). Potentially useful though it is for its identification (sometimes quite mechanical) of attitudes toward the natural environment in terms of pathologies laid out in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV)*, van Tine's article seems stillborn, not a word of it appearing in

any scholarship anywhere that I can find. While this is a bit distressing, the scholarship is important nevertheless because it shows that the kind of theoretical articulation I am seeking in this article has been recognized as being necessary in the field of ecopsychology. My approach, then, while it does not reject ecopsychological analyses of the pathologies behind contempt for the natural environment, is more interested in the confluent approach that examines philosophical underpinnings.

15. Both of these questions, incidentally, are variations on titles of articles that have appeared in response to Rolston: Wayne Ouderkirk's "Can Nature be Evil" and Jim Cheney's "Naturalizing the Problem of Evil."

16. The topic has become an increasingly marketable one, with the Animal Planet/Discovery Channel's joint production of the CGI series *The Future is Wild* (2003), Alan Weisman's 2007 book *The World Without Us*, the History Channel's *Life After People* (David de Vries, *Life After People*, History Channel, 21 January 2008), and the National Geographic Channel's *Aftermath: Population Zero* (March 2008), each, in their own way, tacitly presenting an implicitly ecophobic vision of a Nature that will finally conquer humanity, will reclaim all of the world, and will remain long after we are gone.

17. In work that predates ecocriticism, several capable scholars have, in fact, discussed precisely the topic "the domination of Nature" (see, for example, Leiss, Evernden, and Roszak).

18. All references to Shakespeare's works use *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 1997.

19. There have been articles here and there, to be sure. Greta Gaard offered the first serious study that sought a confluent analysis between queer and environmental theory in her pioneering 1997 "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism," but the bulk of the work done in this area has been that of Catriona Sandilands, whose books and articles (see References) have, in many ways, brilliantly defined the field. This said, however, work is appearing. In August 2008, Ashgate published *Queering the Non/Human* (Noreen Giffney, and Myra J. Hird [Eds.] *Queering the Non/Human*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), a book which will no doubt be indispensable to all theorizing in queer ecocriticism for years to come.

20. Robert Azzarello echoes this concern in his June 2008 CFP "Queer Ecocriticism and Theory" (<http://cfp.english.upenn.edu/archive/Theory/1439.html>), where he asks "why has queer theory been so disconnected from environmental studies?"

21. This idea has been stated variously in numerous places. To cite just two recent examples, Charles Bergman has argued that "to study nonhuman animals in ways that try to accord them value and dignity is still likely to strike most academics as quaintly marginal, even risible, an easily dismissed sentimentality" (143), while I have argued that "scholarly interest in animals [...] has remained on the fringes of ecocritical writing" (*Theory from the Fringes* 61). This is not to say, however, that animals have been absent from ecocritical discussions. Indeed, theories from the fringes of mainstream contemporary ecocriticism—such as those of Randy Malamud, Barney Nelson, and the increasingly supplanted ecofeminist corpus—have had significant scholarly dialogue on connections between environmental and animal issues,

but, to reiterate, this dialogue has remained on the fringes and has not moved into the mainstream.

22. Malamud's work is insightful and radical, as far as it goes; at least he mentions Adams, though fleetingly, in *Reading Zoos* (214–15). One thing that becomes very clear in reading Malamud's work, as I mention elsewhere (see "Theory from the Fringes"), is that theory and activism are difficult to reconcile. Malamud's *Reading Zoos* is, in part, a response to Glen Love's complaint that scholars have retreated "even further from public life into a professionalism characterized by its obscurity and inaccessibility to all but other English professors" (211). While Malamud's writing about zoos from the premise that they are wrong is a radical move, his theory—like much literary theory—seems worlds apart from the political activism from which Love sees scholars as having retreated, and Dale D. Goble seems correct in claiming that "the language [Malamud uses] does force someone outside the discipline to parse the sentences" (Goble 3), that Malamud sometimes produces the very obscurity and inaccessibility that he seeks to remedy. Of course, any of us doing theory (myself included) produce writing at times shot through with obscurity, but it would be nice to see Malamud producing clarity at least on what should be so very obvious, given his subject—namely, on the topic of the use of animals for food and clothing.

23. Raglon and Scholtmeijer discuss "the struggle to exempt ourselves from the 'laws of nature'" in relation to Daniel Quinn's remarkable novel *Ismael* (126).

24. Confluent theorizing would help William Leiss understand better what he sees as a "puzzling affinity" between desires to control people and desires to control the natural world (15). It would allow him to better understand that the questions of power and control feminism addresses, for instance, have strong theoretical resonances in ecocriticism. Control of the natural environment is perhaps less puzzling when understood through a perspective that takes cognizance of the interconnectedness among sites in which questions of power play out.

25. See <http://home.ca.inter.net/~greenweb/Disconnect.html>.

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