

KAREN L KILCUP, *Fallen Forests: Emotion, Embodiment, and Ethics in American Women's Environmental Writing, 1781-1924* (Athens and London: U of Georgia P, 2013), 512 pp.

Karen Kilcup's astute investigation into the environmental dimensions of the works of a heterogeneous set of nineteenth-century American women writers contributes to scholarship in American women's writing, ecocriticism, and feminist rhetoric while also expanding the scope of each of these fields. In the American tradition of nature writing that runs from Henry David Thoreau and John Muir to Barry Lopez and Annie Dillard, the primary objective has been to develop self-awareness through close observation of nature and to reflect critically on the terms of that self-awareness so as to extend empathy to the nonhuman world. Kilcup identifies a lesser known tradition of American environmental writing authored by women who "often perceived 'nature' and 'the environment' within a complex framework of embodied and social experience" (2). The women she portrays were all acutely aware of their own physical and mental enmeshment in the world that surrounded them, whether they lived a rugged life on the Western frontier or earned their living in urban environments. Importantly, Kilcup's selection of primary texts consciously moves "beyond white middle-class women's writing," including works by "women of color, working-class women, and non-Protestant women" (5), thus offering a kaleidoscope of culturally inflected understandings of nature and human-nature relationships that challenge and significantly enlarge the accepted canon of American environmental writing.

Furthermore, the culturally rich and ethnically diverse archive of environmental writing that Kilcup has uncovered is not only comprehensive in terms of its authors; *Fallen Forests* also highlights the multiplicity of genres as well as the development of hybrid genres "ranging from Cherokee oratory to travel writing, the slave narrative, diaries, polemical texts, sketches, novels and exposés" (5). Kilcup's deliberately wide and open definition of environmental writing allows her to include the voices of women who might otherwise not have been noticed. She explores the intersections and inevitable mixing of these different forms of storytelling, and she goes far beyond reading them as chronicles of a bygone time

in American environmental history or even as forgotten treasures of nature writing. Highlighting their political and activist dimensions, she understands American women's environmental writings as the result of a deliberate foregrounding of individual subjective experience, and she constantly reminds us that individual experiences of the natural world are circumscribed not only by gender and sexuality, but also by ethnicity, race, class, age, health, and geographical location.

The multifaceted tradition of environmental writing that Kilcup uncovers begins in 1781 when the Cherokee Beloved Woman and political activist Nancy Ward gave her first recorded speech to U.S. treaty commissioners in order to oppose Indian Removal. From here, the book proceeds in a chronological vein, considering diverse groups of writers within thematically organized chapters. The first chapter focuses on the orally influenced hybrid rhetoric of Native American writers who responded to the traumatic experiences around eastern Indian Removal, among them Margaret Ann Scott, Lydia Sigourney, and Mary Jemison. Kilcup's analytical emphasis is on these women's recounting of what the large-scale loss of ancestral lands meant on the level of embodied experience, arguing that such orally inflected and highly visceral storytelling "anticipate[s] contemporary environmental justice and ecofeminist analysis" (22). Chapter two continues the examination of the relationship between landownership, gender, and environmental justice issues but shifts the focus to the rhetorical strategies of a diverse set of travel narratives that range from Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to Caroline Kirkland's *Forest Life* and Lydia Sigourney's *Scenes in My Native Land*. Regardless of their many important differences, Kilcup suggests, these narratives all grapple with questions of land ownership, resource exploitation, and the closely related question of who gets to own and exploit humans and non-human nature alike.

The third chapter shifts the focus from race and ethnicity to class as it turns to the environmental writing of working-class women "whose voices have been almost entirely eclipsed in studies of 19th century American women's writing, American women's rhetoric, and environmental literature" (134). At the center of Kilcup's analysis are the paid domestic servant Lorenza Stevens Berbineau, the indentured servant and entrepreneur Har-

riet Wilson, and factory worker and teacher Lucy Larcom who all wrote texts that engage questions of physical embodiment, agency, and environmental justice. Chapter four continues to interrogate the importance of social conditions and economic necessities for writers' environmental perspectives but turns to the question of respectability and its social mediation through consumer goods such as clothing and food. The "advice writing" of mostly urban middle-class women such as Celia Thaxter, Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Pauline Hopkins may not fit into traditional categories of nature writing, but Kilcup detects in them a sustained focus on gendered and class-related injustices of bodily harm, some of which are connected to environmental factors. In most cases this critical analysis of female embodiment is convincingly linked to nonhuman nature and the environmental cost of consumer culture. The fifth and final chapter of the book returns to the frontier again, which by now has moved far into the "uncivilized" West. With Sarah Winnemucca, Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton, and Zitkala-Ša, the chapters turns to a multi-ethnic group of women who strove to expose in their writings that "the savage/civilized polarity" (268) that was so frequently employed in mainstream frontier displaced violent conflicts over resources.

Throughout the book, Kilcup relies on the concept of *literary emotional intelligence* (3) in her analysis of the affective narrative strategies and activist rhetoric that she detects in the writings of these nineteenth-century women. As its subtitle, *Emotion, Embodiment, and Ethics in American Women's Environmental Writing, 1781-1924* suggests, *Fallen Forests* is interested in the physical dimensions of environmental storytelling and in these writers' deliberate employment of sentimental strategies to engender an embodied awareness of environmental and ethical concerns. She grounds her analysis of particular texts' rhetorical functions and effects in ecofeminist theory as well as "contemporary emotional intelligence theory" (10). This allows her to approach the issue of embodiment from a materialist perspective, and it also turns her focus toward the rhetorical functions of empathy and sympathy and their relationship to ethical questions. As she explains in the introduction of her book, the "affective virtuosity" of the writers under consideration "incorporates not only emotions—such as sympathy,

anger, fear, and frustration—but also ethical appeals, a rhetorical mode traditionally denied to women in Western societies" (22). The link between affective and ethical appeals is an important one—one that has been the subject of much research in moral philosophy, psychology and literary studies—and Kilcup deserves credit for bringing it to the forefront in her ecocritical discussion of women's environmental writing.

One almost wishes, however, she had limited her "capacious and flexible theoretical approach" to the concept of sentimentalism and related research in literary studies and stayed away from emotion research in psychology and the somewhat hazy notion of emotional intelligence. For that she relies centrally on British journalist Daniel Goleman's popular science book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* (1995). Although Kilcup claims that "[i]n its attention to sympathy, literary scholars' work on sentimentalism has paralleled recent brain science" (8), her references to the latter do not go beyond Goleman's somewhat simplistic conceptualization of emotional intelligence as a bundle of "abilities...which include self-control, zeal and persistence, and the ability to motivate" (xii). There is very little direct engagement with affective science and/or with contemporary philosophy of emotion—both of them research fields that have exploded in recent years—and the exact relation between empathy, emotion, and ethics also remains unclear. Nor is there an engagement with theories of embodiment (for example within the field of embodied cognition) beyond those debated within material feminism (Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Alaimo 2010).

This lack of theoretical substantiation of key critical terms seems regrettable, not least because an engagement with either affect theory in the poststructural vein or (cognitive) affective narratology may have given her analysis of the sentimental strategies of nineteenth-century women's environmental writing an additional critical edge. The scholarship of Suzanne Keen (2007) and Patrick Colm Hogan (2003, 2011), for instance, might have given Kilcup some solid empirical and theoretical grounding for her largely unsubstantiated claim that "emotions are contagious" (9) and her assertion that a writer like Hopkins is "carefully directing readers' emotions" (256). It might also have led her to reexamine her assertion that a writer who uses strong emotional appeals "is more

likely to influence...those sensitive to emotion” while potentially alienating “individuals governed principally by intellect” (9). The conclusion could very well have been that grouping readers (and non-readers) into such clear-cut categories with regard to their emotionality is inherently problematic. Another, and perhaps related, point of critique concerns Kilcup’s somewhat inconsistent use of ecocritical methodology. While it is one of the great accomplishments of her groundbreaking study that it foregrounds the environmental dimensions of texts that we might not immediately recognize as a form of nature writing, its important focus on justice issues at times lacks a discernable environmental or ecocritical dimension. A typical example is Kilcup’s reading of Hopkins’ “Bro’r Abr’m Jimson’s Wedding” in chapter four, which fails to es-

tablish a clear relationship between conspicuous consumption and the exploitation of the nonhuman environment.

Despite some gaps and inconsistencies in the study’s theoretical grounding, however, *Fallen Forests* offers a wide range of significant insights that are immensely valuable not only for ecocritics but also for a broad range of American Studies scholars with an interest in nineteenth-century literature and in gendered perspectives on American environmental history and human-nature relationships. Kilcup formulates a highly convincing plea for the inclusion or reconsideration of previously marginalized voices, or, in some cases, for a new attention to the environmental overtones of more widely known texts.

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