

versations between academics and activists, and to forge coalitions amongst various social and environmental movements, is particularly important to this historical moment. The essays collected in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* are a stimulating and welcome addition to this burgeoning body of critical thought.

## **BREAKING THE BOUNDARIES: TOWARDS A FEMINIST GREEN SOCIALISM**

Mary Mellor. London: Virago Press. 1992.

*by Kim Hume*

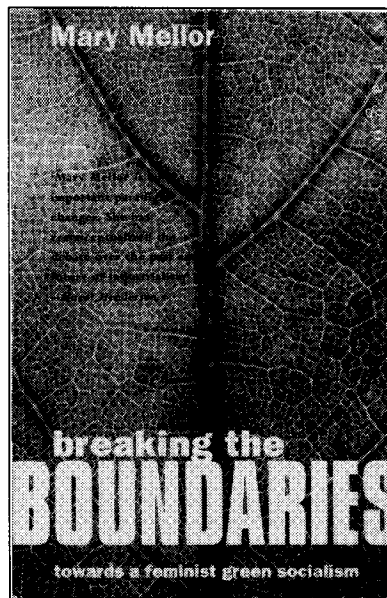
Our world is on a fast track towards self destruction. Women continue to be marginalized. The gaps between rich and poor are widening. The rape of our environment threatens individual lives and our collective existence. "We are linked into a destructive connectedness that is putting boundaries between people, but no boundary on our destruction of the planet."

In *Breaking the Boundaries*, Mary Mellor draws on feminist, green, and socialist thought in a convincing argument for the necessary integration of these three movements "if we are to achieve a sustainable future for both humanity and the planet."

Mellor's compelling enthusiasm for the future is the main strength of this book. Her conviction that her vision can address our global problems despite their magnitude and extent, is a testament both to her ideas and her writing.

She begins by asserting that capitalism, sexism, racism, industrialism, and militarism are male centred dominations that threaten our world. Citing historians, ecofeminists, and anthropologists, Mellor chronicles the emergence of patriarchy and male domination. She gains her point by contrasting the traditional male view of history with the more recent female-centred theories such as ecofeminism.

One of Mellor's stark examples illus-



trating the skewed priorities of a world run by men is the commitment of resources to military expenditure, which has meant that "nuclear missiles can go from Europe to Moscow in minutes, while a woman in Africa must walk several hours a day to fetch water."

Mellor does not believe that modifications of existing mechanisms are enough to arrest our self destruction: a new ideology is needed. While she admits there may be room for capitalism to "go green" in the long run, she points out with good reason that "in the long run we are all dead."

Ultimately, the boundaries that Mellor seeks to break are those that can be recognized at the global level, dividing race, culture, ethnicity and sex. Boundaries also exist between the feminist, green and socialist movements, which she illustrates both theoretically and from personal experience: as a feminist and a socialist, Mellor's original inspiration for this book arose out of her disillusionment with a male-oriented socialism "preoccupied with industrial and economic systems."

Breaking the boundaries between these movements makes sense, as they share a common interest in the future of our people and our planet. Feminism links socialism with green thought through women's connection to the earth. By breaking the boundaries between them, these movements will also gain a collective strength.

*Breaking the Boundaries* is an academic work with a popular focus; Mellor's argu-

ments are drawn from and supported by a large body of feminist, green, and socialist thought. As such, it can be heavy reading. It's made easier though, by the organization of the material. Subheadings divide each chapter into digestible pieces, and are listed in the table of contents for easy reference. Quotations from other writers intersperse and break up the text with succinct nuggets. A comprehensive bibliography and detailed index strengthen and substantiate Mellor's work.

Mellor doesn't make any policy recommendations, but clearly states that this was not her intention. Rather, she seeks a sustainable, egalitarian society. In broad terms, she is convincing in suggesting that this requires a paradigm shift "from men to women, from rich to poor, from North to South, from nature exploitation to nature stewardship." The world Mellor seeks and tangibly depicts is one worth striving for. This work provides the arguments and the inspiration inciting us to try. Our problems are significant, but they needn't overwhelm.

*Breaking the Boundaries* will find a wide audience in feminists, greens, and socialists who are concerned about our future as a planet. I'm not convinced that Mellor's vision of a feminist green socialism is the only path to a sustainable future, but she certainly goes far towards proving that the elements within her vision will be part of the solution.

## **RADICAL ECOLOGY: THE SEARCH FOR A LIVABLE WORLD**

Carolyn Merchant. New York: Routledge, 1992.

*by Jan Clarke*

In *Radical Ecology*, Carolyn Merchant carefully follows the threads of environmental politics to trace the historical, social, and ecological roots which shape contemporary radical ecology movements. While she discusses each branch of radical ecology in some detail, her particular

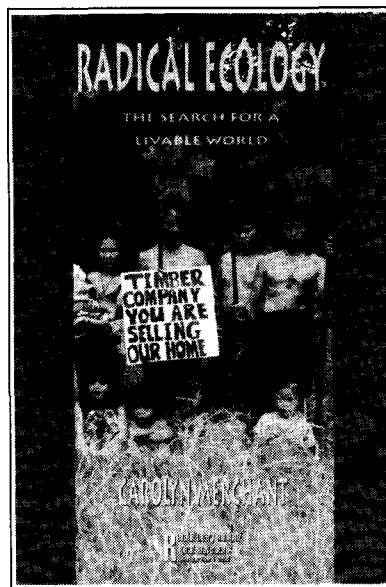
interest in ecofeminism obviously forms the basis of many of her arguments. In my view, it is both her feminist critique of radical ecology and her clear overview of ecofeminism which makes *Radical Ecology* a useful contribution to environmental and feminist literature.

Carolyn Merchant identifies two central contradictions to do with environmental problems: the tension between economic forces and local ecological conditions, and the tension between production and reproduction. The three main sections of this work provide explanations of these contradictions, and a historical analysis of the science, theory, and politics of radical ecology.

First, the problems which are relevant to radical ecology are outlined in the context of the history of science and the development of environmental ethics. Second, the theoretical perspectives which inform different approaches to radical ecology are discussed with particular reference to historical and cultural context. The final section outlines recent trends in the environmental movement to effectively synthesize many of the issues and ideas raised in earlier chapters.

Since *Radical Ecology* is aimed at an audience with an interest in environmental issues, regardless of knowledge of the principles of ecology and technology, perhaps the snapshot view of science in a global context in the first chapters is a necessary starting point. For many, however, it may be worth skimming these background chapters on science and ecology, because the rest of the book is far more interesting and insightful. The first section ends with a discussion of environmental ethics in terms of egocentric, homecentric, and ecocentric perspectives. This succinct and informative analysis forms the basis for Carolyn Merchant's subsequent interpretation of the theory and practice of radical ecology. At this point, she draws on feminist theory to systematically critique radical ecology, a strategy she uses to pattern the rest of the book.

In the second section, theoretical frameworks which distinguish deep ecology from spiritual ecology and social ecology are delineated. Deep ecology offers a philosophical approach based on the principle of biospheric equality, a vision of society which offers total freedom. This



perspective is informed by a social understanding of western science and a holistic interpretation of the interconnections between society and the environment. Alternatively, spiritual ecology focuses on a connection to the earth to inform political action and management of resources. The healing practices of goddess spirituality and native American land wisdom are ways in which women's traditions are part of this perspective. One strategy for change central to spiritual ecology is sharing in rituals which are intended to be not only celebratory, but also a preparation for social action.

Deep ecology and spiritual ecology can be criticized for a lack of political critique and inadequate analysis of capitalism and patriarchy. In contrast, social and socialist ecology are firmly grounded in historical materialism and provide explanations of the human implications of systems of economic production on the environment. For Carolyn Merchant, versions of social and socialist ecology are clearly the means of providing explanations which account for not only gender, 'race' and class, but also for the environment. This perspective also offers strategies for political action which potentially lead to social transformation.

Drawing on her analysis of environmental ethics and radical ecology theoretical perspectives, Carolyn Merchant's discussion of environmental movements is particularly informative. While the descriptions of green politics and sustain-

able development link well with earlier analysis, it was the discussion of ecofeminism that caught my attention. Using a feminist analysis, the diversity of ecofeminism is described in terms of feminist theory and concrete examples of political action. By placing an emphasis on environmental issues to rethink many studies from the women and work literature, the usefulness of ecofeminism for uncovering previously hidden connections is clearly demonstrated. Carolyn Merchant's arguments to support ecofeminism as a distinct branch of feminism are persuasive. Nonetheless, I am not convinced that this further fragmentation of feminism is necessarily a useful strategy.

*Radical Ecology* offers a sound introduction to the theory and practice of radical ecology in the context of progress made by current social movements. If this work is taken as an introduction to radical ecology, then some of the oversights in terms of an analysis of gender, race, and class are less problematic. It is worth noting that this book is intended to be an overview of radical ecology in general; it may be most useful as a reference source to draw on when pursuing other ecofeminist literature in more depth.

## CELEBRATING THE LAND: WOMEN'S NATURE WRITINGS, 1850-1991

Karen Knowles, ed. Flagstaff, Arizona: Northland Publishing, 1992.

by *Catriona Sandilands*

Ecofeminist theory begins from a point that suggests that women and nature have been mutually oppressed and denigrated because of their supposed "connection." What that connection means, however, is a matter of debate: some ecofeminists emphasize women's reproductive activities as the experience of continuity of life on earth; others emphasize women's historical association with nature, a shared "connection" born from a shared oppression.