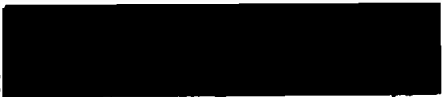


BREAKING WITH TRADITION:
CONCEPTIONS OF WOMAN AND NATURE.

An Undergraduate English Thesis
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...Hear the earth sing
 of her own loveliness
 of her hillock lands, her valleys
 her furrows well-watered
 her untamed wild places
She arises in you
 as you in her
Your voice becomes her voice
Sing!
Your dance is her dance
 of the circling stars
 and the ever-renewing flame
As your labor has become her labor
Out of the bone, ash
Out of the ash, pain
Out of the pain, the swelling
Out of the swelling, the opening
Out of the opening, the labor
Out of the labor, the birth
Out of the birth, the turning wheel
 the turning tide

--Starhawk (Reweaving the World,p.73)

INTRODUCTION

A strong connection has traditionally been seen between Woman and Nature, whether because of Woman's physical connections such as menstrual cycles and childbearing, or because of a perceived spiritual affinity. This association has been used as a source of oppression by patriarchal society; that is, both have been perceived as vulnerable and easily dominated. In light of the development of ecofeminism, the link between woman and nature can also be seen as liberating rather than limiting.

Ecofeminism is in a sense reactionary and in a sense revolutionary. It is a reaction against the inadequacy of traditional Western thought in dealing with women's issues and environmental concerns. It is revolutionary in that it seeks to form a new philosophical base from which to form new attitudes. In order to gain a better understanding of the ideological conflicts that have motivated the development of ecofeminism, I have chosen to examine three authors. I begin with a study of Ralph Waldo Emerson as a traditional anthropocentric and andropocentric thinker. I then look at Willa Cather, who expands many of Emerson's notions, and gives both Woman and Nature more power and autonomy. Finally, I examine the way in which Susan Griffin re-works the foundations of Emerson and Cather's writings, to create an ecofeminist viewpoint.

The current feminist and environmental movements have much to gain from combining their efforts to evaluate and change current attitudes, since each has been oppressed by patriarchal society. Feminism often strives to make women equal in patriarchal terms. That is, success for "modern women" has been measured by their ability to attain the same things as men. Likewise, the environmental movement is also forced to present itself in

patriarchal society's terms. Arguments to prevent the destruction of nature must be presented in terms of economics, quantifiable usefulness, and "recreational utility." Rather than joining patriarchal forces in a supposed liberation, feminism can create new visions of reciprocating, mutually beneficial relations between men and women, humans and nature. In so doing, the movement becomes ecofeminism.

In light of the current ecological crisis, now is an important time to adopt new attitudes which accept the interdependence of humans and nature. In order to understand new attitudes such as those suggested by ecofeminists, it is important to understand some of the earlier visions of woman and nature which ecofeminism works both from and against. Emerson's views on both woman and nature represent an embodiment of traditional Western values. His work has been a strong influence on American thought. Therefore, an examination of Emerson's attitudes is a revealing first step towards understanding the traditional, patriarchal view of Woman and Nature.

THE TRADITIONAL, PATRIARCHAL VIEW:
R.W. EMERSON

Emerson's treatment of the natural world in his essay "Nature" is problematic. He sees nature as both an entity to be admired and enjoyed aesthetically, and as a servant to be used and exploited for the advancement of human society. He vacillates between enjoying and admiring the natural world, and feeling threatened by it. Considering that Emerson implies that nature is feminine, there is an interesting parallel between "Nature" and a lecture which Emerson gave to a Woman's Rights Convention in Boston, 1855, entitled "Woman".

In "Woman," Emerson encourages the Women's Rights movement not on the grounds that women are equal to men, but that women are important to society in their own way. Women, he says, "are more delicate than men...and thus more impressionable...I think their words are to be weighed; but it is their inconsiderate word"(Woman,337); that is, while "all wisdom Woman knows"(Woman,338), she does not understand the reasoning behind her knowledge. Her inconsiderate word is her instinctive knowledge which she cannot fully consider, or understand. Thus, "Man is the will, and Woman the sentiment. In this ship of humanity, Will is the rudder, and Sentiment the sail: when Woman affects to steer, the rudder is only a masked sail"(Woman,p.339). Women, try as they might, are unable to effectively direct society; rather, they are suited best to inspiring the men who make the decisions. After all, look at what happened when Eve tried to be a "rudder".

Emerson implies that he admires and values women, but not as equals to men; He believes that women are less capable of dealing with the affairs of

human civilization than men are. Their value is in their connection to a more spiritual world. As a result of their inherent connection to a higher plane of knowledge, and their more sheltered position, Emerson explains, "there is much that tends to give them a religious height which men do not attain"(Woman,345).

Women have further value in their willingness to serve: "The omnipotence of Eve is in humility"(Woman,344), Emerson explains. Women need no loftier occupation than that of mother and wife, since they operate on instinctive knowledge, and thus do not demand reasons and incentives:

The life of the affections is primary to them, so that there is usually no employment or career which they will not with their own applause and that of society quit for a suitable marriage. And they give entirely to their affections, set their whole fortune on the die, lose themselves eagerly in the glory of their husbands and children(Woman,339).

Emerson admires the willingness of women to forsake all else for their families. This is a convenient stance for him, since, as a man, he is one of those who is served by women.

Finally, the power of women to civilize mankind is essential, according to Emerson. "What is civilization? I answer, the power of good women"(Woman,340). Their "social influence" and talent for "wise, cultivated, genial conversation [which] is the last flower of civilization" make women the "civilizers of mankind"(Woman,340). Through conversation, "All we have, all we can, all we know, is brought into play, and as the reproduction, in finer form, of all our havings"(Woman,340). Cultivated conversation is "an art which is better than painting, poetry, music, or architecture,--better than botany, geology, or any science"(Woman,340). In "Nature", Emerson explains that art is "a nature passed through the alembic

[something which refines through distillation] of man"(Nature,586). Thus conversation distills and refines the physical world, for "culture inverts the vulgar views of nature"(Nature,601).

It is curious that Emerson considers women to be the "civilizers of mankind" since he believes that nature itself is feminine. Perhaps this gender tie between women and nature is precisely what gives women the ability to "refine" the natural world; who better to control something than one who knows it intimately. Emerson does make a distinction between the civilizing powers of a woman of society and a farm woman. He observes that,

Between the men of rustic life and the polite world [there was] little difference; ...in the former, though unpolished by fashion and unenlightened by science, [one found] much observation and much intelligence; but a refined and accomplished woman was a being almost new to him(Woman,341).

Rural women are apparently too close to nature to bring the refinement of civilization to their men, who otherwise are intelligent and capable. According to Emerson, all that rural men really lack is the refinement a polished woman brings to civilization, which distances humans from "base" nature.

In Emerson's essay "Nature," we see that Emerson's idea of the ideal position of that nature which women "civilize" is remarkably similar to his idea of the ideal position of women themselves. Like women, nature is a willing servant to man, presents many incomplete elements which can aid man's advancement through his interpretation and selection, and is connected to a higher spiritual realm. The similar treatment of women and nature is logical, since Emerson sees nature as feminine. He calls it "mother", and advises that a wise man, "will not extort all her secrets"(Nature,580), just as a woman's elements of mystery are often considered her allure.

According to Emerson, nature's highest purpose is to serve humans: "More servants wait on man/ Than he'll take notice of...Man is one world, and hath/ Another to attend him"(Nature,605). In "Nature", those "servants" include "Beasts, fire, water, stones, and corn"(Nature,583); from "Woman" it is clear that women also serve men. Both are meek and willing servants. Just as women "lose themselves eagerly in the glory of their husbands and children"(Woman,339), nature "is thoroughly mediate. It is made to serve. It receives the dominion of man as meekly as the ass on which the Saviour rode"(Nature,593). The latter quotation implies not only that nature is supposed to serve man, but that man is far above nature spiritually, and rescues it from its chaotic lowliness.

Emerson puts women somewhere between nature and men, since women are subservient to men, yet are served by nature as well: "Whatever runs, flies, dives, or delves/ All doff for her their ornaments,/ Which suit her better than themselves"(Woman,343). Emerson thus insists that the natural world accepts that its elements are more beautiful adorning a woman than themselves. A mink apparently would gladly give up its fur for a woman, who would look much better in it.

Emerson finds both positive and negative elements in nature. Humans have the ability to use it "properly", sifting out what Emerson sees as useful, good elements from the bad. Nature, he says,

offers all its kingdoms to man as the *raw material* which he may *mould* into what is useful. Man is never tired of *working it up*. He *forges* the subtle and delicate air into wise and melodious words...More and more, with every thought, does his kingdom stretch over things, until the world becomes, at last, only a realized will,—the double of the man. [Italics added.](Nature,593)

In The Machine in the Garden, Leo Marx notes that in this passage, Emerson "is praising intellectual power in general, but, as the submerged metaphor indicates, the specific example he has in mind is technology"(Marx, 230). Technology is important to Emerson in that it takes certain natural elements and forges them into something which is useful to humans and, therefore, good. "A thing is good only so far as it serves," Emerson insists; "A conspiring of parts and efforts to the production of an end, is essential to any being"(Nature,593). As with women, nature is most noble as a servant, and needs man's ability to select and steer, to sift out the "good" and "useful" elements. Ultimately, Emerson concludes, when people have elevated their minds to a more pure philosophical state, "A correspondent revolution in things will attend the influx of the spirit...The sordor and filths of nature, the sun shall dry up, and shall be no more seen"(Nature, 608). Humans will purify both themselves and nature until "disagreeable appearances, swine, spiders, snakes, pests, mad-houses, prisons...shall no more be seen"(Nature,608).

Like woman, nature is connected to a higher spiritual knowledge. However, nature needs the aid of men to become more pure because, as with women's spirituality, it is only through men that this knowledge can be understood. "The noblest ministry of nature is to stand as the apparition of God. It is the great organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it"(Nature,602). Nature, then, is most admirable when interpreted as the image of a human god.

Emerson feels overwhelmed by nature:

In the woods we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life,—no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes),

which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God... I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty(Nature, 581).

He feels connected to a universal spirit through nature. However, in this passage, he is still separate from nature. He looks out at the natural world, as an eye. In fact, he implies that if he could not see, it would not give him the same feeling. He does not touch or smell nature, for which he would have to be much closer to it. Instead, he uses his sight, the most distanced sense, to evaluate it.

Emerson seems frightened by nature's power to evoke such an overwhelming emotion in him. Immediately after this passage, he insists upon nature's subservience to humankind: "Nature always wears the colors of the spirit"(Nature,581). This implies a transparent eye-ball which is wearing tinted glasses. Emerson, the observer, is in charge once again. He is sure that nature is less magnificent than humans, and says, "In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature"(Nature,581). Beautiful as nature is, it does not quite equal the majesty of humans. With this rhetorical turn about, Emerson regains his position of control.

Leo Marx suggests that, after the engulfing transparent eyeball experience, Emerson is "certain that the power to produce such delight does not reside in nature [and] he tries to determine whether it resides in man or in a harmony of both"(Marx, 232). More specifically, he is afraid of allowing nature such power over himself, and thus attempts to subjugate nature to his spiritual self. While nature may seem powerful in affecting him spiritually,

behind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present;...that spirit does not act upon us from without, that is, in space and time, but spiritually, or through ourselves. Therefore, that spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us(Nature, 602).

Nature, then, is not a threat, for it exists only as God creates it through humans. "The noblest ministry of nature is to stand as the apparition of God"(Nature, 602), Emerson explains. Thus nature is not an "other" which threatens man's power over the world; it is, in fact, the work of God, for man, who is "nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws, at his need, inexhaustible power"(Nature,603).

Emerson knows, on some level, that this attitude is problematic, because he backs off in the middle of "Nature", and says, "I have no hostility to nature, but a child's love to it...I do not wish to fling stones at my beautiful mother, nor soil my gentle nest"(Nature,601). Although he feels guilty about it, he still must be in control, and continues, "I only wish to indicate the true position of nature in regard to man"(Nature,601). Later, he concludes his vacillation between loving and fearing nature by telling the reader, "Know then, that the world exists for you"(Nature,608). He has succumbed to his fear, and thus ends with this affirmation of human control.

Just as Emerson feels his sovereignty threatened by nature's ability to overwhelm him, he also feels that the movement for women's rights threatens the power of men in society. However, he cannot deny that the power of women is, and should be, increasing. Thus, in the same way that he refutes nature's power over man in "Nature", he undermines the power of women in society in "Woman". He cannot deny that nature overwhelms him, and he cannot deny that women are becoming increasingly powerful. However, while he acknowledges women's right to vote, he denies their equal status to men by insisting that women are more delicate, and less

capable of making decisions which guide society: They should be sails, not rudders.

Emerson addresses three main objections to allowing women to vote not by denying the inferiority of women to men, but by criticizing common men and their society. If all voters were as intelligent and reflective as Emerson, then perhaps women would hurt the system, he implies. However, he states that women's lack of practical wisdom (and, we infer from previous statements, their inability to obtain such understanding), is no worse than the reluctance of many men to use their ability to reason. Likewise, in response to the criticism that women do not know the world and are too idealistic, he does not note that they have not been encouraged to, or even allowed to, deal in practical worldly matters as men do. Rather, he encourages their idealism, saying that perhaps an impractical, idealistic vote would balance out the uneducated, greedy vote:

If the wants, the passions, the vices, are allowed a full vote through the hands of a half-brutal intemperate population, I think it but fair that the virtues, the aspirations should be allowed a full vote, as an offset, through the purest of the people(Woman,353).

Finally, he counters the claim that women would be "contaminated" or "unsexed" through association with politics by saying, "that only accuses our existing politics, shows how barbarous we are"(Woman,353). So, while women are not as capable as men of operating in society, the system does not live up to its potential anyway. Perhaps the influence of women would "civilize" politics as it has men. Emerson cannot admit that women are as capable as men, and therefore should be allowed the same rights. However, he knows that he must accept women's increasing rights. Thus, he encourages their advancement, while simultaneously undermining their power, by encouraging them to believe their traditional position is the most

noble. This way, men can still be the "rudders" of society, and can retain their control.

Attitudes such as Emerson's fear of the threat of women to a male-controlled society, and his subsequent attempts to deny that women can be equal to men are now recognized for what they are-- a desperate grasp for control. Emerson's similar fear of Nature's power over humans, and his subsequent efforts to subordinate it and deny its power, is an attitude common to both his time and ours. However, we are beginning to understand the harmful results of such anthropocentric viewpoints. According to contemporary ecofeminists like Susan Griffin, we must examine and re-work our attitudes towards both women and nature, and use the power in each in a positive, constructive, mutually beneficial way. As typically anthropocentric and andropocentric, Emerson's attitudes provide an interesting comparison to the more personal connection between woman and nature which Willa Cather explores. Cather's attitudes are based on the same traditional ideas as Emerson's, yet she feels less threatened by the power inherent in nature and her reliance upon it for inspiration.

INTERPRETING MY ANTONIA

In order to better understand the differences between Cather's and Emerson's attitudes, a brief examination of one of the most important works in Cather's career, My Antonia, is essential. The first task in analyzing My Antonia is deciding how to read the character of the narrator, Jim. Cather seems to agree with Jim's basic attitudes, but while Jim is presented as a straightforward narrator, there are many indications that she at times undercuts his reliability. In using a male narrator of debatable reliability, Cather seems to distance herself from the more traditional views towards woman and nature, such as those held by Emerson. As a result, Cather's feminine perspective becomes apparent.

Cather sets the story up as a frame narrative in which the first narrator, presumably Cather herself, encounters a childhood friend, Jim, on a train. Jim tells her of a collection of memories he has written about a Bohemian girl, Antonia, with whom they grew up. When Jim later gives the novel to the frame narrator, he entitles it "Antonia" and then frowns a moment and changes it to "My Antonia" which "seemed to satisfy him" (intro, 3).

What follows is indeed the story of Jim's Antonia. He describes, criticizes, and praises her from his own bias. Jim indicates that her proper role is as his loyal and humble companion: "I had Antonia beside me, to appreciate and admire [me]" (My Antonia, p.50). When she works in the fields, or dances with other men, Jim disapproves of her deviance from her "proper" role. He's especially disappointed with her when her sexuality is evident, such as when Wick Cutter attempts to rape her, or when she dances with other men.

Jim's biased approach to the story is further suggested by the frame narrator, who mentions "the romantic disposition which often made [Jim] seem very funny as a boy" (My Antonia, intro, p.2), and by Frances Harling, a respected minor character, who calls him "hopelessly romantic." Significantly, Frances is referring to his attitude towards the "hired girls", Lena, Tiny, and Antonia, who amusedly humor Jim's romanticizing. Jim is better able to be a romantic than the stoic, hardworking immigrant girls because he leads a comfortable and safe life with his grandparents. He lacks neither food, shelter, nor love, nor does he work much on the farm. Thus he can easily ignore the hardships of prairie life, and can presume that Antonia was made for nothing other than farming on the dry prairie and bearing the many children who occupy most of her time. Stories of horror and hardship, such as the man who threw himself into the threshing machine or Crazy Mary chasing Lena with a butcher knife remain just stories to Jim. He cannot understand how anyone could be unhappy in his beautiful, bountiful world. While Jim recognizes that Mr. Shimerda killed himself over homesickness aggravated by his harsh new life, he romanticizes this story by imagining that Mr. Shimerda's spirit stopped by to enjoy one last glimpse of Jim's grandmother's snug kitchen before he made his way back to Bohemia, where he could "live" happily ever after. Jim does admit that his situation is much better than the Shimerda's: "if [Mr. Shimerda] could have lived with us, this terrible thing would never have happened"(My Antonia, p.101).

Nevertheless, the Shimerdas do not live in a comfortable home, and Mr. Shimerda's death is much more serious than the exciting story Jim sees it as when he says, "I got 'Robinson Crusoe' and tried to read, but his life on the island seemed dull compared to ours"(My Antonia,p.100).

Jim's romanticizing continues in his description of nature. His descriptions of the land are very impressionistic; he describes it in terms of how it relates to himself (Murphy, p.234). He uses extremely anthropocentric language, as though the beauty in nature is in what it reminds him of artistically. For example, Jim describes the red prairie grass as "wine stained", the snow "like strokes of Chinese white". The use of such human terms shows not only Jim's self-centeredness, but also his resulting tendency to romanticize. He does not want to see nature as anything but his own picture-perfect pastoral ideal.

Cather herself felt that art improved upon nature. She writes in The Professor's House: "...the seasons...gain by being brought into painting, and into poetry. The hand, fastidious and bold, which selected and placed--it was that which made the difference. In Nature there is no selection"(The Professor's House, p.75). However, her emphasis is on nature inspiring art, becoming art, as it does through The Song of the Lark's Thea's singing. Conversely, Jim uses art to describe nature, as if the art came first. To him, the landscape reflects a painting, whereas Cather herself would probably describe the painting as reflecting the landscape. While the difference may be subtle, the implication is that once again Jim is distanced from nature, and enjoys primarily his romanticized vision of it.

Cather does not present Jim as wholly unreliable, however. Despite his romanticized descriptions, through Jim, Cather successfully conveys the beauty of Nebraska and life on the prairie. Her intent is not to deny the legitimacy of Jim's descriptions but to indicate their narrow-sightedness. The prairie is indeed beautiful, but life on it can be harsh, taxing, and frightening as well as bountiful. In general, Jim seems to convey Cather's attitudes towards nature, but in a romanticized, and thus incomplete, fashion. As a

result, Cather shows the limitations of the traditional attitudes which Jim espouses.

To further show his distance from nature, Cather has Jim bring his university learning, particularly that which he learned from Gaston Cleric, the classics professor he so admired, to romanticize the memory of his childhood. When he remembers the Danish laundry girls and the three Bohemian Marys, for instance, he muses, "It came over me, as it had never done before, the relation between girls like those and the poetry of Virgil. If there were no girls like them in the world, there would be no poetry"(My Antonia p.270). True, these admirable women are worthy muses to Jim's novel, yet they are not idle beauties whose refinement inspires great works. Jim overlooks their taxing, demanding lives. He sees their lives as adventures more than harsh realities. Without these women, there would not only be no poetry, but there would be no human settlement on the prairie. He applauds these women as muses, yet overlooks their contribution of something more concrete: subduing the harsh reality of the prairie, and learning to live with the natural world. He ends his musing about these women by saying, "this revelation seemed to me inestimably precious. I clung to it as if it might suddenly vanish"(My Antonia,p.270). Convinced that the past was perfect, Jim clings to his romantic story, writing it down as "proof" that it existed, and asserts that "Optima dies...prima fugit"(My Antonia,p.271). While this is true for Jim, whose carefree childhood led to a demanding career and unhappy marriage, it is hardly true for Lena and Tiny, who left taxing and servile lives for rewarding and independent ones.

Jim's romanticized story especially overlooks the harsher side of reality in his treatment of Antonia. While Antonia's farm and orchard are

admirable and bountiful, Jim's descriptions of Antonia at the end of the novel fail to acknowledge her sacrifices and hardships in creating her prairie paradise. Antonia's relationship with nature, particularly with her orchard, is indeed very positive and mutually rewarding. However, Jim seems to agree with Emerson that "there is usually no employment or career which [women] will not...quit for a suitable marriage. And they...lose themselves eagerly in the glory of their husbands and children" ("Woman", p.339). He glosses over the details which indicate all that Antonia has given up for her life on the farm. She has lost most of her teeth, although teeth must be important to her since she is so proud that her husband retained his. She no longer goes to town to dance, a pastime once so enjoyable to her that she left her friends, the Harlings, in order to continue doing it. Her husband, however, has just returned from a dance when Jim meets him. Apparently someone has time for such things. Antonia has lost much of her English, once such a source of pride to her. Antonia (and Cather) may consider her life to be fulfilling, but Lena and Tiny present alternative roads which Antonia could have followed. They too are successful and happy, despite Jim's criticism, as a seamstress and a hotel keeper. Just as Antonia gave up much of what Lena and Tiny retained--particularly their individual freedom--they missed out on her connection to her family and to nature, although according to Lena, family life on the prairie meant "...too many children, a cross man, and work piling up around a sick woman" (My Antonia, p.291) and "It's always being under somebody's thumb" (My Antonia, p.292).

Jim's romanticized story continues in his occasional visits to Nebraska when he is older. Although he says he loves the prairie, he is now a railroad lawyer who fights for the expansion of the railroad, to "open up" America, and settle the West. When he is on Antonia's farm, it is Cuzak's boys

(Antonia's children) who most delight him: "My mind was full of...the trips I meant to take with the Cuzak boys...There were enough Cuzaks to play with for a long while yet!"(My Antonia, p.370). The rural setting provides an idyllic backdrop, but his main concern is companionship. "Even after the boys grew up, there would always be Cuzak himself! I meant to tramp along a few miles of lighted streets with Cuzak" (p.370), Jim says, implying that he longs for friendship more than the prairie; there are undoubtedly no street lights on Antonia's farm. He romanticizes the image of the prairie but does not feel the affinity with it which Antonia does. After doing the chores on the farm, for example, Jim "began to feel the loneliness of the farm-boy at evening, when the chores seem everlastingly the same, and the world so far away"(My Antonia, p.347). This sharply contrasts Antonia's insistence that she never is lonely on the farm as she was in town. (My Antonia, p.343).

Despite her sacrifices, Antonia's connection to the natural world is a deep and mutually rewarding one, an aspect which Cather's professionally successful women lack and miss. Jim trivializes this relationship to nature by romanticizing it and turning Antonia's life into a pastoral picture instead of admiring and exploring the reality of it, just as Emerson trivialized women and nature by elevating them to an idealized spiritual world rather than admiring them as very real, and powerful, entities. In fact, there are hints of Emerson in many of Cather's attitudes and descriptions.

EMERSON AND JIM: ANTHRO-AND ANDROPOCENTRIC CONNECTIONS

Although Cather's perspective is different from Emerson's, similarities between the two are apparent. She uses many images similar to those he uses, but with a different emphasis and underlying philosophy, so that she implies a relaxed closeness to nature which Emerson does not maintain. For example, Jim dissolves into nature in the pumpkin patch:

I kept as still as I could. Nothing happened. I did not expect anything to happen. I was something that lay under the sun and felt it, like the pumpkins, and I did not want to be anything more. I was entirely happy. Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become a part of something entire, whether it is sun and air, or goodness and knowledge. At any rate, that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great. When it comes to one, it comes as naturally as sleep"(My Antonia, p.18).

Emerson too dissolves into nature, in his "transparent eyeball" passage in "Nature". However, he puts extreme emphasis on his eyes, the most distanced of the senses. Jim, in contrast, uses mainly his senses of touch, smell and hearing. He runs his hands through the dirt, while Emerson stands back and watches from a safe distance. Emerson seems overwhelmed by the power in nature, and attempts to lessen this power later in his essay. Jim simply enjoys nature--almost too much, in fact, for he is a passive character, content to easily enjoy life because he can ignore its hardships.

Emerson seems afraid of being insignificant in regards to nature. Jim too feels that "Between that earth and that sky I felt erased, blotted out" (My Antonia, p.8), yet instead of struggling to control the feelings which overwhelm him, Jim lets them be: "Here, I felt, what would be would be" (p.8)). However, to him, "what will be", ultimately, is a country, a civilized land. While now there is "nothing but land; not a country at all,"(My

Antonia p.7), Jim expects the land to be subdued, and implies that this is its purpose in describing it as "the material out of which countries are made" (My Antonia p.7). This echoes Emerson's "nature is fully mediate, it is made to serve", although in view of Jim's willingness to be "blotted out" and "dissolve", (albeit with utter security), Jim feels less threatened by nature, which indicates that Cather is much more willing than Emerson to accept herself as a part of nature, and to accept nature's power and influence without feeling threatened. In Panther Canyon, for instance, The Song of the Lark's Thea "could become a mere receptacle for heat, or become a colour, like the bright lizards that darted about on the hot stones outside her door; or she could become a continuous repetition of sound, like the cicadas" (Song of the Lark, p.270). For Thea, the issue of security from a powerful nature is nonexistent. Instead, she delights in her dissolution into nature, and pours this delight forth through her voice, "a river of silver sound" (Song of the Lark, p.359). Thus Cather's vision is one of nature as beautiful, powerful and inspirational, while Emerson's is of nature as beautiful, powerful, and ultimately threatening.

Jim and Emerson are also similar in the way they spiritually elevate woman, which actually decreases her power. They remove woman from reality just as they remove nature from reality, creating a beautiful, feminine, pastoral ideal. They admire a beautiful picture rather than trying to comprehend the philosophy behind the relationship. Jim presents, in My Antonia, a pastoral ideal which ignores the harsher aspects of reality and thus is of less importance and value than Antonia's relationship to nature really is. Emerson also belittles women and nature by elevating them to a level "higher" than the mundane world of men, a world which would only soil them if they were to be involved with it. Emerson's elevation of woman's

spiritual connection to God is similar to Jim's elevation of Antonia's spiritual connection to Nature. Each actually reduces the power of the woman and nature connection by elevating it beyond the reality and importance of everyday life, creating a picture or idea to admire in the distance rather than something concrete and relevant to everyday life.

Like Emerson, Jim wants both nature and woman to conform to his own expectations and needs. For example, in My Antonia, in the episode at the river, Jim feels close to Antonia for the first time in a long while. He is happy because instead of being the strong-willed hired girl who so disturbs him, she seems "exactly like the little girl who used to come to our house with Mr. Shimerda"(My Antonia,p.237), a little girl who admired and envied Jim rather than the independent, headstrong woman she now is.

The river here also pleases Jim: "the sandbars, with their clean white beaches and their little groves...were a sort of No Man's Land, little newly created worlds that belonged to the Black Hawk boys"(My Antonia, p.233). This is a secret, story-book place for Jim where he felt in control; it "belonged" to him, just as he wishes Antonia "belonged" to him.

Unfortunately for Jim, this paradise cannot last long, and reality, in the form of Lena Lingard, suddenly breaks in, picking flowers, "demolishing our flowery pagoda"(My Antonia,238). Lena, a more modern woman who rejects life on the prairie, begins to destroy the flowered cave, a place where both Antonia and the land seem to conform to Jim's romantic ideal. Not long after this episode, Wick Cutter attempts to rape Antonia, and then she becomes pregnant with Larry Donovan's child. Jim is bitterly disappointed in her. She has smudged his idyllic picture.

Cather gives women back their power while also using them as muses by implying that Jim is unreliable at times, by indicating that Antonia is

much more complex than Jim sees her, and by presenting the models of independent women in Thea, Lena, and Tiny. In showing Antonia's harsh experiences as well as the beauty in her connection to nature, Cather makes her a realistic woman, and thus grounds her in reality while at the same time using her as inspiration for her art.

Art is important to both Emerson and Cather. Emerson's "Thus is art, a nature passed through the alembic of man" ("Nature", p.586) is also a theme of Cather's, yet Cather emphasizes the necessity of Nature's influence, while Emerson, like Jim, emphasizes the necessity of the human observer.

Emerson writes:

...it is certain that the power to produce this delight, does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both...Nature always wears the colors of the spirit. To a man laboring under calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. then, there is a kind of contempt of the landscape felt by him who has just lost by death a dear friend. The sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population ("Nature", p.581).

His emphasis is on the centrality of the human observer, almost as if nature's ability to influence any emotion is nil; the human brings the emotion and evaluates it. While Cather also praises art's ability to refine nature, she strongly emphasizes the necessity of nature in inspiring both art and life. Thea's singing is inspired by the prairie and the canyon in which she grew into womanhood. When Thea picks up a piece of pottery in the ruins of the dwellings of the Ancient People, Native Americans who once lived in Panther Canyon, she compares her throat, a vessel from which music pours forth, to the earthen shard, a vessel from which water pours forth (Song of the Lark p.273). The shard, made of clay, and carrier of water, two basic elements of Earth, connects Thea's voice to the earth. Nevertheless, the shard is human-made, and much of its power in affecting Thea is in its connection

to the Ancient People. However, while the human element may be of central interest to Cather, nature still plays a powerful and undeniable role. To Emerson, nature's role is more one of a silent muse, one which reflects the human diety, and the human spirit, both of which give it its only power: "the Supreme Being does not build nature up around us, but puts it forth through us" ("Nature", p.602); it "offers its kingdoms to man as the raw materials which he may mould into what is useful...until the world becomes...only a realized will, the double of man" ("Nature", p.593). For Emerson, nature is a product of God which would be nonexistent if humans did not observe it, and make something "useful" out of it. To Cather, nature itself is the powerful force, not the God behind it. Nature, strong and autonomous, momentarily pours forth through Thea as art. Emerson sees humans as nourished by nature, a gift from God, while Cather considers this nourishment not so much a right as a fact. If anything, it is a gift from nature itself, one which is returned by her characters--through Thea's voice and Antonia's well-tended garden, for example.

Although the natural world is essential to Thea's growth as both an artist and a woman, she cannot be satisfied with nature alone. Art and a sophisticated, urban life are as essential to Cather's characters as the natural world's inspiration is to their art. Nature, powerful and inspirational, is limiting and ultimately unfulfilling to Cather's characters who are "destined for great things." Cather's view of nature as ultimately limiting is a product of her acceptance of traditional values, such as those expressed by Emerson.

WILLA CATHER: HINTS OF ECOFEMINISM

Despite the limitations which her acceptance of traditional values places upon her attitudes, Cather can be seen as a precursor to ecofeminists since she portrays women who seek a relationship with and draw inspiration from nature. In an essay on Ecofeminism, for instance, Irene Diamond and Lisa Kuppler suggest that Antonia is an ecofeminist model of sorts, who becomes a "representative of the land and an older--stable and morally coherent--way of life"(Diamond/Kuppler,p.165). They continue, "With metaphors that contemporary ecofeminists term 'matriarchal mythology,' Cather portrayed Antonia in her apple orchard as the goddess of fertility offering the visitor an apple from the Garden Eden[sic]:

There was the deepest peace in the orchard....[It] seemed full of sun, like a cup, and we could smell the ripe apples on the trees.(Diamond/Kuppler, p.166).

As when Antonia speaks of the trees as her children and friends, this passage shows that "In Antonia's world, nature was valued equally with humans"(Diamond/Kuppler,p.166).

Ecofeminists connect the oppression of women by patriarchal western society to the oppression of nature. They study the history of and nature of such a connection, and work towards a conception of a new vision of society. "...Ecofeminism means overcoming not only ethnocentrism and adropocentrism but also anthropocentrism"(Diamond/Kuppler,p.163).

In the final portrait of Antonia in her orchard, Cather presents a woman who loves her trees "as if they were people"(My Antonia p.340). She cares for and nourishes her garden ("I couldn't feel so tired that I wouldn't fret about these trees when there was a dry time. They were on my mind like

children")(My Antonia, p.340), creating a lush orchard in the midst of the dry prairie. The garden in return nourishes Antonia and her family. Despite her haggard outward appearance, Antonia still possesses a beautiful "inner glow," as Jim explains: "The changes grew less apparent to me, her identity stronger"(My Antonia, p.331). She was "battered, but not diminished"(My Antonia, p.332).

Antonia uses and nurtures what the land provides in order to create a comfortable home for herself. She views her garden not as a tool which nature somehow owes her, but as a pleasure which she loves and cares for just as it cares for her. The final portrait of her in her garden paradise is utopian, but "...ecofeminism actively creates, rather than rejects, utopian visions" (Diamond/Kuppler, p.163).

The garden is very much a part of Antonia. She has, in fact, been seen as a metaphor for the land. When her children spill out of the earthen fruit cave, "a veritable explosion of life out of the dark cave into the sunlight"(My Antonia p.339), the earth is in a sense giving birth to them just as Antonia did. Her weathered face attests to the years she has spent caring for her garden, as well as her family.

Antonia is a strong woman who may have given up much of her autonomy for her family and her farm, yet is nevertheless a matriarchal figure. She is loved, admired by, and considered central to her family. It is she who decides to remain with the land in the early years of the farm, while her husband wants to leave. Her strength, caring, and knowledge get them through the lean years. "Cather's rural world was a female domain where women's qualities, motherhood and gardening, were the dominant characteristics"(Diamond/Kuppler,p.166).

Ecofeminism looks to non-white cultures to study alternative ways of relating to nature, as Diamond and Kuppler explain:

...the immanent sense of spirituality that is said to prevail in Native American cultures has been an important source of inspiration to western feminists' evolving ecological consciousness...ecofeminism tries to take seriously other cultures and lifestyles as valuable ways of living and thinking(Diamond/Kuppler, p.163).

However, they warn, "The line between genuine learning from these cultures versus nostalgic romanticization is not easy to draw"(ibid). While Cather's characters are inspired by and learn from traces of Native American cultures (particularly Thea in Panther Canyon), she does seem to cross into the realm of romanticization, particularly since she only writes about Native American cultures as being extinct. Native American tribes still existed in the Southwest when Cather wrote; she chose to portray them as only a romantic memory. This implies that she liked the nostalgic idea of Native Americans who lived close to nature, but viewed their non-white culture as inferior to her own.

Despite her romanticization of Native American cultures, Cather does use them to teach her characters valuable lessons in ways of thinking and viewing the world. The Song of the Lark's Thea finds her true self as a woman, no longer a child, in an old Indian cliff dwelling in the overtly sexual landscape of Panther Canyon. It is actually two canyons: "a gentler canyon within a wilder one," accessible only at its head. It contains a "V-shaped inner gorge" with a "deep groove running along the sides"(Song of the Lark, p.267). Sunlight "began to reach quiveringly down into the gorge", where it "bored into the wet, dark underbrush"(Song of the Lark,p.281). Thea traces the steps of the Ancient People who once lived so closely connected to this very feminine earth:

...Thea relived the life of the Indians by becoming one of them and sharing their culture. The pottery shards, carbon flakes, the rock and the dust of the path, and the water of the pond talked to her. Her "understanding of those old people came up to her out of the rock shelf on which she lay." Rock and water as continuities from the ancient time were in dialogue with her. "Nature" became the bridge between times and cultures (Diamond/Kuppler,p.167)

The canyon is the scene of Thea's sexual awakening, as she and her friend Fred share the canyon together. Her sexual awareness forms at the same time as her spiritual self-awareness, and she chooses to subjugate the former to her self-fulfillment as a singer. The climax of these awakenings, which foreshadows her eventual choice of a career over a life with Fred, occurs after Fred asks Thea if she could be content to settle down and have a family. Thea scoffs at the very idea, and later that day sees a golden eagle fly into the canyon. Thea sees the dreams of the Ancient People as still living in this eagle.

According to Ellen Moers, in Literary Women, this scene is a "violent rejection of normal married life"(Moers, p.247). After Fred proposes, Moers says (although he does not actually propose), Thea "almost pitches him over the edge of the canyon"(Moers, p.248). Again Moers is mistaken. Thea is indeed horrified by the suggestion of settling down, but not by Fred himself, who never expected Thea to accept it. Later that day, Thea sees the eagle: "...straining her eyes after that strong, tawny flight...Endeavour, achievement, desire, glorious striving of human art! From a cleft in the heart of the world she saluted it"(Song of the Lark, p.288). From this Moers concludes that "The young man must admit that Thea is 'not a nesting bird'"(Moers,p.248).

Moers fails to recognize that this scene is much bigger than a rejection of a settled married life. To Thea, the desires and dreams of the Ancient People are still alive in this eagle, and, as she watches it, in herself. The eagle is an embodiment of an everlasting spirit of life who "had come all the way; when men lived in caves, it was there"(Song of the Larkp.288). In the eagle,

Thea also sees her own spirit. The eagle also went into the canyon, stayed for a moment, and then soared out, "mounted until his plumage was so steeped in light that he looked like a golden bird"(Song of the Lark,p.287-8). Thea has spent her time in the canyon, has grown through her contact with nature and the memory of the Ancient People, and now she is ready to soar out to great, glorious heights.

Before her canyon experience, Thea was tired and willing to accept failure. "It would be easy to dream life out"(Song of the Lark,p.271), she thinks (as Jim is content to do). Then the canyon and the Ancient People give her dreams and the strength to attain them: "She was getting back to the earliest source of gladness that she could remember"(Song of the Lark, p. 266). The natural world's powerful influence inspires her singing, and her voice becomes "a river of sound" (Song of the Lark, p.359), and "she felt like a tree bursting into bloom"(Song of the Lark, p. 410). Her identification with the natural world is a precursor to similar ecofeminist visions. Nevertheless, while this inspiration is crucial to, and remains with Thea, she feels she must leave the rural world. She watches the swallows who never leave the canyon: "The only sad thing about them was their timidity...[they] never dared to rise out of the shadow of the canyon walls"(Song of the Lark,p.271). Thea is much more of an eagle than a swallow. The Ancient People were swallows, and they died out.

Here Cather's emphasis changes drastically from her portrait of Antonia at the end of My Antonia. Thea gains valuable strength and a sense of beauty which inspires her art, but then she leaves the canyon for "better things." If the swallows are content in the canyon, as Antonia is on the prairie, why should they leave? Cather's own feelings show through here, for, while the Nebraskan prairie was an integral part of her self, a part which

she longed to connect with more often, she felt the need for a more sophisticated, urban life. She may have admired Antonia, but she herself was not content to live a similar life. For Thea, Panther Canyon eventually becomes too calm, and she and Fred leave. "They were tired of the desert and the dead races, of a world without change or ideas"(Song of the Lark, p.294). However, even after her career becomes successful, she longs for the days when she was content to dream lazily in Panther Canyon, living close to the earth. Her occasional loneliness and emptiness, only partly assuaged by her marriage of friendship with Fred, stem from a longing for a connection with nature which she can not experience in the city. As she says, the flowers in the city are merely flowers but the flowers in her hometown of Moonstone, like the painted hills, are a part of her (Song of the Lark, p.270).

In Thea, Cather seems to portray her own conflictual feelings regarding urban and rural lives. While she admires Antonia, she needs more than prairie life. She perhaps wishes that she too could be content with a life so close to the land, but sees herself as too ambitious and talented to accept this ecofeminist utopia. Perhaps this is because a rural woman generally sacrificed much of her own identity for taking care of her husband, her children, and the land, as Antonia indeed does. In order to break away from the oppression which a life close to nature often brought women, Cather's Thea (as well as Cather herself), must reject life on the prairie. With modern women relatively liberated by the Feminist movement, we now can imagine a situation in which a woman could live close to the land yet not be the work horse of the farm, and not lose her identity to her family and farm. Antonia and Alexandra of O Pioneers! seem to be models of an older, utopic, more moral and harmonious way of life which is closed to Cather's "modern" women.

In *Alexandra*, Cather presents a woman who rejects married life but remains on the prairie, living in harmony with the earth. Alexandra, however, unlike Thea, has "not the least spark of cleverness" (*O Pioneers!* p.35), yet she has good common sense and a good sense of her own values. Although Alexandra is lonely and not fully satisfied with her life, this dissatisfaction seems to stem from Cather's own dissatisfaction with the female sexual roles acceptable at her time rather than a conflict between a rural and urban existence.¹

Like Antonia, Alexandra feels an undeniable link to nature: "She had felt as if her heart were hiding down there, somewhere, with the quail and the plover and all the little wild things that crooned or buzzed in the sun"(*O Pioneers!* p.41). Furthermore, "You feel that...Alexandra's house is the big out-of-doors, and that it is in the soil that she expresses herself best"(*O Pioneers!*, p.50). Alexandra's relationship to the land is a spiritual one, in a sense much like an ecofeminist vision. She is visited in dreams several times by a fertility god figure, the "spirit of the Divide," who carries her into the fields. He is "yellow like the sunlight" and has "the smell of ripe cornfields around him"(*O Pioneers!*,p.120). This figure, similar to a pagan fertility god, helps Alexandra through her weariness and pain. Finally, he comes to her as the god of death. "In this imagery, Cather drew from nature religions in which the natural cycles of birth, life, and death were worshipped" (Diamond/Kuppler,p.166). The fertility figure carries her into death, implying that she will return to the earth to continue the natural cycles of birth and death.

¹ A full discussion of Cather's characters' possible homosexual traits is not within the scope of this paper; those interested should read Sharon O'Brien's "The Thing Not Named: Willa Cather as a Lesbian Writer", in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1984, vol.9, no.4.

While Cather's characters do fit in, to a large extent, to an ecofeminist vision, she still tends to view humans as superior to nature. Thea's need to leave the "boring" canyon and move on to bigger things overshadows her need to be close to nature. Cather, like Jim, seems to see settlement and cultivation as the prairie's proper destiny. Even the seemingly wild Panther Canyon is tamed by the houses which the cliff dwellers built there. There may be no people there when Thea arrives, but the people who once occupied it, people who lived much closer to nature than Thea's own society, are what make the canyon special to her.

Cather does indicate that nature is always strong and wild underneath: "Nature says, I am here, at the bottom of things, warming the roots of life; you cannot starve me nor tame me nor thwart me; I made the world, I rule it, and I am its destiny"(Kingdom of Art, p.95). However, she implies that nature would never want to rebel, for it loves serving people. In O Pioneers!, for instance, the land initially resists being tamed. Cather writes that it was "a wild thing that had its ugly moods; and no one knew when they were likely to come, or why...Its genius was unfriendly to man"(O Pioneers!, p.12). It "seemed to overwhelm the little beginnings of human society that struggled in its sombre wastes," making Alexandra's brother Emil feel that "men were too weak to make any mark here, that the land wanted to be let alone, to preserve its own fierce strength, its peculiar, savage kind of beauty, its uninterrupted mournfulness"(O Pioneers! p.9). Through the settlers' perseverance, though, the land is eventually happy to be subdued:

There are few scenes more gratifying than a spring plowing in that country, where the furrows of a single field often lie a mile in length, and the brown earth, with such a strong, clean smell, and such a power of growth and fertility in it, yields itself eagerly to the plow, rolls away from the shear, not even dimming the brightness of the metal, with a soft, deep sigh of happiness"(O Pioneers!, p.46).

Such a sexual description of cultivation can be seen as either a mutually beneficial ritual, or as one being giving itself over to serve another. Responsible cultivation requires respect for the land rather than an attitude that the land owes humans something. Alexandra shows respect for it, as Antonia does, and does not share Emil's view that it is "savage" and "mournful." Instead, even during the lean years, "It fortified her to reflect upon the great operations of nature, and when she thought of the law that lay behind them, she felt a sense of personal security"(O Pioneers!p.40). Although Cather implies that nature is eager to please humans, as a female yielding "eagerly to the plow," she understands that nature does "rule the world", it is "at the bottom of things," and that the relationship between nature and those who cultivate it must be one of mutual nourishment, as it is for Antonia.

Cather herself, like both Thea and Jim, is content to be inspired by nature and then leave it, using that inspiration for something "greater": Artistic expression. In this respect, Cather is much like Jim, although her vision of a mutually rewarding experience such as Antonia's is less romanticized than Jim's. Other than her recognition of Antonia's sacrifices, which Jim ignores, Cather's attitude towards Antonia is the same as Jim's. If she did not recognize these hardships and sacrifices, however, she would have no reason to consider rural life as limiting, as she did.

Cather's treatment of her characters' sexuality is another area of interest for an ecofeminist approach since ecofeminists are concerned with the basic fear of woman's body and her sexuality, (and of man's sexuality in response), which Susan Griffin portrays in Woman and Nature: "Her passion is endless, without reason, without boundary, existing only for itself,

careless, arrogant, lavish, indulgent, mindless, inexorable, cruel, selfish, she will not stop her own will...; in her body is the seed of nothingness"(Woman and Nature, p.84). While Jim can accept and even enjoy the nothingness which nature makes him feel in the pumpkin patch, he also believes that the land must be controlled, made "into a country," and he works for the railroad in order to do so. Similarly, he strives to control Antonia's sexuality, which disturbs him as much as the empty expanses of land. His battle with the old rattlesnake, for instance, has sexual overtones as he describes his revulsion for the snake: "His abominable muscularity, his loathsome, fluid movement, somehow made me sick...[he] looked as if millstones couldn't crush the disgusting vitality out of him. He lifted his hideous little head and rattled"(My Antonia, p.45-6). Interestingly, Susan Rosowski notes that the snake shapes itself into a 'W', the first initial of Wick Cutter's name (Teaching My Antonia, p. 69). Cutter provides the next main threat to Jim's sexuality when Jim takes Antonia's place at the Cutter's house one night and Cutter, believing him to be Antonia, attempts to rape him. Jim afterwards feels more disgust with Antonia than Cutter himself. Horribly embarrassed and threatened by the incident, Jim blames Antonia: "She had let me in for all this disgustingness"(My Antonia, p.250). Although Cather's exact intentions in portraying these characters' sexuality are uncertain, at least on one level Jim adheres to the generalized male fear of a woman's sexuality and his resulting "loss of control."

In addition, Antonia's pregnancy by Larry Donovan disturbs Jim: "I tried to shut Antonia out of my mind. I was bitterly disappointed in her"(My Antonia, p.298). Antonia is not ashamed; she loves her child, even if the father, Donovan, deceived her and then left when he discovered the result of his dalliance. Physical actions have physical consequences. Antonia is not

free, as Donovan is, to run away from that fact. On the contrary, she loves her baby. Returning to the farm to nurture her, Antonia also connects to the land, where she finds deeper ties than Donovan, or Jim, would ever understand.

Further interesting insight into the characters of Antonia and Thea as beginnings of an ecofeminist view can be gained by comparing them to the writings of an ecofeminist such as Susan Griffin. Griffin solves Cather's hesitations and limitations through reworking the entire philosophy behind traditional attitudes towards woman and nature. While Emerson fears dissolution into the natural world in "Nature," and Jim enjoys such a dissolution in the pumpkin patch because his life is so safe and his world so romanticized, Griffin takes the full plunge into a merging of the self with nature, and says of attitudes like Emerson's:

We are, in fact, devouring ourselves with our fear of natural power and our attempts to control it. We seek to save ourselves from our own experience. We refuse to be eaten in a sense that one ought to be and always is finally eaten by experience (Griffin, in Reweaving, p.89).

SUSAN GRIFFIN:
ECOFEMINISM ON WOMAN AND NATURE

Emerson's admiration of woman and nature is countered by his fear of their power. While Cather does not feel threatened in the way that Emerson is, like Emerson, she is hindered by her acceptance of the traditional views of woman and nature. Susan Griffin presents an entirely new attitude towards woman and nature, one which builds on the positive, constructive aspects of writers such as Emerson and Cather, but which redefines their limiting basic assumptions.

Griffin's book Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her traces patriarchal Western civilization's attitudes towards both woman and nature and presents an alternative, ecofeminist way of viewing and interacting with the world. To Griffin, woman and nature have each been oppressed, enslaved, and degraded by patriarchal Western society. She illustrates this with a panoply of texts--scientific articles, medical manuals, history books, lumbering reports, etc.-- which present "factual" information about the "right" of men to exploit and control both women and nature. Women, she observes, are perhaps closer to nature than men, not only because of such physical connections as their menstrual cycles and the fact that they give birth, but also because they share a similar position in relation to man, who closely links the two:

He says that woman speaks with nature. That she hears voices from under the earth. That wind blows in her ears and trees whisper to her. That the dead sing through her mouth and the cries of infants are clear to her. But for him this dialogue is over. He says he is not part of this world, that he was set on this world as a stranger. He sets himself apart from woman and nature....

We are the bird's eggs. Bird's eggs, flowers, butterflies, rabbits, cows, sheep; we are the caterpillars; we are leaves of

ivy and sprigs of wallflower. We are women. We rise from the wave. We are gazelle and doe, elephant and whale, lilies and roses and peach, we are air, we are flame, we are oyster and pearl, we are girls. We are woman and nature. And he says he cannot hear us speak.

But we hear (Griffin, prologue).

Thus, while men degrade the connection they see between women and nature, women like Griffin exalt it.

Griffin imagines a world in which humans are more in tune with nature, in which all creatures, male and female, live in harmony, and acknowledge and cherish their connections, as well as their differences. In "Forest: the way we stand" she writes:

The way we stand, you can see we have grown up this way together, out of the same soil, with the same rains, leaning in the same way toward the sun...how we are each purpose...in the way we stand, each alone, yet none of us separable, none of us beautiful when separate but all exquisite as we stand, each moment headed in this cycle, no detail unlovely (Griffin, p.220-1).

Here, the community is valued more highly than the individual. There is great beauty in the connectedness of these trees, which can also be seen as people. Together, they need not ask what their purpose is; they simply *are* purpose. This attitude sharply contrasts the patriarchal view, as interpreted by Griffin in "Timber: what was there for them":

*Trees growing in the forest should be useful trees.
For each tree ask if
it is worth the space it grows in (Griffin,p.57)*

This view looks not at the community but at the individual, and questions the worth (measured by usefulness to humans) of each individual. For this view, the purpose of the trees is to serve humans; the idea of the forest itself as purpose would be considered absurd.

Griffin's view is similar to the one which Cather presents through Antonia. Just as Antonia can be seen as a metaphor for the land, Griffin offers similar parallels of women to the earth, such as in "This Earth: what she is to me": "I feel her pain and my own pain comes into me...This earth is my sister; I love her daily grace, her silent daring, and how loved I am" (Griffin, p.219). Likewise, in "Our Ancient Rages: consequences", in which she compares a woman's rape and subsequent revenge to strip mining and the resulting erosion and flooding: "*We are all a part of this motion, we say, and the way of the river is sacred, and this grove of trees is sacred, and we ourselves, we tell you, are sacred* " (Griffin, p.186).

As Cather does with Antonia's garden and Thea's Panther Canyon, Griffin also presents feminine landscapes and women as essentially connected, as in "Matter: how we know": "*Because we know ourselves to be made from this earth. See this grass...patches of silver. Like the patches of silver in our hair*" (Griffin,p.223), and, on a more spiritual level, "I love this bird...I fly with her...live in the body of this bird whom I cannot live without...because I know I am made from this earth" (Griffin,p.227). The power of this spiritual connection gives Griffin the inspiration and strength to create her art, her book:

I know I am made from this earth, as my mother's hands were made from this earth, as her dreams came from this earth and all that I know, I know in this earth, the body of the bird, this pen, this paper, these hands, this tongue speaking, all that I know speaks to me through this earth and I long to tell you, you who are earth too, and listen *as we speak to each other of what we know: the light is in us* (Griffin,p.227).

Griffin's connection to nature is much more active and consciously acknowledged than Thea's, yet the character of Thea is indeed inspired by a powerful spiritual connection to nature just as Griffin is. In Thea, Cather

does not reject the model of Antonia so much as try to incorporate her own ties to nature with her desire for a sophisticated, urban life. Cather, however, felt that her connection to nature had to be subjugated to the desire to succeed in her writing career, albeit a career inspired by her early years on the prairie. In contrast, Griffin, calls for a much closer connection of woman and nature, a celebrated and all-encompassing unity, in which women rejoice in themselves and in Nature, and thus liberate themselves and Nature from patriarchal chains:

Yes, they say our fate is with the wind...Can we give to the wind what is asked of us?...will we be able to hear the wind singing and will we answer? Can we sing back, this we ask, can we sing back, and not only sing, but in clear voices?...and will we keep on answering, keep on with our whole bodies? And do we know why we sing? Yes. Will we know why? Yes.
(Griffin,p.222)

As this passage indicates, Griffin feels that the fate of women is closely tied to the fate of Nature. Women must listen to, and act with, the natural world, and their natural selves, for guidance and support.

Cather, on the other hand, does not seem to recognize the centrality and importance of women's connections to Nature. She does not seem wholly satisfied with any of her female characters as ideal models for women. In My Antonia and The Song of the Lark, for instance, Antonia gives up much of her autonomy and her intellectual side, and Thea misses her life closer to nature. Perhaps Cather does not present a fully content female character because she herself could not imagine a reconciliation of her need to be close to nature and her need for autonomy and artistic expression. Perhaps Griffin, in analyzing the importance and effects of woman's connection to nature, has indicated a spiritual answer to Cather's question of what balance is necessary and possible between woman and nature. She looks to a world of

equality and unity of all elements, animate and inanimate, of the earth. In this vision, the community of the whole is valued much more highly than individual desires. All aspects respect and aid each other. Women recognize this unity and rejoice in it, using it as the most important inspiration and guidance for their actions, their dreams, and their lives. The resulting model is somewhat like a fusion of Antonia and Thea: a woman who is as spiritually connected to the earth as Antonia, yet who, rejoicing in that spirituality and using it as her primary guidance, is as strong in her femininity and creativity, and as capable of recognizing and following her dreams, as Thea.

CONCLUSION:
THE NECESSITY OF BREAKING WITH TRADITION

As indicated by the writings of Cather and Griffin, in order to create a new, healthy philosophy about Woman (and Man) and Nature, one must start at the beginning, examine traditional values and attitudes, and rework these patriarchal ideas into an entirely new philosophy. A new philosophy built simply from the base of former attitudes will be limited by the older views, even if the author, like Cather, is not aware that her/his views could be greatly expanded if released from the restrictive bonds of traditional thinking.

Griffin starts with Plato, and examines the subsequent attitudes of Western civilization, especially the views of woman and nature, up to the present. By understanding the basis of traditional ideas, she can build a new philosophy--ecofeminism--not just one which re-hashes reactions to old ideas. Ecofeminism can take many forms and present many attitudes; it is not simply one way of thinking. It does, however, reject the patriarchal, anthropocentric views which deny the autonomy and power of both woman and nature. It strives to build healthier societal attitudes towards both woman and nature, and celebrates the connection between them.

The danger in this new concept lies in the distinction between celebrating and exploring the relationship between woman and nature, and romanticizing so much that it moves beyond reality and thus is ineffective in dealing with the "real world." It is not necessarily bad to romanticize and explore a level of mysticism, as long as the philosophy also includes the ability to deal with reality. Emerson and Jim each romanticize woman and nature to the point where they are powerless in dealing with anything but a

spiritual, picture-perfect realm. Rather than just providing another pretty picture, ecofeminism explores both the mystical and the practical elements of feminism and ecology. In so doing, it suggests workable, adoptable attitudes which work towards concrete social and philosophical change.

While it would be impossible for everyone to change to a rural life like Antonia's (and not everyone would want to), the concepts behind her relationship with nature, those of mutual respect and nourishment, are important as attitudes towards nature in general. Even though we are essentially an urban society, our actions have definite consequences for nature (and thus, as part of nature, for ourselves). While our society in general still agrees with Emerson that nature exists as an endless resource for humans, if we are to avoid tremendous environmental destruction with severe life changing effects, we will have to adopt attitudes like those which Griffin presents.

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