

Moon Phases, Menstrual Cycles, and Mother Earth: The Construction of A Special Relationship Between Women and Nature

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Ecofeminists write at length on the association of women and nature, yet I meet so few women on my hiking and river trips. With what kind of nature are women associated? When we speak of nature do we mean menstrual cycles or red rock canyons? In what ways are women distant from nature? With all the emphasis on the familiar correspondence between men/culture and women/nature, ecofeminists have ignored important constructions of femininity as a civilizing force on a savage masculinity common on the Western frontier. And ecofeminists describe women associated with the private rather than public sphere, but is nature in the private sphere? Why have these images, like those of a nonviolent, non-oppressive association between men and nature, been downplayed in favor of a story about connections between women and nature?

This summer my male partner Salm and I taught a field course on environmental issues that included ecofeminist material. As he listened to my survey of the many ways women are connected with nature, he began thinking of cases where men are associated with nature. We discussed cultural images of males in nature ranging from Tarzan to the Greek gods Pan and Dionysus; we pondered the ways our culture naturalizes male violence and aggression, and why sports teams so often use animal mascots. And he began asking questions: "What about these connections between men and nature, what is their significance?" And, on a more personal level he wanted to know, "if women can find belonging and political empowerment by connecting with nature, what are men supposed to do?" Although we have talked before, the conditions of the summer gave us much time for discussion as we hiked through the wilderness areas of Northern California. Salm's questions prompted me to ask, where is the feminist analysis of male relationships with nature? Why have these relationships—

beyond the general description of male distance from nature or male desire to conquer nature—been ignored? To what extent are current ecofeminist constructions of closeness between women and nature reinforcing gender norms that distance men from nature, or link men to nature only through violence?

This paper will explore a number of contradictions to the theme of a special relationship between women and nature by examining associations between men and nature and ways that women may be considered distant from nature. I will suggest a variety of reasons why literature in women and environment, ecofeminism, and feminist political ecology has chosen this particular story about a special connection between women and nature (and thus failed to include other stories), and I will ask whether ecofeminist constructions of gender inadvertently reinforce the very social and ecological relations so many of us critique. Although much of my discussion will be directed towards ecofeminism, the fields of women and environment and feminist political ecology share the emphasis on women and nature to which I refer. I recognize that whether theorists see relationships between women and nature as biological or social has been the subject of much writing and criticism between theorists who consider themselves to be in different fields. But at this point, the fact that there is now such a large body of literature focusing on relationships between women and nature (or environment) sets up a cultural story that is present across fields. I will use the term special relationship to refer to the full range of ways that women and nature have been connected.

I write from an ecofeminist perspective, that is, with the aim of examining how constructions of gender, race, and nature interact to facilitate sexism, racism, and the domination of nature. I write as well with the belief that the more than human world of nature or environment, forms the context for all human experience and thought, that relationships with the living world are wild, sacred, and ultimately beyond description, even as I subject my own relationships and experiences to analysis. In my approach there is a tension between recognizing the authenticity of an experienced human connection to the living, wild, context of nature, and simultaneously wanting to be reflective about that experience, or at least the interpretations we give it. I do believe that we hear “voices in nature,” even that some women are more likely to hear these voices than some men. I do feel a roaring inside me and I do desire to listen to that roar over the voices of a culture telling me to buy more, lose weight, and fear people whose skin is darker than my own. The ‘more than human’ world of rocks, rivers, plants, and animals, the forces we call nature, have always informed the human world with information and meaning—something only Western culture fails to understand. Although this piece may make ecofeminists less cozy in our understanding of a special relationship between women and nature, or by highlighting once again the underlying whiteness of much literature in this area, I hope my criticisms will be constructive. If we as ecofeminists understand ourselves to be not only searching for our voices, but also—as we selectively tell certain stories and not others, in the business of creating culture—we need to ask, what are the consequences of the images we create.

At this point I hope my readers are asking questions and I hope that one of them is

along the lines of: “why should an ecofeminist focus so much on men?” I see two important reasons. As a feminist, I am used to thinking about the oppositional relationship between the construction of femininity and masculinity—the fact that each quality is defined by the absence of the other. By studying male relations with nature we may come to a fuller understanding of female relations with nature. Yet there is another reason why I believe studying masculinity and male relationships with nature matters: if we are to build a feminist understanding of social relations, men too must be seen and dealt with not only as normative subject, but socially constructed. While writing this piece I visited the section of my library devoted to masculinity and found a sparse two shelves, containing no more than several dozen books. This compared to the women’s studies sections where row after row of books on femininity can be found. I know, the obvious response to this is, “the entire library is men’s studies,” and I certainly agree. But the difference is, that library is filled with books written by men who have taken as their subject everything but the critical examination of masculinity! We don’t need more books carrying on the notion of normative masculinity. We do need more books examining masculinity as subject matter—only then can we undo the notion that to be anything but white male middle class and heterosexual is neutral and objective, and make room for the many other voices.

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN MEN AND NATURE

In the same way that an ecofeminist analysis of the relationships between women and nature has been complicated in recent years, we need to complicate our understanding of the relationships between men and nature. My discussion will use the many, shifting definitions of nature as sometimes part of the body, sometimes in the world ‘out there’ beyond our houses or cities currently found in both popular culture and academic writings.

Although the fields of women and environment, ecofeminism and feminist political ecology differ in many ways, they share the tendency to emphasize relationships between women and nature and overlook those between men and nature. For example, even the recent anthology *Feminist Political Ecology* (Rocheleau et al, 1996), one of the most likely sites for work on men, contains eight essays on women and three essays on both women and men. Given that so much discussion focuses on relations between women and nature, and that many authors have claimed that men are in fact associated with culture and not with nature, it is important to understand the many real and symbolic ways that men *are* associated with nature. In fact, because of the way in which nature is drawn upon to normalize both femininity and masculinity, both genders have been “naturalized.” Interestingly, due to the shifting definition of nature, when we talk about what is naturally male, nature itself becomes something different than when we refer to that which is naturally female. I will discuss this issue further on, for now it is important to understand that the pool of Western cultural stories about material and mythical relationships between men and nature is richer and more complex than currently presented. The following discussion will include both

'negative' and 'positive' images of men and nature, primarily to make the point that men have been associated with nature. I am not suggesting that we should celebrate all these images, only that they exist—although some images may be useful for those men who are in search of positive ways to connect with nature.

Real Men are Just Animals

Men have been characterized as close to nature on many symbolic levels, some of which are congruent with radical feminist portrayals of an inherently violent masculinity. Despite ecofeminism's connections to radical feminism, these images do not fit the story ecofeminism has been telling about male proximity to culture and distance from nature. For example, men have commonly been characterized as "wild beasts," with "brute" strength—beings beyond the control of society. Such images are particularly played up around male aggression and sexuality, and have served to normalize male aggression and sexual violence. For example, "he couldn't control himself" or "she made him do it," are all too familiar justifications for rape. In essence these statements rely on a belief is that underneath the surface of every man lies a wild animal that, once released, cannot be stopped. This perception has been reinforced by the fact that, "real men" have been equated with those animals believed to be especially fierce or sexually active such as goats, bulls, wolves, cougars, or wolverines. These associations exist across race and class lines and are especially important when male socialization is at a peak: puberty and the transition to adulthood. Participation in sports becomes an important forum for male socialization during this time (Doyle 1995). Interestingly, sports teams, especially high school sports teams, often have animal mascots. Representations of these animals provide models, for specific kinds of activity such as fierceness, aggression, or loyalty. It is through the association with these animals (through association with their own "animal nature"?), that boys learn the characteristics necessary to fulfill appropriate male roles as adults in society. Of course fierceness, aggression, and competitiveness are not the only things we teach young boys, my point is that *boys are taught to develop these aspects of the "male" self through association with animals.*

Men of color are stereotypically considered, "closer to nature" in a myriad of ways that vary by racial groups, that is, different racial groups are associated with nature in different ways. For example, while the association of men with animal aggression and sexuality does exist across race and class lines, black men are particularly implicated. In *Male Myths and Icons*, Roger Horrocks (1995) describes how, "the black male body is a container for sexual desire, beauty, grace, portrayed in a rather animal-like manner" (157). According to Horrocks, boxer Mike Tyson, "seemed to symbolize a black male primitive violence that was portrayed as both mindless and magnificent . . . Tyson's conviction for rape . . . seemed to confirm the racist stereotypes of the black, male rapist who is not safe to be let out" (159–60). Horrocks also describes the common conception that black men are naturally athletic:

Sport has enshrined many myths about the differences between white and black men, for example, that white men show intelligence, leadership, and emotional control, whereas black men exhibit strength, speed, quickness, and good 'instincts' (150).

African Americans are associated with nature on other levels as well. In an interview with Theodore Rozak, Carl Anthony describes how black people, including of course, black men, are associated with dirt through the notion of purity: "Purity, that it's 100% pure. Like pure granulated sugar, pure white bread. Meaning unsoiled, unsoiled, undamaged, unconnected with dirt. So whites are pure and clean. And black people are dirt" (Rozak 1995). Later, Rozak notes, "There is . . . a whole set of nature references that the dominant white society has assigned to Blacks . . . jungles, savages, wildness. . . ."

In contrast to the negative connotations of men and nature Anthony describes, a different set of stereotypes form the basis for a special relationship between Native American men and nature. In this case, popular culture imagines native peoples to lead ecologically sustainable lifestyles and to hold vast knowledge about the natural world. These associations may be positive, but portrayals of native peoples as the 'noble savage,' and co-option of native rituals and spirituality remain a powerful form of racism. Other stereotypes about the proximity of people of color to nature can all too easily be found in travel magazines using smiling Asian men and women surrounded by flowers, fruit and sunsets to sell tours to places such as Thailand. The stereotypes of just how men of different racial groups are associated with nature are different for different groups, but however constructed, the point remains that men of color are viewed as 'other,' not flesh and blood, but romanticized stereotypes. When ecofeminists describe men's connection to culture, the images of men we have are white. In thinking of the images of men of color it becomes clear that only some men fit the story ecofeminists have told. We need to be careful not only about essentializing women, but essentializing men.

It is also interesting to note that as the 'nature' we are thinking of is associated with women or men and people of different races, 'nature' shifts between something male and something female, something good and pure and something bad and desecrated. Although white women may be able to define the nature we are associated with in positive terms, especially since the environmental movement, it is important to understand that for women and men of color, association with nature may continue to be a source of racist or sexist oppression.

Nature as Male

Carolyn Merchant (1995) discusses Gaia, Eve, and Isis as female symbols of nature. But this is only one story, for just as there are mythic images of women immersed in nature in Western traditions, there are also images of men. The Greek god Pan, half man, half goat, lived in and worshiped the natural world. Pan's celebration of the natural world through his music and sexuality supported, sus-

tained and re-created that world. In our time, Pan's name has become the root of Pantheism, or the worship of nature. Although ecofeminists talk now of the connection between women's fertility and the fertility of the land (see e.g., Diamond 1994) according to the medical knowledge of the ancient Greeks, the father was the creative source of the child and there are many cases where *male* figures are equated with fertility and the land, including both Pan and the mythic character of Kokopeli in the traditions of southwestern American native peoples. And not surprisingly, since for all sexual species, the creation of life involves both females and males, there are also fertility rituals in which women and men together are associated with fertility, such as May Day celebrations in which women and men made love in the fields in springtime. In such contexts, both men and women are associated with creativity and the regeneration of life.

There are many other examples of symbolic connections between men and nature: the sun is often considered male, Neptune was God of the sea, Romulus, the rumored founder of Rome, was suckled by the wolf Lupa, Tarzan lives in the jungle, the Scandinavian god Thor is associated with thunder and lightning, Dionysus was the inventor of viniculture, and the Egyptian god Orisis traveled between heaven and earth following the lunar cycle. Although ecofeminists discuss the ecological significance of a Christian God who is male and lives in the sky replacing a female Goddess in the earth (see e.g., Spretnak 1986), we have overlooked the fact that within Christian tradition there is also a male located under the earth in the form of the biblical figure of Satan. Although Satan is hardly a positive character, it remains significant that the evil being living *within the earth*, is male. Once again, discussing only female symbols of nature serves the ecofeminist narrative that men are associated with culture and only women are associated with nature.

“Red in Tooth and Claw”: Natural Laws of the Animal Kingdom

A third symbolic association of men and nature concerns our images of the animal *kingdom*, as male. This point was reinforced for Salm and me recently by our students, who referred to birds, rabbits, and bears as “he” all summer long. In fact, all animals are referred to as “he” by just about everyone I know (feminist or otherwise). The stereotype of a male animal kingdom is also reflected in biological theories, as noted by Michael Gross and Mary Beth Averill (1983): “Nature, as depicted in biological sciences, is a man's world” (71) and, “competition is a core concept of evolutionary theory” (72). This male, “man's world” of nature fits the “male” model of nature as, “red in tooth and claw.” These authors describe how evolutionary theories stressing the “masculine” characteristic of competition are considered more credible and much more prevalent than those emphasizing the “feminine” quality of cooperation whether their subjects are birds, primates, or seeds. Gross and Averill write that:

“Evolution is a strategy of progress, of ‘improvement,’ of expansion, invasion and colonization. Its episodes and event expresses the familiar sort of processes and characteristics which men think promote progress and create history: competition, struggle, domination, hierarchy, even cooperation—but only as a competitive strategy. A number of other characteristics and kinds of processes do not appear, among them nurturance, tolerance, intention, awareness, benignity, collectivism” (72).

Interestingly, the appearance of female primatologists whose work focuses on caring and nurturing behaviors between parents and offspring implies a gendered struggle in interpreting “feminine” and “masculine” qualities of nature, as I will discuss below.

“It’s a Dirty Business”

There are also physical connections between men and nature, ways that men’s bodies come closer to nature. Men go hunting, fishing, build cabins, and work in the woods as loggers, forestry technicians, or fire fighters more frequently than do women. Farming in this country is considered a male profession. As children, young boys are encouraged to build tree forts, get dirty, and explore the woods while young girls are often supposed to be pretty, clean, and play indoors. And while there is a healthy literature discussing the relationship between women and animals (e.g., Hogan, et al. 1998), a number of popular books and T.V. programs such as *Where the Red Fern Grows*, *White Fang*, *Lassie*, and the cartoon *Davie and Goliath* romanticize a connection between boys and dogs.

Some of these associations between men and nature—particularly that of hunting—have been discussed in terms of men’s desire to separate from and conquer nature (see e.g., Kheel 1990). Without taking from this powerful and useful analysis, I wish to suggest additional meanings of and outcomes to these relationships. For example, boys who spend their childhood exploring in the woods with their dogs may feel a deep sense of familiarity and belonging in the “more than human” world. They will likely learn how to move through a forest, cross streams, and come to recognize trees, plants, birds, and other animals. Boy scout programs teach boys and young men in a militarized, homophobic atmosphere, yet give them exposure to the world beyond humans as well as skills and knowledge about listening, observing, and existing in “nature” that may allow them to continue a relationship on their own terms.

She’s a Lady: The Distance Between Women and Nature

Once you begin looking, it is not difficult to see that there are a number of inconsistencies in ecofeminist discussion of a particular closeness between women and nature. Indeed, there are many times that the nature/culture dualism discussed by ecofeminists is flipped and women are associated not with nature but with culture: women’s organizing for suffrage and social change during the late 1800s

rested on a conception of femininity as a moral civilizing force, girls today are often dressed in restrictive clothing, expected to stay clean and taught to fear snakes and spiders, women are associated with the private sphere and the home, and use infinitely more products to alter their physical appearance than do men. In the TV and movie Westerns so popular among Americans, women are associated with towns and civilization while men are associated with the open plains. Men may have conquered the wilderness, but women brought schools, churches, and 'society' to the frontier (Tompkins 1992). The notion that women are more civilized is connected to the idea that women are morally superior, a theme that has been popular for a long time:

"From the suffragist claim that 'if women voted there would be no more war,' to the 1992 U.S. election slogans proclaiming 'the year of the woman,' many have proclaimed that politics would be more moral if only more women were involved" (Tronto 1994, 1).

An ecofeminist might respond that cultural taboos concerning women's bodies such as the necessity to shave hair or hide smells may be particularly important because there is an underlying fear that women really are closer to nature, and I would agree. Yet in actual practice as we apply make-up, shave, use feminine hygiene products, and cover our smells, women are representing ourselves as 'cultured,' not 'down to earth.' Similarly, the fact that girls are socialized to fear animals that many believe were associated with women in powerful ways in our past such as snakes and spiders, may be interpreted as reinforcing connections between women and these animals. But if the girls of today fear snakes and spiders, they will in very real ways, be distant from these animals.

Although only a beginning, this summary should make clear that associations between women, men, and nature are played out in many more ways than the fields of women and environment, ecofeminism, or feminist political ecology have emphasized thus far. Given that there are many ways that men may be seen as close to nature, and women may be seen as distant from nature, ecofeminists and others have made a choice to tell a particular story: the story of a special relationship between women and nature. Why? I believe this story has been told for at least several reasons. First, our lack of definition of nature, combined with white normative assumptions of gender discussed earlier, has led to the essentialism of both men and nature, making less visible the many other stories our culture contains. Second, I think the women and nature story has not only fit theoretically, but has been emotionally satisfying and politically empowering to white women.

"But women don't go into nature . . . what nature are you talking about?"

Clearly a large problem is that writers in the area of ecofeminism or women and the environment have no more concise definition of "nature" than anyone else. Instead, as ecofeminist Michelle Taylor has remarked, sometimes ecofeminists use nature to mean the wild ooze of the woods, and other times men-

strual cycles: "As it is utilized on an abstract level, 'nature' in its most generalized sense could include non-human nature, our embodied selves, environment, ecosystems and anything symbolically natural" (Taylor 1998). Ecofeminism has developed during a time when changing ideas of nature and what is natural lie at the core of much social theory. Although I hardly expect ecofeminism to provide a fixed definition of nature, it is important to recognize that the very openness of the term has made it possible for ecofeminists to define nature in ways that fit our story of a special relationship between women and nature. What has emerged is a focus nature when nature is female or associated with women.

Furthermore, ideas of gender and nature intersect and shape one another. In other words, there is a slippery relationship between what we consider natural feminine and masculine gender roles and how we portray nature. We mean two things when we say "feminine nature" or "masculine nature"—that which is natural about femininity and that which is feminine about nature. In using these terms we are not only reinforcing specific gender roles, but different interpretations of nature. Feminine nature is creative, life-giving, fertile, nurturing, while masculine nature is violent, aggressive, and competitive—"red in tooth and claw." Women may be closer to a nurturing nature that is fertile and reproduces while men may be closer to a savage, competitive nature that is impersonal, brutal, and heartless like the tough guys in Westerns. In other words, traditional conceptions of masculinity implicate particular constructions of nature. This creates an interesting link between changing images of femininity or masculinity and changing images of nature—and a political significance to creating a new masculinity for men in terms of how they will relate to nature and how we will all conceive of nature. Furthermore, because nature is a single reference for the opposite qualities of femininity and masculinity, there is also a way in which the construction of nature becomes contested terrain. At times these feminine and masculine constructions of nature may even be argued back and forth between living women and men, as when female biologists focus on caring, nurturing behaviors and male biologists focus on behaviors such as aggression and territoriality. Ecofeminist constructions of gender and nature continue this contest over naming and defining the terrain of 'nature.' There is a political imperative in portraying nature in certain ways, and in locating oneself nearer to nature.

"My Side is the Wild Side"

However defined, the idea of a special relationship between women and nature has been enormously popular amongst white women. Why? Beyond the many theoretical strengths of the comparison between patriarchy and environmental degradation, feminism and environmentalism, I believe there exists for many women, especially white women environmentalists, a strong emotional resonance with this notion. I have certainly found this true for myself. At a time when so many of our lives are carried out in cities, distant from many aspects of nature and the groundedness, sense of place and meaning that comes from these relationships, a time

when we romanticize the beauty of waterfalls on Sierra Club calendars and fight over organic food standards, women can imagine ourselves aligned with the beautiful, life-sustaining nature, rather than the corrupt, cancerous culture. Furthermore, despite our many privileges, white women retain a feeling of being on the outside, of not belonging in the culture—"it's a man's world." Few of us get the big salaries, make the big decisions, or find our views expressed on the evening news. Instead, we know what it feels like to be ridiculed, ignored, and to have our bodies used for a man's pleasure. Yet despite, and perhaps because of, our many privileges, white women lack a clear-cut community of our own. Being a kind of 'middle minority' is an awkward position not only politically but emotionally. Do we accept the constructions of reality offered by white men and deny our own experiences, or challenge them and lose more privileges? I believe this ambiguous position leaves white women in particular need of a place where we do or could belong. If we do not feel accepted by society, perhaps we belong in that pure world of nature which we know, like ourselves, is marginalized and under attack. If we have a special relationship to nature, white women can gain special access to the place of safety and refuge for which so many urban environmentalists long. Furthermore, a special relationship with nature is not only emotionally satisfying, it is politically empowering. If we have such a special connection with nature be it through socialized gender roles that bring us into contact with our environment in particular ways, or the shared experience of oppression, we become privileged to speak on behalf of nature. We can feel more trust in our own voices if they are really the voices of nature—our words are backed by the ultimate authority.

Consider the following selections from my favorite author, Terry Tempest Williams, in her essay, *Undressing the Bear*. In these passages, women are equated with nature, wildness, creativity, and hope and are given a special voice and power, as well as the notion of our own goodness. In the first passage Williams is describing the experience of seeing a lunar rainbow:

In these moments I felt innocent and wild, privy to the secrets and gifts exchanged only in nature. I was the tree split open by change. I was the flood, bursting through grief. I was the rainbow at night dancing in darkness (1994, 56).

Later she describes women as beings who, knowing what it is to be feared, have a special connection to nature:

We are creatures of paradox, women and bears, two animals that are enormously unpredictable, hence our mystery. Perhaps the fear of bears and the fear of women lies in our refusal to be tamed, the impulses we arouse, the forces we represent (58).

And here, women share with the earth the qualities of fierceness, wickedness, and perfection. From our voices come the stories that will save us:

As women connected to the earth we are nurturing and we are fierce, we are wicked and we are sublime. The full ranges is ours. We hold the moon in our bellies and fire in our hearts. We bleed. We give milk. We are the mothers of first words. These words grow. They are our children. They are our stories and our poems (59).

The notion that within women lies the way to a more pure life, to knowing how to live ecologically is satisfying for both individual women (who become empowered to speak and have a way to see themselves as less corrupt) and for a society looking for signs of hope. In this vein, Donna Haraway (1989) interprets the attention given to Jane Goodall and other white female primatologists following the explosion of the atomic bomb as the desire for women to "heal man's expulsion from the garden after the bomb . . . to represent immanence rather than transcendence, the possibility of survival on earth." (150). This suggests that white women are being glorified in a parallel manner as the romanticization of the spirituality and traditional knowledge of native peoples, although clearly with a different set of consequences.

As I discussed earlier, I do believe that the natural world provides context for human existence. I believe that ecological problems arise largely because we have cut off our ability to listen to and understand the "voices" and "messages" of nature, be they in the silence of a given springtime or the roar of floods and mud slides cascading down clear-cut slopes. Instead, as David Abram (1996) so eloquently describes, humans have become increasingly fascinated with our own sign and cut off our awareness of the 'more than human' world. It may well be that at this time more women than men are attuned to the voices of nature, for the very reasons that ecofeminists have described.

Thus, I believe we need to think about the idea of a special relationship between women and nature on several levels. Although I write that our work has served our own emotional needs, I equally recognize these motivations as *authentic* needs. To feel that we belong in this world is not only vital to the emotional survival of every woman, every human being, but in guiding how we will behave in the world. We cannot act to create beauty, perfection, or ecologically sustainable lifestyles unless we believe they are possible. We will not act as though we belong in the world unless we believe that we can. This is the difference between moving forward with creativity and staring frozen in fear into the oncoming headlights.

At the same time, we must be aware of the consequences that spring from the story we have created. When we are in this position, as white women, do we then continue to ask ourselves the tough questions about racial and class privileges? How closely do we listen to the voices of native women, of black men, and other groups of people similarly implicated by the constructions of gender, race and nature we create? There is a dance we must carefully dance between knowing the place of beauty and purity within ourselves that we may act from this place, and feeling so sure of our inherent virtuousness that we fail to search for that "good" place within ourselves.

Secondly, to what extent are ecofeminist constructions reinforcing gender norms that distance men from nature, or link men to nature only through violence? This leads me back to my partner's question, "If women are supposed to connect with nature what are men supposed to do?" Women can feel proud that, like the sun, we nurture one another, but none of the men I know are satisfied by answering the question of how they connect to nature by identifying with an inner violent or competitive nature! If white women find the image of connection with nature psychically pleasing

and politically empowering, where does the reverse image leave white men? Looking again at the passages from Williams, if women represent mystery, what do men represent? If women refuse to be tamed does this imply that men have given in to the norms of our culture? Are all men afraid of nature? What forces do men represent? The next passage references children, but children come from men also. Are only women the mothers of words that become stories and poems? Can men also create stories and poems that speak from the nature within? All people need to view themselves as holding the potential for good in order to be creative, effective actors. Currently, progressive pro-feminist men must distance themselves from many cultural associations with nature, yet given what we argue about parallels between the feminist and environmental movements, many of these are the very men who may be most in search of ways to connect with nature. How do men rejecting traditional gender roles connect with nature? I am interested in understanding the images we create of men not only because I watch my male partner engage in struggles similar to my own to find belonging, to act meaningfully, to recreate a sense of self that is congruent with social and ecological relations, but because men do hold power in this society—I do not want to reinforce patterns of masculinity with socially and ecologically damaging consequences. We must begin to see men as part of nature and a life affirming, relational masculinity as natural. Without this vision ecofeminists are not only reproducing the very gender relations we claim to dislike, we are telling a ‘stock story’ and leaving ourselves open to significant criticism.

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