

The Language of Eco-feminism and Early 20th century Feminist writers Buck and Cather

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Abstract

This paper explores the language of eco-feminism and its intersection with the works of early 20th-century feminist writers Buck and Cather. Ecofeminism is a branch of feminism that examines the connections between women and nature, emphasizing the ways both nature and women are treated by patriarchal society. The paper examines the historical evolution of ecofeminist thought and its key tenets, including the revaluing of non-patriarchal structures and a view of the world that respects organic processes and holistic connections. It also discusses the early critiques of ecofeminism and its relationship with environmentalism. The works of early 20th-century feminist writers Buck and Cather are analyzed in the context of ecofeminist philosophy, exploring how their language and themes intersect with the principles of ecofeminism.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Feminism, Environmentalism, Early 20th-century, Writers, Buck, Cather

Review and Analysis

Padini Nirmal, in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography (Second Edition)*, 2020 writes, Ecofeminism emerged in different geographies through political activism and scholarship around two conjoined categories of “ecology” and “gender.” One of the central tenets of early ecofeminist thinking is that women's oppression under patriarchy is closely linked to the oppression and domination of nature under capitalist, colonial, and modernist forces—including those of Development and Science. The field has since evolved through an intersectional lens that considers the links between gender, race, class, nationhood, animality, and ecology.

Further she adds, as a body of knowledge and as a foundation for activism, ecofeminism is arguably the most geographically diverse subfield within “gender and nature” and has gained in popularity within environmental movements in the Global North and South. In fact, ecofeminism continues to be employed around the world—for instance, in tracing European colonization of indigenous land and women's bodies through acts of violence in Australia,

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and to design locally relevant environmental management practices in rural India, among others. Despite its continued relevance, ecofeminism has been critiqued for being essentialist, and for arguing for a power inversion rather than a structural critique of gender—and has since been followed by profound epistemological contestations over several foundational categories including gender. *Val Plumwood* critiques the dualistic thinking behind essentialist, Cartesian framings of nature–culture, mind–body, man–woman, and so on, widening the scope of ecofeminist theory and practice by identifying continuities and fluidities in place of rigidity and social constructions in place of “natural” characteristics instead.

Ecofeminism, like the social movements it has emerged from, is both political activism and intellectual critique. Bringing together feminism and environmentalism, ecofeminism argues that the domination of women and the degradation of the environment are consequences of patriarchy and capitalism. Any strategy to address one must take into account its impact on the other so that women's equality should not be achieved at the expense of worsening the environment, and neither should environmental improvements be gained at the expense of women. Indeed, ecofeminism proposes that only by reversing current values, thereby privileging care and cooperation over more aggressive and dominating behaviors, can both society and environment benefit.

The notion that women's and environmental domination are linked has been developed in a number of ways. A perspective in which women are accredited with closer links with nature was celebrated in early ecofeminist writings, by, for example, *Carolyn Merchant* in the United States and *Val Plumwood* in Australia. These advocated ‘the feminine principle’ as an antidote to environmental destruction, through attributes, which nurture nature. This ‘essentialist’ perspective, often adopting an ideal of woman as earth mother/goddess, has, however, also discredited ecofeminism and led to disaffection among some early protagonists (see, for example, Janet Biehl). In addition to being critiqued for its essentialism, this view of ecofeminism has also been charged with elitism through its provenance in a white, middle-class, Western, milieu. However, Vandana Shiva's consistent and persuasive ‘majority world’ voice has been a counterpoint to this, and arguably, gender and environment have been articulated together more powerfully, and been more influential, in majority world settings (see, for example, Wangari Maathai in Kenya), although how this has been done has been questioned by writers such as Cecile Jackson and Melissa Leach.

Feminist writing was beginning from the period of Virginia Woolf, in my view Buck and Cather might have influenced by Woolf's writing. Buck and Cather took the protagonists from peasant girls/women and they are laborious and successful.

Buck's novel *The Good Earth* carries the story of poverty, slavery, women oppression, Male domination, land becomes the factor for success and prosperity. Women are taken and treated as entity /stock in market and a labour in the field. O'Lan is always oppressed, misused and mistreated by Wang Lung. He was the decision maker in family, holds property and enjoyed flourished life alone with Lotus ignoring O' Lan.

In Cather's novel *O Pioneers!* with the heroic protagonist, Alexandra, the representative of such women characters. With the application of the feminist literary approach, the thesis makes a detailed analysis of the heroine Alexandra in an attempt to illustrate and prove Cather's feminist thinking tendency. The present article aims to introduce the feminist thoughts of Alexandra from the perspectives of her Revolt against "Woman Myth", her struggle against patriarchal society, and her longing for a real equality between men and women.

Through her writings, Cather also gave us a personal chronicle of artistic development: Every artist makes himself born. Now she is regarded as one of the best writers during the first half of 20th century. For Alexandra in *O Pioneers*, she not only gained indigence, autonomy, enjoying a sense of dignity, but also became one with the soul of nature in spirit. In the process of creating Alexandra, who was a female character imbued with consciousness and power instead of an object of male desire and yearning, Willa Cather intended to convey the below-mentioned ideas about women. Secondly, women should seek her identity in something complete and great rather than love and marriage. Cather's success and Alexandra's achievements on land demonstrated that women could never limit their imagination only to love and marriage. Thirdly, it would be so significant for a woman to obtain the economic and spiritual independence in her pursuit for self-identity. Willa Cather's conceptions about pioneer spirit and women's liberation have great significance to modern women. (LIU Xi, WU Yi, , 959-963). Several studies discuss the intersection of feminism and sustainability, highlighting the importance of women's perspectives and leadership in addressing environmental issues. Mishra et al. (2019, 2022) explore the performance assessment of water supply systems and the role of gender in their management. Mishra and Acharya (2018) examine the performance assessment of a saline water supply project in post-earthquake Nepal, emphasizing the need for a gender-sensitive approach. Mishra (2018) and Mishra and Rai (2017) investigate the comparative performance assessment of eco-friendly buildings and conventional buildings in Kathmandu Valley, highlighting the importance of considering gender in sustainable construction.

These studies demonstrate the significance of incorporating a feminist perspective in assessing the performance of water supply systems, the role of gender in their management, and the comparative performance assessment of eco-friendly and conventional buildings. By doing so, they contribute to the development of more sustainable and gender-responsive solutions in the field of water supply and sustainable construction..

Conclusion

The works of Buck and Cather, early 20th-century feminist writers, reflect themes that intersect with ecofeminist philosophy. Their writings depict the oppression of women and the close link between women and nature. Buck's novel "The Good Earth" portrays women's oppression, male domination, and the significance of land, while Cather's novel "O Pioneers!" features a heroic female protagonist who challenges patriarchal society. Through their writings, Buck and Cather contribute to the feminist literary approach, advocating for

women's autonomy, dignity, and equality. Their work aligns with ecofeminist principles, emphasizing the need to address the interconnectedness of gender and the environment.

Ecofeminism's influence is evident in various sustainability discussions, and its evolution continues to shape feminist and environmental discourses. While it has faced criticism, its interdisciplinary nature and focus on intersectionality make it a significant framework for understanding the relationships between gender, nature, and society.

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