

READING NOTES

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Women and the Environment

Carolyn Merchant 1996, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment*, Routledge, New York, 280pp, \$32.95

For some years now I have been an unabashed but not uncritical fan of the writings of Carolyn Merchant. Since her book *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (1980), which has been very useful in my teaching and my research, I have found in each of her books much to reflect on and much to relate to my practices. What I particularly like about her arguments is the way she problematises the ways in which both women and nature have been constructed over time by science and culture, in both positive and negative senses. She also recognises that both men and women have participated in science and cultural projects over time to varying degrees. Merchant does not propose any simple arguments that women's nature is essentially to nurture. She is not a goddess-oriented cultural or radical ecofeminist. Rather, she argues for a socialist ecofeminism which is concerned with social actions that will lead to the sustainability of life and a just society. In this book, she explores many aspects of the association of women with nature in Western culture and of their roles in contemporary environmental movements.

Carolyn Merchant is well credentialed to write in the field. She is Professor of Environmental History, Philosophy, and Ethics at the University of California at Berkeley. But, most importantly, Merchant writes well and communicates her arguments clearly; she is easy to read and persuasive too. This most recent book is a 'best of' her works. It is a selection from a number of her writings over the past decade and a half with a couple of additional chapters.

The organization of the book and the sources of the chapters are as follows:

Part One: Theory

1. 'Gaia: Ecofeminism and the earth', from her 1992 *Radical Ecology*.
2. 'Eve: Nature and narrative', from a chapter she has in the 1995 William Cronon collection *Uncommon Ground*.
3. 'Isis: Women and science', from a 1982 *Isis* article.

Part Two: History

4. 'The Death of Nature: Women and ecology in the scientific revolution', from the 1980 book of the same title.
5. 'From corn mothers to moral mothers: Changing forms of earthcare in New England', from her 1989 book *Ecological Revolutions*.
6. 'Preserving the earth: Women and the progressive conservation crusade', from a 1984 *Environmental History Review* article.

Part Three: Practice

7. 'Earthcare: Women and the American environmental movement' (new)
8. 'Peace with the earth: Women and the Swedish environment', from a 1986 *Women's Studies International Forum* article.
9. 'The ecological self: Women and the environment in Australia' (new).

Conclusion

'Partnership ethics: Earthcare for a new millennium.'

Chapter 9 on women and environments in Australia is particularly interesting as it is grounded in the research she did when she was here in the early 1990s. I have also found her conclusion, in which she further develops the notion of partnership ethics which she proposed in *Radical Ecology*, particularly useful in contemplating notions of a transformed society.

Two frustrating properties of the book are that all referencing is by footnote and there is no bibliography, so it is sometimes hard to trace specific references. However, there is an excellent index and this often helps to solve the problem of finding a source.

Overall, I thoroughly recommend this book and others by Carolyn Merchant to readers interested in developing an understanding of a cooperative approach to creating a habitable, just and sustainable world. 🌱

Other recommended books and chapters by Carolyn Merchant:

Merchant, Carolyn 1980/1990, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, Harper & Row, New York.

Merchant, Carolyn 1989, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.

Merchant, Carolyn 1990, 'Ecofeminism and feminist theory', in Diamond, Irene & Feman, Gloria Orenstein (eds), *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco.

Merchant, Carolyn 1992, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Liveable World*, Routledge, New York & London.

Merchant, Carolyn (ed.) 1994, *Key Concepts in Critical Theory: Ecology*, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, NJ.

Teaching Studies of Society and Environment

Rob Gilbert (ed.) 1996, *Studying Society and Environment: A Handbook for Teachers*, Macmillan Education Australia, Melbourne, 365pp., \$36.95

The outlining of Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE), a relatively new key learning area of curricula at the national level and in most Australian states and territories, has resulted in a growing range of materials being produced to support teachers who are already teaching or are planning to teach in this area.

One of the first cabs off the rank was Colin Marsh's *Teaching Studies of Society and Environment* published in 1994 which was a revision and third edition of his earlier *Teaching Social Studies*. Colin Marsh's book and Rob Gilbert's *Studying Society and Environment: A Handbook for Teachers* are both primarily designed for pre-service primary and secondary teacher education students; both are also of direct relevance to practising teachers interested in recent information and practical ideas about a relatively new area. The two books have commonalities; for example, Kaye Price has written the Aboriginal Studies chapters in both books. However there are also substantial differences between them. One of the greatest of these is in the area of environmental education. 'The environment' rates scant reference in Colin Marsh's book; there are only two entries in the index and the corresponding references are to an outline of an urban environmental studies unit and a case study of Fraser Island.

In contrast, *Studying Society and Environment* has both a strong emphasis on environmental education and a series of links with members of the Australian Association for Environmental Education. For example, there is a chapter on environmental education by John Fien and Annette Gough, a section on environmental citizenship, and many

sections dealing with ecological sustainability. Greg Hunt, Kath Murdoch and Kim Walker are the authors of the assessment and evaluation material. Other cross-curricular perspectives considered in relation to SOSE through having their own chapters in the book are as follows: education for active and informed citizenship, global perspectives, multicultural perspectives, Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies, gender perspectives, futures perspective, and teaching for future work and technology. Each of these chapters includes a discussion of issues related to the area and a section on how associated perspectives can be incorporated into curricula.

In regard to the Futures and Technology chapters, it is worthwhile noting that, as part of its teacher inservice work funded under the Australian government's National Professional Development Program, the Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment (AFSSSE) has produced several teacher resources—see Colliver (1996) and Dunlop (1996).

Another obvious strength of *Studying Society and Environment* is that there are separate chapters on each of the six conceptual strands set out in the SOSE national statement. Each chapter describes the key ideas associated with a particular strand and issues associated with those ideas. Finally, the book begins with a chapter on framing SOSE as an area of learning and ends with one discussing evaluation and reflective practices.

For beginning or experienced teachers wondering how to approach the creation called SOSE this book provides a sound source of perspectives, ideas and suggestions for practice. For thoughtful reflection on what teaching SOSE means *Studying Society and Environment* is a thoroughly recommended handbook. 🌱

Related references

Colliver, Angela & Wildy, Mark 1996, *Futures Studies: A Teacher Resource for Band A in Studies of Society and Environment*, Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment, Adelaide.†

Dunlop, Richard 1996, *Futures Studies: A Teacher Resource for Band B in Studies of Society and Environment*, Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment, Adelaide.†

Dunlop, Richard 1996, *The Impact of Technology: A Teacher Resource for Band B in Studies of Society and Environment*, Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment, Adelaide.†

Marsh, Colin (ed.) 1994, *Teaching Studies of Society and Environment*, Prentice Hall, Sydney.

†Available from the AAEE office. \$12.50 (\$28 for the set of three AFSSSE titles).

Annette Gough is a member of the Editorial Board for AJEE. Biographical revelations are listed elsewhere in this issue with those concerning other Board members.
