Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment
Ed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley
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Editors DeLoughrey and Handley have a strong background in different aspects of western hemispheric colonial and postcolonial literatures and have clearly relied on that experience to build an edited collection that not only provides a range of literary and cultural studies analyses of the postcolonial and the ecocritical, but also a volume that reads as a coherent body of work—not just disparate essays. As a result, a reader gains a sense of cumulative knowledge as he or she moves from the first essay to the next. Unlike many edited collections, where a reader might want to just dip in and read a chapter or two, skipping around and ignoring the Introduction altogether (I, of course, abhor this practice having written a few such unread introductions), this volume is best appreciated by starting at the beginning and continuing until the end. And therein lay my only quarrel with the editors. I would have liked for them, or an invited contributor, to have written an afterword to *Postcolonial Ecologies* that sums up the advance it represents for integrating postcolonial theory and practice with literary ecocriticism. But perhaps the editors are right and that summing up is best left to each of us to decide how we want to build on the work developed here. I for one have become recently concerned about the term *ecocosmopolitanism* and found several chapters particularly useful for that consideration as well as feeling better attuned to postcolonial criticism as a whole. The Introduction to the volume works well as something of an introduction to the synergy of these fields of study, providing a contextual background for the chapters that follow.

Although all of the chapters provided me with a new theoretical or critical turn or else an introduction to literary texts unknown to me, a few of them suffer from a serious limitation. Sometimes large claims are made about postcolonial theory, postcolonial conditions, or literary production based on a single example. While an author may very well wish to focus on a single text and develop a sophisticated reading of it, in order to make wider claims for the conclusions drawn, an author ought at least to mention other texts or circumstances in which the conclusion applies. This criticism does not apply to the first chapter on "Cultivating Community: Counterlandscaping in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*" because Jill Didur sets up an extensive theoretical position and cultural history for her reading of the novel. In other words, she demonstrates the applicability of her claims through her example, having placed it within a large body of

writing about colonial India. In like manner, I found quite compelling much of Elaine Savory's "Toward a Caribbean Ecopoetics: Derek Walcott's Language of Plants," in terms of her detailed analysis of Walcott's attention to flora specificity. But I must take issue with her uncritical acceptance of the view that she attributes to Walcott that all that makes the difference between "an almond leaf and an olive leaf . . . is literature" (82). I beg to differ in that they make a life and death difference to people who cultivate these trees whether anyone ever writes a poem about their labors or their arbors. Otherwise, Savory does a fine job of cultivating an awareness of both the literary influences on Walcott appearing in his poetry that shape his attention to plants and the bioregional basis for his awareness. A broader discussion of flora occurs as the first chapter of Part Two: Forest Fictions, with a discussion of the long history of Caribbean deforestation and the ways in which it is addressed in literature. I dog-eared nearly the entire chapter.

Part III: The Lives of (Nonhuman) Animals starts with a chapter by Rob Nixon reprising points he has made elsewhere. I had problems with various unsubstantiated points claimed by Jonathan Steinwand in "What the Whales Would Tell Us: Cetacean Communication in Novels by Witi Ihimaera, Linda Hogan, Zakes Mda, and Amitav Ghosh," in terms of authorial intentionality and influence. I did, however, appreciate his utilization of Gerald Vizenor's concept of "survivance" and its applicability to postcolonial texts. I think Steinwand also needs to give more thought to the complexity of the idea of a "self." The next two chapters in this section, one by Allison Carruth on J.M. Coetzee and another by Pablo Mukherjee on Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* are both quite good. Mukherjee is developing a particularly strong materialist base of analysis of Indian literature that advances some of Nixon's arguments with greater sophistication and more detailed attention to literary works. His work participates in the analyses of "toxic discourse" and international environmental justice.

The fourth part of the volume is titled "Militourism" and takes more of a cultural studies turn than a literary one. Anthony Carrigan's analysis of transnational exploitation of so-called natural disasters in the case of Sri Lanka after the tsunamis raises important questions about tourism, but seems to claim too much from the single literary example employed. In contrast, DeLoughrey's discussion of Pacific Islanders' linguistic representations of their worldview is quite rich and detailed. Dina El Dessouky's chapter on "Activating Voice, Body, and Place: Kanaka Maoli and Ma'ohi Writings for Kaho'olawe and Moruroa" helped with my thinking about ecocosmopolitanism, as I mentioned at the start of this review. It also reinforced my own sense that linguistic diversity, cultural diversity, and biodiversity are not distinct but rather utterly intertwined and mutually constitutive categories.

While a person might try to get by with checking this book out of the library, I think that would be a mistake. Anyone planning to work on postcolonial ecocritical material or to integrate ecocritical analysis into

postcolonial studies will want to have a copy of *Postcolonial Ecologies* on their bookshelf for frequent and productive reference.