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## Critical Collaborations: Indigeneity, Diaspora, and Ecology in Canadian Literary Studies edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Christl Verduyn

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***Critical Collaborations: Indigeneity, Diaspora, and Ecology in Canadian Literary Studies*** edited by **SMARO KAMBOURELI** and **CHRISTL VERDUYN**

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Reviewed by **CHAD WEIDNER**

Conferences and workshops in ecocriticism abound, but not enough publications emerge from these endeavors. Smaro Kamboureli and Christl Verduyn's *Critical Collaborations: Indigeneity, Diaspora, and Ecology in Canadian Literary Studies* is an exception, and tries to show the breadth and depth present in contemporary Canadian ecocritical scholarship. This book is part of the ambitious wider TransCanada conferences project. The third volume in the series, *Critical Collaborations* seeks to expand the possibilities of Canadian literary culture, highlighting modesty and community, while acknowledging the real limits of present-day systems and thinking. While dedicated to Canadianness in a very broad sense, the book brings together a number of diverse views. In the preface to the book, Kamboureli stresses that the collection highlights three specific matters of importance: "Indigeneity, diaspora, and ecology" (4). Kamboureli and Verduyn wrote the introduction and conclusion to the book and, placed between those chapters, are eleven papers by a diverse set of Canadian thinkers and critics. Broad both in terms of scope and vision, this book will be particularly interesting for those working in Canadian ecocriticism, Canadian literature, diaspora studies, ethnic studies, or North American literature more widely. While it is not possible to go through every essay here, a brief discussion of representative chapters should provide a good sense of the argumentation and direction of the larger collection.

Roy Miki's paper, entitled "Belief as/in Methodology as/in Form: Doing Justice to CanLit Studies," challenges the accepted divide between scholarly and creative work. The chapter begins with a general discussion of Northrop Frye and views on the pastoral. Miki says that Frye's writing constitutes an important moment in the formation of CanLit. More specifically, Miki says a number of "connectives . . . bring form, belief, and methodology" into alignment (35). Miki then discusses relevant issues central to current debates in higher education today, including "the corporatization of university spaces," "[r]esearch capitalism," and "maximization of profits" (36). I find this section especially compelling even if a bit polemical. What follows is a very interesting discussion of the divide between critical scholarship and more creative endeavors. Miki argues: "Even when we pay lip service to the creative as an embodied mode of consciousness, it is the rational that is sanctified as the sign of legitimate knowledge" (37). Such a view seems to challenge existing distinctions between critical and creative efforts. Miki then suggests that a better way of thinking about art might be the development of what he calls "Creative Critical Reading Practices (39)," a call that has been made elsewhere in order to bring criticism and creation together. The realization of such practices might help us to move beyond present modes of thinking.

Catriona Sandilands' "Acts of Nature: Literature, Excess, and Environmental Politics" discusses the role of ecocriticism today, especially in terms of moving "towards politics" as well as possibly finding "particular roles for itself in politics" (her emphasis 128). Such an obvious ideological ecocriticism puts North

American variants seemingly as odds with European developments in the field, which seem more predicated on theoretical considerations. Sandilands goes on to suggest, "ecocriticism offers the potential to *constitute*, rather than merely represent, a world among us" (her emphasis 129). Sandilands discusses views of Martha Nussbaum, Glen Love, and Greg Garrard. Sandilands sees potential problems with these views, in a section that I found particularly nuanced and insightful. While Love and Garrard seem to suggest that literary studies should yield to science on questions of ecology, Sandilands stresses Nussbaum's view that "literary experience is a necessary corrective to rational deduction," especially in a political sense (129). The essay then puts forward an "Arendtian view of ecocritical politics" that is based on the work of Hannah Arendt (136). Sandilands carries out readings of pieces by Hannah Arendt and Dionne Brand. She eventually concedes both the limits and potentials of language to express environmental concerns fully. She states that the "incompletion of the [poet's] task" does not diminish the significance of the attempt (140). This is a very intriguing essay, and I would like to know how Sandilands might suggest that Canadian literary critics take the next step. In her view, is it necessary for ecocritics to engage in the political process directly? I can imagine many European ecocritics becoming uncomfortable with such a suggestion. Then again, the collection *is* about Canadian approaches to ecocritical

thinking. Sandilands says a wider discussion about what constitutes environmental praxis is needed.

Christl Verduyn's "Critical Allegiances" is the final paper in the collection, and reflects on the potential of the TransCanada project. She says the venture is a crucial part of a genuine emergent shift in English-language Canadian studies. While Verduyn is persuasive in arguing for greater transdisciplinary work, I am still left with some questions. I would like to have seen a much more serious discussion of the sometimes-murky distinctions between Canadian and American forms of contemporary ecocritical thinking. Just what exactly constitutes Canadian ecocriticism, and how is it different from American, British, and European manifestations? The TransCanada project is ongoing, so perhaps this question can be addressed more fully in the future.

*Critical Collaborations* is a successful collection. The development of a confident and sustained Canadian conversation in ecocriticism is long overdue. *Critical Collaborations* is useful in discovering the diversity of contemporary Canadian ecocriticism, and for this reason, it is very worthwhile.

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