



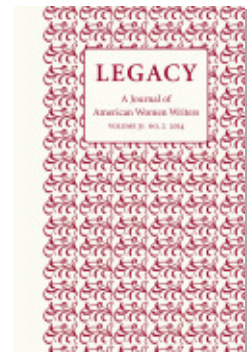
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Fallen Forests: Emotion, Embodiment, and Ethics in American Women's Environmental Writing, 1781-1924 by Karen L. Kilcup (review)

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bery and Coretta Scott King Awards (both given by divisions of the American Library Association) do provide some indication of their books' popularity, but *Slavery in American Children's Literature* does not indicate whether the works under discussion are taught by teachers or recommended by librarians, let alone read by children. Finally, although Connolly briefly mentions Robin Bernstein's *Racial Innocence*, I wonder whether she might have used some of the insights offered by that work to greater effect. She quotes from *Nettie's Trip South*: "When her sister tells her that 'slaves are thought to be three-fifths of a person,' Nettie admits, 'I looked and looked at black people, but I could not see what was missing'" (175). This scene might have been read as a knowing example of "racial innocence" or as a sly critique of the racism enshrined in the Constitution. Unfortunately, Connolly's analysis leaches the humor out of the narrator's Twainish anti-racism: "This 'look[ing] and look[ing]' at slaves is a central focus of eyewitness texts and serves three principal functions: as a way for the protagonist to testify against slavery, as a representation of white power and the slave's commodification, and as an interrogation of racial difference" (175). Still, these are minor quibbles with a book that is sure to make its mark in the fields of childhood studies and American literature. *Slavery in American Children's Literature* is an excellent volume that will be a touchstone for scholars and teachers for many years to come.

Fallen Forests: Emotion, Embodiment, and Ethics in American Women's Environmental Writing, 1781–1924. By Karen L. Kilcup. Athens:

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A crucial work of ecocriticism and ecofeminism at a moment when these fields aspire to enlarge their critical purview beyond nature writing's traditionally masculine and representational canon, *Fallen Forests* asserts the centrality of a diverse range of women's writing from the long nineteenth century to the discussion of environmental literature and ecofeminism. In crystalline prose, accomplished scholar Karen L. Kilcup offers compelling and necessary arguments for the ecocritical and ecofeminist import of texts by American Indian, African American, and working-class women, as well as forms, such as petitions, letters, travel writing, humor, and advice writing, whose implicit and explicit environmental reverberations have been largely overlooked by scholars.

Complicating conventional appraisals of nineteenth-century women's writing as sentimental, Kilcup demonstrates how women writers strategically appeal to emotion, ethics, and embodiment to tackle and anticipate concerns

such as resource depletion and environmental justice. Early in the book, Kilcup announces a parallel emphasis: “one of my oblique projects in *Fallen Forests* is to reground textual study in physical reality” (15). Such regrounding might not seem astonishing for a work of literary ecocriticism focused on the intersection of literature and the environment—that is, until Kilcup reveals that physical reality, for most of her subjects, begins with the body they inhabit. Kilcup’s understanding that “the body is women’s first environment” (136) exemplifies what she describes as a critical shift toward “a more capacious environmental ethos” (119). It also provides Kilcup with an excellent vantage point from which to argue for the environmental consciousness of a range of texts, including speeches and petitions by Native American women such as Nancy Ward (Nanye-hi; Cherokee), as well as personal narratives and autobiographical novels by enslaved and working-class African American women such as Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Wilson, respectively.

For Native American women, Kilcup claims, motherhood reinforces the reality of women’s body-as-environment. Kilcup’s first chapter demonstrates how, “using an oral or orally inflected hybrid rhetoric, early nineteenth-century women writers leveraged their status as literal or figurative mothers to solicit readers’ intervention into resource wars against Native Americans” (76). Petitions and other orally inflected texts by Native American women, and by Nancy Ward in particular, emphasize the womanhood and motherhood of their authors in order to strengthen what Native American culture already understood as “women’s authority and responsibility for the land” (32). Kilcup uncovers why the message and power of these texts have been disregarded: “For Euramericans, *woman* and *mother* conjured individuals of subordinate, dependent status, lacking many legal and political rights and more closely connected to animal nature than their male counterparts. . . . As a Cherokee mother, however, [Ward] embodied enviable authority” (31). This authority, Kilcup contests, led Ward to make valuable contributions to the environmental discourse of Cherokee anti-removal campaigns.

Kilcup’s readings of African American literature, particularly Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig*, build on Kimberly N. Ruffin’s foundational *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions* and, along with Ruffin’s scholarship, will likely inspire more ecocritical study of texts by African American women. Kilcup finds an opportunity in reading *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to critique the academically drawn parameters of environmental writing, which often fail to acknowledge the spatial realities of enslaved and non-Euro-American peoples who lack control of their own environments and, importantly, their own bodies: “When

scholars define nature writing as exclusively or principally focused on nature, we reinscribe racial and ethnic boundaries” (119). “Jacobs asserts,” says Kilcup, “that humans’ initial environment is the body, and her first project must be to possess herself” (129). Similarly, in analyzing *Our Nig*, Kilcup reveals how the laboring body of the novel’s main character, Frado, like the labor she performs, “represents consumable resources” in the same way that nineteenth-century forests represented a fleet’s worth of masts (153). The novel’s scenes of brutality and deprivation produce a critique of the pastoral, “tacitly disparag[ing] sentimental-romantic rhetorical excess and accounts of female interdependence” while “manifest[ing] clearly the problems of embodied, racialized, and gendered resource exploitation and affirm[ing] the desirability of environmental access and agency” (196, 175–76).

In addition to these and other readings of overlooked texts, Kilcup makes another remarkable contribution to the discussion of environmental literature in her fourth chapter, in which she reveals how nineteenth-century ideas about respectability, “a class-based notion frequently mediated through such concrete necessities as clothing and food,” influenced women’s bodies and larger environments in the growing consumer culture of the late nineteenth century (202). In a time when fashion, manners, wealth, and sexual virtue determined women’s social experience, Kilcup finds that Celia Thaxter, Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Pauline Hopkins “reconfigure respectability” in order to “redefine an idea of wilderness that the culture superimposed, though differentially, on women’s bodies” (203). In this context, Thaxter’s excoriation in “Women’s Heartlessness” of women who wear feathers and even entire dead birds on their hats communicates to her audience (of mostly female readers) how women’s implicit violence against birds represents violence against women, who are culturally identified by their affinities to the natural world. Jewett’s story “The Town Poor” exemplifies how rural privation finds especially vulnerable targets in elderly women, who depend on their domestic and social environment for support and justice. Kilcup concludes that the costs of consumerism are environmental and gendered, and from this conclusion she finds an opportunity to criticize contemporary and duplicitous edicts of green fashion and simple living.

Throughout *Fallen Forests*, Kilcup brilliantly spotlights the contemporary social, political, and environmental relevance of her literary discoveries, the number and richness of which a review of this size cannot adequately convey. *Fallen Forests* is a magnificent contribution to many scholarly fields, including ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and US women’s writing, through which its approbations and provocations promise to reverberate.