

Chapter 15

The Giving Tree and Environmental Philosophy

Listening to Deep Ecology, Feminism, and Trees

Ellen Miller

*If you want to achieve the existence of a tree,
Invest it with inner space, this space
That has its being in you. Surround it with compulsions,
It knows no bounds, and only really becomes a tree
If it takes its place in the heart of your renunciation.*

~Rainer Maria Rilke¹

In Shel Silverstein's classic 1964 story-poem, *The Giving Tree*, we witness the evolution of a relationship between a boy and a beloved tree. The surface story is rhythmic and melancholic. A boy returns with long gaps between visits to a tree he first encounters as a child. The tree (gendered female) gives and gives: "[H]e would gather her leaves . . . He would climb up her trunk and swing from her branches . . . And when he was tired, he would sleep in her shade." As the boy matures, the tree provides lumber for his first home, supplies the raw material for the young man's second home (located away from his tree, separated from nature). Yet, his second home contains part of his first primordial connection with this particular tree. Toward the end of the poem, the boy wants money and consumer goods, wants to sail and travel far away. His tree replies, "Cut down my trunk and make a boat . . . Then you can sail away . . . and be happy." At the end of the story, the tree—now only a stump—provides a quiet place for the old man (still called a boy) to meditate, rest, and perhaps find peace. His tree laments, even though she has been depleted, "I wish I could give you something . . . but I have nothing left. I am just an old stump. I am sorry . . ." Finally, when the eternal boy approaches the tree at the end of his life, she provides him with a place of rest and contemplation. He does not

apologize. However, he does engage with the tree again. This time, his frail body merges with the tree stump, still rooted in the earth but no longer blossoming towards the heavens. The mood of the story highlights such topics as existential loss, absence, childhood, destruction of childhood, alienation from nature, home, freedom, and love.

Silverstein's seemingly simple story and images belie their rich philosophical content. *The Giving Tree* has been translated into numerous languages. The book is still read during library story times and included in classroom and religious education activities throughout the United States and abroad. This "tender story" has sold over one million copies in its hardback version alone. The artwork opens us to an "addressive" ethic that focuses on our reciprocal interactions with others. This chapter will illuminate how our engagement with the story (alongside philosophical voices) clarifies key issues in two major environmental movements: deep ecology and ecofeminism. Children, parents, and teachers will benefit from placing the story into ecological and feminist frameworks. This literary work allows us, as adults, to step back from our natural attitudes and everyday ways of being in the world as adults and enter into a more open, childlike space where boundaries are not so carefully delineated. This chapter emphasizes the relationship that develops between reader and beholder (usually adult and child). We will see that *The Giving Tree* can help develop alternatives to calculative and technological ways of relating with nature. This possibility is especially important for children, who are subject to increasingly technological modes of education, learning, and environmental encounters.

The first part of the chapter details the main beliefs of deep ecologists and ecofeminists. The chapter then explores some of the main points of tension between these two philosophical approaches. *The Giving Tree* illuminates what is salient in both approaches. The next part of the chapter concentrates on how *The Giving Tree* impacts readers who listen to the story. We will explore the way the work opens up access to three phenomena: (1) Sadness and loss. (2) Listening to trees. (3) Longing for sacred experiences with nature. The chapter's emphasis on our lived experiences of reading *The Giving Tree* extends phenomenological methods to children's literature. Phenomenological approaches to philosophy share a commitment to describing phenomena as we encounter them in the world (existentialist phenomenology in particular).² Here, we will see how *The Giving Tree* can help us work out some issues within environmental philosophy. Even though some feminists have suggested that this potentially damaging story should be abandoned, the story can help build, sustain, and develop ecological virtues.

DEEP ECOLOGY AND ECOFEMINISM

Deep ecologists, as the label suggests, examine the foundational causes of our domination of nature. Philosopher Arne Naess coined the term *deep ecology* in 1972, and he admits that deep questioning and searching for the root causes of our problematical relationships with nature is necessary but not sufficient if we seek ecological transformations.³ Deep ecology's interdisciplinary approach uses science and philosophy to show the interrelatedness of all life systems. For deep ecologists, scientific principles are not sufficient; their writings emphasize the importance of shifting away from anthropocentrism (human-centered thinking) and even biocentrism (life-centered thinking). Deep ecological scholarship and activism are characterized by ecocentric values and principles. Ecocentric positions maintain that the environment possesses intrinsic value, and nature (not humans) should be the moral center for our decision making, policies, and attitudes.

Deep ecologists do hold differing views on the self, nature, and the value of human interests. Thus it is difficult to identify the essence of deep ecology. Yet, even when scholars disagree about theoretical issues, they often reunite at the practical and policy levels.⁴ Most deep ecologists share a critical attitude toward resource management and conservation-only programs. They also endorse decentralization, bioregional policies, and criticize the totalizing impulse of industrialization: "These biologists and environmental activists were convinced that the dominant anthropocentric orientation of Western civilization was seriously misguided as well as inadequate to deal with the crisis."⁵

Traditional Western ethical theories (utilitarianism, deontological, social contract, virtue ethics) do not endow intrinsic value to the land, environment, ecosystems, algae, trees, soil, water, cacti, or cockroaches. The deep ecological movement encourages biological egalitarianism for individual and complex life systems. With a spiritual zest, deep ecology focuses on healing the bifurcation of humans from nature. Deep ecologists share a desire for finding "a higher unity in the diversity of the world" and they value unity and humility.⁶ Deep ecological commitment requires continuous transformations on several levels: linguistic, perceptual, sensory, imaginative, spiritual, and ethical. Literature, especially children's literature, helps facilitate these transformations. *The Giving Tree*, in part because of its tensions, offers salient entrances into these key deep ecological values.

Feminist environmental philosophers also seek balance among humans and nature. Ecofeminists believe that the same logic used to justify gender domination is used to justify the domination of nature. These twin dominations, according to ecofeminists, are connected theoretically, symbolically,

and in practice. These dominations, they argue, are morally wrong and ought to be eliminated. Ecofeminism unearths how gender beliefs influence how we relate with nature, and our conceptions of nature influence our gender constructions.

Like deep ecologists, ecofeminists hold a critical and normative philosophical position that denounces dualistic constructions, particularly male–female and culture–nature. They reject atomistic individualism and they embrace forms of holism.⁷ Philosopher Karen Warren explains that ecofeminists share “the view that there are important connections between the domination of women (and other human subordinates) and the domination of nature and that a failure to recognize these connections results in inadequate feminists, environmentalists, and environmental philosophy.”⁸

Deep ecology and ecofeminism, along with social ecology, are the three dominant approaches within contemporary environmental philosophy. Deep ecologists and ecofeminists share many of the same enemies and develop similar critiques of dualistic thinking, scientific Enlightenment rationality, and Western ideas of progress. Deep ecology’s egalitarianism extends to all identifiable forms in the ecosphere. Both approaches critique ethical theories that merely value nature as an instrument of human rationality; they bridge theory with practice and seek lively theorizing and thoughtful practicing. Their shared emphasis on transformation, engagement, and reconnection with nature sometimes make it difficult to understand why there have been so many arguments between these two perspectives.

The differences between deep ecologists and ecofeminists sometimes amount to shifts in emphasis rather than substantive philosophical rifts. But there is a real debate here, and the two approaches cannot simply be subsumed into one another. The central ecofeminist critique of deep ecology is that deep ecology’s focus on anthropocentrism neglects critiques of particular accounts of gendered domination. Ecofeminists believe that deep ecologists emphasize anthropocentrism over androcentrism and that they have failed to see the ways in which these two concepts are linked.⁹ Other feminists think deep ecology is andocentric itself. This last critique involves an indictment of deep ecology’s inner logic. Even feminists who do not identify deep ecology as masculine (Val Plumwood, for example) have criticized its inadequate historical analysis: “Deep ecology has failed to account for connections with a number of other critiques that mount a critique of rationalism and of modernity.”¹⁰

Deep ecologists can respond to such ecofeminist critiques by noting that eradication of gender oppression would not necessitate an environmental revolution, nor would it ensure broader egalitarianism. Ecofeminism focuses on particular social classes, whereas deep ecologists think there is a more fundamental level of oppression. Some criticisms of ecofeminism describe

feminism as focused on one ultimate oppression: gender oppression. This criticism is unfair because contemporary feminists understand oppressions as interlocking.¹¹ Ecofeminists address classic feminist issues and extend their attention to nature and to the environment: “[they] make connections among not just sexism, specieism, and the oppression of nature but also other forms of social injustice—racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, and colonialism—as part of western culture’s assault on nature.”¹²

The most radical ecofeminist approaches describe women as more closely aligned with nature than men. Radical ecofeminists revalue characteristics that have traditionally been defined as feminine: caring, reciprocity, connectedness, and emotionality. They characterize other qualities as masculine: individualism, competitiveness, linear rationality, and disconnectedness.¹³ Radical feminists draw distinctions between women and men’s natures. They praise women’s connectedness with the earth and rhythms of the universe. These positions are the most vulnerable to deep ecological criticisms about anthropocentrism. Feminists have also raised concerns about how radical ecofeminism maintains dualistic thinking and may replicate stereotypes about women as naturally passive and nurturing.¹⁴ Even though the deep ecological self is quite feminine, deep ecologists question whether ecofeminism remains too simplistic and anthropocentric in practice.

FEMINIST RESPONSES TO *THE GIVING TREE*

Can we reconcile deep ecological and ecofeminist environmental approaches without sacrificing what is unique in them? When we engage with *The Giving Tree* in an embodied way, we see that it emphasizes the emotions, perceptions, and tactile encounters experienced in childhood, and our recollections of childhood. Our readings of the story, especially shared readings, allow access to the more rhythmic, poetic sense of gender possessed by children. Children’s voices (and even adult descriptions of childhood) are often missing from feminist and deep ecological writings (and philosophical writings in general).¹⁵ *The Giving Tree* needs to be read alongside feminist voices speaking about how/why it matters that the boy and tree possess genders. Gendered voices resonate here, and they demand attuned listening. Some feminists would suggest that the gendered relationship between the boy and the female tree constitutes an oppressive relationship. Indeed, if you engage with ecofeminist articles and then read *The Giving Tree*, it is not difficult to make a case for casting aside this story of human domination, of damaging desire for material goods, and of humans’ inability to care for caregivers (especially mothers). Ecofeminist Gretta Gaard criticizes *The Giving Tree* as an “oppressive vision

of human-nature relationships. [T]he tree stands in for the all sacrificing mother in a hetero-patriarchal culture, and the narrative constructs humanity as a narcissistic little boy who keeps asking more and more of nature (the tree) until there's nothing left."¹⁶ Gaard illustrates how our understanding of mothering needs to change if symbolic connections between women and nature are to work. Visual arts professor Ellen Handler Spitz also criticizes *The Giving Tree*, labeling it "a sexist parable."¹⁷ Still, I do not think we should abandon *The Giving Tree*. In fact, the story helps make certain key features of feminist thinking salient to both younger and older reader/listeners.

In the numerous readings of *The Giving Tree* I have initiated while writing this chapter, many respondents recalled their emotional relationship with the reader. Also, discussants and students highlighted how their surroundings (whether intimate, institutional, nurturing, religious, and/or educational) impacted their memories of the story.¹⁸ As students recalled their early experiences with *The Giving Tree*, many became angry by my imposition of philosophical theory and feminism onto their memories of childhood and onto childhood memories. I encountered several levels of discomfort. First, there was a resistance to theorizing about experiences they found poetic, sacred, and awe-filled. Second, there was a resistance to feminist critics who claimed the book was sexist and oppressive. For many people who talked to me, *The Giving Tree* was one of their favorite books, and these criticisms left them skeptical about the philosophies and feminist writers they were beginning to embrace. Third, even those people who agreed that the gender roles in the story are problematic sometimes dismissed these problems as indicative of the time period (1964) when it was written. Philosophical reflection on gender can help deepen these important responses and thoughts.

Psychologist Ann Johnson notes that psychologists tend to silence children's voices about gender. However, Johnson points out, that when we listen to children's voices, we are prompted to pay attention to the "unstable and ambiguous nature of gender construction."¹⁹ Our early gender formations are dominated by noncognitive factors, and our views develop as we respond to caregivers' expectations, beliefs, and responses. Resistance to gender analysis is part of our longing to retrieve the initial openness and fluidity we experience in childhood. Adults reading *The Giving Tree* can gather security from the stable dichotomies present within its pages: boy/tree; male/female; black/white; human/nature. It is understandable that contemporary readers do not want their affective-emotional recollections of reading *The Giving Tree* disturbed by theoretical speculations about gender. And yet, when we begin to name these more primordial encounters with others, we can retrieve a childhood openness in our adult encounters.

The Giving Tree is often read to preschoolers who are not well versed in feminism or philosophy. They also are just beginning to develop gender awareness, and youngsters are much better able to withstand ambivalence about gender. Importantly, children listen and respond to caregivers' usually more sedimented and fixed gender beliefs. Parents' and teachers' responses, silences, beliefs, and expectations require careful attention and reflection, especially if we want to provide alternatives to gender stereotypes. *The Giving Tree*, as ecofeminist Gaard notes, can unearth how androcentrism and anthropocentrism lead to neglect and destruction of feminine and natural realms. When we allow ourselves to remain with this giving-stump, we notice that she is still rooted in the earth. Still, the boy has destroyed the tree's visible blossoming forth into the sky.

SADNESS AND LOSS

The Giving Tree is a melancholy story, and even those who do not endorse ecocentric environmental positions can feel the sadness within these pages. This sadness provides a "first exit" away from charges of androcentrism. This sadness is our beginning entrance into the poem. The tree wants the boy to be happy; yet, we do not witness a very happy boy or man as we progress into the middle of the story. The boy often wants; his material desires are not satisfied within the pages of the poem, printed upon the flesh of other trees. When we remain within these pages, within the world of the formerly blossoming tree, sadness emerges.

The end of the poem throws us into existential truth: the brute facts that we were thrown into this world and that we will not always exist in the world.²⁰ The old "boy" gives us an engaged encounter with the limited motility we will experience, if we live as long as this character. Parents and teachers who read *The Giving Tree* to young readers may experience this sadness as they concentrate on how much the boy misses, because of his inability to listen to this tree (or any tree).

A more specific absence fills these pages. It is an absence that we experience as loss. During the story we encounter many losses: the loss of home, a connection with nature, the blossoming tree, youth, bodily vitality, our initial rootedness in nature—swinging from branches, eating fruit. The boy's embodied memories are visibly lost; the tree lacks limbs, and she no longer bears fruit.

When the boy initially related with the tree, we are reminded of Heidegger's understanding of how we discover a hammer not by looking at it, but by hammering.²¹ Our primary relation to things consists of our involvement with

them. Our concerns, emotions, and moods constitute our relationship with entities. For philosopher Martin Heidegger, the scientific-calculative mode (where we stand back at a distance from entities) is not our most basic way of relating with the world.²²

As we approach the altruistic, selfless tree, we find ourselves drawn towards nature. The tree holds the boy's memories, contains his desires, labors, failings, and strivings. *The Giving Tree* gives readers a moment where they can witness an instrumental relationship with nature, where gendered embodiment influences their understanding of the story. We can find another entrance into the story by embracing a more open and responsive understanding of gender. This transformative understanding is needed in order to confront the risks of reading *The Giving Tree*, mainly the risk that it will reinforce anthropocentrism and androcentrism.

TREES, GENDER, AND CHILDHOOD

Mother Nature, here depicted through the singular, particular tree, remains context-less in this story. We do not know whether the tree is part of a forest, the boy's suburban backyard, a European forest, an apple orchard filled with pesticides, or a small organic farm. We witness the boy age; we know that the tree also ages. Yet, even when the boy has reached old age (for humans), the tree still calls him a boy. His gender and the tree's gender are named throughout the story. As the boy ages, essential parts of what created their relationship are preserved.

The boy's destruction of nature does not require sophisticated machinery or bulldozers. Heidegger's philosophical meditations on technology deepen what we experience in the story. For Heidegger, individual relationships with others, nature, and ourselves can possess what he calls a *calculative*, reckoning attitude: "Calculative thinking races from one prospect to the next. Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself. Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking, not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is."²³ This attitude, pervasive in our technological age, views everything as available for human consumption. Everything is available for humans to use, in whatever ways we deem appropriate. Often, this attitude amounts to a violation of those entities. We experience an illustration of this attitude in how the boy approaches the tree not as a subject, not even as an object, but as a resource under his control. The tree stands ready for further manipulation, and the boy cannot relate with the tree in a fulfilling way. Indeed, their relationship is marked by the tree's longing for the boy's happiness (which is a gift that never quite arrives). The boy cannot relate

poetically toward this tree; he cannot hear the tree's voice, and he cannot really see her as a separate entity.

The boy interacts with the tree as a resource, a commodity, what Heidegger calls *standing-reserve*.²⁴ She can be used up completely, even destroyed in order to satisfy the boy's never-ending consumer yearnings. He has lost part of his essential humanness—belonging with nature. Importantly, the boy's relationship to the tree changes throughout the story. Still, the calculative attitude dominates: "Nature becomes a gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry."²⁵ *The Giving Tree* allows us to experience "commodification" on a personal level. The boy inscribes his love in the flesh of his tree, "Me and T." We feel the boy's original happiness and connection with the tree (even when we want him to have more awareness of the tree's value). Later, the connectedness and simple being with the tree are absent, although we feel and see echoes of this former unity.

Artwork, as philosophers and literary theorists have explained, is especially well suited for moral instruction. Artwork holds the possibility of altering not just our concepts but also our perceptions, emotions, and social encounters with others. As phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes, when we look at artwork, we do not just look at the artwork, but "see according to it . . . For I do not look at [a painting] as I do at a thing."²⁶ For Merleau-Ponty, artwork teaches us how to see, and it can shift our everyday ways of understanding the world. When we gaze at an impressionistic painting, we begin to see impressionistically according to the lines, colors, and spaces opened up by the painting. Merleau-Ponty's insights help us question *The Giving Tree* in a slightly different key. When children and adults see according to the three phenomena opened up by *The Giving Tree*, this focus will help create readers who do not engage with nature as a commodity. The story helps us see the dying tree, and the story offers the possibility of seeing the often invisible dead trees that surround us.

Silverstein creates a dialectic between violence and care. We move along the tree's care for the boy. We see the boy's violence toward the tree and toward himself. We know that the tree cannot nourish herself without giving over to the boy's demands. The boy does not realize his connection with the tree, nor does he feel the loss and sadness readers feel as we watch him commodify the tree. Thus as readers we move between care and violence, and we wonder whether the tree's love provides an adequate model of love. Is this what it means to love—to sacrifice one's bodily being in order to provide for those who may be inattentive beloveds? The tree's destruction is not just the destruction of any tree. We remember this tree is a female tree, who becomes destroyed. Like Gaard, we cannot ignore the boy's gender and the tree's gender. We cannot ignore (as child educator Nel Noddings explains)

that “femininity has been defined in terms of subservience and masculinity in terms of the manliness of warriors.”²⁷ The fixed gender markings in the story are ways of inhabiting the world that transcend physical gender. As studies of *The Giving Tree* have demonstrated, cultural understandings of power and gender strongly influence how the tale will be understood. In societies where gender is rigidly defined (Japan, for example), the story is understood as displaying hierarchies and separations. In Sweden, where mutuality and gender openness are more prevalent, respondents in turn saw more openness in the story.²⁸

As we move our attention to the gendered participants in *The Giving Tree*, we see an advent of gender that transcends particular bodies. Masculinist attitudes pervade many of our dealings with nature in this technological age. These attitudes cut across cultural and gender lines. Females and males can exhibit these destructive masculinist traits: the desire to control, manipulate, order, calculate, and use according to human standards. In addition, this masculinist attitude displays a lack of connection toward nature and transcends physical embodiment. Our philosophical questioning alongside *The Giving Tree* has helped us recognize salient features of deep ecology and ecofeminism. By focusing on phenomenological entrances into the poem, we discover a link between phenomenology and childhood—namely, their ability to traverse temporal, physical, and emotional boundaries.

Our reflections on the experience of reading and encountering *The Giving Tree* push us back into a space we all once inhabited: childhood. Childhood is a social way-of-being everyone experiences. One’s experience varies according to other social variables; but in a broad sense, we have all experienced the flow of time and the “intensity-in-the-present” of childhood. The immediacy and being-in-the-present that we feel as children only appear as such to the adult who retrieves the child’s perspective. Heidegger says that children are in a “twilight of existence,” and this phrase helps us to understand how children can be part of the adult world, yet separated from it.²⁹ This concept parallels how the boy’s journey places him within the anthropocentrism common to our technological age; yet, he remains outside it through his early and final encounters with the tree.

This chapter will not propose an idealized, homogenized, or static version of childhood. However, scholars have documented a cross-cultural ability to feel at home in nature. The boy in *The Giving Tree* begins at home with the tree, but then he has to separate from the tree and separate the tree from herself. He cuts off part of himself as he cuts into the tree. Heidegger reminds us that we often do not recognize our connection with things until they fail to work. The breakdown pushes us into a more scientific attitude. For example, when your keyboard does not work, you begin to notice your fingers pressing into

the unresponsive keys. You then gaze upon the keyboard as an object. Now, you understand your previous encounters, in which you were connected and integrated in the process of typing. Environmental philosopher Ingrid Leman Stefanovic explains that we can best understand the “primary belonging of children to nature when it is disrupted in a fundamental fashion.”³⁰ In the story, we see and feel the boy’s natural ties with nature have been severed.

SACRED ENCOUNTERS

The boy’s specific location is not named. Silverstein focuses more on the relationship between boy and tree—their situatedness. The poem’s indeterminate place opens us up to how any location, situation, or encounter can take on a sacred dimension. Philosopher Arnold Berleant identifies some features of sacred environments as those where the world becomes especially vivid and “one experiences such a close personal relationship to the places that one’s thoughts, attention, body and senses are intimately engaged.”³¹ Sacred environments open up the continuity with nature desired by deep ecologists and ecofeminists. This emphasis on experiences of the sacred provides a bridge between deep ecological and ecofeminist approaches. We have arrived at the sacred through our journey with *The Giving Tree*. Its emphasis on the shared variable of childhood and fluid understandings of gender holds open phenomena often concealed in adulthood.

To Berleant, it is possible for us to experience the sacred in any environment, and places deemed sacred may not produce the intense engagement he describes. Importantly, our ability to experience environments has moral and practical implications.

Experiencing an environment as sacred may change our sense of the world and affect how we live and act. To regard the world as sacred and everything that is part of it as inherently valuable can change our decisions and alter our actions. It can also sensitize us to the profanation of the world and render unacceptable practices that we formerly ignored or acquiesced in, unthinkingly.³²

From an environmental perspective, this idea of sacred surroundings can lead to the moral shifts required for renewed attention to the earth, nature, and the environment. The advent of our longing for the sacred brings us to a third entrance into *The Giving Tree*: entering into the sacred and longing for the sacred. As readers become aware of the boy’s inability to approach the tree with reverence and attuned listening, they feel the tensions that arise when they remain within the logic of black/white; either/or; male/female; human/nature. This logic encourages strict divisions among individuals and groups. The boy does not express regret, nor does he acknowledge his past misuse of

the tree. The breakdown in the boy's relationship can open us to a longing for more sacred encounters with nature.

This turn towards the sacred points us towards a resolution of the deep ecology–ecofeminism debates. Prior to these debates raised questions about retrieving holy and primordial encounters in nature. Heidegger—thinking along with poet and philosopher J. C. F. Hölderlin—calls this way of relating “dwelling poetically upon the earth.”³³ When we dwell, humans save and conserve the earth and the other three regions of existence: the sky, mortals, and divinities. Throughout his career, Heidegger insists on humans' need to care about entities while still letting them “be” (not appropriating them solely for human consumption). Careful dwelling involves releasing what is essential in things and through “saving the earth as earth.”³⁴

The boy is not “at home” with this tree; or, more disturbingly, he is at home in this materialistic world. His controlling makes him at home in this uncanny world. Alienation and homelessness have become our home as we move ever more skyward, out of the earth, away from the cellars of our first homes, which philosopher Gaston Bachelard describes as dark, deep, irrational spaces.³⁵ The boy is thrown into a relationship with this tree; and as readers, we are thrown into the boy and tree's encounters. Existential “thrownness” reminds us that we do not control many things, such as our births, our deaths, the movement of water, the flow of air currents, the design of soil mounds, storm clouds, and forests. We often behave as this boy does, approaching nature as a calculable coherence of forces that we can order and systematize.

Heidegger's meditations on technology, nature, care, earth, and sky have drawn attention from ecofeminists and deep ecologists. Some scholars embrace Heidegger as a proto-environmentalist, while others use his writings in order to reject him and radical environmentalists as ecofascists.³⁶ Heidegger's writings offer a new way of understanding our environmental crises. Philosophy professor Bruce Foltz has a crucial point, that Heidegger's writings are important for the ways they stress our relationship to nature. Heidegger says that technological thinking grasps nature as constant presence, a resource always available: “This danger attests itself to us in two ways . . . he [sic] comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve. Meanwhile man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself . . .”³⁷ Heidegger's critique of technology does not amount to a romantic longing for primitive times, nor does he think eliminating technical devices will cure our environmental problems. *The Giving Tree* reminds us of Heidegger's warning about the supreme danger within modern technology. Our relationship with nature is threatened because calculative thinking blocks out poetic and meditative ways of relating.

CONCLUSION

Children's literature can help adults retrieve the more poetic modes of revealing discussed by Heidegger, especially in his later writings. When we listen to children's literature (in this instance, *The Giving Tree*), we uncover salient features of deep ecology and ecofeminism. The immediacy and "givenness" of childhood is not experienced by the child. So, when environmentalists emphasize the need for sustainable development, we see the importance of sustaining those childlike aspects of our existence that we can only discover in adulthood. The phenomenological entrances described in this chapter are available when we place the story alongside philosophical voices.³⁸ *The Giving Tree's* central issues overlap key concerns within deep ecology, ecofeminism, and Heideggerian philosophy. When we place this story into dialogue with philosophical writings, we see how children's literature can awaken and heighten our primordial contact with nature.

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NOTES

1. Poème dated June 1924, translated into French by Claude Vigée, published in the review *Les Lettres*, 4th year, nos. 14, 15, and 16; p. 13.
2. My phenomenological work on art has been influenced by the writings of Samuel B. Mallin, whose work clarifies contemporary philosophical issues by describing truths revealed through visual art. See his *Art Line Thought* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996). Also see Ellen Miller, *Releasing Philosophy, Thinking Art: A Phenomenological Study of Sylvia Plath's Poetry* (Aurora, CO: Davies Group Publishers, 2009).
3. See George Sessions, ed., *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Press, 1995) for historical and contemporary reflections on deep ecology and its critics.
4. Arne Naess explains that even activists who hold divergent theoretical beliefs tend to "cooperate well in practice." See Sessions, *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, 267.
5. Sessions, *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, x.
6. Sessions, *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, 139.
7. Dividing the world into two need not lead to systematic support for domination. Daoism describes the world in pairs, and yet these pairings (yin–yang, for example),

imply an interdependence that privileges neither (at least in theory, if not always in practice).

8. Karen Warren, ed., *Ecological Feminist Philosophies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), x.

9. See Robert Sessions, “Deep Ecology Versus Ecofeminism: Healthy Differences or Incompatible Philosophies?” *Hypatia*, 6(1) (March 1991), 90–107.

10. Val Plumwood, “Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy and the Critique of Rationalism,” *Hypatia*, 6(1) (Spring, 1991).

11. African American feminists have been writing about how oppressions intersect since at least 1977. See the Combahee River Collective Statement.

12. Greta Gaard, “Toward an Ecopedagogy of Children’s Environmental Literature,” *Green Theory and Practice: The Journal of Ecopedagogy*, 4(2) (2009), 12.

13. For example, Ariel Salleh’s work connects the damage done to women’s bodily nature with the damage done to the earth’s body. Susan Griffin’s famous ecofeminist work *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (Sierra Club Books, 2008) concentrates on how violence towards women and nature cannot be separated.

14. Karen Warren, for example, criticizes radical feminism’s dualistic paradigm and essentialism.

15. As Hatab explains, “Childhood and child rearing have not been given much consideration in philosophy, most likely because philosophy engages in complex conceptual reflections and articulations that are not indicated in a child’s abilities and experiences.” See *Ethics and Finitude: Heideggerian Contributions to Moral Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 66. Importantly, feminist philosophers have devoted considerable theory and practice to family life, child rearing, and advancing children’s lives.

16. Gaard, “Toward an Ecopedagogy of Children’s Environmental Literature,” 16.

17. Ellen Handler Spitz, “Classic Children’s Book.” *American Heritage*, 50(3) (May/June 1999), 46.

18. I appreciate the insights of my students, Rowan University colleagues, and participants at the International Association for the Study of Environment, Space, and Place 2011 meeting at Towson University. My young son and his friends also continue to open me to the fluidity of gender available to children.

19. Ann Johnson, “Understanding Children’s Gender Beliefs,” in Linda Fisher and Lester Embree, eds., *Feminist Phenomenology* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer, 2000), 148.

20. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes the ways we are given over to situations as thrownness. *Thrownness* is a basic way the world discloses itself to us: “Ontologically, we thus obtain as the first essential characteristic of states-of-mind that they disclose *Dasein* [humans] in its thrownness and—proximally and for the most part—in the manner of an evasive turning-away.” In Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1962).

21. “*Dasein* always assigns itself from a ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ to the extent that it is, it always lets entities be encountered as ready-to-hand . . . The ‘wherein’ of an

act of understanding which assigns or refers itself, is that for which one lets entities be encountered in the kind of being that belongs to involvements . . .” In *Being and Time*, 118–19. To Heidegger, a hammer becomes a hammer when we take up the task of hammering (when we become involved with it).

22. See Bruce Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics and the Metaphysics of Nature* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1995) for more on Heidegger’s understanding of nature, including primordial nature.

23. Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking* (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 46.

24. “Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve [*Bestand*].” See especially the “Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1982), 17.

25. Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, 50.

26. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in James M. Edie, ed., *Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IN: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 164.

27. Nel Noddings, *Critical Lessons: What Our Schools Should Teach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 243.

28. Ingrid Pramling, et al., “A Mother and a Friend in Childhood: Differences in Japanese and Swedish Mothers’ Understanding of a Tale,” *Childhood*, 5 (November 1998): 493–506.

29. Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude*, 67.

30. Ingrid Leman Stefanovic, “Children and the Ethics of Place,” in Bruce V. Foltz and Robert Frodeman, eds., *Rethinking Nature: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 65.

31. Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape: Toward Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Press, 1997), 171.

32. Berleant, *Living in the Landscape*, 176.

33. Martin Heidegger, “Poetically Man Dwells.” In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971).

34. Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth*, 165.

35. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969).

36. As Kevin Deluca explains: “The syllogism is simple and simplistic: Deep ecologists are bio/ecocentric; deep ecologists quote Heidegger; Heidegger was a Nazi. Therefore, deep ecologists are Nazis/fascists.” In Deluca, “Thinking with Heidegger: Rethinking Environmental Theory and Practice,” *Ethics and the Environment*, 10(1) (Spring 2005), 69.

37. Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 27.

38. Importantly, these entrances emphasize general structures of existence such as those described by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Even if there are disagreements over some parts of the descriptions, these entrances still provide helpful guidance for reading the story in dialogue with philosophical writings.