

UCLA

Electronic Green Journal

Title

Review: Out of the Shadow: Ecopsychology, story, and encounters with the land

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3209p377>

Journal

Electronic Green Journal, 1(28)

Author

Milfont, Taciano L.

Publication Date

2009

DOI

10.5070/G312810800

Copyright Information

Copyright 2009 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

Review: Out of the Shadow: Ecopsychology, Story, and Encounters with the Land
By Rinda West

Reviewed by Taciano L. Milfont
Victoria University of Wellington & Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, New Zealand

West, Rinda. *Out of the Shadow: Ecopsychology, story, and encounters with the land*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2007. 247pp. ISBN 9780813926551. US\$65.00, hardcover.

Written by a Jungian psychologist, *Out of the Shadow* is part of the series *Under the Sign of Nature: Explorations in Ecocriticism*, in which the University of Virginia Press presents scholarly works on ecocriticism.

In *Out of the Shadow*, Rinda West brings together the work of conservation philosopher Aldo Leopold and analytical psychologist Carl Gustav Jung to postulate that a land ethic can only be put into practice through the psychological work of individuation and maturity. The heart of the book is thus a demonstration of the need to acknowledge one's own shadow in order to live in an ethical way with nature and other people.

Using Jung's ideas of the symbolic life, the self, shadow, individuation and others, West explores several novels to examine themes that underlie human assumptions about nature and the part they play in it. Many themes are discussed, including numinous experiences, consciousness, remembering, bioregionalism, restoration of natural areas, midlife crisis, the archetype of the Mother, colonisers and indigenous versions of history and connection to the land, and finally the encounters characters have with wilderness and their return to home and their land of origin.

The themes are explored in such novels as *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, *The Oregon Trail* by Francis Parkman, and a number of others, including the more recently published *Animal Dream* by Barbara Kingsolver. The analysis of the novels is divided into six chapters, and the book also includes a preface, an introductory chapter, and foreword.

Some of the ideas and conclusions put forward by West can also be found in other areas of enquiry, especially in environmental psychology. For example, that nature should be protected not only to satisfy human need is related to anthropocentric vs. ecocentric moral reasoning discussed by several scholars; that the experience of transcendence is necessary in order to relate to nature and others is linked to findings showing that individuals who attribute greater importance to self-transcendence and altruistic values are more ecologically conscious.

Indeed, West's argument that connection with nature is necessary for a land ethic is similar to other findings which indicate a link between one's emotional bond with nature (including labels such as connectedness to nature, environmental identity, inclusion of nature in self, implicit association with nature) and care for nature. Finally, West's conclusion that the wilderness brings both a sense of connection and fear is respectively similar to Edward O. Wilson's biophilia and Roger S. Ulrich's biophobia concepts.

Despite these commonalities, *Out of the Shadow* explores ecological consciousness from a different standpoint. By using Jungian theory to discuss human beliefs and actions toward nature, West makes a scholarly contribution to the field of ecocriticism.

Bringing the shadow into consciousness will bring us to the realisation that "[e]veryone who lives in advanced capitalist culture, who uses its tools and enjoys its toys, also participates in its relentless pursuit of growth, which means ever-expanding domination of nature. Ecological consciousness therefore requires us to acknowledge our complicity, and living lightly is always an unfinished process" (p. 198).

The reader might well feel overwhelmed by the number of concepts and ideas condensed in a short space, and the repetition of the book's title as the title of a chapter could be a further minor source of annoyance. Another shortcoming is a lack of reference to other relevant research in the area of environmental psychology, as pointed above. However, notwithstanding these shortcomings, *Out of the Shadow* is overall clearly written and provides a comprehensive discussion of the place of psychological work in developing an ecological conscience. The book is thus a recommended read for academics, students and anyone interested in ecological consciousness.

Taciano L. Milfont, PhD <taciano.milfont@vuw.ac.nz>, Lecturer in Cross-Cultural Psychology, School of Psychology & Centre for Applied Cross-Cultural Psychology, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand. TEL: +64 4 463 6398.