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**Special Issue Introduction:  
Engendering Nature with Three Founding Cultures**

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Mary L. Keller

University of Wyoming  
1025 Cody Ave., Cody, Wyoming 82414, USA  
mkeller@uwyo.edu

A through line worth recalling.... This special issue was envisioned during the Feminist Theory and Religious Reflection (FTRR) business meeting at the November 2018 AAR meeting in Denver, CO. The meeting directly followed the panel 'Becoming and Unbecoming Energy: Agriculture, American Energy Policy, Ecosexuality, and the Church of Stop Shopping'. The panel was very good, and part of the discussion at the business meeting was how we might formulate a publication from the discussion there. Carol W. White and I were passing the leadership of the group on to Tom Berendt, Amanda Nichols, and the steering committee, and encouraged them to harness the excitement from this and future panels toward publishing opportunities. Amanda, the Managing Editor of *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, proposed a special issue. Working together, she and Tom created the CFP seeking papers exploring how 'religion, gender, and nature inform, construct, and interact with one another'. The papers herein gathered continue the excitement and surprises of that panel.

While preparing to write this Introduction, I cycled several blocks over to my Mom's house in order to have a morning walk as she recovered from total hip replacement surgery. I left my home on Cody Avenue in Cody, Wyoming and crossed Sheridan Avenue, heading for her house on Salsbury Avenue. To clarify, this town is named after Buffalo Bill Cody, whose name celebrates his participation in the slaughter and near extinction of myriad buffalo, as part of General Sheridan's policy to starve and thereby destroy Plains Indian culture. This is the General Sheridan who innovated scorched earth policies as a Union Army commander before heading west and inventing the nighttime winter attack on Native American villages. Mom's street is named after Nate

Salsbury who was a showman who helped bankroll Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, after which he headed back to the east and produced 'Black America' in 1895, a show billed as a gigantic educational and entertaining exhibition of happy, plantation-scene re-enactments with a grand chorus of between 300 and 600 Black performers for audiences in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC.

How can six blocks raise this much scandal with regard to a topic like Engendering Nature? This collection invites us to the power of rigorous thought as our collaborating balm, so we don't have to hold our troubled consciences together with numb putty. Let's start small. Is it natural to have a titanium hip? Is it natural to walk slowly toward recovery on settler landscapes? We walk within sight of a mountain, Heart Mountain, also known as Foretop's Father, a prominent and stunning peak to the north. In the oral canons of Apsáalooke traditions, the mountain adopted their ancestor Foretop as evidenced by the great powers he received from the mountain for hunting, fighting, and leading his people. Is it natural for mountains to adopt people? As we walk, the sulfur smells rise on the winds recalling that before it was named the Shoshone River on settler maps it was called the Stinking Waters by many tribes, who knew by smell where they had arrived.

And what of the soundscape of my bicycle as it navigates Sheridan Avenue, which rumbles with an ungodly level of muffler noise from the Sturgis, SD bikers, traveling as they have from the Black Hills; sacred (i.e. worth fighting for) to Indigenous and settler communities in such different ways, producing such different behaviors, as to be different worlds.

I am trying to say that it is very difficult to introduce a special issue on Engendering Nature at this moment, because I want to go small. I want to remain grounded. I want to deliver the refuge of small connections whose through lines are precise and imaginable. But every turn of the wheel includes all that settler colonialism and global commodification of natural resources has wrought. Is my morning journey the natural outcome of an engendered nature, reflecting my 'nearly white male' status? Am I Karen? I want to connect with the writers in this issue, the readers of this issue, and to do so at sliding scales that then follow a kind of tendril intelligence to the planetary perspective of the current crisis. I want to beckon the forces with which we are buffeted: the dawning national and international protest movements born from growing consciousness of climate crisis in this, our next to hottest month ever recorded; the strong and persistent Black Lives Matter protests; the voices raised in the call and response of #sayhername, #metoo, while Chanel Miller reads the audiobook memoir *Know My Name* (Viking 2019).

As I cycled past the candidate yard signs tipping into lazy angles, a place where Trump flags are flapping themselves into shreds from the back of trucks, I was struck in the cool air by a theme with which I am introducing this issue: through lines. I want through lines from my desk to your reading mind, connecting us to the perspectival power of daily, mundane routes and roots to counteract the abstract bigness of crises in a time of surreal tempest.

Part of the question in each of the articles that make up this issue is what does a critical religious studies approach deliver? My contribution in reading the papers and introducing them now is to integrate their respective research questions with Charles H. Long's attention to three founding cultures—Indigenous, Euro American, and African American, as described in his entry 'America: Religious Interpretations of' in the *Encyclopedia of Religion in America* (2010). As argued by Long, the United States has always existed as three cultural continents. By the time the thirteen colonies united to form a more perfect union, the tectonic plates were established, based as they were on the dispossession of Indigenous people from their lands and built upon the capital gained from the enslavement and exploitation of Black bodies. From that moment onward, whiteness invented itself by plundering bodies and their humanity, displaying only the jewelry and flute music of the American Indian, and the singing of a magical negro. As whiteness deluded itself, entirely different cultural landscapes adapted and survived ingeniously, as best they could, seeing, feeling, and experiencing their reality through distinctive meanings of nature, matter, and what's the matter. I want to see how the lens of three founding cultures teases up the deep roots rising through the cements of settler streets. My method is like working a Rubik's cube with three founding cultures at play, with the shifting and turning of each leading to a different set of patterns to be considered in each paper.

In 'Gender, Land and Place: Considering Gender within Indigenous Land-Based and Place-Based Education', Tasha Spillett provides an important genealogy of Indigenous theorists, especially Indigenous feminist theorists. The article provokes us to consider healing as a central function of education, to consider Land as the ultimate teacher, and thus land-based and place-based pedagogy as forms that can restore connections to land that were severed by settler-colonial policies. By directing readers to important Indigenous scholarship from the past thirty years, the article provides a timely service, directing us to scholars whose names we can learn. By so doing, Spillett forges a bridge in the work of restoring Indigenous landscapes and laying the intellectual foundations for future thought. As Nick Estes argued in *Our History is the Future*

(2019), Indigenous heritage shines a critical light on contemporary ecological and racial justice crises while Indigenous activists demonstrate guardian relationships to air, water, land, and our more-than-human relations. Spillett tracks the wilderness in which she writes, whereby not only is the cultural memory fragile, it is also so riddled by intrusions from internalized homophobic and patriarchal colonialism, the legacy of Christian conquest. The alternative found in relational ethics between humans and the more-than-human-world espoused in Indigenous teachings leads to the question 'What happens if Land refuses to reconcile with the human-world?'

How surprising and abrupt, yet right on point, to move next into a study of architecture as manifest in the famous windy city Chicago School. Chicago is of course an Indigenous name that comes from a Miami-Illinois word for a local plant, a garlic or 'stinky onion', unless it comes from a different dialect and a different word under the larger umbrella of Ojibway language. If we take seriously Long's (2010) admonition that critical religious studies begins with pursuing our topics as they relate to the three founding cultures, then we see Chicago anew through the light of its anterior people and the pavements of modern architecture that say the name Chicago without relationship to its Land and people. Illinois is an Indigenous name for a regional tribe. Having inserted this anteriority into our consideration, we can now move even more importantly into the issue of form. Isaiah Ellis argues that the famous father of the American skyscraper, Louis Sullivan, 'offered gendered forms as the constitutive vocabulary of American architecture'. By tracking Sullivan's love of the transcendentalists, Ellis illustrates that form, as in 'form follows function', was a signifier that married materiality and ideology. This is important and I want to emphasize the contrast between the following and that which our first paper urges us to see: 'The term "form" describes the two-way relationship between aesthetic choices and historical contexts that condition them'. Thus, the 'gendered body became the vehicle for natural laws, both material and divine'. I am suggesting that our second paper moves us from Land to rebar.

Our third paper, 'Critical Romanticism and Erotic Thinking: Bringing Queer Theory Back to Nature', is the perfect antidote to Sullivan's forms, by restoring to our self-understanding the radical shift to changing forms that was wrought by evolutionary theory and ecological thinking. Whitney Bauman provides an important service in considering how the grounds of Christian ideology were shook by the sciences. Ernst Haeckel, the German Darwin and Father of Ecology, is clearly given the accolades of androcentrism, though his work, as argued here, laid the

foundations upon which queer theory and erotic ecology rest. Rather than establish a through line between scientific endeavor in which rigid or static forms give way to adaptation and polyandry, Haeckel turned to fascism's authoritarian rigidity. Nevertheless, Haeckel was not constrained by modernity's reductionism and proposed 'feeling' as a foundation of emergent life. As characterized by Bauman, 'we might think of this "feeling" as an organizing principle that helped an organism emerge in and through its surroundings and all that a given organism was in relationship with'. Restoring the queerness to the Father's roots, Bauman establishes a through line, though current political landscapes suggest that fellow feeling and fascism have a shadow life that has found its moment with a vengeance.

Our final article brings us face to face with current, ambivalent menageries by examining the religiosity of pop culture advertising between 2004 and 2019. Amanda Nichols argues that we are witnessing adaptations in advertising designed to elicit, soothe, and seduce our feelings while they reflect the dawning consciousnesses of climate crisis, sexual harassment, and BLM. Patriarchy's socio-political power, a through line with Haeckel's fascism, is alive and well in advertising ideology where female bodies are objectified for male desires in the greenwashing of organic meat in 'bad boy' campaigns. Nichols emphasizes a new level of backlash being orchestrated across social media platforms since the 2016 election. Nichols helps us keep the focus on the screens established in contemporary imagologies whereby the consumer can pretend that driving the car through nature's storms is a viable deliverance offering us a connection with nature, belying in its cinematic photography the fact of the car's emissions as the very fuel of the warming climate.

A final thought to bring the issue full circle, twisting the Rubik's cube of three founding cultures: How might advertising in the contemporary U.S. look if viewed from the perspective of Indigenous feminists who are focused on the healing potential of restoring relationships to Land? Add the twist of queer theory to examine the historical roots of homophobia and future erotic romanticism. In what ways do Black Lives Matter when connected to Indigenous heritage and the marketing of organic meat? Do such triangulations return us to questions of scale, one step at a time, stepping away from the car, dancing into the street or in front of the pipeline? Can critical religious studies build through lines toward the healing needed for the road ahead?

*References*

- Estes, Nick. 2019. *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (London: Verso).
- Long, Charles H. 2010. 'America, Religious Interpretations of', in Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Religion in America*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: CQ Press): 62-68.