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**Review: Ecopiety: Green Media and the Dilemma of Environmental Virtue**

By Sarah M. Taylor

**Reviewed by Yves Laberge**

Québec, Canada

Taylor, Sarah McFarland. *Ecopiety: Green Media and the Dilemma of Environmental Virtue*. New York: New York University Press, 2019, 358 pp. ISBN: 9781479891313, paperback, US\$30.00.

The author of the praised book *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (Harvard University Press, 2007) and a scholar at Northwestern University's Program in Environmental Policy and Culture, Professor Sarah McFarland Taylor is interested in the connections and interactions between environmental policies, culture, and religions. It is not that priests refer much to nature and environmental issues nowadays; rather that environmentalism at large has become like a kind of religious discourse, with positive and negative consequences, such as social practices everyone should follow, social conducts to avoid, and at the end, a possible, ineluctable apocalypse if humans do not respect our endangered and sacred planet. But in this new context, these environmental dimensions do not appear as evident or obvious; we rather must interpret and transpose these everyday messages and stories with an interpretative approach that keeps in mind a religious perspective, or at least a religious structure or a religious way of reasoning. In the mainstream media, most environmental debates are now reframed as stories, and these narratives seem to include a religious component, or rather, these narratives contain messages and a worldview that could be understood and interpreted as religious events and symbols.

In *Ecopiety: Green Media and the Dilemma of Environmental Virtue*, Chapter 1, "Restoring the Earth," sets the book's main ideas with the following representative paragraph:

"Plotting the stories we are telling ourselves today about who we are as humans in relationship to the Earth at a time of environmental crisis enables us both to mark and to probe this ongoing making and remaking of our world for its critical implications. The content and dimensions of these stories are themselves revealing — after all, as we tell our stories, they in turn tell us. But perhaps more significant, is the process of *how* these stories get told and how people engage with them" (p. 22).

One unexpected angle for describing and conceptualising some ongoing environmental issues appears in Chapter 5, on "Vegetarian Vampires," which audaciously argues that

the almost mythical image of the vampire has now been transformed and applied into other situations, that seemingly have not much to do the old horror legends: “Green vampires as tropes in popular cultural narratives explicitly reference or evoke language of vampirism employed in environmental discourse to signal the depleting, and thus unsustainable, nature of capitalist consumption as being that which sucks the very life from the planet” (p. 152). A variety of examples taken from popular programs and movies follow.

A dense but clear and rewarding book, *Ecopietty: Green Media and the Dilemma of Environmental Virtue* is rich with cutting-edge concepts such as “ecopietty,” and “consumopietty,” but also “eco-theologians,” “eco-philosophers”, and “the green clergy” (p. 32). In every chapter, Sarah McFarland Taylor discusses environmental issues with lots of well-chosen references and quotes; her theoretical framework is undoubtedly strong, although it relies only on Anglo-Saxon sources. Her generous conclusion brings even more interesting thoughts about the power of identification related with stories, at any age; the author quotes Brené Brown, who argued that “hearing a story, a narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end — causes our brains to release cortisol and oxytocin. These chemicals trigger the uniquely human abilities to connect, empathize, and make meaning” (p. 241). Because it connects Environmental Studies with Media Studies and Religious Studies, *Ecopietty: Green Media and the Dilemma of Environmental Virtue* will be of interest for academics in these domains; and since it focuses largely on American popular culture and media, all libraries in the USA should own it.

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