

Mother Nature, “She’s a Bitch”: An Ecofeminist Reading of *This One Summer*

Nature in children’s literature typically adheres to Romantic conventions—the garden as metaphor for timeless innocence, the pastoral landscape as prelapsarian world—but *This One Summer* reveals nature, especially water, to be far from Romantic. “Awago Beach is this place,” twelve-year-old Rose narrates as the family sits wedged in bumper-to-bumper traffic, no beach in sight (Tamaki 6). In the woods, Rose finds a smashed penny souvenir of Niagara Falls (155).

And, only the year before, Rose’s mother Alice suffers a miscarriage at the lake: “I was swimming and I felt the baby. Go” (299). Despite, as she says, it being “the most natural thing,” the experience devastates her, a looming sadness that threatens to capsize their family. Even their earth-conscious neighbor Evelyn, who sells vegan cookbooks and swims nightly with the moon, admits that Mother Nature might be lacking the maternal instinct. “I’m vegan, not delusional,” she quips, thus agreeing with Alice that Mother Nature, “She’s a bitch” (300).

Antithetical as it may seem, reconceiving of Mother Nature as a bitch is crucial to the ecofeminist project, which works to de-naturalize oppressive social institutions for environmental justice. In most “green” children’s media, Noël Sturgeon observes, “it is the white, middle-class, nuclear family form that is presented as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ without any critique of its complicity . . . in an environmentally destructive system . . .” (263). Importantly, *This One Summer* shifts the paradigm: not only does it deconstruct what is “natural” about nature, but it also illustrates how women’s oppression, cottage-culture tourism, whites’ exploitation of First Nations, and anthropocentric definitions of agency are linked. Taking my cue from Clare Echterling, who insists that “it is time that environmental literary scholars turn a postcolonial or anti-colonial lens on children’s literature” (97), I argue that the Tamakis’ work renews our attention to the environments that shape these ideas.