

2023

Queer Ecologies: A Final Syllabus/Zine Product of Our Independent Study

Yeh Seo Jung

Swarthmore College, yjung1@swarthmore.edu

Ray Craig

Swarthmore College, rcraig1@swarthmore.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/crossings>



Part of the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Education Commons](#), [Environmental Health and Protection Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), [Fiction Commons](#), [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#), [Literature in English, North America Commons](#), [Literature in English, North America, Ethnic and Cultural Minority Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), [Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Place and Environment Commons](#), [Poetry Commons](#), [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#), [Theory, Knowledge and Science Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jung, Yeh Seo and Craig, Ray (2023) "Queer Ecologies: A Final Syllabus/Zine Product of Our Independent Study," *Crossings: Swarthmore Undergraduate Feminist Research Journal*: 1 (1), 53-80.

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/crossings/vol1/iss1/5>

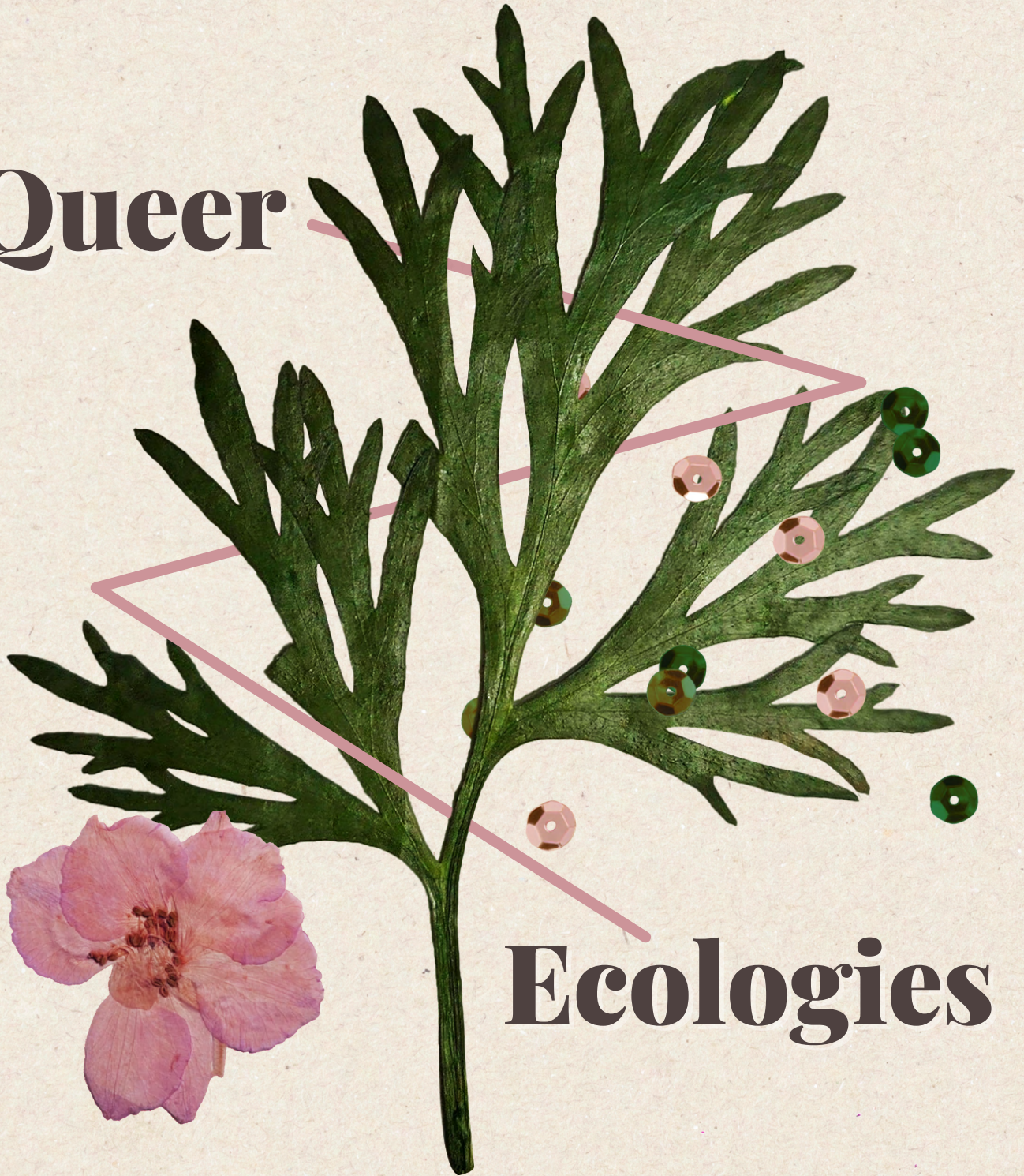
This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Crossings: Swarthmore Undergraduate Feminist Research Journal* by an authorized editor of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

Queer Ecologies: A Final Syllabus/Zine Product of Our Independent Study

Cover Page Footnote

Huge thanks to Professor Giovanna Di Chiro. We would like to extend our appreciation to her for nurturing our curiosity and pushing the boundaries of what we consider to be knowledge production.

Queer



Ecologies

Published
December
2022

Created by
Yeh Seo Jung
& Ray Craig



This is a zine borne out of an independent study with Professor Giovanna Di Chiro, and we would like to extend our thanks to her for nurturing our curiosity and pushing the boundaries of what we consider to be knowledge production.

Sincerely, Yeh Seo and Ray





When we started this independent study, we wanted to start an exploration of bio-social systems using a queer and feminist theoretical lens. We aimed to look critically at knowledge formation and construct alternative visions for more just and sustainable relationships between science, nature, and ourselves. While queer theory most directly interrogates the normative structure of heterosexuality both in humans and in biology, more broadly, these studies include analyses of hierarchy, power, and value. Through these readings, we sought to examine the core questions and debates in the field pertaining to gender and environment, sexuality, queer ecofeminism, climate justice, health and bodies, and decolonization. We are so excited to share what we have learned with you through this zine!





WHAT WE READ

Queer Ecologies edited by Catriona Sandilands & Bruce Erickson, Beast at Every Threshold by Natalie Wee, How Much of These Hills is Gold by C. Pam Zhang, Love After the End edited by Joshua Whitehead, Shapes of Native Nonfiction edited by Elissa Washuta & Theresa Warburton, Gathering Moss by Robin Wall Kimmerer, American Hippo by Sarah Gailey, The Way Through the Woods by Long Litt Woon



“We make choices as nations. We make choices as individuals. And all the choices we make leave a trace.”

— Long Litt Woon in *The Way Through the Woods*

I

WHAT IS QUEER ECOLOGY?

“You've done your work, say the clefted leaves that brush the earth. Now let me do mine.”

— Natalie Wee in *Beast at Every Threshold*, "Future-Proof"



When we ask ourselves what queer ecologies are, we must first acknowledge our own selves as being queer. To "queer" nature is to acknowledge the complexities present in nature, but to us, queering nature is already how we perceive nature as queer folks. **For us, queer ecologies is about imagining an infinite number of possibilities within the space that we consider to be "nature."** Queer ecologies then becomes a concept that helps us connect in nature and make sense of nature/queerness along axes of space, place, loss, and identity. We invite you to explore the unknown and to embrace the possibilities as you read this zine, and in doing so, we hope you can discover your own definition of queer ecologies as well.

“How a mother tongue becomes that which she
guards alone...& now I wear my mother's skull,
sour the native tongue with seethe. *You,
Haunting. Where are you from?*”

— Natalie Wee in *Beast at Every Threshold*, "Can You Speak English?"



II

GRIEF & LONGING

“Grief grinds slowly; it devours all the time it
needs... When you lose the witness to your life,
you also lose a part of yourself.”

— Long Litt Woon in *The Way Through the Woods*, pg 4, 91

While reading the books, we realized that in spite of the different formats (speculative fiction, academic essays, lyric writing, poetry), the various authors explore melancholia, queerness, and grief in the environment. Using Catriona Sandilands' "Melancholy Natures, Queer Ecologies" as a guide, we delved into how nature can hold grief and longing.



Catriona Sandilands begins by describing the relationship between an engagement with environmental loss and environmental responsibility. She asserts that meaning is gained *in negotiation with grief*, whether that be over the state of the environment, over an identity that is blatantly erased by Western society, or over modernity. Washuta and Warburton similarly echo that relationship with grief and melancholy. Specifically, they name their struggle with identity, sovereignty, and trauma as their source of melancholy. In their introduction to *Shapes of Native Nonfiction*, they describe the traditional structures of literature as being another form of settler colonialism that destabilizes Indigenous storytelling.



For example, Deborah A. Miranda writes about her father's traumas and how he finds solace in the river in her short essay, "Tuolumne." Her father was incarcerated, and he struggled with alcohol and a fractured family. "Did he know his body as anything but a weapon or a target?" Miranda asks. "Did he wonder how long he could bear the weight of his body, heavy with the blood of others, stained with indelible loss and grief, curled tight as a fist around a handful of shame?" (77) But the river becomes his solace, his new bloodstream. For both Miranda and her father, the river is not a pristine or pure thing to look at but rather, something to immerse yourself and your grief in. "We go there [to the river] because there is one prayer we have never forgotten: water is life," she writes (79).



This is a stark contrast to the way ecotourism commodifies mourning and grief. Sandilands argues that ecotourism exaggerates the idea of nature as being lost and that modernity memorializes its legacy and petrifies grief into permanent, unchanging national parks and monuments. Rather than creating a consumable, replaceable fantasy of wilderness, Indigenous writers like Miranda, Washuta, and Warburton love and understand landscapes, both in their devastated and restored forms.





“We are all amateurs at grief, although sooner or later every one of us will lose someone close to us.”

— Long Litt Woon in *The Way Through the Woods*



In *How Much of These Hills is Gold*, Lucy and Sam are orphaned siblings who wander the hills in search of a burial place for their father. Unlike Lucy, Sam feels connected to their father through the landscape they must navigate, and nature offers Sam a place to process that grief. Similarly, Long Witt Woon makes connections between her deceased husband and the world around her in *The Way Through the Woods*. Between herself, the shadow of her dead husband, and the fungi that she creates relationships with, Long grapples with grief and finds a solution to her melancholy within nature.



"A queer ecology that both emerges from and politicizes melancholy natures, incorporating the experience of a 'world of wounds' into an ethical stance that resists, rather than fostering, fetish."

— Catriona Sandilands, pg 334

“Once, I lost myself & found an instrument of forgetting, let someone's lover fashion from the ocean of my solitude a shoreline for their sins to wash up on...”



III

QUEERNESS & GENDER

“...maybe the trade-off for resurrection is shame vast enough to kill us & that becomes another execution to tongue our way out of.”

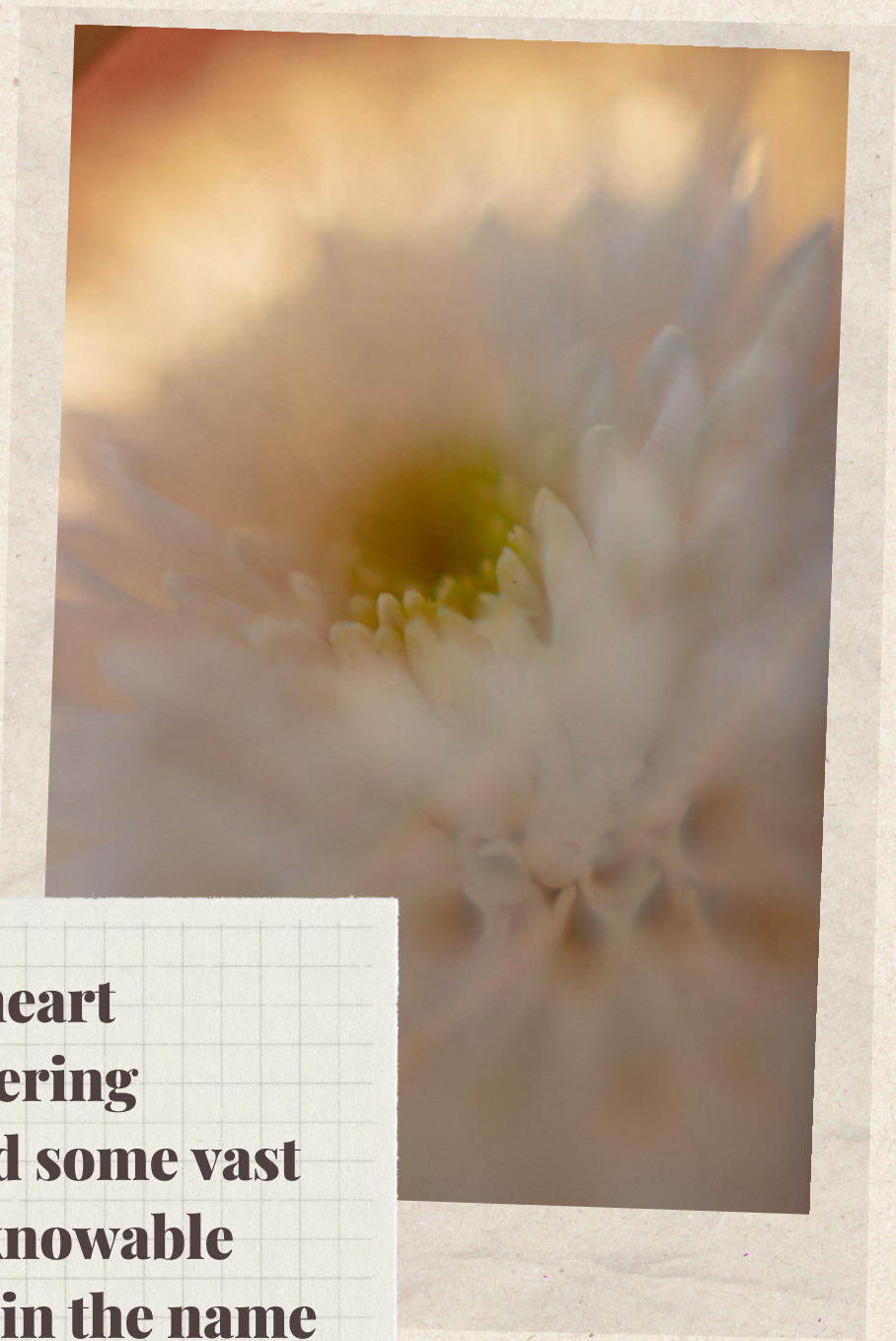
— Natalie Wee in *Beast at Every Threshold*,
"In Defence of My Roommate's Dog"

In *HMOOTHIG*, Ba is the only person who has validated Sam's masculinity/maleness. Because Ba taught Sam everything they know about the hills, Sam's relationship with nature is a product and symbol of both Sam and Ba's relationship and Sam's gender. Having lost the only person who ever validated Sam's masculinity, Sam's knowledge of the landscape is all they have to affirm his gender identity. Natalie Wee has a more visceral take on queerness by confronting it with a sharp poetic edge. She uses the body to situate her queerness and express how her queer love becomes vicious and tangible. For example, the poem, "Skin Hunger, With Waves" has a line that says, "But your sharp kiss was a promise / I failed because the body is a question / only touch can answer." The poet shies away from the intimacy of queer love and the idea of embracing but like a wave to the shore, they are drawn right back to it because they are hungry for something good of their own.



Love After the End is a series of short stories that are primarily dystopian in nature, and this anthology specifically explores the ways in which queer relationships — platonic, familial, romantic — flourish and thrive in the devastated landscape. Although they do not explicitly name it as melancholy as Catriona Sandilands does, the Indigiqueer characters resist the allure of capitalist modernity and actively choose to create a world constituted of kinship. More specifically, they choose to kin in a way that is true to their queerness. Joshua Whitehead asks the question: "What better way to imagine survivability than to think about how we may flourish into being joyously animated rather than merely alive?" This is a response to both loss and the erasure of queer identities within Indigenous communities. It is queer to flourish, it is queer to resist, and it is beautiful and natural to be queer.





**"tiny heart
thundering
toward some vast
& unknowable
glory, in the name
of not vanishing
just a little longer"**

— Natalie Wee in *Beast at Every Threshold*, "In Defence of my Roommate's Dog"

ON BEING QUEER

I think being queer requires a great deal of navigation through the thicket of desire, truth, and observations. There are the heteronormative values that I've absorbed throughout the short few decades I've spent on this earth, and then there are the things that I see with my own eyes that contradict them. The way a clownfish can slip from being father to mother to father again, how trees change their colors in the fall, how my queer body fits into the landscape seamlessly, as if it belongs there against all the odds. These are the things that I think about when I think about queer ecologies. I almost feel sorry for both my body and the earth, for all the destruction that they have both witnessed, but I am trying harder to do what Catriona says and keep myself from petrifying this grief into a singular legacy. These are the things that I think about when I think about queer ecologies.

— *Yeh Seo*



I UNDERSTAND HOW ONE MISTAKES THE KIND / -LING OF LOVERS FOR A FUSE.



— Natalie Wee, *Beast at Every Threshold*

“I ask, ‘How do we build a relationship with this new planet?’ She laughs, ‘I would assume like all consensual relationships: we ask them out.’”

— Gabriel Castelloux Calderon in *Love After the End*, pg 76



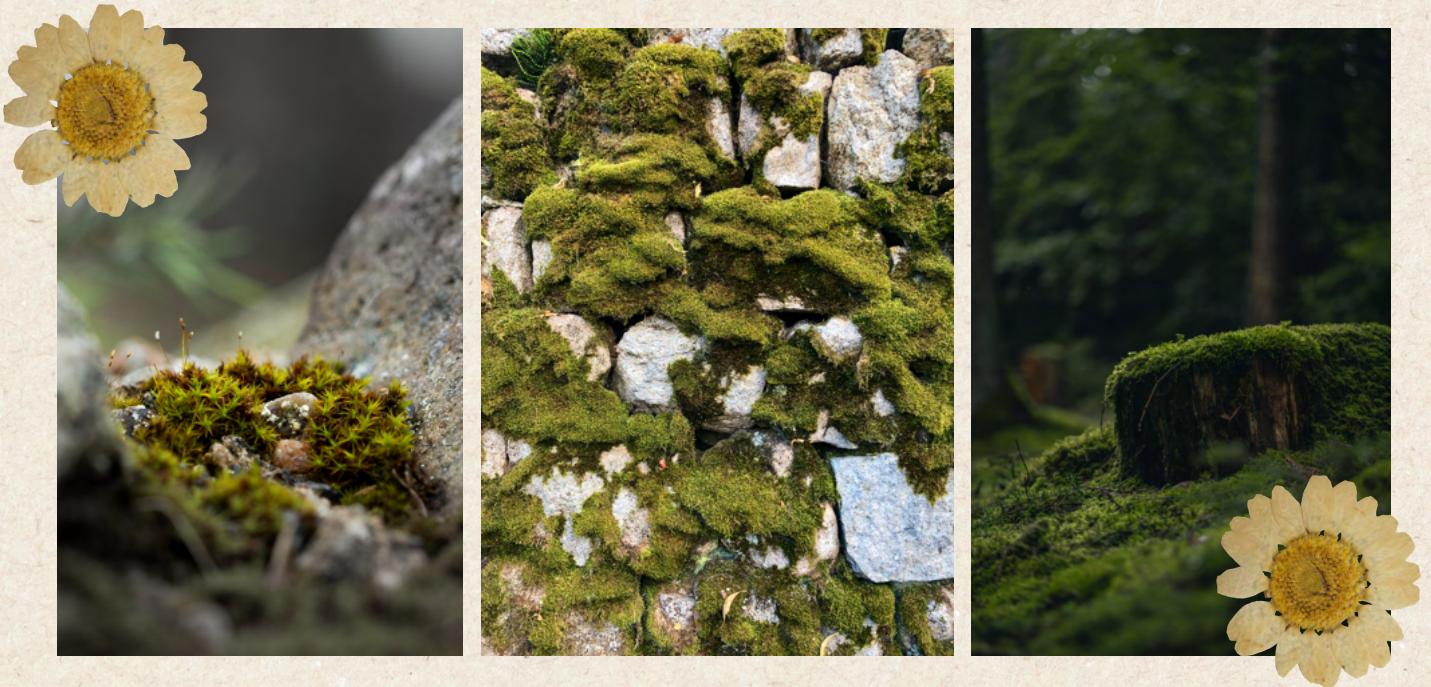
IV

INTERCONNECTIVITY

“Through them [mushrooms], nature seems almost to be communicating and playing with us in a simple, wordless dialogue.”

— Long Litt Woon in *The Way Through the Woods*, pg 13

In *Gathering Moss*, Robin Wall Kimmerer repeatedly emphasizes the importance of **reciprocity** and **interconnectivity** between humans and the world around them. However, in order to engage with nature, she asserts that you must see the world through body, mind, spirit, and emotion. Through **kinning** and understanding the different species around us, whether they be person, plant, or animal, Kimmerer believes that we are able to obtain a greater knowledge about the world and our own place in it.



American Hippo by Sarah Gailey is a piece of speculative fiction in which the bayous of Louisiana are full of hippos as a government response to invasive plant life. It follows the story of a mostly queer, mostly POC group of hippo-cowboys called hoppers. It explores queer joy, sorrow, community and violence alongside the hippos, and in doing so, Gailey offers up an important question about the tie between the domestication of hippos and their relationships with humans. What does it mean in that those doing the domesticating are mostly marginalized people? What is at the center of domestication and what is its relationship with kinning?

These kinds of animal-human relationships are similar to what Stacy Alaimo asserts when she says that human-animal dualisms should be supplanted with models of naturecultures. **Naturecultures** is the idea set forth by Donna Haraway that nature and culture are so tightly interwoven that they cannot be separated into "nature" and "culture." Natureculture also allows us to **describe entangled multispecies histories and worlds that are more than human**, encompassing hippo and human alike. It contests the dominant paradigm that separates man from animal. Although Alaimo's idea comes within the context of animal sex and human interpretations of it, we think that this addresses the kind of close kinning that we see in American Hippo.



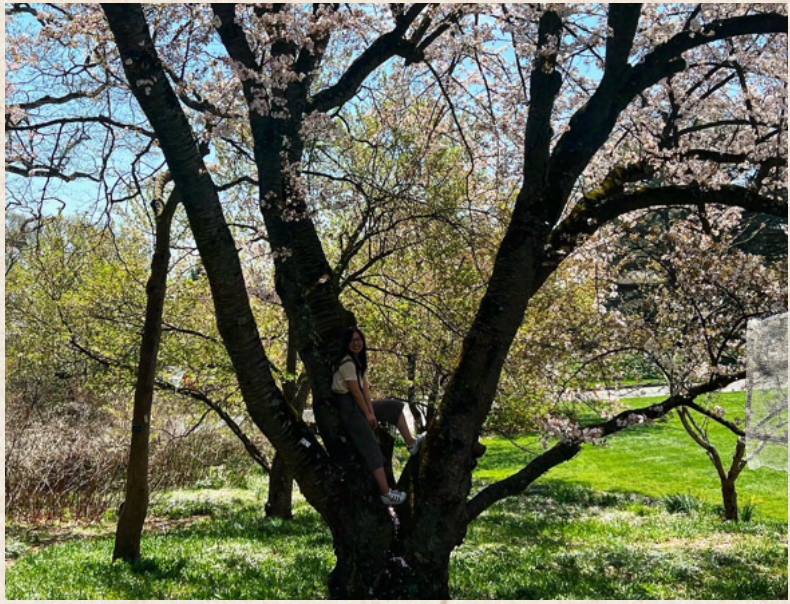
**How much
of the world
must we
pass
through to
arrive at
ourselves?**


ON COLLABORATION

I was not quite expecting the level of interconnectedness that we found in the texts and even in ourselves as we started to talk about things more and more in depth over time. One of my favorite ways we came to draw conclusions was when one of us would have a feeling or more of an undeveloped thought, and we would work it out together. For example, that was how we ended up drawing a connection that I shared in one of our meetings between *How Much of these Hills is Gold* and *American Hippo* despite that we focused on them in different weeks, about human-animal relationships, kinning, and meaningful relationships versus domestication and colonization. There are clearly lots of connections to be made between texts we did not focus on in the same weeks which we fleshed out a bit more in our conversations, but this one stood out to me because of the experience of teasing out a connection with peer support. I think that kind of supportive, generative collaboration represents a big part of what I enjoyed about this experience both academically and personally.

— Ray







**“isn’t this the way we find
our place, by participation
in the life of the world?”**

— Robin Wall Kimmerer in *Gathering Moss*

Overall, we have learned so much from this independent study. Talking about little details that resonated with us brought out similarities and shared experiences which facilitated better conversations and a closer interpersonal relationship than we were initially expecting. In hindsight, this level of bonding makes a lot of sense as an outcome based on many factors: the nature and themes of the course, Prof. Di Chiro’s values and our values, our shared experiences as queer people, and inviting in Robin Wall Kimmerer’s concept of kinning that we agree continues to shape our worldview and experience of interpersonal relationships. Even though that might not have been an unpredictable outcome, it was still a pleasant and welcome surprise.

"Queer ecology suggests, then, a new practice of ecological knowledges, spaces, and politics that places central attention on challenging hetero-ecologies from the perspective of non-normative sexual and gender positions."

— Catriona Sandilands, pg 22



Nature has no boundaries

