



Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire

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For centuries it was believed that all matter was composed of four elements: earth, air, water, and fire in promiscuous combination, bound by love and pulled apart by strife. Elemental theory offered a mode of understanding materiality that did not center the cosmos around the human. Outgrown as a science, the elements are now what we build our houses against. Their renunciation has fostered only estrangement from the material world.

The essays collected in *Elemental Ecocriticism* show how elemental materiality precipitates new engagements with the ecological. Here the classical elements reveal the vitality of supposedly inert substances (mud, water, earth, air), chemical processes (fire), and natural phenomena, as well as the promise in the abandoned and the unreal (ether, phlogiston, spontaneous generation).

Decentering the human, this volume provides important correctives to the idea of the material world as mere resource. Three response essays meditate on the connections of this collaborative project to the framing of modern-day ecological concerns. A renewed intimacy with the elemental holds the potential of a more dynamic environmental ethics and the possibility of a reinvigorated materialism.

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