The Ecocriticism Reader

LANDMARKS IN LITERARY ECOLOGY

Edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm

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PREFACE

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One day late in the 1980s an unsolicited packet arrived in the mail that was radically to alter my professional life as a literary scholar-critic and to have repercussions in my private life as well. The contents consisted of a form letter and bibliography from a Cornell graduate student in English named Cheryll Burgess. She was finishing up a dissertation on three American women writers, but her most intense interest seemed to be the anything-but-apparent connection between literature and the environment. Her plans were ambitious, not to say grandiose: to pursue an interest in ecology while remaining a literary professional, to promulgate the conception of "ecocriticism" while producing an anthology of ecocritical essays, and formally to become the first American professor of literature and the environment.

The bibliography contained more than two hundred essays and books that bore some relation to the idea of ecocriticism, but even more useful was the potential mailing list it provided of authors who might be of some assistance in producing the ecocritical anthology. Writing to most of them, Cheryll Burgess described her aims, included a copy of the bibliography, and waited for replies—which soon began to pour in. One result of this large-scale operation was that I found myself agreeing to serve as chief assistant, although not without some unease that with most of the hard and creative work already done I would emerge in the role of an unearned beneficiary of someone else's groundbreaking labors. Although I have helped to make some decisions and discovered a number of essays to include, this preface gives me the opportunity to disclaim major status.

As things turned out, much more than Cheryll Burgess Glotfelty's original aims have been realized. She has in fact promulgated an awareness

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CHERYLL GLOTFELTY

Introduction

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LITERARY STUDIES IN AN AGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

Literary studies in our postmodern age exist in a state of constant flux. Every few years, it seems, the profession of English must "redraw the boundaries" to "remap" the rapidly changing contours of the field. One recent, authoritative guide to contemporary literary studies contains a full twenty-one essays on different methodological or theoretical approaches to criticism. Its introduction observes:

> Literary studies in English are in a period of rapid and sometimes disorienting change. . . . Just as none of the critical approaches that antedate this period, from psychological and Marxist criticism to reader-response theory and cultural criticism, has remained stable, so none of the historical fields and subfields that constitute English and American literary studies has been left untouched by revisionist energies. . . . [The essays in this volume] disclose some of those places where scholarship has responded to contemporary pressures.[1]

Curiously enough, in this putatively comprehensive volume on the state of the profession, there is no essay on an ecological approach to literature. Although scholarship claims to have "responded to contemporary pressures," it has apparently ignored the most pressing contemporary issue of all, namely, the global environmental crisis. The absence of any sign of an environmental perspective in contemporary literary studies would seem to suggest that despite its "revisionist energies," scholarship remains *academic* in the sense of "scholarly to the point of being unaware of the outside world" (*American Heritage Dictionary*).

If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth's life support systems were under stress. Indeed, you might never know that there was an earth at all. In contrast, if you were to scan the newspaper headlines of the same period, you would learn of oil spills, lead and asbestos poisoning, toxic waste contamination, extinction of species at an unprecedented rate, battles over public land use, protests over nuclear waste dumps, a growing hole in the ozone layer, predictions of global warming, acid rain, loss of topsoil, destruction of the tropical rain forest, controversy over the Spotted Owl in the Pacific Northwest, a wildfire in Yellowstone Park, medical syringes washing onto the shores of Atlantic beaches, boycotts on tuna, overtapped aquifers in the West, illegal dumping in the East, a nuclear reactor disaster in Chernobyl, new auto emissions standards, famines, droughts, floods, hurricanes, a United Nations special conference on environment and development, a U.S. president declaring the 1990s "the decade of the environment," and a world population that topped five billion. Browsing through periodicals, you would discover that in 1989 *Time* magazine's person of the year award went to "The Endangered Earth."

In view of the discrepancy between current events and the preoccupations of the literary profession, the claim that literary scholarship has responded to contemporary pressures becomes difficult to defend. Until very recently there has been no sign that the institution of literary studies has even been aware of the environmental crisis. For instance, there have been no journals, no jargon, no jobs, no professional societies or discussion groups, and no conferences on literature and the environment. While related humanities disciplines, like history, philosophy, law, sociology, and religion have been "greening" since the 1970s, literary studies have apparently remained untinted by environmental concerns. And while social movements, like the civil rights and women's liberation movements of the sixties and seventies, have transformed literary studies, it would appear that the environmental movement of the same era has had little impact.

But appearances can be deceiving. In actual fact, as the publication dates for some of the essays in this anthology substantiate, individual literary and cultural scholars have been developing ecologically informed criticism and theory since the seventies; however, unlike their disciplinary cousins mentioned previously, they did not organize themselves into an identifiable group; hence, their various efforts were not recognized as belonging to a distinct critical school or movement. Individual studies appeared in a wide variety of places and were categorized under a miscellany of subject headings, such as American Studies, regionalism, pastoralism, the frontier, human ecology, science and literature, nature in literature, landscape in literature, or the names of the authors treated. One indication of the disunity of the early efforts is that these critics rarely cited one another's work; they didn't know that it existed. In a sense, each critic was inventing an environmental approach to literature in isolation. Each was a single voice howling in the wilderness. As a consequence, ecocriticism did not become a presence in the major institutions of power in the profession, such as the Modern Language Association (MLA). Graduate students interested in environmental approaches to literature felt like misfits, having no community of scholars to join and finding no job announcements in their area of expertise.

BIRTH OF ENVIRONMENTAL LITERARY STUDIES

Finally, in the mid-eighties, as scholars began to undertake collaborative projects, the field of environmental literary studies was planted, and in the early nineties it grew. In 1985 Frederick O. Waage edited *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources,* which included course descriptions from nineteen different scholars and sought to foster "a greater presence of environmental concern and awareness in literary disciplines."[2] In 1989 Alicia Nitecki founded *The American Nature Writing Newsletter,* whose purpose was to publish brief essays, book reviews, classroom notes, and information pertaining to the study of writing on nature and the environment. Others have been responsible for special environmental issues of established literary journals.[3] Some universities began to include literature courses in their environmental studies curricula, a few inaugurated new institutes or programs in nature and culture, and some English departments began to offer a minor in environmental literature. In 1990 the University of Nevada, Reno, created the first academic position in Literature and the Environment.

Also during these years several special sessions on nature writing or environmental literature began to appear on the programs of annual literary conferences, perhaps most notably the 1991 MLA special session

organized by Harold Fromm, entitled "Ecocriticism: The Greening of Literary Studies," and the 1992 American Literature Association symposium chaired by Glen Love, entitled "American Nature Writing: New Contexts, New Approaches." In 1992, at the annual meeting of the Western Literature Association, a new Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was formed, with Scott Slovic elected first president. ASLE's mission: "to promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the relationship between human beings and the natural world" and to encourage "new nature writing, traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature, and interdisciplinary environmental research." In its first year, ASLE's membership swelled to more than 300; in its second year that number doubled, and the group created an electronic-mail computer network to facilitate communication among members; in its third year, 1995, ASLE's membership had topped 750 and the group hosted its first conference, in Fort Collins, Colorado. In 1993 Patrick Murphy established a new journal, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, to "provide a forum for critical studies of the literary and performing arts proceeding from or addressing environmental considerations. These would include ecological theory, environmentalism, conceptions of nature and their depictions, the human/nature dichotomy and related concerns."[4]

By 1993, then, ecological literary study had emerged as a recognizable critical school. The formerly disconnected scattering of lone scholars had joined forces with younger scholars and graduate students to become a strong interest group with aspirations to change the profession. The origin of ecocriticism as a critical approach thus predates its recent consolidation by more than twenty years.

DEFINITION OF ECOCRITICISM

What then *is* ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies.

Ecocritics and theorists ask questions like the following: How is nature

represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? In addition to race, class, and gender, should *place* become a new critical category? Do men write about nature differently than women do? In what ways has literacy itself affected humankind's relationship to the natural world? How has the concept of wilderness changed over time? In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture? What view of nature informs U.S. Government reports, corporate advertising, and televised nature documentaries, and to what rhetorical effect? What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary studies? How is science itself open to literary analysis? What cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history, and ethics?

Despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman.

Ecocriticism can be further characterized by distinguishing it from other critical approaches. Literary theory, in general, examines the relations between writers, texts, and the world. In most literary theory "the world" is synonymous with society—the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of "the world" to include the entire ecosphere. If we agree with Barry Commoner's first law of ecology, "Everything is connected to everything else," we must conclude that literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, *and ideas* interact.

But the taxonomic name of this green branch of literary study is still being negotiated. In *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1972) Joseph W. Meeker introduced the term *literary ecology* to refer to "the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works. It is simultaneously an attempt to discover what roles have been played by literature in the ecology of the human species."[5] The term *eco-*

criticism was possibly first coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (reprinted in this anthology). By ecocriticism Rueckert meant "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature." Rueckert's definition, concerned specifically with the science of ecology, is thus more restrictive than the one proposed in this anthology, which includes all possible relations between literature and the physical world.[6] Other terms currently in circulation include *ecopoetics*, *environmental literary criticism*, and *green cultural studies*.

Many critics write environmentally conscious criticism without needing or wanting a specific name for it. Others argue that a name is important. It was precisely because the early studies lacked a common subject heading that they were dispersed so widely, failed to build on one another, and became both difficult to access and negligible in their impact on the profession. Some scholars like the term *ecocriticism* because it is short and can easily be made into other forms like *ecocritical* and *ecocritic*. Additionally, they favor *eco-* over *enviro-* because, analogous to the science of ecology, ecocriticism studies relationships between things, in this case, between human culture and the physical world. Furthermore, in its connotations, *enviro-* is anthropocentric and dualistic, implying that we humans are at the center, surrounded by everything that is not us, the environment. *Eco-*, in contrast, implies interdependent communities, integrated systems, and strong connections among constituent parts. Ultimately, of course, usage will dictate which term or whether any term is adopted. But think of how convenient it would be to sit down at a computerized database and have a single term to enter for your subject search. . . .

THE HUMANITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

Regardless of what name it goes by, most ecocritical work shares a common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems. We are there. Either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse. Many of us in colleges and universities worldwide find ourselves in a dilemma. Our temperaments and talents have deposited us in literature

departments, but, as environmental problems compound, work as usual seems unconscionably frivolous. If we're not part of the solution, we're part of the problem.

How then can we contribute to environmental restoration, not just in our spare time, but from within our capacity as professors of literature?[7] The answer lies in recognizing that current environmental problems are largely of our own making, are, in other words, a by-product of culture. As historian Donald Worster explains,

> We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. Historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologists, and philosophers, cannot do the reforming, of course, but they can help with the understanding.[8]

Answering the call to understanding, scholars throughout the humanities are finding ways to add an environmental dimension to their respective disciplines. Worster and other historians are writing environmental histories, studying the reciprocal relationships between humans and land, considering nature not just as the stage upon which the human story is acted out, but as an actor in the drama. They trace the connections among environmental conditions, economic modes of production, and cultural ideas through time.

Anthropologists have long been interested in the connection between culture and geography. Their work on primal cultures in particular may help the rest of us not only to respect such people's right to survive, but also to think about the value systems and rituals that have helped these cultures live sustainably.

Psychology has long ignored nature in its theories of the human mind. A handful of contemporary psychologists, however, are exploring the linkages between environmental conditions and mental health, some regarding the modern estrangement from nature as the basis of our social and psychological ills.

In philosophy, various subfields like environmental ethics, deep ecology, ecofeminism, and social ecology have emerged in an effort to understand and critique the root causes of environmental degradation and to formulate an alternative view of existence that will provide an ethical and conceptual foundation for right relations with the earth.

Theologians, too, are recognizing that, as one book is subtitled, "The Environment Is a Religious Issue." While some Judeo-Christian theologians attempt to elucidate biblical precedents for good stewardship of the earth, others re-envision God as immanent in creation and view the earth itself as sacred. Still other theologians turn to ancient Earth Goddess worship, Eastern religious traditions, and Native American teachings, belief systems that contain much wisdom about nature and spirituality.[9]

Literary scholars specialize in questions of value, meaning, tradition, point of view, and language, and it is in these areas that they are making a substantial contribution to environmental thinking. Believing that the environmental crisis has been exacerbated by our fragmented, compartmentalized, and overly specialized way of knowing the world, humanities scholars are increasingly making an effort to educate themselves in the sciences and to adopt interdisciplinary approaches.

SURVEY OF ECOCRITICISM IN AMERICA

Many kinds of studies huddle under the spreading tree of ecological literary criticism, for literature and the environment is a big topic, and should remain that way. Several years ago, when I was attempting to devise a branding system that would make sense of this mixed herd, Wallace Stegner—novelist, historian, and literary critic—offered some wise counsel, saying that if he were doing it, he would be inclined to let the topic remain "large and loose and suggestive and open, simply literature and the environment and all the ways they interact and have interacted, without trying to codify and systematize. Systems are like wet rawhide," he warned; "when they dry they strangle what they bind."[10] Suggestive and open is exactly what ecocriticism ought to be, but in order to avoid confusion in the following brief survey of ecocritical work to date, I am going to do some codifying. Let us hereby agree that the system is not to be binding. Nonetheless, Elaine Showalter's model of the three developmental stages of feminist criticism provides a useful scheme for describing three analogous phases in ecocriticism.[11]

The first stage in feminist criticism, the "images of women" stage, is concerned with representations, concentrating on how women are portrayed in canonical literature. These studies contribute to the vital process of consciousness raising by exposing sexist stereotypes—witches, bitches,

broads, and spinsters—and by locating absences, questioning the purported universality and even the aesthetic value of literature that distorts or ignores altogether the experience of half of the human race. Analogous efforts in ecocriticism study how nature is represented in literature. Again, consciousness raising results when stereotypes are identified—Eden, Arcadia, virgin land, miasmal swamp, savage wilderness—and when absences are noticed: where *is* the natural world in this text? But nature per se is not the only focus of ecocritical studies of representation. Other topics include the frontier, animals, cities, specific geographical regions, rivers, mountains, deserts, Indians, technology, garbage, and the body.

Showalter's second stage in feminist criticism, the women's literary tradition stage, likewise serves the important function of consciousness raising as it rediscovers, reissues, and reconsiders literature by women. In ecocriticism, similar efforts are being made to recuperate the hitherto neglected genre of nature writing, a tradition of nature-oriented nonfiction that originates in England with Gilbert White's *A Natural History of Selbourne* (1789) and extends to America through Henry Thoreau, John Burroughs, John Muir, Mary Austin, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez, Terry Tempest Williams, and many others. Nature writing boasts a rich past, a vibrant present, and a promising future, and ecocritics draw from any number of existing critical theories—psychoanalytic, new critical, feminist, Bakhtinian, deconstructive—in the interests of understanding and promoting this body of literature. As evidence that nature writing is gaining ground in the literary marketplace, witness the staggering number of anthologies that have been published in recent years.[12] In an increasingly urban society, nature writing plays a vital role in teaching us to value the natural world.

Another effort to promulgate environmentally enlightened works examines mainstream genres, identifying fiction and poetry writers whose work manifests ecological awareness. Figures like Willa Cather, Robinson Jeffers, W. S. Merwin, Adrienne Rich, Wallace Stegner, Gary Snyder, Mary Oliver, Ursula Le Guin, and Alice Walker have received much attention, as have Native American authors, but the horizon of possibilities remains suggestively open. Corresponding to the feminist interest in the lives of women authors, ecocritics have studied the environmental conditions of an author's life—the influence of place on the imagination—demonstrating that where an author grew up, traveled, and wrote is pertinent to an understanding of his or her work. Some critics find it worthwhile to visit the

places an author lived and wrote about, literally retracing the footsteps of John Muir in the Sierra, for example, to experience his mountain raptures personally, or paddling down the Merrimac River to apprehend better the physical context of Thoreau's meandering prose.

The third stage that Showalter identifies in feminist criticism is the theoretical phase, which is far reaching and complex, drawing on a wide range of theories to raise fundamental questions about the symbolic construction of gender and sexuality within literary discourse. Analogous work in ecocriticism includes examining the symbolic construction of species. How has literary discourse defined the human? Such a critique questions the dualisms prevalent in Western thought, dualisms that separate meaning from matter, sever mind from body, divide men from women, and wrench humanity from nature. A related endeavor is being carried out under the hybrid label "ecofeminism," a theoretical discourse whose theme is the link between the oppression of women and the domination of nature. Yet another theoretical project attempts to develop an ecological poetics, taking the science of ecology, with its concept of the ecosystem and its emphasis on interconnections and energy flow, as a metaphor for the way poetry functions in society. Ecocritics are also considering the philosophy currently known as deep ecology, exploring the implications that its radical critique of anthropocentrism might have for literary study.

THE FUTURE OF ECOCRITICISM

An ecologically focused criticism is a worthy enterprise primarily because it directs our attention to matters about which we need to be thinking. Consciousness raising is its most important task. For how can we solve environmental problems unless we start thinking about them?

I noted above that ecocritics have aspirations to change the profession. Perhaps I should have written that I have such aspirations for ecocriticism. I would like to see ecocriticism become a chapter of the next book that redraws the boundaries of literary studies. I would like to see a position in every literature department for a specialist in literature and the environment. I would like to see candidates running on a green platform elected to the highest offices in our professional organizations. We have witnessed the feminist and multi-ethnic critical movements radically transform the profession, the job market, and the canon. And because they have transformed the profession, they are helping to transform the world.

A strong voice in the profession will enable ecocritics to be influential in mandating important changes in the canon, the curriculum, and university policy. We will see books like Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* and Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* become standard texts for courses in American literature. Students taking literature and composition courses will be encouraged to think seriously about the relationship of humans to nature, about the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis, and about how language and literature transmit values with profound ecological implications. Colleges and universities of the twenty-first century will require that all students complete at least one interdisciplinary course in environmental studies. Institutions of higher learning will one day do business on recycled-content paper—some institutions already do.

In the future we can expect to see ecocritical scholarship becoming ever more interdisciplinary, multicultural, and international. The interdisciplinary work is well underway and could be further facilitated by inviting experts from a wide range of disciplines to be guest speakers at literary conferences and by hosting more interdisciplinary conferences on environmental topics. Ecocriticism has been predominantly a white movement. It will become a multi-ethnic movement when stronger connections are made between the environment and issues of social justice, and when a diversity of voices are encouraged to contribute to the discussion. This volume focuses on ecocritical work in the United States. The next collection may well be an international one, for environmental problems are now global in scale and their solutions will require worldwide collaboration.[13]

In 1985, Loren Acton, a Montana ranch boy turned solar astronomer, flew on the Challenger Eight space shuttle as payload specialist. His observations may serve to remind us of the global context of ecocritical work:

> Looking outward to the blackness of space, sprinkled with the glory of a universe of lights, I saw majesty—but no welcome. Below was a welcoming planet. There, contained in the thin, moving, incredibly fragile shell of the biosphere is everything that is dear to you, all the human drama and comedy. That's where life is; that's where all the good stuff is.[14]

ESSAYS IN THIS COLLECTION

This book is intended to serve as a port of entry to the field of ecocriticism. As ecocriticism gains visibility and influence within the profession, increasing numbers of people have been asking the question, "What *is* eco-

criticism?" Many others who are developing an interest in ecocriticism want to know what to read to learn more about this approach to literary studies. Professors who are familiar with ecocriticism and its history nevertheless have had difficulty teaching the subject because until now there has been no general introductory text.

Together, the essays in this anthology provide an answer to the question, "What is ecocriticism?" These essays will help people new to this field to gain a sense of its history and scope, and to become acquainted with its leading scholars. These are the essays with which anyone wishing to undertake ecocritical scholarship ought to be familiar. In addition, this anthology of seminal and representative essays will facilitate teaching; no longer will professors have to rely on the dog-eared photocopies that have been circulating in the ecocritical underground, nor will they need to worry about violating copyright laws.

This sourcebook, consisting of both reprinted and original essays, looks backward to origins and forward to trends. Many of the seminal works of ecocriticism—works of the 1970s by Joseph Meeker, William Rueckert, and Neil Evernden, for example—received little notice when first published, and have since become difficult to obtain. One of the purposes of this anthology is to make available those early gems, thereby acknowledging the roots of modern ecocriticism and giving credit where credit is due. Another purpose of the anthology is to present exemplary recent essays, fairly general in nature, representing a wide range of contemporary ecocritical approaches.

In selecting essays for this volume, then, we have sought to include not only the classics but pieces on the cutting edge. In our coverage of theory, we have avoided essays choked with technical jargon in favor of accessible pieces written in lucid prose. In addition, we have chosen what we consider to be works of brilliance, those pieces that open doors of understanding, that switch on a light bulb in the mind, that help the reader to see the world in a new way. In our coverage of criticism, we have avoided essays that treat a single author or a single work in favor of general essays, discussing a variety of texts and representing a range of critical approaches. While some of the critical essays are argumentative, others are instructional in nature, designed to introduce the reader to a body of literature (such as Native American literature), a genre (such as American nature writing), or a critical approach (such as Bakhtinian dialogics). In short, we sincerely believe that every selection herein is a "must read" essay.

The book is divided into three sections, reflecting the three major phases of ecocritical work. We begin with theory in order to raise some fundamental questions about the relationship between nature and culture and to provide a theoretical foundation upon which to build the subsequent discussions of literary works. The second section studies representations of nature in fiction and drama, including reflections on the ecological significance of literary modes and narrative structures, from Paleolithic hunting stories to postmodern mystery novels. The final section focuses on environmental literature in America, encompassing both Native American stories and the Thoreauvian nature-writing tradition.

I. Ecotheory: Reflections on Nature and Culture

Section one opens with a famous essay by historian Lynn White, Jr., entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." White argues that the environmental crisis is fundamentally a matter of the beliefs and values that direct science and technology; he censures the Judeo-Christian religion for its anthropocentric arrogance and dominating attitude toward nature. White's article sparked heated debate and led to increased environmental consciousness within the Christian church. Christopher Manes in "Nature and Silence" uses the theories of Michel Foucault to consider how both literacy and Christian exegesis have rendered nature silent in Western discourse. He contends that nature has shifted from an animistic to a symbolic presence and from a voluble subject to a mute object, such that in our culture only humans have status as speaking subjects. Harold Fromm in "From Transcendence to Obsolescence: a Route Map" speculates on how the Industrial Revolution affected humanity's conception of its relationship to nature, warning that technology has created the false illusion that we control nature, allowing us to forget that our "unconquerable minds" are vitally dependent upon natural support systems.

While the first three essays discuss versions of alienation from nature, the next two essays analyze how linguistic and aesthetic categories condition the ways that we interact with nature. In "Cultivating the American Garden," Frederick Turner directs our attention to the problem of defining nature. Is the natural opposed to the human? Is the natural opposed to the social and cultural? If everything is natural, then of what use is the term? He discusses cooking, music, landscape painting, and gardening, as healthy mediators between culture and nature. In "The Uses of Landscape:

the Picturesque Aesthetic and the National Park System" Alison Byerly reveals the way that European aesthetics of the picturesque inform management of America's public lands; park administrators are like publishers, she suggests, whose job it is "to produce and market an interpretation of nature's text."

The next three essays of the ecotheory section turn to the science of ecology to consider how this discipline applies to the literary arts. William Howarth's "Some Principles of Ecocriticism" traces the development of the science of ecology, analyzes traditional points of hostility between the sciences and the humanities, and anticipates the ways that ecocriticism will help to forge a partnership between these historic enemy cultures. After outlining a theory and history of ecocritical principles, he describes a basic library of thirty books, distilled from years of interdisciplinary reading. In "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy" Neil Evernden argues that discoveries in ecology and cellular biology revolutionize our sense of self, teaching us that "there is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context," no such thing as self, only "self-in-place." Accordingly, literature, via metaphor, should help us to *feel* the relatedness of self with place. Writing in 1978, William Rueckert ("Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism") coins a new term—*ecocriticism*—to describe his endeavor, proposing to "discover something about the ecology of literature," that is, about the way that literature functions in the biosphere. Describing a poem as stored energy, Rueckert explains that reading is an energy transfer and that critics and teachers act as mediators between poetry and the biosphere, releasing the energy and information stored in poetry so that it may flow through the human community and be translated into social action.

The final essays of this section posit environmentalist versions of poststructuralist theory. Whereas some ecocritics condemn poststructuralism for its seeming denial of a physical ground to meaning, SueEllen Campbell ("The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Post-Structuralism Meet") finds striking parallels in the fundamental premises, critical stance, and basic tactics of poststructuralism and ecological philosophy. David Mazel's "American Literary Environmentalism as Domestic Orientalism" draws upon the theories of Jurij Lotman, Michel Foucault, and, most suggestively, Edward Said, to argue that "the construction of the environment is itself an exercise of cultural power." After demonstrating that "the environment" is a social and linguistic construct, Mazel

argues that ecocritics ought to be asking questions on the order of "What has counted as the environment, and what *may* count? Who marks off the conceptual boundaries, and under what authority, and for what reasons?"

II. Ecocritical Considerations of Fiction and Drama

Section two opens with a meditation on narrative by novelist Ursula K. Le Guin entitled "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction." Le Guin observes that the (male) activity of hunting has produced a tradition of "death" stories having a linear plot, a larger-than-life hero, and inevitable conflict. She urges that an alternative (female) tradition of "life" stories develop, which might look to seed gathering as its model, conveying a cyclical sense of time, describing a community of diverse individuals, and embracing an ethic of continuity. The next essay, "The Comic Mode," is a chapter from Joseph W. Meeker's pioneering work *The Comedy of Survival* (1972). Speaking as both an ethologist and a scholar of comparative literature, Meeker in this book regards literary production as an important characteristic of the human species—analogous to flight in birds or radar in bats—and he asserts that literature

> should be examined carefully and honestly to discover its influence upon human behavior and the natural environment—to determine what role, if any, it plays in the welfare and survival of mankind and what insight it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us. (3–4)

He coins the term *literary ecology* for this enterprise. In the chapter reprinted here, Meeker considers the literary modes of comedy and tragedy, finding that, from an ecological standpoint, comedy promotes healthy, "survival" values, while tragedy is maladaptive.

While Le Guin and Meeker consider literary modes, the remaining essays in this section turn their attention to specific literary works in America from the colonial period to the postmodern. Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975) is by now a classic critique of male-authored American literature, exposing the pervasive metaphor of land-as-woman, both mother and mistress, as lying at the root of our aggressive and exploitive practices. The excerpts reprinted here present the kernel of Kolodny's thesis, concluding that although the land-as-woman metaphor may once have been adaptive, it now must be replaced with a new one. In "Speaking a Word

for Nature" Scott Russell Sanders surveys much of the same literary terrain Kolodny does in her book, progressing from Bradford, to Bartram, to Emerson, to Thoreau, to Faulkner, and praising these authors for their strong sense of nature. Sanders finds, however, that contemporary, critically acclaimed fiction lacks an awareness of the natural world that exists outside the "charmed circle" of "the little human morality play," a myopia that mirrors the blindness of our culture at large.

The final two essays in this section consider postmodern and "postnatural" literature, discovering that this literature offers clues to a basic shift in American consciousness. In "The Postnatural Novel: Toxic Consciousness in Fiction of the 1980s" Cynthia Deitering finds contemporary novels to be littered with references to garbage, signaling a fundamental shift in historical consciousness, a shift from a culture defined by its production to a postindustrial culture defined by its waste. In "Is Nature Necessary?" Dana Phillips maintains that the difference between Hemingway and Hiaasen is the difference between modernism and postmodernism. In modernism the roots of culture lie in nature, whereas in postmodernism nature is replaced by commodified representation.

III. Critical Studies of Environmental Literature

Section three serves as a refreshing tonic after the pessimistic accounts of postmodern literature that concluded section two. The lead essay of this section is Glen A. Love's "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism," one of the most influential essays of the current ecocritical movement. Love first speculates that literary studies have remained indifferent to the environmental crisis in part because our discipline's limited humanistic vision has led to a narrowly anthropocentric view of what is consequential in life. He then recommends that revaluing nature-oriented literature can help redirect us from ego-consciousness to "eco-consciousness."

The willingness to "revalue" nature-oriented literature has led many readers to seek wisdom in Native American texts. These well-meaning readers are often ignorant of the cultural and historical background necessary to understand this literature. In "The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Perspective," Paula Gunn Allen characterizes some distinctive ways of perceiving reality and some fundamental assumptions about the universe that inform American Indian literature, making it qualitatively different from Western literary traditions. Leslie Marmon Silko, herself a Laguna Pueblo storyteller, writes in "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination" about the Pueblo people, describing their relationship to the land of the American Southwest. Pueblo oral narratives function to explain the world, to help people survive in it, and to transmit culture. Specific features of the landscape help people remember the stories, and the stories help them to live in the land; traveling through the storied landscape corresponds to an interior journey of awareness and imagination in which the traveler grasps his or her cultural identity.

One flourishing form of environmental literature in America is the previously undervalued genre of nature writing. Nature writing appears as an "untrampled snowfield," in the words of one scholar, simply inviting critical exploration. The remaining essays in this section provide a general introduction to the genre and represent a broad spectrum of critical approaches to it.

In "A Taxonomy of Nature Writing" Thomas J. Lyon, a leading nature-writing scholar, describes the genre in quasi-taxonomic terms, based on the relative prominence of three important dimensions: natural history information, personal responses to nature, and philosophical interpretation of nature. Michael Branch's "Indexing American Possibilities: The Natural History Writing of Bartram, Wilson, and Audubon" reviews the work of botanist William Bartram, ornithologist Alexander Wilson, and painter John James Audubon to suggest that it is inaccurate to consider Henry David Thoreau the progenitor of American nature writing, that, in fact, Thoreau is a direct heir of the early romantic natural historians, whose contributions deserve recognition. Don Scheese's "*Desert Solitaire:* Counter-Friction to the Machine in the Garden" considers one of Thoreau's most colorful followers, Edward Abbey. Scheese insists that although Abbey resisted the label "nature writer," he nevertheless falls squarely in the tradition of nature writing established by Thoreau and carried on by John Muir and Aldo Leopold, all of whom sought to instill a land ethic in the American public.

In order to convey a sense of the tradition of women's nature writing and to explore the difference between masculine and feminine environmental ethics, Vera L. Norwood ("Heroines of Nature: Four Women Respond to the American Landscape") reviews the work of Isabella Bird, Mary Austin, Rachel Carson, and Annie Dillard, finding that even as these women defend wild nature, their attitude toward it is ambivalent, part of them preferring the safe and the tame. Counterbalancing the many critics of nature writ-

ing who appreciate its careful attentiveness to the nonhuman, Scott Slovic ("Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology: The Interiority of Outdoor Experience") claims that the eye of the nature writer is most often turned inward. Nature writers such as Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, and Barry Lopez go to nature in order to induce elevated states of consciousness within themselves, he suspects, and in their accounts of the phenomenon of awareness they are as much literary psychologists as they are natural historians.

The collection concludes with Michael J. McDowell's consideration of what critical approach seems most promising for an ecological analysis of landscape writing. In "The Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight" McDowell argues that because the Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin incorporates much of the thinking about systems and relationships embraced by the hard sciences, his literary theories provide an ideal perspective for ecocritics, particularly Bakhtin's notions of dialogics, including the "chronotope" and the "carnivalesque." After reviewing Bakhtinian dialogics, McDowell offers several suggestions for undertaking "practical ecocriticism." The end of his essay sounds a perfect final note for this book as a whole, and, indeed, for the ecocritical project in general: "Every text, as Bakhtin unfailingly tells us, is a dialogue open for further comments from other points of view. There is no conclusion."

To enable the reader to pursue further study, we have included some reference material at the back of the book. In order to keep this volume affordably priced and easy to use, we have resisted the temptation to include a comprehensive bibliography on literature and the environment, which would be a book in itself.[15] Instead, we have compiled an annotated bibliography of the most important books in ecocriticism. Selections for the bibliography are based on responses to an electronic-mail survey of 150 ecocritics. Reading these books will provide an excellent grounding in the field. The list of periodicals and professional organizations should help interested readers stay abreast of ecocritical scholarship and will show the lone scholar who howls in the wilderness how to become a member of a growing community of scholars active in ecological literary studies. We trust that this book, like a good map, will inspire intellectual adventurers to explore the ecocritical terrain.

NOTES

1. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn, eds., *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies* (New York: MLA, 1992) 1–3.

2. Frederick O. Waage, ed., *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources* (New York: MLA, 1985) viii.

3. Special environmental issues of humanities journals include *Antaeus* 57 (Autumn 1986), ed. Daniel Halpern, reprint, as *On Nature* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987); *Studies in the Humanities* 15.2 (December 1988), "Feminism, Ecology and the Future of the Humanities," ed. Patrick Murphy; *Witness* 3.4 (Winter 1989), "New Nature Writing," ed. Thomas J. Lyon; *Hypatia* 6.1 (Spring 1991), "Ecological Feminism," ed. Karen J. Warren; *North Dakota Quarterly* 59.2 (Spring 1991), "Nature Writers/Writing," ed. Sherman Paul and Don Scheese; *CEA Critic* 54.1 (Fall 1991), "The Literature of Nature," ed. Betsy Hilbert; *West Virginia University Philological Papers* 37 (1991), "Special Issue Devoted to the Relationship Between Man and the Environment," ed. Armand E. Singer; *Weber Studies* 9.1 (Winter 1992), "A Meditation on the Environment," ed. Neila C. Seshachari; *Praxis* 4 (1993), "Denatured Environments," ed. Tom Crochunis and Michael Ross; *Georgia Review* 47.1 (Spring 1993), "Focus on Nature Writing," ed. Stanley W. Lindberg and Douglas Carlson; *Indiana Review* 16.1 (Spring 1993), a special issue devoted to writing on nature and the environment, ed. Dorian Gossy; *Ohio Review* 49 (1993), "Art and Nature: Essays by Contemporary Writers," ed. Wayne Dodd; *Theater* 25.1 (Spring/Summer 1994), special section on "Theater and Ecology," ed. Una Chaudhuri; *Weber Studies* 11.3 (Fall 1994), special wilderness issue, ed. Neila C. Seshachari and Scott Slovic.

4. Information on *The American Nature Writing Newsletter*, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), and *ISLE* can be found in the Periodicals and Professional Organizations section at the back of this book.

5. Joseph W. Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (New York: Scribner's, 1972) 9. A chapter of Meeker's seminal work is reprinted in this anthology.

6. Wendell V. Harris in "Toward an Ecological Criticism: Contextual versus Unconditioned Literary Theory" (*College English* 48.2 [February 1986]: 116–31) draws upon Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, defining "ecological" theories (he includes speech-act theory, the sociology of knowledge, argumentation theory, and discourse analysis) as those that investigate the individual *parole* and the interactive contexts—the "interpretive ecologies" (129)—that make communication possible.

Marilyn M. Cooper in "The Ecology of Writing" (*College English* 48.4 [April

1986]: 364–75) proposes an "ecological model of writing, whose fundamental tenet is that writing is an activity through which a person is continually engaged with a variety of socially constituted systems" (367).

Harris and Cooper use the science of ecology (specifically its concepts of webs, habitat, and community) as an explanatory metaphor to develop a model of human communication, but they do not explore how this human activity interacts with the physical world, and so their studies are not ecocritical as I am proposing that the term be used.

7. Although this book focuses on scholarship, it is through teaching that professors may ultimately make the greatest impact in the world. For ideas on teaching, see Waage, *Teaching Environmental Literature; CEA Critic* 54.1 (Fall 1991), which includes a section entitled "Practicum," 43–77; Cheryll Glotfelty, "Teaching Green: Ideas, Sample Syllabi, and Resources," and William Howarth, "Literature of Place, Environmental Writers," both in *ISLE* 1.1 (Spring 1993): 151–78; Cheryll Glotfelty, "Western, Yes, But Is It Literature?: Teaching Ronald Lanner's *The Pinon Pine*," *Western American Literature* 27.4 (February 1993): 303–10. The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) maintains a syllabus exchange available to its members. For a provocative discussion of the role of higher education in general, see David W. Orr, *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

8. Donald Worster, *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 27.

9. I do not presume to have full command of the range of environmental work in these and other related fields, but I can direct the reader to some good introductory books and key journals.

In environmental history, see the journal *Environmental History Review*. In addition, see Donald Worster, ed., *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Worster, *The Wealth of Nature;* Richard White, "American Environmental History: The Development of a New Historical Field," *Pacific Historical Review* 54.3 (August 1985): 297–335; "A Round Table: Environmental History," *Journal of American History* 76.4 (March 1990), which includes a lead essay by Donald Worster and responding statements by Alfred W. Crosby, Richard White, Carolyn Merchant, William Cronon, and Stephen J. Pyne.

In anthropology, see Marvin Harris, *Cannibals and Kings: The Origins of Cultures* (New York: Vintage, 1991); Mark Nathan Cohen, *Health and the Rise of Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

In psychology, see Irwin Altman and Joachim F. Wohlwill, eds., *Behavior and the Natural Environment* (New York: Plenum Press, 1983); Rachel Kaplan and Stephen Kaplan, *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992); Morris Berman, *Coming to Our Senses: Body and Spirit in the Hidden History of the West* (New York: Bantam, 1989); Paul Shepard, *Nature and Madness* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1982); Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner, eds., *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1995).

In philosophy, see the journal *Environmental Ethics*. An excellent introductory anthology is Michael E. Zimmerman et al., eds., *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1993). Also good are Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Max Oelschlaeger, ed., *The Wilderness Condition: Essays on Environment and Civilization* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1992).

In theology, a fine introduction to the current environmental thinking of a variety of the world's major religions is Steven C. Rockefeller and John C. Elder, eds., *Spirit and Nature: Why the Environment Is a Religious Issue* (Boston: Beacon, 1992). See also Charles Birch et al., eds., *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990); Eugene C. Hargrove, ed., *Religion and Environmental Crisis* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

10. Wallace Stegner, letter to the author, 28 May 1989.

11. See Elaine Showalter, "Introduction: The Feminist Critical Revolution," *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985) 3–17. I first presented these ideas in a conference paper: Cheryll Burgess [Glotfelty], "Toward an Ecological Literary Criticism," annual conference of the Western Literature Association, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, October 1989.

12. The following are only some of the most recent nature writing and nature poetry anthologies:

Adkins, Jan, ed. *Ragged Mountain Portable Wilderness Anthology*. Camden, Maine: International Marine Publishing, 1993.

Anderson, Lorraine, ed. *Sisters of the Earth: Women's Prose and Poetry about Nature*. New York: Vintage, 1991.

Begiebing, Robert J., and Owen Grumbling, eds. *The Literature of Nature: The British and American Traditions*. Medford, N.J.: Plexus, 1990.

Finch, Robert, and John Elder, eds. *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*. New York: Norton, 1990.

Halpern, Daniel, ed. *On Nature*. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987.

Knowles, Karen, ed. *Celebrating the Land: Women's Nature Writings, 1850–1991*. Flagstaff, Ariz.: Northland, 1992.

Lyon, Thomas J., ed. *This Incomperable Lande: A Book of American Nature Writing*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989.

Lyon, Thomas J., and Peter Stine, eds. *On Nature's Terms: Contemporary Voices*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992.

Merrill, Christopher, ed. *The Forgotten Language: Contemporary Poets and Nature*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, 1991.

Morgan, Sarah, and Dennis Okerstrom, eds. *The Endangered Earth: Readings for Writers*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1992.

Murray, John A., ed. *American Nature Writing 1994*. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1994.

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Pack, Robert, and Jay Parini, eds. *Poems for a Small Planet: Contemporary American Nature Poetry*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993.

Ronald, Ann, ed. *Words for the Wild: The Sierra Club Trailside Reader*. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1987.

Sauer, Peter, ed. *Finding Home: Writing on Nature and Culture from Orion Magazine*. Boston: Beacon, 1992.

Slovic, Scott H., and Terrell F. Dixon, eds. *Being in the World: An Environmental Reader for Writers*. New York: Macmillan, 1993.

Swann, Brian, and Peter Borrelli, eds. *Poetry from the Amicus Journal*. Palo Alto, Calif.: Tioga, 1990.

Walker, Melissa. *Reading the Environment*. New York: Norton, 1994.

Wild, Peter, ed. *The Desert Reader*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991.

13. For a promising first step in international collaboration, see *The Culture of Nature: Approaches to the Study of Literature and Environment*, ed. Scott Slovic and Ken-ichi Noda (Kyoto: Minerva Press, 1995).

14. This quote, and many others from astronauts and cosmonauts around the world, is printed in *The Home Planet*, ed. Kevin W. Kelley (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1988) 21. I am proud to say that Loren Acton is my father.

15. For a reasonably comprehensive bibliography of critical studies of literature and the environment, see Alicia Nitecki and Cheryll Burgess [Glotfelty], eds., "Literature and the Environment: References," *The American Nature Writing Newsletter* 3.1 (Spring 1991): 6–22. An excellent annotated bibliography of nature writing and scholarship appears in Lyon, *This Incomperable Lande* 399–476. The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) publishes an annual bibliography, available to ASLE members; see *Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, ASLE Bibliography 1990–1993*, ed. Zita Ingham and Ron Steffens, which is 120 pages in length, describing 700 works, with annotations and subject divisions.

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