



Blues in the Green: Ecocriticism under Critique

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Source: *Environmental History*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Jan., 2004), pp. 9-36

Published by: [Oxford University Press](#) on behalf of [Forest History Society](#) and [American Society for Environmental History](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3985943>

Accessed: 31-08-2015 22:47 UTC

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MICHAEL P. COHEN

blues in the green:
ECOCRITICISM
UNDER CRITIQUE

Standin' at the crossroads, risin' sun goin' down
... got the crossroad blues this mornin', Lord, baby I'm sinkin' down

Robert Johnson

ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORIANS and ecocritics—scholars who combine literary and historical criticism of texts about nature—share common roots. Many writers who later would call themselves environmental historians or ecocritics began by reading a few books after World War II that opened both of these traditions of inquiry. Directed toward historians and literary critics, these books pursued, simultaneously, a history and critique of American ideas of the West.

Environmental historian John Opie traces his academic interest to the intellectual historian, Perry Miller.¹ I trace my interest in ecocriticism also to intellectual historians. Out of Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950), came an awareness of the disparity between the imagined, symbolic West and the actualities, the limits of environmental factors. Out of Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), came the premise that a culture sees its land according to its desires, and this is worked out by following the pastoral ideal in American imagination. Out of William Goetzmann's *Exploration and Empire* (1966), came the thesis that a culture finds what it seeks. Out of Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967), came the idea that a structural link between mind and land was drawn directly from discussions at the Sierra Club wilderness conferences. Historians and literary critics share these books. At the same time that these writers have explored how we imagine where we live and what we have done to our living spaces, they and others writing in this tradition also care to value and protect these spaces.²

Opie also remembers “interest in something definable as environmental history,” beginning for him with a long camping trip to the West and wilderness. “Wilderness protection lacked an historical perspective” then, as he later commented. When he organized sessions at the AHA in 1972, 1973, and 1976, and at the American Studies Association in 1975, he found colleagues in Donald Hughes, Samuel Hays, and Donald Worster.

As historians and literary critics sometimes move beyond traditional literary and historical studies of intersecting American nature and culture toward the question of what it would mean to act wisely, many of us now study to inform, that people may live well, and as we now say, sustainably.

Like environmental historians, ecocritics read texts by Clarence King, John Wesley Powell, John Muir, and Mary Austin. We read their lives too. Scholars like Annette Kolodny added gender to the reading. The ecocritic Cheryll Glotfelty, who studied Sarah Orne Jewett as a graduate student, began to explore the different kinds of knowledge that compete in the same places and result in diverging gendered values about those places. Literary scholars, like historians, have reached out to other disciplines to understand those different kinds of knowledge. This will require explanation.³

WHAT ECOCRITICS DO

ECOCRITICISM FOCUSES on literary (and artistic) expression of human experience primarily in a naturally and consequently in a culturally shaped world: the joys of abundance, sorrows of deprivation, hopes for harmonious existence, and fears of loss and disaster. Ecocriticism has an agenda. As a feminist film theorist says to an Israeli semiotician in a recent novel of academic life, “Ecocriticism’s new, still finding its feet, but it offers a broad vision of life and our place in nature. It could help you out of the bind you’re in now, caught inside a self-enclosed definition of culture that only mirrors your own obnoxious little self-regarding angst-ridden egomaniacal crypto-smugness.” The response she gets is not surprising: “Culture is a *refuge* from life in nature, not a part of it . . .”⁴ In ecocriticism, positions reveal themselves as persons. So the voice of ecocriticism speaks as an American woman here, *speaks as if she were nature and as if speaking to culture*. When culture dismisses her position, and herself, the process would seem to be self-defeating. If you want to be an ecocritic, be prepared to explain what you do and be criticized, if not satirized.

Rather than defining ecocriticism at the first meeting of English 745: Seminar in Ecocriticism and Theory—the required methods course for students concentrating on literature and environment at the University of Nevada, Reno—I ask several very basic questions:

1. What do ecocritics read?
2. How do ecocritics read?
3. What are the grounds of their methods?
4. Where do they acquire authority?
5. How do they write?

6. What contributions do they hope to make?
7. How do they accept critiques of their methods?

I belabor these basics because entering into critical controversy requires understanding where positions come from. Gerald Graff calls this technique “learning by controversy” and says it may offer a partial solution to the “angrily polarized debates of our time.” He hopes this strategy may become “a model of how the quality of cultural debate in our society might be improved.”⁵ I am hoping that ecocriticism will learn by controversy.

So I claim that ecocriticism is not immune from the contemporary arguments about culture. I gloss ethical inquiry with the work of Geoffrey Galt Harpham.⁶ Ethics does not give answers easily, as Harpham points out; we must build an ethical criticism as a site where we think. “Ethics is, rather, the point at which literature intersects with theory, the point at which literature becomes conceptually interesting and theory becomes humanized.” Consequently, “Ethics does not solve problems, it structures them.”⁷ By definition, or at least by etymology, ecocritical theory structures discussions of environmental literature, drawing upon science, history, and philosophy, while critiquing these sources. Otherwise, ecocriticism would become a place where literature meets popular prejudice and would have little more than sociological interest as the unexamined views of literature professors who are also amateur environmentalists.

PERSONAL ROOTS: THE EXAMPLE OF GLEN LOVE

WHEN GLEN LOVE, professor of English at the University of Oregon, considers how he became a professional ecocritic, he recalls two books that influenced him in the early 1960s: Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) and Rachel Carson’s best selling *Silent Spring* (1962). Love was frightened by the prophetic parable Carson introduced, that “The People had done it to themselves,” but he also was dismayed by Marx, who sounded “a decidedly premature epitaph for the place of nature in American thought and culture ... In the dying fall with which Marx’s book closes, the old pastoral idea is described as ‘stripped . . . of most, if not all, of its meaning,’ a victim of the inexorable ‘reality of history.’”⁸

Love thought Marx “surely correct in delineating so memorably the increasing domination of machine civilization in America.” But Marx announced the end of nature; Carson caught something deeper, “the ecological complexity of nature, the impossibility of its complete control by human beings, and the obstinacy with which Americans would resist any dismissal into history and literary irony what Marx had rightly called ‘the root conflict of our culture.’” Marx’s book appeared in the same year as the passage of the Wilderness Act, written in language that conceded the “increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization,” yet also defined areas in the United States “where earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not himself remain.”⁹ Love believed, as Carson had, that “The most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world.”¹⁰ This task demanded

personal ethical commitment, though he also felt Marx's intellectual method guiding parts of his professional life.

Caught between thinking as Marx or as Carson, Love had no immediate way out of this dilemma. Ecocriticism would offer that way, as a literary inquiry that "encompasses nonhuman as well as human contexts and considerations," on which it "bases its challenge to much postmodern critical discourse as well as to critical systems of the past."¹¹ If the postmodern insists that there is no privileged discourse, Love has been willing to privilege certain forms.

Imagine that ecocriticism has evolved in a constrained design-space that includes certain privileged discourses. Call this space the landscape of ecocriticism. Imagine that this landscape was constructed not by biologist Carson or ecologist Aldo Leopold, but by a tradition of American literary studies that includes Marx, Henry Nash Smith, and Roderick Nash. Marx himself inherited the pastoral as part of a discourse where there are poles along a linear array of possible landscapes, from wilderness to garden. Marx projected these as ideological positions from which speakers emerged. For us these have become speakers from wilderness to civilization, or alternately from nature to culture; as understood in political terms, from preservation to conservation; or in philosophical terms, from biocentric or ecocentric to anthropocentric; or as inherited from Frederick Jackson Turner, from the West to the East.

Ecocriticism has been defined as the work of scholars who "would rather be hiking." It grasped the language of Thoreau, especially as invented in "Walking," to speak for nature, wildness, and the West, while conflating these terms.¹² Ecocriticism found its position by conflating languages near the wild, natural, biocentric, and western pole. Like the voice in "Walking," it found a position and a relation to an urban audience. Topical considerations of gender, race, class, and ethnicity have fixed themselves as positions within the design space, or, dare I say, ecocriticism's inherited cultural construction.¹³ Until recently, ecocriticism did not consider that other lines of reasoning would cross, and confront, its inherited interests.

Many ecocritics have imagined also the evolution of the landscapes they represent as having gone from nature to culture on a one-way path, "to hell in a hand basket," as Dave Foreman, chief founder of Earth First! would put it. Mind you, this trajectory may or may not be the true path of history! My point is that it is an influential position within ecocriticism. To dismiss it as declensionist or apocalyptic may be simplistic, given the state of the world. Ecocriticism certainly sings something like the blues: "My baby left me and run all over town ... Oh come back please ..."

Glen Love's reminiscence reveals a major challenge for ecocriticism, its ability to adhere to a social and political program while accepting a critique of the way it structures ethical issues. A point I take from his recognition of the importance of Marx is the simultaneity of the appearance of modern (even if nostalgic) preservation proposals, for wild and/or pastoral landscapes, with critiques of the ideologies behind these proposals, and vice-versa. Within this structure of proposal and critique one could pair Gary Snyder's *The Practice of the Wild* with

William Cronon's "The Trouble With Wilderness," and Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory* with Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination*. More recently, Dana Phillips's *The Truth of Ecology* offers a panoramic critique of ecology and criticism.¹⁴

In all disciplines, positions emerge in quasi-dialectical ways. Here, an expression of the need for social action is met at inception by critique, suggesting that ecocriticism must expect collisions of positions and prepare to critique its own critical methodology and program, while not paralyzing its own "real work."¹⁵

Already, ecocritics are becoming retrospective. An example might be the introduction to Lawrence Buell's *Writing for an Endangered World*. To Buell's accurate statement I would make a much stronger case for interdisciplinary work and for place-based case studies. Not that we should think like scientists (or economists, or game theoreticians) but that we should know how they think.¹⁶

INSTITUTIONAL ORIGINS OF ASLE

BORN OUT OF disparity, perhaps discordant harmony, between inherited positions within the discipline(s) of literature, ecocriticism has currency within The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), established in 1992 at a special session of a Western Literature Association conference in Reno, Nevada. ASLE now has groups in Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Korea whose purposes include sharing of facts, ideas, and texts concerning the study of literature and the environment.¹⁷ ASLE publishes *ASLE News* (biannually) and, since 1993, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE)*, the official biannual journal.

According to its official statement of editorial policy, *ISLE* "reflects the rapid growth of ecological literary criticism and environmental scholarship in related disciplines in the United States and around the world in recent years, which in turn reflects the steady increase in the production of environmental literature over the past several decades and the increased visibility of such writing in college classrooms." *ISLE* "seeks to encourage such scholarship, writing, and teaching, while facilitating the development of a theoretical foundation for these activities. It also seeks to bridge the gaps between scholars, artists, students, and the public."

ASLE's "Graduate Handbook" states that pursuing a degree in literature and environment "implies investigating the body of literature sometimes referred to as 'nature writing' or 'environmental literature'; or examining literature through an 'ecocritical' lens."¹⁸

Methods include traditional author/work approaches: biographical studies of nature writers.¹⁹ Studies often are defined in regional ("Contemporary Southwestern Environmental Literature"), historical ("Nature Writing of Nineteenth-Century New England"), or generic terms (essays, poetry, fiction and other genres from a given region or time period).²⁰

In the discourse of ASLE, the terms "green" and "ecocritical" are often synonyms for a particular set of approaches toward texts, as in "green reading." Gioia Woods includes the following literary questions: "How is nature represented

in this text? How is wilderness constructed? How is urban nature contrasted with rural or wild nature? ... What role does science or natural history play in a text? What are the links between gender and landscape? Is landscape a metaphor? How does environmental ethics or deep ecology inform your reading?"

Most ASLE members pursue academic careers in English departments. The ASLE web site notes that the six most prominent graduate programs include Antioch New England, in environmental studies; University of Arizona, Tucson, in comparative cultural and literary studies; University of California, Davis, in English; University of Montana, Missoula, in environmental studies and the environmental writing institute; University of Nevada, Reno, in English; and the University of Oregon, Eugene, in English and environmental studies.

ASLE has sponsored five major conferences since 1995. The last two Biennial ASLE Conferences, in Flagstaff, Arizona (19-23 June 2001) and Boston, Massachusetts (3-7 June 2003), were organized so that participants could follow sequential sets of "tracked" sessions on themes or methods, including studies of "urban nature," places (such as literature of the sea), environmental justice and postcolonial issues, Native American literature, pedagogy, genre studies, and interdisciplinary studies, where evolutionary science has played a growing role.

Recent plenary speakers have included Grace Paley, Sandra Steingraber, E. O. Wilson, Lawrence Buell, Leo Marx, Sam Bass Warner, Janisse Ray, Annette Kolodny, Gary Nabhan, Joseph Carroll, Maxine Sheets-Johnson, Ofelia Zepeda, and Simon Ortiz.

The shape of these conferences is central to ASLE's agenda. A remarkable informality at ASLE conferences makes them seem more like a summer camp or retreat. In the evenings, people play guitars and sing campfire songs. The idea borrowed from environmental organizations is that informality fosters community. All this group harmony imports the ideology of the environmental groups from which ASLE sprang and can result in preaching to the chorus. Everyone is friendly, but what if people are spending more time learning to play folksongs than learning literary methods? What if ecocritical thinking is fuzzy?

A BRANCHING TREE OF ECOCRITICAL METHODS

CHERYLL GLOTFELTY, co-editor of a widely used introductory textbook, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), maps the methods of ecocriticism. In "Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," she notes that ecocriticism asks a wide-ranging set of questions, and she insists "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 interconnectedness between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. "[A]s a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman."²¹

Glotfelty's view is wider than that in William Rueckert's founding essay of 1978, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," where he defines the "eco" in ecocriticism as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature." Rueckert suggests that the grounds of the method be

acquired from the science of ecology.²² This premise has resulted in a great deal of trouble. Another foundational work, Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival* (1972), has come under attack recently because its versions of human evolution and ecology are now dated.²³ Ecocritics wrestle with constantly changing scientific paradigms and findings; as I shall argue, these problems are only partially clarified by historical studies and critiques of concepts of ecology—scientific and popular.²⁴

Initially, ecocritics focused on “nature writing,” in specifically “environmental texts.” Lawrence Buell’s interest in “the nature of environmental representation,” allows him to set out a “checklist” of four points that characterize an “environmentally oriented work.” They are:

1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation.
4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text.²⁵

COLLECTING NATURE WRITING IN ANTHOLOGIES

BUELL’S DESCRIPTION of the “environmental text” reveals the kinds of questions the ecocritic wants to ask and also the roots of ecocriticism, which sought its origins first among authors who were heirs to American Romanticism and its tradition: Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, John Burroughs, Mary Austin, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson. Ecocritics initially also gave some attention to origins in writers such as William Bartram and John James Audubon, and more modern writers, including Wallace Stegner, John McPhee, Edward Abbey, Gary Snyder, Annie Dillard, Wendell Berry, Barry Lopez, and Terry Tempest Williams. These choices constitute the core of early anthologies of “American nature writers.” Anthologizing continues to be a major project that shapes the questions ecocritics ask.²⁶

Cheryll Glotfelty frames the work of “canon-formation,” as in recovering “early” nature writing, using a broad analogy between ecocriticism’s aims and Elaine Showalter’s model of feminist critical aims.²⁷ “In much the same way [as in the development of feminist theory], ecocritics are rediscovering early writers, rereading the classics from a ‘green’ perspective and beginning to frame their subject in a theoretical way,” Glotfelty writes. Notable extended examples of recovery include Rochelle Johnson and Daniel Patterson’s editions of the writings of Susan Fenimore Cooper, and Michael Branch’s *Reading the Roots: American Nature Writing before Walden*.²⁸

Several university presses have brought out ecocritical monographs. These include Georgia, Virginia, Utah, Arizona, Harvard, MIT, Oregon State, SUNY, Iowa, Nevada, and New England. Milkweed Editions and Island Press also have substantial lists.

Four anthologies of ASLE/*ISLE* critical essays have been published, including the University of Illinois republication of *ISLE* 3.1 as *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism* (1998). *The ISLE Reader*, celebrating the journal's tenth anniversary, structures ecocritical interest as, 1) re-evaluations of authors; of themes, including population and wilderness; and of genres; 2) interdisciplinary studies of consumerism, gender, Romanticism, environmental education, films, and 3) theoretical essays on activism and bioregionalism, ecocriticism, reading, urban studies, feminism and postcolonial theory.²⁹ Journals similar to *ISLE* include *Orion*, *Terra Nova*, and *Northern Lights*.

REPRESENTING NATURE

NORMAN MACLEAN told a perhaps apocryphal story in the acknowledgments of *A River Runs Through It*, and ecocritics often retell it as an implicit argument behind canon formation. Maclean's book was rejected by a publisher with the comment, "These stories have trees in them." As told, the disdainful publisher locates himself in New York, "coolly dismissing" the stories because they are western, because they have nature in them, or for both reasons. The University of Chicago Press rescued the western book. As Jennifer Price might invert the story, all published or even manuscripted narratives have trees in them because they are made of trees: Nature is always with us at home. But assuming westerners can get their stories published, can "nature writers" represent trees?³⁰

In the broadest terms, as Glen Love or Cheryll Glotfelty argue rather pithily, the ecocritic says yes and speaks for literature as if it had trees in it, for good reasons, and as if the nonhuman environment were an actor. What does a literary critic mean by saying that environment acts in a work of literature, when academic convention requires that literature be treated as a human—not natural or divine—construction? (In order to avoid several possible clear absurdities, the critic must take some care with questions of representation.)

More recently, positions on the relationship between environment and literary representation have been refined and more widely dispersed in academic conferences and publications. In the abstract to "What Ecocritics Do: A Roundtable on Methods Useful to Environmental Historians," presented at the 2001 ASEH conference, I introduced ecocriticism in the following way:

The editors of a *New Literary History* special issue on Ecocriticism find that "Ecocriticism challenges interpretation to own grounding in the bedrock of natural fact, in the biospheric and indeed planetary conditions without which human life, much less humane letters, could not exist." Consequently, "Ecocriticism thus claims as its hermeneutic environment nothing short of the literal horizon itself, the finite environment that a reader or writer occupies thanks not just to culturally coded determinants but also to natural determinants that antedate these, and will outlast them." In this claim, the interests of ecocriticism and environmental history are linked.³¹

In the Modern Language Association's "Forum on Literatures of the Environment," Lawrence Buell writes, "Although the study of literature in relation

to physical environment dates back almost as far as literary criticism itself, only in the 1990s has it assumed the proportions of a movement.” Buell multiplies the number of projects under the rubric of ecocriticism to include:

(1) consideration of the possibilities of certain forms of scientific inquiry (e.g., ecology and evolutionary biology) and social scientific inquiry (e.g., geography and social ecology) as models of literary reflection; (2) textual, theoretical, and historical analysis of the palatial basis of human experience; (3) study of literature as a site of environmental-ethical reflection—for example, as a critique of anthropocentric assumptions; (4) retheorization of mimesis and referentiality, especially as applied to literary representation of physical environment in literary texts; (5) study of the rhetoric (e.g., its ideological valences of gender, race, politics) of any and all modes of environmental discourse, including creative writing but extending across the academic disciplines and (indeed even more important) beyond them into the public sphere, especially the media, governmental institutions, corporate organizations, and environmental advocacy groups; and (6) inquiry into the relation of (environmental) writing to life and pedagogical practice. These and other ecocritical projects are being produced both separately and in combination, and by no means with one accord.³²

As in environmental history, the American center of ecocriticism is contested. In the expanded, published version of a forum that began as a session at the 1998 annual convention of the Modern Language Association, Ursula K. Heise, professor of comparative literature, summarizes “the comparatist’s perspective on ecocriticism.” First, “ecocriticism has nothing specifically to do with American literature. This means, of course, not that ecocriticism does not or should not deal with American literature but that it is not in principle more closely linked to American than to any other national or regional literature.” Second, “ecocriticism has nothing specifically to do with *nature* writing. Again, this does not imply that ecocriticism does not ever deal with nature writing; clearly, it often does. But to suggest that it deals with nothing else is comparable to claiming that feminism is only applicable to texts by or about women.” Third, “ecocriticism has nothing specifically to do with nature *writing*.”³³

Clearly, ecocriticism can become a hot and contested topic in the world of literary studies. But do ecocritics read, manipulate, and use texts in a unique manner? The quick answer is that they are like other literary critics “examining textuality, not just summarizing textual content.” But there is an added component.

FOUNDATIONAL WORKS, INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

AS BECOMES CLEAR from a larger survey of critical methods in articles published in the journal *ISLE*, some ecocritics sift texts as Buell does, some believe all texts can be read as environmental texts, and some take an intermediate position. The length of the ecocritical reach depends, in individual cases, on certainty of critical approach, but even more on certainty of the sources of authority. Hence the importance of the “eco”: By positing connection and relationship, it permits interdisciplinary work to gain authority and analytic power from disciplines

outside one's own. At bottom, ecocriticism needs to import scientific authority in order to combat two positions, 1) that culture can be a refuge from nature, and 2) that nature is merely a cultural construction.

Power and authority account for part of what ecocritics mean when they invoke "interdisciplinary." There is also a real hope that a concerted multidisciplinary effort can avert environmental disaster. How does one become interdisciplinary? Because ecocriticism is interested in ecology and other environmental sciences, it must cross disciplinary boundaries and use the methods and findings of other disciplines when it asks, "What is environment?" or "Why think in ecological or evolutionary ways about it?"

Like history, ecocriticism asks, "How shall scholars deal with continuities and discontinuities found in environmental history, social history, and cultural history?" These questions are universal, raised—to use two disparate examples—by ecologist Daniel Botkin in *Discordant Harmonies* and by historian Patricia Nelson Limerick in *The Legacy of Conquest*.³⁴

Open questions inside and outside of ecocriticism include the following: Is "literature and environment" a sub-discipline of literary studies, or an extension out of literary studies into environmental sciences, or a practice largely within the paradigms of the humanities and social sciences? This issue sounds abstract, but the derogatory term "Standard Social Science Model" (SSSM) bruited about by an increasing number of sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists has been cited increasingly in ecocritical literature, perhaps because it places nature first or in academic terms seems to allow a re-biologizing and consequent hegemony of biological interpretations for human behavior, including literary production.³⁵

Closer to home, can literary critics historicize and theorize ecology while keeping their own vision and agenda from becoming discordant? How can they practice relation—putting together history, ecology, literary theory—in the study of literature? Some mainline literary critics who have offered widely cited models for ecocritical method that moves beyond the Smith/Marx/Nash landscape include George Levine and Gillian Beer on Darwin and fiction; Leo Marx, Raymond Williams, Lawrence Buell, and Terry Gifford on the pastoral; and Simon Schama and Robert Pogue Harrison on cultural studies. Ecocritics read Annette Kolodny and Anne Whiston Spirn on the cultural dimensions of landscape, Donna Haraway and perhaps Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, as feminist historians of science; and Jennifer Price on the relationship between nature and culture.³⁶ A wide variety of approaches to Thoreau demands its own bibliography.³⁷ Major writers that ecocritics would like to claim as forebears (always a questionable practice since it assumes a strange historical rationale) are included in David Mazel's *A Century of Early Ecocriticism*, whose highlights include John Burroughs, Mabel Osgood Wright, Norman Foerster, Aldo Leopold, Lewis Mumford, F. O. Matthiessen, Perry Miller, Sherman Paul, and, somewhat prematurely considering his recent activity, Leo Marx.³⁸ One might add, in an interdisciplinary way and on the Aristotelian principle that literature falls between history and philosophy, J. Baird Callicott, Holmes Rolston III, Roderick Nash, Max Oelschlaeger, and Val Plumwood.³⁹

To speak in general terms, the environmental historians who regularly influence ecocritical discourse tend to be “naturalists” like Carolyn Merchant, Donald Worster, Donald Hughes, and Dan Flores. Unfortunately the ecocritic’s reading list rarely includes urban historians like Martin Melosi. Though Alfred Crosby, William Cronon, and Richard White are powerful influences, many of the more technical and complicated historical arguments in works like *Nature’s Metropolis* or *The Measure of Reality*, *Remembering Ahanagan*, or *The Middle Ground* are less known. Ecocritics are partial to narratives that include a great deal of first person story-telling, like those of William deBuys.⁴⁰

Major critics closely associated with ASLE appear in Glotfelty and Fromm, in the special ecocriticism edition of *New Literary History*, and two anthologies of critical essays: *The Green Studies Reader*, edited by Laurence Coupe, and *Writing the Environment*, edited by Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells.⁴¹

Sometimes the preference for a specific author by an ecocritic reveals shared foundational ideology, as in the case of a favorite like David Ehrenfeld, whose *Arrogance of Humanism* rails against “anthropocentrism,” or George Sessions and William Devall, whose *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* speaks for ecocentrism by presenting a rigid ideology and somewhat simplified “life-style” doctrine. On the other hand, David Rothenberg’s more nuanced analysis of deep ecology has been most influential in ASLE circles.⁴²

HOW ECOCRITICS READ

WHAT CAN HISTORIANS learn from the way ecocritics read? All literary critics are taught to practice close reading—pay attention to language, its genealogy, complexity, ambiguity, the way it carries intended and unintended meaning, and creates expectations on the part of the reader. Trained as literary scholars, ecocritics read and write differently than historians, but not very differently. Rhetorical strategy is important to the literary critic, while the rational structure of argument is likely to catch the attention of the historian. The kinds of questions literary critics ask and the kinds of thesis statements they are likely to write are most easily revealed in a “close reading.”

Consider two essays on wilderness, for example. Though lawmakers may be interested in legal language, managers may be interested in the language of policy, and journalists interested in the most recent controversy, students of literature and environment are interested in the discourses of wilderness.

A standard literary exercise, invented by Ian Watt, is to ask what the “style” of the introduction to an imaginative work reveals about its possible directions.⁴³ Literary critics have been taught, Ezra Pound style, to read for similarities and differences. We immediately notice that the language of William Cronon’s “The Trouble With Wilderness: Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” (1995), is and is not the same as the language of Robert Marshall’s “The Problems of the Wilderness” (1930).⁴⁴ We wonder immediately whether the former title alludes to the latter, but more than that, we notice the difference in strategies of discourse.

Noting the differences in the dates of the essays does not mean that we might imagine any kind of “progress” in conceptions of wilderness, as Roderick Nash

seems to in *Wilderness and the American Mind*, but we do notice the likely differences in the contexts—cultural, biographical, and linguistic—of these essays.

Our attention is not simply toward diction, though both essays begin with an argument from definition; one that takes up the first paragraph of Marshall's essay and lasts a bit longer in Cronon's. Marshall refers to Dr. Johnson, and to *Webster's New International Dictionary*. Cronon is more wily, by which I mean no disrespect. Marshall's mode of discourse is direct, and establishes a kind of earnestness, as he goes on to craft an elaborate definition by enumeration in his second paragraph, but Cronon complicates his term by calling into question appearance and reality, and creating mirrors, paradoxes, and other self-referential tropes in his first paragraph. In doing so, he also complicates the tone and persona of the narrator. Indeed the essay is highly self-referential, and the narrator admits by the third paragraph that his argument about wilderness may be taken by many readers as "absurd or even perverse." After all, how can there be something called "the Wrong Nature"?⁴⁵

Let me go back and explore the shades of meaning between the titles: First of all, Marshall's suggests plurality, and possibly the ability to deal with *problems* one by one. Cronon's *trouble* is singular, as is "*the wrong nature*" in the subtitle of his essay. Also, Marshall speaks of *the* wilderness, where Cronon removes the defining article, thus removes the discreteness indicated by Marshall, and the defining article of a proper name: *The Wilderness Society*. We begin to see that the languages of the two essays reveal that Marshall's *problems* cannot be the same as Cronon's *trouble*; consequently they cannot mean the same thing by *wilderness*. *Problems* may be difficult, but they invite solutions, and the solutions, suggested by connotation, are likely to be rational, scientific, and even mathematical. *Trouble* suggests a condition of distress, worry, anxiety, or danger, quite possibly a disease, or a situation in which something mechanical or electronic is not functioning or operating as it should. Marshall uses the language inherited from the Enlightenment, while Cronon's modernist language is more appropriate for an "Age of Anxiety."

Both essays make allusions to historical information, and both call into question the idea of progress. Cronon does so with a statement, which he wants readers to interpret as ironic: "For many Americans wilderness stands as the last remaining place where civilization, that all too human disease, has not fully infected the earth. It is an island in the polluted sea of urban-industrial modernity." Marshall's irony goes in a different direction: "The philosophy that progress is proportional to the amount of alteration imposed upon nature never seems to have occurred to the Indians."⁴⁶

It is difficult for us not to notice that Cronon's language reveals that his essay has absorbed the "toxic discourse," as Lawrence Buell has called it, of the age of Rachel Carson, whereas Marshall's language, diction, and syntax, are more closely related, derived from, and extracted directly from the romantic and fertile primitivist prose of Willa Cather: "The land and all that it bore they treated with consideration; not attempting to improve it, they never desecrated it."⁴⁷

One could go on. Marshall appeals to a crisis in time: "Within the next few years the fate of the wilderness must be decided." We can contrast the shape of

his opening sentence with Cronon's: "The time has come to rethink wilderness."⁴⁸ Cronon appeals to thought, to rethinking, Marshall to a plan of action. Harkening back to Glen Love's distinction, one paradox is that the shape of Cronon's prose finally follows the position of Leo Marx, while borrowing from the language of Carson.

So why is this kind of reading important or useful to historians? First, literary critics believe the mode of articulation matters: It is a part, if not the central part, of how texts mean. Style is a part of the cultural work. Ecocritics believe that part of the *problems* of or *trouble* with the wilderness, is a result of language and rhetoric. There may or may not be such a thing as wilderness, but it is certainly constructed with words in essays. Second, literary critics remind us that we are part of a tradition of discourse that itself has a history. Third, and not least, literary critics remind us that we should write well and with good effect, while knowing as writers that our language reveals our times.

HOW ECOCRITICS WRITE

A DESIRE to integrate personal narrative and critical analysis has led to such publications as John Elder's *Reading the Mountains of Home*, William L. Fox's *The Void, The Grid, & The Sign*, and *Playa Works*, Ian Marshall's *Story Line and Peak Experiences*, and Rebecca Solnit's *Savage Dreams* and *Wanderlust*. (And perhaps, in the dark abysm of time, my own *The Pathless Way*.)⁴⁹ The form of these books insists that field study is integral and essential to understanding literary and aesthetic representations of landscape. They also establish a trend that has generated more sophisticated techniques for teaching field studies courses.⁵⁰ This method of writing has been termed "narrative criticism" by Scott Slovic.⁵¹

As reviews of admirable literature, as anthologies, or as promotions of a genre, many ecocritical essays lack focus, because the argument is by sequence—one exemplary book after another, as one sees often in the writing of Nash or Buell—and does not create an analytical structure. It distracts the reader while claiming to show multiple perspectives on an environmental problem.

Such unmoored comparisons and accumulations of texts emerge from the canonization and anthologizing work of ecocriticism. Because they are accumulative rather than analytic, they still work within the prison house of language. They fail to go to grounds, and they fail to reach their object, which is outside the world of words.

In its enthusiasm to disseminate ideas, a certain version of narrative ecocriticism might be better described as praise than criticism. I call this version of ecocriticism the "praise-song school." As characterized by the writings of critics like John Elder, the purpose seems to be to seek and find hope and comfort, and to offer both to readers, wherever they are, even in history. In *Reading The Mountains of Home*, Elder chooses one Frost poem, "Directive," and uses it for "hiking a poem and reading a wilderness." He writes: "Out of the openings and limitations of my own experience, I offer this contribution to what [Leslie

Marmon] Silko calls the ‘ancient continuous story composed of innumerable bundles of other stories.’” This premise allows Elder to “identify with the losses and recoveries, the migrations and returns, that are the living circulation of our family’s place on earth.”⁵²

In a forthcoming work focusing on the ideas of George Perkins Marsh, Elder does not look for cultural difference in the definitions of such key ideas as “restoration,” in the way environmental historians like Marcus Hall do.⁵³ He prefers not to see the history of forests as contested terrains the way environmental historians see them, and he does not distinguish European and American ideologies on conservation as split at the root. Instead, Elder wishes to draw communal threads together.

In style, much so-called “narrative scholarship” is not sharply analytical but gracefully meditative; in homage to Thoreau, perhaps, it includes the first person. Narrative scholars look at landscapes not as fields for argument, but as scenes for reconciliation—of the wilderness ethic with the stewardship ethic, of nature with culture. Such lyrical, nearly religious work approaches a timeless harmony, and seems to be beyond rational scrutiny.⁵⁴

The praise-song school also sees nature writing as a progressive historical tradition, seminal writers of the past leading to our contemporary ways of thinking. In the hands of critics like Elder, the progressive view of literary history—“This is where we have been going all along”—uses the standard list of popular modern nature writers to create a parable of the development of finer environmental consciousness. Sometimes these critics write as if they return to timeless values, yet they neglect discussion of the principles of inclusion in and/or exclusion of writers in the canon.

Early writers are imagined—as Roderick Nash imagined Aldo Leopold—as “prophets.” Major voices like Gary Snyder often are treated as gurus or icons rather than as writers. Local writers are praised for their provinciality under a claim for their “deep roots,” thus further confusing life, genealogy, and literature.

Narrative scholarship is fraught with dangers. These include: 1) Such books are always turning into travelogue.⁵⁵ 2) Discussions of environmental topics like fast food and organic farming are based more on journalistic accounts than on rigorous scholarship, and are in danger of being clichéd. 3) Critical prose sometimes shifts to lessons on “the kind of life worth living” that are testimonial, as when Elder takes Frost to be such a model. Certainly historians, even Cronon, are not immune to this third problem in narrative scholarship: “I think of a November evening long ago when I found myself on a Wisconsin hilltop in rain and dense fog, only to have the setting sun break through the clouds to cast an otherworldly golden light on the misty farms and woodlands below, a scene so unexpected and joyous that I lingered past dusk so as not to miss any part of the gift that had come my way.”⁵⁶ There is always a danger of such prose seeming like sermonizing.

The praise school is in danger of forgetting that the critical task, at its best, requires an open inquiry. Reading is not simply a consumer activity: Interesting critics do not simply choose ideas and authors that best fit a pre-arranged interior cognitive décor. The purpose of subjecting texts and authors to critical inquiry is

not simply to search for authority to buttress an argument or perspective. Criticism is not the same as sermonizing; it must be able to entertain ideas as they are established. Not simply descriptive, it requires making judgments, positive and negative, about the texts under inspection and about the critical perspective being used. Nevertheless, many ecocritics continue to value celebration. The Credo Series, published by Milkweed Editions and edited by Scott Slovic, is such a celebration, praised by SueEllen Campbell because “for many of the rest of us, the most powerful current may be the one that moves us through the shadow of loss toward love and care, toward *cherishing*.”⁵⁷

However, narrative scholarship also suggests something positive: that criticism and “nature writing” can merge and sing together if the writing is good enough. At the ASLE conference in 2003, Sandra Steingraber said that when she read Terry Tempest Williams’s *Refuge*, the personal narrative opened up possibilities that allowed her to write *Living Downstream*.⁵⁸ It is the nature of this vital literary tradition that writers are seduced by the way others read and write landscape and literature together. At the same time, an analytical critic, like me, is bothered by the idea that the modes of reading texts and reading biological or cultural systems can be collapsed into a single activity, without testing the differences between these methods.

WILL THE REAL ECOCRITIC STAND UP?

A PERUSAL of the book reviews in *ISLE* reveals no negative review of any book. Why? A central question might be whether ecocriticism is capable of creating its own critique of environmental literature, or whether it is only capable of praising certain modes of it. In the meantime, the wider public may have a very incomplete idea of what ecocriticism is. One reads the following on the World Wide Web: “After scholars such as William Cronon, Timothy Luke, and J. Baird Callicott introduced ‘eco-criticism’ to the scholarly and popular publics, various environmental activists and thinkers have struggled to articulate a response.”⁵⁹

At ASLE, these scholars would not be called ecocritics. But the ranks of ecocriticism are larger than the membership lists for ASLE. It will be a step toward maturity for the literature and environment community when ecocriticism welcomes its own most trying critics into its ranks. Otherwise, the complacency of the praise songs and the denial of real contesting positions will mean slow stagnation. Virtually all positions create their own antitheses, and when critique goes unheard, it probably is being suppressed. Cronon’s recent contribution to *Orion* bodes well for change.⁶⁰

I believe that the future of ecocriticism will rely on a more analytical method in three ways: It will focus on place and region, it will adduce science in a way not unlike Cronon’s *Changes in the Land*, and it will include critique of global paradigms—scientific and cultural—as they fit in discussions of local place and possible future environmental outcomes.

Ecocriticism must question more closely the nature of environmental narrative, not simply praise it, as it has too frequently.⁶¹ Maybe it is unreasonable to expect ecocritics to begin to treat historical narrative or place as the

poststructuralists like Hillis Miller or Stephen Greenblatt do.⁶² Because of resistance to post-structural theory, ecocritical work is more likely to look like Cronon's "A Place for Stories," but hopefully it will reach beyond Cronon's strictly Aristotelian rationalism in the treatment of narrative structure.⁶³ Two examples of recent sophisticated theoretical work are David Mazel, *American Literary Environmentalism* (2000), and Louise Westling: *The Green Breast of the New World* (1996).⁶⁴

CRITIQUES AND CONTROVERSIES FROM WITHIN ASLE

FOR SOME YEARS, ASLE has not been just about the discourse of American wilderness, but there are still traces of these roots, as in ASLE's motto, "I'd rather be hiking." The inclusion of people who would rather not be hiking, but whose concerns ought to be the concerns of ASLE precipitated a crisis in 1999. As a result, ASLE scholars are spending more effort not simply on the literary language established by the wilderness culture but also on the public language and discourse of environmental issues as they appear in institutional contexts.⁶⁵

As I argued during that crisis, Roderick Nash was wrong. America's important contribution to global environmental protection is not wilderness or national parks. The National Environmental Policy Act with its provisions for Environmental Impact Statements, more than any other U.S. statute, has been widely emulated (in over eighty countries now). As Lynton Keith Caldwell has pointed out, the promise of NEPA is still unfulfilled.⁶⁶ It will not be fulfilled until people like ecocritics demand better nature writing in Environmental Impact Statements, because this is where much of the real writing of nature occurs today. Ecocritics must enter the public arena by encouraging and facilitating writing of the most important single literary genre, the letter to a governmental agency.

NEPA's intention to establish interdisciplinary teams that include social sciences and "environmental design arts other than engineering" for the writing of Environmental Impact Statements, Caldwell shows, "could bring considerations of equity, ethics, and environmental justice into the decision process and could enlarge the basis for mediation when values conflict." The promise is there but we have yet to give it substance.

Critique (and regulation) of ecocritical practice—as expressed in the previous two paragraphs—have been local (looking inward), but they are becoming more global (looking outward).⁶⁷ The Caucus for Diversity has created the most powerful reform within ASLE to date.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, INSTITUTIONAL LANGUAGE

THE CAUCUS for Diversity was formed in June 1999. It presented a letter to the executive council of ASLE citing "clear evidence of growing interest in environmental and social justice issues, and in intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nature. The time has come to expand these efforts, and in response to this need, we have formed a Caucus for Diversity."⁶⁸ The caucus asked that a majority of "plenary speakers should be representative of nondominant

viewpoints,” and asked for a conference “addressing diverse perspectives involving the intersections of environment with human differences of race, class, gender, and sexuality, as well as considerations of what texts and what genres are appropriate for investigation.” The letter writers also hoped to see “more interdisciplinary diversity as well,” including “science, dance, music, and performance art.” They wanted “conferences more closely connected with the communities in which they are held,” connecting with “local environmentalists and environmental justice activists, inviting their participation in the conference planning and presentations.”

The caucus has changed ASLE conferences. Several important and collaboratively created publications have come from continuing discussions, most recently *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, & Pedagogy*, edited by Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein. This elaborate book refuses to adhere to the limiting categories of literary analysis, offers “new case studies including cultural analysis of environmental justice arts,” and asserts “that both teaching and making art are intrinsically political acts.”⁶⁹ The book puts ethnically diverse urban and rural inequalities into conversation, and asks about the directions of the causality of injustice. In one conversation, Terrell Dixon says, “I emphasize that what we can call the toxicity chain is not only physical, that the way we have degraded our environment, our own bodies and those of other citizens, also creates a web of mistrust [and] deep divisions along lines of class, ethnicity and gender.”⁷⁰ A good deal of ecocritical work on so-called “urban nature” has as a result acquired clearer focus.⁷¹ While not attempting a comprehensive view of globalization, these critics speak of “proactive scholarship” that will empower those who are being affected by it.

Among young scholars one sees special interest in these kinds of cultural studies. As an example, Erica Valsecchi, of Italy, a graduate student at the University of Nevada, Reno, focused for her M.A. examinations on “Social Struggles in Nature: Exploring The Connections between Environmental Justice and Environmental Literature.” “The link is oftentimes obscured or understated on both sides by activists, engaged in diverse environmental policies and campaigns, and by literary scholars, involved in the reformulation of concepts of nature and redefinition of the role of literary study in envisioning a responsible commitment towards the environment.” Valsecchi is keen to critique environmentalism from the margin: “Stemming from marginalized cultures and traditions in the United States and elsewhere, alternative views to typical environmentalism are often labeled either as essentialist, ‘feminine’ and ultimately unpractical relationships between human and nature, or worse they are ignored and discarded on racist assumptions.”⁷²

REPRESENTATION, ECOCENTRISM, AND STEWARDSHIP

QUESTIONS OF representation have become productively complicated and contested primarily in two ways. First, it is the occupational hazard of those who study literature that they absorb the epistemology and style of their favorite books, fictional and non-fictional. The danger is in becoming merely a “fan.”⁷³

Traditionally, students of American Romantics have allowed themselves to believe the principles of representation of their favorite writers—for instance, Emerson’s idea of “correspondence.” Critics find themselves writing as if they were Emersonian ideologues. Under such circumstances, the critical act becomes an affirmation and a religious act.

Nowhere is this limitation—of uncritically accepting and using the tradition—more obvious than in the ecocriticism’s conceptual landscape, shaped by the critics of the pastoral. There are multiple constraints here that limit discussions of literature and environment. Even more pronounced and perhaps limiting is ecocriticism’s acceptance of the discourse of wildness that it has imported from the writings of its own canon—Thoreau, Muir, and Leopold, for example.

More than one critic has noted that much of American nature writing is built on the model of the conversion narrative.⁷⁴ It would be a huge mistake if ecocritics were simply “converted” by what they read in other “nature writers” and found themselves writing conversion narratives, twice removed. Also, imaginative writers may not have to ask hard questions about representation and cognition, but critics do. This is why it can be dangerous to follow the practice so frequently found in ecocriticism, of taking established nature writers to be reliable theorists on nature writing, and of importing their language into the critical vocabulary.

As a result, contention over strategies of representation and the underlying ideologies that create them are likely to provide unending discussions that no doubt will be shaped by the unfolding of cognitive studies.⁷⁵ Because literature is about human expression, all theories of representation must be about human strategies and therefore “anthropocentric.” Ecocritics constitute an interpretive community whose work focuses primarily on literature, not “nature.”

At about the summer solstice of 1999, Leo Marx ignited a controversy still running in ecocritical circles by attacking ecocentrism. “Ecocentrists are the Puritans of today’s environmental movement,” he argued, they are “critical of anyone—whether an environmentalist or a despoiler—who assumes that the chief reason for protecting the environment is its usefulness to human beings. ‘No intellectual vice is more crippling,’ writes the Harvard sociobiologist and outspoken ecocentrist E.O. Wilson, ‘than defiantly self-indulgent anthropocentrism.’”⁷⁶

In the context of the debates about ecocentrism, several established ecocritics like John Elder or Glen Love have moved away from the wilderness-based or preservationist outlook and toward an outlook often portrayed as “stewardship.”

Elder’s most recent manuscript, *Valambrosa*, interests itself in George Perkins Marsh, and expresses a clear desire to find a Euro-American ethic of stewardship. Love’s *Practical Ecocriticism* leans this way too, as he describes his shift away from an “aggressive anti-anthropocentrism” characterizing his earlier critical writings, that needs to make way for an exploration of “what it means to be human.”⁷⁷

Love attributes his strategic move to the re-biologizing of human nature going on in the life sciences over the past few decades. It was not the debate among ecocritics about ecocriticism that forced this shift. It also was a response to

politics, especially the environmental justice movement, which reminded ecocritics of the way traditional users have been marginalized from the natural world and from the benefits of resources.

CROSSROADS

SO, ONCE upon a time, ecocriticism was born out of the perceived disjunction between business as usual in the university and the environmental crisis. The crisis was and is real, and ecocritics proposed to meet that crisis, using the skills that literary studies possess. At that moment, simple and straightforward positions and strategies seemed possible. Since then, the perceived dimensions of environmental crisis have enlarged and spread from local to global. Scientists have responded with ideas like island biogeography, terms like biodiversity, and disciplines like conservation biology. Social activists have also responded with terms like environmental justice, globalization, and cosmopolitanism. Using such terms puts critics inside specific arguments.

I have said in years past that, “by definition, ecological literary criticism must be engaged. It wants to know but also wants to do. ... Ecocriticism needs to inform personal and political actions, in the same way that feminist criticism was able to do only a few decades ago.”⁷⁸ I have not changed this view, but have come to see its complications.

One purpose of environmental literature, *as literature*, is to express not just the joy of the wide-open spaces, but also what it feels like to be “naked” in southern Utah, be a victim of toxics, be deprived of an ancestral place in the sun. The responsibility of ecocritics includes valuing these experiences when they become literature. But literature also must bear scrutiny and make sense under the lens of interdisciplinary study.

I have come to recognize more acutely the degree to which informed political action requires taking advice from others with greater expertise. Like environmental history, ecocriticism must seek authority from perspectives outside itself, including those outside academia, including victims, because it engages and applies insights, methods, and theories that are outside the authority of literary criticism. That is the reason for, and insistence upon, interdisciplinary activity. Because it wishes to be informed, and wishes to create alliances with other workers in other disciplines, as well as with other members of other communities, to meet the crisis. Because the modern world and the nature of the crisis demand it do so.

Crisis always includes the dimension of perception: Do we perceive crossed intentions and possibilities accurately? No movement can operate successfully and healthily unless it takes account of and absorbs critique. Otherwise, the result easily can become “doing or advocating the wrong thing for the right reason.” Environmentalists have been accused of this error.

An already historical case in point might be the storm over Cronon’s “The Trouble,” not merely because so many ecocritics followed their leaders, nature writers like Gary Snyder and Terry Tempest Williams, in responding negatively and often *ad hominem* to Cronon’s argument. Cronon argued strenuously against

the ecocentrist position advocated by deep ecology. Because deep ecology is widely supported by ecocritics, Cronon, like Leo Marx, had been taken by some to be an opponent.

Something similar seems to be happening with Dana Phillips's recently published *The Truth of Ecology*. Phillips argues that "ecocriticism ought to be less devoted to pieties: that it ought to offend." Yet speaking for the wild requires civility and this is no paradox. Even when making interesting points, Phillips defeats himself by acting the wild man, in a bad-tempered savaging of canonical writers of ecocriticism and contemporary American nature writing. He adds a gratuitous attack on the work of environmental historians Donald Worster and Carolyn Merchant, for good measure. I believe that the institutional culture of ASLE must bear part of the responsibility for the tone of the Phillips critique. ASLE's design space, or landscape, has no place within for voices of critique, and can expect more rhetoric that storms its culture, from outside.

Consequently, the response to the Phillips book is shaping up to be one measure of the maturity of the ecocritical community. In a recent review published in *Orion*, Scott Slovic, editor of *ISLE*, admits that more people than Phillips believe "the community of nature writers and ecocritics has become too chummy and self congratulatory—too self-satisfied and self righteous." Slovic argues, unfortunately, given his misunderstanding of the experience or the science behind chemotherapy, that "Reading *The Truth of Ecology* is like enduring a dose of chemotherapy—if it doesn't kill you (or your spirit), it will make you stronger." Slovic does not answer the challenge, except to say "that words—including nature writing and ecocriticism—have the potential to be nourishing and therapeutic." Does this nourishment apply to the reader or the writer? In a review published by *ISLE*, Sean O'Grady condescendingly argues that the book "misbehaves ... [Y]et, like a bright, refractory child, it is not without merit."⁷⁹

I hope I express my point more gently. Phillips is more frequently accurate and acute than most ecocritics seem to be able to bear. He offers a challenge. A healthy ecocriticism should be capable of accepting critique and using it constructively, because it speaks within a cultural context. What Lawrence Buell calls praxis, and most of us call activism will continue to resist critique: In an age of environmental crisis, nothing is more depressing than the prospect of environmentalists fighting interminably among themselves. But the story within environmental organizations should be a caution to scholars. The fallout from David Brower's resistance to criticism when he was executive director of the Sierra Club should be a reminder of what happens when people fail to listen.

A RETURN TO ROOTS?

SURELY THE crisis within ecocriticism was born of its peculiarly American conception, as it canonized American writers (Thoreau and Muir and their tradition) and American critics (Leo Marx, Roderick Nash, Joseph Meeker, Annette Kolodny, Lawrence Buell, and their traditions), but the roots of its crisis of ideology are historically deeper. Perhaps some ecocritics still desire to say "Look for nature,

in all literature, at every reasonable opportunity, externally, toward environment, and internally, toward human nature!" But to what extent does accepting such a universal or panoramic priority of nature over culture translate an idea of Alexander Pope into modern critical terms?

Unerring Nature! Still divinely bright,
 One clear, unchang'd, and universal light
 Life, force, and beauty must to all impart,
 At once the source, and end, and test of art.⁸⁰

As "source, and end, and test," and as the form of his couplets signal, Pope's theory expresses a desire for an all-purpose model that gives congruent answers and closure to all questions of representation, of external and human nature, of the purpose of literature, of modes and sources of literary production, and of the critic's mission.

To put this another way, in Pope the transactions of representer and represented are shaped by a mystified union of human mind, human language, and human culture, and are based on an essentialized version of the "external world." This view is not unknown in the writing of some ecocritics, but it is an unstable grounding for the future.

The really big question might be how to continue the tradition, confront a complex, global crisis, critique the Pope position—and other unexamined positions in ecocriticism—without going through a period of internecine battle, where Young Turks displace the old dogs, and without producing an academic discourse so arcane it has no readers in the real world.⁸¹

How can ecocriticism be more analytical without becoming less politically efficacious? As the young critics disdain the loose thinking of some of their elders, shall ecocriticism replace the Thoreauvian father with other fathers, or better yet, with mothers, or read Thoreau more carefully? Can ecocriticism be re-grounded in ecofeminism or postcolonial studies to meet racial and ethnic inequalities? What about globalization? Where do the roads of inquiry meet and where do they diverge; what happens at these crossroads? One thing is certain: traditional theories of representation are under attack because of the narrowness of their interests and especially because younger critics have become suspicious of personal narratives about nature produced from privileged positions of gender, class, and ethnicity.

Some English professors decided to follow a decidedly not-majority path in their careers. As we used to say, "If you are not part of the solution," well, we know the rest. Ecocritics wish to be part of some solution, or at least part of the dialogue about possible solutions. They wish to avoid certain risks of academic business as usual, where research is driven by the market and by the need for professional advancement. They face risks in giving autonomy to those in other disciplines, especially when the information and methods of those other disciplines are rapidly changing. But the worst risk is of speaking only to themselves, or of dying out, like frogs from the Sierra Nevada.

I have spent most of my career examining textual strategies, including those produced through institutional rhetoric, for preserving wild lands and biological

diversity. I consider that much of this work falls almost exactly midway between environmental history and ecocriticism, and I consider this a productive place for both literary scholars and environmental historians to work. Of one thing I am certain: Good writing is more effective and important for these purposes than bad writing, but what is good is not such a simple matter. Books are tools for seeing the world: Which tools help perception is a question to be answered partly by those who specialize in the literary structure of books.

One begins literary analysis by decomposing texts into their constituent parts. What goes into green writing that is indispensable? Part of the goal is to recompose the writing. How can these elements be composed more successfully, made more powerful, for the purposes of making a better world? The role of the ecocritic is not only to celebrate, but it is also not only to disassemble. The goal is to facilitate clearer thinking about human transactions with environments, and to facilitate better nature writing in the future. This role seems remarkably congruent with the role of environmental history.

Perhaps Robert Johnson didn't have to sell his soul to the devil at the crossroads to learn how to play that mean guitar. "Poor Bob," as Johnson called himself in his song, went home and practiced. Ecocritical practice will not be as enjoyable as we had once hoped, but it will determine what kind of music we make.

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NOTES

1. *ASEH News* 12 (Summer 2001): 2.
2. Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966); Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967).
3. Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).
4. David Damrosch, *Meetings of the Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 126.
5. Gerald Graff, *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992).
6. Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "Ethics," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentriccia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 387-405.
7. *Ibid.*, 400, 404.
8. Glen A. Love, *Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology, and the Environment* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 1-12; Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

9. The Wilderness Act, sec 2 a., c.: PL 88-577, 88th Congress S.4., 3 September 1964.
10. Glen A. Love, "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed., Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 237.
11. Love, *Practical Ecocriticism*, 1.
12. Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," in *Excursions and Poems*, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1906). Note that the third chapter of Gary Snyder's *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990) uses the language of Thoreau to place itself within a tradition.
13. See Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land*.
14. Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*; William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 69-90; Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995); Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
15. I discuss this issue in "Resistance to Wilderness," *Environmental History* 1 (1996): 33-42. The term "real work" is used by Gary Snyder in the poem "I Went Into The Maverick Bar," *Turtle Island* (New York: New Directions, 1974), 9.
16. Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1-29.
17. See Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic, "Introduction," in *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*, ed. Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), xiii-xxiii; and the ASLE website: <http://www.asle.umn.edu/>.
18. Gioia Woods, *Graduate Handbook*: <http://www.asle.umn.edu/pubs/handbook/lit.html>.
19. Scott Slovic, *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press: 1992); John P. O'Grady, *Pilgrims to the Wild* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press: 1993).
20. These regional studies sometimes are called "bioregional studies." See David Robertson, *Real Matter* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1997); David Robertson, *West of Eden: A History of Art and Literature of Yosemite* (Berkeley, Calif.: Wilderness Press, 1984); For a non-literary genre, see David Rothenberg, *Sudden Music: Improvisation, Sound, Nature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002).
21. Glotfelty and Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, xix. Some basic texts and anthologies of ecocriticism include Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*; Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells, eds. *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature* (London: Zed Books, 1998); Michael P. Branch et al., eds. *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and the Environment* (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1998); Patrick Murphy, *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000); John Tallmadge and Henry Harrington, eds. *Reading Under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in Ecocriticism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000); and Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace, eds., *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001).
22. William Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," in Glotfelty and Fromm, *Ecocriticism Reader*, 105-23.
23. Joseph W. Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (New York: Scribners, 1972). For a superficial critique of ecology as ground for ecocriticism, See Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, 153-65.
24. Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the Twentieth Century*:

- A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Robert H. Peters, *A Critique for Ecology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Daniel Botkin, *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); David R. Keller and Frank B. Golley, *The Philosophy of Ecology: From Science to Synthesis* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000).
25. Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, 6-8.
 26. Some anthologies of and about nature writing include John Elder and Robert Finch, eds., *The Norton Book of Nature Writing* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990); Tom Lyon, ed., *This Incomperable Lande* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989); Robert M. Torrence, ed., *Encompassing Nature: A Sourcebook* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998); and John Elder, ed., *American Nature Writers*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles M. Scribner's Sons, 1996). See also Lorraine Anderson, ed., *Sisters of the Earth: Women's Prose and Poetry about Nature* (New York: Vintage, 1991); Scott Slovic and John P. O'Grady, ed., *Literature and the Environment: A Reader on Nature and Culture* (1999).
 27. Elaine Showalter, "Introduction: The Feminist Critical Revolution," in *New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 3-17. See also Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Winter 1981): 179-206.
 28. Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Rural Hours*, ed. Rochelle Johnson and Daniel Patterson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Essays on Landscape and Culture*, ed. Rochelle Johnson and Daniel Patterson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); Michael P. Branch, ed. *Reading the Roots: American Nature Writing before Walden* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, forthcoming 2004).
 29. Branch and Slovic, *The ISLE Reader*.
 30. Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It, and Other Stories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), ix-xiv.
 31. *New Literary History* 30 (Summer 1999): 505.
 32. Lawrence Buell, "Letter," *PMLA* 114 (October 1999) 1090-1. This and other letters are collected under the title "Forum on Literatures of the Environment," *PMLA* 114 (October 1999), 1089-1104.
 33. Ursula K. Heise, "Letter," *PMLA* 114 (October 1999): 1096-7.
 34. Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987). One also could include Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Ecological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and many other historical and scientific studies to show the ubiquity of this kind of question.
 35. Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Cosmodes, and John Toobey, *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (New York: Oxford 1992), 31-48; Steven Pinker, *Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Viking, 2002); Joseph Carroll, *Evolution and Literary Theory* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1995); Robert Storey, *Mimesis and the Human Animal; On the Biogenic Foundations of Literary Representation* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1996).
 36. George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1983); Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999); Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: the Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Language of Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mother Nature: Maternal Instincts and How They*

- Shape the Human Species* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999); and Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
37. Recent reviews by Leo Marx included the following texts and critical works on Thoreau: Elizabeth Hall Witherell, ed., *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau*, 5 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972-1983); Bradley P. Dean, ed., *Faith in a Seed: The Dispersion of Seeds and Other Late Natural History Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993); *A Year in Thoreau's Journal: 1851*, with an introduction and notes by H. Daniel Peck (New York: Penguin, 1993); *Consciousness in Concord: The Text of Thoreau's Hitherto "Lost Journal" (1840-1841)* Together with Notes and a Commentary, ed. Perry Miller (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958); George Sessions, ed., *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala Press, 1995); Sharon Cameron, *Writing Nature: Henry Thoreau's Journal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*; Laura Dassow Walls, *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).
 38. David Mazel, ed., *A Century of Early Ecocriticism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001).
 39. J. Baird Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989); *Beyond the Land Ethic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999); Holmes Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993).
 40. William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991); Alfred Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Remembering Ahanagan: Storytelling in a Family's Past* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998); *The Middle Ground* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). For environmental history read by ecocritics, see Glotfelty and Fromm, *Ecocriticism Reader*, 393-400; William deBuys and Alex Harris, *River of Traps: A Village Life* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990).
 41. Laurence Coupe, ed., *The Green Studies Reader* (Routledge: London, 2000); Kerridge and Sammells, *Writing the Environment*.
 42. David Ehrenfeld, *The Arrogance of Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985); George Session, ed. *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*; David Rothenberg, ed., *Wild Ideas* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Peter Reed and David Rothenberg, eds., *Wisdom in the Open Air: The Norwegian Roots of Deep Ecology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Eric Katz, Andrew Light, and David Rothenberg, eds., *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).
 43. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957). This exercise of reading was invented for the exploration of fiction. But with such investigations as Hayden White, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) and *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), the mode of analysis has been applied to non-fiction.
 44. Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 69-90; Robert Marshall, "The Problem of the Wilderness," *The Scientific Monthly* 30 (1930) 141-48.

45. Cronon, "Trouble with Wilderness," 69.
46. Marshall, "The Problem of the Wilderness," 141.
47. Cather quoted in Marshall, "The Problem of the Wilderness," 142.
48. Marshall, "The Problem of the Wilderness," 141; Cronon, "Trouble with Wilderness," 69.
49. John Elder, *Reading the Mountains of Home* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); William L. Fox, *The Void, The Grid, & The Sign: Traversing the Great Basin* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000) and *Playa Works: The Myth of the Empty* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2002); Ian Marshall, *Story Line: Exploring the Literature of the Appalachian Trail* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998) and *Peak Experiences* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2003); Rebecca Solnit, *Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Hidden Wars of the American West* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1994) and *Wanderlust: a History of Walking* (New York: Viking, 2000); Michael Cohen, *The Pathless Way: John Muir and American Wilderness* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1984).
50. Field studies are explored in David Orr, *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1992); Gregory Smith and Dilafruz Williams, eds., *Ecological Education in Action* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1999); John Tallmadge, *Meeting the Tree of Life: A Teacher's Path* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1997); Hal Crimmell, ed., *Teaching in the Field: Working with Students in the Outdoor Classroom* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003); Corey Lewis, "Reading the Trail: Exploring the Literature of the Pacific Crest" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nevada, Reno, 2003).
51. Scott Slovic, "Ecocriticism: Storytelling, Values, Communication, Contact," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Literature Association, Salt Lake City, Utah, 5-8 October 1994), discussed in Marshall, *Story Line*, 7-8. When asked, one literary-critic colleague at the University of Nevada will say, "All criticism is narrative."
52. Elder, *Reading the Mountains of Home*, 26, 237.
53. John Elder, *Vallombrosa: Pilgrimage to Stewardship* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).
54. Richard White warned against this problem, that a vision of "transcendent nature" might "wash away the boundaries that time creates" in imagining "a universal language shared by author and subject." "American Environmental History: The Development of a New Historical Field," *Pacific Historical Review*, 54 (1985): 297-304.
55. See the review of Peter Matthiessen's *The Birds of Heaven: Travels with Cranes*: Richard White, "The Natures of Nature Writing," *Raritan* 22 (Fall 2002): 145-61.
56. Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 86. I will spare the reader my own indulgences into this kind of narrative voice.
57. A few of the volumes in the Credo Series by Milkweed Editions (Minneapolis, Minn.) include John Nichols, *An American Child Supreme: The Education of a Liberation Ecologist* (2001), Rick Bass, *Brown Dog of the Yaak: Essays on Art and Activism* (1999), Scott Russell Sanders, *The Country of Language* (1999), John Elder, *The Frog Run: Words and Wilderness in the Vermont Woods* (2001), Pattiann Rogers, *The Dream of the Marsh Wren: Writing as Reciprocal Creation* (1999), Ann Haymond Zwinger, *Shaped By Wind and Water: Reflections of a Naturalist* (2000), and William Kittredge, *Taking Care: Thoughts on Storytelling and Belief* (1999). Each contains a substantial profile of the author by Scott Slovic. In addition, see SueEllen Campbell, "The Credo Series: Language/Nature/Cherishing," *Western American Literature* 37 (Fall, 2002): 361-9.
58. Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (New York: Pantheon, 1991); Sandra Steingraber, *Living Downstream: An Ecologist Looks at Cancer and the Environment* (New York: Addison Wesley, 1997).
59. Paul Wapner, "Leftist Criticism of 'Nature': Environmental Protection in a Postmodern Age," *Dissent*: <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/>.

60. William Cronon, "The Riddle of the Apostle Islands," *Orion* 22 (May/June 2003): 36-42. Virginia J. Scharff, ed. *Seeing Nature Through Gender* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003) comprises an excellent collection of ecocriticism by historians.
61. Jim Cheney, "Postmodern Environmental Ethics: Ethics as Bioregional Narrative," *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1989): 117-34; Dan Flores, "Place: An Argument for Bioregional History," *Environmental History Review* (Winter 1994): 1-18.
62. J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995); Stephen Jay Greenblatt, *Renaissance Refashionings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gun, *Redrawing the Boundaries: A Transformation of English and American Literary Studies* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1992).
63. William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," *Journal of American History* 78 (March 1992): 1347-76.
64. David Mazel, *American Literary Environmentalism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000); Louise Westling, *The Green Breast of the New World: Landscape, Gender and American Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).
65. In a session on "Lynching Trees" (as in the song, "Strange Fruit") at ASLE in Boston, one scholar commented that in the African-American community the pine tree logo used for Timberland Products was coded as meaning: "Stay Away!"
66. Lynton Keith Caldwell, *The National Environmental Policy Act: An Agenda for the Future* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 55-56.
67. See Simon C. Estok, "A Report Card on Ecocriticism," *AUMLA: The Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 96 (November 2001): 220-38.
68. The letter can be found at <http://www.asle.umn.edu/about/diversity.html>.
69. Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein, eds., *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics & Pedagogy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 7. See also Joni Adamson, *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism* (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2001); and Rachel Stein, *Shifting the Ground: American Women Writers' Revisions of Nature, Gender and Race* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1997).
70. "Environmental Justice: A Roundtable Discussion with Simon Ortiz, Teresa Leal, Devon Pena, and Terrell Dixon," in *The Environmental Justice Reader*, ed. Adamson, Evans, and Stein, 23-24.
71. See Michael Bennett and David W. Teague, eds., *The Nature of Cities* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1999); Terrell F. Dixon, ed., *City Wilds* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002).
72. Valsecchi's reading list and proposed questions for her M.A. examination at the University of Nevada, Reno, included Adamson, Evans, and Stein, *The Environmental Justice Reader*; Devon Pena, ed. *Chicano Culture, Ecology, Politics: Subversive Kin* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998); Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1990); Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*; Stanley Crawford, *Mayordomo: Chronicle of an Acequia in Northern New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993); Jose Rivera, *Acequia Culture: Water, Land, Community in the Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998); Jimmie M. Killingsworth and Jaqueline S. Palmer, *Ecospeak: Rhetoric and Environmental Politics in America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992); Kerridge and Sammels, *Writing The Environment*; Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderland—La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987); Sandra Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek And Other Stories* (New York: Random House, 1991); and Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: the Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002).

73. Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, 138.
74. *Ibid.*, 185-239.
75. Within evolutionary studies, Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little Brown, 1991) and *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Touchstone, 1995) have gained some influence. Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991) is pregnant with possibility. Andy Clark, *Being There* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997) tests the construction of various ecological models of representation.
76. Leo Marx, "The Struggle Over Thoreau," *New York Review of Books* 46 (24 June 1999); Leo Marx, "The Full Thoreau," *NYRB* 46 (15 July 15 1999); "An Exchange on Thoreau" with letters by Lawrence Buell, and Leo Marx followed: *NYRB* 46 (2 December 1999). The protracted discussion between Buell and Marx has reproduced, in print and in a session at the 2003 ASLE conference, well-known basic philosophical distinctions between the anthropocentric and biocentric positions that found environmental ethics, as in Roderick Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 9-10. But the discussion has made no progress. Steven Marx (no relation to Leo) has pointed out that, rather than polarizing ecocentric vs. homocentric, or nature vs. culture, Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory* claims that these categories overlap, and Schama mocks the distinction in somewhat the same way that Cronon does in "The Trouble With Wilderness." (<http://cla.calpoly.edu/~smarx/Nature/Buell.html>).
77. Love, *Practical Ecocriticism*, 6.
78. Michael P. Cohen, "Letter," *PMLA* 114 (October 1999): 1092-3.
79. Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, 241. John P. O'Grady, review of *The Truth of Ecology*, *ISLE* 10 (Summer 2003): 278-9; Scott Slovic, review of *The Truth of Ecology*, *Orion* 22 (September/October 2003): 75-6.
80. Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism," in Vincent B. Leitch, et al., eds., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (1711, reprint; New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001), 442.
81. See Donald Worster et al., "A Roundtable: Environmental History" *Journal of American History* 76 (March 1990), 1087-1147.