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# ECOCRITICISM

Greg Garrard

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understanding is that many Native Americans prefer the traditional term.

In the first edition I drew a contrast between the early twentieth-century 'pastoral' ecology of ideal climax ecosystems and the supposed balance of undisturbed nature and more recent 'postmodern' ecology that stresses complexity and continual change. Since, as David Ingram pointed out, both ecologies were quantitative sciences and neither had much in common with postmodernism, I have substituted the more precise term 'postequilibrium' for 'postmodern' throughout.

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# 1

## BEGINNINGS POLLUTION

It is generally agreed that modern environmentalism begins with 'A Fable for Tomorrow', in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). Carson's fairy tale opens with the words, 'There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings' and, invoking the ancient tradition of the pastoral, goes on to paint a picture of 'prosperous farms', 'green fields', 'foxes barking in the hills, silent deer, ferns and wild-flowers, 'countless birds' and trout lying in clear, cold streams, all delighted in by those who pass through the town (Carson 1999: 21). Concentrating on images of natural beauty and emphasising the 'harmony' of humanity and nature that 'once' existed, the fable at first presents us with a picture of essential changelessness, which human activity scarcely disturbs, and which the annual round of seasons only reinforces. However, pastoral peace rapidly gives way to catastrophic destruction:

Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the community: mysterious

maladies swept the flocks of chickens; the cattle and sheep sickened and died. Everywhere was a shadow of death.

In the ensuing paragraphs, every element of the rural idyll is torn apart by some agent of change, the mystery of which is emphasised by the use of both natural and supernatural terminology of 'malady' and 'spell'. The most impassioned passage concerns the collapse in bird populations: 'On the mornings that had once thrived with the dawn chorus of robins, carbirds, doves, jays, wrens, and scores of other bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh' (1999: 22). The 'silent spring' of the title alludes, on one level, to this loss of birdsong, although it also comes to function as a synecdoche for a more general environmental apocalypse.

So the founding text of modern environmentalism not only begins with a decidedly poetic parable, but also relies on the literary genres of pastoral and apocalypse, pre-existing ways of imagining the place of humans in nature that may be traced back to such sources as Genesis and Revelation, the first and last books of the Bible. *Silent Spring* initially suggests that the mythical eco-catastrophe of the fable might be supernatural, and emphasises this by including an epigram from Keats' poem 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', in which the magical power of a beautiful woman blights the environment: 'The sedge is wither'd from the lake, / And no birds sing.' But then the fable concludes: 'No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves.' The rest of the book sets out to prove that such an apocalypse was already going on in a fragmentary way all over America, so that the doom befalling this mythical town of the future could be seen as a composite of lesser tragedies already known, and scientifically validated, in 1962.

The real culprits, according to Carson, were the new organic pesticides such as DDT, aldrin and dieldrin that had been introduced after the Second World War and had already proven highly successful in controlling pest insects. *Silent Spring* marshalled an impressive array of scientific evidence to show that this very success constituted a serious threat both to wildlife and to human health, confronting the utopian claims of agricultural scientists on their

own ground. Carson's scientific claims have since been largely confirmed, leading to increased public awareness of pesticide pollution, firmer state regulation and development of less persistent agricultural chemicals.

Environmentalist claims like these make crucial contributions to modern politics and culture, and many of us respond to them to some degree, yet for the student of the humanities they can be difficult to assess on their own terms. Academia has been organised into relatively autonomous 'disciplines' and scientific problems seem to require scientific expertise. Nevertheless, the rhetorical strategies, use of pastoral and apocalyptic imagery and literary allusions with which Carson shapes her scientific material may well be amenable to a more 'literary' or 'cultural' analysis. Such analysis is what we will call 'ecocriticism'. This book is a critical introduction to the field of ecocriticism today.

Let us look, then, at some provisional definitions of the subject. The first is from the 'Introduction' to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), an important anthology of American ecocriticism:

What ... is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies. (Glotfelty 1996: xix)

Glotfelty goes on to specify some of the questions ecocritics ask, ranging from 'How is nature represented in this sonnet?' through 'How has the concept of wilderness changed over time?' to 'How is science itself open to literary analysis?' and finally 'What cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history, and ethics?'

So ecocriticism is an awfully political mode of analysis, as the comparison with feminism and Marxism suggests. Ecocritics generally tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a 'green' moral and political agenda. In this respect, ecocriticism is closely related

to environmentally orientated developments in philosophy and political theory. Developing the insights of earlier critical movements, ecofeminists, social ecologists and environmental justice advocates seek a synthesis of environmental and social concerns.

It is worth noting also that the questions posed by ecocriticism in Glotfelty's account follow a clear trajectory: the first question, for example, is very narrow and literary, tending to favour the student of Romantic verse. Thus, two of the most important works of ecocriticism in the 1990s were studies of Wordsworth and Shelley (Bate 1991 and Kroeber 1994). The questions grow in scope as the list continues, with several of the later ones suggesting gargantuan interdisciplinary studies such as Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory* (1995).

Richard Kerridge's definition in the mainly British *Writing the Environment* (1998) suggests, like Glotfelty's, a broad cultural ecocriticism:

The ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis. (1998: 5)

We will have reason to question the monolithic conception of 'environmental crisis' implied here, and perhaps to resist the evaluation of 'texts and ideas' against a seemingly secure ecological yardstick: both as a science and as a socio-political movement, 'ecology' itself is shifting and contested. However, the emphasis on the moral and political orientation of the ecocritic and the broad specification of the field of study are essential.

From the point of view of academics, ecocriticism is dominated by the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), a professional association that started in America but now has branches in Korea, Canada, India, Japan, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand, Europe and the British Isles. It organises regular conferences and publishes a journal that includes literary analysis, creative writing and articles on environmental education and

activism. Many early works of ecocriticism were characterised by an exclusive interest in Romantic poetry, wilderness narrative and nature writing, but in the last few years ASLE has turned towards a more general cultural ecocriticism, with studies of popular scientific writing, film, TV, art, architecture and other cultural artefacts such as theme parks, zoos and shopping malls. As ecocritics seek to offer a truly transformative discourse, enabling us to analyse and criticise the world in which we live, attention is increasingly given to the broad range of cultural processes and products in which, and through which, the complex negotiations of nature and culture take place.

Indeed, the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself. This book will reflect these trends by giving space to both literary and cultural ecocriticism. However, at this point there is a caveat: I will be dealing principally with British and North American literature and culture, although the principles of ecocriticism would of course admit of more general application.

Ecocriticism is unique amongst contemporary literary and cultural theories because of its close relationship with the science of ecology. Ecocritics may not be qualified to contribute to debates about problems in ecology, but they must nevertheless transgress disciplinary boundaries and develop their own 'ecological literacy' as far as possible. I therefore provide brief discussions of some important environmental threats faced by the world today. To consider these in detail is beyond the scope of this book, but it is essential for ecocritics to recognise that there are serious arguments about the existence of the problems, their extent, the nature of the threat and the possible solutions to them. So, for example, in Chapter 5, I consider the problem of 'over-population' from a demographic point of view, before going on to explain how the issue has been refracted through apocalyptic rhetoric.

It may seem obvious that ecological problems are scientific problems rather than objects of cultural analysis. Indeed, when *Silent Spring* was published the agro-chemical industry reacted by criticising the book for its literary qualities, which, they

implied, could not coexist with the appropriate scientific rigour. Would we not be recapitulating the propaganda published by the pesticide producers if we read Carson's book using literary-critical tools? John Passmore has proposed a distinction that may help to negotiate the problem. 'Problems in ecology', he maintains, are properly scientific issues, to be resolved by the formulation and testing of hypotheses in ecological experiments, while 'ecological problems' are 'features of our society, arising out of our dealings with nature, from which we should like to free ourselves, and which we do not regard as inevitable consequences of what is good in that society' (1974: 44). To describe something as an ecological problem is to make a normative claim about how we would wish things to be, and while this arises out of the claims of ecological scientists, it is not defined by them. 'Weed' is not a botanical classification, it merely denotes the wrong kind of plant in the wrong place. Eliminating weeds is obviously a 'problem in gardening', but defining weeds in the first place requires a cultural, not horticultural, analysis. Likewise 'pollution' is an ecological problem because it does not name a substance or class of substances, but rather represents an implicit normative claim that too much of something is present in the environment, usually in the wrong place. Carson had to investigate a problem in ecology, with the help of wildlife biologists and environmental toxicologists, in order to show that DDT was present in the environment in amounts toxic to wildlife, but *Silent Spring* undertook cultural not scientific work when it strove to argue the moral case that it *ought* not to be. The great achievement of the book was to turn a (scientific) problem in ecology into a widely perceived ecological problem that was then contested politically, legally and in the media and popular culture. Thus ecocriticism cannot contribute much to debates about problems in ecology, but it can help to define, explore and even resolve ecological problems in this wider sense.

One 'ecocritical' way of reading is to see contributions to environmental debate as examples of rhetoric. I have already suggested that Carson deploys both pastoral imagery and apocalyptic rhetoric, and will return to these subjects, but there are many other applications of formal rhetorical analysis. For example, Ralph

Lurtz has attempted to account for the impact of *Silent Spring* by drawing attention to the underlying analogy Carson uses between pesticide pollution and another kind of pollution that was strong in popular consciousness in 1962:

She was sounding an alarm about a kind of pollution that was invisible to the senses; could be transported great distances, perhaps globally; could accumulate over time in body tissues; could produce chronic, as well as acute, poisoning; and could result in cancer, birth defects, and genetic mutations that may not become evident until years or decades after exposure. Government officials, she also argued, were not taking the steps necessary to control this pollution and protect the public. Chemical pesticides were not the only form of pollution fitting this description. Another form, far better known to the public at the time, was radioactive fallout. Pesticides could be understood as another form of fallout.

(2000: 19)

So Carson combined ancient ways of imagining nature with contemporary ways of imagining a threat derived from 'fallout hysteria', with a view to establishing particular normative claims about pollution. Detailed rhetorical analysis shows how *Silent Spring* is constructed in order to achieve certain political results: not only the concrete measures described in the final chapter, but also a subtle revision of the concept of 'pollution' itself.

Reading *Silent Spring* as rhetoric has a number of advantages for an overtly politicised critical practice, some of which are set out by Marxist critic Terry Eagleton:

What would be specific to the kind of study I have in mind ... would be the kinds of *effects* which discourses produce, and how they produce them. Reading a zoology textbook to find out about giraffes is part of studying zoology, but reading it to see how its discourse is structured and organised, and examining what kind of effects these forms and devices produce in particular readers in actual situations, is a different kind of project. It is, in fact, probably the oldest form of literary criticism in the world, known as rhetoric.

(1996: 205)

I will be reading culture as rhetoric, although not in the strict sense understood by rhetoricians, but as the production, reproduction and transformation of large-scale metaphors. Each of my chapters will examine one such metaphor, thought to have specific – though sometimes ambivalent – political effects or to serve particular social interests. Some, like 'pastoral', are established literary tropes, whilst others name more heterogeneous materials that one can provisionally unify under a single title. Since all are, in some sense, ways of imagining, constructing or presenting nature in a figure, I will call my chapter headings 'tropes'. Each trope will gather together permutations of creative imagination: metaphor, genre, narrative, image. This introduction explores the trope of 'pollution' as an example. The basis upon which each trope is defined and limited is worked out in each chapter, with the constant proviso that, as ecocritics like to say, 'the map is not the terrain'. My topology is not definitive or exhaustive; it is intended to be enabling, not limiting.

Rhetorical analysis suggests that the meaning of tropes is closely related to their wider social context. They are therefore not fixed entities but develop and change historically. 'Pollution', for example, derives from the Latin 'polluere' meaning 'to defile', and its early English usage reflects its theological-moral origins: until the seventeenth century it denoted moral contamination of a person, or acts (such as masturbation) thought to promote such contamination. This essentially interior or subjective definition was gradually transformed into an exterior or objective – in fact, specifically environmental – definition between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, to the point where today only its later definition is widely known. The process is exemplary in that it highlights how people had to learn to hate their detritus, as well as indicating the deep cultural roots of the fear attaching to such immoral emissions. Most of the tropes in the book are traced to ancient origins before I explore their modern inflection.

The first citation of the modern sense of 'pollution' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from Francis Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), a founding text of modern scientific methodology: 'The Sunne ... passeth through pollutions, and it selfe remains as pure as before.' Bacon seems here to be writing about a material,

not a moral, phenomenon, which constitutes a crucial shift in meaning, and the very birth of a new way of seeing and thinking. Yet a key text in ecocritical history, Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980), ascribes to Bacon a pivotal role in the construction of an environmentally destructive worldview where 'the image of an organic cosmos with a living female earth at its center gave way to a mechanistic world view in which nature was reconstrued as dead and passive, to be dominated and controlled by humans' (1990: xvi). Thus the trope of 'pollution' is historically implicated in both environmental destruction and salvation since Bacon both 'discovered' pollution in the modern sense and, according to Merchant, helped make much more of it. From an ecocritical perspective this reflects the ambivalent role of science as both a producer of environmental hazards and a critical analyst of them. All the tropes examined in this book show some such ambivalence.

Another crucial feature of rhetoric is that tropes are assumed to take part in wider social struggles between genders, classes and ethnic groups. Cultures are not shaped equally by all their participants, nor are the many world cultures equally influential, and we must remain aware that even tropes that might potentially confront or subvert environmentally damaging practices may be appropriated. So although wilderness might seem to form a bulwark against an industrialised, materially progressive world view and social order, elements of that order such as manufacturers of four-wheel-drive sports utility vehicles have still been able to appropriate the wild as the 'natural home' of their products in their advertisements (see Campbell 1998). Since these vehicles virtually require their own oil well to feed their huge engines, the irony of the juxtaposition might suggest to us that 'wilderness' has an ideological function in this case, helping to legitimise the conspicuous consumption of a privileged class and nation.

In ordinary usage, 'rhetoric' suggests language that substitutes for literal truth: it is all 'hot air'. The sense intended in this book, however, is emphatically interested in literal meaning. This would be a negligible point were there not important trends in literary and cultural theory that would seem to marginalise the role of literal truth in literature and culture, even in science itself. Structuralism and post-structuralism, for example, have emphasised the linguistic

function of signs that relate to each other rather than refer to real things. Developments in other areas have reinforced this separation of language from reality; post-colonial and feminist literary theorists have shown that apparently real or 'natural' categories such as race and sex are better understood as 'cultural constructions' that covertly substitute normative claims about how, for example, women ought to be for how women actually or necessarily are. Feminist critics have distinguished between sex, which is a biological category, and gender, which is a social construction, and shown how a male-centred world view and social order have tried to legitimise changing gender constructions by referring them back to a supposedly fixed 'natural' sexual identity. 'Femininity' is not, according to many feminist theorists, a natural or necessary consequence of being genetically 'female', but rather a set of culturally prescribed behaviours. This argument largely or wholly detaches the female sex from a 'constructed' feminine gender identity that lives only in language and culture. Whilst this strategy provides opportunities for women to escape repressive stereotypes, it also represents a marked prioritisation of the claims of culture over those of nature.

'Constructionism' is a powerful tool for cultural analysis, and indeed, I have relied on it above in my discussion of the construction of 'pollution'. But it does suggest that 'nature' is only ever a cover for the interests of a privileged or embattled social group. The challenge for ecocritics is to keep one eye on the ways in which 'nature' is always in some ways culturally constructed, and the other on the fact that nature really exists, both the object and, albeit distantly, the origin of our discourse. Lawrence Buell calls this 'a myth of mutual construction: of physical environment (both natural and human-built) shaping in some measure the cultures that in some measure continually refashion it' (2001: 6). The imprecision of that phrase "in some measure" is entirely necessary since such reciprocal 'shaping' networks of nature and culture are bound to be complex to the attentive eye. Throughout this book, the aim is to balance a constructionist perspective with the privileged claims to literal truth made by ecology. Ecocritics remain suspicious of the idea of science as wholly objective and value-free, but they are in the unusual position as cultural critics

of having reasons to defer, in the last analysis, to a scientific understanding of the world. Even such a balanced commitment both to literary artifice and literal reference has led to accusations, notably in Dana Phillips's *The Truth of Ecology* (2003) and Timothy Morton's *Ecology without Nature* (2007), that ecocriticism frequently involves a simplistic view of representation, a naive 'ecomimeticism' committed to exactitude and immediacy. Nature writing tries, argues Morton, to 'achieve escape velocity from writing itself', but founders on the irony that 'the more I try to show you what lies beyond this page, the more of a page I have' (p. 30). Buell, however, points out that such critics 'tend to work from a reductive model of mimesis, which ... [in reality] posits refraction but most definitely not "sameness," and from a cartoon version of ecocritical neorealists as doggedly hard-hat positivists' (2005: 32). His discussion of 'The World, the Text and the Ecocritic' in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* is a sustained and persuasive defence of 'mutual construction' (pp. 29–61).

So Buell's phrase remains neat and useful, but part of the problem lies in the metaphor of 'construction' itself, which even in his revised version suggests an artefact like a building or machine, an autonomous work of minds and hands. I doubt many readers would automatically imagine a natural construction such as a terrine mound. But if any building or machine, however technologically advanced, must be made by evolved animals (*Homo sapiens*) of materials of natural origin in accordance with natural 'laws' of mechanical physics, then it follows that all our vaunted cultural constructions are, in a sense, natural constructions. Perhaps the architectural metaphor obscures, or mystifies, the natural basis of all human culture and exalts only our own powers as a species. Indeed, as we will see in the 'Animals' chapter, there is considerable evidence of non-human 'cultures' as well. The excessively culturalistic implications of 'construction' are not easily avoided by a substitution of terms, but I tend to use 'shaping', 'elaboration' or 'inflection' to describe the complex transformations and negotiations between nature and culture, or between real and imagined versions of nature.

Returning to pollution with this in mind, we might observe that the rhetorical history of the term has been very closely

aligned with the truth claims of ecologists and environmental toxicologists. Techniques of chemical analysis have developed to the point where unimaginably small amounts of chemicals can be detected in the environment:

In dealing with environmental reports or policies or regulations we must always keep in mind that what was zero today will no longer be zero tomorrow. We have already moved from measuring micrograms in the 1950s to measuring picograms in the 1980s and 1990s. ... At the same time, we must keep in mind that there is no relationship between toxic effects and our ability to detect a chemical. Small amounts only matter if they do affect living organisms.

(Baarschers 1996: 46-47)

Baarschers is highly critical of environmentalist 'hysteria' surrounding the presence in the environment of amounts of chemicals far below levels of observable toxicity. His frustration at widespread misunderstanding and ignorance of environmental science is reasonable, given the cognitive bias of the human species to, for example, fear public risks greater than those seen as personally chosen. Thus people accept the very high risks involved in smoking, whilst demanding the elimination of infinitesimal risks associated with high-anxiety technologies. Environmental pressure groups may also promote ignorant paranoia rather than educated critique (see Chapter 5).

At the same time, Baarschers does not account for the possibility that public anxiety is a response to precisely the extent and degree of environmental surveillance that he describes. Rather than simply divorcing the 'real risk' as defined by toxicologists from the 'perceived risk' felt by the public, then criticising people for not trusting the experts, we ought to see perceived risk as, paradoxically, a consequence of increasingly sophisticated surveillance. The more accurately the expert measures hazards, the greater the disjunction between official estimates of risk and any conceivable lay assessment based on personal experience, a process of alienation sociologist Ulrich Beck describes as 'expropriation of the senses' (1999: 55). Furthermore, nuclear, biological and chemical 'megahazards' undermine the traditional guarantors of industrial

safety such as private insurance, compensation and state regulation of measurable and calculable risks, precisely insofar as the threat revealed by environmental surveillance dwindles below the point of statistical determinability. We cannot, by ourselves, assess risks, and industrial safety scientists actually render risks less knowable and more fearful the more they minimise them.

The result, Beck argues, is that security claims produced by mega-hazard industries themselves produce public insecurity. Carson's reconstruction of 'pollution' to include minute quantities of pesticides as well as the gross, observable pollution of traditional industrial production was the continuation of an historical process of redefinition that continues in contemporary culture. The proliferation of types and sources of 'pollution' means that artificial light and noise may now be considered pollutants and carbon dioxide defined as a climatological pollutant even though it occurs naturally in vast quantities. Baarschers's attempt to rationalise and minimise this continual extension cannot reckon with the political and media culture that Beck's constructionist analysis illuminates.

This generalisation and, from an ordinary sensory perspective, dematerialisation of pollution has significant ramifications in our culture, constituting a 'world risk society' of impalpable, ubiquitous material threats that are often in practice indissociable from their cultural elaborations. As Ursula Heise argues:

Not only is risk theorists' exploration of the ways cultural worldviews and institutions shape risk perceptions fundamental background knowledge for anyone interested in the forms that environmental art and writing have taken at different historical moments and in various cultural communities, but, inversely, literary critics' detailed analyses of cultural practices stand to enrich and expand the body of data that an interdisciplinary risk theory can build on.

(2008: 136)

On this view, ecocriticism need not remain parasitic upon the natural sciences, but has a distinctive and constructive contribution to make to the diagnosis and resolution of ecological problems.

'Pollution' has seeped into our culture in many areas and on various levels of representation, from the implicit environmental



concern of Sylvia Plath's poetry (Brain 1998) to explicit environmental thrillers such as Hollywood 'green thriller' *On Deadly Ground* (1994) (Ingram 2000; Kerridge 2000). Buell has set out four criteria of such 'toxic discourse' as a cultural genre: a 'mythography of betrayed Edens' (2001: 37) based, like Carson's parable above, in pastoral; horrified, 'totalizing images of a world without refuge from toxic penetration' (p. 38) founded most probably in the postwar fear of radioactive miasma from nuclear weapons; 'the threat of hegemonic oppression' (p. 41) from powerful corporations or governments as contrasted with threatened communities; and the 'gothicization' of squalor and pollution characteristic of the environmental exposé. These criteria, and the genealogy of 'pollution' set out above, enable a vital modern ecocritical trope to be identified in slum gothic such as Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), environmental lawsuit dramas like *Erin Brockovich* (2000), and the exploration of contamination of place and family in Terry Tempest Williams' *Refuge* (1991). Andrew Ross identifies New York as Hollywood's perfect toxic landscape: 'On the other side of authority lies a city teeming with biological perils. Surely no other city has had such a fantastic bestiary of historical residents – from alligators to ninja turtles – in its sewage tunnels' (1994: 135).

However, in the postmodern world of media saturation, the modern trope of 'pollution' can become dangerously separated from its referent in ways that Baarschers would not recognise. In Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1986) the protagonist and narrator Jack Gladney strives to come to terms with the proximity of an unexpected 'toxic airborne event':

Smoke drifted from red beams of light into darkness and then into the breadth of scenic white floods. The men in Mylex suits moved with a lunar caution. Each step was the exercise of some anxiety not provided for by instinct. Fire and explosion were not the inherent dangers here. This death would penetrate, seep into the genes, show itself in bodies not yet born.

(1986: 116)

In one way this seems to confirm Beck's argument that the risk anxiety cannot be relieved or even addressed by 'instinct', the lack

of definite threat itself making it all the more pervasive. Even so, the narrative struggles to characterise the 'event' in terms of other, pre-existing narratives, such as the 'conquest of space' with its spectacular imagery and military-industrial brand names. Pollution has become a spectacle that is almost detached from any real sense of threat thanks to the ubiquity of such images: 'the cloud resembled a national promotion for death, a multi-million dollar campaign backed by radio spots, heavy print and billboard, TV saturation' (p. 158). People living close to the emission rely on the media for its definition: at first, 'a feathery plume', then 'a black billowing cloud' and finally 'the airborne toxic event'. Reversing Baarschers's priority of fact over representation, the symptoms of victims change as the media risk reports are updated. The radical disproportion between saturation of imagery and paucity of fact marks the toxic event out as the kind of postmodern crisis with which ecocriticism must increasingly engage.

According to some ecocritics, though, toxic discourse and pollution anxiety themselves perpetuate a harmful distinction between nature, seen as wild and pure (Chapter 4), and the toxic taint of humanity. Anthony Lioi, for instance, has proposed the mythological figure of the 'swamp dragon' as a 'symbolic place in ecocriticism for dirt and pollution, an alias or an icon that allows us to give dirt its due' (2007: 17). The ideal habitat for such a creature would be the New Jersey 'wilderness' of toxic waste dumps and buried gangsters explored in Robert Sullivan's *The Meadowlands* (1998), of which Lioi observes:

Though he is disgusted by the Meadowlands, he does not turn away; though his fear is justified, it does not drive him out. Persisting until it finds a hidden loveliness, Sullivan's parody turns in on itself to become a real adventure and revelation ... a serpentine wisdom.

(pp. 31–32)

In a similar vein, Timothy Morton agrees with the tactical value of a rhetoric of purity and toxicity, but argues that 'our philosophical adventure should in some ways be quite the reverse' (2007: 188). Such a 'dark ecology' involves loving 'the disgusting, inert and meaningless' because 'the most ethical act is to love the other

precisely in their artificiality, rather than seeking to prove their naturalness and authenticity' (p. 195). How dark ecology might contribute positively to legal, political and cultural campaigns to manage, contain and avert pollution, though, remains an open question. A powerful test case for it might be the extraordinary photographic work of Chris Jordan, which continually focuses upon the detritus of our waste. His moving 'Midway' series, for example, documents the effects of plastic pollution upon albatross chicks on the remote Pacific island, juxtaposing their frail, bleached skeletons with the multicoloured assortment of lighters, bottle caps and unidentifiable junk that has erupted from within them ([christordan.com/gallery/midway](http://christordan.com/gallery/midway)). In Chapter 7, we will look at other creatures that, like the swamp dragon, call into question the conventional boundaries of culture and nature: feral and 'queer' animals.

So these are the basic propositions of this book: environmental problems require analysis in cultural as well as scientific terms, because they are the outcome of an interaction between ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflection. This will involve interdisciplinary scholarship that draws on literary and cultural theory, philosophy, sociology, psychology and environmental history, as well as ecology. The study of rhetoric supplies us with a model of a cultural reading practice tied to moral and political concerns, and one which is alert to both the real or literal and the figural or constructed interpretations of 'nature' and 'the environment'. Breaking these monolithic concepts down into key structuring metaphors, or tropes, enables attention to be paid to the thematic, historical and geographical particularities of environmental discourse, and reveals that any environmental trope is susceptible to appropriation and deployment in the service of a variety of potentially conflicting interests. Ecocriticism makes it possible to analyse critically the tropes brought into play in environmental debate, and, more tentatively, to predict which will have a desired effect on a specific audience at a given historical juncture. To confront the vast, complex, multifarious agglomeration of ecological crises with the apparently flimsy tools of cultural analysis must be seen by the ecocritic as a moral and political necessity, even though the problems seen perpetually to dwarf the solutions.

The next chapter gives a brief account of the various political and philosophical orientations within the broad spectrum of environmentalism, in part to make clear that no single or simple perspective unites all ecocritics. From Chapter 3 onwards, the analysis is arranged under the names of important ecocritical tropes, starting with 'Pastoral', the most deeply entrenched, and concluding with the construction of the 'Earth' as a whole. Within each chapter, the development of the trope is traced historically and, in some cases, geographically, and I mix discussion of canonical texts and critics with more peripheral materials in order to indicate the depth and breadth that the field has already assumed. The chapters follow a rough trajectory from traditional concerns with the local to contemporary concepts of the global: from place to space, from earth to Earth. Throughout the book I will return to the implications of postequilibrium ecology for ecocriticism.

Chapters 3 to 5 examine a linked series of tropes that are heavily indebted to the Euro-American Judaeo-Christian narrative of a fallen, exiled humanity seeking redemption, but fearing apocalyptic judgement – 'Pastoral', 'Wilderness', 'Apocalypse' – and assess the significance of the shapes these tropes have acquired in the modern world. Chapter 6 compares two quite distinct conceptions of 'dwelling' upon the Earth: the European 'georgic' tradition of writing about working on the land, and the more recent identification of indigenous ways of life as potential models for a harmonious existence. To discuss these constructions of humanity's relationship with the natural world, however, takes for granted the problematic distinction between our species and other animals. Therefore Chapter 7 looks at the different ways in which animals, wild and domestic, are represented and conceptualised. I argue that reconsideration of the idea of 'the human' is a key task for ecocriticism, tending to drag it away from pastoral and nature writing towards postmodern concerns such as globalisation and the numerous 'naturecultures' (Donna Haraway's term) that render the conventional binary opposition of culture and nature redundant. In the final chapter, I explore the meanings that have clustered around the extraordinary images of the whole Earth from space, ranging from global marketplace to precious super-organism.

## 2

## POSITIONS

'Environmentalism' is relatively young as a social, political and philosophical movement, but already a number of distinct ecophilosophies have emerged that seem as likely to compete with each other as to combine in any revolutionary synthesis. Each approach understands environmental crisis in its own way, emphasising aspects that are either amenable to solution in terms that it supplies or threatening to values it holds most dear, thus suggesting a range of political possibilities. Each one, moreover, might provide the basis for a distinct ecocritical approach with specific literary or cultural affinities and aversions.

## CORNUCOPIA

Despite the remarkable degree of consensus that exists amongst scientists about the environmental threats posed by modern civilisation, there are nevertheless some who argue that most, if not all, such dangers are illusory or exaggerated. This 'cornucopian' position is therefore, in an important sense, not environmentalist at all, and is in some cases financially supported and disseminated by anti-environmentalist industrial pressure groups. Free-market

economists and demographers are amongst its most outspoken intellectual proponents, arguing that the dynamism of capitalist economies will generate solutions to environmental problems as they arise, and that increases in population eventually produce the wealth needed to pay for environmental improvements.

The key positive claim put forward by cornucopians is that human welfare, as measured by statistics such as life expectancy or local pollution, has demonstrably increased along with population, economic growth and technological progress. They point out that, in the long run, the supposed scarcity of natural resources is belied by falling prices of food, minerals and commodities relative to wages; as a specific resource becomes harder to obtain, the price increases, leading capitalist entrepreneurs to search for substitute sources, processes or materials. The discovery of alternatives leads to a fall in price of the original material, such as the drop in real copper prices brought about by the widespread substitution of fibre-optic cables for copper wires. 'Scarcity' is therefore an economic, not an ecological, phenomenon, and will be remedied by capitalist entrepreneurs, not the reductions in consumption urged by environmentalists: 'The fact is that the concept of resources itself is a dynamic one; many things become resources over time. Each century has seen new resources emerge' (Beckerman 1995: 60). More people on the planet means more resourceful brains, more productive hands, more consumption and therefore more economic growth. The confidence of economist Julian Simon in the 'virtuous circle' of economic and demographic growth was such that he issued a standing bet:

You pick (a) any measure of human welfare — such as life expectancy, the price of aluminum or gasoline, the amount of education per cohort of young people, the rate of ownership of television sets, you name it; (b) a country (or a region such as the developing countries); (c) any future year, and I'll bet a week's or a month's pay that that indicator shows improvement relative to the present while you bet that it shows deterioration.

(Myers and Simon 1994: 21)

Simon won one bet, with ecologist Paul Ehrlich, over the scarcity of mineral resources as measured by prices during the 1980s.

Ehrlich in turn has attacked Simon for 'brownwashing', which he describes as the use of spurious science to attack environmentalism (Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1998).

Alongside the claims of an endless cornucopia of wealth, growth and commodity production, Beckerman, Simon and others bring criticisms of environmental 'scare-mongering', citing inaccurate projections of global cooling and worldwide famine made by some ecologists in the 1970s. They point to the acknowledged uncertainty in, for example, species extinction rates or global climatic modelling, and argue on this basis for inaction or, at best, further research. As Frederick Buell has shown, the anti-environmental fight in the United States has depicted their opponents in any number of contradictory ways since the 1970s in order to discredit them:

Abused as communists, fascists, pagans, Stalinists, Arcadians, utopians, Puritans, evangelical, doomsters, pathological idealists, ecofreaks, selfish and manipulative elitists, and selfish and unintelligent middle-class home owners, [environmentalists] lost their status as public-spirited prophets of imminent dangers to a fundamental legacy for all Americans.

(2003: loc.663)

Perhaps most striking has been the success of cornucopian lobby groups, such as the Caro and Discovery Institutes (which call themselves 'think tanks'), and anti-environmental media organisations such as Fox News, in amplifying the vocal dissent of a small minority of scientists from the global expert consensus about anthropogenic climate change. Climate change 'scepticism', a mélange of valid scientific uncertainty, popular misunderstanding and politically motivated misrepresentation, is a major barrier to progress on reducing greenhouse gas emissions in some democratic countries.

It is certainly important to remember the vast improvements in measurable human welfare brought about in both developed and developing countries, albeit terribly inequitably, by economic growth and technological progress. Capitalism mobilises problem-solving capacities in humans that it would be wise not to

underestimate. However, this position suffers from a major inconsistency: many of the environmental improvements enjoyed by post-industrial nations have not only been achieved by moving damaging industries to developing countries, but have been driven by the political agitation of the environmental campaigners cornucopians now claim are obstructing economic and technological progress. It is not capitalism alone that produces the solutions cornucopians identify, but entrepreneurs responding to morally motivated consumers and government regulations.

A more serious objection is that cornucopians take little or no account of the non-human environment except insofar as it impacts upon human wealth or welfare. Nature is only valued in terms of its usefulness to us. Many environmentalists argue that we need to develop a value system which takes the intrinsic or inherent value of nature as its starting point. This fundamental distinction is evident in the debate between Simon and conservation biologist Norman Myers, from which I have quoted above.

### ENVIRONMENTALISM

The very broad range of people who are concerned about environmental issues such as global warming and pollution, but who wish to maintain or improve their standard of living as conventionally defined, and who would not welcome radical social change, will be described hereinafter as 'environmentalists'. Many value rural ways of life, hiking or camping, or are members of one of the mainstream environmental organisations such as the Sierra Club, Nature Conservancy and Audubon Society in the USA, or the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Council for the Protection of Rural England in the UK. They may be concerned about natural resource scarcity or pollution but would look to governments or non-governmental organisations such as charities to provide solutions, usually technological ones. Their hopes for curbing population growth, whether in rich or poor countries, would lie in family-planning campaigns rather than, say, state-sponsored sterilisation. Activism may range from recycling bottles and buying organic food to major commitment to conservation activity. In terms of philosophical and religious orientation, environmentalists

still regard Western traditions such as liberal democracy, human rights, Christianity and notions of historical or scientific progress as valuable, to a greater or lesser degree, even in the light of environmental crisis. So characterised, a substantial proportion of the populations of developed countries would count as environmentalists. Political and consumer pressures wielded by environmentalists are responsible for many concrete improvements, such as the rapid expansion in organic agriculture in recent years.

Environmentalism, then, is widespread and, in certain respects, very powerful. Political parties must at least pay lip service to it, and industries respond in ways that range from costly modifications to production processes to merely cosmetic 'greenwashing' to appeal to or appease it. At the same time, environmentalism, or 'shallow environmentalism' as it has been called, has been attacked by radical critics for the compromises it makes with the ruling socio-economic order. Each of the following approaches accuses environmentalists of failing to address the allegedly more fundamental malaise it has identified.

Many of the most prominent scientific proponents of environmental protection, such as Rachel Carson, Paul and Anne Ehrlich, E. O. Wilson and Stephen Schneider, espouse this position for the most part, although in terms of environmental philosophy and criticism, environmentalism has found few systematic defenders. Martin Lewis's *Green Delusions* (1992) combines a vigorous attack on radical environmentalism with a reformist programme that emphasises the role of science, technology and government policy change. Against the 'Arcadian' approach of radicals advocating de-urbanisation, use of non-synthetic products and low-technology solutions, Lewis's 'Promethean' environmentalism promotes the 'decoupling' of human economy and natural ecology as far as possible, in order to protect nature. He points out that cities are not only centres of cultural vitality, but less environmentally costly than suburban sprawl or exurban flight, and argues that capitalism guided by educated voters and consumers can provide technological solutions to many problems of resources and pollution. The anti-interventionist, 'nature knows best' approach that Lewis ascribes to eco-radicals is inadequate: 'Prometheans maintain ... that for the foreseeable future we must actively manage the planet to ensure the

survival of as much biological diversity as possible. No less is necessary if we are to begin atoning for our very real environmental sins' (1992: 251). Richard North's *Life on a Modern Planet* (1995) adopts a similar position, setting out a moderate 'manifesto for progress'.

It may be said that this technocratic, managerial approach, known to social scientists as 'ecological modernisation', has already failed if we accept both the long-standing popularity of the cause and the continuing pace of environmental destruction. At the same time, the mainstream environmental movement not only has significant successes on specific issues such as ozone-depleting CFC emissions to its credit, but also represents the constituency to which radicals must appeal either for conversion or coalition. Successful radical organisations, such as Greenpeace, have attempted to maintain their reputation for radical activism whilst simultaneously promoting recycling and 'green consumerism'. The future of any of the more radical positions outlined here will probably depend upon a similar balancing act. Moreover, since many ecocritics espouse radical views, they will likewise seek to exploit environmentalism amongst readers whilst tempting them towards a politics or philosophy more adequate to the environmental crisis as they perceive it.

## DEEP ECOLOGY

Of the four radical forms of environmentalism, deep ecology is the most influential beyond academic circles, inspiring many activists in organisations such as Friends of the Earth, Earth First! and Sea Shepherd. This position, and its variants, will recur most often in this book as the explicit or implicit perspective of ecocritics, and aspects of it will be discussed further in several chapters. The 'poet laureate' of deep ecology is Gary Snyder (b. 1930; see Chapter 4) and his philosophical guru is Arne Naess. Naess sets out eight key points of the deep ecology platform in George Sessions's definitive anthology *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century* (1995). The crucial ones are as follows:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.

4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantially smaller human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires a smaller human population.

(Sessions 1995: 68)

The second of these points refers not only to developing but also to developed countries, whose populations consume far more per capita. Deep ecologists argue for long-term population reduction throughout the world. The lethal combination is that of rapid population growth in developing countries, which exacerbates environmental problems associated with poverty such as land pressure and deforestation, accompanied by rapid economic growth in developed countries, which exacerbates problems associated with wealth, such as domestic waste disposal and greenhouse gas emissions.

Many deep ecologists see the first point as distinguishing their position from environmentalism; whereas 'shallow' approaches take an instrumental approach to nature, arguing for preservation of natural resources only for the sake of humans, deep ecology demands recognition of intrinsic value in nature. It identifies the dualistic separation of humans from nature promoted by Western philosophy and culture as the origin of environmental crisis, and demands a return to a monistic, primal identification of humans and the ecosphere. The shift from a human-centred to a nature-centred system of values is the core of the radicalism attributed to deep ecology, bringing it into opposition with almost the entirety of Western philosophy and religion.

Deep ecology is concerned with encouraging an egalitarian attitude on the part of humans not only toward all *members* of the ecosphere, but even toward all identifiable *entities or forms* in the ecosphere. Thus, this attitude is intended to extend, for example, to such entities (or forms) as rivers, landscapes, and even species and social systems considered in their own right.

(Sessions 1995: 270)

This remarkable even-handedness might well seem to empty deep ecology of any substantive content: if value resides everywhere, it resides nowhere, as it ceases to be a basis for making distinctions

and decisions. It is not being alive or being sentient that qualifies an entity or form for intrinsic value, but rather, it would seem, whatever kind of purposive organisation one could claim to find equally in a single bird, a river, an entire species, a distinct ecosystem or an ethnic group. The considerable debates about the concept of intrinsic value may be traced in the influential journal *Environmental Ethics* or in one of several anthologies (Elliot and Gare 1983; Cooper and Palmer 1992; Elliot 1995; also Curry 2006).

One major, recurrent objection to deep ecology is that ecocentrism is misanthropic, and indeed certain advocates such as Dave Foreman and Christopher Manes have made inhumane and ill-informed statements about population issues, for example. But alongside this 'hard' wing is the 'soft' mainstream for whom ecocentrism is merely an 'orientation' within which major differences of opinion will always subsist. It is specifically allowed by Naess, for example, that 'vital' human needs may take priority over the good of any other thing, thus ruling out difficult conflicts between the interests of humans and the interests of a man-eating tiger or a bubonic plague bacillus. In fact, when it comes down to specifics, deep ecologists often reaffirm the conventional priorities they criticise in environmentalists, not least because they risk the charge of misanthropy if they do not. Moreover, it seems likely that any given concerned individual will probably have both eco- and anthropocentric attitudes at different times, under different conditions. At the same time, it is important to distinguish both perspectives from the animal rights philosophy that argues for the extension of the moral consideration accorded humans to certain higher mammals (see Chapter 7).

The notion of ecocentrism has proceeded from, and fed back into, related belief systems derived from Eastern religions, such as Taoism and Buddhism, from heterodox figures in Christianity such as St Francis of Assisi (1182–1286) and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), and from modern reconstructions of American Indian, pre-Christian Wiccan, shamanistic and other 'primal' religions. Alongside this strongly spiritualistic dimension subsists, somewhat uneasily at times, the scientific ecology from which the movement takes its name. In fact, not one of the essays

in the substantial Sessions anthology is written by an ecologist, and 'ecology' appears there, if at all, as a laudable background activity that need never be discussed directly, but can rather be used to validate existing 'intuitions'. Where intuition and science clash, the former typically wins out, so that scientifically informed attempts to manage ecosystems, for example, are seen as part of the 'problem'. Ecologists can be accused of being 'anti-ecological', not because their projects might accidentally inflict damage, but because the undertaking of such projects betrays an anthropocentric managerialism at odds with the true, ecocentric promise of the discipline. In fact, developments in postequilibrium ecology would seem fatally to undermine deep ecology, if it would only attend to them (see Chapter 3).

## ECOFEMINISM

Deep ecology identifies the anthropocentric dualism humanity/nature as the ultimate source of anti-ecological beliefs and practices, but ecofeminism also blames the *androcentric* dualism man/woman. The first distinguishes humans from nature on the grounds of some alleged quality such as possession of an immortal soul or rationality, and then assumes that this distinction confers superiority upon humans. The second distinguishes men from women on the grounds of some alleged quality such as larger brain size, and then assumes that this distinction confers superiority upon men. Ecofeminism involves the recognition that these two arguments share a common 'logic of domination' (Warren 1994: 129) or underlying 'master model', that 'women have been associated with nature, the material, the emotional, and the particular, while men have been associated with culture, the nonmaterial, the rational, and the abstract' (Davion 1994: 9), and that this should suggest common cause between feminists and ecologists.

If women have been associated with nature, and each denigrated with reference to the other, it may seem worthwhile to attack the hierarchy by reversing the terms, exalting nature, irrationality, emotion and the human or non-human body as against culture, reason and the mind. Some ecofeminists, especially those promoting 'radical ecofeminism' and goddess worship, have adopted this approach.

Thus, for example, Sharon Doubiago asserts that 'ecology consciousness is traditional woman consciousness'; 'Women have always thought like mountains, to allude to Aldo Leopold's paradigm for ecological thinking. (There's nothing like the experience of one's belly growing into a mountain to teach you this.)' (1989: 41, 42). Charlene Spretnak similarly grounds a kind of women's spirituality in female biology and acculturation that is 'comprised of the truths of naturalism and the holistic proclivities of women' (1989: 128-29).

Yet, as suggested earlier, feminists have long argued against the acceptance of some 'feminine essence' grounded in biological sex, arguing instead that gender is culturally constructed. Because this applies regardless of whether the essence is construed negatively or positively, radical ecofeminism would then appear to present us with a mirror-image of patriarchal constructions of femininity that is just as limited and limiting. Even a positive valuation of femininity as 'closer to nature' thanks to female biology or social experience neglects the reality that all the gender distinctions we know have been constructed within patriarchal societies. Radical ecofeminist essentialism has been rightly criticised by ecofeminists with a philosophical or sociological orientation (Biehl 1991; Warren 1994), who point out that 'a truly feminist perspective cannot embrace either the feminine or the masculine uncritically, [but] requires a critique of gender roles, and this critique must include masculinity *and* femininity' (Davion 1994: 9). This objection now seems to have been generally accepted by ecofeminists.

If radical ecofeminism is questionable in terms of its feminism, it is even more so in terms of ecology. The desire to reverse the androcentric priority of reason over emotion leads to a striking anti-scientism (e.g. Griffin 1978; Kheel 1989). Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1979) frankly appropriates a vaguely 'green' rhetoric in the service of a sententious, sustained and unqualified assault on the phallic myth and language of science, especially medical science. Yet, as Val Plumwood's analysis shows, merely differentiating men from women, humans from nature, or reason from emotion, does not itself constitute problematic anthropo- or androcentrism. Rather, the underlying model of mastery shared by these forms

of oppression is based upon *alienated* differentiation and denied dependency: in the dominant Euro-American culture, humans are not only *distinguished* from nature, but *opposed* to it in ways that make humans radically alienated from and superior to it. This polarisation, or 'hyperseparation', often involves a denial of the real relationship of the superior term to the inferior (Plumwood 1993: 47–55). So, for example, Plumwood shows how philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) proposed an influential account of the difference between mind and body that struggled to eliminate all traces of the corporeal from the mental domain of reason. He had to

reinterpret the notion of 'thinking' in such a way that those mental activities which involve the body, such as sense perception, and which appear to bridge the mind/body and human/animal division, become instead, via their reinterpretation in terms of 'consciousness', purely mental operations.

(Plumwood 1993: 115)

Descartes hyperseparated mind and body, and denied to animals not only the faculty of reason, but the whole range of feelings and sensations that he had associated with thought. As a result, he saw animals as radically different from, and inferior to, humans. They were bodies without minds, effectively machines.

Plumwood's most important contribution is a critique of the gendered reason/nature dualism. She presents it as 'the overarching, most general, basic and connecting form' of a historically varied series of dualisms. It can serve this general analytical function because 'reason' has so often been called upon to hyperseparate both men from women and humans from animals, and so can stand in for both dominant terms. She does not argue for a rejection of either science or reason, but rather a qualification of the philosophies that would polarise reason and nature in opposition: whereas scientific 'objectivity' decrees that any talk of intention or purpose in nature constitutes unscientific *anthropomorphism*, Plumwood advocates a recognition of both similarity and difference in the human–nature continuum. We can continue to distinguish reason and emotion, man and woman, human and animal, but without the neurotic obsessiveness of the mainstream philosophical

tradition. In doing so, the mastery model that legitimises anthropo- and androcentrism is undermined (see also Plumwood 2001).

Reason, once rescued from its idealisation by androcentric philosophy, can acknowledge and respect 'earth others', afflicted by neither ultra-rationalistic alienation nor animistic assimilation: 'We need to understand and affirm both otherness and our community in the earth' (Plumwood 1993: 137). This position rejects both cornucopian dualism, privileging the rational economic subject above all else, and simplistic ecofeminist and deep ecological monism, in which the distinctive capacities and needs of the human species are in danger of being submerged in an undifferentiated, apolitical ecosphere. Unfortunately, it may nevertheless lead to the position espoused by Carolyn Merchant in her influential historical critique of 'mechanistic' science, *The Death of Nature*: a somewhat pious recommendation of 'holistic' or 'vitalist' science based on its moral, rather than its methodological or pragmatic, superiority over 'reductive' conventional science. The place of science in the two major forms of radical ecology, then, remains vexed.

Ecofeminism emphasises environmental justice to a far greater degree than deep ecology. The logic of domination is implicated in discrimination and oppression on grounds of race, sexual orientation and class as well as species and gender. Whereas the *Deep Ecology* anthology contains essays on 'dead white males' such as D. H. Lawrence, John Muir and Henry Thoreau, a major anthology of *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism* (Gaard and Murphy 1998) includes work on East German, French, Native American, Chicana and other writers, mainly but not exclusively women. This diversity is thought to derive necessarily from ecology, as argued here by Ynesra King:

A healthy, balanced ecosystem, including human and nonhuman inhabitants, must maintain diversity. Ecologically, environmental simplification is as significant a problem as environmental pollution. Biological simplification, i.e., the wiping out of whole species, corresponds to reducing human diversity into faceless workers, or to the homogenization of taste and culture through mass consumer markets.



Social life and natural life are literally simplified to the inorganic for the convenience of market society. Therefore, we need a decentralized global movement that is founded on common interests yet celebrates diversity and opposes all forms of domination and violence. Potentially, ecofeminism is such a movement.

(1989: 20)

We might feel that both biological and cultural diversity are valuable, and ought to be defended, without accepting the move, made without proper explanation, between these very different concepts of 'diversity'. No evidence is given for the similar view of Gaard and Murphy that 'cultural diversity ... is one dimension that enhances the survival of the human species' (1998: 6). Here, as in some other ecocritical work, the terminology of ecological science is simply appropriated for political ends without any acknowledgment of change in use or qualification of meaning. Moreover, as Chapter 3 shows, the notion of 'balance' in ecosystems is scientifically highly problematic, and ecologists no longer assert that biological diversity is necessarily linked to stability.

Radical ecofeminism clearly functions as an inspiration to many to change their lives, but as a critical philosophy its irrationalism and essentialism are serious limitations. Ecofeminists such as Warren and Plumwood, however, bring to bear social and philosophical insights that give the position far greater depth, scope and rigour. This is reflected in the growing significance of ecofeminist literary and cultural criticism within the ecocritical field, and in the complex analyses ecofeminists can make of, for example, population problems, which greatly exceed in both diagnostic and prescriptive power the crude analyses of deep ecologists (Cuomo 1994). Ecofeminists have also provided sharp critiques of globalisation, free trade and 'international development' that link their project as much to the politically orientated positions associated with social ecology and eco-Marxism as to ethically and spiritually orientated deep ecology (Shiva 1989). More recently, 'queer' eco-critics, who apply feminist anti-essentialism to sexuality, have brought their perspective to bear on pastoral (Chapter 3) and animals (Chapter 7) to denaturalise the rigid categories that underlie them.

## SOCIAL ECOLOGY AND ECO-MARXISM

Like ecofeminism, the positions discussed here do not suggest that environmental problems are caused by anthropocentric attitudes alone, but follow from systems of domination or exploitation of humans by other humans. Focusing on these intraspecies relationships, they perpetuate, deep ecologists claim, the anthropocentrism that ought to be the target of any Earth-centred critique. At the same time, social ecologists and eco-Marxists lament the individualism and pervasive mysticism of deep ecologists, which, they argue, represent a retreat from rational thought and real political engagement. Social ecology and eco-Marxism are explicitly political, and have their origins in nineteenth-century radical thought: the anarchism of Mikhail Bakunin (1814-76) and Piotr Kropotkin (1842-1921), the communism of Karl Marx (1818-83) and Friedrich Engels (1820-95).

Social ecology and eco-Marxism share the crucial insight with the cornucopian economists, whom they diametrically oppose politically, that the notion of ecological 'limits' is a kind of mystification. The fear of 'overshoot' of the capacities of natural systems to provide resources and absorb waste informs both deep ecology and environmentalism, but this analysis obscures the way scarcity is created by capitalistic forms of production that depend on the manipulation of the dynamic of supply and demand. Furthermore, technology modifies the dynamic, both by initiating new demands, and, through changed extraction or production processes, offsetting or exacerbating scarcity. In other words, 'scarcity' is not simply an objective fact about the natural world, but a function of the will and means of capital: the purposes that guide production, and the technologies that facilitate it. Change the political structure of society so that production to meet real needs replaces production for the accumulation of wealth, it is argued, and the ecological problem of limits produced by capital's structural need for perpetual growth will disappear. It is worth noting that, whilst this argument is persuasive in relation to mineral resources, it is far less so when applied to non-substitutable and economically invisible resources such as freshwater aquifers or biodiversity.

Social ecologists, most of whom recognise political philosopher Murray Bookchin as their intellectual guru, share with eco-Marxists a distinctive view of the place of humans in nature. They claim the ecocentric monism enjoined by deep ecologists is disingenuous because, although humans are supposed to be 'part of nature', many of the things humans do are still portrayed as 'unnatural', thereby reintroducing the dualism they were trying to overcome. Opposing this false monism is a dialectical perspective that envisages the evolution of human culture, or 'second nature', from 'first nature', in an ongoing process in which each defines and transforms the other:

Marx ... recognised the priority [sic] of an 'external' or 'first nature, that gave birth to humankind. But humans then worked on this 'first' nature to produce a 'second' nature: the material creations of society plus its institutions, ideas and values. This process, as Bookchin ... stresses, is part of a process of *natural* evolution of society.

(Pepper 1993: 108)

Eco-Marxists and social ecologists are therefore neither monists nor dualists. One of the consequences of this view is that environmental problems cannot be clearly divorced from things more usually defined as social problems such as poor housing or lack of clean water. It gives these positions a clear affinity with environmental justice movements that protest the common association of acute environmental degradation and pollution with poverty.

In line with traditional Marxist thought, eco-Marxists argue that there is a structural conflict between workers and the owners of the means of production, in which the latter cream off the surplus value created by the labour of the proletariat. This objective exploitation is at the heart of all other forms of exploitation and oppression, as Pepper argues: 'The true, post-revolutionary, communist society will be classless, and when it is attained the state, environmental disruption, economic exploitation, war and patriarchy will all wither away, being no longer necessary' (1993: 207-8). Against this vision of a planned economy based on need

rather than greed, social ecology promotes a decentralised society of non-hierarchical affiliations avowedly derived from an anarchistic political tradition:

A fundamental unit will be the *commune*, a closely knit, small community based on love, friendship, shared values, and commitment to a common life. ... cooperative institutions in all areas of social life will be formed: mutualistic associations for child care and education, for production and distribution, for cultural creation, for play and enjoyment, for reflection and spiritual renewal. Organization will be based not on the demands of *power*, but rather on the *self-realization of persons* as free social beings.

(Clark 1990: 9)

If eco-Marxists identify class conflict as the key political issue, social ecologists oppose the power relations and hierarchy they see as afflicting all kinds of societies; be they capitalistic or centrally planned socialist. In place of a workers' revolution, social ecologists promote exemplary lifestyles and communities that prefigure a more general social transformation and give people practice in sustainable living and participatory democracy.

Eco-Marxism seems at present to be a marginal force in the green politics of rich nations, although its role in Third World environmental justice movements is more significant. However, it suffers from association with the environmental horrors perpetrated by the former Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites. On the other hand, social ecology and anarchism more generally, seem to be experiencing a resurgence in the anti-globalisation and bioregional movements. Anarchism has the advantage of not requiring an elusive revolutionary proletariat for its realisation, and is clearly amenable to a range of counter-cultural movements. Nevertheless, Marxists are right to emphasise the pervasive power and reach of global capital, and the probable futility of rebellious actions by individuals or small, loosely affiliated groups against a handful of its symbols but none of its essential structures. Despite these differences, in what follows, holders of both these positions will be called 'social ecologists'.

## HEIDEGGERIAN ECOPHILOSOPHY

Whilst it is undoubtedly marginal to green political thought, the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) has inspired a number of ecocritics. It is seemingly impenetrable to the beginner, but some critics argue that Heidegger's thought is among the most profound critiques of industrial modernity because it combines a poetic awe before the Earth's being with a savage deconstruction of the death-denying project of world mastery that we are taught to call 'progress' (see Zimmerman 1990 and 1993; Foltz 1995; Garrard 1998).

Heidegger's starting point is the fundamental difference between mere material existence and a revelation of 'being', or the thing-ness of things. To 'be' is not just to exist, but to 'show up' or be disclosed, which requires human consciousness as the space, or 'clearing' (*Lichtung*), in and through which it is disclosed: 'At bottom, the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extraordinary' (Heidegger 1993: 179). Once again, the problem of dualism is not so much resolved as displaced, as being only 'is' through this clearing, and human being is in turn properly realised in the letting be of beings in its 'space' of consciousness. The clearing and what shines forth there have a mutual need for one another, as the sheltering Earth provides the entities from which human being finds a world: 'A stone is worldless. Plant and animal likewise have no world; but they belong to the covert throng of a surrounding into which they are linked. The peasant woman, on the other hand, has a world because she dwells in the overtness of beings' (p. 170).

The relationship of being and clearing, or Earth and world, is not a simple one, however, because the responsiveness or attunement between them may be more or less responsible, and beings may or may not be 'let be' (i.e. be disclosed, show up, emerge). Thus responsible humans have an implicit duty to let things disclose themselves in their own inimitable way, rather than forcing them into meanings and identities that suit their own instrumental values. One of the crucial modes of proper letting be or unhindered disclosure of being is poetry: language, especially archaic or oblique poetic language, rightly understood discloses to us the act

of disclosure itself. It enables showing-up itself to show up. On the other hand, Heidegger was dismissive of everyday chatter because it discloses both language and beings to us as mere instruments of our will; disposable words correspond to a world of disposable stuff. Worse still, things may emerge as mere resources on call for our use when required, so that a living forest may show up as merely a 'standing reserve' of timber (*Bestand*), no longer trees even but just lumber-in-waiting, and even the mighty Rhine may be disclosed as just a source of hydroelectric power. In meditation upon the poetic word, however, we discover that 'language is the house of Being' in which man ek-sists by dwelling' (Heidegger 1993: 237), and Heidegger claims that the essence of beings, their autonomy and resistance to our purposes, is disclosed by a similarly resistant language. Through poetry, then, we learn that 'Man is not the lord of beings. Man is the shepherd of Being' (p. 245). We learn resistance to the instrumentalism or en-framing (*Ge-stalt*) that discloses beings always in its narrow and reductive terms. We seek attunement to the demand beings put on us to disclose them without constraint. We learn, that is, to let beings be.

Thanks to the pivotal role he assigns to the work of art in what he calls 'saving the earth', Heidegger's philosophy has obvious attractions to ecocritics. Yet many philosophers argue that Heidegger's writings are virulently anti-rational, besides being infuriatingly difficult to read. Moreover, from 1934 to 1945, Heidegger was an enthusiastic Nazi, believing that Hitler could lead Germany in saving the Earth. Some philosophers consider that this has no bearing on his thought, whilst others see a profound congruence between his philosophy and his politics. The situation is complicated further by the claims of some historians that early Nazism included environmentalist elements. The place of Heidegger in ecocriticism is considered further in Chapter 7.

One of Heidegger's many philosophical heirs was Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61). In his late works especially he attempted to overcome the residual anthropocentrism of his mentor, emphasising instead that 'humans are enmeshed in the wild realm of the "actual world" as flesh of its flesh' (Westling 2006: 34). On this view, there is no human perception that is not reciprocated by the

world, as David Abram claims in his popularisation of Merleau-Ponty, *The Spell of the Sensuous*: "To touch the coarse skin of a tree is thus, at the same time, to feel oneself touched by the tree" (1996: 68). Language, which for Heidegger was the 'ek-static' clearing in which man, uniquely, dwells, is for Merleau-Ponty gestural and emotionally expressive as well as conventional and denotative (p. 79). As such, 'this language "belongs" to the animate landscape as much as it "belongs" to ourselves' (p. 82), a view that has much in common with the fascinating theory of 'biosemiotics', 'which sees semiotic and communicative processes as an indispensable part of living nature' (Maran 2006: 458). In addition to the philosophical challenge it offers to anthropocentrism and Cartesian dualism (Chapters 4 and 7), Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology has encouraged ecocritics to highlight the sensuous pleasure of encounters with the 'flesh of world', as distinct from the Puritan self-denial often wrongly associated with environmentalism.

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### 3

## PASTORAL

Since the Romantic movement's poetic responses to the Industrial Revolution, pastoral has decisively shaped our constructions of nature. Even the science of ecology may have been shaped by pastoral in its early stages of development and we have seen that the founding text of ecocriticism, *Silent Spring*, drew on the pastoral tradition. No other trope is so deeply entrenched in Western culture, or so deeply problematic for environmentalism. With its roots in the classical period, pastoral has shown itself to be infinitely malleable for differing political ends, and potentially harmful in its tensions and evasions. However, its long history and cultural ubiquity mean that the pastoral trope must and will remain a key concern for ecocritics.

What then is this 'pastoral' tradition, and what is its significance for environmentalism? Terry Gifford distinguishes three kinds of pastoral: the specifically literary tradition, involving a retreat from the city to the countryside, that originates in ancient Alexandria and becomes a key poetic form in Europe during the Renaissance; more generally, 'any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban' (1999: 2); and the pejorative sense in which 'pastoral' implies an idealisation of rural