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ECOCRITICISM

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Remembering the Earth

In 1756, the vicar of Selbourne planted four lime trees between his house and the butcher’s yard opposite, “to hide the sight of blood and filth” (White cit. Thomas 1983, 299). Gilbert White was a great naturalist and went on to write *The Natural History of Selbourne* (1789), a text much prized by ecocritics as environmental literature. White’s arboreal screening out of the slaughter-house is, in a sense, equally significant, for it exemplifies one of the key developments Keith Thomas charts in his history of changing attitudes towards the natural world in England between 1500 and 1800: namely, a growing uneasiness about killing animals for food. Towards the end of the eighteenth century this change in sensibilities led some, including the English poet Shelley, to become vegetarian.ⁱ The vast majority of people, including the vicar of Selbourne, nonetheless continued to eat animals. What changed was rather that slaughterhouses were banished from the public gaze, while meat increasingly was sold and prepared as faceless flesh - that is, minus the head. What concerns me here for the moment is less the ethics of meat consumption than the concealment of its price. For it is this kind of concealment that would become characteristic of society’s relationship to the natural world in the modern era – an era, which with the dramatic disclosure of global ecological imperilment has perhaps now begun to come to an end.

Since the eighteenth century, the necessity of recalling the true cost, both to subordinate humans and to the earth, of our production processes and consumption habits has grown in equal measure to its difficulty. For at the same time that the ecosystems sustaining all life on earth have become ever more critically endangered by our growing numbers and levels of consumption, ever more people (above all, those whose ecological debt is the largest) live at an ever greater remove from the natural world, unmindful of their impact upon the earth. In addition, as Slavoj Žižek has observed, to the extent that the ecological crisis pertains to what Lacan terms the ‘real,’ that which precedes, defies and disrupts symbolic representation, it remains strangely elusive to thought, even while pressing in upon us daily, shifting the literal ground of our being (Žižek 1991, 35-9).ⁱⁱ Within the academy especially, the recollection of our embeddedness within an increasingly endangered earth has not come easily to those disciplines devoted to the study of cultural artifacts. Literary critics and cultural theorists in particular have been notoriously slow to register those changes in thinking about the relationship of culture and society to the natural world which began to be articulated in neighbouring disciplines, above all philosophy, but also theology, politics and history, from the early 1970s. ‘If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from

the major publications of the literary profession,' observed Cheryll Glotfelty in 1996 in her introduction to the first ecocriticism reader,

you would quickly discern that race, class and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never know that the earth's life support systems were under stress. Indeed, you might never know that there was an earth at all. (Glotfelty 1996, xvi)

There were in fact some isolated calls for an ecologically oriented criticism during the 1970s.ⁱⁱⁱ However, it was not until the end of the twentieth century that the study of literature and the environment was finally recognized as 'a subject on the rise'.^{iv} In some respects it is perhaps not surprising that the study of literary texts should be coupled with such forgetfulness of the earth. Although the practice of criticism has ancient origins in the exegesis of biblical and classical Greek texts, modern literary criticism only began to be institutionalized as an academic discipline in the early nineteenth century. This was precisely the time when a rigid separation began to be drawn between the 'natural' and the 'human' sciences. This is a divide that few literary critics and cultural theorists have dared to cross, until relatively recently. The compartmentalization of knowledge effected by this divide is central to what Bruno Latour (1993) terms the 'Modern Constitution,' which sunders the human from the nonhuman realm, while defining society's relationship to nature predominantly in terms of mastery and possession. It is the Modern Constitution, which facilitates also that characteristically modern (and especially urban) form of self-deception, whereby the consumption of meat can be disconnected from the suffering and death of animals. Thus, to regain a sense of the inextricability of nature and culture, *physis* and *techne*, earth and artifact - consumption and destruction - would be to move beyond both the impasse of modernism and the arrogance of humanism.

What, then, might such a posthumanist, postmodernist remembering of the earth entail for the literary critic or cultural theorist? In her poem 'Parchment,' Michelle Boisseau gives us some valuable leads:

I'm holding in my hand the skin of a calf
that lived 600 years ago, translucent
skin that someone stretched on four strong poles,
skin someone scraped with a moon-shaped blade.
Here is the flesh side, it understood true dark.
Here is the hair side that met the day's weather,
the long ago rain. It is all inscribed
with the dark brown ink of prayer,

the acid galls of ancient oaks, though these reds,
deluxe rivulets that brighten the margins,
are cinnabar ground too a paste, another paste
of lapis for these blue medieval skies,
and for flowering meadows or a lady's long braids-
the orpiment - a yellow arsenic -
whose grinding felled the illuminator's

boy assistants like flies, or the insect kermes

whose pregnant bodies gave pigment, and the goose
who supplied quills, the horse its hair, and flax
the fine strong thread that held the folded skins
into a private book stamped with gold for a king.
(Boisseau 2000, 177)

The parchment that Boisseau describes here is a product of *techne*, an artifact of considerable beauty, embodying something of the religious traditions and aesthetic sensibilities of a rich cultural tradition: it is, we learn, a late medieval illuminated prayerbook. In her poetic presentation of this prayerbook, Boisseau calls attention not to its meaning as a text, nor to its economic or antiquarian value, but to its materiality. Or rather, she asks us to reconsider its potential meaning and value in relation to its materiality, perceived in terms of its cost to the natural world. Thus, she recalls the slaughtered calf, whose skin supplied the parchment, the oak trees, the insect-engendered galls from which supplied dark ink for the written text, and all the other animals, vegetables and minerals, which made possible the material production of this artifact. Recalling too the illuminator's boy assistants, who died 'like flies' from arsenic poisoning as a result of their labour, Boisseau reminds us that the price of production is borne by subordinate humans, as well as by non-human others. This link between social domination and the exploitation of nature is hinted at again in the close of the poem, where we learn the purpose for which this book had been produced at such cost: namely, for the private use of a king.

In one of his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' Walter Benjamin observes that, to the historical materialist, there is 'no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism' (Benjamin 1973, 258). Most ecocritics would agree with this, but they would add that there is also no work of culture which is not simultaneously exploitative of nature. This is of course also true of Boisseau's 'Parchment' (and, indeed, this essay), the writing, publication and distribution of which has taken its own toll on the natural environment. And yet, the relationship between nature and culture is not one way. Of this too we might be reminded by Boisseau's poem. For the written prayers and visual images contained in this prayerbook convey ideas about nature, and about the relationship between nature, humanity and the divine, which crucially conditioned medieval perceptions and practices regarding the natural world, and which continue to resonate in complex and contradictory ways up to the present. Culture constructs the prism through which we know nature. We begin to internalise this prism from the moment we learn to speak; the moment, that is, that we are inducted into the *logos*, the world as shaped by language. 'Nature,' which, as Raymond Williams has remarked, is 'perhaps the most complex word in the language' (Williams 1983, 219), is in this sense a cultural and, above all, a linguistic construct. The physical reality of air, water, fire, rock, plants, animals, soils, ecosystems, solar systems etcetera, to which I refer when I speak of 'the natural world,' nonetheless precedes and exceeds whatever words might say about it. It is this insistence on the ultimate precedence of nature vis-à-vis culture, which signals the ecocritical move beyond the so-called 'linguistic turn' perpetuated within structuralism and poststructuralism.^v For some ecocritics, this

precedence extends to a consideration of the ways in which human languages, cultures and textual constructs are themselves conditioned by the natural environment.

It might be countered that at a time when there is allegedly no place on earth that has not been affected in some way by humanity's alteration of the natural environment, the precedence of nature has now become questionable. It is however precisely the imperilment of the biosphere wrought by that alteration which impels the ecocritical reinstatement of the referent as a matter of legitimate concern. For the ecocritic, it is vital to be able to say, with Kate Soper, that 'it is not language that has a hole in its ozone layer; and the "real" thing continues to be polluted and degraded even as we refine our deconstructive insights at the level of the signifier' (Soper 1995, 151). Moreover, the fact that ever more of the earth's surface is currently being refashioned by *techne* does not mean that *physis* has ceased to exist. All human making, including the largely unintentional remaking (or rather, undoing) of the earth's ecosystems remains dependent upon physical processes which precede and exceed human knowledge and power. All human being, meanwhile, remains interwoven, albeit often invisibly, with the life of countless nonhuman beings, who continue as best they can to pursue their own ends in the midst of an increasingly anthropogenic environment.

Ecocriticism, then, remembers the earth by rendering an account of the indebtedness of culture to nature. While acknowledging the role of language in shaping our view of the world, ecocritics seek to restore significance to the world beyond the page. More specifically, they are concerned to revalue the more-than-human natural world, to which some texts and cultural traditions invite us to attend. In this way, ecocriticism has a vital contribution to make to the wider project of Green Studies, which, in Laurence Coupe's words, 'debates "Nature" in order to defend nature' (Coupe 2000, 5). For many ecocritics, moreover, the defense of nature is vitally interconnected with the pursuit of social justice. As Scott Slovic reminds us (citing Walt Whitman), ecocriticism is 'large and contains multitudes' (Slovic 1999, 1102). Ecocritics are increasingly many and varied, drawing on a range of analytical strategies and theoretical approaches, and addressing a diversity of cultural phenomena, from Shakespearean drama to wildlife documentaries, romantic pastoral to sci-fi ecothrillers, the Bible to Basho.^{vi} This is a fast growing field, which cannot be explored fully within the limits of this chapter. In what follows, I will nonetheless seek to trace some of the primary ways in which ecocriticism is currently transforming the practice of literary studies.

Critiquing the Canon

In 1967, the American historian Lyn White Jr. published a slim article entitled 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis' (White 1996). The fact that this key early work of ecological cultural criticism first appeared in the journal *Science* reflects the extent to which environmental destruction was at that stage still seen as a largely scientific and technical issue. Yet the burden of White's article was precisely that science provided an inadequate basis for understanding, let alone resolving, a problem which was cultural and social in origin. Preempting Arne Naess' influential critique of 'shallow ecology' (1972), White argued that, '[w]hat people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny – that is, by religion' (White 1996, 6). For this

reason, White maintained that it was necessary to look to the dominant religious traditions of the West in seeking to identify the primary source of those attitudes towards the natural world, which in his view had led to the current crisis. The main target of White's critique is the Hebrew creation story in Genesis 1, which, 'not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends' (White 1996, 10). As White is well aware, however, the Bible, like all texts, is a complex and multivalent document, conveying highly mixed messages about the relationship between God, humanity and the rest of creation. In his analysis, the problem lay not so much with the biblical text itself, but rather with the way in which it began to be interpreted in Western Christianity from about the twelfth century: namely, as legitimating that scientific exploration, technological manipulation and economic exploitation of the natural world, which has today reached a level that would have been unimaginable, and quite possibly appalling, to the authors of Genesis.

White's article inaugurated the ecologically oriented critique of the way in which Nature is constructed in certain canonical texts of the Western tradition. The first extended deployment of an ecocritical hermeneutics of suspicion to literature was Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival* (1972). Meeker's disapprobation falls in particular upon classical tragedy, which, he contends, reinforces the anthropocentric 'assumption that nature exists for the benefit of mankind, the belief that human morality transcends natural limitations, and humanism's insistence on the supreme importance of the individual' (Meeker 1972, 42-3). Meeker is also highly critical of the pastoral tradition, which he sees as a form of escapist fantasy, valorising a tamed and idealised nature over wild no less than urban environments. This kind of critique continues to have an important place in the ecological recasting of the canon. However, the charge that Christianity, or any other key element in Western culture (tragedy, pastoral, rationalist metaphysics, phallogocentrism etc.) 'bears a huge burden of guilt' (White 1996, 12) for today's ecological crisis needs to be qualified in at least three ways.

Firstly, and most obviously, it is important to note that the West does not have a monopoly on ecological errancy. Many other cultures and societies have also failed to live sustainably in the past. Secondly, Western religious and literary traditions are not monolithic ideological constructs, but complex and ambivalent cultural legacies. As we will see, much recent ecocriticism has been directed towards revaluing some of these traditions, including pastoral. As yet, no ecocritics have to my knowledge attempted a sustained defense of tragedy, but it could be argued that in some forms and contexts, its force is precisely to question, rather than endorse, the hubris of human self-assertion. In recent times, the tragic mode has been effectively redeployed in environmental apocalyptic, such as Rachel Carson's 'Fable of Tomorrow' (Carson 1982, 21-2), in which the prefiguration of the potentially disastrous consequences of society's tragic blindness functions as a call to environmental action in the present. Similarly, it is increasingly clear that Christian arguments can be and have been called upon to justify very different, even contradictory, ways of relating to the natural world. Thus, for example, while Francis Bacon (1561-1626), the so-called 'father' of modern science, could appeal to the Bible in presenting the conquest of nature by man as divinely-ordained,^{vii} many of the opponents of precisely this kind of human chauvinism from the late sixteenth century onwards have also couched their arguments in Christian terms (Edwards 1984, 166-72). During the medieval period, too, divergent interpretations of Christian texts and traditions

are evident even within the West, as White's own endorsement of St Francis as a 'patron saint for ecologists' (White 1996, 14) attests. Moreover, the fact that the period of the greatest despoliation of the earth has coincided precisely with the waning of the earlier theocentric view of nature as God's creation suggests, at the very least, that the culpability of Christianity is indirect.

There is finally also the tricky question of causality. While it might be true that 'what people do about their ecology depends upon what they think about things around them,' as White puts it, we still have to ask what conditions the discursive practices and cultural traditions within which those thoughts are embedded. To leave the analysis on the level of cultural critique would be to fall prey to the fallacy of idealism, especially if there is any truth in the Marxist view that the material forces and relations of production are the real drivers of cultural and social change. Although we might not want to subscribe to the alternate ('materialist') fallacy of economic determinism either, it is important to acknowledge the influence of social, political and economic structures in the perpetuation, transformation and displacement of those views of nature which are conveyed by the texts of culture. As Carolyn Merchant and others have demonstrated, the Baconian reinterpretation of Providence, in conjunction with the mechanistic and atomistic view of nature that came to prominence in the seventeenth century, proved highly congenial to the laissez-faire mercantile capitalism, and associated colonialist ventures, that took off in northwestern Europe at the time.^{viii} These socio-economic developments might not have *generated* the new conception of Nature as totally knowable, manipulable, and predestined to be conquered and transformed by Man; but they almost certainly *guaranteed the success* of this view as a dominant paradigm in the modern era.

Reframing the Text

And yet, a consideration of social context alone cannot produce a fully ecological reading of cultural texts and traditions. Here too, White's brief article is instructive. A critique of capitalism is notably absent from his account. However, White's argument is in another respect profoundly materialist. For the somewhat aggressive interpretation of Genesis that emerges in the West is in his view connected, albeit indirectly, with something no less material than the nature of northern European soils. Unlike the lighter soils of the Mediterranean region, these are typically heavy and sticky, necessitating the use of a correspondingly heavy iron plough in farming the land effectively. Such a plough, 'equipped with a vertical knife to cut the line of the furrow, a horizontal share to slice under the sod, and a moldboard to turn it over' (White 1996, 8) appeared in northern Europe towards the end of the seventh century. Whereas the older wooden plough merely scratched the surface of soil, the new plough, which required eight oxen to pull it, 'attacked the land with such violence that cross plowing was not needed, and fields tended to be shaped in long strips' (White 1996, 8). Intriguingly, within about fifty years of the development of this plough, which, as White stresses, is unique to northern Europe, a change can be noted in the Western illustrated calendars. In place of the old passive personifications of the seasons, the 'new Frankish calendars [...] show men coercing the world around them – plowing, harvesting, chopping trees, butchering pigs' (White, 1996,

8). The burden of these images, in White's view, is that, 'Man and nature are two things, and man is master' (White 1996, 8).

Whether or not the connections that White makes between soils, ploughs, calendars, biblical interpretation and, ultimately, industrial modernity, can be substantiated, his introduction of the earth as a *player* in his historical narrative is methodologically and philosophically significant. For White, as for subsequent ecocritics and environmental historians, the natural world is no longer a passive recipient of human interventions and projections, but an active participant in the formation and transformation of human culture and society. As Aldo Leopold observed in 1949, many historical events, 'hitherto explained solely in terms of human enterprise, were actually biotic interactions between people and land,' the outcome of which was determined as much by the character of the land as by the culture and character its human occupants (Leopold 1998, 89). Transposed to literary studies, it is clear that this principle necessitates a radical shift in the way in which texts are interpreted and contextualised. This is the second way in which ecocriticism recasts the canon, and it demands of the critic an acquaintance with new areas of knowledge and understanding. Whereas, in the past, literary critics might have leant on history, philosophy or the social sciences in framing their readings of particular texts, ecocritics need to draw also on geography, ecology and other natural sciences.

A striking example of this procedure is provided by Jonathan Bate (1996), when he rereads Byron's apocalyptic poem 'Darkness' (1816), together with Keats's idyllic ode 'To Autumn' (1819), against meteorological records for the places and time periods in which these texts were written. Pitting himself against the literary critical convention of reading apocalyptic writing such as Byron's either intertextually, with reference to earlier apocalyptic, or as a product of imagination, bearing a largely metaphoric relation to the world beyond the page, Bate explores what happens if Byron's image of a darkened earth is taken literally. This leads him to the discovery that the highly inclement weather conditions described by Byron in his letters of the time, and confirmed by the meteorological records, can be traced to the eruption in 1815 of the Tambora volcano in Indonesia. This huge eruption caused an estimated 80,000 deaths locally, and lowered global temperatures for three years, leading to failed harvests, food riots and increased respiratory problems as far away as Europe. Bate's ecocritical strategy of foregrounding the role of the natural environment in the genesis of this text is in fact entirely in keeping with the perspective of the poem itself, which dramatizes the potentially catastrophic consequences of a dramatic change in the natural environment: in this case, the loss of the life-giving rays of the sun. Read in this meteorological context, 'To Autumn' also appears in a different light. Keats' pastoral idyll was written in the autumn following the first good summer since 1815, at a time when clear air and warm weather was especially important to its consumptive author. Far from being an escapist fantasy, this is in Bate's view a valuable 'meditation on how human culture can only function through links and reciprocal relations with nature' (Bate 1996, 440).

As Karl Kroeber (1994) has observed, the literary critical preoccupations and disputations of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, appear in retrospect to owe much to the ideological context of the Cold War. Focusing on questions of human creativity, human agency and human social relations, 'Cold War criticism' can also be seen to perpetuate that binary opposition of the human to the non-human, culture to nature, which has a long

history in Western rationalism. By contrast, 'Global Warming criticism,' as Bate terms his new approach, attends to the inextricability of culture and nature, the primary sign of which he considers to be the weather (Bate 1996, 439). Informed not only by meteorology and ecology, but also by the new science of non-linear dynamic systems popularised as 'Chaos Theory', Global Warming criticism presupposes a natural world which can no longer be thought of as passive, orderly and compliant, but which is rather volatile, unpredictable, and responsive to our interventions in ways that we can neither foresee nor control. Acknowledging the ecologically embedded, embodied and hence vulnerable nature of human existence, Global Warming criticism privileges those texts which can, as Bate puts it, enable us to 'think fragility' (Bate 1996, 447). Allied to an ethos of respect towards the natural world, this new critical paradigm has begun to generate its own counter-canon of literary texts which are seen to model a more ecologically sustainable mode of being and dwelling in the world than that which has predominated in the lived reality of the modern era.

Revaluing Nature Writing

Environmentalists, not unlike Gramscian Marxists, tend to be pessimists of the intellect and optimists of the heart. No matter how grim the statistics on the degradation of soil, air and water, on the loss of biodiversity, on global warming and the depletion of the ozone layer, on rising human population and consumption levels, we continue to wager on the possibility that the extraordinary beauty, diversity and fecundity of the earth can, in some measure, yet be saved, and that we might one day learn to live on this earth more equitably. Buoyed by this leap of faith, we continue to seek for sources of hope: places from which change for the better might be initiated. For environmentally committed literary critics and cultural theorists, attempting to reconcile their love for the more-than-human natural world with their professional engagement with works of human culture, this has meant that critique has often taken a back seat to recuperation. This recuperative impulse was already evident in Meeker, whose critique of tragedy and pastoral is conjoined with a revaluation of comedy and the picaresque. In the ecocriticism of the 1990s, the recuperative predominates even more strongly over the critical. Here it is important to note that in the US especially, ecocriticism to a considerable extent grew out of the study of that hitherto highly marginalised genre, nature writing. Among those who founded the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) at the 1992 annual meeting of the Western Literature Association, several key players were scholars of nature writing, including ASLE's first President, Scott Slovic, and Cheryl Glotfelty, editor of the first ecocriticism reader and co-founder of *The American Nature Writing Newsletter*, which later became the *ASLE Newsletter*.^{ix} Nature writing figures prominently in ASLE's official mission, 'to promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the relationship between human beings and the natural world,' and to encourage 'new nature writing, traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature, and interdisciplinary environmental research' (cit. Glotfelty 1996, xviii).

This revaluation of nature writing, or, somewhat more broadly, 'environmental literature', constitutes the third way in which ecocriticism recasts the canon. According to

the checklist provided by Lawrence Buell (1995, 7-8), an environmentally oriented work should display the following characteristics:

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 framework. [...]*
4. *Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text. [...]*

While some of these characteristics might be found in particular works in a variety of genres, including prose fiction, lyric poetry and drama, Buell argues that the kind of literature that most consistently manifests most or all of his ecological desiderata is nonfictional nature writing. Buell's landmark study of this neglected genre is centred on the work of Thoreau, especially his classic text *Walden* (1854). Thoreau is the only author of environmental nonfiction to have been admitted to the canon of American literature. Buell nonetheless redefines Thoreau's canonicity by reconnecting the 'order of the text' with the 'order of the body' (Buell 1995, 373): that is, by restoring flesh-and-blood readers and writers as agents in the world, while nonetheless recognizing that 'perforce they must operate and cooperate within the realm of textuality as a limit condition of their exchange' (Buell, 1995: 384). In order to do this, Buell argues that it is necessary to consider not only the literary and scholarly reception of an author, but also their place in popular imagination and the lived practices that they modelled and inspired. In the case of Thoreau, this includes not only the (increasingly touristic) pilgrimage to Walden, but also countless practical endeavours find ways of living in closer communion with the natural world. Buell's reading of Thoreau and his reception is not entirely uncritical. However, he concludes by affirming that, 'Thoreau's importance as an environmental saint lies in being remembered, in the affectionate simplicity of public mythmaking, as helping to make the space of nature ethically resonant' (Buell 1995, 394).

Although Buell, like all ecocritics, is concerned to develop a form of criticism that will ultimately lead us back to the world beyond the page, he is also alert to the ways in which all writing and reading is sustained by a dense mesh of intertexts. Thus, he includes a fascinating Appendix to his study, in which he reconsiders the intertextuality of *Walden* in relation to the many forms of environmental nonfiction that were popular during Thoreau's time: literary almanacs, homilies celebrating the divine in nature, literary regionalism, the picturesque, natural history writing, and travel writing. Although some canonical texts are included here, such as Emerson's *Nature* (1836), Buell's inventory highlights the importance of a great number of other texts, which have generally not been valued as literature, from Charles Darwin's *Journal of Researches [...] during the Voyage of HMS Beagle* (1839) to Susan Fenimore Cooper's *Rural Hours* (1850). Environmental nonfiction, in Buell's analysis, turns out to be even more 'heteroglossic,' in Bakhtin's terms, than the novel.^x Moreover, Buell's reconsideration of

Walden's many-tongued intertexts implies also a revaluation of later environmental nonfiction, such as that of Mary Austin, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, Terry Tempest Williams and Barry Lopez.

Returning to Romanticism

While much ecocriticism remains devoted to this counter-canon of environmental nonfiction, the revaluation of nature writing has also generated a new perspective on many canonical texts and traditions, including romantic pastoral. This tradition forms another crucial strand in the intertextual mesh of Thoreau's writing. As we have seen, pastoral comes off very badly in Meeker's *Comedy of Survival*, as indeed it tends to in most leftist criticism, especially of the New Historicist variety.^{xi} It was nonetheless a leading British Marxist critic, Raymond Williams, who initiated the left-green recuperation of romantic pastoral. In his highly nuanced account of the changing fortunes and perceptions of the country and the city from 1973, Williams demonstrates that pastoral is potentially far more than an expression of conservative nostalgia for a lost agrarian past. Thus, he begins by observing that pastoral, which first emerged in Hellenistic Greek literature, may well have originated not in the escapist fantasies of an urban elite, but rather in the singing competitions of peasant communities themselves (Williams 1985, 14). Latin, and to an even greater extent Renaissance and Augustan, pastoral writing did nonetheless undoubtedly tend towards forms of idealisation, which elided the realities of rural life from the perspective of the labouring poor. In the 'green language' of romantic neopastoral, however, above all that of early Wordsworth and his younger contemporary John Clare, himself a rural labourer by birth, Williams finds an important locus of resistance to the increasing commodification and degradation of the land, which was then occurring in many parts of England, and which is now worldwide. 'The song of the land', Williams concludes, 'the song of rural labour, the song of delight in the many forms of life with which we all share our physical world, is too important and too moving to be tamely given up, in an embittered betrayal, to the confident enemies of all significant and actual independence and renewal' (Williams 1985, 271).

Unfortunately, Williams's moving plea for a red-green revaluation of romantic pastoral was largely ignored by Marxist critics in the following decades. Williams's lead has nonetheless been followed by some ecocritics, including the eminent British literary scholar, Jonathan Bate.^{xii} In his 1991 monograph on Wordsworth, programmatically entitled *Romantic Ecology*, Bate reaffirms the value of romantic pastoral as nature writing. In so doing, he endorses what is probably the dominant non-academic reading of Wordsworth against the New Critical and deconstructionist claim that what Romanticism really valorises is not nature, but the human imagination and human language. Arguing also against the New Historicist counter-claim that the ideological function of romantic imagination and pastoral was to disguise the exploitative nature of contemporary social relations, Bate repositions Wordsworth in a tradition of environmental consciousness, according to which human wellbeing is understood to be coordinate with the ecological health of the land. Thus understood, Romantic nature poetry stands in an ambivalent position to earlier pastoral writing, functioning simultaneously as continuation and critique. As Terry Gifford (1999) has argued, romantic poetry is perhaps more accurately termed 'post-pastoral,' or even, notably in the case of Blake, 'anti-pastoral.'^{xiii}

The importance of romanticism is explored further by Bate in *The Song of the Earth* (2000). Here, Bate extends his discussion of romantic ecology to a consideration of texts which are less obviously congenial to a sympathetic ecocritical reading, such as Byron's ludic writing of the body in *Don Juan* (1823). In his discussion of a range of later texts, from T. H. Hudson's *Green Mansions* (1904) to the work of the contemporary Australian poet Les Murray, Bate also demonstrates the continuing resonance of romantic 'ecopoetics.' Other ecocritics too have recognised in the romantic tradition a valuable point of departure for rethinking our relations with the earth. Karl Kroeber, for example, acclaimed Wordsworth's 'Home at Grasmere' as a model of 'ecological holiness' as early as 1974, and romanticism also provides the focus for his major work on *Ecological Literary Criticism* (1994). Historians of ecological thought have drawn attention also to the significance of romantic 'natural philosophy' and natural science in the emergence of a post-mechanistic, proto-evolutionary view of nature as a dynamic, autopoietic, unity-in-diversity.^{xiv} And yet, the romantic legacy too is a mixed one. Romantic thought undoubtedly overcame the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter by positing human consciousness and creativity as a manifestation of potentials inherent in nature. However, this very naturalisation of mind can lend itself to a celebration of *techne* at the expense of *physis*, as in the image of the 'good mine' in Shelley's *Queen Mab* (1813), which embodies a symbiosis of mind and matter that, in Timothy Morton's reading, ultimately confirms the 'omnipotence of mind' (Morton 1996, 418). Clearly, romantic holism does not always undo the hierarchies embedded in the oppositions that it reconciles. Nor is the romantic affirmation of *physis* in less technologically transformed landscapes entirely unproblematic either. It might be argued that the romantic aestheticisation of nature has functioned historically not so much as a potential locus of *resistance* to its industrial exploitation, but rather as *compensation* for it. Under the Modern Constitution, it has been all too easy to move between the consumption of nature as raw material for economic production during the working week, to the consumption of nature as sublime or beautiful on Sundays. Moreover, even within the romantic celebration of natural beauty or sublimity, there is sometimes a transcendental strain, whereby the ultimate source of meaning and value is projected out of this world into a heavenly beyond, the true home for which many a romantic soul, in accordance with centuries of Christian teaching, continues to long.

To draw attention to these problematic elements is not to negate the value of the ecocritical return to romanticism. On the contrary: to the extent that elements of technoutopianism, compensatory nature consumption, and transcendental escapism are still very much with us, such a reconsideration becomes all the more important. On closer analysis, it might appear that in some respects at least, romanticism is part of the problem of modernity. In other respects, however, it could indeed represent a road not taken, to which we might now return in seeking to make our way forward into an alternative (post)modernity. As Greg Garrard has observed, 'we are fast depleting our limited indigenous resources of hope here in the West, and should therefore accept the Romantic offering of sympathy with and confidence in nature' (Garrard 1998, 129).

Reconnecting the social and the ecological

The romantic affirmation of the ties binding human well-being to a flourishing natural environment finds its critical counterpart in the recognition that 'ecological exploitation is always coordinate with social exploitation' (Bate 2000, 48). This is the point of departure for much recent ecocriticism, which incorporates a concern with questions of gender, 'race' and class. This kind of eco-social critique is not entirely new. It is, for example, foreshadowed by Rousseau in his 'Discourse on the Origins of Inequality among Men' (1754). Paying close attention to Rousseau's voluminous footnotes to the work of Buffon and other eighteenth-century naturalists, Bate has reinterpreted this text as an early 'green history of the world' (Bate 2000, 42). According to Rousseau, the progress of civilisation in the domination of nature had been achieved at the price of increased social inequality, alienation and military conflict. This analysis is akin to what the German social theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer would later term the 'dialectic of enlightenment' ([1944] 1979). By the time when they were writing as Jewish Marxist exiles from Nazi Germany during the Second World War, this dialectic had, they believed, generated a whole new order of barbarism right in the midst of the technologically most advanced civilisation in world history.

While Adorno and Horkheimer were primarily concerned with domination on the basis of 'race' and class, they also pointed to certain connections between the domination of women and that of the natural world. The 'marriage of Mind and Nature,' which Francis Bacon hoped would be effected by the new science and technology, was, they observed, always patriarchal (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979, 4). This had implications for women as well as for non-human nature. Because of their close symbolic and to some extent also practical association with nature, namely through the kinds of labour they have traditionally performed, women have been cast either as 'primitive' and potentially 'monstrous,' hence part of that nature that was to be mastered by rational man, or as an alluring embodiment of that nature to which rational man simultaneously longs to return. Such connections between the domination of women and nature have been explored more recently in far greater depth and detail by ecofeminist philosophers, historians, sociologists and critics.^{xv} The first major work of ecologically oriented feminist literary criticism was Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* from 1975. Here, Kolodny examines the metaphorisation of the land as feminine in North American literature. In particular, she draws attention to the conflict between phallic and foetal attitudes towards the feminised landscape, whereby the impulse to penetrate and master the country as a whole has oscillated uneasily with a desire to preserve certain places perceived at once as 'virginal' and 'maternal'. Such privileged places are imaged as sites of (typically masculine) regeneration. This ambivalence, Kolodny suggests, might have its origins in universal aspects of the human psyche, but it is also overdetermined by certain geographical, social and cultural contingencies. The metaphoric feminisation of the land is likely to have rather different consequences depending on the place and perception of women in society. In the patriarchal context of North America following white settlement, it has in Kolodny's view contributed to the development of land use practices that are both contradictory and ultimately unsustainable. The nature and implications of the patriarchal association of women and nature in the work of both men and women writers in America has been explored further by other ecofeminist critics, most notably Louise Westling in *The Green Breast of the New World* (1996).^{xvi} As Westling notes with reference to the work of Donna Haraway, this association has also had implications for

the perception and treatment of indigenous peoples (Westling 1996, 151). Here, ecofeminist and postcolonial concerns intersect.^{xvii}

Another aspect of the exploration of interconnections between nature, gender, 'race', and class, also exemplified by Westling's work, is the consideration of the extent to which those who stand in a different relation to nature from elite males on account of their occupation, social position or cultural traditions might have valuable alternative understandings of the nature-culture complex. This consideration drives much ecocritical work focusing on environmental literature by women, Afro-American, Indian and Chicano authors. None of these heterogeneous groups, it should be emphasised, constitutes a locus of pure difference: all live, to a greater or lesser extent, in more than one world, participating in some aspects of the dominant culture, while nonetheless also having access to certain alternative understandings and practices. Some recent writers perceive this inhabitation of multiple traditions as at once alienating and liberating. One such writer is Gloria Anzaldua, a 'border woman', who, as she puts it in the Preface to her autobiographical work, *Borderlands/La Frontera* 'grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory)' (1985, Preface). As a lesbian ecofeminist Chicana, Anzaldua is further distanced from the patriarchal and heterosexist elements of the various traditions she inherits. On the other hand, she is also able to draw inspiration from some other aspects of these traditions. Thus, for example, Anzaldua reappropriates the Toltec Indian earth goddess, Coatlicue, as a model of female divinity and divine immanence, while simultaneously embracing Western discourses of personal and collective self-determination. Hybridity is also manifest in *Borderlands* on the level of the written language Anzaldua uses, which shifts continuously between English, Tex-Mex, northern Mexican dialect, Castilian Spanish and Nahuatl. From an ecocritical perspective, what is particularly valuable in Anzaldua's work is her interrogation of the patriarchal, capitalist and racist values that have contributed to the ecological destruction of the Rio Grande Valley and the impoverishment of its inhabitants. As Terrell Dixon observes: 'By voicing the damage that the dominant culture visits on those whom it marginalizes', Chicano and Chicana writing such as Anzaldua's, 'resists those national narratives that privilege metastasizing suburbs and environmentally debilitating consumption, and it emphasizes the lack of environmental justice in them' (1994, 1094). Dixon is among those ecocritics who believe that it is now necessary to turn our ecocritical attention 'from wide open spaces to metropolitan spaces' (Bennett 2001).^{xviii} If, as is widely anticipated, ever more people come to live in cities in the new millennium, social ecocriticism with an urban focus is also likely to be a growth area in the years to come.

Regrounding Language

Although, as we have seen, ecocriticism often incorporates questions of social justice, it nonetheless differs from other forms of political critique in one important respect: namely, as a form of advocacy for an other, which is felt to be unable to speak for itself. If, as Gayatri Spivak (1988) has argued, the human subaltern cannot always be heard without the mediation of more privileged supporters, how much more so is this true of the subordinated non-human? This is not to say, however, that nature is entirely silent. Nor,

despite all our best efforts at domination, is it truly subordinate (as we are forcefully reminded by every earthquake, volcanic eruption, passing comet, and the sheer unpredictability of the weather). The perception that nature has indeed been enslaved is perhaps most readily arrived at by people inhabiting relatively gentle regions with the benefit of air-conditioning, electricity and clean water on tap. Similarly, the view that nature is silent might well say more about our refusal to hear than about nature's inability to communicate. Certainly, this view is not shared within animistic cultures, where, as Christopher Manes observes, human language takes its place alongside, and in communication with, 'the language of birds, the wind, earthworms, wolves, and waterfalls – a world of autonomous speakers whose interests (especially for hunter-gatherer peoples) one ignores at one's peril' (Manes 1996, 15). In a very different discourse and context, contemporary biologists also testify to the abundance of signifying systems in the natural world. These range from the biological information system of the genetic code itself, through the largely involuntary production of a huge variety of indexical signs by all species of plants and animals, to the possibly intentional deployment of apparently conventional signs by many birds and mammals. More generally, whole ecosystems might be said to be sustained by complex networks of communication and exchange between species and non-biological elements of their environment. As Robert S. Corrington has observed, 'The human process actualises semiotic processes that it did not make and that it did not shape. Our cultural codes, no matter how sophisticated and multi-valued, are what they are by riding on the back of this self-recording nature.' (Corrington 1994, ix)

If, for us, nature has nonetheless fallen silent, this is perhaps because we inhabit an increasingly humanised world as heirs to a cultural tradition, within which 'the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative' (Manes 1996, 15). This tendency to restrict language to the human sphere might be related to the rise of literacy, whereby language becomes tied to the exclusively human practice of writing. A further shift occurs with the invention of alphabetical writing, when the textual signifier loses all iconic connection to the signified. David Abram has argued that it is above all at this moment that human language and culture appears to emancipate itself from the natural world (Abram 1996, 102). This liberation is nonetheless to a large extent illusory. Not only is our capacity to speak, write and create culture predicated upon the vastly more ancient and complex signifying systems of non-human nature. The particular languages that we use to communicate in speech and writing themselves bear the trace of the natural environments in which they evolved. 'Language', as Gary Snyder puts it, 'goes two ways' (Snyder 1995, 174). This can most readily be seen on the level of lexicon. Take, for example, the many words for 'snow' in Inuit languages. This is often cited by semioticians as exemplifying the way language shapes perception. To the ecocritic, however, it also exemplifies the way in which language is shaped by environment. For these verbal distinctions would not have been created in the first place, if the well-being and possibly survival of the speakers did not depend upon their ability to recognise the corresponding differences in their snowy environment. Thus, although the relationship between spoken and written signifiers and their signifieds might be arbitrary, the distinctions that they signify are not, or at least, not entirely. Nor is the relationship between signifier and signified always arbitrary, as we are reminded by the existence of many onomatopoeic words in most, if not all, natural

languages. Some writing systems, too, are mimetic of the world to which refer through the use of pictographic elements. As Abram points out, even the alphabet, in its original Hebrew form, manifested residually iconic elements, and required the participation of the embodied subject in order for its vowels to be formed through the breath of speech (Abram 1996, 240-3). Many uses of language also manifest a two-way movement between world and word. In the oral traditions of indigenous peoples, for example, the world created verbally through story, song and ritual, comprises a mnemonic of the physical world in which the speaking community dwells, encoding important messages about how to survive in the land with respect for its wider animal, vegetable, mineral and spiritual community (Abram 1996, 154-79).^{xix} Arguably, even the most highly intertextual and imaginative works of modern science fiction ultimately derive their imagery from terrestrial experience of a more-than-human world. Thus, as Jim Cheney puts it, if it's 'language all the way down,' then it is also 'world all the way up' (Cheney 1994, 171).

Jonathan Bate develops a further argument that a specifically literary use of language can reconnect us to the natural world in the final chapter of *The Song of the Earth*. Taking his cue from Heidegger, Bate privileges metrical writing, which, he suggests, 'answers to nature's own rhythms' (Bate 2000, 76). In a world where nature has been reduced to what Heidegger, in his 'Essay Concerning Technology' (1953) terms 'standing reserve,' poetry becomes all the more important in recalling and sustaining a non-instrumental relationship to the world. Poetry, in this view, does not name things in order to make them available for use, but rather in order to disclose their being in language (Bate 2000, 258). Poetry thus becomes a 'refuge for nature, for the letting be of Being' (Bate 2000, 264). It does not necessarily do this by explicitly defending nature's 'rights.' The best ecopoetry, in Bate's view, is not overtly political, let alone propagandistic. Rather, poetry becomes 'ecopoietic' simply (or not so simply) through its disclosure within the realm of *logos* of the earth as our *oikos*, or dwelling place. It is in this sense that poetry might be said to be 'the place where we save the earth' (Bate 2000, 283).

Yet, there remains a certain tension between *logos* and *oikos*, the world of the word and the earth which sustains it, but from which it also departs. The poet *qua* poet, as Bate observes, dwells in the *logos*, rather than in any earthly place (Bate 2000, 149). Following Heidegger, Bate seeks to protect the *logos* of poetry from the machinations of technological reason. Poetic 'presencing,' which discloses nature without 'challenging' it, is said to be opposed to technological 'enframing,' which makes 'everything part of a system, thus obliterating the unconcealed being-there of particular things' (Bate 2000, 255). According to Hegel, however, this is precisely what we do whenever we use language. The particularity of the thing, as he rather drastically puts it in the *Jena System Programme* of 1803/04, is 'annihilated' whenever we subsume it under a designation, the signifying capacity of which is determined by a logic not its own, namely that of the linguistic system (Hegel 1975, 20). From this perspective, language is itself a system of enframing. Moreover, the specifically poetic use of language to speak of nature is not always innocent of instrumentalising tendencies, especially if it is oriented primarily towards the elevation of the human soul. This does not mean that we should abandon poetry. But it does mean that we need to be cautious about what we can expect of literary language. Bate himself expresses an important reservation in acknowledging that what is

disclosed in poetry is not Being in its fullness, nor even the singular being of particular entities, but only the trace of an experience, which is itself evanescent and always already conditioned to some extent by cultural constructs (Bate 2000, 281).

While it is important to relocate human language within the wider signifying systems of the more-than-human natural world, it is also necessary to recall that there is more to this world than can ever be disclosed within the frame of human language. We fall back into hubris if we follow Heidegger in claiming that, 'only the word grants being to a thing' (Heidegger 1979, 164; my trans.). Other entities in the natural world have their own systems of signification and can get along quite happily without the imposition of human designations. It is rather we who need language, and our own merely human language at that, in order to share understandings about the world as we see it. More specifically, as our world becomes ever more ecologically impoverished and technologically manipulated, we need writers and artists who can draw our attention to the beauty, complexity and potential fragility of the earth, mediating the 'voices' of nonhuman others, whose being and meaning we can never fully comprehend, and, perhaps, inviting us to join in their heteroglossic song.^{xx} From this perspective, we need a practice of reading which, in recalling the absence rather than the presence of that which is named in the text, inspires us, in Yves Bonnefoy's words, to 'lift our eyes from the page' (1990). 'It is not within the poet's scope to reestablish presence,' Bonnefoy argues, but he or she 'can recall that presence is a possible experience, and he can stir up the need for it, keep open the path that leads to it' (Bonnefoy 1990, 801). With reference to a sonnet by Mallarmé, Bonnefoy asks: 'How can we read about "forgotten woods" over which "somber winter" passes without going into woods that are our own, where we can either find or lose ourselves?' (Bonnefoy 1990, 806) To this we might add, if the natural world around us is endangered, how can we read a poetic evocation of another's experience of it, without wanting to restore it as a possible locus of our own experience, since the poem itself cannot do so? Read in this way, ecopoetry may well become a factor in our efforts to 'save the earth,' not only through our creative and critical writing, but perhaps in more directly political and practical ways as well.

Notes towards a reading of Wordsworth's *Home at Grasmere*

Wordsworth's paean to his Lakeland dwelling-place was to be the first part of the first book of a long philosophical poem entitled *The Recluse*, of which *The Prelude* was the introduction. To his great regret, Wordsworth never completed *The Recluse*, and although his major autobiographical poem *The Prelude* was published posthumously in 1850, *Home at Grasmere* only reached the public gaze in 1888, in a 'thin green volume of fifty-six pages bearing no editor's name' (Darlington 1977, 32). Most critics were initially unenthusiastic about this new addition to Wordsworth's by now increasingly popular and highly regarded published works.^{xxi} Subsequently, however, *Home at Grasmere* has come to be seen as standing 'securely on its own as Wordsworth's triumphant manifesto,' as Beth Darlington affirms in introducing her edition of the work (Darlington 1977, 32). From a contemporary ecocritical perspective, moreover, the choice of green for the cover of the first edition appears inspired. For, as Karl Kroeber recognised back in 1974, this is an exemplary work of ecopoetry.^{xxii}

Until 1888, 'Home at Grasmere' existed in two main versions, one completed in 1806 (Ms. B) and the other in 1832 (Ms. D), in the form of two closely written, homemade notebooks without covers.^{xxiii} In view of Wordsworth's sparing use of writing materials and the frugality of his household as a whole, the ecological cost of the initial production of this text (if not its subsequent publication, republication and distribution) appears to have been slight.^{xxiv} What qualifies *Home at Grasmere* as a work of environmental literature is nonetheless to be found primarily on the semantic level of the text, whereby Wordsworth explicitly remembers and indeed honours the wider ecological conditions of possibility for his work. The nonhuman environment certainly figures here as far more than a framing device for the exploration of narrowly human concerns. For the primary purpose of this poem is to render an account of how Wordsworth's life as a poet was enabled by the rural 'retreat' (147), 'this small Abiding-place of many Men' (146), 'the calmest, fairest spot of earth' (73), which he had made his home. Grasmere is nonetheless not presented as a place of delight for the poet (and other human inhabitants) alone. It is celebrated rather as a place where all manner of life, human and otherwise, might flourish; a place, which seems even to take pleasure in itself:

Dear Valley, having in thy face a smile
Though peaceful, full of gladness. Thou art pleased,
Pleased with thy crags and woody steeps, thy Lake,
Its one green Island and its winding shores,
The multitude of little rocky hills,
Thy Church and Cottages of mountain stone –
(116-21)

As Wordsworth's reference to the church and cottages reminds us, by the time the poet and his sister Dorothy moved to Grasmere in 1800, the Lake District had long been a cultural landscape, shaped by thousands of years of human habitation. Its potentially treacherous mountain peaks, wooded hillsides, fast flowing streams and deep lakes were nonetheless perceived by Wordsworth and his contemporaries as retaining something of the wild. Whereas other parts of northern England were caught in the first throes of industrialisation, the Lake District was still overwhelmingly rural. Here, as elsewhere in Britain, the enclosure of formerly common land and the shift to a somewhat more intensive and commercialised form of agriculture were beginning to have an impact on the farming community. Among the 'untutored Shepherds' (428) who tended their small flocks on the hills and dales around Grasmere, Wordsworth could nonetheless still find evidence of a way of life and mode of relationship to the land, that he knew to be endangered. It is perhaps in part precisely in the face of the changes that were underway elsewhere, and soon to encroach here too, that Wordsworth constructs Grasmere as a 'shelter' (113) and 'last retreat' (147). What Wordsworth appears to value especially about Grasmere, beyond his enjoyment of its lake, wooded hills, green vales and craggy peaks, is the extent to which it embodies the possibility of a reciprocal relationship between humanity and the earth. The 'Cottages of mountain stone' exemplify this reciprocity in that they signal an ethos of respect for that which is given by nature. The local culture of Grasmere is thus seen as having arisen from a process of accommodation to

the natural environment of this particular bioregion, which had in turn been moulded by millenia of human habitation.

Wordsworth's Grasmere, however, is no pastoral idyll such as that projected by the idealising poets of the Augustan age.^{xxv} Although his first experience of the place as a 'roving School-boy' (2), recalled in the third person in the opening stanzas, was positively blissful, nature was not always kind here, as he and Dorothy discovered when they first moved to Grasmere in the middle of an especially harsh winter.^{xxvi} Wordsworth's Lakelanders are no 'noble savages' either: 'ribaldry, impiety, or wrath' (344) are not unknown to them, and their lives are shown to be often hard, fraught with personal suffering and economic hardship. This is nonetheless in Wordsworth's assessment still a place where most people can live in relative freedom and modest self-sufficiency,^{xxvii} as well as in 'true Community, a genuine frame/Of many into one incorporate' (615-6). Significantly, this is represented as an open community, welcoming strangers, such as Wordsworth himself, 'come from whereso'er you will' (148). It is, moreover, a more than human community, comprising 'a multitude/Human and brute, possessors undisturbed of this Recess, their legislative Hall,/Their Temple, and their glorious Dwelling-place' (621-4). Among the denizens of this wider community, Wordsworth focuses especially on the wild birds that frequent the shores of the lake and dwell in the woods and mountains. Within his more immediate community, he also recalls individual domestic animals, such as 'the small grey horse that bears/The paralytic Man' (505-6) and 'The famous Sheep-dog, first in all the Vale' (510). Moreover, Wordsworth emphasises that he and his 'happy Band' (663) of family and friends were not alone in their affection for the more than human dimensions of their dwelling place. Although he acknowledges that the local farming community had a more practical relationship to the land than his own household, whose source of income came from elsewhere, he nonetheless insists that 'not a tree/Sprinkles these little pastures, but the same /Hath furnished matter for a thought, perchance/For some one serves as a friend' (441-4).

Wordsworth was himself something of a 'reinhabitant,' seeking to develop a sense of belonging in a world that was increasingly characterised by dislocation and alienation.^{xxviii} Among the rural inhabitants of Grasmere he nonetheless encountered an older sense of place, incorporating an appreciation of the land as something far more than resource and commodity. Here, the land was still a storied place, traversed by pathways both literal and figurative, and studded with sites of narrative significance; here, the land could still be experienced as a 'nourishing terrain,' sustaining its inhabitants both physically and spiritually.^{xxix} Grasmere was thus in Wordsworth's assessment a 'holy place' (277), where it was still possible to live in wholeness: in relationship, that is, with ones fellow men and women, with a richly varied natural world, and with the divine.

Home at Grasmere concludes with Wordsworth's famous poetic mission statement, which was published separately in 1850 as a 'Prospectus' to *The Prelude*. Here he proclaims that his great poetic work was to be a 'spousal verse,' celebrating the marriage, 'in love and holy passion' of 'the discerning intellect of Man' with 'this goodly universe' (805-10). In this context, the significance of *Home at Grasmere* lies perhaps in its demonstration of how the 'marriage' of the human mind and the more than human natural world needs to emerge from an embodied experience in and of place. This poem is thus itself a 'spousal verse,' celebrating the marriage of the poet with the place that

modelled for him the partnership of humanity and nature, of which he proposed to write in his work.

It is tempting to conclude here. And yet, there remains a problem which no contemporary ecocritical reading of this poem should overlook. Namely, the extent to which taking refuge in 'Grasmere,' as it is recalled by Wordsworth in this poem, is for us, if not necessarily for him, to retreat from the pressing issues of the contemporary world in nostalgic reminiscence of a world that we have lost; one that perhaps never even existed in quite the way that it is represented here. Ironically, Grasmere has itself in the meantime been transformed, not least by the growth of tourism, inspired in part by such a nostalgic urge and fuelled, ironically, by Wordsworth's own work.^{xxx} Wordsworth himself nonetheless also provides an indication of how such unproductive nostalgia might be avoided: namely, when he calls upon his readers to attend to and value what is good in earthly existence, here and now, 'Dismissing therefore all Arcadian dreams/All golden fancies of the Golden Age,/The bright array of shadowy thoughts from times/That were before all time, or are to be/Ere time expire' (625-9). If, for contemporary readers, most of whom live under the 'black sky' (603) of the city, 'by the vast Meptropolis immured' (597), Wordsworth's *Home at Grasmere* has itself become an Arcadian dream, then we must endeavour to read it differently: not as a lost idyll, but as embodying an ethos of ecosocial relationship that is more relevant today than ever. *Home at Grasmere* cannot return us to Wordsworth's world. Read ecocritically, it might nonetheless inspire us in the 'greening' of those many and varied places, however urban, where we actually live today, and where we might yet learn to dwell equitably and sustainably in the future.

Further Questions

1. With reference to Buell's third criterion for environmental writing, consider to what extent and how *Home at Grasmere* incorporates an ethos of accountability to the natural environment.
2. With reference to Buell's fourth criterion, consider to what extent the environment is represented as a process, rather than a constant, in this text.
3. The metaphor of the 'marriage' of mind and nature that Wordsworth invokes here was also used by Francis Bacon as a model for science and technology. How does Wordsworth's conception of this 'marriage' differ from Bacon's? Does it seem to be any less patriarchal?
4. What role do class and gender play in Wordsworth's representation of Grasmere?
5. In the final section of *Home at Grasmere* that became the Prospectus to *The Prelude*, Wordsworth affirms the superiority of natural beauty, 'a living Presence of the earth,' over artifacts made by humans (795-8). *The Prelude*, however, concludes with the assertion that 'the mind of man becomes/A thousand times more beautiful than the earth' (Wordsworth 1971, lines 446-8).^{xxxi} How would you account for the apparent contradiction between these two statements?
6. In what ways do you think that your response to *Home at Grasmere* is influenced by the ecological and social context in which you yourself live, the place(s) in which you are (or are not) 'at home'?

ⁱ Shelley's participation in this 'revolution in taste' is explored by Timothy Morton (1994).

ⁱⁱ See also Kerridge 1998a, 1-4 and 1998b.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ See in particular Meeker 1972, Kolodny 1975, and Rueckert 1996. Originally published in 1978, Rueckert's article includes the coinage 'ecocriticism'.
- ^{iv} See e.g. the 'Special Forum on Literatures of the Environment' in *PMLA* 114/5 (October 1999).
- ^v On the relationship between poststructuralism and ecophilosophy, see Soper 1995. The first ecocritic to seek a point of connection between poststructuralism and Deep Ecology was SueEllen Campbell in an article from 1989 (Campbell 1996). See also Cheney 1995.
- ^{vi} The following edited collections give a sense of the scope and diversity of contemporary ecocritical work: Glotfelty and Fromm 1996, Kerridge and Sammells 1998, Branch *et al.* 1998, Armbruster and Wallace 2000 and Coupe 2000.
- ^{vii} In his *Novum Organum*, for example, Bacon proposed that through the arts and sciences, humanity could 'recover that right over nature which belongs to it by divine bequest,' and should endeavour 'to establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race itself over the [entire] earth.' Bacon 1870, 114-5.
- ^{viii} In addition to Merchant 1980, see also the earlier studies of Leiss 1972 and Easlea 1973.
- ^{ix} In 1995 Scott Slovic also took over from Patrick Murphy as the editor of the main ecocriticism journal, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE)*.
- ^x The term "heteroglossia" was used by the Russian literary theorist Bakhtin to describe the many voices that vie with one another in the form of the novel, and, more generally, the inevitably contextual and intertextual nature of meaning (Bakhtin 1981, 259-422, and 428). See also Murphy 1995, for an ecofeminist deployment of Bakhtinian dialogics.
- ^{xi} See e.g. McGann 1983 and Liu 1989, and Bate's critique of the New Historicist take on Wordsworth (Bate 1991, 1-6).
- ^{xii} It should also be noted that a segment from William's chapter on romanticism from *The Country and the City* is included in Laurence Coupe's *Green Studies Reader* (2000, 50-8).
- ^{xiii} For an extended ecocritical treatment of Blake, see Lussier 1999.
- ^{xiv} E.g. Marshall (1994) devotes three chapters to romanticism in his history of environmental thought. On romantic natural history, see also Ashton Nichols (1997) and my own article on Goethean science (Rigby, 2000).
- ^{xv} On ecofeminist philosophy, see e.g. Plumwood 1993. For a historical perspective, see Merchant 1980 and 1989. On ecofeminist social and political theory, see Mies and Shiva 1993, Mellor 1997 and Salleh 1997.
- ^{xvi} On feminist ecocriticism, see also Murphy 1995 and Gaard and Murphy 1998.
- ^{xvii} See also Merchant 1995.
- ^{xviii} See also Bennett and Teague (1999) and Dixon (2001).
- ^{xix} Abram's ecophilosophy is based, in part, on his reading of the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, whose work is of considerable interest to ecocritics because of his emphasis on corporeality and the 'flesh of the world.' See Merleau-Ponty (1962). For an ecocritical deployment of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, see e.g. Scigaj 1999.
- ^{xx} An eco-poetics of 'joining in' rather than 'speaking for' has been proposed by David Rothenberg (2000), who is himself a musician who delights in playing along with the diverse and unpredictable sounds of the more-than-human world.
- ^{xxi} See Darlington 1977, 460-2. Darlington nonetheless praises the insight of one critic, William Minto, who in a review of 1889 ranks *Home at Grasmere* as among the finest of Wordsworth's works.
- ^{xxii} See also Bate 1991, 102-3.
- ^{xxiii} This discussion follows Ms. D in the Cornell edition (1977); references to the text are given according to line numbers.
- ^{xxiv} It should nonetheless be recalled that the material cost of production was also borne by Wordsworth's long-suffering wife Mary, who transcribed all of Ms. D and a substantial part of Ms. B. Wordsworth's devoted sister Dorothy also transcribed part of the latter, as did William himself.
- ^{xxv} Wordsworth differentiates his depictions of the Lake District from earlier pastoral writing in his allusion to, 'The idle breath of softest pipe attuned/To pastoral fancies' (406-6).
- ^{xxvi} It is very striking that Wordsworth follows his celebration of Grasmere as a place of 'Perfect Contentment, Unity entire' (151) with the sobering words, 'Bleak season was it, turbulent and bleak,/When hitherward we journeyed, side by side' (152-3). This first bleak winter is subsequently construed as a test of their resolve to settle there (182).
- ^{xxvii} Wordsworth reassures us that, 'Labour here preserves /His rosy face, a Servant only here/Of the fire-side or of the open field,/A Freeman, therefore sound and unimpaired;/That extreme penury is here

unknown./And cold and hunger's abject wretchedness./Mortal to body and the heaven-born mind; That they who want are not too great a weight/For those who can relieve.' (359-67) Marxist critics might rightly object that Wordsworth is glossing over the existence of certain forms of social domination and exploitation here. However, it would doubtless be a category error to expect a detailed sociological analysis from what is essentially a song of praise.

^{xxviii} On reinhabitation, see e.g. Elder 1985, 40-74.

^{xxix} I take this phrase from the title of anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose's book *Nourishing Terrains* (1996).

^{xxx} In addition to his many poetic works celebrating life in the Lake District, Wordsworth also wrote an extremely popular *Guide through to District of the Lakes* (1835; Bicknell, 1984). Wordsworth was nonetheless very concerned about the likely impact of mass tourism, which he feared would be encouraged by the projected construction of a railway linking the Lake District to the growing urban centre of Liverpool. See his letters to the *Morning Post* (1844) in Bicknell 1984, 185-98. For an ecocritical discussion of the *Guide* and Wordsworth's objections to the railway, see Bate 1991, 41-52.

^{xxxi} This quote comes from the version of 1805-6 (Wordsworth 1971).

Annotated Bibliography

Bate, Jonathan. *The Song of the Earth*. Cambridge, Mass.:Harvard University Press, 2000.

This important book by one of Britain's preeminent ecocritics constitutes a sustained reflection on the enduring value of written works of the creative imagination in an era of growing disconnection from, and devastation, of the earth. Beginning with a consideration of the present popularity of Austen and Hardy, Bate proceeds to engage ecocritically with a wide range of literary and philosophical texts, primarily in the romantic tradition, but including also Ovid and Shakespeare, as well as contemporary poets from Australia, America and the West Indies. Bate's hermeneutic is informed by social and environmental history, the sciences of evolutionary biology, ecology and 'chaos theory,' German critical theory and phenomenology. It is above all to Heidegger that he owes the lineaments of what he here terms '*ecopoesis*.' This is an eloquent and compelling call to attend to the 'song of the earth,' whilst not forgetting also the wrongs of history.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, Mass: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

This is probably the most significant work so far published on non-fictional nature writing, which remains a major focus of much ecocritical research, especially in the US. Although Buell's discussion centres on Thoreau's *Walden*, the importance of this book extends well beyond Thoreau scholarship. For in the process of rereading Thoreau, and Thoreau's contribution to the formation of American culture, from an ecological perspective, Buell provides some valuable theoretical and methodological pointers for 'green' literary studies more generally. As Buell notes, 'putting literature under the sign of the natural environment requires some major readjustments in the way serious late twentieth-century readers of literature are taught to read' (144). His book outlines some

of the new kinds of questions and approaches that are necessitated within literary studies by the search for more ecocentric ways of imagining our relationship to the earth.

Coupe, Lawrence (ed.). *The Green Studies Reader. From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

This is the second ecocriticism reader, and the first to be published in Britain. It is particularly valuable in that it embeds contemporary ecocritical research and reflection in a longer history of thinking about the relationship between nature and culture from romanticism through to the critique of modernity by twentieth-century writers and philosophers, such as D. H. Lawrence, Adorno and Horkheimer, and Heidegger. The second section on 'Green Theory' provides the basis for a more philosophically reflected ecocriticism by including work by critical theorists such as Kate Soper, Donna Haraway and Lyotard, while the final section provides a good range of examples of practical ecocriticism, including work on popular as well as canonical texts. Coupe's general introduction and introductions to each of the sections provide an excellent guide to the key questions motivating green theory and criticism today.

Glotfelty, Cheryl and Harold Fromm (eds). *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1996.

This is the first general reader in ecocriticism, and remains an excellent point of departure for newcomers to the field. Cheryl Glotfelty's introduction is invaluable in providing a background to the emergence of ecocriticism and an outline of its concerns. As well as including a range of essays from the late 1980s and early 1990s, Glotfelty and Fromm reprint a number of important earlier essays, such as those of Lynn White, William Rueckert, SueEllen Campbell and Joseph Meeker. Unlike Coupe's reader, this has a predominantly North American orientation, and includes contributions by the Native American writers Paula Gunn Allen and Leslie Marmon Silko.

Westling, Louise. *The Green Breast of the New World. Landscape, Gender and American Fiction*. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996

Building upon the work of Annette Kolodny, Westling's book makes a major contribution to the flourishing area of feminist ecocriticism. Although her focus, like Buell's, is North American, Westling addresses questions that are of central concern to feminist ecocriticism generally, above all in relation to the highly gendered nature of most cultural constructions of land. Westling follows Max Oelschlaeger (1991) in contextualising her readings of nineteenth and twentieth-century literature in a 'deep history' of changing understandings of nature from prehistoric times through to the present. Westling discusses in depth variations on the trope of land-as-woman in the work of women as well as men writers, focussing on the examples of Emerson, Thoreau, Willa Cather, Hemingway, Faulkner and Eudora Welty. In the final chapter, she also considers the work of Native American writer Louise Erdrich, arguing that if we are going to find

new ways of imagining our place on earth, we might need to look outside the dominant European American cultural traditions of the West.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City* (1973). London: Hogarth Press, 1985.

This highly nuanced study of the changing fortunes and perceptions of the countryside and the city by the preeminent British Marxist critic of the 1960s and 1970s is today widely valued as a precursor of ecocriticism. Inspired in part by his own experience of growing up in rural Wales and by his resultant dissatisfaction with the urbanist bias of much Marxist thought, Williams here seeks to recuperate the 'song of the land, the song of rural labour, the song of delight in the many forms of life with which we all share our physical world' (271) for a progressive left-green criticism and politics. His reevaluation of the 'green language' of Wordsworth and Clare in particular has provided ecocritics such as Bate with an invaluable point of departure for their own more explicitly ecological reconsideration of the legacy of romanticism.

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