From the editors

The response to the first issue was most gratifying, indicating that the newsletter provides a needed forum. We would like to thank everyone who wrote to encourage us in this venture and to offer their suggestions and help.

Starting in 1990, the Fall issues will be devoted to special topics. The topic for Fall 1990 is Ecocriticism. We welcome suggestions for future issues. Starting with the Spring 1990 issue, the Newsletter will include a column on Environmental Ethics by Joan Whitman Hoff, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Bentley College. The topic for Spring 1990 is the Alaska Oil Spill.

We are soliciting course descriptions, rationales, etc., for Classroom Notes. We would like contributions from people teaching environmental studies as well as courses in literary naturalism. Forward items of interest to: Thomas L. Stuckert, Findlay University, Findlay, OH 45840-3695.

We would like to hear from readers about their work. Please fill out the enclosed form to aid us in reporting the year's activities.

Several people have suggested that we might try to get together at the Modern Language Association (MLA) in Washington, DC. A good meeting point might be the College English Association Program on Nature Writing arranged by Betsy Hibbert—especially since Betsy is hoping that the discussion will continue beyond the formal session. The session is scheduled for Friday, December 29, 1989 at 3:30 p.m. in the Colorado Suite at the Sheraton.

Thank you, Alicia Nitecki and Cheryl Burgess

Review


The term "nature writing" refers not only to literary non-fiction about the natural world, but also to the examination of nature and its human significance in other literary genres, including fiction. Bert Bender's ambitious, loving (i.e., written without the usual academic dispassion) survey of the "tradition" of American fiction featuring sailors, ships, and the sea picks up where Thomas Philbrick's James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction (1961) left off. Philbrick's attention ranges from Philip Freneau to Herman Melville, but concentrates on Cooper's role in the genre's development, noting the latter's elevation of the "sea novel" to a literary form in which both the sea and sailing "become the symbolic ground for the dramatic conflict of ideas and attitudes having universal significance". Bender resoundingly agrees with this assessment of the genre, tracing the fruitful pairing of meditation and water from Moby-Dick (1851) to Peter Matthiessen's Far Tortugas (1975); however, he rejects Philbrick's claim that the inland frontier came to supersede the influence of the sea on American literature after 1805. In arguing that Moby-Dick merely signaled a new phase in American sea fiction, not its extinction as a vital tradition, Bender echoes what Philbrick himself called the "heretical proposition" of Jeanne-Marie Santraud's La mer et le roman americain dans la premiere moitie du dix-neuvieme siecle (1972). According to Bender, Melville was "the first writer to give such profound emphasis to the sea itself," and in the etiological passages of his masterwork he demonstrated his particular interest in the

The American Nature Writing Newsletter is published twice a year and contains brief essays, book reviews, classroom notes, and disseminates information about activities relating to the study of writing on nature and the environment. Items of interest, including news about conferences, forthcoming publications, and work in progress are welcome. Copies are free.

Editor: Alicia Nitecki, Bentley College
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life forms and life processes of the sea; after Melville, "all writers in the tradition of American sea fiction... have been guided by biological thought, but from the cataclysmic new point of view that was created by the Origin of Species [1859]."

Melville's pre-Darwinian natural theology and relative unconcern for "nautical realism" distinguish him from his successors in the tradition, but he nonetheless anticipated the Darwinian revolution with his abundant images of "man immersed in the biological order of life" (Bender emphasizes the example of the chapter "A Squeeze of the Hand" from Moby-Dick with its suggestions of the shipsmates physically merging with each other and with the essence of the whale). The spread of Darwin's ideas brought with it a darker, less comforting vision of man's place in the universe than had been possible during Melville's theological phase; yet Bender finds that writers of sea fiction since Melville nearly always, at one time or another, demonstrate a Jamesian "will to believe" in their preservation of "the ideal brotherhood" despite "the reality of discord" necessitated by the Darwinian view of warring nature and the Spencerian idea of survival of the fittest. This faith in human brotherhood is most prominent in Melville and Crane (Chapter 5 is entitled "The Experience of Brotherhood in The Open Boat"). In his chapters on Hemingway, Hesse, and ten lesser known writers who marked the transition "from sail to steam" between 1860 and the early decades of this century, Bender notes the shared concern for nautical verisimilitude and, particularly, for the daily reality of the common sailor (many of these writers, like Bender himself to a certain extent, staked their evaluations of sea fiction on its rootedness in the actual experience of working sailors, reflection the sway of literary naturalism around the turn of the century). But these writers also have in common their attempt to "tie the essential biological struggle" —indeed, in extreme cases, to "the primal amoral-animalness of man," as Bender notes with regard to Jack London's character Wolf Larsen.

Despite asserting that Hemingway's belief in the eternal, inviolable pristineness of the sea appears dated in light of our current awareness of the earth's fragile ecology, Bender does allow that Hemingway glimpsed the unity, the interconnection, of this planet's many species. But what Hemingway "celebrated," according to Bender, was "the bloody biological brotherhood in which all life is joined," a union forged out of violent conflict rather than respect and ecological awareness. A more complete and respectful notion of pan-organic "brotherhood" (though still in the context of biological competition) emerges in the work of Peter Matthiessen, both in his sea fiction and in his works of nonfiction as Men's Lives (1986). Matthiessen goes so far in Far Tortuga as to create a common language—a mutual echoing of gyps and sights—which reveals "the primal kinship between these seamen and sea creatures, the hunters and the hunted." Yet even for Matthiessen the vision of man's relationship with the natural world is a dual one, half bright and half bleak: the fishermen in Far Tortuga (which Bender hyperbolically praises as "one of the greatest sea novels of all time, in any language") are "at home in raw element nature," but have been "stripped of human pretense" in the bargain.

Bender's book succeeds in its effort to trace the abiding patterns in American sea fiction. The repeated delineation of traditional elements in the works of the fifteen writers considered in Sea-Brothers (five of whom—Melville, Crane, London, Hemingway, and Matthiessen—receive at least an entire chapter's worth of attention form the critic) creates a sense that these writers have indeed participated in a genuine tradition, and a vital one at that. Sometimes, though, this must be written off as a pitfall of the project's impressive breadth, Bender's sketches of specific fictional characters and "minor" authors or texts come across as cursory, stilted, and even redundant. This occurs especially in the quick assessments of Melville's later tales, in the catalogues of transitional writers from Morgan Robertson to Archi Binnas, and in such "afterthought" chapters as "Hemingway's Sea Men" (in the latter case, perhaps it is the proceeding chapter, an intriguing but slender summary entitled "Hemingway: Coming to the Stream," that is wobbly on its own). Also, in his valid, eloquent, and yet occasionally shrill argument about the importance of these individual authors and their coherence as a "tradition," Bender tends to make sweeping, emotional judgments, some of which would be difficult to defend without providing more evidence and more sustained argumentation than he has room for in Sea-Brothers; one example is his concluding claim that Far Tortuga is "more purely a sea novel than any in our literature, a bold, beguiling notion which calls for explanation beyond what Bender offers in his lyrical final paragraph. In fairness, I should mention that the critic himself laments, in the last note of the book, the impossibility of fully "comprehending" Far Tortuga and "other great works in its tradition...in more essays such as this" and thus justifies his decision to limit himself to detecting the "most significant traditional elements". Despite its reasonableness, this approach often leaves the reader hungering for more. I do admire Bender's willingness to acknowledge and meditate on the various authors' apparent use of the fictional medium to represent their own "deeply emotional and mysterious experiences(s)" at sea. And Tony Angel's fifteen drawings, which explicitly illustrate day scenes in the fiction, hauntingly complement Bender's sympathetic commentary.

One final note: the conspicuously masculine title of this book is no accident. "Sea-Brothers" (a phrase coined in an 1849 letter from Melville to Richard Henry Dana, Jr.) refers not only to the communities of sailors (and eventually the communities of both seamen and sea creatures) presented in the fiction, but to the fraternity of sea writers. Bender notes that women became frequent passengers on ships in the late nineteenth century, and that female characters even played an obligatory role in the new wave of sea fiction which began in the 1890s; but women writers seem not to have contributed to the genre of sea fiction, at least not as Bender defines it. This may well result from the exclusion of women—even today—from seafaring occupations, such as fishing, commerce, and exploration; and I ultimately fault Bender not for omitting women writers from his book, but for
I have been teaching a course on the nature essay at Lehman College, CUNY, located in the Bronx, off and on for fifteen years. Over that time it has necessarily grown, changed, even mutated, but has maintained a constant focus: the interpenetration in one’s experience of nature of the external, physical world and the internal, psychological/emotional one.

In its most recent shape (Spring 1987), it bore the title "Nature and the American Land." The course explored a variety of attitudes towards nature and land in fiction, poetry, the essay, and the students’ own experiences and writing. The aim was to enable students to see how their (and others’) preconceptions affected the way they saw the natural world, experienced it, and wrote about it. The question under which we worked was, simply, "How much of IT is IT?"

Students were required to keep a journal of one place in nature which they could return to all semester. Their final task was to write an essay based on their observations: the model, of course, was that of any experienced essayist of any subject. Throughout the term students were asked to allow me and their classmates to share the journal entries and let our discussions shape their vision.

Field trips to parks in and around New York helped the class gel and provided students with "hands-on" (eyes-on?) experiences. And a trip to the New York Historical Society to view their holdings of Audubon paintings and the work of the Hudson River painters afforded a visual dimension of a world in which practical (conventional attitudes) influence seeing, thinking, and writing. This stage can be replaced with slide shows if museums are not available.

We read the following works that Spring: Edward Abbey, Desert Solitaire; Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek; Loren Eiseley, The Immense Journey; Ernest Hemingway, The Old Man and the Sea; Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac; John McPhee, The Pine Barrens; and Henry D. Thoreau, Walden. These texts were supplemented by articles on various ecological issues which happily (or unhappily, as the case may be) kept appearing in the New York Times.

The course began, I should say, with my collecting several lists of twenty-five words or phrases from the students on what came immediately to mind when I mentioned "nature," "America," "land." These were a storehouse of preconceptions which I refused to let the class see until the end of the term. When we finally did explore them, the students’ "re-discovered" old mental maps and were able to compare them to their newer, more "geodesic" understanding of the "landscape.

Our guiding light throughout the term was Gary Snyder’s "Smokey the Bear Sutra." Whether my students won "HIGHEST PERFECT ENLIGHTENMENT" in three months I wouldn’t hazard a guess. I hope, however, that they started (or continued) along the way to learn Smokey the Bear’s mantra: "I dedicate myself to the universal diamond/Be this raging fury destroyed!"

Jack Kilgorman, Lehman College, CUNY

Joseph W. Meeker, a Tribute

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately," proclaimed Thoreau in "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For." To live deliberately seems to be the binding force that unifies Joseph Meeker’s migratory perceptiveness, many publications, and manifold publications. A modern day, rustic, renaissance man, Meeker is a human ecologist with a Ph.D. in comparative literature, and postdoctoral studies in wildlife ecology and ethnology. He has lived in Alaska, California, Oregon, and Washington, and has held positions ranging from assistant professor of languages and literature, to chair of an English department, to fellow in comparative literature, to professor of environmental studies, to interdisciplinary professor, to visiting professor of ethics—all of the above at different institutions—to director of The Strong Center for Environmental Values in Berkeley, to chair of the doctoral studies program in New Natural Philosophy at International College, Los Angeles, to director of Graduate Studies in Whole Systems Design, Antioch University, Seattle. He has been a technical editor and writer, a seasonal ranger, a radio announcer, a narrator for educational films, executive producer and host of a weekly 30-minute national radio series, "Minding the Earth." At the time of this writing, he is in Alaska, helping to plan a major conference on the Exxon oil spill.

Meeker’s prodigious publications list extends for six volumes, including two books, one essay, one set of books, and one book of essays for academic journals. In addition to The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology, reviewed below, he has written an introductory text on ecology (Spheres of Life), a multi-media self-study course entitled Ancient Roots of the Modern World, a series of three volumes under the title Modern Consciousness, and a collection of meditative essays on humanity’s place in nature (Minding the Earth). Appearing frequently in North American Review, his journal articles tend to be interdisciplinary in conception, exploring connections among science, philosophy, and art, between ecology and aesthetics.

What is the thread of deliberation that knits together the diverse strands of Meeker’s tapestry? He shared with me the following answer: "Somewhere near the center of what most of my writing is about is an attempt to change percep-
tions about the natural environment. My work doesn't touch politics much, or activism, or causes, or dangers, or strategies. Rather, I think the quickest way to change things is to find a new way of seeing and feeling our relationships to one another and to all other creatures. Those are the doors I try to open when I write.

Although Meeker's work has not gone unnoticed—he was an invited observer at the 1973 Nobel Prize ceremonies and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1974—his most interesting book from the standpoint of literary studies is rarely cited and deserves special mention. As its title suggests, The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology (Foreword by Konrad Lorenz. New York: Scribner's, 1972, 217 pp.; rpt. Los Angeles: Guild of Tutors Press, 1980.) considers the interrelationship of literature and ecology. Postulating that "human culture and environmental crisis are intimately and causally interrelated" and that "life imitates art at least as much as art imitates life," the book evaluates several literary genres on the basis of whether or not the modes of human behavior and systems of human values they identify are consistent with a diverse and stable natural ecology and with the goal of global survival. Tragedy, for example, is found to be a maladaptive pattern of human behavior in that it rests upon a philosophy which elevates humanity above nature and values the individual over the community. Comedy, in contrast, earns a high ecological rating for its endorsement of diversity, accommodation and reconciliation. Similarly, the pastoral tradition with its escapist longings is an ecologically less wise survival strategy than the picareseque with its premium on adaptation. A chapter on ecological aesthetics addresses such topics as the biology of beauty, and time as a bioesthetic structure. A product of the seventies, The Comedy of Survival is a cache of original ideas and profound insight, quietly waiting to be rediscovered in the 1980s. And Meeker himself, with his brimming creativity answering to his unity of vision, inspires both gratitude and emulation.

Cheryl Burgess, Cornell University

JOSEPH W. MEEKER

PUBLICATIONS

Books


3. Ancient Roots of the Modern World, a multi-media self-study course on ancient origins of modern ideas. Twenty-seven 30-minute videotapes, twenty-seven radio broadcasts, and 1,000 pages of illustrated text published by Athabasca University, 1974-75.

   Vol. 1 Amity (1976)
   Vol. 2 Hope and Expectations (1977)
   Vol. 3 Habits and Hang-ups (1978)


6. The Epistles of Joseph (work in progress)

Contributions to Books


the Earth: Toward a New Natural Philosophy."

11. Delivery of Services to Families, New York, Universi-
Age and the Nuclear Family."

12. The Human/Whale Connection, Washington, Inter-
national Whaling Commission, 1982. Chapter by J. Meeker,
"Cetaceans and the Hunting Ethic."

13. Modernization: The Humanist Response to its
Promise and Problems, Washington, Paragon House Press,
1982. Chapter 3 by J. Meeker, "Fields of Danger and the
Wilderness of Wisdom."

14. Dynamic Relationships: The Human-Animal Bond,
J. Meeker, "Who Needs Animals?" Reprinted as The Loving

15. Winterburning, poems by Patricia Monaghan, Fair-
Meeker.

16. Wolf, poems by Edgar Carter, Lewiston, NY, Edwin

Journal Articles

Nebraska Academy of Sciences, April 1969.

2. "Notes Toward an Ecological Esthetic," Canadian Fic-


Vol. 257, No.3, Fall 1972.

5. "The Only Witness" (co-author Todd Newberry),

6. "The Humanities and the Environment" (editorial)

7. "Academic Fields and Other Polluted Environments,"
Journal of Environmental Education, Vol. 4, No. 3, Spring


9. "Prologue to an Environmental Ethic," North

10. "Red, White and Black in the National Parks," North

11. "Mother Earth and Women's Lib," Journal of En-

12. Newspaper series on World Ecology, published in
Edmonton Journal, Fall 1973, and collected as Spheres of
Life (Scribner's, 1975). This series was reprinted in twelve
Canadian newspapers during 1974-75:

1. "The Spheres of Life"
2. "The Lichens re".
3. "The Hydropore".
4. "The Atmosphere".
5. "The Biosphere: Plant Life".
7. "The Noosphere".
8. "Paths of Energy".
9. "Populations".
10. "Evolution".
12. "Environmental Ethics".

Facing Humanity, Hanford: Batelle Memorial Institute,
1974.

Humanities Forum, August 1975.

15. "Science Serves Humanity: Humanity Returns the
The Advancement of Science, (London) Vol. 1, No. 1, Fall
1975.

Can Come Undecided and Learn to Live in the Wilderness,"
Reprinted in Not Man Apart, Fall 1975. Reprinted by Guild
Press, Los Angeles, Spring 1977.

17. "Genes and Clever Livers," North American Review,
Vol. 260, No. 3, Fall 1975.


19. "Northern Change in Perspective," The Northern
Engineer, Fall-Winter 1977.

20. "The Immanent Alliance: New Connections among
Art, Science and Technology," Technology and Culture,
April 1978. Also published by Alaska Humanities Forum,
Anchorage, Fall 1976.

21. "Dolphins Do: Dugongs Don't" in Proceedings of
U.N. Scientific Consultation on Mammals in the Seas, Ber-
gen, Norway, 1976.

22. "Field of Danger and the Wilderness of Wisdom,"
Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Unity
in the Sciences, San Francisco, 1977. Reprinted in North


Book Reviews


Book reviews in academic journals


American Women Nature Writers

A WORKING LIST

Betsy S. Hilbert, Miami-Dade Community College

A list of every American woman writer who has taken the natural world as her subject would be long and fascinating, but it would require energies far beyond the scope of this project. The books listed here form a substantial portion of that genre known as the nature book--a book which is generated from its author's direct experience with the natural world, which has that world as its primary subject, and which reports its understandings as nonfictional literature. This list does not, therefore, include such authors as Elizabeth Gemming, Maxine Kumin, or Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, the "local color" or regional writers who portrayed mainly village or rural life, nor does it include authors whose primary interest was in the history and people of a particular area, even though many works by those writers beautifully express the landscapes and ecologies of their settings. Also omitted here are works whose spirit is primarily scientific or
technical, or those intended as field manuals, such as Elna Baker's *An Island Called California*.

The writers listed here include amateur naturalists and professional scientists who worked from field observation and direct experience to describe and interpret the natural environment. These women left a heritage of understanding, an appreciation of the essential interrelationships between the human spirit and the natural environment, and a body of nonfictional literature that is unsurpassed in both craft and vision.

Works by an author are arranged in order of their original publication. Where possible, reprints have been noted.

**Austin, Mary**
  [Austin wrote over thirty books in addition to her essays, articles and poetry. Nearly all of her work emphasized her interest in the American West and in Native American life and art. The books listed above—particularly *Land of Little Rain*—best exemplify her work as a naturalist.]

**Back, Mary**
- *Bailey, Florence Augusta Merriam*
  [Writing under her married name, Bailey later produced extensive work in field guides and travel literature.]

**Carrighar, Sally**
  [Later made into a Walt Disney nature film.]

**Carson, Rachel**

**Caudle, Catherine**

**Cooper, Susan Fenimore**
  [Though *Rural Hours* is essentially a picture of village life, it is included here as an influential early work on nature by an American woman.]

**Cruickshank, Helen Gera**

**Cushman, Carol**

**Davis, Julie** [See the note under Douglas, Marjorie Stoneam.]

**DeSileu, Jan**

**Dillard, Annie**
  [Dillard's essays and poetry often deal with the theme of nature; Pilgrim reports direct observation of the natural world.]

**Doubleday, Natje Blanchan**
- *Bird Neighbors*. 1897.
- *Birds That Hunt and Are Hunted*. 1898.
- *How to Attract the Birds*. 1903.
  [Though the accuracy of Doubleday's observations has been called into question—one recent editor pointed out her probable capacity for fiction—her lavish, illustrated books made popular presentation copies of the period.]

**Douglas, Gilean**

**Douglas, Marjorie Stoneam**
  [The Everglades, which was highly influential in supporting conservation efforts in South Florida, was one of the Rinehart Rivers of America series. Other books in the series by women authors—not included separately in this list because they primarily discuss the history and people of the regions the rivers flow through—include Julia Davis' *The Shangandoah*, 1945; Anne B. Fisher's *The Salinas*, 1945; Cecile Hule Matsu'chael's *Suwannee River: Strange Green Land*, 1938; and Blair Niles' *The James*, 1939.]
Eiffert, Virginia S.  

Fisher, Anne B. [See note under Douglas, Marjory Stoneman.]

Flak, Erma J.  

Fuller, Margaret  
[More travel piece than natural history, with a discussion of women in the West. Thoreau's biographers have indicated this was one of the models for Walden.]  

Gantz, Charlotte Orr  

Goin, Olive Brown  

Griffin, Ina  

Hancock, Lyn  
[Hancock has written many books about Canada; Looking for the Wild is included here as a sensitive picture of American nature in the 1980's.]

Heckman, Hazel  
[Island in the Sound, 1967, is a delightful depiction of the human inhabitants of Anderson Island, the subject of Island Year.]

Holmgren, Virginia C.  

Hoover, Helen  

Hubbell, Sue  

Jakes, Florence Page  

[Previously published as The White Feather of the North]  


Johnson, Josephine  
[Johnson's other works are fiction and poetry, though much of her work deals with the theme of nature.]  

LaBarstille, Anne  


Lawrence, Loula de Kiriline  

Leister, Mary  


Matsch, Cecile Hulse. [See note under Douglas, Marjory Stoneman.]

Miller, Margaret  

Miller, Olive Thorne (Harriet Mann Miller)  
A Bird-Lover in the West. 1894; Arno, 1970.

[Miller's bird books were primarily intended for children, but she was a writer who never talked down to her audience, and the books are still well worth reading. Her other works include Birdways, In Nesting Time, The First Book of Birds, Upon the Time-top., and The Children's Book of Birds.]

Murie, Margaret E.  

Nice, Margaret Morse  
[A pioneer in behavioral research, Nice was one of the most important ornithologists of her day. Her autobiog-
Raphy Research Is a Passion with Me was published in 1979, five years after her death.

Niles, Blair [See note under Douglas, Marjory Stoneman. Niles also wrote extensively about Latin America and the Caribbean.]

Pepin, Yvonne

Pottingill, Eleanor Rice

Rich, Louise Dickinson

Riley, Laura
[The Guide is included here because it is to date Riley's only published book; her articles and photographs are worth noting.]

Ryden, Hope

Sanger, Marjorie Bartlett

Scheffer, Katharine

Schultz, Zella

Steele, Mary Q.

Stratton-Porter, Gene

[Reprints of chapters from Friends in Feathers and Homing with the Birds.]

Sutton, Ann
[Ann and Myron Sutton wrote the current Audubon Society nature guides.]

Teel, Mildred

Thaxter, Celia Leighton
Among the Isles of Shoals. 1873.

Vanstory, Burnette

Watts, May Theiligard
Reading the Landscape of America. New York: Macmillan, 1975. [originally published as Reading the Landscape in 1957.]

Wright, Mabel Osgood
The Friendship of Nature. 1894.
Citizen Bird, with Elliott Coues. 1897.
[Wright also produced a number of field guides.]

Zwinger, Ann
THE FOLLOWING ARE NOT WORKS OF NATURAL HISTORY, BUT ARE INTERESTING FOR THEIR EXPRESSIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN AND NATURE:

Griffin, Susan

Kolodny, Annette

Merchant, Carolyn

OTHER BOOKS WORTH NOTING:

Bird, Isabella
- A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains. New York: Putnam's, 1879-80; University of Oklahoma Press, 1969. [Though most of the works of the formidable British traveler Isabella Bird Bishop dealt with the Far East, her pictures of the landscapes of the Rockies are among the best works written about that time and place.]

Graber, Linda