



THE ENVIRONMENTAL  
TRADITION IN  
ENGLISH LITERATURE

JOHN PARHAM

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*For Isaac*

# The Environmental Tradition in English Literature

*Edited by*

JOHN PARHAM

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# Notes on Contributors

**Paul Davies** is Reader in English at the University of Ulster (Coleraine). He is author of *Romantic and Esoteric Tradition* (New York: Lindisfarne Books, 1998) and is currently writing a book on ecological theory in the humanities.

**Lisa Garforth** is a Graduate Researcher in the Department of Sociology at the University of York doing work on utopian and ecotopian narratives.

**Terry Gifford** is Reader in English at the University of Leeds. His many publications include *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) and *Pastoral* in Routledge's New Critical Idiom series (1999). He also edited *John Muir: The Eight Wilderness-Discovery Books* (London: Diadem, 1992) and wrote the conclusion to Michael Wheeler (ed.), *Ruskin and Environment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

**Naomi Guttman** is Assistant Professor of English at Hamilton College (USA) and a practising poet. Her publications include 'Rooms without Walls: Marge Piercy's Ecofeminist Garden Poetry', in *Proteus, A Journal of Ideas* (Fall, 1998); 'Studies in Caribbean and South American Literature: An Annotated Bibliography' (with Lucy Wilson) in *Callaloo* 15:1 (Winter, 1992); and the poetry collection *Reasons for Winter* (London, Ontario: Brick Books, 1991).

**Dominic Head** is a Reader in the School of English at the University of Central England. He has written books on the modernist short story, Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee. His other publications include 'Problems in Ecocriticism and the Novel', *Key Words: Journal of Cultural Materialism*, 1 (1998) and 'The (Im)Possibility of Ecocriticism', in Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (eds), *Writing The Environment* (London: Zed Books, 1998).

**Bennett Huffman** is Postgraduate Researcher and Tutor at the University of Liverpool, and has been a Lecturer of English at John Moores University, Liverpool. He is currently working on ecocriticism and the novels of Ken Kesey. He co-authored (with Kesey) the novel *Caverns* (New York: Penguin, 1990) and his other most recent publication is 'Twister: Ken Kesey's Multimedia Theatre', in *Modern Drama* (Spring, 2001).



**Andy Jurgis** is Development Officer in Liverpool for the WEA Cheshire, Merseyside, and West Lancashire District and tutors in literature. He also lectures in literature for the University of Liverpool Continuing Education Centre.

**Richard Kerridge** is Senior Lecturer in English at Bath Spa University College. He co-edited (with Neil Sammells) *Writing the Environment* (London: Zed Books, 1998), has written numerous articles on environmentalism, and received the BBC Wildlife Award for Nature Writing in both 1990 and 1991.

**Diane McColley** is Professor of English at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. She has written extensively on Milton including *Milton's Eve* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983) and *A Gust for Paradise: Milton's Eden and the Visual Arts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). She has also written several ecocritical articles including 'Ecology and Empire', in Balachandra Rajan and Elizabeth Sauer (eds), *Milton and the Imperial Vision* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999).

**Gavin Murray** is Director of Studies in Business Administration at the Canterbury Business School. His research interests include corporate strategy, learning and accountability in organizations, and individual and organizational development.

**John Parham** is a Lecturer at the London College of Music and Media which is part of Thames Valley University. He completed a doctoral thesis on 'Gerard Manley Hopkins and Ecocriticism' in 1998 at the University of East London and hosted the 'Writing the Environment' conference (also at East London) in 2000.

**Ralph Pite** is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Liverpool. He is completing a study of Thomas Hardy and the regional novel and has also published on Romanticism, Dante studies, and modern poetry as well as on ecocriticism.

**Jo Rawlinson** is a Graduate Researcher in the Department of English at the University of Central England.

**Gillian Rudd** is a Lecturer in English at the University of Liverpool. She is the author of *Managing Language in Piers Plowman* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1994) and has co-edited two collections on Charlotte Perkins Gilman. She has recently completed the Routledge *Complete Critical Guide to Chaucer*.

**Martin Ryle** is Senior Lecturer in Continuing Education at the University of Sussex. His books include *Ecology and Socialism* (London: Radius, 1987) and *Journeys in Ireland* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999).

**Charlotte Zoë Walker** is Professor of English and Women's Studies at the State University of New York, College at Oneonta. She has published essays on Virginia Woolf, Alice Walker, and Margaret Atwood, and is the editor of *Sharp Eyes: John Burroughs And American Nature Writing* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000) and *The Art Of Seeing Things: Essays By John Burroughs* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001). Her novel *Condor And Hummingbird* was published in England by the Women's Press.

**Louise Westling** is Professor of English and Environmental Studies at the University of Oregon and was President of ASLE in 1998. Her most recent book is *The Green Breast of the New World: Landscape, Gender, and American Fiction* (Athens, GA and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996). Her other publications include 'Virginia Woolf and the Flesh of the World' (*New Literary History*, 1999) and she has also written on Native American writers, Southern women writers and African-American autobiography.

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# Preface and Acknowledgements

The essays assembled in this collection are, by and large, the fruits of two conferences, the 1997 Literature and the Natural Environment Conference (University of Wales, Swansea) and the 1998 Culture and Environmentalism Conference (Bath Spa University College). It is worth acknowledging here the organizers of those conferences – Greg Garrard; and Richard Kerridge and Greg Garrard, respectively – for their efforts in providing fora which have helped in the move towards establishing ecocriticism in British literary studies.

Languishing in the apparent isolation of attempting to write a thesis on the ecological thinking of the Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, I had been unaware, until attending the Swansea conference, of the existence both of ecocriticism itself and of a community engaged in similar work. The impetus received then has resulted, just four years on, in this collection which, I believe, marks a further step forward in the process put in motion by the two conferences. *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature* is the first ecocritical collection to include a number of essays that reappraise the work of a variety of British literary figures. Furthermore, the book also offers a range of approaches to ecocritical work – philosophical, textual analytical, historical, theoretical, bibliographic – that are informed by perspectives made available from within that tradition (as Louise Westling indicates in the ‘Introduction’).

The hope for this collection is twofold: first, that we manage to indicate some parameters for a distinctively UK perspective on ecocriticism; second, that in doing so, we correct some prevailing misconceptions, in this country and elsewhere, about what ecocritical work entails. Possibly the first real public exposure that ecocriticism received in the UK came with Jennifer Wallace’s article ‘Swampy’s Smart Set’ that appeared in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* in July 1997. This was a somewhat mixed blessing in giving a platform to a certain degree of scepticism about the field, notably Marilyn Butler’s dismissive remark that ecocriticism was ‘old fashioned and nostalgic writing about nature under a new, trendy name’. As Louise Westling’s introduction makes clear, nature writing has been and still is a part of ecocritical work (though in some ways a problematic part). Yet what Butler’s comment ignores is the fact that perhaps the single, most important contribution a British perspective might offer, in a hitherto US-dominated field, is a cultural studies type of analysis which lets, for instance, critical theory, feminism, environmental justice, and policy concerns into ecocriticism, thereby moving it away from the pre-eminence of nature writing. Westling discusses

this further in the ‘Introduction’ that follows and most of the essays in this collection underline the point.

Inevitably, however, there remain areas still absent from the ecocritical body of work. These will need to be addressed elsewhere and in due course but are worth outlining as I do below. While there is, in this list, an element of ‘special pleading’, it remains important to keep reflecting on these, as pointers to future research and as a means to confront theoretical weaknesses in ecocritical work. A field of research that preaches, as Terry Gifford writes, a certain degree of ‘humility’ to our coexistent non-human nature ought to retain enough to reflect upon its own practices.

### **Interdisciplinarity**

In theory, interdisciplinarity should be a prerequisite when one considers the holistic claims made from within ‘ecological’ philosophy. In fact, certain disciplines – history, geography, and political philosophy (up to a point) – are adequately represented in ecocritical work. Yet others are largely absent and these include, for example, environmental science and media studies. The implications of these particular examples I discuss below.

### **Terminology**

Just about all ecocritical works that I have read fail to reflect upon their terms of reference. Words like ‘ecology’ and ‘environmentalism’ are used uncritically and often interchangeably, resulting in a certain theoretical vagueness once they venture beyond literary theory. To take, perhaps unfairly, one prominent example, Jonathan Bate’s *Romantic Ecology* is subtitled ‘Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition’. Yet these two terms (and related terms such as ‘conservation’), whether seen as scientific or as socio-political paradigms, have distinct meanings that signify distinct (that is, different) philosophies. Furthermore, writers in other disciplines have been rather more careful to unpick these differences – see, for example, Michael Allaby’s *Basics of Environmental Science* or, conversely, Andrew Dobson’s *Green Political Thought*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Allaby, *Basics of Environmental Science* (London: Routledge, 1996); Andrew Dobson, *Green Political Thought* (London: Routledge, 1990).

## Unscientificity

Glen Love writes that humanities scholars, including ecocritics, 'are usually deficient in scientific aptitude and interests'.<sup>2</sup> Though not always true, this is a symptom of the above point – of not bothering to theorize (say) 'ecology'. It is mystifying, also, when one considers the explosion elsewhere of interest in literature and science in English studies. Gillian Beer's work, for example, on how the emergent scientific theories of the nineteenth century – respectively, evolutionary and thermodynamic theory – were embodied in Victorian literature has not been matched by corresponding studies of how the developing sciences of (say) ecology, or energy economics, or environmental science, might have been incorporated in literary texts.<sup>3</sup> Yet whether at their inception in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see my essay on 'Victorian Ecology' in this collection) or in more recent environmentalist literature related to 'protest' and/or notions of global environmental crisis, various writers have been engaging with ecological or environmental science.

## Reflexivity

There is not enough reflection on ecocriticism's own assumptions, including its grounds of exclusion. Part of this critique is implicit in my comments above on science. Another aspect, that I have considered recently, is the hostility in some ecocritical works towards media forms and, in particular, television. A book such as Bill McKibben's anti-television polemic *The Age of Missing Information*, though not strictly ecocritical, routinely and uncritically contrasts 'mediated representation' with the 'truthfulness' of 'nature', frequently citing poets as a source of authority. McKibben invokes here the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture being revived in the anti-popular culture agendas promoted by literary critics such as Harold Bloom in *The Western Canon*.<sup>4</sup> My argument is that ecocritics need to reflect more on these (perhaps accidental) alliances. To isolate environmental poetry or literature within 'high culture' not only ignores some fertile sources for ecocritical work but, of course, threatens to marginalize environmental writing. Conversely, we need to acknowledge the fundamental importance (and inevitability) of the mass media in conveying environmental issues (as Greenpeace does so successfully). It is ironic that

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<sup>2</sup> Glen A. Love, 'Science, Anti-Science and Ecocriticism', *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 6:1 (1999), p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Ark, 1985); *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Bill McKibben, *The Age of Missing Information* (New York: Random House, 1992); Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (London: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1994).

some writers and editors working on the media and environmentalism have displayed a far greater degree of self-reflection than is often apparent in ecocriticism.<sup>5</sup>

## Research Areas

Certain literary genres remain neglected within ecocriticism. While I would make this point in respect of Victorian literature, the most glaring omission seems to me to be post-colonial literature. Writers such as Annette Kolodny, Patrick Murphy, and Louise Westling have gradually revealed the gendered aspect to notions of landscape (see Westling's 'Introduction' below). However, relatively little has been written still – either by post-colonialists or ecocritics – on the racializing of landscape, especially in regard to the former European colonies (though in chapter 4 of this collection Terry Gifford briefly indicates a convergence of feminist and post-colonial perspectives in poets such as Grace Nichols). Yet, as Raymond Williams pointed out in 1973, in *The Country and the City*, numerous writers – from James Ngugi in Kenya to Wilson Harris in Guyana to Han Suyin in Malaya – embody both the ecological, embedded relationship of person with land and the (often) damaging incursions of wider socio-political forces. This is something, I believe, that should interest ecocritics now in the context of expanding (and expansionist) globalization and the activities, for instance, of the World Trade Organization.<sup>6</sup>

## Urban Ecocriticism

I have always tried to integrate ecocritical research with practical environmental work, first through the Green Party and then through a public Environment Forum in my local community (Lambeth in South London). This relationship of academic work to activism is, perhaps, itself a question that needs to be considered. However, my point here is that I have rarely seen the urban ecological issues that concern this practical work represented in ecocritical literature. Where the city does get mentioned it is in the context of reclaiming nature, 'green space', in the urban environment (as implied in Michael Bennett and David Teague's *The Nature of Cities*).<sup>7</sup> Yet the other

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Alison Anderson, *Media, Culture and the Environment* (London: UCL Press, 1997); Donella Meadows, 'Changing the World through the Information Sphere', in *Media and the Environment*, eds Craig L. La May and Everette E. Dennis (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), pp. 284–8.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Bennett and David Teague (eds), *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999).

problems that confront urban environmental organizations – the sustainable city, transport, air quality, the built environment – are notable only by their absence. This is despite the fact that literary sources which address precisely those issues are there to be studied – for example, in the work of the Victorian social novelists such as Dickens, Gaskell, and Kingsley.

### **Pedagogy and Institutionalization**

Dominic Head's piece, in this collection, is almost unique in discussing the place of ecocriticism within contemporary higher education. This emphasis has, I would suggest, two aspects. First, the teaching of ecocriticism – how, pedagogically, do we teach ecocriticism and to what end? Is it simply a branch (sic) of literary studies? Should it be more didactic and aim to teach environmental values? Might it even be vocational – for example, teaching students how literary texts might inform practical environmental work? As an example of the last point, exercises in 'community visioning' – research or surveys in which local people reflect upon the environment they want – might well utilize literary examples (as Lisa Garforth argues in relation to how utopian novels can inform debates on sustainability).

Secondly, if literature has to struggle, as Head argues, against Raymond Williams's 'Plan X' – the increasing vocationalism of the academy in an emphasis on 'preparation for employment' – ecocritics need to consider what contemporary spaces exist and can be exploited for their work. One of vocationalism's structural embodiments is the modularization that encourages students to develop 'portfolios' of (job-related) skills. Yet modularization might also offer ecocritical literature teachers potential alliances with colleagues in (say) environmental science or environmental management. In meeting the vocational pedagogical objectives described above, we might have – if we work in a proper interdisciplinary way – a ready-made constituency not necessarily available to other literary scholars. Likewise, the expansion in the activities of higher education institutions already being encouraged – in short courses, seminars, conferences, and summer schools, all designed to maximize income – could give ecocritics the opportunity to build bridges with their local communities including with local environmental groups.

### **Acknowledgements**

Finally, I would like to make a few acknowledgements. My greatest thanks to Erika Gaffney, our commissioning editor at Ashgate Publishing, for her support all along but particularly during the difficult early stages in the genesis of this project. Likewise, to Cathrin Vaughan for her careful editing of the manuscript.



To Ruth Borthwick and Linda Rozmovits who both, some time ago, gave important, concise advice as I planned the collection. To Louise Westling for her helpful comments on the draft chapters and for writing such a thorough introduction to the book. And to my colleague Donovan Synmoie, whose skill in manipulating various versions of Word enabled me to overcome what at first appeared to be insurmountable problems in formatting the finished draft. Finally, of course, I wish to thank my other contributors for their hard work and their achievement in writing these chapters in the face of – in just about every case – the relentless constraints that ‘Plan X’ inflicts on genuine, groundbreaking research. One can only hope that we retain enough sustainable energy to keep pushing the ecocritical project forward.

*John Parham  
South Lambeth  
November 2000*

# Introduction

*Louise Westling*

John Parham's original title for *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature* was 'Muddying the Waters'. While such a label might not mean much to uninitiated readers, it does suggest the function served by this welcome new collection of essays, in further extending the reach and complexity of British ecocritical discussion. We have now moved into the second stage of ecocriticism in both the UK and the United States, after earlier calls for a new focus of critical attention upon the natural world in poetry, fiction, and essay were answered throughout the 1990s with an outpouring of books and articles, the creation of new curricular programmes in a number of universities, and the international spread of interest among scholars from many European and Asian countries beyond the English-speaking world. Ecocriticism has suddenly come into its own.

John Parham began collecting the materials for this anthology at an early UK conference on ecocriticism, held in Swansea in 1997. Already by then a generation of young scholars inheriting Raymond Williams' Marxist re-evaluation of pastoral traditions and inspired by Jonathan Bate's 1991 *Romantic Ecology* were busy defining a sophisticated British ecocriticism that immediately both challenged and complemented ecocritical debates on the other side of the Atlantic. Indeed, just as English and American literature are interwoven traditions, so too are the ecocritical movements in the two spheres. Two previous British anthologies of ecocriticism, *Writing the Environment* (1998), edited by Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells, and *The Green Studies Reader* (2000), edited by Laurence Coupe, include representative essays from both traditions. Re-evaluating positions established during the first wave of ecocritical commentary, *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature* offers a fresh collection of predominantly British perspectives that focuses on important socio-political and theoretical issues in Part 1, and applies them to literary works from Chaucer to Gillian Clarke in Part 2.

The first wave of ecocriticism, particularly in the United States, was generally characterized by 'nature-endorsing' attitudes, as Martin Ryle points out in the first essay here. That is, most early ecocritics praised 'nature writing', and promoted writers who attend to and extol the beauties of non-human spaces and creatures in an effort to turn cultural attention back to the wider living environment, from the specifically human realm. But there are

significant national differences in theoretical orientation. American literary criticism has maintained a strong thematic focus on 'wilderness' landscapes since its colonial beginnings. When the environmental movement began to gather political force during the 1970s, ecological literary criticism grew out of this long habit. As an academic response to environmentalism, ecocriticism centred on two particular areas of American literary scholarship. One was Western literature set in open landscapes of cattle ranges and mountains, a regional tradition including early narratives of exploration and settlement, and the cult of the frontier or cowboy hero. The other regionally-focused area of literary scholarship was that concerned with nineteenth-century transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. As more American scholars began to work in ecocriticism, however, attention broadened to include the whole range of literary tradition from the earliest colonization narratives (Columbus through English and French texts) to modern nature writing in the Thoreauvian tradition, poetry from Robinson Jeffers to Elizabeth Bishop, Gary Snyder, and Simon Ortiz; and fiction including Hemingway and Faulkner, Toni Morrison and Leslie Silko. The national obsession with 'wilderness' and 'pure Nature' still colours most of this work to date. Nature writing has been understood primarily as providing unmediated access to an essential non-human world, and experiences of blissful union with this realm have been identified through the texts examined, as providing true self-knowledge, access to a primal realm of authentic being, purification from the corruptions of history and urban life, and rebirth into fresh possibility. The kind of subjectivity defined and valorized in both the literary texts and the ecocritical discussions of them, is highly individuated, usually solitary and self-absorbed. In the writing of men, it tends to produce an heroic, masculinist gaze at a feminized Nature uniquely possessed by the writer. Women writers, operating within this kind of symbolic economy, usually identify themselves and their characters more closely with the natural spaces they describe.

However, a number of influential proto-ecocritical American literary historians – such as Leo Marx, R.W.B. Lewis, Leslie Fiedler (himself deeply indebted to D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classical American Literature*), and Richard Slotkin – had earlier demonstrated the problematic complexity of American literary tropes of Edenic innocence, pastoral escape, and frontier heroism. Then Annette Kolodny's classic gender study, *The Lay of the Land* (1975), demonstrated how the North American landscape had been feminized by the earliest English explorers, beginning a tradition that has been used continually ever since to justify attraction, conquest, and exploitation. Such complex anatomies of the American pastoral tradition were not absorbed into ecocriticism at the outset, but in 1995 Lawrence Buell's magisterial *The Environmental Tradition in Literature* appeared, surveying the whole range of the discussion, and Patrick Murphy published *Literature, Nature, and Other:*

*Ecofeminist Critiques*. In recent years the ironies, inconsistencies, and bad faith both of American literary treatments of the natural world and of the ecocritical postures towards them have been increasingly engaged, as postmodern critiques are absorbed and environmental justice concerns enter the debate. In *The Green Breast of the New World* (1996), I examined the workings of gender politics and imperialist nostalgia in American fiction against the backdrop of a deep history of cultural figuration of the feminine. Timothy Luke's *Ecocritique* (1997) deconstructed American deep ecology's fetishization of wilderness and its anachronistic fascination with mythologized pre-agricultural peoples, and a year later Patrick Murphy and Greta Gaard's anthology *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism* (1998) presented a variety of strong ecofeminist studies challenging mainstream ecocritical perspectives. Furthermore, Krista Comer's *Landscapes of the New West* (1999) critiqued the myth of the Wild West and the 'wilderness plot' with their reification of 'natural landscapes' where the privileged can recreate themselves in heroic adventures. David Mazel's *American Literary Environmentalism* (2000) examines nineteenth-century cultural formations to reveal exploitative political and economic purposes shaping the wilderness ethos and continuing to motivate public policy, private interest, and literary production. Considerable interest in problems of environmental justice reflected in recent American fiction and poetry has emerged in the past several years of ecocritical scholarship as well. The enterprise of ecocriticism received a kind of formal acceptance by the mandarins of American literary scholarship when the prestigious journal *New Literary History* made it the subject of a special issue in the summer of 1999, while Publications of the Modern Language Association published a special Forum on the topic the same year.

British ecocriticism began to make itself felt a few years after the American movement began. It emerged from within an older literary tradition concerned with long-domesticated and densely populated landscapes and, for the past 200 years, with problems of industrialization and urban space: These contexts create very important theoretical differences between British and American ecocriticism. The pastoral tradition in English literature, understood from its earliest Renaissance adoption from Greek and Roman models to be an artificial genre, has been associated with aristocratic privilege and elite cultural practices for most of its history, in spite of protestations to the contrary since the Romantic period.

Neoclassical aesthetic principles of rational order in landscape design held sway for an extended period in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, shaping expectations of manicured beauty and controlled picturesque experience that travelled with the British Empire as it extended into Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Australia, influencing the design of both public and private spaces throughout the colonies. Even after changes in taste

initiated by the Romantic movement, elements of neoclassical taste continued to influence landscape design and concepts of space.

The Romantic Sublime was itself usually focused upon long-settled geographic areas like the French and Swiss Alps, rather than in the 'wildernesses' or vast, unexplored regions that first ignited American imaginations. In European Sublime settings, wanderers like Wordsworth and Shelley could admire lofty crags, snowfields, and waterfalls while hiking on established paths by day, and resting in comfortable inns at night. As Jonathan Bate has demonstrated in both *Romantic Ecology* and *The Song of the Earth*, Wordsworthian nature poetry and the proto-environmentalist writings of Hardy, Ruskin, and Morris depict landscapes where industry exists side by side with agriculture, and wild creatures must coexist with domesticated animals in spaces bounded by human settlements.

British ecocriticism has been conditioned from its beginnings by such awareness, and by Raymond Williams's argument in *The Country and the City* for the essentially nostalgic and mythic quality of pastoral, with its failure to engage actual conditions of rural life or the wider political landscape within which it stands. The cultural studies orientation of much British work in the field has given it a greater sophistication than most American work manifests, and with it a wariness of naively heroic posturing or presumptions of unmediated access to an essentialized natural world. In her postmodern theoretical analysis of contemporary environmental writing, *What Is Nature?*, Kate Soper warns against the politically dangerous attractions of an uncritical ecological naturalism and draws especially timely attention to connections between the tradition of organicist imagery in right wing political movements of the twentieth century and tendencies within present-day environmentalism. The historical reach and theoretical range of British ecocriticism is evident in the variety of perspectives Laurence Coupe has collected in *The Green Studies Reader*. We see here no simple embrace of the Romantic Sublime or the softer pastoral impulses of the Edwardians and Georgians. Characteristic of the more qualified and distanced British approach to writing about the natural world, Terry Gifford's recent *Pastoral* (1999) reappraises English pastoral tradition as a cultural construction through the main stages of its evolution, describes anti-pastoral resistance, and suggests a post-pastoral orientation that is ecologically responsible. With *The Song of the Earth* (2000), Jonathan Bate continues the effort he began in *Romantic Ecology*, to provide a green, ecological restoration of the Wordsworthian Romantic Sublime after reductionist diminishments from two political extremes: those of 1960s bourgeois idealism and post-Althusserian Marxist critiques. In the new study Bate extends his examination of ecologically contextualized literary representation to work produced on both sides of the Atlantic, from Jane Austen to Elizabeth Bishop and Gary Snyder. Emphasizing depictions of regional and national landscapes within their own

distinctive cultural and historical conditions, Bate deploys a Heideggerian concept of poetic 'dwelling'.

In assembling the present collection of new essays, John Parham has focused upon major issues confronting British ecocriticism as a problematic new century begins. In part 1, 'Theoretical Approaches', Martin Ryle's opening essay, 'After "Organic Community": Ecocriticism, Nature, and Human Nature', argues for a more complex sense of political and cultural intersections than has been typical of ecocritical debates up to the present. Ryle suggests that cultural debates about environmental consciousness should coalesce with critiques of instrumentalist political economies, so that environmental health is understood as including human communities within their wider biological matrix. 'Beyond 2000: Raymond Williams and the Ecocritic's Task' by Dominic Head applies Williams' late writings on education to the ecocritical project. Head uses a 'green cultural materialism' in Williams's writing to illuminate the political dangers of changes in education that push literary and cultural studies farther to the margins while privileging technological and managerial curricula, thus limiting the potential for ecological critiques of contemporary society.

Head examines Williams' unfinished Welsh trilogy, *People of the Black Mountains*, as a radical fictional exploration of these issues within a dynamic, 'more than human' environment that creates a panoramic social history of place. Another socio-political area is illuminated by Naomi Guttman's discussion of the present state of ecofeminist theory and her urging that this body of work be more centrally engaged, rather than considered a side issue or concern of a marginal group with an idiosyncratic agenda.

Essays by Terry Gifford, Bennett Huffman, Paul Davies, Lisa Garforth, and Richard Kerridge, all British writers (or, in Huffman's case, working within the British academy), seek to push ecocriticism farther beyond traditional literary conventions and philosophical premisses than it has yet moved. Terry Gifford's 'Towards a Post-Pastoral View of Contemporary British Poetry' encapsulates his theory of the 'post-pastoral' principles which embody an ecological world-view and infer an ethical stance that leaves behind the ideological baggage of traditional pastoral. Bennett Huffman's essay on 'Postmodern Ecocriticism in the Science Fiction Novel' seeks to mark a bridge from the postmodern novel to the ecological novel as the dominant form of our era. Huffman's discussion of J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* and Ken Kesey's science fiction novel *Sailor Song* illustrates his view of the need to adapt postmodern theory for ecocritical purposes. In 'Cosmos as Metaphor: Eco-spiritual Poetics', Paul Davies argues that the same basic account of existence is implied by an ecological world-picture, the functioning of poetic metaphor, and mystical philosophies. For him, these overlapping visions offer the potential for overturning the tradition of Western humanist culture and

supplanting it with a biophilic, Gaian perspective. The final two essays in part 1 highlight the alternative political perspectives available within contemporary environmentalist novels and give an illuminating contrast between dystopian and utopian views. Richard Kerridge, in 'Narratives of Resignation: Environmentalism in Recent Fiction', examines four novels which offer only a sense of impasse (resignation). Taking a 'basic environmentalist perspective', they are, he writes, 'fatalistic about the likely trend of events, and offer hope only in the form of sardonic poetic justice and apocalyptic survivalist fantasy'. In a tantalizing pointer for future ecocritical work Kerridge suggests that novelists and ecocritical theorists need to develop or explore narratives more appropriate to addressing ecological questions 'with their extremes of time-scale and complexities of interdependency'. Alternatively, however, Lisa Garforth, in 'Ecotopian Fiction and the Sustainable Society', describes some of the ways that green utopian fiction can contribute to social debates. Arguing from radical critiques by NGOs and writers such as Vandana Shiva of the anthropomorphic basis of international policy-making definitions of sustainability, Garforth examines Kim Stanley Robinson's *Pacific Edge* and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* as ecotopian novels. Such works can provide cognitive estrangement by holding the future open, and show us how it might feel to live in a sustainable, ecologically enlightened world.

Part 2 of *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, 'Historical Approaches', provides examples of how fruitfully ecocritical theories can be applied to works spanning the entire range of English literature. Gillian Rudd's 'Making the Rocks Disappear: Refocusing Chaucer's Knight's and Franklin's Tales' opens up perspectives on the physical world of medieval England invoked by the *Canterbury Tales*, and models the kind of attention that can reveal important dimensions of many other medieval texts, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and lyric poetry. Rudd examines the destruction of the natural grove of trees in the 'Knight's Tale' and shows how intertwined human tragedy is with the natural environment. She also demonstrates how 'The Franklin's Tale' reveals that we deal less with any essence of nature than with socially constructed preconceptions.

Diane McColley's 'The Commodious Ark: Nature's Voice in Early Modern Poetry' is informed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of the gestural, embodied quality of human language, and its function in dialogue with the whole of nature. McColley offers an ecological reading of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Andrew Marvell's *Upon Appleton House*, according to which both poets employ a monist and vitalist language that opposes dualism and the objectification of nature. Why should we concentrate only on poetry of high seriousness, asks Ralph Pite in "'Founded on the Affections": A Romantic Ecology'. He complements Jonathan Bate's attention to well-known Romantic poems with a consideration of more playful poems by William Cowper, Christopher Smart, John Keats, and William Blake that require us to reconsider

our habitual attitudes about our fellow creatures and the natural world in general.

John Parham's object in 'Was there a Victorian Ecology?' is to complicate the 'Romantic Ecology' model proposed by Bate. Accordingly he views Victorians such as Ruskin, Morris, Tennyson, Carlyle, and Hardy as much more directly engaged with ecological questions than earlier writers of the century. Victorian writers, he argues, were keenly interested in the developing scientific disciplines of their day, particularly Darwinism, but also movements within physics and the other natural sciences that anticipated ecological science and its challenge to Cartesian thinking. Furthermore, this scientific interest informed Victorian critiques of the impact of industrialism on the English landscape. Along this line, Charlotte Zoë Walker's 'Letting in the Sky: An Ecofeminist Reading of Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction' demonstrates how far Woolf moved in her stories to destabilize comfortable notions of human subjectivity or certain access to knowledge about the world. Dizzying changes of perspective from the microscopic to the cosmic, from the eye of a snail to that of a human or a dog, signal a radical critique of such positivistic notions as human exceptionalism, objective distance from 'nature', or any epistemological certainty. The lens of ecofeminism allows the identification of ecologically relevant experimentation that has been ignored by previous criticism. Gavin Murray offers an ecocritical re-evaluation of another modernist figure in 'Reversing the Fall: The Sense of Place in D.H. Lawrence'. Murray focuses on Lawrence's efforts to re-embody consciousness by reversing the lapse from full physical awareness that has accompanied self-conscious civilization and by reawakening to the experience of place.

The last essay in this collection, Andy Jurgis's 'Twentieth-Century Rural Poets of Britain and Ireland: Ecological Voices from the Geographical and Cultural Margins', identifies the key rural poets of twentieth-century Britain and Ireland, surveying their work to show the variety of ecological concerns animating poetry in the present era of high technology and environmental degradation. The piece is, in part, bibliographic and in that respect anticipates and complements the final chapter in which Jo Rawlinson completes the anthology with an annotated bibliography of major ecocritical studies – an invaluable resource for readers who want to explore more deeply into the present state of this emerging field particularly within English literature.

The rich array of ecocritical approaches in the essays collected in this volume points to the work of theoretical articulation and reorientation which lies ahead for ecocritics, as well as to the invigorating energies they can bring to traditional areas of literary interpretation and new kinds of writing. This new ecocritical work suggests possibilities for vital cross-fertilization between British and American ecocriticism. Left political traditions and cultural criticism in a line of descent from Raymond Williams, for instance, can be used by American ecocritics as a model for integrating environmental justice



narratives from Native American and Latin American writers into the American literary canon and defining the cultural work to which they contribute. Cultural criticism and postmodern theory need to be brought into dialogue within ecocritical debates and used to challenge the privileged positions from which too many ecocritics have tended to speak. The challenge of ecofeminism to the unconsciously masculine gaze of most work in literature and environment has yet to be seriously accepted, as the recent special issue of *New Literary History* makes obvious, and as Lawrence Buell points out in his review essay at the end of the issue. Until all privileged positions within ecocriticism are acknowledged and abandoned, the field will be weakened by special pleading and bad faith.

A closely related tendency in the environmental movement at large, and one which works as a sinister undercurrent of much literary environmentalism, is the heritage of fascism and racism which has accompanied ecology from its origins in the work of Ernst Haeckel in the mid-nineteenth century down through the German *völkisch* and *Wandervögel* movements of the early twentieth century and the Blood and Soil doctrines of the Nazis. It also reappears in British literary tradition from between the wars (for example, in the work of Henry Williamson) and writing on literature and environment, notably Anna Bramwell's *Ecology in the Twentieth Century*. Such tendencies, then, still surface from time to time in contemporary ecological debates and motivate resistance to efforts of inclusion for the problems of minority communities such as Native Americans, poor African nations, and indigenous Australian peoples, as well as those of slum dwellers in large cities around the world. Environmental justice themes in writings by American poets and novelists of colour need to be considered beside postcolonial writings from the global English-speaking community. All ecocritics need to widen their sense of context to include global considerations: Americans need to turn their attention to urban and agricultural landscapes like those traditional in British literature, and all of us need to pay more attention to the relevance of global ecological problems for contemporary poetry, fiction, and essay. We are only beginning to discover what ecocriticism really means, but the essays which follow here do much to illuminate the path.

PART ONE

# Theoretical Approaches