GREEN CULTURE

Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America

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Introduction

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Rhetorical Criticism and the Environment

> Words are used as signs, arbitrary and temporary, even as language reflects (and informs) the shifting values of the peoples whose minds it inhabits and glides through. We have faith in "meaning" the way we might believe in wolverines—putting trust in the occasional reports of others or on the authority of once seeing a pelt. But it is sometimes worth tracking these tricksters back.
>
> —Gary Snyder

This book is about an idea, the environment, and about the language we use to talk about it. For most rhetoricians who write essays such as those collected in this book, the environment is not a thing you could go out and find in the world. Rather, it is a concept and an associated set of cultural values that we have constructed through the way we use language. In a very real sense, there is no objective environment in the phenomenal world, no environment separate from the words we use to represent it. We can define the environment and how it is affected by our actions only through the language we have developed to talk about these issues. As rhetorical theorists have long argued, what we know, how we know it, and who can speak about it authoritatively are largely determined by our language.

We are not claiming that there is no such thing as nature or that pollution has no effect outside the arena of environmental discourse. What we are suggesting is that the environment about which we all argue and make policy is the product of the discourse about nature established in powerful scientific disciplines such as biology and ecology, in government agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency and its regulations, and in nonfiction essays and books such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* or Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*. Beyond this, the values and beliefs we hold about the environment are established through the discourses of a be-

wildering variety of genres, institutions, and media. For example, the value the environment holds in our culture is shaped not only by documents such as environmental impact statements, but also by books like Thoreau's *Walden: Or Life in the Woods* or television shows such as Mutual of Omaha's *Wild Kingdom* that we watched as children. The language of these various discourses determines what exists, what is good, and what is possible. Furthermore, as our brief list suggests, the field of environmental rhetoric is immense and remarkably varied, so varied in fact that we think it connects almost every part of our social and intellectual life, crossing the boundaries between various academic disciplines and social institutions.

The environment is certainly a political issue; in 1988, George Bush ran as "the environmental president," and the Rio Earth Summit reminded us all that the environment is an important foreign policy problem. The continuing and bitter arguments between advocates of economic growth and advocates of environmental preservation divide communities. Work in biology and ecology has made environmental study the center of powerful scientific disciplines. Debates over what Garrett Hardin calls the "commons" add complex moral issues and have led to the development of an entire subdiscipline called "environmental ethics." The concentration of pollution and waste sites in minority and ethnic communities has come to be seen as environmental racism. The tradition of American landscape painting and the many books, stories, and poems written about our relation to nature and the power of natural beauty have made attention to the environment part of our culture's aesthetic.

The ubiquity with which the environment pervades our lives makes it an important issue for everyone. But for rhetoricians who study the way we use language to construct our world and to conduct our lives, this wide range of environmental discourse is both interesting and problematic. The variety of very different contexts in which we talk about the environment suggests that there is not one environmental discourse but many, a polyphony that makes it difficult to understand and resolve environmental disputes.

At different points in its history, the study of rhetoric has been understood as a way to help citizens participate in their government. Rhetoric has been understood not only as Aristotle defined it as "the discovery of the possible means of persuasion" but also as a tool that allowed people to explore significant social and moral issues and make wise or prudent decisions. For example, as Greg Clark and Michael Halloran have demonstrated, the purpose of formal rhetorical education in nineteenth-century America was to help citizens participate in the public discussions necessary for democratic government. Certainly our society has changed, but familiarity with rhetoric and its analytic methods can help us understand the

nature of our environmental debates and their outcomes. As Barry Brummett argues, rhetoric is "the social function that influences and manages meanings," and it does so in both professional forums and popular culture (xiv). Brummett concludes that "If we could see how we are influenced [by rhetoric], if our repertoires for making reality were broadened, we might make the world into something different" (xxii).

In order to demonstrate the way rhetorical analysis might elucidate our discourse about the environment and the way that discourse shapes our relations to the world, we begin with two brief examples. The first example is drawn from Diane Ackerman's essay "Albatrosses," which appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine. The essay describes an expedition to survey short-tailed albatrosses, an almost extinct species that lives on Torishima, a remote island off the coast of Japan. Like most essays in the *New Yorker* genre, the narrative of the expedition is punctuated by the sobering facts of environmental degradation and with fascinating biography, in this case the life story of Peter Harrison, a remarkable naturalist and noted illustrator. What interests us about this text is the way it frames the albatross and the environmental issues of preservation and loss within a powerfully romantic discourse about the spiritual vision of private individuals and the kinds of social action it encourages or discourages.

The essay is quite long, covering twenty-seven pages with relatively few advertisements, but we need not reproduce the whole essay; a few salient examples will illustrate our argument. It focuses on the expedition to Torishima by the writer along with Peter Harrison and Hiroshi Hasegawa, the Japanese scientist who has fought to preserve the island and the short-tailed albatross. Throughout, this is a story of solitary individuals fighting to save the last remnants of a once abundant species. The three adventurers struggle against government intransigence and cross typhoon-ravaged seas to reach the barren rock where the last colony of short-tailed albatross cling. They make a "pilgrimage," an "arduous religious journey to discover what is sacred, . . . beset by many unavoidable steps and hardships on [their] quest" (66). The narrative invokes a private, religious, and romantic context. The environmentalist becomes the knight-errant or the wandering visionary. And this sense of the protagonist as an individual set apart is compounded when we are introduced to the essay's hero, Peter Harrison.

We learn that Harrison grew up in a seamen's orphanage on the northern coast of England where he spent his childhood sailing whaleboats into the North Sea and scaling the sea cliffs looking for birds' nests. At one point, Harrison recalls an earlier expedition during which he climbed barren rock towers off Cape Horn in stormy seas to make the first survey of the gray-headed albatross. He tells of falling 125 feet into the freezing surf,

and then, after a couple of restorative shots of whiskey, climbing back up the tower. His comment: "this was certainly the closest I've ever come to death, and not just once or twice a day but many times" (70–71). His feats seem superhuman as he literally defies death to overcome the "hardships on [his] quest."

The romantic vision of this essay is perhaps clearest in the passage where Harrison describes his feelings for the sea:

> There is a rhythm to the sea, and the sea obliges you to adopt it. . . . You haven't any choice. So I sometimes think of the ocean as the heartbeat of the world. If you stand anywhere on any shoreline, even if it is just at a lake, and just listen, letting the stillness descend around you, it doesn't matter where you are—there's always a rhythm, a beat. I love being part of that bigger self. (68)

In the vision Harrison articulates, nature is the province of the solitary figure: an exceptional person acts out of a separate, intimate, and personal connection with a mysterious and wild nature. We could easily find these lines about being "part of that bigger self" in a poem by a leading figure among the nineteenth-century British romantic poets, William Wordsworth. In fact, the description of Harrison's childhood exploits echoes Wordworth's poems about his childhood on this same northern English coast, complete with the gathering of birds' eggs along the sea cliffs. Harrison's sense of the unity of nature, of belonging to a "bigger self," recalls Wordworth's description of a benevolent and unified nature, the spirit that "rolls through all things," in poems such as "Tintern Abbey," or a poem like "The Eolian Harp" in which Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wordsworth's contemporary, speaks of "the one Life within us and abroad" that he feels in nature.

This mythologizing is one version of our engagement with nature, but with its own particular ideological origins and political consequences. The individualism that lies at the center of this romantic vision considers knowledge and action as private affairs and sees nature as an aesthetic, even religious, object. The kinds of discourse and social engagement provided by this construction of nature and our relations to it, however, simply do not fit our urban, postindustrial age. Indeed, as scholars have argued, this myth didn't even fit the historical conditions of the early nineteenth century, but was itself a nostalgic desire for an agrarian culture that was already lost or may never have existed. In many ways this vision of nature emerged as a reaction against the urbanization brought on by the industrial revolution.

As interesting as the historical sources of the romanticism in the *New Yorker* essay are, the consequences of this vision for our relations to the environment are at least as important. The model of knowledge and of the

contemplation made possible by a romantic vision makes it nearly impossible to think of the environment as a social responsibility, to think of nature as a scientific, an economic, or an institutional construction or problem. This form of romanticism celebrates the inner life of the exceptional individual who is engaged in a private relationship with nature. The kinds of actions necessary in our contemporary political context are those in which individuals act within social communities and the ethical values at play are often those of social responsibility rather than private pleasure and spiritual reverie.

Our argument here is similar to the one Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer recently made in an article, "How to Save the Earth," in which they analyze the rhetoric of the new and widely read genre of environmental "how-to" books. Among their conclusions Killingsworth and Palmer point out that even if these books reach audiences who would not read Barry Commoner,

> The green consumer movement is all too open to be appropriated by forces whose long term interests are anything but environmentalist. . . . Emphasis on small scale actions or personal agendas that ignore public causes may function ideologically, blinding the general public to the need for massive shifts in government policy and curtailments of large scale industrial activity. (399)

In the *New Yorker* essay, seemingly a direct descendant of nineteenth-century romanticism, the poetics of individual vision perform precisely this function. The literary critic Marjorie Levinson, for example, has pointed out that the pastoral landscape Wordsworth idealized in his famous poem "Tintern Abbey" was actively being cut and burned even as Wordsworth gazed upon it (29–30). But this social, industrial problem, and any appropriate shift in government policy, are invisible, absent from the romantic lyric Wordsworth produced. He literally looked the other way, ignoring the impact of industrialism as he described a vision of nature that became, like Harrison's sense of the sea, "the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being" ("Tintern Abbey"). Levinson has argued convincingly that the great power of Wordsworth's lyric comes precisely from his ability to present the social and political problem as a spiritual and aesthetic issue. By idealizing nature, Wordsworth, inadvertently or not, contains or even dismisses the threat of industrial change and makes the idealized landscape part of his internal poetic vision rather than part of a public dilemma.

The ideology that concentrates on the private at the expense of the public and social is striking in the *New Yorker* article. Introducing the depredation of the once abundant albatross, Ackerman notes that "In barely a hundred years, plume hunters slaughtered almost every one of these birds"

(61). A page later, the writer describes watching two pieces of film footage of the island, one old, one new. She describes the first film and then moves to the second.

> Just offshore, the waves appeared permanently whitecapped, so large and dense were the rafts of magnificent birds. Next, in sharp contrast, a color film shows us the few birds that are left, and we shake our heads in disbelief. How could such a thing have happened? (62)

The naiveté of this disbelief is remarkable enough, but Killingsworth and Palmer's prediction that the individualism of much environmental rhetoric may actually be used to promote anti-environmental agendas is fulfilled when we consider the advertisements that are interleaved throughout this *New Yorker* essay. Among the advertisements that share the page with this text is one for a $24,000 jewel-encrusted broach; one promoting the nuclear power industry and warning us of the "dangers" of "unpredictable" "foreign oil"; and, the most apropos, an advertisement for the "overwhelming furs" of Copenhagen's Birger Christensen furriers. Because the romantic ideology of Ackerman's essay celebrates the individual's private vision and excludes the social and material from her discourse, it leaves no room to contest this commercial appropriation of her narrative. A story about the depredation of the albatross by plume hunters becomes a vehicle to sell exotic furs.

To avoid the implication that the romantic ideology of private, individual consciousness is the only problem in environmental rhetoric, we offer one other very brief analysis of environmental discourse. The genre of environmental writing that probably reaches the most people in American and that may come to define the environmental rhetoric for millions of people is direct mail solicitations. Greenpeace alone sends out forty-seven million pieces of direct mail annually. Greenpeace activists Peter Bahouth and Andre Carothers describe the mailbox as "a sanctuary and a lifeline: a sanctuary for delivering those political views that cannot survive the media's censorship, and a lifeline for the growth and preservation of the issues" (55). Bahouth and Carothers stress that direct mail helps establish a community that cannot be built in any other way.

As important as direct mail is to the efforts of groups like Greenpeace, the Nature Conservancy, or the Wilderness Society, the consequences of their rhetorical construction are not all beneficial. For example, a recent mailing from the Nature Conservancy has a sandhill crane on the envelope and the crane seems to be glowering at you. The enclosed letter describes the crane's sanctuary as "prime real estate," and its postscript suggests that your $15 donation will buy the crane's "first motel stop." The rhetoric of real estate values, motel prices, and neighborhood preservation makes the

crane just another consumer competing in the marketplace, thus reinforcing the very commercial ideology that has destroyed much of the crane's habitat. Direct mail campaigns are a technology designed to make a sale, and environmental groups who use them often position themselves as just another group in a consumer economy.

Our second point about direct mail is that such letters offer only two options: ignoring the letter, or sending money to the group. Thus the possibilities for participation and rational engagement are radically limited. Such letters do not ask readers to explore the complexities of the environmental situation. They do not offer readers a chance to participate in the making of environmental policy decisions. This limitation, perhaps one largely imposed by the medium, reduces the process of ethical decision making so severely that it essentially guts any viable sense of collective, community-based ethical action. As a number of rhetorical scholars suggest, such letters compromise the ethics of the environmental discourse (see, for example, Johannesen; Porter; Wallace).

Unfortunately, environmental discourse is not as straightforward as the simple dichotomies our examples suggest. If the romantic ideology we have described in the *New Yorker* essay tends to discourage social analysis and collective action, it can also provide an emotional and spiritual language that maintains a value and love for nature. Peter Harrison may be a daring adventurer set radically apart from the lives of his readers, but he is also a figure with whom many readers can identify, at least emotionally. Through Ackerman's romantic narrative about Harrison and the albatross, readers may very well come to share some of Harrison's love and reverence for nature. And if the language of the Nature Conservancy's direct mail campaign reinforces the dominant view of nature as just another commodity, this same language has built unusual political and social coalitions and raised funds that have protected large areas of sensitive habitat.

Our examples and the complications that arise in them demonstrate the need for rhetorical and cultural analyses of environmental rhetoric. Whether we think our language practices privilege some kinds of thinking and some forms of knowledge at the expense of others, or whether we think of the genres of environmental writing—e.g., EPA reports, *New Yorker* essays, books such as *Silent Spring*—as recurrent forms of social action (Miller), it is clear that environmental discourse is a historically developed cultural form maintained by rhetorical activity. As Roderick Nash, Max Oelschlaeger, Carolyn Merchant, and others demonstrate, our "ideas" about nature have long been a defining characteristic in human culture.

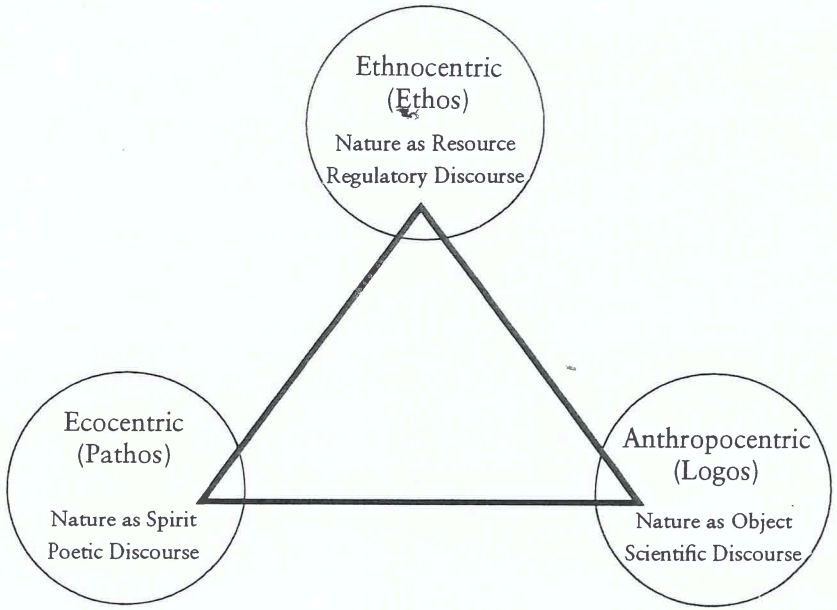
Our brief examples demonstrate some of the ways rhetorical criticism examines the details of a text and considers its relation to the context in

which it circulates. Rhetorical critics determine how some texts succeed in particular situations and why. Unfortunately, rhetorical criticism cannot always dictate rhetorical practice. Rhetorical acts are embedded in their immediate context, and this context changes. Thus, the analysis of past rhetorical activity does not always tell us what to say or how to say it in future situations. But rhetorical criticism does provide a method for analyzing our public rhetoric, and principles which can guide our rhetorical practice in the future.

In order to organize analysis of environmental rhetoric we offer the following model. This model is designed to identify the dominant tendencies or orientation of a piece of environmental discourse. Loosely adapted from Ogden and Richards' rhetorical triangle (11) and from Killingsworth and Palmer's "Continuum of Perspectives on Nature" (*Ecospeak* 14), the model ask us to determine the attitude, or in Kenneth Burke's term, the "motive," of a particular text regarding an environmental topic. Burke's influential theory of rhetoric says that the motives and purpose of a document can be found in the "scene" from which the document emerges, and that we can understand a text only if we understand the relations between the scene and the other elements of any rhetorical action. Burke calls this "dramatism," a "technique of analysis of language and thought as basically modes of action rather than as means of conveying information" (*Language as Symbolic Action* 54). As a description of action, dramatism is an epistemological system that can be used as a heuristic to generate new knowledge. What we learn in analyzing a text gives us a broader understanding of the world; it provides "*equipments for living*" (*Philosophy of Literary Form* 304).

Of particular interest here is Burke's argument that our understanding of the world comes through the symbols provided in our language. The way we use these symbols to represent the world is determined by motives that emerge from the rhetorical scene. Our model is designed to help clarify the connections between a text, a writer, and the setting from which a piece of writing comes in an effort to elicit the underlying motives around a text or topic. As we will see later, this model can also help us apply the results of rhetorical criticism to practice.

The regulatory discourse at the top of the model represents the discourse of the powerful institutions that make decisions and set environmental policy. This discourse usually regards nature as a resource, one among many others, to be managed for the greater social welfare. In many ways this discourse is the legacy of Gifford Pinchot's vision of a utilitarian management of natural resources which eventually won out in the contest with John Muir's wilderness philosophy. As a result, we call this an ethnocentric discourse, one devoted to negotiating the benefits of environmental policy



A rhetorical model for environmental discourse

measured against a broad range of social interests. The U.S. Department of the Interior's policy of multiple use in national forests and the broad appeal of the Nature Conservancy direct mail campaign are representative examples of this position. The breadth of the interests represented, of course, is precisely one of the contested issues in many environmental disputes. The political power of this discourse comes from its institutional context, but its rhetorical power emerges from the rhetorical notion of ethos, the culturally constructed authority of the speaker or writer who represents these institutions. As we will see in the essays that follow, the failures of many policy-making processes emerge, in large part, from the failure to construct an acceptable authority from which to promulgate decisions.

The scientific discourse in the model represents the specialized discourse of the environmental sciences. Within this discourse, nature is usually regarded as an object of knowledge constructed through careful scientific methodology. Because this discourse locates the human researcher as outside and epistemologically above nature, we call this anthropocentric discourse, one grounded in its faith in the human ability to come to know nature's secrets. The immense cultural power of this discourse comes from our rationalist faith in science and in the productivity of the scientific method. The rhetorical power of this discourse emerges from the rhetorical

notion of logos, the appeal to objective fact and reason. This is the discourse to which the policy makers often turn to ground their arguments; technical data and expert testimony usually represent the basis of policy decisions, often at the expense of other participants or other forms of rhetorical appeal.

The poetic discourse in the model refers to the language we use to discuss the beauty, the value, the emotional power of nature. In this discourse, nature is usually regarded as a spiritual or transcendent unity. Because this discourse largely considers humanity as part of nature and seeks to locate human value in a harmonious relation to the natural world, we call this an ecocentric discourse. The power of this discourse comes largely from aesthetic or spiritual responses to the rhetorical notion of pathos, or appeals to the emotions of the audience. Thoreau's *Walden: Or Life in the Woods,* Henry Beston's *The Outermost House,* and Diane Ackerman's essay "Albatrosses" are good representatives of this kind of emotional appeal.

Our model identifies the main characteristics of three powerful environmental discourses, but these discourses are not pure. As the following chapters demonstrate, successful writing often combines the styles, forms, and rhetorical appeals of more than one of these discourses. Like any model, ours identifies only the dominant tendencies and is perhaps most useful as a heuristic that helps us navigate the sometimes bewildering variety of discourses on the environment, their cultural importance, and the array of rhetorical techniques available to the critic or the writer.

The Essays

> Statements are made but partially— Things are said with reference to certain conventions or existing institutions.— not absolutely.
>
> —Henry David Thoreau

The first three chapters examine the writing of a number of influential nature writers such as Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold, Barry Commoner, and Loren Eiseley. These essays describe in detail the way these writers adapt well-known textual strategies to suit their specific context and purposes. We would locate the genre of nature writing along the bottom of our model. Nature writing often combines a scientific knowledge of nature with a desire to reenchant science, to connect scientific knowledge to a spiritual sense of nature and its beauty. Thus, nature writing often uses conventions and forms more characteristic of poetic discourse and appeals to pathos as well as to reason. These important texts do not set policy, but they do construct the cultural understanding of nature and our relation to it whereby policy decisions will be judged.

In the first chapter, Killingsworth and Palmer trace the recent history of the apocalyptic form in environmental writing. Starting with Rachel Carson's famous opening to *Silent Spring,* Killingsworth and Palmer discuss the changing shape and context of the apocalyptic form in writers such as Paul Ehrlich, Barry Commoner, and even James Watt. They argue that in the three decades since the publication of *Silent Spring,* this important form of environmental writing has changed as political and cultural contexts have changed. Thus, Carson's strident warning suits the Cold War context in which she can associate the danger of pesticide contamination with the threat of nuclear destruction. Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb,* published in 1968, uses a less polemical style while maintaining a powerful attack on the ideology of industrial progress. But Barry Commoner, writing in the environmentally active 1970s, eschews the radical apocalyptic rhetoric and adopts a moderate voice more suited to what was then a part of mainstream culture. Ironically, it is the radical anti-environmentalist James Watt who adopts the explicitly Christian apocalyptic rhetoric during the Reagan era's fight against environmentalism. Identifying the connection between rhetorical form and cultural context allows Killingsworth and Palmer to see the apocalyptic narrative as a rhetorical strategy rather than a literal argument. They demonstrate that writers have used the apocalyptic form as a way to attract new members to the environmental movement, and that these narratives should be read not as predictions, but as emotional and political appeals to a wide readership.

Taking his title, "Thinking like a Mountain," from one of the most famous essays in *A Sand County Almanac,* Louis Ulman examines the writings of Aldo Leopold as examples of the way nature writing can help us resolve environmental dilemmas. Ulman defines nature writing as a genre that exists on the border between scientific writing about natural history and autobiographical writing about the way individuals relate to the natural world. Nature writing combines the objective description of natural history with the personal insight of autobiography to give its readers a model of how, individually and collectively, we should relate to the nonhuman world. Thus, Ulman argues that Leopold's most enduring contribution to conservation is the essays in which Leopold presents "an ethical vision of humanity's place in nature." Using the rhetorical concepts of *ethos, persona,* and judgment to explain the way Leopold changes his essays to suit different contexts and purposes, Ulman demonstrates how Leopold came to construct the powerful persona that inhabits *A Sand County Almanac.* He argues that the ecological essays in the middle of *A Sand County Almanac* weld the personal experience of the first section to the philosophical essays of the last section in a fashion that has become a dominant rhetorical model in American nature writing.

In his chapter, "Epistemology and Politics in American Nature Writing," Scott Slovic traces the rhetorical strategies at work in the writing of Henry Beston, Loren Eiseley, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson back to the early American sermons of Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards. He describes the way these two New England preachers used a rhapsodic celebration of nature to inspire wonder and love of God in their listeners and how, at other moments, they used the shrill warning of the jeremiad to instill obedience. After demonstrating the pervasiveness of these two styles in contemporary nature writing, Slovic evaluates the different effects these strategies have on readers. By doing so, he provides environmentalists with a way to decide how best to persuade specific audiences to respect the environment and to alter their actions.

The next four chapters examine the shape environmental discourse takes in the powerful institutions that make decisions and set policy. These essays examine various aspects of the regulatory discourse located at the top of our model. They examine procedures such as risk analysis as methods for making policy and consider the degree to which citizens can effectively participate in this institutional discourse. Each chapter develops its analysis through an extended case study of a specific environmental issue, and as a group, they explore the ways we succeed or fail in constructing the kind of social and rhetorical authority necessary to make and promulgate environmental policy.

Katz and Miller trace the process through which the North Carolina Waste Management Authority, charged with selecting a site for a low-level waste repository, conducted its investigation and came to a decision. They take the five-year process involved in this case as typical of the way state and federal agencies make decisions about locating facilities that are opposed by the communities in which they are to be located. They demonstrate that the procedures and assumptions built into the techniques of "risk communication" that guide the institutional decision-making process on this and other environmental issues "can help account for the communication and decision-making failures." After years of work, over 350 hearings, and more than $3,500,000 spent on public information campaigns, debate and public opposition to the Authority's siting decision remain widespread. By examining the documents and testimony involved in this case, Katz and Miller explain how the "engineering model" of communication embedded in risk communication reduces public participation to a passive reception of information, turning what should be dialogue into a public relations campaign. They conclude that the model of communication used in risk analysis depends on an erroneous faith in the social and political neutrality of information and scientific fact, and that, as a result,

the model excludes the attitudes, values, and emotions of the affected community from the decision-making process.

Craig Waddell's discussion of the International Joint Commission on Great Lakes Water Quality offers a sharp contrast to the analysis Katz and Miller offer. Established by the Boundary Waters Treaty between the United States and Canada, the International Joint Commission investigates disputes about water quality and quantity, and, most recently, monitors both governments' compliance with the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Unlike the North Carolina Waste Management Authority, however, the International Joint Commission is notably successful in resolving disputes and encouraging public participation. Through his analysis of documents, public testimony, and personal interviews, Waddell demonstrates that, in this case, public participation took the form of what he calls the "social constructionist model"; to a greater or lesser extent both information and values passed from the public to the commission. Waddell demonstrates that despite the common conflict between "rational" experts and "emotional" members of the public, emotional appeals were common in the testimony of both groups, and that they were effective in persuading the commission and moving them to take action. His analysis suggests that environmentalists combine emotional appeals that describe the effect of policies on human life and health with the power of ecocentric appeals, those based on the intrinsic value of the environment separate from human interests.

The complex of rhetorical positions involved in resolving environmental disputes with which Waddell closes is the central focus of James Cantrill's ethnographic study of the Beartooth Alliance in Cooke City, Montana. Here, Cantrill explores the uneven success with which a small town constructs a sense of community and wages its environmental fight. Cooke City faces the threat of the New World Project, a hugh gold-mining operation that would drastically alter the physical and social environment that Cooke City residents treasure. By analyzing the themes that recur in the way members of the Beartooth Alliance talk about themselves, the Alliance, and the mine, Cantrill explores the way the rhetoric of grassroots organizations both creates a rhetorical community and limits the effectiveness of groups' attempts to shape public policy. He argues that the tensions and divisions revealed within the Beartooth Alliance are symptomatic of the fissures and differences that run through most environmental organizations in this country. Thus, the uncertain future and uneven success of the Cooke City group provide a useful cautionary tale for environmental groups everywhere.

In the last chapter in this section, Zita Ingham examines the value of

rhetorical education in changing community values. In the small town of Red Lodge, Montana, as elsewhere across the country, environmental preservation is tied to disputes over land use, economic growth, and private property rights. The problem here is exacerbated by the fact that the area around Yellowstone National Park that includes Red Lodge is one of the fastest-growing areas in the United States. In her study of the way the people of Red Lodge respond to change, Ingham describes how one town constructs its sense of community through rhetorical activity that combines reason and emotion, outside experts and local citizens. Central to the success of this process is the idea that "rhetorical dialogue about the environment ties the health of the environment to the rhetorical health of the community." In the case of Red Lodge, the rhetorical principle of "identification" between speaker and audience helps consolidate a sense of community, and the rhetorical notion of dissensus, the willingness to explore the reasons for differences rather than enforce an artificial consensus, lead townspeople to an ongoing process of dialogue and collective action. In many ways, the rhetorical education going on in Red Lodge is an example of the more democratic models of risk communication advocated in the previous chapters by Waddell and by Katz and Miller.

The last four chapters describe the cultural and historical background in which the writers discussed in the first section and the institutional debates described in the second section take place. These essays examine some of the history of environmental rhetoric, and how ideological positions are established and negotiated through the language of environmental discourse. In various ways, these four chapters describe environmental discourse as the scene of cultural conflict and struggle. These essays explore the power of the poetic discourse at the bottom of our model, its historical development, and the cultural context within which these values and emotions are formed and combined with regulatory or scientific discourse. These four chapters make more explicit what the earlier chapters left implicit: the politics and details of environmental discourse must be understood within a broad cultural context. The connections between Thoreau, or Edwards and Mather, and current environmental debates, for example, emerge only as part of the historical development of American culture. Or as we suggest about the *New Yorker* essay "Albatrosses," romantic ideology can transcend narrowly defined political or institutional conflicts and reside, finally, in our shared cultural sense of the world and our place in it.

In the first of these essays, Robert Brown and Carl Herndl examine the environmental writing of the John Birch Society. They read one of the society's publications devoted to a discussion of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit as an example of the way the unequal relations of power between social groups affects environmental discourse. Using the cultural theory of

French critic Pierre Bourdieu, they argue that the society's seemingly irrational rhetoric is not evidence that its writers are uninformed or illogical. Rather, the radical discourse of society publications serves to establish the social identity of society members and to consolidate power within their group. Brown and Herndl argue that for members of politically marginal groups such as the John Birch Society this oppositional rhetoric and its spokespersons offer a powerful, idealized persona with which sympathetic readers identify. Thus, the society's rhetoric, like that of other environmental discourses, must be understood as part of a complicated social negotiation of power and identity.

In her essay "Environmental Rhetoric in the Age of Hegemonic Politics," Marilyn Cooper points out that the fundamental dilemma facing environmental organizations is the degree to which we must change our lifestyle to preserve the environment. Must we make the radical changes advocated by the deep ecology movement and groups like Earth First! or simply manage our environment better as groups like the Nature Conservancy suggest? Cooper focuses on an essential rhetorical construct: the nature of persuasion. Specifically, she is concerned with how we can best persuade people to change their lifestyles and how we can gauge the success or failure of the rhetorical strategies of different environmental groups. Cooper compares the policies of the Nature Conservancy and Earth First! and examines the rhetorical structure of representative pieces of their writings. She analyzes these two groups through the perspective of radical democratic politics, a theory that examines the way groups struggle to create a position or point of view that people in a society will accept as a commonsense basis for their actions. Social change is successful when groups can link new values to accepted political positions in a society. Using this theoretical approach, Cooper concludes that the environmental movement needs to forge connections between the very different rhetorical strategies of Earth First! and the Nature Conservancy.

The books, essays, and community discussions analyzed in earlier chapters all represent the environment in language; after all, we negotiate our cultural and political consensus, or our lack of one, through language. But as Clark, Halloran, and Woodford demonstrate, the language we use to discuss and debate environmental policy is partly determined by the way we have historically depicted nature and our relations to it in art, here the paintings of the Hudson River School. This distinctly American tradition of landscape art provides us with images that carry with them political and cultural assumptions about the relationship between humans and nature. As Clark, Halloran, and Woodford argue, the paintings of Thomas Cole establish a rhetoric in which humans are alienated from the natural world, which then becomes the potential object of human domination. They set

this artistic tradition in the context of the nineteenth-century development of the land and connect this rhetorical representation to contemporary debates over the environment. The images of the Hudson River School are an important source for the contemporary sense of nature as a resource to be used and the opposing position that humans are a destructive intrusion into nature.

In the last chapter, Charles Bergman explores the ways in which our artistic images speak to us about the alienation of men and women both from the natural world and from themselves, from their own bodies. Moving from prehistoric paintings etched on the walls of Spanish caves to the pastoral tradition in Western literature, Bergman traces the connection between nature and the human body. He interprets these images as signs that help us understand the cultural myths that have constructed our relationship to nature as one of power and desire. Bergman finds the clearest expression of this relationship in the prehistoric cave paintings; he argues that we have always invested the body of nature with the desires that control our relation to our own bodies. Noting the absence of desire and sexualized imagery from American nature writing, he calls for a transformation of our relationship to nature and the the relations of power and control that mark our alienation from the natural world.

The environment has become a central topic in a wide range of institutions and forums. Discussions of environmental matters now not only occupy entire fields of study, but cross disciplinary boundaries and include the distinctly American genre of nature writing, several sciences, politics, economics, ethics, law, and spirituality. Despite this widespread concern, however, scholars have produced very few concentrated analyses of the rhetoric of these debates. This collection begins to address that lack and provides a scheme for defining the emerging field of rhetorical analyses of environmental discourse. Although the chapters in this collection examine a range of methods, sites, and issues, there is a great variety of environmental discourse that remains to be examined. Environmental discourse in the mass media, writing in sciences such as biology and ecology, and the growing body of work in environmental racism and ecofeminism provide rich sites for future analysis.

As the essays in this collection demonstrate, rhetorical criticism offers a means to investigate and evaluate, as Sonja Foss notes, "rhetorical acts and artifacts for the purpose of understanding the rhetorical process" of language at work in the world (5). Rhetorical criticism can provide "a form of interrogation, of performed response, of appreciation, interpretation, explanation, and judgment," according to Thomas Benson (xxii). The essays

collected here analyze environmental discourse produced in a wide variety of sites and genres and offer explanations of how these very different discourses are constructed rhetorically.

Questions of environmental action and policy are notoriously difficult to resolve—the pervasive nature of the problems, their breadth and variety, as well as the encompassing range of professional and social interests involved all create a seemingly intractable complexity. Often competing arguments seem incommensurate, not only because they represent opposing interests, but because of differences in institutional, disciplinary, and social discourses. The various essays presented here examine these differences and provide analytic tools to investigate the language through which environmental issues are constructed and contested. Further, they suggest how rhetoric as a discipline can help resolve environmental disputes. Many of the studies in this book suggest that writing intended for a large public audience is most successful when it combines the rhetorical resources of more than one kind of discourse. For example, the power of nature writing to alter our cultural values and influence action comes from the writer's ability to combine scientific information with some of the forms and appeals characteristic of poetic discourse. As our relations to nature are not purely rational, not solely a matter of scientific knowledge, so our discourse must acknowledge the emotional and spiritual elements of our relation to nature. But perhaps most importantly, if we live in an "age of missing information," as Bill McKibben argues, rhetorical analyses of how we talk about the environment provide a means to recover some of what is missing.

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CHAPTER 1

Millennial Ecology

The Apocalyptic Narrative from *Silent Spring* to *Global Warming*

M. JIMMIE KILLINGSWORTH and JACQUELINE S. PALMER

> More and more it seems to me that the philosopher, being *of necessity* a man of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, has always found himself, and *had* to find himself, in contradiction to his today: his enemy was ever the ideal of today. So far all these extraordinary furtherers of man whom one calls philosophers, though they themselves have rarely felt like friends of wisdom but rather like disagreeable fools and dangerous question marks, have found their task, their hard, unwanted, inescapable task, but eventually also the greatness of their task, in being the bad conscience of their time.
>
> —Nietzsche

> I'll walk to the depths of the deepest forest,
> Where the people are many and their hands are all empty,
> Where the pellets of poison are flooding their waters,
> Where the home in the valley meets the damp dirty prison,
> Where the executioner's face is always well hidden,
> . . . It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall.
>
> —Bob Dylan

Apocalyptic narratives, long recognized as a major thematic and structural component in science fiction (Slusser, Greenland, and Rabkin), as well as in both canonical and postmodern American literature (Bercovitch; Dewey; Jameson; Newman; Robinson; Tichi), have for the last three decades also served as a standard feature of environmentalist polemic (DeGregori; Emsley). In depicting the end of the world as a result of the overweening desire to control nature, activists have discovered a rhetorical means of contesting their opponents' claims for the idea of progress with its ascendent narratives of human victory over nature (Killingsworth and Palmer). How are we to receive the words of these latter-day prophets?