APOCALYPSE THEN AND NOW: CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES OF ENVIRONMENTAL EXTINCTION

By

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APOCALYPSE THEN AND NOW: CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES
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ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines the heretofore unexamined dovetailing of concerns and motifs found in environmental, science-fiction, romantic, and post-apocalyptic narratives. In particular, I focus upon contemporary renderings of architectural ruins, vegetation, children, and depopulated landscapes. These broadly romantic tropes of the nineteenth century, I argue, are reworked in post-World War II fictions and writings to yield now commonplace ecological and post-apocalyptic motifs. Typically, post-cataclysmic landscapes are endowed with a sometimes uncanny fecundity, which can signal both healthy, consoling growth and also the dominion of a toxic, “postnatural” nature that is working to rid itself of humans and human infrastructures. The narratives I examine are, then, often poised between affirming an optimistic humanism and, perhaps unwittingly, a more nihilistic ideology, one which in some versions values non-anthropocentric ecology over urbanism and human life. As such, many of the narratives I examine anticipate contemporary forms of radical environmentalism.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been a long and often bewildering task. At times I measured progress not in pages or even paragraphs but in lines. Numerous engrossing books remain half read; others I carefully marked up only to leave out of the bibliography. There were many detours, and until quite late the project seemed hydra-headed. My supervisory committee--Ronald Granofsky, Joe Adamson, and Imre Szeman--corrected my intellectual and grammatical missteps, and to them must go much of the credit for this dissertation's strengths. They treated me as a colleague, I suspect, long before I had produced anything to warrant such a designation. Ron, a man of extraordinary patience, scrutinized every line, and I could not have wished for a better editor, commentator, and teacher. As well, I thank Graham Petrie and Joseph Sigman, two early committee members (now retired) who respectively helped me get a handle on Tarkovsky and Pynchon. From the front office Antoinette Somo and Clover Nixon steered me through the annual administrative hazards. I also picked up countless leads and benefited in subtle ways from conversations with my contemporaries: Robert Brazeau, Adam Carter, Dennis Desroches, Robin Lucy, Anne Milne, Nanette Morton, Ken Paradis, Wendy Stewart, and Neil Stubbs. At every turn my mother and father offered encouragement and love. And Giuseppina and George buoyed up my spirits.
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INTRODUCTION:

THE GENESIS AND MAP OF MY PROJECT AND THE SCOPE OF CONTEMPORARY APOCALYPTIC ANXieties

My project is thoroughly rooted in and inspired by the films of Andrei Tarkovsky (d. 1986). On first encountering his work, I believed (following Borges's musings on Kafka) that in his capacity as a filmmaker he was as "singular as the phoenix" (199). In a sense, my dissertation, then, is an attempt to dispel this hasty first impression by sketching one possible context for Tarkovsky's films, a context or network of affinities that he himself may not have been aware of or would not, in any case, have seen in quite the same way. Running throughout Tarkovsky's work, I find, is an increasingly urgent environmental message. Societies are typically seen on the brink of some sort of cataclysm or eradication. In Ivan's Childhood (1962), Andrei Roulewy (1966), and Mirror (1972), Russia faces threats of foreign invasion (from Germany's World War II armies in the first and third films; from fourteenth-century Tartars in the second). In Stalker (1979) a tormented environmental martyr wages a meagre campaign to teach others to respect what is seemingly the last enclave of nature in an oppressively industrialized world. In Solaris (1972) an alien planet's entire ecosystem is faced with annihilation. In his last films, Nostalghia (1983) and The Sacrifice (1986), the director is concerned with the struggles of would-be apocalyptic prophets to be heard.
Drawing upon centuries-old religious speculation about human situatedness within the cosmos, Tarkovsky’s films depict the gradual conversion of what were once purely theological apocalyptic anxieties into ecologically-based speculations about the future of our planet. To that end, I recontextualize contemporary eco-apocalypse narratives (for example, the fictions J. G. Ballard, H. G. Wells, Russell Hoban, Edward Abbey, and Timothy Findley among others) with reference to environmental and romantic texts, for I believe that a similar recontextualization was Tarkovsky’s unacknowledged plan. Specifically, I focus on the post-World War II period, during which there arises in fictions an obsession with natural landscapes that somehow endure cataclysms and even yield uncanny beauty. If environmental sciences and philosophies teach us that nature can be read as a registry of the ecological state of things, then established nature genres such as romantic poetry can provide one possible context for reading these new apocalyptic genres. Of particular interest to me are narratives of survival and aftermaths: for example, Wells’s The World Set Free (1917), William Golding’s Lord of the Flies (1954), Walter M. Miller Jr.’s A Canticle for Leibowitz (1959), Hoban’s Riddley Walker (1980), Abbey’s Good News (1980), Findley’s Not Wanted on the Voyage (1984), and numerous short novels by Ballard.

Of course, the field of contemporary apocalyptic texts, films, narratives, and discourses is tremendously broad. There is, for example, Nevil Shute’s melodramatic thriller On the Beach (1957) and Stanley Kramer’s faithful film adaptation of 1964; yet during the same seven-year span, Stanley Kubrick released his relentlessly absurdist Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964), seemingly
meant for an utterly different generation.¹

Around the same time, Rachel Carson published her widely read and influential Silent Spring, and six years after this book, Abbey (a Thoreau for the Cold-War era, we might say) begins publishing a long series of apocalyptic non-fiction and fiction texts.

Also proliferating in the post-war period are popular science-fiction films featuring forms of world-threatening crisis: The Thing (dir. Christian Nyby, 1951); The Day the Earth Stood Still (dir. Robert Wise, 1951); When Worlds Collide (dir. Rudolph Maté, 1951) (the latter’s premise of an asteroid hitting the earth revived recently by the blockbusters Deep Impact and Armageddon [both 1998]); Godzilla (dir. Inoshiro Honda, 1954); Invasion of the Body Snatchers (dir. Don Siegel, 1956); and Planet of the Apes (dir. Franklin Schaffner, 1968).²

But there is also a sizable body of self-consciously highbrow (that is, more “difficult”) postmodern literature that indirectly touches upon similar concerns. I have in

¹

See Ian Christie’s essay on apocalyptic cinema, in which he writes that the “end of the war . . . inaugurated a new modality of Apocalypse . . . . Henceforth there would be films about the imminence of nuclear ‘mutually assured destruction,’ about the psychological effects of living with this threat, and about the likely aftermath of nuclear war: a whole arsenal of films devoted to this blasphemous man-made Apocalypse” (Carey 331-32).

²

For a summary of science-fiction films, including those from Japan, see chapter twelve of David A. Cook’s comprehensive and arguably definitive A History of Narrative Film (1996): “all of the decade’s science fiction films contained an element of dread, but The Thing . . . started a phenomenally popular cycle of films about monsters and mutations produced by nuclear radiation or materialized from outer space which dominated the genre for the next ten years” (499). One could therefore easily make the case that virtually all science fiction films of the period, including a great many right up to the present, are at least implicitly apocalyptic.
mind here the works of Margaret Atwood, Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, the Strugatsky Brothers, Martin Amis, Russell Hoban, as well as J. G. Ballard, who seems to relish the fact that his fictional output still straddles both conventional thriller categories (for example, Hello America [1981] and Rushing to Paradise [1994]) and more experimental forms (Love and Napalm: Export USA [1969]; Crash [1973]; High Rise [1993]). Of course, I do not seek to make or maintain fast generic distinctions, but I have tried to highlight through my selection of materials the extent to which the anxieties about an apocalyptic end occurring within our near future cut across many political, national, intellectual, ideological, and generic boundaries. Given his varied output, where, for example, does one place Tarkovsky, if only provisionally?

Two noteworthy anthologies that further indicate the immense breadth of textual, visual, and cultural materials that have been included in discussions of contemporary apocalyptic themes are Adam Parfrey’s Apocalypse Culture (1987) and John Clute’s coffee-table book, Book of Endtimes: Grappling with the New Millennium (1999). Lavishly illustrated with film stills and images, both volumes assemble assorted pop-culture phenomena. Parfrey compiles, in an “unsentimental spirit of inquiry,” testimonies by LSD users and advocates, extreme right-wing pamphlets, the writings and drawings of institutionalized schizophrenics, UFO theories, excerpts from New-Age religious writings, conspiracy theories, and interviews with unrepentant necrophiles and child-porn enthusiasts. He states that “these folk artists” and their researchers (that is, Parfrey and several others who provide commentary and conduct interviews) are “more worthy cultural barometers than often more clever but intellectually and emotionally corrupt
professionals" (13). Clute’s book focuses on more mainstream culture, albeit at its most ravenously consumerist extremes (Tamagotchis, Teletubbies, science fiction, popmusic, for example), to illustrate “our diseased compulsion to misunderstand things, to be hysterical” in the late twentieth century (1).

How is it that we are able to recognize such widely disparate productions and practices as somehow apocalyptic? The materials found in the anthologies collectively advance notions that humanity, civilization, and culture are indeed in their death-throes and that anything is now permitted, insofar as humans can--and do--take part in radically carnivalized orgies of aggression, affront, and self indulgence.³ My own approach differs markedly as I focus on narrative and/or textual genres (fiction, philosophy, ecology, cinema, for example) that endeavour to show how a human demise may come about. If Parfrey’s and Clute’s anthologies suggest a very peculiar variant of late-twentieth-century pop culture’s vaguely defined mood of helter-skelter, we should pause to note that calculated affront is not unprecedented.

For example, in Conrad’s The Secret Agent (1907), the czarist Vladimir lectures Verloc, an agent provocateur, on the likelihood that Verloc’s next bombing will have the desired effect of being perceived as a truly anarchic act that will create widespread panic: “A bomb outrage to have any influence on public opinion now must go beyond the

³ See, for example, chapter nine of Thomas Pynchon’s V. (1963), in which besieged German colonialists in 1922 South Africa retreat into a well-fortified compound for an orgiastic “siege party” while a bloody indigenous uprising rages. The episode concludes with the revellers emerging “dehumanized and aloof, as if they were the last gods on earth” (279).
intention of vengeance or terrorism. It must be purely destructive” and should “indicate a willingness to make a clean sweep of the whole of social creation” (emphasis added). But times have changed, he recognizes. Newspapers effectively dictate the meanings of such attacks with “ready-made phrases to explain away such manifestations”; moreover, many traditional targets have been invested with very specific meanings: if one bombs a church, for example, many will see a “religious manifestation,” Vladimir laments, sounding a peculiarly nostalgic tone (66).

Now, some one-hundred years later, the circumstances attending contemporary notions of a sudden, purely catastrophic event are virtually reversed. Where Conrad’s operatives seek to contrive an incident free of all theological meanings, today we, that is, our newsreports and politicians, cannot readily attach theological meanings to catastrophes such as toxic spills, nuclear mishaps, and military threats. Even terrorism explicitly waged in the name of holy causes is interpreted as being ultimately about political ends, and the aggressor’s rhetoric is more often regarded as propagandistic rather than truly theological. The Realpolitik is what we look for in the West. Headline news is cast in secular terms. Accordingly, the rhetoric of a “clean sweep” is more likely to be invoked when speaking of the environment, of, say, species extermination, barren seas, and uninhabitable toxic zones, while the religious interpretation is apt to be stifled or turned into a minority voice.

Increasingly prevalent today is a more radical, anarchic rhetoric, one which already looks past the seemingly inevitable, as if cynically anticipating the apocalypse with either true glee or dark irony. Interviewed in 1980, the East German playwright
Heiner Müller suggested that “[s]ooner or later one should perhaps admit that one takes pleasure in destruction and things that fall apart. . . . The true pleasure of writing consists, after all, in the enjoyment of catastrophe” (190). He was speaking specifically about Germany in 1945, about the collapse of infrastructures and a heinous political order, but the essence of his sentiment is, I believe, applicable to much of the contemporary discourse about ends. His words articulate an anarchic, far-left glee. This glee, however, also occurs frequently in the writings of the more right-wing environmentalist Edward Abbey, whose writings about industrial sabotage I also examine.

Attempting to grapple with the paradoxes that attend contemporary versions of our ultimate end, the German cultural critic Hans Magnus Enzensberger argues that the apocalypse is today both a “nightmare” and an “aprodiasic,” insofar as it represents both our worst fear and a collective death wish that is endlessly being reimagined (233). Yet the theological component, he argues, is largely residual:

the end of the world is no longer what it used to be. The film playing in our heads, and still more uninhibitedly in our unconscious, is distinct in many respects from the dreams of old. In its traditional coinings, the apocalypse was a venerable, indeed a sacred, idea. But the catastrophe we are so concerned with (or rather haunted by) is an entirely secularized phenomenon. (234)

More succinctly, he writes: “Once people saw in the apocalypse the unknowable avenging hand of God. Today it appears as the methodically calculated product of our own actions” (234). Where Conrad’s Londoners are all too ready to find revelation in catastrophe, epiphanies at such moments seem increasingly impossible today.4

4 On the subject of truly theological, apocalyptic narratives employed by populist preachers and televangelists, such as Bill Graham and Robert Schuller, see Barry
Accordingly, our era is also accented by a sizable body of dire humanist warnings, wherein we can witness a transformation of old, theologically based fears into secular anxieties. Frank Kermode, for example, writes in a recent anthology of apocalyptic art that

it is not difficult to see the history of the twentieth century as providing more than adequate confirmation of the horrible events imagined as preceding the end. . . . Modern artists, in giving precise expression to a vaguer, more general, less acute anxiety that all may share, find themselves repeating the old figurations of Apocalypse. Even when the old thought is modernized the old imagery recurs. (Carey 20)

Spencer Weart makes a similar point but stresses the displacement of older ideas of apocalypse. In his massive compendium of twentieth-century nuclear imagery, he shows how, after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, apocalyptic rhetoric, which had once been purely theological, began to infiltrate mainstream and secular discourses as both narrative model and metaphor. Henceforth, the idea of a doomsday brought about by technology began to be separated from mythical or religious accounts of Armageddon; as well, nuclear energy and the bombs it made possible became a condensed symbol of the worst of modernity and gave twentieth-century nihilism a dismal tangibility (19, 106, 392-95). In my first chapter, I address the question of the secularized apocalypse with reference to etymology and Nietzsche.

The spectre of nuclearism that Weart invokes centres, of course, on the year 1945. There as well, Ron Granofsky finds the emergence of an important contemporary sub-genre, the trauma novel, poised between pre-war modernism and postmodernism.

Delineating in part his grouping of texts is the common apprehension of “the destructive potential in human depravity given free rein by modern technology” (11). Ecological disaster, he suggests, begets ecological trauma and notes “a suicidal bent to humanity which does not bode well for its future” (10). Although our projects share many affinities, I make environmental catastrophe into my major theme, whereas Granofsky focuses more often upon fictional characters who are survivors of human atrocities or who are otherwise afflicted. Accordingly, their psychological states tend to be delineated in greater detail; however, a writer such as Ballard, for example, fits better into my scheme because his characters tend to be formulaic and, some might say, even cardboard-like.

Until well into the 1980s, what seems a pervasive Cold War logic insinuates the topic of a nuclear holocaust into the most unlikely places. Terry Eagleton’s enormously popular literary-theory primer includes this unexpected musing:

As I write, it is estimated that the world contains over 60,000 nuclear warheads, many with a capacity a thousand times greater than the bomb which destroyed Hiroshima. The possibility that these weapons will be used in our lifetime is steadily growing. . . . Anyone who believed that literary theory was more important than such matters would no doubt be considered somewhat eccentric. (194)

Also making a case for politically engaged literary-criticism, albeit of very different texts, is Brian Easlea, whose gender-sensitive reading of science narratives and discourses (for example, Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein [1818; 1831] as well as the biographies and testimonies of real scientists) finds a very different cause at the bottom of today’s apocalyptic climate but arrives at a similar conclusion:

I believe that masculine tendencies in general predominate over human [sic] in at least a minority of highly important activities, including modern science, and that
it is this insufficiently bridled reign of the masculine that is taking all of humanity and indeed the entire biosphere along the path to nuclear holocaust, just as Dr. Frankenstein’s unbridled masculine ambition eventually took him and all the people he loved to a miserable death. (39)

Here too, we can see a tendency to read realities through secular fictions.

In the mid-1960s, Kermode famously noted: “No longer imminent, the end is immanent” (Kermode 25, 101). Today we might make an emendation and say that ubiquity breeds apathy. Many critics have suggested that complacency comes with the proliferation of apocalyptic narratives and imagery. Indeed, attending the proliferation of any narrative paradigm, genre, or common train of thought is the risk of banality and public apathy. For instance, in The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture (1995), Lawrence Buell worries that the narratives and rhetoric of “late twentieth-century environmental dystopianism” have long ago begun to “look somewhat hackneyed” (308).

For Peter Schwenger this ubiquity has important consequences: “nuclear war is dominated by textuality, is in a sense created by it,” because it has only taken place in theoretical or narrative forms. Accordingly, “we have an extreme example of the dominance of the signifier over the signified” (xv). His observation can be extended beyond nuclear anxieties; that is, we have narratives, predictions, and theories about apocalyptic ends that are applicable to seemingly infinite phenomena standing under threat. In most cases, a truly final cataclysm is still to come (except, of course, where particular animal species or biota are concerned), but we seem to have become weary through textual anticipation of all its possible variants. On this very point, Klaus Sherpe
writes, “an ecological disaster and the catastrophic developments now underway in
genetic engineering are both just as suitable for snuffing out human existence or making
it unrecognizable. The producibility of the [images and narratives of] catastrophe *is* the
catastrophe” (96).

To that end, Jean Baudrillard remarks, in his laconic travel-diary about the United
States, on weariness through familiarity. He notes, for example, the American “masses’
silent indifference to nuclear pathos (whether it comes from the nuclear powers or from
antinuclear campaigners)” (44). Although it focuses relentlessly upon cultural and
spiritual demises rather than biological ones and, therefore, perhaps lacks what we would
today consider a truly ecological concern, T. S. Eliot’s “The Hollow Men” (1925)
anticipated much of the grim irony attending twentieth-century notions of the end when it
predicted an end “[n]ot with a bang but a whimper.” “No, not with a bang but through
proliferations,” we could respond.

A very different set of imperatives and responses can be traced in the ecocriticism
written in recent years. Like the comments of Eagleton and Baudrillard, these texts too
are gravely apprehensive, but missing are irony and detachment. There prevails instead a
spirit of political engagement. The environmental historian Donald Worster, for example,
offers this summary in the conclusion: “Juggle our responses as we may, there can be no
getting around the fact that science has made possible the modern devastation of nature”
(343). Similarly, the environmentalist and author Farley Mowatt writes: “We are like
yeasts in a vat—mindlessly multiplying as we greedily devour a finite world. If we do not
change our ways, we will perish as the yeasts perish—having exhausted our sustenance
and poisoned ourselves in the lethal brew of our own wastes” (279).

In this light we should also note that the majority of essays in Michael E. Soulé and Gary Lease’s anthology, *Reinventing Nature?: Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction* (1995), and especially the statistics-laden and biologically informed arguments of Stephen R. Kellert and Soulé, who confirm that hard data and apocalyptic rhetoric need not be mutually exclusive. Kellert uses statistical methods to compare Eastern and Western conceptions of nature, but his ultimate aim is to discredit deconstructionist relativism ("the notion of nature as an ‘invention’ of culture,” for example) as “both biologically misguided and socially dangerous” (103, 118). Soulé writes of “the ideological war on nature” and summarizes conceptions of nature that date back 10,000 years. Both essays conclude with bleak forecasts.

Richard Kerridge attempts to map this relatively new field of critical and literary endeavour, and, pondering the possibility of a grave ecological crisis, writes that its elusiveness is its salient feature: “on the one hand there is hard scientific evidence; on the other there is much uncertainty about the meaning of these figures and measurements, and accordingly even more uncertainty about possible remedies (Kerridge and Sammells 1). But despite uncertainties, he continues, “the starting-point for the eco-critic is that there really is an unprecedented global environmental crisis, and that this crisis poses some of the great political and cultural questions of our time” (5). Accordingly, the bulk of environmental writings I examine contain an explicit apocalyptic moment.

Here is Cheryll Glotfelty, co-editor of another recent anthology of environmental writings, summarizing the breadth of her area of study: “most ecocritical work shares a
common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet’s basic life support systems. We are there. Either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse” (xx). Although varied, the field clearly is defined best by a common belief in an imminent environmental collapse.

In some sense, fiction has long anticipated many of the issues that critical theory is now addressing and bringing into greater focus. For example, a pervasive theme of Atwood’s Surfacing (1972) is the threat of an imminent natural-resources war, during which Canada is invaded by an aggressively imperialistic and desperate America after its own water supplies are exhausted and its citizens begin dying en masse. The northern Quebec bush “is the kind of place that will be strategically important during the war,” theorizes one character (96). Given the meagre evidence marshalled, the logic is clearly not a likely geopolitical scenario but rather a paranoid extension of the characters’ fragile nationalist fervour and Cold War fears: not only will East fight West but even once-allied nations will turn against each other when a crisis is sufficiently grave. Tellingly, the fear of American aggression later contributes to the mental breakdown of the unnamed narrator, who even in the novel’s first sentence is worrying about an invasive “disease . . . spreading up from the south” (7).

Ultimately, this haphazard constellation of fears contribute significantly to the narrator’s psychotic but metaphorically accurate fear of threats to her body, which in turn better enable her to intuit the real and pervasive ecological threats to non-human nature.
Already traumatised by an abortion that she underwent earlier as well as by the disappearance and possible death of her father, the narrator is ideally suited to articulate the sanctity of all living things. Setting too is important in this novel because only in the wilderness, in close proximity to relatively pristine nature, Atwood suggests, can one become the canary in the coal mine for the entire globe, albeit at the risk of completely losing one’s sanity.

Operating in *Surfacing* is an eco-logic informed largely by romanticism. This logic dictates that we can learn lessons from nature and, in turn, from the long tradition of nature writing. In particular, rural writers, it can be argued, have for much longer been acutely attuned to environmental hazards because of their, as Raymond Williams puts it, “insistence on the complexity of the living natural environment” (300). Although concerned largely with nineteenth-century fiction, Williams concludes his book *The Country and the City* (1973) on an uncanny note. One could well imagine Abbey having written it:

Some of the darkest images of the city [or urbanization] have to be faced as quite literal futures. An insane over-confidence in the specialised powers of metropolitan industrialism has brought us to the point where however we precisely assess it the risk to human survival is becoming evident, or if we survive, as I think we shall, there is the clear impossibility of continuing as we are. (300, 301).

Once again, a student of nature and nature texts, one who is coincidentally rural-born, best apprehends disasters that lie well beyond his immediate realm, as if to belie his supposed rusticity.

In a similar spirit of urban antagonism, the photographer Sophie Ristelhueber
describes a recent project's aims thus: “to photograph modern architecture in ruins” (Hindry 12). To that end, her work from the 1980s and 90s features images of picturesque old ruins, set amidst apparently bucolic landscapes with horses and meadows; but these landscapes are, in fact, fragments of regions only recently devastated by war or natural disasters, areas such as Beirut, Kuwait, Mostar (located in the former Yugoslavia), and Armenia (photographed after a 1989 earthquake). All her images intentionally avoid the traditional post-disaster iconography of haggard survivors in front of destroyed homes. Sometimes accorded the same aesthetic reverence that we associate with the ruins found in romantic landscapes by Joseph Turner (1775-1851), Ristelhueber's landscapes reveal only upon further study that the architecture they contain is not weathered by the elements but by bullets. Lush, wild landscapes are, it turns out, near recently excavated mass-graves; a dandelion-filled meadow lies adjacent.

In a catalogue of Ristelhueber's recent work, Ann Hindry describes the sensation of looking at the photos and feeling “a vague awareness aris[ing] that these impressive geological configurations, once clear of human traces, will be recast once more on a cataclysmic scale in a time beyond human measurement” (74). Herein I find a secret, misanthropic desire to wish away humans who merely abuse the environment. A similar fascination with ruins and depopulated spaces runs through many of the narratives that I will examine.

In the first chapter proper, I examine the etymology of the word “apocalypse” and take note of the waning of its explicitly theological meanings and connotations. I argue that Nietzsche’s brief parable about the extinguishing of our sun (contained in his 1873
essay, “Of Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense”) forms an apt paradigm for contemporary apocalyptic warnings and narratives. In this light, I then consider Ballard’s *The Drowned World* (1963) and Nevil Shute’s *On the Beach* (1957).

Chapter two is an examination of the pervasiveness of notions that hold that we must expand the scope of our ethics to properly apprehend (and rectify) nature’s apocalyptic trajectory. By examining the history of ecology (as mapped by Worster and Nash) and the works of three seminal environmental thinkers (Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Arne Naess), I show how philosophical branches of ecology, such as Naessian deep ecology, draw upon older ethical, intellectual, and artistic traditions. Also, throughout the chapter, I turn to the apocalyptic fictions of William Attaway, Wells, George Case, Findley, Bernard Malamud, and DeLillo, all of whom suggest the urgent need for broader ethical consideration.

In my third chapter, I argue that after nineteenth-century romanticism, the intuitions and experiences of childhood invoked in ecological narratives are routinely regarded as the necessary preconditions for environmental sensitivity. In this light, and with reference to some shorter poems by Wordsworth and Blake, I look at Sara Orne Jewett, Ernest Callenbach, Ballard, and Hoban, among others. The theme of children thriving in a post-apocalyptic wilderness is pervasive, I argue, because romanticism teaches that children intuitively absorb, and sometimes articulate, eco-ethical wisdom. As such, childhood is invested with optimistic metaphors for environmental recovery, and accordingly childhood memories have become a common theme in environmentalist biographies.
In the fourth chapter, I examine the integral role played by ruins in the iconography of contemporary eco-apocalypse narratives. In turn, I look closely at texts that feature romantic and toxic ruins, and at narratives of returning to (and reinhabiting) post-cataclysmic sites. Informed by the romanticisms of Goethe, Percy Shelley, and Mary Shelley, our modern conceptions of ruins, I argue, are the embodiment of numerous fantasies (and anxieties) about nature’s inexorable recuperative powers. To illustrate these themes, I cite the works of Abbey, Shute, Miller, the Strugatskys, Stanislaw Lem, John Hersey, Jonathan Schell, and Alexander Kluge.

In the fifth chapter, I examine Tarkovsky’s films. I return to themes of contemporary apocalyptic dread, eco-apocalypse, ethical expansion, children in nature, and ruins. I single out Tarkovsky because I believe that his articulations of these themes are the most complex, and thus they provide a useful coda for my study of the period in question.
CHAPTER 1

ETYMOLOGY, NIHILISTIC ANXIETIES

One need not perform a rigorous etymological study of the word “apocalypse” to recognize how, in its adjective form in particular, the word has in recent years come to refer to a great variety of things within the critical discourse arising out of the humanities. In textual and in oral genres, contemporary usage has made “apocalyptic” virtually synonymous with a series of qualities—violent, climactic, frenzied, savage, passionate, final—and only rarely is it applied in any context remotely related to the Christian framework of St. John’s visionary revelation on the island of Patmos, the account of which concludes the New Testament and eventually makes necessary the introduction of the word into the English language. The OED records the first use of the English noun-form in a twelfth-century account of St. John’s vision: “Hereof seid Seint Johan Pe ewangeliste in apocalpsi.” Here already arise seemingly innumerable questions for the modern reader as well as for many areas of literary-academic inquiry: for example, whether “apocalpsi” refers only to the actual revelation and St. John’s singular experience of it; whether St. John’s account of and commentary on his revelation comprise the only conceivable version, that is, the only true “apocalpsi”; and whether the account’s eventual form as a canonical text retains across transmission and translation the “apocalyptic,” that essential quality which makes it singular and somehow coherent.
across time. Nonetheless, the OED's delineation of the usage of "apocalypse" and its derivations (apocalypt, apalypt, apocalyptic, apocalyptical, apocalyptically, apocalyptist) reveals a surprising coherency as the cited uses consistently refer specifically to St. John (or the Book of Revelation, or both), to prophetic revelations generally, or to the Greek root ἀποκαλύπτειν that gives us the often-forgotten "correct" sense of the word in modern usage: to uncover or disclose. The extension of the word to encompass any revelation or disclosure, including some that are not necessarily divine, begins in the fourteenth century, and by the early eighteenth century, for example, Swift can introduce his thoroughly secular A Tale of a Tub (c. 1704) as "a compleat Body of Civil Knowledge, and the Revelation, or rather the Apocalyps of all State-Arcana" (1. Introduction; 299). Hereafter, the usage of apocalyptic is broadened to include any text because all texts disclose something.

In Contemporary Apocalyptic Rhetoric (1991), an excellent survey of the literature debating the etymology and the correct use of "apocalypse," Barry Brummett includes a section titled "What Does 'Apocalyptic' Mean?" (7-10). Modern biblical scholars, he finds, generally concur that the word's Greek derivation restricts its meaning to some form of metaphoric or literal unveiling of a metaphysical order; in fact, he goes on to say, "some scholars deny that any other characteristic can be as important" to the word's meaning. Most biblical scholars reject the reduction of "apocalyptic" to "cataclysmic," and some even deny that the term "need mean eschatology or the advent of a new age" (31). I am arguing, then, that in contemporary usage, a secondary (and perhaps debatable) but certainly not incorrect attribute of "apocalypse" has begun to dominate.
The more commonly understood sense of the word, the imminent physical end of a discernible structure (an urban area, a forest, a portion of our atmosphere), is what concerns us.

According to the OED, the specific association of the word “apocalypse” with the end of the world was hastened by the doctrinal forms “apocalypticism” and “apocalyptism,” which by the late nineteenth-century began to be used in reference to any prophecies, beliefs, or discourses articulated by groups who are in expectation of a cataclysmic event. Shedding any cultish associations and focusing exclusively on a violent end, contemporary usage has further shifted the word’s meaning. When we speak of the apocalyptic in contemporary literature we rarely mean that the texts in question are prophetic or have predictive capacities in the ancient sense, and, interestingly, even rarer are the writers who refer to their own texts as apocalyptic in any sense of the word. Such self-aggrandizement would surely seem out of place in our postmodern times. I will argue throughout that contemporary apocalyptic narratives eschew any sort of revelation or prophecy and emphasize instead irrevocable destruction; thus, what I am calling an apocalyptic nihilism is formed.

This late apocalyptic tone was first articulated by Nietzsche who, well before he so famously announced the death of God, killed off the earth’s human population with a rather unspectacular ending:

In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the haughtiest and most mendacious minute of “world history”—yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die.
One might invent such a fable and still not have illustrated sufficiently how wretched, how shadowy and flighty, how aimless and arbitrary, the human intellect appears in nature. There have been eternities when it did not exist; and when it is done for again, nothing will have happened. For this intellect has no further mission that would lead beyond human life. It is human, rather, and only its owner and producer gives it such importance, as if the world pivoted around it. . . . The proudest human being, the philosopher, thinks that he sees the eyes of the universe telescopically focused from all sides on his actions and thoughts. ("On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" 42)

The contemporary nihilist apocalypse, inaugurated here perhaps inadvertently, discloses no metaphysical or spiritual truth; it merely reports the denudation of the earth’s surface and the destruction of nature and biological life. The irony inherent in Nietzsche’s compact parable lies in its revelation of the ultimate limitations of collective human intellectual endeavour, limitations which differ from familiar Christian notions of mortal limitations viewed from a divine perspective, and which do not focus on guilt or sin, although they do address the Christian fundamentals regarding pride and humility. While Nietzsche counsels intellectual humility, he clearly does not intend a lesson to be gleaned by a wiser, post-apocalyptic generation, like, say, the lesson we might extrapolate from accounts of the expulsion from Eden or an Old Testament plague. Nietzsche’s human population does not cause its own extinction; “the star grew cold,” quite simply; there is no transgression and, of course, no Last Judgement. In earlier apocalyptic narratives such as the biblical account of the flood, humanity sins, ignores, strives too high, or somehow transgresses, and a predestined apocalypse is activated by a divine agency. Nietzsche’s parable is not properly a prophecy of the end of humanity, of humanity’s inevitable self-destruction through some form of transgression; it has no truly predictive aspiration. However, it does invoke the now all-too familiar post-apocalyptic setting of a desolate
earth existing in a cosmic void. In fictions ranging from Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826) to Nevil Shute’s cold-war thriller *On the Beach* (1957) to Timothy Findley’s *Not Wanted On the Voyage* (1984), we catch glimpses of abandoned yet eerily intact urban-centres, and the opening pages of J. G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World* (1963) fully relies upon the reader’s previous knowledge about such literary settings:

At the end of the month [a] small holding unit would complete their survey of the city (had it once been Berlin, Paris or London?, Kerans asked himself) and set off northward, towing the testing station with them. Kerans found it difficult to believe that he would ever leave the penthouse suite where he had lived for the past six months. The Ritz’s reputation, he gladly agreed, was richly deserved—the bathroom, for example, with its black marble basins and gold-plated taps and mirrors, was like the side-chapel of a cathedral. In a curious way it satisfied him to think that he was the last guest who would stay at the hotel, identifying what he realised was a concluding phase of his own life—the northward odyssey through the drowned cities in the south, soon to end with their return to Camp Byrd and its bracing disciplines—and this farewell sunset of the hotel’s long splendid history. (9)

We require little more context to comprehend this passage. Kerans’ rhetorical question (“had it once been Berlin, Paris, or London?”) suggests that at least a Europe-wide catastrophe has taken place, and the series of virtually interchangeable city names draws upon our familiarity with such cataclysmic settings; in fact, the narratorial voice may even suggest a kind of wariness of such literary settings. As the symbolic last guest, Kerans, occupies the luxury suite like a squatter, and his presence suggests some sort of post-apocalyptic opportunism not unlike the pillaging and looting of war-torn or otherwise abandoned cities, whereby foot soldiers or long-oppressed peasants finally gain entrance to the palaces of enemies or tyrants. The wide-eyed enumeration of the suite’s furnishings that is focalized through Kerans consciousness suggests that he is
unaccustomed to such opulence. Significantly, he imagines a cathedral. Metaphorically, the Ritz’s “long splendid history” evokes Europe and, by extension, both Western culture and the entire urbanized world, whose long histories are now, like Kerans’ life, in a “concluding phase.” I do not wish to politicize this particular apocalyptic narrative overmuch; Ballard is no latent anarchist taking aim at institutions, and there is ultimately nothing particularly liberating about this unfettered access to London’s treasures after the evacuation. Art and architecture are now typically too run-down or reduced to junk by exposure and neglect; at best they represent tawdry bric-a-brac or shelter. In fact, only the book’s villain, Strangman, becomes opportunistic. Like a latter-day Colonel Kurtz he enacts an old colonialist fantasy when, with the aid of a black crew, he navigates the flooded European continent to loot now-worthless art treasures. Ballard’s apocalyptic fictions are replete with such fantasies of transgression, of access, and of indulgence that range from the humbly nostalgic to the violently acquisitive. But these fantasies are usually lived out nostalgically.

Is an apocalypse out of nature or a part of it? This question may seem idle or naively put; however, the Christian apocalypse is traditionally regarded as an unfolding of the universe and the agency of God therein, and it reveals a preternatural dimension that has always been there beyond terrestrial nature and biological life. As such, it is an enlargement of the old concept of nature and all that any conception of it might entail. However, the nihilistic apocalypse as delineated by Nietzsche reveals only the brute materiality of the solar system that persists after man’s extinction. Nietzsche’s apocalypse is a reduction of the world as we had already perceived it, however imperfectly; it is a
diminishing of environments to tactile materials whereby no new facets are revealed.

Nietzsche’s apocalypse is doggedly grounded in natural cosmic processes. Humankind’s humility in the face of the Christian apocalypse arises out of an encounter with a divine agency, whereas humankind’s humility in the face of the Nietzschean apocalypse arises out of the inconsequentiality of its Sisyphusian attempts to know ultimate truths within an indifferent universe. The Christian apocalypse brings about transcendence, while the nihilist apocalypse reduces our world utterly. Like Nietzsche’s impotent philosophers, the biologists of Ballard’s novel, as well as a good many of the scientists of contemporary science fiction, are simply overwhelmed by the impending cataclysm; in fact, all anthropocentric illusions of progress through technology or scientific endeavour are finally exposed as fatally apocalyptic.5

But is it correct to speak of the enlargement or reduction of nature? I shall stick to my enlargement metaphor for those apocalypses informed by the New Testament; however, the Nietzschean nihilistic apocalypse needs further consideration. While it is clearly a final destruction emphasizing un-survivability, the contemporary apocalypse is

5 See Barry Brummett on Protestant notions of progress which underwrite most Western societies: “Postmillennialism [the belief that humanity will experience a kind of golden age before a final divine apocalypse] is a structure of thought that underlies, or is embodied in, many religious ideas that are fundamental for the current order of Western social, religious, political, and even technological thought. Therefore, an argument within postmillennial terms and assumptions is also fundamentally an argument for the established order. . . . postmillennial thought is the underlying cosmology behind the kind of Protestant theology that has been dominant in Western capitalist democracies during the industrial era” (62). Ernest Tuveson makes a similar point about Protestantism’s eventual triumph over Roman Catholicism’s premillennial notion of history, which held that history was “degenerating” toward an apocalypse rather than progressing (Millennium and Utopia 14, 67, 95).
not clearly a diminishing of nature but a radical transformation of it, whereby the pristine qualities of nature, which are sometimes regarded as the very essence of nature, are in fact dilated after the purgation of humans. Nietzsche’s burnt out solar system is one of the archeological desiderata of contemporary science fictions in that it presents the ruins of an extinct civilization for possible study. Common in contemporary literature, especially in Ballard’s work, is the scientist who, long after the futility of persisting with any sort of everyday endeavour has become clear, wishes to stay behind or who continues to gather data because of the unique scientific opportunity. When questioned about the utility of science in the face of the impending, fatal radioactive-fallout, which is the result of the nuclear holocaust that has devastated the entire northern hemisphere and has left Australia the last populated continent, the scientist Osborne in Shute’s On the Beach responds: “It’s all knowledge . . . . One has to try and find out what has happened” (65).

In Ballard’s version of an ecological apocalypse, a “succession of gigantic geophysical upheavals” (The Drowned World 21) drastically expand the sphere of a new kind of rampant nature. They can be read as a litany of real contemporary environmental fears: global warming, diminishing atmospheric protection, melting of polar ice-caps, declining fertility, mutations owing to radioactivity, and all their attendant complications. Here too, pristine spaces are restored; nature is conceived as a suddenly alien, encroaching force which causes the earth to regress to pre-ice-age conditions and causes a concomitant atavism of biological life. Here too, rare scientific opportunities are available, and the biologists Kerans and Bodkin continue gathering information even after this particular form of ecological catastrophe has grown to apocalyptic proportions:
[Kerans] longed for this descent through archaeopsychic time to reach its conclusion, repressing the knowledge that when it did the external world around him would have become alien and unbearable.

Sometimes he restlessly made a few entries in his botanical diary about the new plant forms, and during the first weeks called several times on Dr. Bodkin. (84)

Even though scientific endeavour continues unabated until the end, it has long lost the power to affect a nature now radically out of control.

In both Shute and Ballard, and in the contemporary apocalyptic in general, comprehensive scientific explanations arising in the wake of the catastrophe are marshalled for the sake of the narrative alone and hold no transcendant revelatory power.

When Kerans ponders a more philosophical account of what is happening, an explanation that will combine his scientific training with the some rudimentary Judeo-Christian beliefs, he provides a vaguely symbolic dimension for the novel:

The birth of a child had become a comparative rarity, and only one marriage in ten yielded any offspring. As Kerans reminded himself, the genealogical tree of mankind was systematically pruning itself, apparently moving backwards in time, and a point might ultimately be reached where a second Adam and Eve found themselves alone in a new Eden. (23)

But we cannot simply take this passage as some sort of key to the novel, as, for example, a *mise en abyme*, embedded in the text in order to duplicate the entire work in miniature and to highlight its latent Christian symbolism as a coherent narrative that prefigures another genesis.6 Articulated here is an atheistic view of the universe. We are of course

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In *The Sense of an Ending*, Kermode, summarizing narrative paradigms, writes "[b]roadly speaking, apocalyptic thought belongs to rectilinear rather than cyclical views of the world, though this is not a sharp distinction" (5). Like Erich Auerbach, Kermode argues that classical Greek epics rely on a cyclical, non-terminating notion of history: in accordance with fundamental rules, an event on one point of a cycle corresponds to a
free, like Nietzsche, to draw our own conclusions about, say, man’s anthropocentric arrogance, but anthropocentric arrogance is entirely different from Christian notions of human arrogance in the face of God’s apocalyptic power. The difference lies, I believe, in our changed attitude towards the environment in the twentieth century. Anthropocentrism and our actions as a species, as opposed to our role as God’s subjects, are being interrogated.

While the apocalyptic narratives inaugurated by Nietzsche posit nothing but a series of ultimate voids, some also suggest that we can somehow look past human timescales and thereby redefine what a void is. Is it only that from which humans are absent, for example? Nietzsche’s notion that our collective “intellect has no further mission that would lead beyond human life” is being challenged by environmentalists and ecologists that urge us to look past narrow anthropocentric concerns. While these thinkers too are typically nihilistic (or simply bleak) in their outlook when they are estimating the survival of a particular species, some thinkers suggest that our human intellect can, in fact, reach beyond our mere minute of “world history” by forging in the present an ecologically based system of ethics to benefit the future, perhaps even a future without us. Inherent in Nietzsche’s bleak parable is a revalorization of some romantic ideals about nature, particularly about its dwarfing of strictly human concerns. But, despite its familiar romanticism, it is a radically changed conception of nature inaugurating a new attendant vocabulary: biosphere, ecosphere, global, green, eco-philosophy, and eco-apocalypse. Contemporary environmental thought, as we shall see, takes from romanticism just as it series of parallel points on an infinite series of parallel cycles (3–23).
does from Nietzsche.
CHAPTER 2

CONTEMPORARY APOCALYPSE AND EXPANDED ETHICS: READING FICTION WITH ECOLOGY IN MIND

Eruptions of an eco-conscience occur with increasing frequency in the latter half of the twentieth century. In many ways the environment's fate has become the tacit agenda of contemporary apocalyptic narratives. When, after numerous premonitions, one of the blast furnaces in William Attaway's remarkable 1941 novel, Blood on the Forge, eventually does explode there is even a mushroom cloud (185). The exploitative northern steel industry, in which the migrant blacks toil after having escaped a racist agrarian South, is hazardous even when operating normally, and many workers, in fact, believe that a steel furnace, a place of "liquid fire," will be the site of the Last Judgement (62). Many biblical allusions can be found in Attaway's novel (bondage and exile, most obviously), but more unexpectedly one of the workers, Smothers, who is rumoured to be "off his nut," perceives another type of sin, one of which they are all guilty, he believes:

"It's wrong to tear up the ground and melt it up in the furnace. Ground don't like it. It's the hell-and-devil kind of work. Guy ain't satisfied with usin' the stuff that was put here for him to use--stuff of [sic] top of the earth. Now he got to git busy and melt up the ground itself. Ground don't like it.... All the time I listen real hard and git scared when the iron blast holler to git loose, an' them big redhead blooms screamin' like the very heart o' the earth caught between them rollers. It jest ain't right." (62)

A loyal worker to a fault, Smothers sees past socio-racial structures, past the injustices of
the industry and of what we would today call management to focus on the ethics of mining itself, which is sometimes regarded as a decisive early step toward modern, anthropocentric environmental arrogance (Merchant 29-41). His notion that steel is going to “git everybody” attributes retributive power to the earth rather than God (143). The true sin is against the environment, not against expendable, exploited workers or Creation.

Two texts which bracket approximately the time period that concerns me are H. G. Wells’s *The World Set Free: A Story of Mankind* (1914) and George Case’s *Silence Descends: The End of the Information Age 2000-2500* (1997). From the vantage point of a historian or narrator in a putative future, each text offers an account of the preceding epoch, that is distinguished by nearly apocalyptic nuclear catastrophes after which each society enters a profoundly new historical phase. Case’s ninety-page text purports to be a pocket-history of the years in question; Wells’s text is in fact part historical novel, part history, putatively written in the late-twentieth century, but replete with decidedly Victorian meditations on humankind’s entire evolution. Despite the eighty-three years which separate the two books, what their securely omniscient narrators see of the twentieth century and of its technological legacy is remarkably similar. Together the works bear out Frank Kermode’s famous pronouncements about apocalyptic narratives, about “our human need . . . to humanize the common death,” our perennial interest in which is reflected in “our deep need for intelligible Ends.” “We project ourselves--a small, humble elect, perhaps--past the End,” he argues, “so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle” (7, 8).

Both Wells and Case offer wide-ranging critiques of twentieth-century
modernity’s most pernicious manifestations: nuclear power and weaponry, esoteric and alienating technologies, disenfranchised populations, environmental abuses, and misguided leadership. Wells’s novel centres upon a mid-century global war fought with atomic bombs, the aftermath of which reads like a passage lifted from a Cold-War thriller:

By the spring of 1959 from nearly two hundred centres, and every week added to their number, roared the unquenchable crimson conflagrations of the atomic bombs, the flimsy fabric of the world’s credit had vanished, industry was completely disorganised, and every city, every thickly populated area was starved or trembled on the verge of starvation. Most of the capital cities of the world were burning; millions of people had already perished, and over great areas government was at an end. . . . For many months it was an open question whether there was to be found throughout all the race the will and intelligence to face these new conditions and make even an attempt to arrest the downfall of the social order. For a time the war spirit defeated every effort to rally the forces of preservation and construction. (152-53)

Case, on the other hand, enumerates a series of cataclysmic global events: the “atomic levelling of Volgograd” in the year 2004 (19); the “Sino-Indian Nuclear Exchange of 2039” (30); and, most notably, the “Pacific Catastrophe,” a “series of seismic shocks which struck at several points along the western coasts of North and South America, at the Japanese home islands, in northeast Asia, and at Oceania, during a three-week period in the fall of 2043” (31). Here too, nuclear technology is the central evil, or so it would seem. Case’s editor-historian, however, remembers these catastrophes not, as one might expect, for having caused apocalyptic death tolls, or for having been caused by nuclear weapons, but for having caused the disruptions of global communications systems and infrastructures. These disruptions reveal the twenty-first century’s overreliance on technologies and help inaugurate a post-technological utopia, hence the text’s title, which
can be seen, then, as part of a deft (and rather suspect) move on the part of Case to suggest that nuclear technology is ultimately the mere subset of a much more ubiquitous contemporary problem which he labels information.

Wells’s opening lines--his thesis--could well stand for both texts: “The history of mankind is the history of the attainment of external power. Man is the tool-using, fire-making animal” (11). Culminating with atomic energy, modern technologies are, for Wells, the clear successors of the cave dweller’s earliest utensils, and in The World Set Free they directly bring about the apocalypse necessary to usher in a new, enlightened epoch. Case, on the other hand, vilifies information as an emblem of technology gone wrong. Anti-nuclear rhetoric having perhaps become passé by 1997, he focuses his most sustained meditations on information technology. More specifically, it is “Information at its most decadent, during the twentieth century”--the “endless quantities of trite ‘product’” disguised as art--and “the fact of most Information’s being essentially a retail item sold by a few monopolies at inflated prices to a gullible public” which finally come into focus as “data gluttony” for the twenty-first century historians cited by the twenty-sixth century editor-historian of Silence Descends to argue his thesis (44-45). Although information technology does not directly precipitate any of the apocalyptic disasters, it is explicitly (albeit somewhat tenuously) linked to them:

Not only was the repair of global communications systems not considered of any urgency, many involved in the relief work--that is, many millions of men, women, and children--believed that the lack of intact systems was a help rather than a hindrance to their efforts. The Pacific Catastrophe, and the catastrophes that preceded it, had to be fully faced and fully remedied. A suspicion had developed that Information was not a cure but part of the original disease... Information was now to sink from being a symbol of unmet potential to being an inducement
of unmatched remorse. (34)

But what particular sort of technophobia is it that these two texts map out? Why are such diverse technological and scientific developments depicted in such a similar manner at the beginning and end of this century? How is it that in each text the technological avant garde at the time of publication can carry out barely separable functions: register of progress, barometer of civilization’s moral shortcomings, and cause of apocalyptic disasters?

Some of the answers can be found, I suggest, in the introductory chapter of Silence Descends, in which Case’s editor-historian acknowledges the great prescience in the apprehensions of Huxley, Orwell, Thoreau, Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, and others, who, “numerous” and “influential though they were, had failed to prevent the inexorable rise of the Information Age.” The romantic writers especially are seen as prophets because they “mourned the growing pre-eminence of cold reason, rationalism, and intellect over feeling, spirituality, and intuition,” while the other writers are revered for the acuity of their misgivings about urbanization and modernity (11). We should note Case’s reliance on proverbial dichotomies here. The problems which beset future societies, it seems, are at least as old as the conflicts between the Age of Reason and the high-Romantic Era (conventionally 1798 to 1832, but to 1870 if we want to include its American flourishing).7 The twenty-sixth century, however, can finally enjoy a utopian

7 See, for example, M. H. Abrams’ A Glossary of Literary Terms (1993), in which he argues that capital “R,” English Romanticism proper ended in 1832, beyond which literature became increasingly preoccupied with Victorian politics (153). The Romantic Period in America, he explains, spans 1828-1865; it is ended by the outbreak of the
triumph over all age-old dualisms. Holism is in the process of becoming the dominant form of spiritual belief all over the world, and the global population is now linked telepathically via “The Community of Soul,” although Case’s narrative of this achievement is vague. The twentieth-century palaeontologist and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), is seen as the harbinger; credited with “an arresting forecast” of twenty-sixth-century society because “he believed that matter and spirit were but temporarily divided components of a single, profounder entity, drawing closer together over the millennia,” Teilhard de Chardin becomes a symbol of this new age, his great insight owing, Case’s historian emphasizes, to “his dual callings of science and religion” (73, 72). In Case’s narrative, then, we can see a new age faith in balancing and reconciliation.

Wells’s narrator also ascribes the crises of the twentieth-century to similar dualisms, and after the apocalyptic “Last War,” civilization in its new phase is able to rectify these imbalances. However, Wells’s utopia is technocratic in the extreme (the narrator, for example, celebrates “the acceptance of achieved science as the basis of a new social order” [210]). But then the rebuilt civilization experiences a spiritual re-awakening as well as an artistic renaissance, the “Efflorescence”:

[T]here was in the vast mass of people a long-smothered passion to make things. The world broke out into making, and at first mainly into aesthetic making. . . . The majority of our population [now] consists of artists, and the bulk of activity in the world lies no longer with necessities, but with their elaboration, decoration and refinement. (249)

American Civil War (145). When we look at the various romanticisms as a subset of broader, extra-literary concerns about nature and environment, exact dating of periods becomes difficult and perhaps irrelevant.
While Wells’s utopia hardly embodies the ideals of high Romanticism celebrated by Case’s historian, let alone the fantastic achievements of Case’s twenty-sixth century, there lurks in the triumphant latter chapters of The World Set Free a recognition that at least some dualisms (reason-feeling, feeling-spirituality, and intellect-intuition) must be reconciled, albeit in a highly utilitarian manner. Of course, these dualisms are notoriously vague and difficult, if not impossible, to sustain when one begins to examine specifics or when one goes beyond the cursory tone of the short-history format, but for both Wells’s and Case’s historians they are the structuring metaphors necessary for narrating the past. More importantly, the utopias are achieved and the narratives are closed when dualisms and dichotomies are reconciled.

Perhaps the most startling aspect of Wells’s account of the mastery of atomic power is that he regards it as a fortunate fall necessary for societal renewal. Ruinous individualism, avarice, warring nations, environmental abuse, and callous capitalism are all eliminated as a direct consequence of the apocalyptic war, according to Wells’s narrator, who furthermore speaks of “the ‘moral shock’ the bombs had given humanity,” and who argues that “nothing less than those bombs could have . . . made it a healthy world” (214, 277). Surveying the rebuilding of society, Wells’s philosopher Marcus Karenin, whose ruminations close the novel, states unequivocally that “the atomic bombs burnt our way to freedom again” (283).

While Wells’s conclusions seem quaint in light of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and in light of more recent nuclear mishaps, the utopian resolution envisioned by Case, on the other hand, is of a different order and arguably more in line with a post-
World War II consciousness. We might have misgivings about Case's peculiar scapegoating of information technologies, the domination of which casts the pall of a second dark-age akin to Wells's second fortunate-fall; however, the foundation of his twenty-sixth century utopia rests upon a holistic embrace of the environment and attendant ethical extensions to include the rights of non-human life, vegetation, and landscapes—ecological ideas which no longer exist only in the new-age utopias envisioned in science fiction. Case's historian boasts that "hitherto unsuspected or unused sensitivities were introduced into the lives of men, women, and children around the earth. Codes of ethics and morality were not lost but expanded, absorbed by a broader law of awareness and understanding" (69). Elsewhere he addresses environmental issues specifically:

The painful, painstaking healing of the natural kingdom had succeeded. The damage done by countless generations was nearly repaired. Sustainable use of resources, careful control of waste, and reproductive common sense had grown into fundamental principles of personal and collective morality. (82)

Case suggests that these achievements are to be seen as more than mere perfunctory environmental efforts, and lest there remain any doubts, he lists several historic international agreements: the "Australian Declaration" of 2267, the "Hemispheric Declaration" of 2272, and the "Gaia Charter" of 2280, documents which all in some way

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8 Wells too would revise his outlook. Perhaps finding his earlier predictions overtaken by history, he dashes decades of wholehearted utopianism with his last publication, The Mind at the End of Its Tether (1949), in which he writes: "Our universe is not merely bankrupt; there remains no dividend at all; it has not simply liquidated; it is going clean out of existence, leaving not a wrack behind. The attempt to trace a pattern of any sort is absolutely futile" (3.17).
underwrite expansive holism and the global goal of a "pure, empathic biosphere" (81). Clearly holism routs hurtful dualisms and dichotomies; moreover, it remedies all mistakes of global consequence made since at least the romantic age. For Case, holism becomes both the lesson learnt from the apocalyptic crises of the twenty-first century and, by implication, the solution to our own, late twentieth-century apocalyptic crises.

Where real environmental issues are debated, holistic thought too sets out to confront global problems. Arguments for more holistic conceptions of the environment and for ethical extensions have become fundamental to contemporary ecological platforms emerging after World War II. In *Nature's Economy: A History of Environmental Thought* (1977), Donald Worster writes of a "bifurcation in ecology" defined by an ongoing historical dialectic between "arcadian" and "imperialist" traditions (x, 378-79). He acknowledges his debt to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), a book in which the authors argue that, since the eighteenth century, Western thought has been animated by two opposing drives: "a dedication to freeing the human mind from its self-constructed mental prison to search for intrinsic value, order, ultimate purpose, the ends of life" and a "drive for the domination of nature," a drive that "begins with the desacralization of the world, its reduction to a quantitative, mechanistic" mass of materials (Worster xi). In environmental and ecological thought Worster's arcadian tradition, as the word's derivation from classical sources suggests, upholds ideals of rustic and often ascetic simplicity, of human coexistence with nature and of noninterference with pristine wilderness. The arcadian tradition is suspicious of any rhetoric of progress and therefore frequently nostalgic. It
tends to foster holistic conceptions of nature. For Worster, its key figures are the English parson and naturalist Gilbert White (1720-1793) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), but its other legacy can be found in continental and English romanticisms, as well as in modern environmental activism, where one only rarely finds an ideological position that is not to some degree arcadian in Worster’s sense of the term.⁹

By contrast, the imperialist tradition’s drive to dominate nature is not simply aggressively urban; it resides benignly, for example, in the pastoral image of the Christ-like shepherd protecting his flock from the hostile and predatory forces of nature. While the imperialist tradition seeks to separate the human from the natural, it can also underwrite agrarian ideals of animal husbandry and farming, two fields wherein it seeks to study nature according to rigorously biologic and scientific methodologies in order to maximize yield. The imperialist tradition in environmental thought, Worster claims, derives from the Swedish botanist Carl von Linné (1707-1778), who throughout his prolific career sought to taxonomize the whole of nature to determine which species of plants and animals are most beneficial to humans and to find evidence everywhere in nature of a providential plan (31-37). Predictably, Francis Bacon (1561-1626) is an important precursor, but Worster also points an accusatory finger at Charles Darwin and Herman Melville because they both espouse an often pessimistic view of a hostile, fallen

⁹ See also, Carolyn Merchant, whose gender-conscious The Death of Nature: Women Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution (1980) maps the classical arcadian tradition (Virgil [70-19 B. C.] and Juvenal [A. D. 60-140]) and its importation into European intellectual life via Philip Sidney (1554-1586) and Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) (6-9). Merchant emphasizes the early history of arcadianism while Worster focuses on its later application as an environmental polemic.
nature.

In twentieth-century ecological thought the dialectic continues; however, the imperialist tradition firmly has the upper hand. Worster identifies influential figures like botanist Arthur G. Tansley (1871-1955), who in a 1935 essay sought to finally remove ecology from the realm of moral, ethical, speculative, and ontological philosophies, "in short, . . . to purge from ecology all that was not subject to quantification and analysis, all those obscurities that had been part of its baggage at least since the Romantic period" (301). Worster's more general assessment reads almost like a eulogy for arcadian ecologies:

Among all the sciences, [ecology] came closest to . . . [the] nostalgic ideal of a natural history wedded to holistic sympathy. But . . . [by the mid-1940s], ecology was moving in the other direction, toward its own niche in the modern technological society. It was preparing to turn abstract, mathematical, and reductive. Moreover, ecologists were taking up with increasing devotion . . . concepts of Progressive, agronomic conservation . . . [such as] efficiency, productivity, yield crop. (289)

But the waning of arcadian ecologies does not mean their obsolescence. While the imperialist legacy has successfully turned the majority of institutionalized ecologies into hard sciences, the arcadian legacy can be traced to the newer, more properly philosophical ecologies which are frequently critical or subversive or which seek to implement an ethics regarding our relationship to environments and nature. Another historian of

10 For a recent, highly critical account of the blending of ideology and (environmental) science and of what he regards as the proliferation of "scientifically generated fiction," see Ronald Bailey's *Eco Scam: the False Prophets of Ecological Apocalypse* (1993). Scientists generally but ecologists especially, Bailey argues, must never assert that their findings "impel," "require," or "demand" that a specific course of action be followed." He adds, "[g]ood scientists rarely propose radical social and
environmental thought concurs with Worster on this relatively recent reshuffling of disciplines; referring to the debates of the early quarter of this century, Roderick Nash writes in *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (1989): “Because of the holistic orientations of their discipline, ecologists frequently leaped from science to moral philosophy” (57).

In our century, the spectres of many truly apocalyptic models and predictions prevail. Worster points to the popularization, first among physicists, eventually among ecologists, and finally among laypersons, of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Formulated in 1850 by Rudolph Clausius (1822-1888), the second law holds that all energy in the universe (the energy of stars) tends irreversibly toward increasing disorder and inertness or a state of maximum entropy. Therefore, when our sun burns out, as it must according to the law, the entire solar system will die. To the scientific ecologists of the 1930s, this law suggested a new imperative: that “[a]ll ecological kinships thereafter had to be reworked in terms of energy relations. [Since] [n]o energy is created by the ecosystem, but only transformed and re-transformed before escaping” (Worster 302-03). Here was a totalizing, holistic model posited not by philosophy but by a hard science, and its ultimate horizon was an apocalyptic one. In their book *Science Fiction* (1977), Robert Scholes and Eric Rabkin point out that thermodynamics, and the term “entropy” in particular, have had a tremendous impact outside of physics upon modern thinking and modern science fiction. They add, however, that writers frequently misunderstand the Second Law of Thermodynamics and therefore show it being violated in their fictions economic plans” (117, 177).
(136-68). Curiously, Scholes and Rabkin ignore entirely the apocalyptic trope made available for a whole generation of writers such as Arthur C. Clarke, whose widely-anthologized short story “The Star” (1958) includes the death of an inhabited solar system after its sun goes supernova, and Thomas Pynchon, who in the short story “Entropy” (1960) uses the concept as a metaphor for intellectual and social stasis. Moreover, they ignore the tremendous popularity of Norbert Wiener’s *The Human Use of Human Beings* (1950), a book which introduced thermodynamics to the non-specialist and from which Pynchon admits cribbing (Pynchon, *Slow Learner* 13). But let us turn to more immediate matters.

Ever since strictly terrestrial apocalypses of the sort envisioned by Wells have become our most pressing concern, ecologists of all persuasions have had to reassess the aims of their work. Worster argues that the detonation of the first nuclear bomb (code-named “Trinity”) on July 16, 1945 at a New Mexico testing site symbolically ushered in “The Age of Ecology”: “One kind of fallout from the atomic bomb was the beginnings of widespread, popular ecological concern around the globe” (340). Significantly, an often repeated anecdote about the test holds that project leader J. Robert Oppenheimer, upon seeing the awesome mushroom cloud, thought of a phrase from the Bhagavad-Gita, the central text of Hindu and Krishna consciousness: “I am become Death, the shatterer of..."
worlds” (Weart 101; Wilson 246; Worster 339). As if by convention, Oppenheimer’s thoughts are retold specifically for the finality and destruction they conjure up. A foreign religion’s apocalypse proliferating in contexts where it is only imperfectly understood, not freighted with questions about revelation, about the Hindu belief in the immortality of the soul, about history’s cycles--this is how we in the West imagine the nuclear age was inaugurated: by emphasizing that nothing can survive. In the last fifty years, the layperson’s list of environmental crises, whether imminent and cataclysmic or cumulative and glacial, has of course grown enormous and varied. However, the belief that we are surely awaiting a nihilistic apocalypse is the common theme. As a consequence, the ecologist, and especially the eco-philosopher, has become a prominent figure, frequently compelled by the public to use, as Worster puts it, “all the authority of science” to provide a “moral counterforce to technology lurching toward madness” (344).

Surveying roughly the same period as Worster’s “Age of Ecology,” Nash argues that recent radical environmentalists occupy the same social role as the American political radicals of the late eighteenth century: both groups use the rhetoric and ideology of innate and natural rights to reach revolutionary conclusions (34). Similarly, he points to the American counterculture movements of the 1960s that took up Eastern religions such as Taoism, Buddhism, Zen, and Hinduism. More than a mere trend of youthful rebellion against an older generation’s bourgeois values, this spiritual fervour, Nash argues, signalled the outright rejection of Judeo-Christian dualisms and anthropocentrism in favour of holistic ontologies; moreover, it “cleared the intellectual way for environmental ethics” (113). Where Worster finds the waning of this type of eco-
philosophy in the mainstream of ecological thought, Nash traces its return among a new
generation of ecologists, many of whom target new spheres of influence that are not
merely academic, scientific, specialist, or narrowly ecological. All urge public awareness,
many urge activism and protest, some urge militancy and sabotage.

But the new ecologist is no mere pamphleteer. Working with a larger time frame
than Worster, Nash situates the most recent forms of environmental concern within a vast
historical trend which he calls ethical extension (or expansion). His thesis in *The Rights
of Nature* is

that ethics have expanded over time and that some thinkers and activists now
regard nature (or certain of its components) as deserving liberation from human
domination. For people of this persuasion natural rights has indeed evolved into
the rights of nature.

Ideas like these, to be sure, are on the far frontier of moral theory. From
the perspective of intellectual history, environmental ethics is revolutionary; it is
arguably the most dramatic expansion of morality in the course of human thought.

(6-7)

In the pre-ethical past, Nash explains, there was only self-interest; thereupon followed
considerations for the well-being of one's family, tribe, nation, race, and species (that is,
humans collectively). Eventually certain animals received consideration, but what
remains to be developed fully, Nash argues, are ethics that include all animals, all plant
life, all biological life--in short, the entire environment and eventually the universe. His
model is abstract rather than rigorously historical, but he uses the example of Western and
Anglo-American culture: from classical concepts of natural rights and intrinsic values that
date to Greek and Roman jurisprudence, to the *Magna Carta* (1215), which curtailed the
absolute power of the king of England, to the American Declaration of Independence
(1776), to the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), to the various twentieth-century acts giving rights to oppressed minorities (women, indigenous peoples, labourers, native Americans, and blacks), the concept of rights has continually been extended. The most recent addition to this list is the Endangered Species Act (1973) (Nash 3-32). Leaving aside Nash’s somewhat exasperating celebration of American liberalism, his attempt to situate contemporary eco-philosophies within a much broader historical trend in ethics is, as we shall see, entirely in line with how many of the intellectual descendants of Worster’s arcadian tradition see themselves.

In 1949 Aldo Leopold called for a reevaluation of our relation to the environment with his Sand-County Almanac, a book which has become something of a sacred text for grass-roots environmental activism and for more abstract eco-philosophical writings. In the passages which have received the most attention, Leopold calls for a philosophically coherent land-ethnic to correct the legacy left by centuries of neglect and human self-interest:

> There is as yet no ethic dealing with man’s relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. Land . . . is still property. The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations.
> The extension of ethics to [land and nature] in [the] human environment is . . . an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity. . . . Individual thinkers since the days of Ezekiel and Isaiah have asserted that the despoliation of land is not only expedient but wrong. Society, however, has not yet affirmed their belief. I regard the present conservation movement as the embryo of such an affirmation. (218)

More specifically, the proposed “land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively the land.” The land ethic changes “the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to
plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his [sic] fellow members, and also respect for the community as such” (219-20). Here I see numerous consequences. To view the environment as a community and to situate humans in an egalitarian relationship with other “citizens” presupposes the reconfiguring--if not the outright dismantling--of age-old dichotomies such as culture-nature and human-natural, dichotomies which have existed in the West in various forms at least since Genesis, that is, since our putative beginning. Leopold’s introduction of the community metaphor is an attempt to apprehend with greater clarity a totality, a “biotic community” that is much more pervasive than the old, familiar nature, which even in otherwise environmentally sensitive, nineteenth-century romanticisms was seen to exist largely in enclaves beyond cities. The land ethic is the inevitable and rightful consequence of an “ecological interpretation of history”—a history which Leopold does not see as apocalyptic, environmental abuses being still amendable (220). He is clearly in line with the arcadian eco-philosophic tradition mapped by Worster; as well, he is a part of the historical trend in ethics defined by Nash. His benign and deliberately rustic vision belies the implications which I have drawn here; however, later eco-philosophers who call for similar ethical expansions argue more explicitly and hold that the stakes are much greater.

Since Nash’s optimistic historical model skirts the apocalypticism of many contemporary environmental positions, his assessment of Rachel Carson, a pioneer in the crusade against pesticides, is strangely slanted. Carson’s monumental *Silent Spring* (1962) fails to exorcise fully an anthropocentric conception of nature, Nash claims, insofar as it contains “no direct mention . . . of the rights of insects, birds, fish, and other
victims of the poisons” (79). Although the book urges a more thoroughly ethical
treatment of nature, it remains, according to Nash, a work that somehow falls just short
for it is “only a step [away] from . . . a full-blown philosophy of the rights of nature”
(Nash 81). Carson’s holistic conception, although commendable, is seen as incomplete.
Where Carson is, however, quite blunt, and many contemporaries contended, alarmist, is
in the opening chapters of Silent Spring, where she writes:

Along with the possibility of the extinction of mankind by nuclear war, the central
problem of our age has . . . become the contamination of man’s total environment
with such substances of incredible potential for harm—substances that accumulate
in the tissues of plants and animals and even penetrate the germ cells to shatter or
alter the very material of heredity upon which the shape of the future depends. (8)

The previous chapter, “A Fable For Tomorrow,” is a brief allegory celebrating an agrarian
idyll: “There once was a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in
harmony with its surroundings,” it begins. However, suddenly

a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil
spell had settled on the community: mysterious maladies swept the flocks of
chickens; the cattle and sheep sickened and died. Everywhere was a shadow of
death. The farmers spoke of much illness among their families. In the town the
doctors had become more and more puzzled by new kinds of sickness appearing
among their patients. There had been several sudden unexplained deaths, not only
among adults but even among children, who would be stricken suddenly while at
play and die within a few hours. (1-2)

The chemicals used in agriculture, the “synthetic creations of man’s inventive mind”
without “counterparts in nature,” are her immediate concern, but fears of “mysterious
maladies,” “unexplained deaths, “new kinds of sickness,” and cell mutations allude to
some form of protracted, plague-induced apocalypse not unlike the one imagined in Mary
Shelley’s The Last Man (1826). That Carson also has nuclear fallout in mind throughout
is highly probable. Boasting a bibliography of over two-hundred scientific sources, *Silent Spring* is, to be sure, a rigorously researched work, not a piece of fiction; what I want to highlight, however, is how Carson relies on narrative conventions and literary effects to reintroduce into the discourse of scientific ecology questions of ethics and morals, the very questions which Tansley rejected a generation earlier. The apocalyptic nuclear-fears that haunt Worster’s “Age of Ecology” undoubtedly also motivated Carson to write *Silent Spring*; undoubtedly too, they helped determine its final form, for the work of the crusading environmentalist was by the early 1960s finding a new audience of laypersons interested in narrative versions of her/his findings and concerns.

While Carson seems cautious and pragmatic, today’s environmentalists are typically bold and demand an even greater broadening of eco-ethics. Although it would be far from accurate to label the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess an apocalyptic doomsayer pure and simple, the account he gives in *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* (1989) (hereafter cited as ECL) of the impetus behind his “deep ecology” includes a reading of late twentieth-century societies which gains a pronounced rhetorical force from end of the world anxieties:

> We have “progressed” to the point where the objectives of the good life must be considered threatening; we are intricately implicated in a system which guarantees short-term well-being in a small part of the world through destructive increases in

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12 Weart’s *Nuclear Fear: A History of Images* (1988) suggests that the science-fiction and fantasy literatures of the first half of the twentieth century contributed to widely held, post-World War II beliefs that nuclear energy was the source of “uncanny pollution” and that “bizarre nuclear damage could strike anywhere in the world” (189, 187). Furthermore, even “by the late 1950s most experts realized they had no sure knowledge about the effects of low levels of radiation” (209).
material affluence. The privileges are regionally reserved because a similar increase of affluence in Africa, Asia, or South America is not intended and would hasten the advent of an environmental Armageddon. (25)

Such forceful language is typical of many contemporary environmental writings. The discourse of environmentalism and politicized ecologies relentlessly strives to correct our misguided notions of progress, a concept which, however it is conceived, now becomes inextricably linked to an apocalypse with a fastness otherwise reserved only for Cold War writings and ancient religious beliefs. But what are deep ecology’s solutions to our formidable crises?

Deep ecology, Naess explains, is an umbrella term which can yield many correct interpretations and subsume many other environmental philosophies. Its core truths (for it is not merely an ethics but an ontology, Naess insists) were first articulated in Naess’s 1973 essay, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary,” in which he also coins the term. Naess’s depth metaphors will, I think, become clear from their contexts. “Shallow” ecologies are mostly what we have heretofore experienced; they are distinguishable by a human self-interest which is concerned only with fighting pollution and preventing resource depletion insofar as these practices help meet ulterior economic, political, or industrial goals. They are pragmatic solutions to local environmental problems, and they lack a philosophical basis. By contrast “[e]cologically responsible policies are concerned only in part with pollution and resource depletion. There are deeper concerns which touch upon principles of diversity, complexity, autonomy, decentralization, symbiosis, egalitarianism, and classlessness” (95). Several years later, Naess, in collaboration with the ecologist George Sessions, expands this credo
into the widely reproduced, eight-point platform of the deep ecology movement:

1. The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has intrinsic value. The value of nonhuman life forms is independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life are values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
5. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
6. Significant change of life conditions for the better requires change in policies. These affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of intrinsic value) rather than adhering to a high standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes. (ECL 29)

Always insisting that exact wording is not important and that the platform need not become doctrinal, Naess encourages those who feel themselves addressed by point eight to “work out their own alternative formulations” (ECL 28). There lurks, however, a crucial presupposition; David Rothenberg, Naess’s translator and an environmental philosopher in his own right, explains in the introduction to *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle* that Naess’s “intention is to encourage readers to find ways to develop and articulate basic, common intuitions of the absolute value of nature which resonate with their own backgrounds and approaches” (3 emphasis added). Indeed, the belief in an awestruck love of nature that is virtually innate to humans permeates environmental writings and suggests the legacy of nineteenth-century romanticism (for which, see my
Naess, like Leopold and Nash, calls for an expansion of the scope of things to be included in an enlightened system of ethics. Like Leopold, he teases the metaphoric potential of an already laden term; however, the ontological ramifications are much greater. Regarding point one, he elaborates:

Instead of "biosphere" we might use the term "ecosphere" in order to stress that we of course do not limit our concern for the life forms in a biologically narrow sense. The term "life" is used here in a comprehensive non-technical way to refer also to things biologists may classify as non-living: rivers (watersheds), landscapes, cultures, ecosystems, the "living earth." Slogans such as "let the river live" illustrate this broader usage so common in many cultures. (ECL 29)

Naess’s radical use of "life" is more likely than Leopold’s "community" to arouse immediate objections from religious, political, legal, medical, biological, and eco-scientific positions, who each rely on a sacrosanct or positivistic definition of the term, or at least a definition cleansed of a certain kind of metaphorical meaning. On the other hand, community, explains Raymond Williams, is a term in perpetual flux; since the sixteenth century it has frequently been used to refer to "the quality of holding something in common" or to "a sense of common identity and characteristics," and since the nineteenth century it has been readily available as a term to designate social "experiments in an alternative kind of group-living." Moreover, "community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or
distinguishing term” (Keywords 75-76).

In Naess’s vocabulary, “deep,” “flourishing,” “richness,” “diversity,” “common intuitions” (in addition to “life”) are the central terms invested with positive meaning; “progress,” “affluence,” “narrow,” and “high standard of living,” are suspect or even outright dangerous owing to the environmentally detrimental values they promote. I shall return in subsequent chapters to the ethical obligations and to the asceticism urged by deep ecology. But for now it will suffice to see how Naess, Leopold, Nash, and to some extent Carson expand familiar concepts in order to expand the traditional realms of ethics. Holistic conceptions are what modern societies lack; ancient dualisms (for Leopold: man and land; for Naess: non-living and living) are what prevent us from making true ethical progress. However, many more questions regarding the implementation (if that is the correct word) of the platform can be raised: what, for instance, are the “vital needs” referred to in point three?; how are we to bring about “a substantial decrease of the human population” as urged in point five?; and, what is meant in point six by “change in policies”? A centralized global-government as envisioned in the post-apocalyptic utopias of Wells and Case seems necessary to work such elemental changes in society. Are these utopias the tacit fantasies of power held by eco-philosophers who are often disenfranchised by the modern capitalism that underwrites techno-industrial growth? Naess is vague on the question of whether to centralize power in order to administer environmental legislation and admits merely that “[t]here is . . . an ‘instinctive’ reaction against being absorbed in something that is big but not great—something like our modern society” (ECL 144). More typically though, he situates the
environmentalist and the eco-philosopher on the peripheries of power where he or she can insist upon debate and inquiry: the deep ecologist must "force the fact-dependent experts who underpin environmental decision into discussions in terms of values and priorities" (ECL 72). Deep ecology, Rothenberg reminds us, "can be an opening to a full scale critique of our civilisation, seeking out false conceptions of reality at the core" (ECL 4); for Naess it is clearly nothing less.

Here we might digress briefly to consider Fredric Jameson's influential arguments for "the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts," which "conceives of the political perspective not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today . . . but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation" (Political Unconscious 17). Where Jameson finds a political dimension in all texts, discourses, artistic productions, and in all the critical responses to them, Naess would uncover the heretofore-unseen environmental impact lurking behind virtually all decisions and would make eco-philosophical considerations his absolute horizon; he examines, for example, technological changes, community planning, and economic-growth models based on Gross National Product measurements to argue that the ecological is the perspective from which all should be judged. Arguably, Naess's aims are more ambitious than Jameson's insofar as he proposes not only a hermeneutic model for reading cultural productions but "a new ontology which posits humanity as inseparable from nature" (ECL 2). I make the comparison to Jameson here to show how the concerns arising in fields once held to be extra-literary can now impinge upon aesthetic concerns, to show how any discipline's most pressing questions can now
impinge upon any other discipline, indeed, how any discourse can be used as the basis for a critique of any other. On this very matter Naess holds that

"[a]ll-encompassing philosophical viewpoints have always been more or less inspired by the sciences. In Indian philosophy, grammar was important for Pāṇini, while, in Greek philosophy, geometry (for Plato) and biology (for Aristotle) were especially inspiring. . . . Some all-encompassing philosophical viewpoints . . . are formed as a generalisation or universalisation of one science or one theory within a science. The conceptual framework and general problem approaches within a given science are then regarded as universal and utilisable within all fields of inquiry. In the Western world, such systematic programmes were introduced when Pythagoras contended that "everything is numbers," thereby trying to universalise mathematics. Descartes almost universalised mechanics, but he reserved a tiny retreat for God and free will. (ECL 39)

Unlike Worster, Naess believes that science precedes philosophy, and so his deep ecology must remain rooted in an ever-reifying scientific discipline: ecology. But as a science it always has important shortcomings for Naess: the "inability of the science of ecology to denounce such processes as the washing away of the soil of rain-forests suggests that we need another approach which involves the inescapable role of announcing values, not only 'facts'" (ECL 24). The philosophic component of ecology is, then, always a kind of surplus—the something-added to its scientific foundation, but a very crucial something. "Ecology," he explains, "may comprise a great deal, but it should never be considered a universal science" (ECL 39). Clearly, the issues raised by deep ecology have far reaching consequences. Like psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism, and queer theory, whose successful inroads into literary and artistic realms have long become routine, deep ecology has much to say about art and literature.

One of the "false conceptions" that first comes under Naess's scrutiny plays an integral part in many artistic genres, media, and movements—in pastoral texts,
romanticism, naturalism, film, painting--indeed, in all representational art forms. Deep ecology proposes the

[r]ejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of the relational, total-field image. Organisms as knots in the biospherical net of intrinsic relations. [sic] An intrinsic relation is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of A and B, so that without the relation, A and B are no longer the same things. The total-field model dissolves not only the man-in-environment concept, but every compact thing-in-milieu concept--except when talking at a superficial or preliminary level of communication. ("The Shallow and the Deep" 95)

Naess's proposed revision of how we see ourselves within nature and within environments has profound consequences for our readings of literature and art. Our old tendencies to hierarchize, to read humans as the inevitable owners, stewards, conquerors, and rulers of properties, kingdoms, lands, and domains, must be reevaluated. These reevaluations are comparable to the sort initiated by post-colonial studies. Prospero, to take one familiar example, is thereby displaced even further from his once secure status as benign ruler, and Caliban, who is simultaneously a part of pristine nature and yet the synaesthetic register of its complexities, emerges as the play's sole character capable of Naessian "intuitions of the absolute value of nature." Because Caliban is intrinsic (in Naessian terms) to the enchanted island he becomes the prototype of the holistic subject that deep ecology encourages.13 Timothy Findley clearly has in mind a similar

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For a post-colonial reading of The Tempest, see Stephen Orgel's introduction to the 1987 Oxford edition: "in the context of Gonzalo's commonwealth and the assumption behind it that any new land is there for the taking and refashioning, Caliban's accusations against Prospero of usurpation and enslavement reveal an unexpected solidity" (Orgel 36). In Northrop Frye's 1959 introduction to the play (Penguin edition), however, Prospero's dubious imperialism is not an issue, although Frye concedes that Prospero, while an "admirable ruler," is somewhat overbearing and politically incompetent (Frye,
reevaluation, albeit of a more ancient, sacrosanct narrative, when he rewrites the biblical flood-myth and scripts Noah as a violent patriarch (Doctor Noyes), overseeing what amounts to a suspiciously mortal God’s eco-genocide (*Not Wanted on the Voyage* [1984] 145, 174, 185).

In this regard we might also examine Bernard Malamud’s novel *God’s Grace* (1982). After a global-wide nuclear holocaust, Malamud’s Calvin Cohn finds he is the sole human survivor, shipwrecked on a wild tropical island with a group of apes as his only companions. Over many years he domesticates them and even teaches them to debate, do arithmetic, sculpt, and study the Talmud. They even acquire language and speech. He reasons that he can best appease an evidently vengeful God by arranging the apes into the semblance of a civilized, egalitarian community. The scheme goes surprisingly well at first; under Cohn’s benign leadership the new society achieves an environmentally sound idyll that appears to be an atonement for the latent imperialism of earlier European shipwreck-narratives such as *The Tempest* (c. 1611), *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and *Lord of the Flies* (1954). But eventually the apes rebel and, parodying Abraham’s readiness to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22), kill Cohn; in this version God does not intervene. Evidently Cohn’s teachings are finally still too anthropocentric despite—or perhaps because of—his bouts of deep introspection about the ethics of his actions. I say “despite” because he never learns to perform the ego-less scrutiny of his simian companions and his environment that Naessian deep ecology demands, although Naess, Worster, and Leopold would probably commend his efforts to forge a true kinship with

Introduction 14-24).
non-human life. "Chimpanzees may someday be better living beings than men were," Cohn guesses (171). However, he remains blind to tension and dissent among their ranks, and moreover, to their instinctual violence.

Obviously both novels ask to be read foremost in light of Judeo-Christian beliefs, with eco-ethical themes being of secondary concern, especially with respect to God's Grace. Findley more clearly than Malamud rejects scriptural traditions: "Everyone knows it wasn't like that," he begins, responding to Genesis 7:7 ("And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wives with him into the ark, because of the waters of the flood") and then precedes with his version (3). Malamud's story, on the other hand, is complexly ironic where Findley's is polemical. Using Bakhtin's terminology, we might say the stories are dialogic and monologic respectively, for God's Grace leaves open the question of where the ultimate failing lies: with Cohn's zeal? with Judaism itself? with the apes? with the human-animal co-habitation scheme specifically?

If, however, we foreground ecological questions then each narrative appears to depict a kind of ethical vacuum—that space once occupied by seemingly infallible scriptural traditions. How, for example, do animals and ecosphere thrive under Judeo-Christian-based systems of ethics? we might now ask. What should replace them? Malamud concludes with the death of the last human (a false prophet or a true messiah who is wrongfully martyred?) and leaves open the question of whether the apes reject Cohn or his teachings (or both), of whether, having gotten rid of him, they will incorporate Cohn's teachings into a new, non-anthropocentric ethical system of their own, one that will be ecologically superior to what humans had been able to devise. In
Findley’s narrative, on the other hand, the biblical flood is a decisive step in the enduring human dominion over nature—a colossal eco-tragedy that deep ecology seeks to undo.

Although Findley tallies the cruelties of this dominion largely in terms of the assault upon human and animal life, Not Wanted on the Voyage also contains this remarkable passage describing a drowned world as seen from the floating ark:

There below . . . was all the world: its valleys, hills and woods . . . [T]he world . . . with all its movement stilled and all its features perfectly limned and shadowless: all its trees . . . leaning up through the green depths . . . everything equal—valleys and mountains drowned in the same viridian deep . . . . There were the farms—and all the white stone buildings—all the winding ribbons of the cowpath geography that had defined the place where she [Mrs. Noyes] had lived her life. There were the terraced fields and the white stone walls and the tumbled fences over which and through which all the drowned cattle and all the drowned goats had finally managed to find their way—and the pastures on the hillsides where the sheep had learned to sing and the sacred orchards where the elders and the rabbis and the chosen women would never walk again or dream their sacred dreams. There were the drowning pools made one with harmless ponds—and the bridges fording meaningless riverbeds. (342-43)

As if privy to an anachronistically placed aerial-shot from cinema, Mrs. Noyes recognizes that the cataclysm has destroyed not only her beloved animals but an entire ecosphere that included nonliving things of intrinsic value. Only now does the full scope of antediluvian life (in the broadest, Naessian sense of the word) occur to her. Her perspective is unique in many senses; “[n]ot even birds could have seen the world as she saw it now,” Findley informs us (342). Ultimately, the book mourns in considerable detail all aspects of the destruction, especially those aspects that the Old Testament omits. Clearly, Findley demands a more comprehensive system of ethics and ontology than scripture provides, but the book ends pessimistically with Mrs. Noyes defiant but powerless in a patriarchal world: “she prayed. But not to the absent God. Never, never again to the absent God”
(352). In Mrs Noyes’ future (or our mythical history) imperialistic conceptions of nature will (or have) reigned, but there will always be dissenters. Malamud, meanwhile, entertains the more radical notion that true deep ecology (or some form of non-anthropocentric ecology) can occur only after man has been eclipsed. The “long Kaddish for Calvin Cohn” that is chanted in the novel’s final paragraph by “George the gorilla, wearing a mud-stained white yarmulke he had one day found in the woods,” is either heartfelt or it celebrates with ferocious irony the end of the human era (223).

If ideally all organisms are to become joined in deep ecology’s “biospherical net” the vulnerability to assaults will increase, for it is no longer only the most obvious military and industrial technologies that threaten, but also a myriad of unsound and unexamined practices which now carry an apocalyptic potential. It is an ecological scrutiny to which contemporary society is frequently subjected. Consequently, a deep ecologist would find the technocratic utopia mapped out in The World Set Free intolerable; not only does the narrator have a clear contempt for all rural environments, but he also celebrates the urbanization of the entire globe as well as the successful extermination of all insects and flies to make the earth even more comfortable for humans (216, 241). Wrongly anticipating the sort of solutions that the real twentieth century conceives to extricate itself from global threats, Wells appears like an inept social engineer and would-be environmentalist, solving one disaster ironically only to create another. But Wells the writer does, of course, accurately anticipate contemporary anxieties and enduring literary formulas.

Nowhere is Naess’s revision of the “man-in-environment image” so bluntly
thematized as in the apocalyptic narratives written after 1945, where landscapes and environments are often as important as the characters. When urban areas have become uninhabitable, new, humbler relations to rural regions, wildernesses, and landscape are frequently defined. Some of the texts written during the Cold War and during the years of nuclear unease that follow in its wake are quite specific about causes: in Nevil Shute’s *On the Beach* (1951), Walter M. Miller Jr.’s *A Canticle For Leibowitz* (1959), Russell Hoban’s *Riddley Walker* (1980), Edward Abbey’s *Good News* (1980), and Paul Auster’s *In the Country of Last Things* (1987) nuclear war has devastated the earth. Subtler forms of apocalyptic dread can be found in William Attaway’s *Blood On the Forge* (1941); William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*; J. G Ballard’s short stories and novels; Thomas Pynchon’s “Under the Rose” (1959) and *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973); the Strugatsky Brothers’ *Roadside Picnic* (1973; trans. 1977); Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1973); Andrei Tarkovsky films (1963-1986); and Don DeLillo’s *End Zone* (1972), *White Noise* (1982), and *Underworld* (1997). However, in these narratives too environmental issues are prominent and a nuclear threat is always real or implied.

What can the proliferation of narratives featuring post-apocalyptic settings mean? Also, we should note the transvaluation of the post-apocalyptic setting from “B-grade” plot-device to “high brow” trope. For example, Shute and Ballard (especially the early Ballard) are sometimes regarded as pulp-thriller writers, whereas Tarkovsky, Hoban, and DeLillo seem to have found an immediate audience among what used to be called the intelligentsia. And how do we account for Wells’s curious position on the margins of academic fashionability? The answers lie in part, I suggest, with the recognition that
threats to our environment are becoming undeniable and more apocalyptic; accordingly, older fictions do not seem so far-fetched. As Weart remarks on a related matter, after World War II “science fiction stories [break] out of their limited market” (191-92). He also notes that science influences science fiction, and science fiction in turn inspires scientists (in fact, Leo Szilard, a pioneering physicist who worked on the Manhattan Project, claimed *The World Set Free* inspired much of his work as well as the anxieties that eventually attended it [Weart 81; Easlea 55-56]).

Seemingly fantastic landscapes with drastically reduced human populations (or without humans entirely) suggest, in my grouping, the future diminution of anthropocentric concerns. In Worster’s terms, such landscapes represent the Pyrrhic victory of imperialistic ecologies, and therein lies an implicit question: will the new wildernesses found in Shute, Hoban, Abbey, Auster, Ballard, the Strugatskys, and Tarkovsky lead to a new arcadianism? I shall return to this question and to these authors in subsequent chapters, but we might note briefly the unexpected forms that a new arcadianism can take. In *Underworld* DeLillo reminds us that, for many, something approximating the post-apocalyptic wildernesses of fiction is a daily reality:

Esmeralda . . . lives wild in the inner ghetto, a slice of the South Bronx called the Wall—a girl who forages in empty lots for discarded clothes, plucks spoiled fruit from garbage bags behind bodegas, who is sometimes seen running through the trees and weeds, a shadow on the rubbed walls of demolished structures, unstumbling, a tactful runner with the sweet and easy stride of some creature of sylvan myth. (810)

I do not believe DeLillo is simply indulging in a sentimentalized nostalgia for ghetto life or the deprivations of inner-city areas. Rather, he is asking to what degree we are able to
aestheticize our environments and what happens in them by means of romantic metaphors and old habits of seeing—the “epidemic of seeing” he mentions later (812). After the girl is found murdered, she re-appears to several commuters as an apparition, but the sighting takes place only after a graffiti artist has painted an angelic image of her and CNN has aired her story. Perceptions are preceded by paradigms of seeing. Can we, therefore, find a Naessian ecosphere here; can we form an objective “relational, total-field image” of the rundown South Bronx, of its intermingling of infrastructure and encroaching weeds? That is, should one hope for an urban renewal that distorts what currently exists? By Naess’s estimation, living anywhere in North America or the industrialized West already entails more “good life” privileges than living in underdeveloped parts of the world, but this argument is also sometimes used by the political right to argue against increasing social services.

On the subject of “brownfields” (abandoned urban lots), two German environmental writers attempting to reverse the doomsday mindset of their peers, Dirk Maxeiner and Michael Miersch, have recently argued that we should learn to see these underused, and frequently despised, parcels of land as potential urban wildernesses capable of sustaining untended animals and plants (Öko-Optimismus [Eco-Optimism] [1996] 190-200). For the authors, such a revaluation represents not a delusion by romantic nature ideals (as would, for example, converting brownfields to groomed parks) but rather the abandonment of unattainable rustic, agrarian, and wilderness romanticisms. Hereby they find a position midway between the guilt-inducing abstractions of Naessian deep ecology and workable local solutions; that is, they apply a relational, total-field
image to sites that have heretofore escaped notice. DeLillo too, I suggest, is anticipating such a revaluation.

For the generations following World War II, the fervent hope expressed by Naess in *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle* that artists and writers will spread deep ecology's message, seems to have come true in other unexpected ways. Martin Amis's introduction to his book of apocalyptic short stories, *Einstein's Monsters* (1987), for example, recounts a series of exchanges with his father, Kingsley Amis, on two perennial environmental topics:

I argue with my father about nuclear weapons. In this debate, we are all arguing with our fathers. They emplaced or maintained the status quo. They got it hugely wrong. They failed to see the nature of what they were dealing with—the nature of the weapons—and now they are trapped in the new reality, trapped in the great mistake. Perhaps there will be no hope until they are gone.

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When I told him that I was writing about nuclear weapons, he said, with a lilt, "Ah. I suppose you're... 'against them,' are you?" ... Once, having been informed by a friend of mine that an endangered breed of whales was being systematically turned into soap, he replied, "It sounds like quite a good way of *using up* whales."

(13-15 second ellipsis is in the original text)

The casual manner in which the younger Amis turns the debate surrounding nuclear weapons and endangered animal species into the same fundamental issue here presupposes in part the holistic perspective that deep ecology encourages. Indeed, the insight that "everything is interconnected" functions somewhat like a mantra in the ecological literature (ECL 164). Yet Amis hardly comes across as an environmental extremist. What I wish to emphasize here is how a vaguely mystic and "Eastern" idea, rather than being deemed esoteric or from the fringe, can now underwrite a relatively
commonplace position and define the parameters of debate. No matter where we stand on these very complex issues, nuclear technology and endangered species can now be yoked together in political and ethical debates that need not even mention an all-encompassing biospherical net. Doubtless, for the oceanographer, the marine biologist, and the nuclear physicist their fields remain discrete on a professional level; however, in terms of ethics the biospherical net is a tacit reality. For the deep ecologist the preservation of animal species or the sustainability of resources are merely the side effects of one of the fundamental goals of most eco-philosophical and environmental thought: the vast extension of ethics.
CHAPTER 3

SPECTRES OF ROMANTICISM, OR, CHILDHOOD IN NATURE: THE LEGACIES OF WORDSWORTH AND BLAKE IN JEWETT, BALLARD, CALLENBACH, HOBAN, AND NAESS

*Wordsworth went before us in some of the steps we are now taking in our thinking about the environment.*

--Jonathan Bate

In the next two chapters I want to examine how contemporary environmental texts and apocalyptic fictions rely on some of the most enduring images and motifs of English and German romanticism. Approximately since World War II, the broadly romantic motifs of the child in nature and the architectural ruin have been utilized in environmental writings and narrative fictions to articulate apocalyptic fears, and I believe that this trend is owing largely to the fact that the canon of romanticism provides a storehouse of secularized, more easily-understood, or better, more easily-recognised motifs than the Bible, borrowings from which would give these neo-apocalyptic positions an unwanted theological or even fanatical tone. To say that the world will experience a cataclysmic change and to base such a claim on a biblical hermeneutic, or even to articulate one’s position with a convenient biblical metaphor, is to risk alienating a large portion of one’s target audience by speaking or seeming to speak in an outmoded prophetic voice. To predict, on the other hand, in terms no less certain, in terms no less prophetic, that the world’s climate, atmosphere, or planet surface is on the verge of a cataclysmic change
and to narrate such a prediction through motifs, values, and assumptions borrowed from romanticism is perhaps to invite debate and charges of alarmism from one’s opponents and audience; however, one’s metaphors and language are less likely to be rejected as those of a religious crank. I fully realise that in a discussion about apocalypse that focuses on language, diction, images, literary tropes, and so forth I cannot simply bracket off the Bible’s enormous influence; indeed, it can be argued that any discussion of apocalypse necessarily entangles one in some consideration of the Bible. In *The Great Code* (1982) Northrop Frye argues that the Bible’s narrative and imagery “set up an imaginative framework—a mythological universe . . . within which Western literature had operated down to the eighteenth century and is to a large extent still operating” (xi). However, I am arguing that, although the Bible provides important narrative paradigms against which we may read apocalyptic predictions, it is the unique motifs of romanticism which are more readily (re)situateable within those contemporary apocalyptic narratives that are fundamentally nihilistic.

In the first chapter of *A Study of English Romanticism* (1968) Frye sees such a displacement of the Bible by romantic literatures:

> In Western Europe an encyclopedic myth, derived mainly from the Bible, dominated both the literary and the philosophical traditions for centuries. I see Romanticism as the beginning of the first major change in this pattern of mythology, and as fully comprehensible only when seen as such. (5)

More specifically, romanticism, Frye argues, displaces a four-tiered, Christian conception of things, which situates our fallen, natural world below the level of a lost, Edenic nature, which is in turn situated below God’s divine realm, the highest level. Below us is the
demonic level or hell (23-5). "In the Romantic period," Frye continues, "this scheme becomes profoundly modified," and "the structure becomes much more ambiguous" (25). It is not difficult to find evidence of these modifications, these new ambiguities in the importance romantic writers place on human consciousness developing amidst physical nature.

In his discussion of romantic conceptions of nature in \textit{Natural Supernaturalism} (1971), M. H. Abrams concurs essentially with Frye. The change that Frye describes in the abstract, Abrams describes using the example of Wordsworth, who, he argues, "inherited a long tradition of finding moral and theological meanings in the aesthetic qualities of the landscape" (102). One important figure in this "long tradition" is the seventeenth-century Scottish theologian Thomas Burnet, who is often cited by contemporary critics seeking to identify the revolutionary aspects of romanticism's ontology. In many ways Burnet's view of nature typifies the older four-tiered conception of the Christian cosmos identified by Frye. In \textit{Sacred Theory of the Earth} (1681-89) Burnet argues that antediluvian creation was radically different from the world we know, and while such an assertion is perhaps something of a theological commonplace, Burnet is worth examining here for his relentless focus on the earth's present geological profile and material composition as proof. When God created the world it was smooth, perfectly ovoid; the perfect being would create nothing less, Burnet seems to be arguing, betraying a neoclassical passion for symmetry and order. There were no mountains, rocks, seas, or underground caverns, and the climate was uniform. Although the laws governing plant life were much as they are now, there was no precipitation for the soil was infused with a
"benign juice, easy and obedient to the action of the sun" (68). All superfluous liquids encircled the earth, suspended like an atmospheric layer. "[I]t was suited to a golden age, and to the first innocency of nature," summarizes Burnet, attempting evidently to reconcile his Christian view with pagan legends of the Elysian fields, Hesperides, and Fortunate Islands (1.6; 76). By doing so he resists the neat compartmentalization of the four-tiered Fryegan schema insofar as he views antediluvian creation as continuous with Eden: "the whole earth was, in some sense, paradisiacal in the first ages of the world, and . . . there was . . . one region or portion of it that was peculiarly so, and bore the denomination of paradise" (2.1; 198).

While the climactic flood, "that great execution upon a sinful world" (1.6; 77), retains in Burnet's view all of its morally punitive force, it is of greater interest to him as God's colossal act of terraforming: "At this one stroke, all nature would be changed" owing to the "universal deluge" of water released from the atmosphere, the impact of which largely formed the earth's uneven topography of land, mountains, and oceans. He describes the present earth pejoratively as "a World lying in its Rubbish" and as an earth in ruin, a point he makes over and over again, referring to its "destroyed," "torn," "confused," and "mangled" state. At one point, he uses an unexpected sculpture metaphor that romanticism, specifically Percy Shelley in "Ozymandias" (1818), will use to different ends: "that form which the earth is under at present, is in some sort preternatural, like a statue made and broken again" (1.6; 43 emphasis added). Elsewhere, blending nostalgia and theology, Burnet finds some consolation in the vaguely Platonic notion that one can still "see the true image of the present earth in the ruins of the first" (1.6; 77). For Burnet,
then, the crucial event in the Old Testament is the creation of geophysical ruins, not the expulsion from Eden. His theology draws attention away from the human fall to focus upon the landscape’s fallen state.

The pre-romantic attitude toward nature that Burnet typifies devalues nature and denies it intrinsic aesthetic worth. His theology places humans in a position similar to Job, who is made to better understand God’s immense and inscrutable power; what Job learns directly from the voice of God, Burnet’s adherents are reminded of at every turn by geological features. Nature is of interest only insofar as it displays evidence of God’s vengeance; it can be made more intelligible by scripture, theology, natural philosophy, and speculative history, but there is little need for field trips and personal encounters.

What is redundant in the seventeenth century, however, becomes central about a hundred years later. The earth’s features that so offend Burnet become the sites and focal points of romanticism’s most famous moments particularly because of the poet’s subjective experience of them.

Of particular concern to me is the persona of Wordsworth that emerges from the poetry and from the critical literature. For contemporary environmental concerns Wordsworth becomes a key figure because the new sensitivity to nature in all its manifestations that the poet articulates becomes a crucial precondition for enlightened ecological practice and thought. In his essay on the history of British environmentalism, Wolfgang Rüdig locates Wordsworth in a line of radicals who rejected industrialization: “The nineteenth century did see a strong romantic movement, with writers and artists celebrating ‘nature’ in their works. Carlyle, Cobbett, Wordsworth, Ruskin, and Morris are
amongst the most famous poets, writers, and artists who formulated what may be interpreted as an environmentalist view of nineteenth century developments" (Taylor, *Ecological Resistance Movements* 226). There are of course many other candidates real and literary for the figure of eco-fountainhead--Thoreau and Caliban, for example--but it is Wordsworth (and perhaps Blake) who is most often cited for valorizing childhood experience of nature, and, as we shall see, childhood or the nostalgia for it, are important points of departure for many environmental texts. If a sensitivity to nature is a precondition for enlightened ecological practice, then a childhood spent in contact with some form of nature is in turn a precondition for this sensitivity.

In his history of ecological writings, *Nature's Economy* (1984), Donald Worster makes a similar point when he remarks in passing on "young Wordsworth's leaping, exuberant kinship with nature" (180). No further context is given, but probably none is needed. This persona of Wordsworth can be gleaned from numerous instances in a body of writing that is often intensely autobiographical. But do we run the risk of caricaturing Wordsworth with lay readings? Worster is no specialist, but compare his comment to Abrams's assessment of Wordsworth: "he constructed his account of an individual mind in its developing capacity to respond to and interpret" any aspect of nature--an achievement which in its subtlety and insight was without precedent either in the theology, aesthetics, or psychology of the poet's time (*Natural Supernaturalism* 102). Despite his markedly more politicized critical approach and ideology, Raymond Williams's summary of Wordsworth's achievement, which situates the poet within the context of the history of literary representations of urban and rural communities, also
emphasizes early experience. "Wordsworth took as the centre of his world not a possessive man but a wondering child," he argues, citing book two of *The Prelude* as an example (127). The childhood spent in nature contributes to the alienation that the narrator feels later during his residence in London, because "Wordsworth," Williams explains, now "sees the city with his country experience behind him and shaping his vision" (*The Country and the City* 149).

This way of presenting Wordsworth is by no means confined to Anglo literary traditions. In an essay on Russian emigre artists (Joseph Brodsky, Marc Chagall, and Andrei Tarkovsky) Bruce Ross argues that the "topoi of the idealization of childhood, ultimately an extension of the classic pastoral idiom, seems a product of romanticism [sic]" (307). Here too Wordsworth is the chief example; for the essay’s epigraph Ross uses the famous concluding lines from "My Heart Leaps Up": "The child is father of the Man; / And I wish my days to be / Bound each to each by natural piety"—lines which Wordsworth himself uses (in some versions) as an epigraph for "Ode (‘There was a time’)" (subtitled in some versions "Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood").

Ross does not purport to give a rigorous reading of Wordsworth; neither the poet nor English romanticism are mentioned beyond the introductory paragraph. However, both are clearly implicated throughout the essay and in Ross’s central rhetorical question, in particular: "How is one to confront the Heideggerian ‘Rift’

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14 All quotations from Wordsworth’s poetry are taken from Stephen Gill and Duncan Wu’s William Wordsworth, *Selected Poetry* (1997). To avoid the repetition of titles I will below refer to the ode simply as "There was a time." I give the line numbers in parentheses.
and make space for the sacred in a so-called post-modern, post-humanistic, post-Christian, post-capitalistic, post-nuclear age whose central emblems are anxiety, disruption and schizophrenia? How may the imaginative consciousness find tropes appropriate to express this disruption and to exorcize it? To mend the "Rift" and celebrate sacred presence?" (307). A tall order indeed. By Ross's account, the three emigres "have addressed these questions through the idiom of an idealized childhood and a literal nostalgia for their homeland" (307). Their debt to Wordsworthian romanticism is made sufficiently clear by implication. In an intellectual climate in which once-discrete disciplines, genres, and national literatures regularly chafe against each other and inform once-separate critical practices and assumptions, Wordsworthian romanticism can occupy many roles; it functions here as a point of departure for Ross's critical reading and, as it does in Case's *Silence Descends*, as a familiar response to contemporary problems.

Among specialists and among readers further afield in particular, then, a motif of the Wordsworthian child in nature emerges, and this motif is corroborated by the poet's most frequently anthologized poems. As a fixture of literary romanticism, Wordsworth's poetry no longer needs to be explicated, analysed, or even cited per se; his name alone can stand for nature unmediated by theological and ideological categories.

Of the unnamed poems that are tacitly invoked when we speak of the Wordsworthian child in nature, perhaps none is more widely known than "There was a time," of which I cite the opening stanza:

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There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
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Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;--
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more. (1-9)

The lament for the loss of a child’s perception proceeds and occasions several arrested moments that we would now call epiphanies; the narrator recognizes that he can no longer delight in rainbows, flowers, sunshine, and birdsongs as he once did: “yet I know, where’er I go, / That there hath passed away a glory from the earth” (17-18). Isolated elements of the familiar landscape “speak of something that is gone” (53). That the lost subjectivity diminishes both nature and narrator, or rather the intensity of their engagement, is made explicit with the question that follows: “Whither is fled the visionary gleam?” (56). Crucial here is the adjective-noun construction “visionary gleam.” The gleam is emitted by the pansy then under scrutiny, but only the attuned perceiver, the child as visionary (noun) can recognize its visionary (adjective) quality. In the poem’s climactic tenth stanza, the narrator, recognizing that “nothing can bring back the hour / Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower,” finds consolation in the faculties of adulthood: the “primal sympathy [for nature] / Which having been must ever be,” the ability to reason and rationalize, the “philosophic mind” attained only in maturity, and evidently the poetic ability to compose verse (180-81, 184-85, 189). Most important to my purposes though, is the enduring nostalgia for childhood—the nostalgia that is the ostensible origin of the poem.

In its treatment of the subject of the mature poet amidst nature, the narrative of
“Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey” is very similar to that of “There was a
time.” Laments for the lost sensibilities of childhood are balanced by the analytical and
poetic abilities gained in adulthood. Nostalgia also occasions the composition:

Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a sweet inland murmur. (1-4)

Each real or imagined visit to the banks of the Wye intensifies the poet’s deep
identification with this particular parcel of landscape, and the short middle-stanza
suggests the river has long since become the focus of a private meditation or ritual: “How
oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee / O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods, /
How often has my spirit turned to thee!” (56-58). The next stanza occasions a more
spontaneous recollection as the poet indulges in a more distant nostalgia for the
unreflecting first encounter with this landscape in childhood: “For nature then / (The
course pleasures of my boyish days, / And their glad animal movements all gone by,) / To
me was all in all” (73-76). But the poet has matured considerably since then; by his
account “That time is past, / And all its aching joys are now no more, / And all its dizzy
raptures” (84-86). He has “learned / To look on nature, not as in the hour / Of thoughtless
youth” (89-91).

Setting aside for the moment the meditation on death that informs Wordsworth’s
“There was a time” and the intermediary function of Dorothy in “Tintern Abbey,” the two
poems are of a piece in the consolation they find in adulthood through the recollection of
an uncritical, childhood engagement with nature. The mature affirmation “Therefore am I
still / A lover of the meadows and the woods, / And mountains; and of all that we behold
/ From this green earth” (103-06) could function just as well in the ode, in which the poet,
recognizing that the perception of nature’s radiance is somehow diminished in adulthood,
concludes “We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind” (182-83).
Crucial as well is the fact that both sites are revisited on several occasions and that each
landscape is perceived to change owing to the changed subjectivity of the poet.
Scrutinizing himself as much as the landscape, Wordsworth in both poems effectively
acknowledges the recognition of “Tintern Abbey”: that eye and ear “half-create” what
they “perceive” (107, 108). In his seminal essay on forms of romantic expression, “The
Rhetoric of Temporality” (1969), Paul de Man reminds us that when “observing the
development of even as geographically concrete a poet as Wordsworth, the significance
of the locale can extend so far as to include a meaning that is no longer circumscribed by
the literal horizon of a given place” (206). De Man’s observation is particularly relevant
not only to romantic poets but also to writers concerned with environmental issues for, as
we shall see, landscapes real or imagined occasion many far-reaching ethical
pronouncements, in particular when the environmental threats are grave.

Like Wordsworth, William Blake is often enlisted as an important poetic
precursor of contemporary environmental sensitivities. In The Environmental Imagination
(1995), a superb history of environmental perception in American literature, Lawrence
Buell finds one English precursor, the Blake of “Auguries of Innocence,” reproaching
humans for their mistreatment of animals and advocating an “extension of moral
accountability” (185). Wrens, wolves, flies, bats, spiders, and even gnats and chafers are
listed alongside creatures with a long-established affinity with humans based upon domestication (dogs), agrarian practices (horses, sheep, oxen), or traditional iconography (lions, deer, eagles). Partly because the cast of animals is here free of the private mythological meanings Blake attaches to animals in the longer epics and prophecies, the poem can more readily articulate animal rights, albeit in an inchoate form; all creatures must receive our ethical consideration, Blake argues:

A dog starvd at his Masters Gate
Predicts the ruin of the State
A Horse misusd upon the Road
Calls to Heaven for Human blood
Each outcry from the hunted Hare
A fibre from the Brain does tear
A Skylark wounded in the wing
A Cherubim does cease to sing
The Game Cock clipd & armd for fight
Does the Rising Sun affright (page 490; lines 9-18)\(^{15}\)

Countering all this injustice and suffering is a cosmic order or balance, the existence of which is reinforced structurally by the rhymed couplets which one is perhaps tempted to extract as proverbs of proto-ecological wisdom. Our bad behaviour toward animals is met at every turn with a variety of consequences ranging from ostracism and vague menace to divine wrath:

He who shall hurt the little Wren
Shall never be belovd by Men
He who the Ox to wrath has movd
Shall never be by Woman lov'd

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\(^{15}\) All quotations from Blake are taken from David V. Erdman, The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake (1988). I cite both page and line numbers for all Blake poems because Erdman frequently includes more than one version of a poem; “Auguries,” for example, is extant in two versions (each version has 132 lines, but their orders differ).
The wanton Boy that kills the Fly  
Shall feel the Spiders enmity  
........................................
Kill not the Moth nor Butterfly  
For the Last Judgement draweth nigh (490-91; 29-40)

The poem’s catechistical rhythm suggests that these are rudimentary lessons in good
Christian conduct for the young. But, as we learn, random or childish cruelties quickly
beget firmly-entrenched, immoral social practices beyond the animal kingdom:

The Whore & Gambler by the State  
Licenced build that Nations Fate
The Harlots cry from Street to Street
Shall weave Old Englands winding Sheet
The Winners Shout the Losers Curse
Dance before dead Englands Hearse (492; 113-8)

In these lines we suddenly hear Blake the fiery social critic--the Blake of Songs of
Experience and of “London” in particular. Ultimately though Blake’s aims in “Auguries
of Innocence” are even more ambitious, for he is articulating a deliberate metaphysics
that urges us “To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower” (490;
1-2). The ethics that we must contrive to complement this interdependence of all living
creatures are infinite, hence the open-ended, non-narrative structure of the poem, which
seems to invite the reader to add to the catalogue of transgressions being compiled.

Where “Auguries of Innocence” urges us to understand that ethical conduct begins
with our initial encounters with the animal kingdom and expands outward into our urban,
social, and professional adult-lives, many of the poems of Songs of Innocence (1789)
simply celebrate the rural idyll of childhood, although by extension they too teach proper
interaction with nature. “The Ecchoing Green” opens with the early morning, springtime
frolicking of children:

The sky-lark and thrush,
The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around,
To the bells cheerful sound.
While our sports shall be seen
On the Echoing Green. (8; 5-10)

Such well-known pastoral moments are, for my purposes here, virtually interchangeable with similar passages in “Nurse’s Song”; “Laughing Song”; and in other Blake songs such as “Spring,” “The Blossom,” “How sweet I roam’d from field to field,” and “I love the jocund dance.” Collectively these poems permit us to speak of a Blakean pastoral.¹⁶

Of course the much bleaker moments in The Book of Thel (1789), Songs of Experience (1794), and Milton (1804) unsettle these safe, pastoral enclaves of childhood with their depictions of death, organic decomposition, and urban squalor; however, the second stanza of “Echoing Green” envisions a complete life-cycle spent in harmony with nature through the several generations that gather to enjoy the green:

Old John with white hair
Does laugh away care,
Sitting under the oak,
Among the old folk,
They laugh at our play,
And soon they all say.
Such were the joys.
When we all girls & boys,

¹⁶ “Nurse’s Song” begins with the lines, “When the voices of children are heard on the green / And laughing is heard on the hill, / My heart is at rest within my breast / And every thing else is still” (15; 1-4). “Laughing Song” begins, “When the green woods laugh, with the voice of joy / And the dimpling stream runs laughing by, / When the air does laugh with our merry wit, / And the green hill laughs with the noise of it” (11; 1-4).
In our youth-time were seen,
On the Echoing Green. (8; 11-20)

Although not as clearly pronounced as Wordsworth’s notion of a recuperative nostalgia, Blake’s vision is akin to that of “Tintern Abbey.” The nature idyll of childhood can be revisited imaginatively by the old folk and by the poet, and so it can potentially keep the “dark Satanic Mills” at bay; certainly it can, to quote David Rothenberg, help us “develop and articulate basic, common intuitions of the absolute value of nature” (ECL 3).

Doubtless Blake and Wordsworth would concur with a great many fundamental tenets of contemporary environmental writings. Blake’s reveries and songs and Wordsworth’s nostalgia and introspection are occasioned by natural settings; collectively these instances in romanticism come down to us as a fundamental literary grammar for communicating human encounters with nature—a grammar that runs through Western literature and which seeps into environmental nonfiction, often with surprisingly little alteration. The childhood motif is an attempt to start anew each time, to pare away heedless practices and cultural accretions learned in adulthood so that unmediated apprehensions of nature can be realized. For the romantics the task is largely to evade insofar as possible the inherited religious traditions and to replace these with more secular, more personalized tropes. As well childhood seems the logical starting point for longer narratives of environmental encounter.

Sarah Orne Jewett’s “A White Heron” (1886) occupies a point roughly midway between literary romanticism and contemporary environmental writings because of its date of composition and its central conflict’s implications. Now regularly anthologized in
American-literature collections, it has become something of a classic of proto-ecological literature owing in part to its highly nuanced attention to setting. The adolescent Sylvia has left behind a stifling existence "in a crowded manufacturing town" to live with her grandmother in the "New England Wilderness" on a farm so isolated that "it seemed like a hermitage" (203, 205). Even more telling are the narrator's sketches of the immediate environment which forsake geographical precision in order to convey better a child's highly subjective sense of place through a disorienting blend of seemingly-specific yet generic descriptors: the woods, the huckleberry bushes, the swamp, the pasture, the path, the brook, and so forth. The frequency of the definite article when referring to quite common aspects of rural landscape sets a tone not unlike that of a fairy tale or a children's story. When questioned about the habitat of a rare, white heron, for example, Sylvia recalls a previous excursion:

she knew that strange white bird, and had once stolen softly near where it stood in some bright green swamp grass, away over at the other side of the woods. There was an open place where the sunshine always seemed strangely yellow and hot, where tall, nodding rushes grew and her grandmother had warned her that she might sink in the soft black mud underneath and never be heard of more. Not far beyond were the salt marshes and beyond those was the sea, the sea which Sylvia wondered and dreamed about, but never had looked upon, though its great voice could often be heard above the noise of the woods on stormy nights. (206-07)

Throughout the story, all that is local is made to seem familiar, but remoter areas are

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17 In 1963, significantly, three years before Richard Cary's scholarly edition appeared, Barbara Cooney illustrated a children's version of Jewett's story, for which see my bibliography. Although it does not include mention of Jewett's story, Karin Lesnik-Oberstein's "Children's Literature and the Environment" is an excellent history and survey of a burgeoning sub-genre. The concepts "child" and "natural," she argues, "were created out of a split in which they represented the opposition to civilization and the book" (Kerridge and Sammells 208-17).
vaguely defined and come with admonitions from adults about hidden dangers, in spite of the fact that Sylvia is the one most adept at traversing the landscape: "There ain't a foot o' ground she don't know her way over," her grandmother boasts (205). When she begins her triumphant climb of the great pine tree, she at once develops further capabilities that border on the preternatural: "Sylvia began with utmost bravery to mount to the top of it, with tingling, eager blood coursing the channels of her whole frame, with her bare feet and fingers, that pinched and held like bird's claws" (209). Clearly, Sylvia is much too feral to be read as merely a sentimentalized version of the romantic child in nature. In fact, in many ways she anticipates the unnamed narrator of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972), who, while in the Quebec bush, evolves mentally into a truly unromantic animal-like creature in order to efface the traumas of urbanism and, indeed, of her entire human existence.

In addition to the elusive white heron, the local landscape is further characterized by a cast of natural inhabitants: moths, thrushes, geese, partridges, gray and red squirrels, jay-birds, crows, whippoorwills, sparrows, robins, hawks, bats, cat-birds, and other unspecified "birds and beasts." The domesticated animals—a cow, a cat, hens, and a toad that lives under the doorstep—although singled out owing to the dramatic requirements of the story, blend imperceptibly with the zoological setting; that is, aside from the cat feeding on young robins and thereby taking its proper place in the food chain, they do not significantly disturb the indigenous biota. The cow, "Mistress Mooly," is a favourite, but Sylvia enjoys all animal companionship equally. The "wild creatur's counts her one o' themselves," her grandmother points out (205). Hunting (with the exception of the cat's
predatory tendencies) has become a thing of the past; Dan, the grandmother’s son, once hunted partridges and squirrels, but he has since migrated to California, and so an idyllic pastoral setting is maintained, in particular since the two women seem to subsist largely on wild berries and the cow’s milk. All in all we have a setting whose economy is governed by concerns that lie well beyond self-interested anthropocentrism; Sylvia’s ethical concern extends beyond humans to include the welfare of birds. And there is even reciprocity from the great pine tree which, suddenly anthropomorphized, ponders Sylvia’s presence as she is climbing:

it must truly have been amazed that morning through all its ponderous frame as it felt this determined spark of human spirit creeping and climbing from higher branch to branch. Who knows how steadily the least twigs held themselves to advantage this light, weak creature on her way! The old pine must have loved his new dependent. More than all the hawks, bats, and moths, and even the sweat-voiced thrushes, was the brave, beating heart of the solitary gray-eyed child. And the tree stood still and held away the winds that June morning while the dawn grew bright in the east. (209-10)

It may seem tempting to regard this passage as overly sentimental pathetic fallacy; however, the tree’s metaphoric potential is teased into many directions. The “great pine tree . . . the last of its generation” we would now call old growth: “the woodchoppers who had felled its mates were dead and gone long ago, and a whole forest of sturdy tress, pines and oaks and maples, had grown again” (208). Up close it seems to Sylvia “a great mainmast of the voyaging earth” (209). As such it becomes a potent symbol against deforestation, as well as a more broad metaphor anticipating numerous holistic forms of contemporary environmentalism.

But the story does not remain a mere celebration of a New World pastoral as the
central conflict makes clear: Sylvia is faced with the decision of whether to sell out nature to the ornithologist who has come to stalk the white heron and who tries to sway her with the gift of a jackknife and the promise of a ten-dollar finder’s fee. The narrator clarifies for us the heroic dimensions of her decision: “No, she must keep silence! What is it that suddenly forbids her and makes her dumb? Has she been nine years growing, and now, when the great world for the first time puts out a hand to her she must thrust it aside for a bird’s sake?” (211). For the “great world” we can now read the great urban world, with its emphasis on masculine prerogative, masculine sexuality, commodification, and an imperialistic treatment of nature. To be sure, the young man’s gestures contain sexual overtones: “the woman’s heart, asleep in the child” finds itself “vaguely thrilled by a dream of love,” notes the narrator and elsewhere even encourages a union, noting that the man is “so well worth making happy” (207, 211). One might well argue that an initiation into a heterosexual adulthood is more properly a part of nature than a cloistered life, but such an argument encourages the tendency to see female isolation as fundamentally unhealthy. As Buell notes, “male narratives of self-reliant cabin dwelling isolates are common, whereas the commonest counterpart in women’s narratives is the story of the ‘female hermit’ who has not risen above society but fallen below it as a result of a disastrous love affair usually extralegal, which has left her with child, who usually dies” (46). But Sylvia’s defiance is clearly heroic. As her metaphoric atavism underscores, she has become one with her environment to an extent that goes well beyond the carefree idyllic play of romantic pastoralism, and therein, I believe, lies the answer to the narrator’s rhetorical question. Her attachment to place is ultimately much stronger than
that of her grandmother, who encourages the sell out and who confesses a long-standing desire to leave this existence behind: "I'd ha' seen the world myself if it had been so I could" (205). Of course, from her treetop vantage point, Sylvia has already "seen" the world, albeit a world cleansed of the urban squalor of her earlier life:

Yes, there was the sea with the dawning sun making a golden dazzle over it. . . . Westward, the woodlands and farms reached miles and miles into the distance; here and there church steeples, and white villages; truly it was a vast and awesome world. . . . At last the sun came up bewilderingly bright. Sylvia could see the white sails of ships out at sea, and the clouds that were purple and rose-colored and yellow at first began to fade away. (210)

Although not as isolated as the farm, the world that Sylvia now sees is almost as pastoral as the local one that she knows so well. What is truly noteworthy, then, is that Sylvia chooses to remain here and to remain the "lonely country child," despite the fact that she has now caught a glimpse of other possible rural lifestyles (212). Buell has characterized the actions of Sylvia and others like her as "the mark of insiderness" whereby "the denizen's knowledge of the environmental particularity . . . is deliberately withheld from the uninitiated because the denizen's allegiance to maintaining the integrity of her environment has come to take precedence" (80). As we shall see, the term becomes a useful one for understanding the conversion of romantic literary motifs into uniquely ecological motifs.

While the significance of Sylvia's defiance of the ornithologist is only belatedly, in light of late twentieth-century environmentalism, coming into fuller focus, J. G. Ballard's early novels of ecological apocalypse are clearly of their time in terms of commonly harbored anxieties that seem to lie behind their premises. The plots exhibit a
tendency toward the formulaic: Ballard isolates some aspect of nature and imagines the
global consequences if it should suddenly operate disastrously outside of normal or
predictable parameters: for example, wind in The Wind From Nowhere (1962); global
warming and the consequent rise of water levels in The Drowned World (1963); water
depletion in The Drought (1964; 1974); and the vitrification of jungle vegetation in The
Crystal World (1966).18 Ballard revives the formula with slight modification in Hello
America (1981), in which massive last-ditch efforts to control global climates go
disastrously wrong and reduce the entire North American continent to an uninhabitable
desert. Bill McKibben’s influential The End of Nature (1989) focuses precisely on this
recent tendency in nature toward extreme unpredictability. In writing a layperson’s guide
to our compromised environment, McKibben tries to find the means by which to convert
hard scientific data from a variety of disciplines and sources into something readable.19

18 The Drought was originally published as The Burning World. (See my
bibliography for an edition of each text.) Was the title change made later to disguise the
formulaic quality of the “world” novels (which significantly appeared early on as
inexpensive paperbacks with pulpish cover-illustrations)? For an account of Ballard’s
potboiler days, see James Goddard and Peter Pringle’s J. G. Ballard: The First Twenty
Years (1976), which also includes an interview with the author and a detailed
bibliography.

19 In the preface, McKibben writes of his debt “to the scientists who have brought to
the world’s attention the greenhouse effect and other environmental cataclysms described
in this book. The science of global climate change is young and still evolving, so there are
few textbooks or standard references on which to draw.” He names “eight scientists and
policy analysts” and lists numerous organizations, institutes, and groups whose specific
mandate is to interpret the work of various disciplines for the public, among them the
Worldwatch Institute, the World Resources Institute, the Environmental Defense Fund
(vii-viii).
His main argument is that “we live in a postnatural world” since no aspect of organic life or environment (from atmosphere to wilderness to genes) has escaped the touch of technologically-endowed humans (60). And so it is with a mixture of delight and horror that he recounts Bob Marshall’s 1930 expedition to Alaska’s Brooks Range, which saw the discovery and simultaneous breaching of the earth’s last frontier. “[A]ll the lower forty-eight states had been visited, mapped, and named,” McKibben laments, adding that “Marshall was very near the last to see surroundings unpolluted even by the knowledge that someone had been there before” (52-53). But exploratory mapping and “polluting” are today very likely two different things in the minds of even his sympathetic readers, who might hold truly pristine spaces—spaces we must never see or even know about in order for them to remain so—to be a luxury of sorts and who are probably more concerned with less esoteric forms of pollution. On the issue of wilderness, McKibben soon concedes to a more moderate position: “if we can’t have place where no man has ever been, we can at least have spots where no man is at the moment” (55). Even Jewett’s narrator is forced to admit that sections of Sylvia’s “New England wilderness” had probably been mapped several generations prior by woodchoppers and that before arriving the ornithologist in a sense already knew the area owing to its proximity to the heron’s usual habitat. Thus, it is perhaps for this reason that McKibben avoids a lengthy catalogue of final frontiers and looks elsewhere to advance his postnatural nature thesis. He quickly abandons bleak figures and gloomy statistics as well, although there are enough here to rank the book as an apocalyptic environmental text. He finds his narrative hook in a topic with seemingly universal appeal: the local weather.
Against those who contend that meteorological fluctuations such as heat waves, storms, and droughts are just that—fluctuations—and that the figures will average out over the long term as conditions return to normal, McKibben argues emphatically that "there is no normal situation in the weather to return to .... The weather of the future cannot be predicted by the weather of the past, nor can its effects"; furthermore, he elaborates "those 'record highs' and 'record lows' that the weathermen are always talking about—they're meaningless now. It's like comparing pole vaults between athletes using bamboo and those using fibreglass, or dash times between athletes who've been chewing steroids and those who've stuck to Wheaties" (125, 60). Therein McKibben finds the apocalyptic precondition that arguably can be most widely understood in both religious and secular contexts: inclement weather. Through almanacs, a genre dating back to the medieval period, we can recognize that an interest in record breaking weather is an ancient human compulsion. However, by suggesting that any environmental measurements must henceforth appear in a new "post" category that signifies an absolute break with the past, McKibben turns the familiar into something uncanny—something that has seemingly always been there but has suddenly become menacing. "The salient characteristic of this new nature is its unpredictability, just as the salient feature of the old nature was its utter dependability," he concludes at one point, moving quickly from weather to nature in general (96). One might wish that McKibben had refined his vocabulary somewhat. On the other hand, one might wish to subject The End of Nature to a rigorous, close reading to flush out its aporias, for who can truly hold separate "predictable," "unpredictable," and "dependable" when speaking of quantifiable environmental phenomena. Another
model of, say, climate change or global warming can (and frequently does, as McKibben is forced to admit) supplant or normalize earlier data. More to the point though, McKibben finds himself throughout the book in the odd position of having to make predictions about natural phenomena that he has deemed random; thus, he takes, for example, a dismissive attitude toward the doom-laden environmental predictions of the late 1960s and early 1970s because these undermine environmentalism’s credibility, yet he forecasts “superhurricanes,” 50% stronger than the strongest hurricane on record, much like the type Ballard includes in The Wind From Nowhere (McKibben 96). Here we see the persistent dovetailing of science and science fiction that characterizes the late-twentieth century, whereby an apocalyptic tone can easily be invoked in either type of text with the assurance that it will be understood with the widest possible resonance. Environmental non-fiction and literature now routinely inform one another, and we can see root concerns common to both regardless of authorial intentions.

A postnatural ordering of things where scientific discourse explains belatedly but can no longer predict is what I see in Ballard’s early fiction. In response to the catastrophes precise scientific explanations are always put forth belatedly, but passages of scientific forewarning are never included. These are narratives about the aftermath. The protagonist, typically some sort of scientist or doctor, has a great stake in a rational understanding of the world; however, in no instance are the aberrant phenomena rectified by human or technological efforts, and thus we can speak generally about these works as cautionary science-fiction narratives that share some of the goals of environmental non-fiction, goals which include apprehending the blindspots of technological progress.
Ballard is perhaps at his bleakest in *The Drowned World* and *The Crystal World*; both narratives are relatively open-ended insofar as the apocalyptic conditions do not unexpectedly reverse themselves (as they do in *The Wind from Nowhere*, for example), and the surviving humans are the last of our species, faced with the daunting task of adapting to the harsh conditions. It is Ballard’s third novel, *The Drought*, though, that I now want to focus on, chiefly because of its two adolescent characters.

The worldwide drought that lasts a mere five months and causes a chain reaction of food shortages and other catastrophes is finally attributable to one specific cause:

Covering the offshore waters of the world’s oceans, to a distance of about a thousand miles from the coast, was a thin but resilient mono-molecular film formed from a complex of saturated long-chain polymers, generated within the sea from the vast quantities of industrial wastes discharged into the ocean basins during the previous fifty years. This tough, oxygen-permeable membrane lay on the air-water interface and prevented almost all evaporation of surface water into the air space above. Although the structure of these polymers was quickly identified, no means was found of removing them. (29-30)

Here we see the use value of science reduced to two pages of text (of which I give only a portion) that come after the fact. As conditions deteriorate and the post-apocalyptic landscape emerges, the traditional foundations of society erode. There are neo-primitive water-worshipping cults, armed militia, reclusive millionaires, refugees, and vigilantes, all competing for survival in an atmosphere of frontier violence. Ballard’s protagonist, Charles Ransom, an upper-middle class medical-doctor, embodies the impotence of the status quo. Well into the period of drought, after an arduous journey to an overcrowded refugee-camp by the ocean, he asks helplessly, “We’re going to need some water soon. Aren’t there any police around?” (85). Shortly thereafter in a refugee camp hundreds of
sick and malnourished persons died under his care, we later learn. A decade after the onset of the drought, a hunter-gatherer society that forages for fish and water establishes itself, and Ransom lives as a shunned outsider, in part because the settlement has no use for him, having adopted “the principle that a person who needed a doctor would soon die” (116). Distinctions between essential and superfluous are several times redrawn, and Ransom, who had carefully hoarded water early on and had seemed most likely to thrive as a hardy, self-sufficient survivalist, is reduced to stealing from the better equipped foraging parties from the settlement. On the other hand, the dissolute and alcoholic Mrs. Quilter becomes a sought-after fortune-teller. The two figures who unexpectedly thrive most in the reconfigured society, however, began as disenfranchised youth who spent their time in close kinship with nature.

Ballard clearly had in mind several literary echoes when creating the two adolescent boys Philip Jordan and Quilter. Philip, a homeless “foster child of the river,” who scrounges about the waterfront for salvageable materials and routinely accepts gifts of food from Ransom, is explicitly identified with Shakespeare’s Ariel by the narrator, and to that end Ransom fancies him “part waif . . . part water-elf,” in particular it seems owing to the youth’s compassion for injured animals, which he brings to the doctor for care (18). When Ransom notes his resourcefulness, he views him as a “juvenile Robinson Crusoe . . . creating his own world out of the scraps and refuse of the twentieth century,” and as a “wily young Ulysses of the waterfront” (19). When the youth attempts to revive a swan that is suffocating in oil and near death, Ransom thinks of “some landlocked mariner and his stricken albatross” (21). But Ransom (or Ballard) finds no exact literary
shorthand to express Philip’s romantic kinship with nature and the local environment. “[H]e seemed able to tame swans and wild geese, and knew every cove and nest in the banks,” Ransom marvels, and it is this fixed association of zoophilia with intimate topographic knowledge, this insiderness, that none of the figures drawn from earlier literature embody precisely. His secret knowledge of terrain surprises Ransom on several occasions: twice Philip successfully helps Ransom escape from Jonas by the adroit maneuvering of his skiff, even though the waterways are so depleted by the drought that they are barely navigable; later Philip takes them to his fully-restored sailboat, hidden in plain sight, so to speak, in “a small drained lagoon”; years later, he reveals a similarly intact hearse that he has restored in the basement garage of an abandoned house (74, 118).

Although the two are never directly in conflict, Quilter, who is afflicted with Down’s syndrome, is Caliban to Philip’s Ariel, a metaphoric association that reveals either Ballard’s questionable taste or Ransom’s lack of tact, in particular since he is a physician. In the first sentence of the novel, which I have trouble reading in anything but the third-person narrator’s voice, he is identified as “the idiot-son of the old woman who lived in the ramshackle barge outside the yacht basin”(7). Ransom is equally contemptuous; after the start of the drought he watches the youth staring at dead birds in the receding river and notes that he “resembled a demented faun strewing himself with leaves as he mourned for the lost spirit of the river” (7).

Throughout, Ransom concocts many such grotesque pastoral parodies inspired by Quilter. Trying to understand his morbid fascination, he reckons that Quilter “seemed an obscure omen, one of many irrational signs that had revealed the real progress of the drought
during the confusion of the past months” (8). A more detailed description follows when he comes face to face with the youth:

Despite his deformed skull and Caliban-like appearance, there was nothing stupid or unintelligent about Quilter. The dreamy ironic smile, at times almost affectionate in its lingering glance, as if understanding Ransom’s most intimate secrets, the seamed skull with its curly russet hair and the inverted planes of the faunlike face, in which the cheekbones had been moved back two or three inches, leaving deep hollows below the droll eyes—all these and a streak of unpredictable naïveté made Quilter a daunting figure. Most people wisely left him alone, possibly because his unfailing method of dealing with them was to pick unerringly on their weaknesses and blind spots and work away at these like an inquisitor. (10)

Ballard’s echoes of *The Tempest* have an allegorical consistency. As a fortune-teller Quilter’s mother approximates Sycorax. The adult Quilter has a family with Miranda, sister of the eccentric millionaire Richard Lomax, who is at one point identified as Quilter’s charitable protector. As Prospero, Lomax arranges spectacular pyrotechnical displays, as much for his own self-indulgence as to indicate his power and resources in the post-apocalyptic society; however, there is little substance to his authority, and by the time he begins to deteriorate mentally he has influenced no one. Quilter and Lomax eventually come into violent conflict, but in this version Quilter triumphs, and Lomax is finally killed by a henchman now loyal to Quilter. While the equation of Philip with Ariel is never truly integrated with this strand of the narrative, Ballard’s meaning is clear: where Shakespeare’s castaways reestablish a foundering society and bring about a comic ending of marriage and reconciliation, the survivors in this society do not rise collectively to meet the challenges of their post-apocalyptic environment. Instead they become isolated and increasingly selfish, forming only fleeting alliances; as well, they lack
practical goals and, one might say, even motivation. The social arrangements that do emerge—the Reverend’s parish militia, the hunter-gatherer settlement, the fishermen cult, Quilter’s family—are in varying degrees violent, oppressive, patriarchal, or incestuous. Miranda, in fact, jokes about the lean times when she and Quilter resorted to cannibalism (143). Early on, Ransom notes that “in the new landscape emerging around them, humanitarian considerations were becoming increasingly irrelevant,” an assessment which not only rationalizes his growing isolation, but also reveals much about the collective morality of the survivors (75). Immediately after Lomax’s death at the end of the novel, the rains suddenly begin again after some ten years, a resolution which contrasts with T. S. Eliot’s unredeemed wasteland, and thereby suggests that the slaying of Lomax is possibly the one rightly-placed human action which restores nature. But I think such a reading places overmuch emphasis on the mythic dimensions of Ballard’s novel by turning the polluted environment into merely symbolic setting and by making ecological concerns subordinate to archetypal ones, to say nothing of the fact that it attaches undue importance to Lomax, who is at best a minor local eccentric and not an imperialistic villain of global proportions. To put it another way, the polluted environment of The Drought does not symbolize humankind’s moral failure, it is humankind’s moral failure. What I want to emphasize about the novel is that human

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20 In the first two stanzas of section five of “The Waste Land,” the rain does not come immediately after the death, despite a lot of thunder (328-58). Further down, though, “a cock stood on a rooftree / . . . / In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust / Bringing rain” (391-94). Is the ending redemptive or ironic? It would be foolhardy to try to pin Eliot’s poem down on this matter; suffice it to say that the conclusion of this narrative is much more ambiguous than Ballard’s.
endeavour is ultimately irrelevant--indeed non-existent--when pitted against the fallout from a seriously blighted environment. It is the brute physicality of nature that Ballard does not allow us to lose sight of--a brute physicality which marks the return to an industrialized world of a misanthropic nature with tenfold its original strength. And this reading applies to all of Ballard’s early novels.

That explicit literary reference functions as something of a ruse which does not fully reveal the ecological dimensions of the text can be seen in the passage that focuses on Quilter’s physiognomy. The comparison to Caliban does not fix Quilter in Ransom’s mind once and for all, but leads rather to ever more detailed descriptions of the youth which become a sort of phrenological narration that never reaches a clear conclusion. Only the landscape is accorded this kind of painstaking attention. When Ransom returns to the abandoned city after a ten year exile he is stalked and finally ambushed by the adult Quilter. His first glimpse of his pursuer reveals a remarkable transformation:

[O]ver his shoulder, he became aware of a huge figure standing on the sand behind him.

Well over six feet tall, and with its broad shoulders covered by a loose cloak of cheetah skins, an immense feathered cap on its head, the figure towered above him like a grotesque primitive idol bedecked with the unrelated possessions of an entire tribe. Girdled around its waist by a gold cord was a flowing caftan that had once been paisley dressing gown, cut back to reveal a stout leather belt hitching up a pair of trousers. These had apparently been cut from odd lengths of turkish carpeting, and terminated their uneven progress in a set of hefty sea boots. Clamped to them by metal braces were two stout wooden stilts nailed down to a pair of sandals. Together they raised their owner two feet further above the ground. (138)

We might recall here Joseph Conrad’s Marlow and the epiphanal moment in which he comes to a new understanding of the jungle while looking upon the “gorgeous apparition”
of the indigenous woman. Marlow sees in her the image of her native environment's "tenebrous and passionate soul," and he imagines the "immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life" looking at her (Heart of Darkness 99). While the nuances of Conrad's prose reveal much about the biases and shortcomings of the Eurocentric gaze, there is little doubt that Marlow is immediately awestruck and that he genuinely admires her for her oneness with her surroundings. Ransom, however, cannot let go of old prejudices. Because he still believes Quilter to be wholly immersed in feebleminded games, Ransom's description of him focuses on the youth's absurd appearance. When Quilter tackles Ransom and thrashes him into submission, we recognize at once the youth's ascendancy in the new order and Ransom's misplaced condescension. Quilter has prospered and even raised a family in a region thought to be uninhabitable. Ransom meanwhile has become disillusioned, having abandoned all the survivalist strategies heretofore attempted. It is significant, then, that Ransom misunderstands the clues inherent in the costume and at once ridicules it. Part salvage, part utilitarian, part hunting-trophy, part totem, Quilter's costume marks a more successful attempt to adapt to the new environment than the badly leaking wet-suit worn by Ransom during his years on the beach. Quilter is merely playing at being a chieftain, it is true, but his fantasies yield better results than Ransom's desperate attempts at harvesting the sea. The mental inferiority that Ransom has throughout seized upon so mercilessly is become an uncanny virtue, for it allows Quilter to indulge in uninhibited role-playing which ironically bests the efforts of Ransom and others. In the absence of civilising Prosperos, the atavistic Calibans will triumph, Ballard suggests, and from an
anthropological perspective it is right that they should.

Regarding this last point, Leo Marx, in his classic study of the pastoral ideal in America, *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), cautions against the naive and sentimental notions of nature that permeate popular culture: magazine covers, advertising, television, and leisure-time activities such as camping, hunting, and gardening. While he does not want to dismantle entirely what he calls the “piety toward the out-of-doors,” he does want to draw a sharp distinction between those depictions of nature found in “serious literature” and in the “lower plane of our collective fantasy life” (5-6). Drawing upon examples from politics and literature, Marx worries finally about our unexamined celebration of primitivism in all its forms. His reading of Herman Melville’s *Typee* (1846) is crucial to his overall argument. Tommo, “a fugitive from a highly developed . . . civilisation,” escapes “directly into primal nature” where he enjoys a carefree Gauguinesque existence, only to recognize gradually that the Typee are in fact cannibals and that he must extricate himself at any cost from the freedoms afforded by nature (281-85). The lesson drawn by Marx is, I believe, still informed largely by canonical literature, in which, caught between the lure of the primitive and the constrictions of civilisation, successful protagonists must always, like Odysseus in Tennyson’s “Lotos-Eaters,” choose the latter; that is, they must see through what are typically constructed as merely sensual appeals and return to the duties of responsible adulthood. Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Shakespeare’s *Anthony and Cleopatra*, and William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954) can all be cited here to make this point.

In light of my topic, what interests me most about *The Machine in the Garden* is
that Marx, as his inclusion of political writings makes plain, is clearly no rigid formalist, concerned only with "literary" issues. In the introduction he muses in passing about our "intricately organized, urban, industrial, nuclear armed society" (5). Likewise, he recognizes in The Great Gatsby (1925) the disparity between the suburban greenness enjoyed by the privileged and the landscape of ashes that is the polluting by-product of modern technological power. Yet, he is unable to see in the literature he examines the rudiments of a more radical environmental message. Citing Melville as an example, he concludes that the "romantic attitude toward external nature is finally narcissistic" (290-91).

But if we read Ballard (and literature in general) with environmental criteria uppermost in mind, a great deal changes. How are we to read literature with an ostensible ecological message? Ernest Callenbach's strongly polemical novel Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston (1975), as the main title suggests, offers, without a trace of irony, a long catalogue of virtually every late twentieth-century environmentalist goal realized. The country of Ecotopia forms after Washington, Oregon, and Northern California, using guerilla tactics, secede from the United States in 1980, twenty years prior to the novel's present. An egalitarian, quasi-socialist society eventually emerges. Callenbach imagines citizens riding bicycles and using electrically-powered public-transit; growing and consuming organic food; practising benign, sustainable forestry; living in biodegradable plastic houses in small urban communities interspersed with wilderness areas; and drawing energy from geothermal, hydroelectric, solar, and wind-generated sources. Although holistic ecology is here become a religion as well as
the foundational principle underwriting all its politics and social policies, the Ecotopian way of life is scientifically justifiable in every aspect. William Weston, a New York reporter and the first American to be admitted into the country, encounters well-informed and articulate people prone to friendly debate who “spout statistics” when challenged about their ways (17). One spokesman boasts to him of their astonishing 99% waste-recycling rate. A local science reporter attributes many of his country’s successes to an economy that eschews the type of progress conventionally measured by Gross National Product. He explains with a metaphor that could be mistaken for one of Thoreau’s ruminations:

Our system meanders on its peaceful way, while yours has constant convulsions. I think of ours like a meadow in the sun. There’s a lot of change going on--plants growing, other plants dying, bacteria decomposing them, mice eating seeds, hawks eating mice, a tree or two beginning to grow up and shade the grasses. But the meadow sustains itself on a steady-state basis--unless men come along and mess it up. (39-40)

Pastoral wisdom defeats the hard logic of economics, as this society proves. Likewise, all the government officials interviewed readily explain their policies using both ethical and scientific justifications. “Ecotopians claim to have sifted through modern technology and rejected huge tracts of it, because of its ecological harmfulness,” Weston concludes in his journal (49). Highly sceptical at first and defiantly cosmopolitan by nature, Weston is gradually won over and settles in Ecotopia by the end of the book. In his characterization and plot, Callenbach, like Jewett, counters Marx’s reading of the normative patterns of high literature, according to which the nature enclave must eventually be forsaken.

Ecotopia can be accurately summarized as a critique of Western societies from the
radical ecological left. Comprised entirely of Weston’s private journal and news stories, the book reads like a revisionist history. In fact, Fredric Jameson sees Callenbach’s novel as a product of Herbert Marcuse’s pervasive influence on American countercultural thought in the 1960s and finds in it “a summa of all the disparate . . . impulses” of the period; as well, he finds here a utopian “ambition to write a book around which a whole political movement might crystallize” (Postmodernism, 160). Not surprisingly, the ostensible political enemy of Ecotopia is an increasingly belligerent United States government. In the spring of 1982, it launched a covert helicopter-assault in what became a failed attempt to retake the territories, Weston learns much to his astonishment. That the Vietnam War secretly continued well into the 1980s and that there are currently similar US-led military-campaigns in Brazil is common knowledge among Ecotopians. One often has the sensation that the conspiracy theories of both the extreme-Left and extreme-Right are being enacted. Through many such casually placed asides we learn that the rest of the world is in grave shape owing to mismanagement of various kinds: lethal pollution levels, abortive antipollution efforts, economic disruptions, energy crises, overpopulation, famines, and widespread labour unrests are commonplace in the twenty-first century. Callenbach weights virtually every detail to depict Ecotopia as an ecological enclave within an apocalyptic world. Accordingly, we learn that Ecotopians gained their independence by desperate means: nuclear terrorism. At the time of secession, Ecotopia’s nationwide militia had mined major cities in the Eastern United States with atomic weapons as a defensive measure. The justification offered retrospectively by one civilian, it seems, could stand for the entire nation or for many grass roots ecological movements:
“if we wished to survive we had to take matters into our own hands” (59).21 Most ominous perhaps are the abnormally high levels of airborne radiation that drift across the Pacific during Weston’s stay. That their source remains obscure despite the best efforts of international diplomacy, reinforces the idea that the outside world is on the brink of chaos, unable or unwilling to take account for its disasters. Consequently, by the time Weston weighs life in New York (“crime and crazed people everywhere . . . our children’s children will go on being poisoned by smog and chemicals”) against life in Ecotopia we are surely expected to agree with his conclusion that it offers “a realer world . . . . In better touch with basic natural processes and the nitty gritty with fellow humans” (102). An ecologically benign lifestyle by any means necessary, is Callenbach’s unambiguous message.22

Having defined themselves geopolitically Ecotopians must find ways to sustain their isolationist society. Their claim to have “sifted through modern technology” could also be applied to other aspects of their infrastructure, insofar as Ecotopia is a far-flung historical reading of cultures and societies whereby everything that has gone before is subjected to stringent environmental criteria. Not surprisingly, many old ways fare well under the Ecotopians’ scrutiny, but their objectives are not guided merely by nostalgia. As progressivists they encourage the development of highly advanced technologies and can

21 For a recent assessment of current eco-terrorist fears and practices in North America, see Andrew Nikiforuk’s “Green and Mean,” a cover-story in the October 1998 issue of Canadian Business. See also my chapter four.

22 On the right-wing tendencies in contemporary ecology and on Nazi Germany’s ecological measures see chapters four and five of Luc Ferry’s The New Ecological Order.
claim extraordinary breakthroughs in plastics, metals, glass, ceramics, fabrics, electronics, communications, mass transit systems, defensive military-hardware, and microbiology.

But it is their deliberate incorporation of primitive elements into their twenty-first century society--their nostalgia sanctified by sound ecological practice which truly astounds, particularly in light of their technological sophistication. The consequences of such an outlook are numerous. For example, Weston finds that many Ecotopians are "sentimental about Indians" and "their lost natural place in the American wilderness" (37). From the indigenous example they derive environmental slogans: "live in balance with nature"; "walk lightly on the land"; "return nature to a natural condition" (37, 75). What could remain mere misty idealism is turned into policy though; faced with the prospect of overpopulation, the government adopts a "formal national goal of a declining population," some party members justifying the policy by pointing to the size of the Native American population at first contact as an ideal (78, 81). Likewise, in livestock and agricultural production the occupation of cowboy is revived from virtual obsolescence when it is determined that cattle drives combined with careful grasslands management are, in fact, sound environmental practice. This neo-frontierism is also evident in their penchant for hunting. In a revealing instance of Ecotopian anachronism early in the novel, Weston watches a group of primitive-looking hunters with bows and arrows exiting a city bus with a freshly killed deer, which they intend to butcher and consume. Still naive, he wonders "[w]hether such practices are forced upon them by scarcities, or are the result of some deliberate throwback policy" (19). At this point already, though, we understand that we are to take it for the latter; a healthy game
population just outside of town is evidence of a successful forest reclamation strategy.

As readers, we are repeatedly placed in the position of having to examine our own predilections for modern conveniences: are we willing to forsake, say, the family car for the sake of a wilderness in our backyard? Ecotopians, however, have moved beyond such debates; "we only agree on the root essentials, everything else is in dispute," Weston learns (39). But root essentials are not exactly the same as instincts, and consequently education plays a key role in perpetuating Ecotopian values. From an early age the curriculum stresses foremost physical fitness and outdoor activities such as fishing, hunting, and survival skills, and "how to improvise ecologically acceptable equipment in the wilds" (45). In light of the means used to gain independence this seemingly idyllic scouting has unmistakeable paramilitary overtones. Weston never makes any such connection, but instead consoles himself with familiar notions that could have been gleaned from nineteenth-century romanticism:

The experiences of the children are closely tied in with studies of plants, animals, and landscape. I have been impressed with the knowledge that even young children have such matters--a six-year-old can tell you all about the "ecological niches" of the creatures and plants he encounters . . . . He will also know what roots and berries are edible, how to use soap plant, how to carve a pot holder from a branch. (45)

During a subsequent tour of another primary school he blindly repeats the same pattern of thought:

The woodlot is a main focus of activity, especially for the boys, who tend to gang up into tribal units of six or eight. They build tree houses and underground hide-outs, make bows and arrows, attempt to trap the gophers that permeate the hillside, and generally carry on like happy savages--though I notice their conversation is laced with biological terminology and they seem to have an astonishing scientific sophistication. (149)
Where Weston sees only innocent “happy savages” or perhaps would-be naturalists, Ecotopian cultural organization once again proves to be farseeing in its anticipation of what these primitive drives could become in maturity. Recognizing the imperative of “adapting anthropological hypotheses to real life” it was deemed essential “to develop some kind of open civic expression for the physical competitiveness that seemed to be inherent in man’s biological programming.” Weston writes, parroting official rhetoric (94-95). Although nominally pacifist, Ecotopians find it indisputable that man was not a creature built for a totally and routinely peaceful life. Young men, especially, needed a chance to combat “the others,” to charge and flee, to test their comradeship, to put their beautiful resources of speed and strength to use, to let their adrenalin flow, to be brave and to be fearful. (95)

Through such rhetoric they are able to justify their most radical social practice: ritual war games. In these contests, which have taken the place of professional spectator-sports, young civilian men face each other in gladiatorial-style combat with lethal weapons. Casualties are routine; the fifty or so dead per year, it is argued, are trifling in comparison to the highway-death tolls and war casualties that are routinely tabulated in modern nations. The education and subsequent socialization of young males avail themselves for a telling case-study of Ecotopia; the findings of biology, sociology, anthropology, and education are here efficiently integrated so as to be fundamental to an ideological system where everything is subsumed by an ecological imperative. How could such a system produce anything but citizens who can function only within the parameters of Ecotopian society? Significantly, isolationism is portrayed as necessary and good; only a fool would want to leave. Emigration policies are not discussed at all, and the two
dissidents who approach Weston in secret are characterized as paranoid "prospective terrorists": "they would probably be against the regime whatever it was or did," he decides (63). As readers familiar with the modern dystopias of Kafka, Orwell, and Huxley, and the late twentieth-century horrors found in Vonnegut, Pynchon, and William S. Burroughs, we await a glimpse of the dark side of this utopia, but it never comes—at least not by design. Callenbach avoids any sort of intentional irony about Ecotopian ways.

I have outlined Callenbach’s novel in some detail because I believe it to be a paradigmatic contemporary environmentalist narrative. As such, it acknowledges the romantic legacy that articulates the primitive inclinations of childhood and adolescence. Developed by later writers like Jewett and Ballard these same inclinations, although still seen largely as childhood play, become increasingly ambiguous or violent. Ecotopia holds that they are natural and necessary, and shows how they can be harnessed to contribute to the goal of ecologically sound social organization on a large scale--effectively, how these might help stave off an environmental armageddon.

In the post-apocalyptic England of Russell Hoban’s Riddley Walker (1980), the ideology behind the type of survival-skills curriculum that so impresses Weston is put to the test. In many ways the obverse of Callenbach’s optimistic vision, Hoban’s novel renders an England of the future that resembles a distant past insofar as all the technologies of the modern era broadly conceived--indeed, all coherent accounts of civilization leading up to the twentieth century--have been obliterated by a nuclear holocaust that occurred in 1997. Reminiscent of Twain’s Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885), the book is narrated entirely by the twelve-year-old Riddley, who, although an
adult according to custom, offers an adolescent perspective (by turns cynical, idealistic, naive, and worldly, Riddley’s perspective is unwittingly satiric) on an archaic society that is only now emerging from a hunter-gatherer state.\textsuperscript{23} By his account they live in primitive squalor, a judgement he bases on golden-age legends of fantastic technology and knowledge. At times their existence echoes life in the middle ages: Riddley and Lissener, for example, unconsciously recreate a medieval pilgrimage when they set out for “Cambry” (Canterbury); as well there are itinerant puppeteers; the land is being cleared for agriculture; and permanent settlements are beginning to form. Most importantly, their language approximates various forms of pre-Renaissance English.\textsuperscript{24} Yet in other ways their day-to-day life, which regularly includes brutality and violence, evokes an even earlier, less-refined social organization that includes warring clans and roaming wild-dog packs. Moreover, Riddley must ritualistically kill a boar and later, in defense, a wild dog that stalks his foraging party. Also, he receives a ritual scar which symbolizes his initiation into full manhood. Finally, torture, confinement, and rape, although certainly present at any given time in history, are here part of a way of life and contribute to an oppressively primitive setting in which living means fighting for sheer corporal survival. Accordingly, Riddley dismisses the idea that his actions were especially heroic. The dog

\textsuperscript{23} Internal evidence suggests the novel’s events take place in the forty-third century (125).

\textsuperscript{24} In an excellent discussion of Riddley Walker’s language and syntax, Natalie Maynor and Richard F. Patteson argue that the novel’s “language suggest[s] early stages in language acquisition”; as well, they claim the novel “echoes . . . earlier stages of English,” which are “strengthened by thematic parallels with medieval literature” (21-22).
that attacks him is old and runs onto his spear as if committing suicide. The boar that he
kills is in fact sickly and the last of its kind, he guesses. The woods in which the first
killing took place are the remnants of a rapidly diminishing wilderness. By his account
"[t]he woal thing fealt just that littl bit stupid. Us running that boar thru that las littl
scrump of woodling with the forms [farms] all roun. Cows mooing sheep baing cocks
crowing and us foraging our las boar in thin grey girzel [drizzle]" (1). Through his
account we can foresee how, owing to the scarcity of feral animals and changing land-use
practices, some of the most violent aspects of their tribalism may soon become purely
ritual reenactments; however, out of necessity their existence remains dependent upon the
landscape whatever its condition.

Because his people are a community of foragers, Riddley resents the
encroachment of farmers upon their territory, as is made clear later during the meeting
with Goodparley and Orfing. Goodparley explains using a rather contemporary sounding
rationale that "theres a time for every thing and time for moving crowds is past innit You
take a crowd of 30 or 40 out foraging naminals and moving 1 place to a nother theyre
using up mor groun nor 100 may be 150 living on the lan and forming it with stock and
growings. You jus cant have all Inland for your forage groun no mor" (39). Here we have
the leadership of a primitive people discussing sustainable growth in relation to land-use
by applying a commonplace measure of progress: population size. Clearly, distinct
visions of progress are beginning to emerge as the agricultural imperative threatens to
supplant other demands. Consequently, a discernible elegiac tone for the loss of certain
aspects of the old nature-escape runs through the novel. Later, for example, Riddley
recounts a legend about the first domestication of a dog which occurred when a man and woman shared their food with a dog who had been drawn by their fire: "they made a contrack with the dog in the Ful of the Moon. They roadit on to gether with the dog and foraging to gether. Dint have no mor fear in the nite they put ther self right day and nite that wer the good time" (18). Because no one has been able to tame dogs since the nuclear holocaust, the narrative of this achievement has become a kind of ur-myth of a time when humans enjoyed a greater kinship with animal nature, one not solely based on penning them up. Canine domestication can protect humans from predators and, as such, marks a triumph over a hostile environment, but the alliance does not unduly disturb nature as current aspirations to progress (farming, the re-discovery of gunpowder, and a centralized government, for example) threaten to do. Riddley recognizes intuitively that domesticated dogs safeguard the foraging lifestyle; they make the wilderness traversable without clear-cutting it. While it is probably impossible to evaluate once and for all the ecological benefits of foraging, farming, practising animal husbandry, and domesticating animals to arrive at an optimum combination, it is noteworthy that Hoban would envision emerging in this primitive land-dependent society a nostalgia not simply for a mythical time of technological magic, but for a pastoral state of greater harmony between animals, nature, and humans.25 Preternaturally sensitive to wild creatures, Riddley realizes this golden-age

25 Nancy Drew Taylor also recognizes this harmony but goes further, arguing that “[t]he dog’s offering of itself in death to Riddley becomes an indication of the renewal of the possibility of ‘1st knowing’ . . . [or] the garden of Eden” (29). For a contrasting opinion see Leonard Mustazza, who argues that the novel “beautifully mirrors the movement forward of the species” (17), insofar as Riddley and his people are learning to question the inviolability of the Eusa myth and learning to make categorical, modern
myth when symbolically he forms a bond with the lead dog of the Bernt Arse Pack, which
leads him to the imprisoned Lissener, whom Riddley then frees. The fact that Lissener’s
telepathy has guided the lead dog only furthers the possibilities of inter-species kinship.
As Riddley says of the trek, “it wer a hy fealing it wer hyern any thing I ever felt befor.
Running oansome with them dogs” (74).

As a chronicler and a newly appointed authority-figure within his clan, Riddley is
acutely aware of the socio-evolutionary pressures that impinge upon them.26 While his
concern for dogs and woodlands and his consequent rejection of agricultural prerogatives
are perhaps attributable to sheer self-interest, rather than nostalgia, his pastoral
sensitivities clearly run much deeper. As a distant descendant of the pastoral children of
Blake and Wordsworth, he possesses a sensory and tactile awareness of nature, although
his expression can be decidedly blunt: “It ben pissing down rain since befor we lef
Widders Dump. I always liket the rain. Liket on the back track coming up to hy groud
smelling the meat smel from the divy roof” (37). His appreciation for rain is unusual
given that elsewhere he laments his society’s inability to advance beyond “slogging in the
mud” (125). Like a naturalist, he has an eye for unexpected details; he can even study
gory nature and find a strangely consoling tranquillity, as for example in this description
of the clan camp after the hunting ritual: “It wer ful of the Moon that nite. The rain littlt
off the sky cleart and the moon come out. We put the boars head on the poal up on top of

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distinctions between myth, history, actuality, and truth (18, 22).

26 Maynor and Patteson find Riddley’s “society . . . still in the process of moving
through the usual stages of cultural evolution” (19).
the gate house. His tusks glimmert and you cud see a dryd trickll from the corners of his eyes like 1 las tear from each” (4). Although his clan routinely reads animal behaviour as portentous, outright anthropomorphism is not part of their cultural practice. Riddley’s ability to personify his quarry in such a manner suggests an idiosyncratic faculty that perceives a kinship between humans and animals. His is a poetic sensibility given to metaphoric expression, a remarkable faculty given that the society is largely pre-literate.

As the evening continues Riddley has a sexual encounter with Lorna Elswint. As a narrator given to candour he is faced with a question of representationality that requires delicacy. He quotes the carnivalesque mating-song that Lorna sings in his ear and continues:

then we frehent the Luck up there on top of that gate house. She wer the oldes in our crowd but her voyce wernt old. It made the res of her seam young for a littl. It wer a col nite but we wer warm in that doss bag. Lissenin to the dogs howlin aftrwds and the wind wuthering and wearying and natterin in the oak leaves. Looking at the moon all col and wite and oansome. (5-6)

Riddley adroitly uses the outdoor setting to establish mood as if having somehow grasped T. S. Eliot’s lesson about the importance of finding an objective correlative. What I am (only half-jokingly) attributing to Riddley here could of course be said of Hoban. What interests me most though, is that nature--in fact, hostile nature: cold, dogs, wind--can be viewed romantically, despite the fact that it is the immersion in raw nature, the too-close-to-nature existence, that causes so much hardship for Riddley’s society, despite the fact that it is a focus of its much-lamented primitiveness. “Dyou mean to tel me them befor us by the time they done 1997 years they had boats in the air and all them things and here we
are weve done 2347 years and mor and stil slogging in the mud?” Riddley exclaims when he learns that the golden-age myths of fantastic technology are likely true. “Now you see . . . why Im all ways strest and straint Im jus a war out man. Riddley we aint as good as them befor us. Weve come way down from what they ben time back way back,”

Goodparley admits (125). These disparate attitudes show to what extent Riddley and his people are capable of aestheticizing their place within nature while simultaneously experiencing pronounced feelings of cultural inferiority.

In his ironic attack on highly mimetic art in “The Decay of Lying” (1889), Oscar Wilde saves his sharpest barbs for artistic representations of nature and even for nature itself, but he allows that natural scenes are redeemed by the fact that they enable us to gauge the evolution of aesthetic conventions: “At present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London . . . . But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not exist till art had invented them” (312). For Wilde, the Impressionists began a new school of painting and more importantly revolutionized fundamentals of cognition as only art can. Hoban belies Wilde’s extremist position where perceptions guided by art necessarily beget the cognitive frameworks by which we perceive the phenomenal world; Riddley can simultaneously perceive the oppressive environment in which he is immersed and conceive it in pastoral terms, even though he has not had any artistic forebears, let alone anyone who might have shown him that nature can be viewed aesthetically. For Riddley, there is no gap between the reality of the rain and its expressive, artistic potential. Wilde
jokes that "where the cultured catch an effect, the uncultured catch cold," to which one might respond that Riddley does both.27

Rich in descriptive language, Riddley’s narrative, ostensibly his written journal, stands in marked contrast to his society’s obsessive hermeneutic tendencies which conceive language chiefly as a series of puzzles to be solved. By long-standing tradition puppeteers tour the settlements, and performances are interpreted by the local “connexion man” who derives useful wisdom and therefore holds an important public office. But interpretation is not a narrow specialist’s task; it has become common practice to comb language in the hope of decoding ancient myths, folktales, children’s songs, in fact, any narrative at all which might hold embedded explanations of history or lost technology. Moreover, many of the stories and rhymes are ubiquitous; widely known due to the orality of the culture, they are habitually repeated much like proverbs or pieces of scripture whenever they seem applicable to everyday life, although behind each telling there lies the dim hope that some monumental truth will be revealed from a casual recontextualization. As Goodparley explains to Riddley, “every now and agen youwl hear something it means what ever it means but youwl know theres more in it as wel” (128). As such, Riddley’s society exists in a paradoxical condition of profound linguistic estrangement insofar as they do not understand the full significance of the narratives that

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Is it possible to green Wilde? See Neil Sammells, who argues that Wilde’s “mannered anti-naturalism, his apparent contempt for nature, paradoxically opens up a radical political space ... which contemporary ecocriticism might occupy”; in fact, he “shows more ‘respect for nature’ than Wordsworth: to aestheticize nature is to affirm its beauty and otherness; to turn it into a moral exercise-yard is sanctimonious, egoistic and ugly” (“Wilde Nature,” Kerridge and Sammmells 124-33).
they so freely circulate and often embellish. This estrangement is exacerbated by their
inability to categorize their stories or to put them into some sort of interpretive context;
all narratives are obscure in origin and are accorded roughly equal ontological potential.
Furthermore, there is no common understanding about what type of truth the old stories
might yield.

Goodparley’s aggressive attempts to systematize and thereby accelerate the search
for technological knowledge via a thuggish central-intelligence agency stand to succeed
insofar as Goodparley has managed to focus all efforts on retrieving the formula for
gunpowder. But when he shows Riddley his jealously-guarded scrap of pre-holocaust
writing, which he regards as key to unlocking the lost formula, we see how blindly he is
proceeding: “I can as plain the mos of it to you. Some parts is easyer workit out nor others
theres bits of it wewl never know for cern jus what they mean. . . . this here writing . . . its
cernly seakert [secret or sacred or a fusion of both].” Goodparley boasts after Riddley has
finished reading the fragment that describes in modern English the medieval wall-
painting, “The Legend of St Eustace” (124). The incident is paradigmatic of all attempts
to master language and narratives and to reconstruct history in Riddley Walker’s post-
apocalyptic world, where contexts have been torn away. Goodparley’s tour-de-force
performance of idiosyncratic logic, random deductions, and intuitive leaps manages to
stitch together numerous unrelated narrative snippets (126-29). Freed from the constraints
of any sort of intellectual tradition, he wills them all to cohere like an inspired alchemist
and deduces that the “yellerboy” (sulfur) is the ingredient that has been missing thus far.
The great irony of course is that while his method is wildly eccentric, he finds an
approximately correct formula. Goodparley desperately (and naively) wants a complete understanding of language and what it can do; he seeks to convince himself of language’s potential for full referentiality, and therefore, one discernible pattern in his “logic” is his attempt to make abstractions into concrete things that he knows intimately: “Saviour,” for example, becomes “savery,” which in turn becomes “Not sweet” and is therefore “salty” (128); “this . . . painting depicts with fidelity” becomes “done with some kynd of paint callit fidelity” (124); and “a cross of [divine] radiant light” becomes “radiation” by way of “radiating lite” (127). Goodparley embodies quite clearly the interconnectedness of the will to knowledge and the will to power.

Although increasingly isolated, in part because of his artistic sensitivity, Riddley is not immune from his contemporaries’ misguided aspirations, linguistic and otherwise. As his clan’s new connexion man, he too is faced with the task of providing interpretations. From the outset he repeats his culture’s stories and myths and accepts their traditional meanings in wide-eyed amazement. Although he suspects hidden motives, Riddley is enthralled by Goodparley’s performance, as we have seen, and he briefly shares his elder’s avowed goal of getting his people “moving frontwards agen” (118). As well, Riddley does not immediately reject Goodparley’s offer of a political partnership, although his silence is probably a stratagem. Most notable, though, is Riddley’s disturbing fantasy which equates being raped with being empowered:

Funny feelin come on me then like that Power wer a Big Old Father I wantit it to do me like Granser done Goodparley I wantit it to come in to me hard and strong long and strong. Let me be your boy, I thot. Stanning on them old broakin stones I fealt like it wer coming in to me then and taking me strong. Fealt like it wer the han of Power clampt on
the back of my neck fealt the big Old Father spread me and take me. Fealt
the Power in me I fealt strong with it and weak with it boath.” (158-59)

The “funny feeling,” which overtakes him as he enters the ruins of Canterbury, the centre
of the nuclear blast, is evidently caused by the lingering radiation: “unner neath that Zero
Groun I lissent up a swarming it wer humming like a millying of bees it wer like 10s of
millyings” (159). If we view Riddley’s wanderings as a spiritual quest or a moral journey
then this moment is surely the nadir. With the ground stimulating him into an increasingly
graphic, carnal ecstasy, he reaches a megalomaniacal climax: “Not jus my cock but all of
me it wer like all of me wer cock and all the worl a cunt and open to me” (159). By turns
Riddley is willingly the victim and instrument of the disembodied power; as he imagines
being raped, so he imagines raping the earth. Riddley’s hallucinatory fantasies provide a
clearer context for Goodparley’s motivation: raped by his mentor, Granser, Goodparley
was seduced by the lure of power and now exercises his political office with increasing
cruelty. We can see how Goodparley’s humble rhetoric of prosperity for the people,
although perhaps partly genuine, can mask a sinister fantasy of global conquest. But
where Goodparley has been seduced, Riddley is merely tempted: he genuinely wants to
help his people and is dazzled by the lure of new technologies, but he recoils from the
aggressive methods of Goodparley and those that succeed him. Insofar as the root evil is
the nuclear residue which inspires all the fantasies and threatens to put history on an
apocalyptic trajectory again, it is appropriate that Riddley is almost turned not by
Goodparley but by the radiation-induced episode in Canterbury, which occurs after he has
clearly denounced Goodparley. All the politically ambitious characters hover about the
Canterbury ruins, "that Senter [of] Power," the broad metaphoric potential of which Hoban undoubtedly relishes. Our reliance upon nuclear energy, fundamental to twentieth-century military applications, technology, and urban infrastructures, eventually generates nuclear waste that lingers in a pernicious state for thousands of years and ultimately becomes a lasting legacy of twentieth-century technology.\textsuperscript{28}

When Riddley recalls the height of his ecstasy he attributes his narrow escape from the thralldom of the power fantasy to a weakness: "I los it I wernt man a nuff right then" (159). But, in fact, it is his pastoral imagination—the intuition honed while observing and describing nature—that enables him to reject violence and aggression. The Canterbury episode brings on a series of ecological epiphanies which mark the culmination of his gratifying experiences of nature thus far. The radiation triggers the violent fantasies, but ironically it also seems to stimulate in him a heightened awareness of organic processes occurring beneath the ground. Conversely, one might argue that we cannot truly distinguish whether all of his hallucinatory spells are triggered by radiation or by a preternatural, hypersensitive faculty (such as the Eusa folk's telepathy) that has merely been dormant until now. The ambiguity begins as soon as he enters the outskirts of Canterbury and begins "fealing the place rise up in me," much as nausea-inducing radiation might be perceived to rise from the ground (157). But what seems to be a hallucination of organic processes follows immediately:

The old dry parcht smel and the wet green smel together like in all the dead towns. No stilness like the other dead towns tho. Qwick it wer. All of

\textsuperscript{28} See Kluge and my chapter four.
it qwick and a qwickful hy moving coming up out of the groun and
hyring hyering up thru the rain in to the dark what stans for ever on them
broakin stoans with its hans over its face. (157)

"Hyering," "moving," "coming up," quickness, rising—all these sensations could well
describe Riddley's conception of the dynamics of radiation or his vision of vegetable life
reclaiming the poisoned soil. Choosing either commits one to a reading that is in all
likelihood scientifically flawed, albeit metaphorically abundant. Clearly, he mystically
perceives that something is occurring underground, only he cannot refine his vocabulary
enough to make precise distinctions.

Most importantly though, once he overcomes the power fantasies, he pours forth a variety
of environmental insights as if infused to the point of irrationality with an overwhelming,
quasi-divine power, like a rhapsode of classical Greece. 29 He imagines an animated
universe that surpasses even the most extravagant ecological utopia: "Stoans want to be
lissent to. Them big brown stoans in the formers feal they want to stand up and talk like
men" (163).

Lest one is tempted to regard Riddley's notion of talking stones as primitive
animism clear and simple, we should remember that just as Hoban has provided an
(artistically) plausible explanation for Riddley's preternatural faculties (they are radiation
induced), he now provides a logic for the youth's idea of "Stoan men... lying on the
groun trying to talk only theres no soun theres grean vines and leaves growing out of ther

29

In Plato's Ion dialogue, Socrates argues "there is no invention in [an oral poet]
until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and reason is no longer in him: no man,
while he retains that faculty, has the oracular gift of poetry" (Adams 15).
mouf” (164). Riddley has evidently stumbled upon a chunk of a building bearing a “green man,” a pervasive architectural embellishment consisting typically of a masculine head shrouded by leafy vegetation and vomiting up vines. In their book on the green-man motif in northern-European architecture, visual art, and folklore, William Anderson and Clive Hicks explain that it is “an image from the depths of prehistory” predating Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (ca. 1375-1400), in fact, predating even the Christian era by several hundred years (14). As an ancient image of renewal, rebirth, and nature’s fecund powers, the green man is an apt symbol for modern environmentalism, and his inclusion here is yet another clue Hoban provides to suggest Riddley’s developing ecological conscience.30

Likewise, we should also remember Christopher D. Stone’s often-cited 1972 article, “Should Trees Have Standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects,” in which the author argues that the United States should give the ecologically desirable features of natural landscapes a legal voice in order to set a precedent for valuing nature from a vantage point superior to that of narrow anthropocentricism. Measured against the twentieth century, Riddley is either the vanguard of ideas which remain in our remote future (like Callenbach’s Ecotopia) or form part of our distant, superstitious past (like indigenous peoples valorized by some versions of contemporary environmentalism). But since Riddley inhabits a world where history and contexts have been obliterated, it is not

30 Anderson and Hicks cite several contemporary uses of the green-man motif and suggest that “his reappearence today in art and as symbol of environmental movements is of profoundest significance for humanity” (14). As well, the motif hovers behind several ideas in Frye about the consoling representations in literature of human, animal, and vegetable life-cycles (Anatomy 158-59, 196). See also my chapter four for the notion of fecundity stimulated by toxins.
requisite that we measure his potentiality according to our chronology. Riddley is not clearly progressing or regressing, but simply evolving, influenced by his apprehensions about his physical environment.

His next insight seems at first neither aggressive nor particularly ecological:

“There are the many cools of Addom which they are the party cools of stoan. Moving in ther millyings which is the girt dants of the every thing its the fastes thing there is it keaps the stilness going. Reason you wont see it move its so far a way in to the stoan” (163).

Here he envisions a rudimentary atomic structure, which, significantly, coincides with a benign and purely descriptive science’s diagrammed representation of the essence of all material reality, including, of course, natural phenomena. He elaborates using an analogy:

“If you cud fly way way up like a saddelite bird over the sea and you lookit down you wunt see the waves moving youwd see them change 1 way to a nother only you wunt see them moving youwd be too far away. You wunt see nothing only a changing stilness. Its the same with a stoan” (163). We might recall here Weston’s Ecotopian host, who explains economic philosophy by comparing his society to a meadow. Likewise, Riddley uses a folksy, natural image to expound a difficult concept. In the most lyrical passages of his journal, he develops a vocabulary that narrates a subjective experience of nature to express himself emotionally; here he uses a similar method, not for self-expression but to describe with greater accuracy some other aspect of nature by analogy. His recollection of the subjective experiences of stillness and of seeing from a great distance (and of observing birds) enables him to communicate his vision of atomic structure. All of his groping attempts to refine his verbal expression are finally grounded in nature--a nature
from which he is never estranged no matter what its form. Compared to the linguistic
decadence of Goodparley, who coerces language and narrative to conform to his maniacal
schemes and to subjugate nature in order to make it yield a product, Riddley’s narration is
romantic insofar as he uses language and other narratives simply to describe nature with
greater accuracy and sensitivity. Significantly, the revelation of atomic structure does not
generate further fantasies of aggression or even of technological prowess, as
Goodparley’s divination of the formula for gunpowder does. Riddley simply contemplates
nature with renewed wonder, much like Wordsworth’s matured narrators in “Tintern
Abbey” and “There was a time.”

While expression, description, and analogy have been adequate thus far, he now
adds a timely ethical component to his writings. Emerging from the ruins of Canterbury,
he recognizes “I wer programmit diffrent from how I ben when I come into Cambry my
hed ben ful of words and rimes and all kynds of jumbl of yellerboy stoan thots. . . . I cud
feal some thing growing inside me like it we a green sea surging in me saying, LOSE IT.
Saying, THE ONLYES POWER IS NO POWER” (166-67). This assertive conclusion
marks the final stage in his passage from inquisitive adolescent to ecologically sensitive
pacifist. The most important of only a few ethical and vaguely ontological absolutes
found in his journal, its placement and capitalization suggest that Riddley is now ready to
become a strong voice exhorting his people. And clearly they are in need of his

David Dowling describes Riddley’s “lyrical outpouring” in the “Stoan” section as
the novel’s “only non-narrative piece”; furthermore, he continues, “it is an expression of
[Riddley’s] feeling of oneness with the universe brought on by his proximity to both the
cathedral and the power station at Cambry.” While he does not discuss Riddley’s pacifist
message: in the next chapter the Eusa folk torture Goodparley, and Granser returns to inaugurate a new arms-race by his lethal reintroduction of gunpowder. Riddley eventually assumes the humble guise of itinerant puppeteer, a profession whereby he can spread his wisdom. As with Thoreau’s Walden, Riddley’s journal ultimately relies less on sloganeering than on the first-person narration of an exemplary attitude toward nature—an attitude subject to constant refinement as it seeks out the endless minutiae of the environment. Riddley’s next long descriptive passage is at first glance not much different from earlier ones; in fact, his sentences are on the whole somewhat formulaic:

\[
\text{Dark nite it wer Dark of the Moon but where the woodlings littlt off to barrens I cud feeal it on my face the open of it and I had a feeling inside me I never had befor. Sour groun and dead the barrens are you cudnt grow nothing on them only the dry dus blowing in the summer and the grey mud in the winter. Even the blowing the dus is some thing moving tho it aint jus only dead groun in a stilness. Seeds blow in the wind and what is earf but a deadness with life growing out of it? Rottin leaves and dead branches and naminal shit and that all makes live earf on the dead groun and if you look at woodlings edge all roun the barrens youwl see the runty coming up, where skin of earf growit back on nekkit groun. Nekkit groun what ben the bloody meat and boan of Bad Time covering itself with skin of earf and grass and woodlings. I thot: What ever it is its my groun. Here I stand. (196)}
\]

A key difference here is the incorporation of insights gained during the trauma at Canterbury. Such an acute perception of the earth healing itself—of slow underground processes such as decomposition, fertility, and seeding, of the gradual reclaiming of the post-apocalyptic landscape—is not possible with the naked eye. Riddley is now able to intermingle the microscopic with the metaphoric signatures of nature through his declaration, his main argument—that Riddley “proceeds from being a listener to being a teller to being a performer” of new truths—concurs with my reading (184-85).
narration. The total evolution of his narrative and perceptive capabilities is perhaps more important than a single, extractable proverbial phrase. By the same token, the production of a complete text of his adventures (for posterity perhaps) more than compensates for his failure to confront belligerent parties by the end of the story. Despite the bloodshed, bondage, and power struggles that it records, Riddley’s text often closely resembles a naturalist’s field-journal, more suited to focusing on the unvarying processes of nature than on the calamities of human history.

Insofar as the language of Riddley’s era is primitive by our linguistic standards, Riddley’s narration inevitably seems clumsy and slightly inadequate, most notably when someone is wrestling with abstract concepts or when trying to reconstruct pre-holocaust history or knowledge. Riddley Walker delineates a language that has yet to undergo refinements. As with Joyce’s “Oxen in the Sun” (the fourteenth chapter of Ulysses [1922]), we clearly anticipate a modern language’s coming into being. Joyce sketches the evolution of our language by narrating a single episode in approximations of distinct English-language styles that range from medieval to modern American slang. His narrative experiment suggests, by juxtaposition, that any single stage in the evolution of a language can at best approximate the coincidence of signifier with signified that another stage regards as absolute. At no stage, Joyce shows, can a language refer more accurately in an absolute sense; for every linguistic gain, for every new coining, there is a comparable diminution, as another word becomes obscure or disused. Hoban’s imagined language conveys something similar. We cannot know exactly what Riddley means by the verb “zanting,” just as he cannot know exactly what we mean by--say--airplane (“air
boats"). The obscurity created by the gaps between modern English and the English of Riddley's time, however, allows Riddley's pastoral voice to transcend mere literary convention. His reverence for commonplace aspects of nature might risk sounding like cliché were it not for our subtle estrangement from his vocabulary.

The Romantic Child and Contemporary Environmental Writings

We need not search far in environmental non-fiction and attendant literatures to find the legacies of Wordsworth and Blake. In contemporary ecological writings, Wordsworthian nostalgia is routinely projected onto the environment at large to become a nostalgia for enclaves of unspoilt nature. Farley Mowat's Rescue the Earth!

Conversations with the Green Crusaders (1990) profiles, through interviews conducted by the author, persons currently active in environmental or ecological debates. A recurring topic of the collection is the autobiography of the crusader, in particular the question of how experiences in childhood and adolescence contribute to a mature eco-conscience in adulthood. John Livingston, an environmentalist, eco-philosopher, and ecology professor claims that there is "a phenomenon which takes place in pre-adolescence . . . if one is exposed to other species . . . [the result is always] a connection which is never lost" (266). This logic bears the unmistakeable stamp of Blakeian and Wordsworthian romanticism, of Wordsworth's notion of "primal sympathy."

In the same volume, David Suzuki recalls "[a]s a kid I was always a daydreamer. From as early as I can remember my greatest joy was to go out . . . and dip in the creeks with nets for bluegills, sunfish, and catfish. I discovered insects when I was around ten or
eleven" (169). As well, following Livingston's logic, Suzuki urges us to "look at a very young infant and show it a butterfly or flower or spider or snake or slug for the first time. . . . [Y]ou will not see revulsion or fear, you will always see instant fascination. I think that's genetic. It's a built-in interest in others" (185). Suzuki's initial training was in genetics, but surely his conclusion here is unwarranted when it is taken in the literal, scientific sense. Rather, his narrative follows an old romantic paradigm; it is ideological rather than positivistic.

Likewise, the biographical sketches of Arne Naess that are included in David Rothenberg's *Is It Painful to Think?: Conversations with Arne Naess* (1993) begin like an uncanny echo of romanticism in prose:

> We begin with the ever hazy and essential theme of childhood memories, searching for the roots of lifelong obsessions and directions in the image of a precocious and inquisitive boy [Naess], feeling most himself when he is totally alone. How does one choose the vocation of philosopher, most impractical and most abstract of sciences, where the questions seem unanswerable and progress appears to be anathema? In the mountains, of course—where land and ideas have no limit, and one's gaze frames but does not change the glorious world. (I emphasis added)

Why is the theme of childhood essential in this context? we might ask. Why is the biography of interest? What aspects of a philosopher's life are pertinent to the discussion of the ideas? It is probably of little relevance to an intellectual inquiry that Mikhail Bakhtin was in poor health and that he suffered the amputation of both his legs late in life. It is, however, of great importance to us that Naess and Suzuki live exemplary lives that mirror their ideas. The photographs and biographical sketches included in *Is It Painful to Think?* are there to attest that Naess is one with his writings. If he lived
luxuriously—that is, wastefully—charges of hypocrisy would doubtlessly follow. Suzuki too recognizes fully his public persona (“Mister Environment”) and the political clout that it entails. Accordingly, he understands that he, and even his family, must lead lifestyles that are exemplary in environmental terms (Mowat 169, 177, 184).

In his influential essay on the question of authorship, “What is an Author?” (1969; trans. 1977), Michel Foucault, echoing Samuel Beckett, asks finally “What matter who’s speaking?” (Language, Counter-Memory, Practice 138). Given the essay’s focus, the best answer to the question is today at least highly tentative. Clearly, in environmental nonfiction, however, the lifestyle, habits, and personality of the author remain a paramount concern. Here, there is little allowance for irony and masking discursive voices, and I would argue that especially in the instance of Rothenberg’s depiction of Naess (who has become a near cult-figure in some circles), the old romantic paradigm of author as guarantor of truth and integrity remains intact despite contemporary post-structuralist textual practices which argue the contrary.

The earlier collaboration of Naess and Rothenberg, Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle, which offers a more systematic account of Naessian deep ecology, largely in the philosopher’s own words, likewise gives prominent place to biographical sketches of childhood. Naess recalls:

From when I was four years old until puberty, I could stand or sit for hours, days, weeks in shallow water on the coast, inspecting and marvelling at the overwhelming diversity and richness of life in the sea. The tiny beautiful forms which “nobody” cared for, or were even able to see, were part of a seemingly infinite world, but nevertheless my world. (2)

Clearly these narratives bear much repetition. And, unlike in nineteenth-century
romanticism, they are not the exclusive domain of sensitive young men who grow up to be poets, outdoorsmen, and philosophers.

Also in Mowat’s collection, Elizabeth Way, for example, profiles numerous contemporary “Gaia Women” who, following the spiritual example of Rachel Carson, have shown “energy and leadership” within various movements. Her biographical narrative of Colleen McCrory, who campaigned to save the Valhalla Valley (in the Kootenays, British Columbia) and was for this work awarded a Governor General’s Conservation Prize, also features the now-familiar idyllic moment: as a child “[s]he hiked in the mountains and swam in the crystal waters of glacial lakes . . . . She mothered goats, chickens, rabbits and sheep; perennially adopted strays--puppies, kittens and, later, hippy newcomers” (255 emphasis added). Aside from the hippies, this excerpt could well have been found in Jewett’s account of Silvy. Subtly, Way suggests that women probably make better green activists than men; they are nurturers from an early age and are more apt to identify through instinct potential allies for the cause.\(^{32}\)

Like Wordsworth and Blake, whom we have seen revisiting favourite landscapes through poetry, the (auto)biographical Naess seems compelled to revisit his childhood literally and in more figurative senses. As we shall see the revisit, the sense of being tied

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\(^{32}\) For the argument that masculinity, in the broadest sense, is responsible for the dire state of our planet, see Carolyn Merchant’s The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution (1980), the seminal and probably still definitive work on the topic. See also, Brian Easlea’s Fathering the Unthinkable: Masculinity, Scientists, and the Arms Race (1983). On the subject of lethal technologies wielded by gyno-envious men in apocalyptic science-fiction narratives, see Zoë Sofia’s 1984 essay, “Exterminating Fetuses: Abortion, Disarmament, and the Sexo-Semiotics of Extraterrestrialism.”
to one specific place, is also an important theme of the environmentalist's biography. In the portions of *Is It Painful to Think?* written by Rothenberg, childhood is again a recurring theme: in the introductory chapter he muses, "children all trust and wonder at nature, so it may be something we can all recollect if we delve deeply enough into our formative memories" (xxii); in conversations he persistently urges the philosopher to speak in greater detail about his youth and so titles the first chapter "Childhood and the Distance." Regarding his role as biographer, he eventually admits a conscious literary debt to Freud when he compares the present series of interviews to the psychoanalytic sessions that Naess underwent in the 1930s (22). Perhaps all this revisiting and returning is not accidental and not merely related to the biographical task; nor is it simply the revival of a trope of introspective romanticism. The revisit is not simply the idyllic play in a familiar spot of Blake's songs, but rather it has today become sound--and imperative--ecological practice according to deep ecology. In Naess's own words,

> after being in a certain spot many times, you of course see very much more until it's unbelievable how much there is in any single wild place. Then, you need not go new [sic] places all the time and more and more spectacular places . . . . Ecologically, spectacular nature is not important. *(Painful* 168)*

Continually honing one's senses to perceive more must become part of a personalized ecological practice with far-reaching consequences for our lifestyles, urges Naess as well as many other environmentalists. Frivolous travel and tourism are clearly being targeted, but what concerns Naess is not merely the well-known admonition to "think globally, act locally." This revisiting, this "being in a certain spot many times," is closely tied to the ascetic virtues that Buell has called the "aesthetics of relinquishment," and when such
revisiting is serialized in a longer narrative form (as in *Walden*) the result can be "epics of voluntary simplicity." The relinquishment of material things, Buell goes on to say, "supplies perhaps the commonest plot scenario in environmental writing" (143). By Naess's logic, certainly, asceticism enables one to perceive nature without encumbrance. "Tintern Abbey" provides perhaps the first script for such a revisit; the poem teaches that the more we return, the more we look—the more we teach ourselves to look—the more we will finally be able to see.

Often in eco-centric biographies there also comes a moment approximating a Blakeian fall from innocence into experience. But traumas also beget epiphanies recollected in adulthood. Livingston, for example, remembers when "they decided to put a storm sewer through my ravine—Cedarvale—which meant ripping the heart out of the place. I remember weeping with rage, anger and frustration because it felt as if part of me was being cut out. It was like a piece coming out of my stomach, and I was only ten or twelve. I may have been a bit 'bent' by that experience. But from then on I was committed to defending nature" (Mowat 267).

On a promotional tour for a new book in 1998, David Suzuki told a similar anecdote set in his boyhood hometown, London, Ontario. On the edge of the city a vast forest rife with animals and insects, his favourite playground, was callously bulldozed to build a concrete city of high-rise buildings. Like the young Livingston, he was enraged. In the Mowat book, the same narrative paradigm seems to lurk at the back McCrory's

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33 David Suzuki, Lecture and Promotional Tour for *Earth Time: Essays*, University Hall, McMaster University, Hamilton, 9 Dec. 1998.
eventual vision of “the devastation caused by clear-cut lumbering operations, the streams choking with debris, the hillsides wasted and barren, their good top soil flowing down to clog little brooks that fed mountain lakes” (256).

Her childhood trauma prepares us for her sudden realization in adulthood: Way reasons that as McCrory’s involvement [in local grass-roots activism] deepened, she became more and more single-minded. One day while weeding her garden in front of the beautiful log house she and her husband had just finished building, she was struck with a thought, almost a command: “I have to leave all this.” That same day she moved herself and her children down to the lakeshore to a small house heated only by a wood stove, a place which would offer no distractions to her dedication and would become her headquarters and battle-station for many years. (257)

To become one of Buell’s true insiders one must first (or at some point) be regarded an outsider among humans, it seems. Likewise, Naess recalls “[f]eeling apart in many human relations, I identified with ‘nature’” (ECL 2). The very public Suzuki too can claim, without appearing to falsify, “I was always a loner, an outsider” (Mowat 169). Here again is evidence of Buell’s “aesthetics of relinquishment.” Questions about Way’s evasion of the dissolution of McCrory’s marriage are forestalled, almost as if a biographical-narrative paradigm for the ecologically minded subject existed, one which inculcates us to assume that such questions are irrelevant. There are similar nagging questions regarding Naess’s life (for example, he jokes that he left his first wife because she did not sufficiently enjoy mountain climbing). While I am not suggesting that some sort of muckraking journalism is needed to expose Naess or McCrory as callous human beings, I am suggesting that if the biography should become part of the public record then what is it that compels us to only read it a certain way? One possible answer is that a combination
of the familiar romantic trope of isolation, along with vague notions that an ascetic existence can harden one for an honourable fight (and perhaps a much older tendency to see these individuals as would-be prophets, in particular since environmentalism typically operates under apocalyptic assumptions) are governing the logic of these narratives. Accordingly, portions of these biographies are virtually interchangeable and broad patterns emerge.

As Wordsworth in a roundabout way instructs Dorothy, and the reader via the poem itself, so the contemporary descendants of romantic environmentalism often aim to educate, albeit in a more systematic fashion. Suzuki argues for an intervention in the school curriculum: “[w]e have to put our best efforts into kindergarten and the first three or four years of primary school to reconnect those children to nature . . . . Give the children good hand-held magnifying glasses . . . . let them root around in nature and exercise their inherent curiosity about all forms of life” (Mowat 86). Closer to Wordsworthian or Blakeian idealism than the ideology behind Callenbach’s wilderness-survival-skills curriculum, Suzuki’s belief is that mere exposure to nature is sufficient to start building desperately needed eco-consciences.³⁴

CHAPTER 4

RUINS

To represent the world of nature rather than the world of culture, he is posed against the pathetic ruins of antiquity irreversibly invaded by greenery.

--Simon Schama describing Roeland Savery’s Bohemian Huntsman (ca. 1616)

During the Walpurgisnacht scene of Goethe’s Faust, Mephistopheles asks: “Are any British here? / They’re usually great travelers [sic], / looking for battlefields and waterfalls, / dilapidated walls and dreary ancient sites; / this is an ideal place for them to visit” (2.2; 7118-21). This “ideal place” to which he refers is Pharsalia, Greece, the site of Caesar’s military victory over Pompeii in 48 BC. By 1830, the year in which Goethe composed this section of the tragedy, there was no longer any need to specify what particular sort of Englishman Mephistopheles has in mind; the English had become synonymous with both archeology and antiquarianism. That this sly bit of national stereotyping works is undoubtedly owing in part to British romantic writers like Percy Shelley, whose “Ozymandias” (1817) is perhaps the best-known short meditation on the ruins of imperialism in the language. In 1739, an earlier British traveller on a Grand Tour, Horace Walpole, wrote excitedly to a friend back home about a trip through the Italian Alps where he encountered a very different sort of ruin: “Now and then an old foot-bridge, with a broken rail, a leaning cross, a cottage, or the ruin of an hermitage! This sounds too bombast [sic] and too romantic to one who has not seen it . . . . We staid for
two hours, rode back through this charming picture, wished for a painter, wished to be poets!" (Toynbee 246). Where Goethe identifies one strain of romantic writing about storied remainders, Walpole anticipates the other--the more rustic strain of humble, picturesque miniatures--which finds its best versified articulation in Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" (1798). Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's long narrative of the end of humanity, The Last Man (1826), on the other hand, is perhaps the best approximation of apocalyptic ruins within romanticism. Aside from presenting a virtual compendium of aesthetic attitudes toward remainders, Shelley's novel also critiques these same romantic attitudes.

In this chapter I want to examine the architectural ruins and the urban industrial detritus of contemporary landscapes. I am arguing that modern ruins, although still capable of yielding aesthetic pleasures similar to those discovered by the romantics, routinely suggest the remnants of an ecological struggle in which random and fecund nature has triumphed over urbanism. The environmentally-conscious spectator often celebrates the victory whereby a once natural site is partially restored to its pristine condition. Typically, the most extreme "restorations" occur in the post-apocalyptic landscapes of fiction, where infrastructures have been virtually obliterated and where humankind's ability to work upon its environment has been reduced to a primitive level. Surprisingly, contemporary discourses are not unanimous in their responses to global cataclysms. The disparities depend, I believe, on a variety of considerations: the changing beliefs regarding the imperatives of the environment--the green imperative of the late-twentieth century; the degree to which one believes that extreme events will indirectly
save the planet; and ultimately, the degree to which one would displace an
anthropocentric humanism from its cardinal position in our ethics. Poised between nature
and human invention, ruins are the liminal sites where these considerations are brought to
bear. Here, what we have gleaned from nineteenth-century romanticism, which teaches us
to regard ruins with a mixture of elation, melancholy, and dread, figures significantly.

During a 1989 interview for the radical environmental newsletter, Current,
Edward Abbey, the outspoken nature-writer, envisioned with great enthusiasm a
startlingly different sort of ruin:

I predict that the military-industrial estate will disappear from the surface
of the Earth within fifty years. That belief is the basis of my inherent
optimism, the source of my hope for the coming restoration of a higher
civilization: scattered human populations modest in number that live by
fishing, hunting, food-gathering, small-scale farming and ranching, that
assemble once a year in the ruins of abandoned cities for great festivals of
moral, spiritual, artistic and intellectual renewal--a people for whom the
wilderness is not a playground but their natural and native home. (rpt. in
Manes 241; emphasis added)

This statement by itself registers the extremity of contemporary disenchantment with
urban life as well as the desperate longing to recreate and extend natural spaces. Abbey

35 In The Monkey Wrench Gang Abbey imagines a virtually identical post-
apocalyptic celebration, no longer fettered by civilising restraints:
When cities are gone . . . and all the ruckus has died away, when
sunflowers push up through the concrete and asphalt of the forgotten
interstate freeways, when the Kremlin and the Pentagon are turned into
nursing homes for generals, presidents and other such shitheads, when the
glass-aluminum skyscraper tombs of Phoenix Arizona barely show above
the sand dunes, . . . why then by God maybe free men and wild women on
horses . . . can roam the sagebrush canyonlands in freedom-- . . . herding
the feral cattle into box canyons, and gorge on bloody meat and bleeding
fucking internal organs, and dance all night to the music of fiddles!
banjos! steel guitars by the light of a reborn moon! (98-99).
deftly avoids clarifying how this "disappearance" will come about. An absolute change in
our collective values? An economic collapse? Civil Insurrection? The imagined dance
amidst destroyed metropolises takes on a more complex significance when one
recognizes Abbey not only as the author of two celebrated volumes of nature essays but
also as the man who SueEllen (sic) Campbell identifies as the "American guru of eco-
sabotage" in a 1989 article (Glotfelty and Fromm 125).36

The essays Abbey intends for mainstream readership advocate, for example,
recreational desert-trekking ("the freest, cheapest, most nonprivileged of pleasures") and
the careful observation of the minutiae of landscape and animals (xiv). Hardly esoteric or
radical, some of these writings have appeared in National Geographic, GEO, and Sierra-
Club publications and are typically replete with benign eco-wisdom: "Let us leave some
places forever undisturbed," he writes after one excursion (45); while feeding ravens, he
ponders the "basic kinship of living things" (34); elsewhere he notes "the special and
extraordinary beauty of wild and lonely things" and "the grandeur and heroism inherent in

36 On the canonization of the radical Abbey, see, for example, Glotfelty’s
introduction to The Ecocriticism Reader (1996), in which she anticipates ecocritics
"mandating important changes in the canon, the curriculum, and university policy. We
will see books like... Abbey’s Desert Solitaire become standard texts for courses in
American literature" (xxv emphasis added). Robert Finch and John Elder, the editors of
The Norton Book of Nature Writing (1991), acknowledge "the fierceness with which
[Abbey]... pursues his polemic on behalf of the desert" and suggest that Abbey’s best-
owned novel, The Monkey Wrench Gang (1975), "encouraged the founding of the radical
environmental movement Earth First!" (679). However, the anthologized selections do
not contain the author’s most inflammatory rhetoric but instead focus upon the desert
aesthetic and naturalist etiquette, and they may well have been chosen as representative
texts for these reasons.
all forms of life” (90). The self-portrait that Abbey forges here is of a somewhat curmudgeonly recluse, troubled by the litter that he finds in his favourite wild spots, aware that his advocacy could be the victim of its own success, but willing nonetheless to share his expertise with all novices from the city. It is tempting (and certainly not entirely misguided) to argue that the difference between the two Abbeys amounts simply to the author’s gradual radicalization in response to deteriorating environmental conditions. However, Abbey’s macabre fetishization of the ruin as the site of destruction, as occasion to celebrate the anniversary of the apocalypse, bears further scrutiny. The landscapes of the desert essays are filled with broken or abandoned architecture and technology–ghost towns, deserted ranches and cabins, broken windmills, disused wells, old billboard signs, cast-iron stoves, broken fences, gunnery ranges, and even spent ammunition–items which complement the long inventories of plants and animals and thereby complete Abbey’s contemporary desert aesthetic. As ruins and remnants, these remainders convey a picturesque rusticity. Some types of litter, though, he regards as a true breach of outdoor etiquette: diapers, liquor bottles, wrappers, fishing tackle. But these remnants too have a purpose; carefully itemized, they confirm Abbey’s ascetic superiority, his status as the man who can survive here without such accoutrement. Through the novels, however, a portrait of the author as radical emerges. The

37 For an outline of the Sierra Club’s policy of moderate environmental-activism, see an interview with Ron Burchell, chairman of the eastern Canadian sector of the organization, in Farley Mowat, Rescue the Earth! (1990). The organization “is very reasonable,” Burchell explains. “It’s not a radical group. We don’t attempt to embarrass governments. We do not sit on flagpoles and engage in confrontations but tend to participate with governments on good conservation projects” (92).
detritus of modern urbanism has become overwhelming. There no longer seems to be much point to drawing distinctions between picturesque traces left by humans and mere litter, and so he now obsessively compiles long and indiscriminate inventories. In The Monkey Wrench Gang (1975) he refers with resignation to “the tin-can tumbleweed community of the roadside ecology” and “all that tragic and abandoned trivia of the American road” (21). Jean Baudrillard has said that “[a]ll you need to know about American society can be gleaned from an anthropology of its driving behaviour” (America 54). Throughout Abbey’s fictions, the detritus and litter, roadside and otherwise, suggest a consumerist orgy of superfluities that must soon come to an end; in Good News (1980) the orgy has come to an end. In this novel, the post-apocalyptic urban landscapes are invaded by sand dunes or filled with the weed-choked wreckage of suburban homes, ranches, automobiles, supermarkets, and shopping centres, all of which are carefully inventoried along with their contents in order to render this new wasteland. Where Abbey the environmentalist finds blight, Abbey the anarchist finds a source of relief. Frontier lawlessness, that vital component of a true wilderness, is here again. The subleties of outdoor etiquette are now obsolete, as are all restraints. What matters most is that architecture and technology lie broken or in disarray. The wily outdoorsman can now apply his skills to foraging among the remnants, like Ballard’s Quilter (discussed in chapter 3), and he is happier in this role than in the seemingly futile one of the wilderness custodian who admonishes others for littering. The garbage dump of modern living becomes a pastoral ruin and eventually (it is hoped) a compost heap, and so the dump is preferable to intact civilization, Abbey argues. Consequently, it makes a kind of sense
that George Washington Hayduke, Abbey’s heroic eco-saboteur, litters his trail with empty beer cans while committing eco-sabotage. Limits are bourgeois considerations when one is busy dismantling the infrastructure.

It is in the fictions, then, that Abbey suggests how to read his prophetic remarks from 1989: the disappearance of the military-industrial estate and metropolitan centres ought be helped along. In Hayduke Lives! (1990), the sequel to The Monkey Wrench Gang, one character reminds Hayduke of the “code of the eco-warrior”: “The point . . . is to increase their costs, nudge them toward net loss, bankruptcy, forcing them to withdraw and retreat from their invasion of our public lands, our wilderness, our native and primordial home.” Furthermore, he explains, eco-sabotage should consist of “misdemeanours against the perimeters of the techno-industrial ordnung” (110-11). Ironically, affecting these disappearances and withdrawals will create a few lasting monuments in the process. The climax of Hayduke Lives! is the sabotage of the giant earth-mover, which its hijackers manoeuvre off a canyon rim to spectacular effect:

Disintegrating part by part, wrapped in flames, shrivelling in magnitude, . . . GOLIATH sank down into the deep time of geologic history—from Jurassic into late Triassic into early Triassic, ricocheting off the Hoskinnini Tongue and the Cutler Formation, shattering itself finally upon the floor of Lost Eden Canyon, the unyielding monolithic fine-grained rock of the Cedar Mesa Sandstone deep in the Permian age, 250 million years ago.

Flames flickered far below among the mangled black ruins of the hulk. Smoke spiralled upward in sooty thermal columns. The rumble clash and collision of falling rock would continue, slowly fading, for the next three days and nights. (287)

Before its destruction GOLIATH is “so outsize, it seem[s] to violate the proportions of the landscape” (249). In the novel’s opening the machine and its advance guard of smaller
bulldozers denude vast tracts of unspoiled land of its indigenous plants and animals. Now the giant earth-mover has become embedded in the landscape as a mere technological ruin—an archeological artifact situated within a new hierarchy where technology’s relative importance is severely diminished in the context of much broader environmental and geological scales of size and age.

Romanticism offers an important precedent for reading all such structural demises, collapses where a ruinous monumentalism follows an intact state. In “Ozymandias,” Shelley, much like Abbey, creates an aesthetic context where ruin and landscape throw each other’s essential qualities into higher relief. One helps us to recognize the other, just as Wallace Stevens’ man-made vessel and “slovenly wilderness” interact perceptually and conceptually.38 The “traveller from an antique land,” who discovers the two “vast and trunkless legs of stone,” concludes his recollection: “Nothing beside remains. Round the decay / Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare / The lone and level sands stretch far away.”39 Here too extra-human nature survives human manufacture, as the architectural remainder is contrasted with vast and enduring natural processes. In both works the site reverts as near as possible to a pristine condition, but the reversion was first imagined in Shelley’s poem. Moreover, Shelley’s (and romanticism’s)

38 “I placed a jar in Tennessee, / And round it was, upon hill. / It made the slovenly wilderness / Surround that hill.” (“Anecdote of the Jar” [1919], The Palm at the End of the Mind: Selected Poems and a Play by Wallace Stevens [New York: Vintage, 1972]).

39 All quotations of Percy Shelley’s poetry are taken from Donald Reiman and Sharon Powers’ Shelley’s Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts and Criticism (1977). I have omitted line numbers when quoting short poems.
precedent of aestheticizing ruins and significant remainders allows Abbey to transform more readily the mere-debris status of the earth-mover into a consoling monument for the ecologically-minded reader.

There is a further parallel between the two works: Shelley's inclusion of a text within the poem to explain the significance of the ruin. The inscription that the traveller finds on the pedestal runs: "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings, / Look on my works ye mighty and despair!" Having survived its referent, the vainglorious text has become ironic; the "works" that remain are broken or entirely obliterated, and the "despair" that comes to mind is perhaps owing to the melancholic topic of human mortality, but certainly not to fearful awe or reverence. Empire and its outmoded hubris have been eclipsed. GOLIATH too comes with a text, but it is more far-flung. The destruction of the earth-mover deflates the hyperbolic marketing-rhetoric which touts the machine's official unveiling: "high as a hotel and taller than a grain elevator, heavier than 150 Boeing 727 jet-liners, . . . wider than six caterpillar D-9 tractors lined end-to-end, with enough power to supply electricity for a city of 100,000" (26). In addition, the political aspirations of Bishop Love are destroyed, insofar as his campaign is inextricably linked to a pro-growth, anti-environment message of which GOLIATH is the chief symbol. With the precedent of "Ozymandias," the wreckage of the earth-mover is more readily understood as a metaphor for the eclipse of the modern industrial age. The context of text and ruin that is created in both works further undermines the respective forms of imperialism.

I place the destruction of this ridiculously oversize machine at the centre of the novel, and the novel at the centre of Abbey's oeuvre. The desert essays celebrate pristine
nature and intimate the immediate threats to its integrity. In these, Abbey asks, like
Leopold and Naess, that we extend our ethical consideration to include landscapes. The
Monkey Wrench Gang presents eco-sabotage as a radical but necessary option practised
by a small coterie. In Hayduke Lives! less spectacular forms of eco-sabotage such as tree-
spiking have become part of mainstream environmental activism, and the original
saboteurs have become folk-heroes. In Good News the entire globe’s techno-industrial
infrastructure has been destroyed. The destruction of GOLIATH is the pivotal moment
which makes imperative the choice between urban industrialism and the environment.
The machine’s destruction is the first great victory to leave a lasting monument.
Throughout the writings the long lists of technical data of various kind are always treated
ironically by Abbey. Nowhere else, however, does he so compulsively describe a machine
(and its destroyed remnant) in such excessive detail. Here is the inaugural description:

Its engine housing is 120 feet wide . . . . The top of its main boom is twenty-two
stories high . . . . The excavating bucket that hangs from the point of the boom has
a capacity of 220 cubic yards—big enough to hold two railroad cars, eight
bulldozers, twelve automobiles . . . . The complete machine (with empty bucket)
weighs 27 million pounds, or 13,500 tons . . . .

Mobile? Yes, it moves. It does not roll on wheels or track on endless
treads but it moves, it walks on a pair of steel shoes mounted—one on each side—
above the circular tub that forms the base, or bottom, or mono-buttock . . . . The
shoes, each 130 feet long, are hoisted in unison, cambered forward, downward
and back, raising the base 80 inches off the ground and moving it ahead by
fourteen feet at each rotation. Maximum walking speed is 90 feet per hour. (6-7)

The details of the ruin seem to compensate for such grudging itemizations of functioning
technology. It is as if the rigorous mechanical-logic ordinarily found in a detailed
technical manual is now being applied to an anarchist’s check-list by which to confirm
the destruction of the machine. GOLIATH casts a spell which Leo Marx has identified as
“the technological sublime” (Machine 195). This technological sublime, however, now also enthrals those who would dismantle technology with a similar sense of euphoria.\textsuperscript{40}

For Abbey, the details of the ruin signal an inaugural victory in a larger war against technology and modernism; the ruin’s inception precedes the inevitable apocalypse but, like Shelley’s statue, will survive it. The post-apocalyptic landscape of Good News, ironically, approximates most closely the wild landscape that Abbey holds so precious in the nature essays. The apocalyptic desire that I find throughout radical environmental commitment is, broadly stated, a mute hope that earth and nature can absorb and compost detritus, provided the sources of pernicious technologies are at once dismantled. The entire process may incidentally yield aestheticized and antisepticized monuments. This idea is, I believe, romantic at its core.

A casually-placed detail in Good News will clarify this point. As one character passes through a familiar post-apocalyptic city-scape, “she runs down the dark street between unlit cliffs of glass and steel, through the sand and the weeds and among hulks of useless Cadillacs, Peugeots, Daimlers, Jaguars, Mercedes-Benzes.” We have experienced this type of setting many times before in the novel, but Abbey adds a significant detail to this description. He imagines: “Decomposing steel, glass turning blue as old bottles, fine-grained walnut and once-supple leather becoming dust. Becoming air and dust and

\textsuperscript{40} Marx argues that despite the retrospectively obvious threat to the equally important goal of sustaining pastoralism, nineteenth-century Americans were able to maintain their faith in machines and technology alive because they believed that “[t]o see a powerful, efficient machine in the landscape is to know the superiority of the present to the past” (Machine 192).
history” (158 emphasis added). Can steel and glass actually “decompose” in the space of one generation? Or do they merely rust and tarnish? I would like to consider these questions in metaphorical terms by turning to Wordsworth.

Jonathan Bate’s Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition (1991) offers a “green reading” of the poet which seeks to re-establish him as a preeminent nature writer (as he was regarded by the first generation of romantic critics), one who uncannily anticipates a late twentieth-century environmental consciousness (9).41 Central to Bate’s argument is his reading of “The Ruined Cottage,” a poem which, he argues, shows that “where wilderness reasserts itself there the spirit of humanity survives. Orthodox thought defines man through his mastery over nature; [the poem] . . . proposes that the survival of humanity comes with nature’s mastery over the edifices of civilization” (34). The passage which particularly interests Bate occurs in the final section of the poem. Wordsworth’s poet-narrator hears the conclusion of Margaret’s tragic story, and finds consolation in

That secret spirit of humanity
Which, ’mid the calm oblivious tendencies
Of nature, ’mid her plants, her weeds, and flowers,
And silent overgrowings, still survived. (503-06)42

The like-minded narrator of Margaret’s story, the peddler Armytage, as if elaborating the

41 Bate’s book is a deliberate polemic against the influential readings of Romanticism by M. H. Abrams, Geoffrey Hartman, Jerome McGann, and Alan Liu, all of whom, in Bate’s opinion, give insufficient consideration to Wordsworth as naturalist. See Bate’s introduction (1-11).

poet's thoughts, adds:

I well remember that those very plumes,
Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,
By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er,
... did to my heart convey
So still an image of tranquillity,
So calm and still, and looked so beautiful
Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,
That what we feel of sorrow and despair
From ruin and from change, and all the grief
The passing shews of being leave behind,
Appeared an idle dream that could not live
Where meditation was. (513-24)

One isolated rustic ruin can today hardly assuage "uneasy thoughts" about decades of acute environmental neglect; however, it could not undo very much amidst burgeoning nineteenth-century industrialism either. Wordsworthian optimism is now, as then, largely metaphoric. And in one sense, then, Abbey's dystopian science-fiction, with its quasi-literal image of disintegrating steel, re-enacts a consoling, nineteenth-century romanticist fantasy about nature's inexorable processes--processes which can today be found not merely in picturesque landscapes or humble cottages but in the impromptu scrapyards generated by metropolitan areas. Where observing weeds helps Wordsworth deal with human loss, watching weeds helps Abbey imagine urbanism's demise. In Abbey's writings nostalgia and radicalism are often found together.  

One unexpected emulator of Wordsworth's wandering poet is Bill McKibben,

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43 For a discussion of the unsettling similarities between Abbey's environmentalism and the beliefs of "ultra-right-wing militias," see SueEllen Campbell's 1998 essay "Maggie" (Kerridge and Sammells 13-26), in which she reevaluates her earlier admiration of the author (Glotfelty and Fromm 124-36).
whose apocalyptic environmental-scenarios would seem at first to make him an unlikely candidate for finding comfort in a local ramble. Nonetheless, approximately midway through the book which outlines these very scenarios, McKibben describes a day-long hike along Mill Creek Valley, in the vicinity of his home in the Adirondack Mountains. While he does eventually find symptoms of our sick environment (trees blighted by acid rain; sunshine, which brings to mind ozone depletion), the account of the hike is of equal interest for what he nonchalantly accepts:

So what if it isn’t nature primeval? One of our neighbours has left several kitchen chairs along his stretch of the bank, spaced at fifty-yard intervals for comfort fishing. At one old homestead, a stone chimney stands at either end of a foundation now filled by a graceful birch. Near the one real waterfall, a lot of rusty pipe and collapsed concrete testifies to the old mill that once stood there. But these aren’t disturbing sights—they’re almost comforting, reminders of the way that nature has endured and outlived and with dignity reclaimed so many schemes and disruptions of man. (88 emphasis added)

Given the overriding pessimism of his book, these sites could just as easily pass for minor instances of what Martin Amis calls the “toiletization of the planet” (Glotfelty and Fromm 196). The remains of the mill, whether antique or more recent, could be regarded as a ready symbol of industrialism’s long history of environmental disregard. The various domestic items suggest, for example, a connection between simply picking up after oneself and obtaining a clean environment. Etymology virtually completes the connection for him: *oikos* (Greek for household) is at the root of both ecology (originally “oecology”) and economy (originally “oeconomy”); economy refers to the management of a household in the sixteenth century; the phrase “oeconomy of nature” is coined in the seventeenth century to refer to a then-emerging branch of natural science. All variants suggest that
order or management is rightly brought to bear on something, or that an inherent order is
discovered and ought to perpetuated.44

McKibben, however, seeks a different kind of order here; in his mind he cordons
off the trivial junk of semi-rural living and industry from global problems and creates a
consoling, ersatz version of Wordsworth's ruined cottage. He even draws a "poetic"
conclusion: "These ruins are humbling sights, reminders of the negotiations with nature
that have established the world as we know it" (88). In fact, moments earlier, McKibben
complains, "I spent hours stumbling through overgrown marsh, battling ten-foot saplings
and vines," adding that "[t]he worst thing about battling through brake and bramble of
this sort is that it's so anonymous--gray sticks, green stalks with reddish thorns, none of
them to be found in any of the many guides and almanacs on my shelf" (87). Amidst an
arguably better approximation of "nature primeval," then, McKibben finds what amount
to aesthetic flaws; he would have the solitary birch among the ruin, not the impersonal
(inhuman?) vegetation, regardless of ecological criteria. The lamentable, "permanent
stamp of man" on every facet of nature, which forms the crux of his forewarning about
our postnatural world, leaves a kind of vacuum when it is not to be found (210). With this
scene McKibben suddenly introduces picturesque and metaphoric imperatives even at the
risk of affirming the postnatural world. As if seeking a middle ground between nature in

44 For the etymology of "ecology," see Raymond Williams, Keywords: A
Vocabulary of Culture and Society (110-11); Donald Worster, Nature's Economy: A
History of Ecological Ideas (37); and Martin W. Lewis, Green Delusions: An
Environmentalist Critique of Radical Environmentalism (47). For a use of the word's
etymology to advance a polemic, see Naess, Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle (35-36).
its tainted, present state and nature primeval, he conjures a nostalgic approximation of
nineteenth-century ruralism (fishing camp, homestead, mill).

It is not my intention to expose McKibben as an environmentalist charlatan, or to
expose a crucial weakness in his argument, but rather to dilate a blind spot in order to
show to what extent we have learned to aestheticize ruins and even some types of
garbage, provided a particular context is perceivable. It is crucial to these contexts that
the fecund processes of nature be thrown into greatest relief so that we may perceive
nature’s greatest promise. The nature that is idealized is an irrepressible nature which
composts or surrounds irreducible remainders according to recognizable aesthetic
paradigms. To that end, romantic texts teach us to read mnemonic devices in
contemporary landscapes; romantic texts teach us to find in the landscape signs and
metaphors which can facilitate environmental optimism. As we shall see, these
romanticist notions persist amidst the most hostile circumstances and settings. Using the
aesthetic precedents of romanticism, Abbey and McKibben delineate two distinct ideas
about contemporary remainders: the ecological compost and the monumental ruin.

Toxic Ruins and Their Contexts

The young man rejoiced, that, in the heart of the city he had the privilege of overlooking
this spot of lovely and luxuriant vegetation.
--Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844)

Romantic texts are frequently narratives of the poet’s estrangement. “Tintern
Abbey” is the account of Wordsworth’s attempt to rehabit a particular place, time, and
frame of mind, vicariously through the act of writing and through his sister: “in thy voice
I catch,” he tells her

[the language of my former heart, and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once (117-21)

While Wordsworth affirms his physical return throughout the poem (“Once again / Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs” [4-5]; “The day is come when I again repose / Here” [9-10]), he finds he cannot as readily surmount the age barrier which prevents him from completely reinhabiting the (mental) landscape of his youth: “That time is past, / And all its aching joys are now no more” (84-85). Moreover, he cannot create a surrogate of his younger self through the act of writing: “I cannot paint / What then I was” (76-77).

Insofar as the poem is ostensibly an attempt to return to a particular site in order to describe it (and most of the first stanza is a description of setting), Wordsworth makes a prodigious detour into self-examination and finds he cannot finally return exactly as he had anticipated.\(^45\)

A similar sense of estrangement runs through the narrative of “The Ruined Cottage” despite all effort at greater intimacy. The poet-narrator merely provides a frame for Armytage’s first-hand account of the dissolution of Margaret’s family, which forms the bulk of the poem. Thus the poet-narrator is essentially an interlocutor who, although deeply moved by the tragedy associated with the site he is visiting, comes to understand

\(^45\) M. H. Abrams offers this succinct summary of what he calls “the exemplary lyric form” as established by “Tintern Abbey”: “an individual confronts a natural scene and makes it abide his question, and the interchange between his mind and nature constitutes the entire poem, which usually poses and resolves a spiritual crisis” (Natural Supernaturalism 92).
that he cannot be an intimate participant in its history, which must always remain for him
“the tale which he [Armytage] had told” (496). Despite his parting gesture—“with a
brother’s love / I blessed her [Margaret] in the impotence of grief” (499-500)—the tale
remains an account of “that Woman’s suff’rings” (498).

Likewise, when Mary Shelley’s sole plague survivor, Lionel Verney, undertakes
his desperate journey to Rome at the end of The Last Man, he expects, like every tourist
seeking antiquities, to arrive belatedly in a confrontation with an older culture; he
anticipates walking among “its storied streets, hallowed ruins, and stupendous remains of
human exertion” (358). Like Wordsworth’s narrators, Verney overcomes one obstacle
(physical distance) but, since history has always already taken place, he encounters
another (time). This sense of belatedness that is present during the writer’s encounter with
the romantic ruin—indeed, with any ruin—has become paradigmatic. In similar fashion,
Percy Shelley’s narrator experiences the ancient monument of Ozymandias only through
the mediatory narrative of the exotic traveller, and it is, in fact, unclear from the poem
whether the first narrator ever sets foot in the desert. Therefore, the real or perceived
distance from the ruin (temporal in both Wordsworth poems and in Mary Shelley’s novel;
temporal and spatial in “Ozymandias”) allows each author to fabricate furthermore a
crucial aesthetic distance—an assumed vantage point from which to objectify the ruin for
his/her subjective purpose through the act of writing. Distance and estrangement of one
type or another are characteristic components of the romantic experience of the ruin.

In contemporary representations of the ruin, this romantic distance becomes
considerably less subjective or mental; in fact, often the obstacle is virtually
insurmountable owing to a new element of the landscape: toxicity. Cynthia Deitering refers to the “toxic consciousness” that arises in fiction in the 1980s, when we “came to perceive, perhaps inchoately, our own complicity in postindustrial ecosystems.” Increasingly, she adds, characters of contemporary fiction apprehend nature as a “toxic riskscape” (Glotfelty and Fromm 197). In the fictions and texts that I have selected, “toxic consciousness” and “riskscape” are well established at a much earlier date. Where the romantics discover ruins and landscapes suffused with intimate and national histories to be gradually uncovered, contemporary authors apprehend topographies saturated with the toxic legacies of military and industry that spill into the present and into the future in heretofore unforseen ways. Here, the romantic consolations of ruins as monuments and nature as an un-saturable compost are rendered obsolete in practical terms, yet the metaphors retain their potency.

In Nevil Shute’s popular thriller On the Beach (1957), for example, a series of cataclysmic nuclear exchanges results in extremely high levels of radiation which quickly envelop most of the globe. In terms of setting, Shute’s novel can be seen as an updating of Shelley’s Last Man: the nuclear fallout, like Shelley’s plague, leaves architecture eerily intact, turning metropolitan areas into vast expanses of virtual ruins. Stanley Kramer’s

Deitering’s essay, “The Postnatural Novel: Toxic Consciousness in Fiction of the 1980s,” groups, for example, John Fowles’ Daniel Martin (1977), Saul Bellow’s The Dean’s Chamber (1982), Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale (1985), Don DeLillo’s White Noise (1985), and John Updike’s Rabbit at Rest (1990) to illustrate her argument. On Sylvia Plath as a proto-environmental writer who “depicts the permeation and poisoning of the human body by toxic chemicals and pollutants”, see Tracy Brain (Kerridge and Sammells 146-64).
1963 film adaptation of Shute’s novel exploits this peculiarity to good effect. During the naval reconnaissance mission to the Pacific West-Coast of the United States, we see, from the safety of the submarine via the periscope’s point of view, completely deserted but otherwise largely intact cities. In the novel, there are some patches of scorched land, and the Golden Gate Bridge has been destroyed. There are no survivors and relatively few corpses; this apocalypse entails the bloodless erasure of human populations, as if it anticipated one great post-atomic fear of the 1980s, the neutron bomb, which has passed into contemporary folklore as the weapon that kills with greater efficiency—strictly by radiation, not by heat or by the force of the blast—and with an eye toward the strategic value of the enemy’s infrastructures.\(^{47}\) Kramer’s film adaptation concludes with a montage of deserted American cities and finally with shots of the Australian setting where the earth’s last survivors had been awaiting the inevitable radiation sickness and death. *On the Beach* stresses the toxicity (as opposed to the carnage) found among the post-apocalyptic “ruin”—its irradiated and radiant state.\(^{48}\) Both book and film insert us along with the characters into the privileged position of being able to glimpse but not enter this new, pristine wasteland.

Shute does not offer lengthy moralising passages that attempt to read the broader

\(^{47}\) For an example of the popularization of neutron-bomb fears, see Arnold Freeman, *This is the Way the World Will End, This is the Way You Will End, Unless...* (1983), 12-13.

\(^{48}\) For graphic, fictional renderings of the violence done to the human body by nuclear weaponry, see Alain Resnais’ *Hiroshima, mon amour* (France, 1959) and Shohei Imamura’s *Kuroi Ame* [*Black Rain*] (Japan, 1989).
historical significance of the ruin of the world (as do, for example, Wells and Chase, for which see my second chapter). His characters' analyses are typically laconic: "The human race was to be wiped out and the world made clean again for wiser occupants without undue delay" (8; 277). Of course, we can find here an oblique reference to the biblical flood; however, this apocalypse is fundamentally nihilistic—or at best ironic—since it occasions revelations which are too late to be of any consequence for the survivors. In light of contemporary fears of political terrorism and eco-sabotage by radical groups, and the post-Cold War fear of "isolated" nuclear skirmishes, one observation bears quoting, though, insofar as it offers a specious geo-political reading of the ruin. Despite the massive Russo-Chinese war which immediately preceded the final conflict, one scientist surmises:

The trouble is, the dang things [nuclear bombs] got too cheap. . . . Every little pipsqueak country like Albania could have a stockpile of them, and every little country that had that, thought it could defeat the major countries in a surprise attack. That was the real trouble. (3; 94)

In Walter Miller Jr.'s _A Canticle for Leibowitz_ (1959) and in Russell Hoban's _Riddley Walker_ (1980), post-apocalyptic, neo-primitive populations become sifters of recovered pre-apocalyptic technology. In both novels, ruins and archeological sites are regarded with suspicion and (particularly in Miller) with religious awe, as attempts are

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On this point, see Martha Bartter's "Nuclear Holocaust as Urban Renewal" (1986), a survey of science fiction from H. G. Wells to the 1950s: "Our fiction shows that an ideal world would consist of small, self-supporting communities . . . . We cling to this myth . . . no matter how often it is debunked. Ideal communities, we somehow believe, _could_ exist if only our world were renewed as a better (less urban, mechanized, depersonalized) place. [Science fiction frequently] demonstrates the power of this dream by . . . destroying cities . . . without destroying the society that built them" (150).
made to recover forgotten technology and historical documents from them. Insofar as Miller’s relic-seeking monks are unknowingly digging up military installations and nuclear-fallout shelters, exploring ruins can have lethal consequences. Hence, a character in Miller’s novel draws a pragmatic lesson: the “miraculous contraptions of the ancients were not to be carelessly tampered with, as many a dead excavator-of-the past had testified with his dying gasp” (22). For Riddley’s people too the ruins can be lethal. In Hoban’s novel the ruins have become communal job-sites, places were the drudgery of excavation is interrupted only by the occasional death of a worker, as for example Riddley’s father, who is crushed by a massive piece of machinery when the crude mechanism of ropes and winches being used to hoist it gives out. Furthermore, both societies face great social and medical problems owing to the biological mutations that result from the toxic remainders, symbolized by and housed in the ruins of technology.

For both societies, the ruins and detritus of technology represent Pandora’s boxes. Both authors envision history repeating itself, insofar as militaristic or imperialistic factions soon converge upon the ruins with an aggressive competitiveness, and insofar as the survivors cannot (as we can if we choose) read the ruins they have inherited “properly”—that is, romantically, as either portentious monuments (“Ozymandias”) or compost sites (“Ruined Cottage”). Since both apocalypses were caused by nuclear technology, both authors argue that the respective societies—and, by implication, our

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50 Riddley is an exception, which is perhaps another reason for his outsider status; toward the end of the novel, in a visionary moment, he does intimate ecological processes and reads them positively. See especially chapter seventeen.
global civilisation—would be better served if such technology were left buried. Viewed from an environmental perspective, the primitive, quasi-pastoral societies that have ensued are, despite all hardships, preferable to the re-establishment of twentieth-century urban-centric society. In fact, Miller’s vast post-apocalyptic desert would undoubtedly delight Abbey.

A similar scavenging for abandoned technology among a quasi-romantic landscape occurs in Boris and Arkady Strugatsky’s science-fiction novel *Roadside Picnic* (1972; trans. 1977). One or several extra-terrestrial visitations have transformed the vicinities of former landing sites into toxic “Zones,” in which, in the immediate aftermath, the human populations are affected by an array of ailments such as blindness, hair loss, and eventually mutation and birth defects. Regarded as “horrible sore[s] on the face of the earth,” the Zones are quickly evacuated and cordoned off, actions whereby the Strugatskys reinforce the idea that the Zones are to be regarded as metaphors for the sites of the real environmental mishaps of our time (85). The novel focuses on a Zone located near an isolated town in Canada and the economy that has grown up around it. Scientists and black marketeers pay “stalkers” who risk their lives to retrieve the alien technology

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51 The plight of the Russian artists of the time, subject to rigorous governmental scrutiny, I trust, need not be elaborated here at length. Vida Johnson and Graham Petrie, in a chapter on Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Stalker*, a film adaptation of *Roadside Picnic* (regarding which, see my chapter five), refer to “the common Eastern bloc practice of using ostensibly Western settings to criticize ‘their’ problems when in fact the settings are unmistakeably and purposefully Soviet” (305, n.4). I suggest that, in addition to assuaging censorship concerns, a “generic” Canadian setting provides a significant hinterland (into which a Zone of considerable size can be imaginatively inserted) and more specifically one not already overladen, from a Russian vantage point, with literary history or geopolitical tension.
which lies strewn about (along with terrestrial junk) like litter from an advanced society's random stopover or picnic, as the title suggests.

Much like the stricken landscapes of Shute, Miller, and Hoban, the Zone “looks like any other piece of land.” As the stalker Redrick notes, “The sun shines on it like on any other part of the earth. And it’s as though nothing had particularly changed in it. Like everything was the way it was thirty years ago” (14). The uncannily preserved landscape immediately triggers a nostalgia for the lost town, but subtly, with each subsequent description, this impulse gives way to a purely aesthetic appreciation of the abandoned town in ruin, gradually invaded by weeds as if following an old romantic paradigm:

the plant’s smokestack was still. . . Yellow ore piled up in cone-shaped mounds, blast furnaces gleaming in the sun, . . . a locomotive with flatcars on the rails. In other words, an industry town. Only there were no people. Neither living nor dead. . . . There’s a crack in the asphalt, if it hasn’t been overgrown with bramble yet. (14-15)

Through lengthy descriptive passages such as these, the Zone comes increasingly to be seen (by us and by the characters) as a green enclave which can truly absorb the grimy residue of industry, enfold all our junk, and thereby ultimately fashion a cleansed, natural landscape. But are we to attribute these seductive effects to some malign super-intelligence?

During his last expedition, Redrick, accompanied by the novice Arthur, hunts for a long-sought device that has become a sort of holy grail for stalkers, “The Golden Ball.” Despite the extreme hazards of this mission, their attention is diverted from both human and alien detritus again by the exceptional beauties of the Zone:

The fog was disappearing before their eyes. It was completely gone from
the embankment and in the distance it was thinning, melting away and showing the rounded bristly peaks of the hills. Here and there between the hills could be seen the mottled surface of the stagnant swamps, covered with sparse thickets of willows, and the horizon, beyond the hills, was filled with bright yellow explosions of mountain peaks, and the sky above them was clear and blue. Arthur looked back and gasped with awe. Redrick looked too. In the east the mountains looked black, and over them the familiar green wash of color billowed and shone iridescently—the Zone’s green dawn. (126-27)\(^2\)

Ironically, several pages later, on the verge of obtaining “The Golden Ball,” Arthur is killed by a “transparent emptiness that was lurking in the shadow of the excavator’s bucket” (143). The account confirms either a real instrumentality of the Zone—a final reflex to guard against thieves and trespassers should the toxins and booby-trapped technology fail—or a hallucination of it by Redrick. The former reading suggests that the Zone is to be regarded as an elaborate trap with recoverable technology as its bait. In tandem with the bait, the entire picturesque array of ruins and nature occasions a romantic nostalgia which lulls the trespasser into a fatal misstep. The latter reading can be supported by the fact that the seasoned stalker’s senses have become hyper-sensitive, perhaps owing to prolonged contact with the Zone. Like a mutated descendant of the Wordsworthian child of nature (or like Ballard’s Quilter, Jewett’s Sylvia, or even Abbey) Redrick perceives what the average person cannot. Here, however, subjectivity is

\(^{2}\) Jameson writes of “that tranquil and unearthy conflagration of sunsets over Santa Monica whose optical effects are due, we are told, to the extreme density of chemical pollution in the atmosphere” (Postmodernism 178-79). See also Rob Wilson’s American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre (1991) for a valuable account of American poetry’s attempt to affirm the sublime qualities of contemporary landscapes, although besieged by “toxic sunsets,” “whiffs of toxicity,” and all manner of manifestations of techno-industrial urbanism (199, 223).
heightened to an extreme. In both readings a romantic response to nature, as I have characterized it, is crucial.

Therefore, it is perhaps no surprise that something approximating a grass-roots environmentalism with respect to the Zone develops among some of the stalkers. Redrick, although weary of his profession’s many deprivations and its criminal milieu, retorts sharply when a governmental emigration-agent offers him financial assistance and a chance to settle into a better life anywhere else in the world: “Our Zone, the bitch, the killer, was a hundred times dearer to me at that second than all of their Europes and Africas” (36). As well, Redrick begins to resent the profiteers, whom he regards as “the lousy fungus growing on the Zone” as if describing a fragile eco-system that has been compromised; he sees in their wealth only “drinking . . . eating, exploiting, and growing fat on the Zone” and regards them as one might a rapacious industry that uses up non-renewable resources without planning for the future: “what would happen later, when it had eaten its full and gotten power, . . . when everything that was once in the Zone was outside” (68). The crucial exception here is that this new eco-concern focuses on the removal of scrap technology—not trees or minerals—as if the Zone represented a delicate tableau of landscape and ruin which ought to be preserved after some fashion. One stalker, Gutalin, becomes particularly zealous, and argues that “we should take nothing out of it and return everything that we’ve taken” (38). Although impoverished, Gutalin purchases booty at a loss from other stalkers and returns it to the Zone. There is even a report to the effect that he and others routinely enter the Zone to destroy whatever they can, as if enacting a common, contemporary eco-activist practice (tree-spiking, for
example) whereby resources are through strategic damage rendered useless to industry (90). In Roadside Picnic we have, then, a hazardous and toxic landscape strewn with ruins and debris that has become the focus of an altruistic environmentalism that strives to reach beyond mere anthropocentrism in an attempt to preserve a site’s integrity—not reclaim it. The Zone, safeguarded like a conservation area or a national park, cannot offer anything in the manner of Abbey’s wilderness recreation, for example. It would become a toxic terrarium at which one can only peer from behind a barrier, like the wall surrounding the garden of Hawthorne’s Rappaccini, a plot of ground which I take as an apt metaphor for contemporary toxic landscapes.53

“I’d like to know how this will all end,” says one character as he ponders the Zone (85). His musing saves me from having to ask naively of a literary text: what happens after the end? Although clumsily put, my question is central to the environmental literature (fiction and non-fiction) that deals with poisoned soils and nuclear remainders, and where our conceptual time-scale must now routinely accommodate half-life values. In A Canticle for Leibowitz, Riddley Walker, and in the fictions of Ballard (and to some extent even in On the Beach), nature, although blighted and weakened, is re-endowed with an old romantic power of infinite fecundity which, given enough time, will, it is hoped, compost into apparent nothing our greatest technological follies. However, we

53 Karla Armbruster suggests that mainstream nature and wildlife documentaries seen on television (“eco-porn”) put the viewer in a similar position of passivity, of seeing but not being able to touch or enter the desired landscape. Nature is typically represented as “a place that is most properly empty of human beings” (Kerridge and Sammells 222).
must conceptualize an immense time-scale in order to affirm such optimism. In post-apocalyptic or toxic landscapes, one cannot, like Wordsworth, stumble upon a site that has been reclaimed within a single human life-span. In the meantime one must console oneself with a transfigured nature from which humans have been temporarily exiled.

This last possibility gives rise to a more sobering prospect: a transfigured nature whose fecundity and energy are working to efface human life—not to repair a landscape and to redeem us from environmental exile. When we begin to consider the uncertain status of germs and viruses—whether these are part of nature, or part of “another” nature that we do not wish to perpetuate—an ancient torment takes on a new dimension. In The Last Man, the end of the human epoch is brought about by a plague that is believed to have erupted spontaneously; as Verney explains, “This enemy to the human race had begun to raise its serpent-head on the shores of the Nile” (137). This positivistic assertion of origin is, however, soon forgotten as increasingly disparate attempts to understand the ensuing chaos accumulate. To the Turks, vanquished by the Greek armies

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54 In The Sense of an Ending, Frank Kermode writes: “[w]e measure and order time with our fictions; but it seems, in reality, to be ever more diverse and less and less subject to any uniform system of measurement. Thus we think of the past in different time-scales . . . ; the time of the art-historian is different from that of the geologist. . . . There is [as well] . . . a time of radioactive carbon.” (63). See also Arne Naess, who argues that the awe inspiring time-scale of geology rightfully humbles anthropocentric humankind (Ecology, Community and Lifestyle 126-27).

55 In Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra, Antony swears by “the fire / That quickens Nihus’ slime” (1.3.68-69). Taking “fire” (significantly, in lower case) to refer to the sun, I read Antony’s oath as affirming that the river’s mythical fertility is ultimately part of the natural order. Granted, the semantic ambiguities are numerous when ancient-Egyptian, ancient-Roman, Elizabethan, and modern ontologies converge.
and their English allies, the plague is “the curse of Allah,” to be inherited by the
conquerors of their fallen cities (150). “Some disorder had surely crept into the elements,
destroying their benignant influence,” Verney writes later of a violent windstorm, thereby
linking meteorological phenomena with the epidemic (180). Another storm off the coast
of Dover is even more ferocious: at its peak, meteors suddenly appear in broad daylight
like “three other suns”; these unite and plunge into the sea. Some read in this spectacle
that “the day of judgement was come”; Verney’s ruminations are less overtly theological:
“it appeared as if suddenly the motion of the earth was revealed to us--as if no longer we
were ruled by ancient laws, but were turned adrift in an unknown region of space” (290).
As well, there are ghosts and apparitions in the trees and in the air, all witnessed by
groups of people (320). Ironically, the dispassionate perspective expected from science
falls most notably short by providing only abstruse readings of events: taking an
extremely long-range view, the astronomer Merrival urges calm because gradual changes
in the earth’s planetary position indicate a paradisiacal future of perpetual “universal
spring”; however, with each report of the plague’s progress, his already immaterial
predictions must be revised, and consequently they become increasingly irrelevant to the
immediate crisis (172-73, 227). When Merrival’s wife and children die of the plague, he
goes mad and abandons his science for religious zealotry (238-39). Ultimately, no
phenomenon is too trivial or far-flung for consideration by the desperate populace, and
there is a general confusion of symptoms with essences. The Last Man may rightly be
called a compendium of utterly futile attempts to read nature’s trajectory; the surfeit of
signs that arise do not coalesce into a pattern appreciable to theology, epidemiology,
astronomy, or any other system of meaning. In this regard, Verney’s attempt to give narrative coherence to the apocalyptic end of humankind falls short, as does his attempt to delimit one pernicious facet of nature. Mary Shelley, however, decisively asks us to ponder a nature that in its totality has become malevolent toward its human population, or at best has become completely indifferent to it.\(^56\)

Stanislaw Lem’s *Solaris* (1962; trans 1971), a somewhat further afield and therefore brief example of an indifferent nature, features an alien planet entirely enveloped by a sentient ocean. After many generations of inconclusive study, the earth scientists then aboard an orbiting space-station are traumatized when the ocean begins to generate replicas of deceased persons (“visitors”) cloned from their memories. For Lem’s narrator, Kelvin, the ocean’s unambiguous status as a life-form possessing intelligence is hereby confirmed, but ultimately the ocean remains inscrutable to terrestrial science which cannot agree on much else—most notably, the ocean’s purpose in generating the replicas. (In a final enigmatic gesture, the ocean generates an island consisting of a “petrified landscape” with “ruins of an ancient town, a Moroccan city tens of centuries old” [201-02]). Like *The Last Man*, *Solaris* presents a series of futile attempts by humankind, endowed with a storehouse of knowledge, to read nature’s exuberances, insofar as the ocean may be regarded as nature (understood as biosphere or environment) with respect to the alien planet. One group of theories about the ocean describe it as an

\(^{56}\) For a reading of *The Last Man* as a sceptical Mary Shelley’s repudiation of prophecy, typology, and masculine romantic-mythologies (knowledge, poetics, politics, imagination), see Morton D. Paley, “The Last Man: Apocalypse Without Millennium,” (Fisch 107-23).
“introverted world,” a “hermit entity,” and an “anchorite . . . of the cosmos”—metaphors which suggests that nature, wherever it is found, may be a phenomenon that recedes from our scrutiny and understanding, despite (or because of) advances in our science (171, 198).

These instances of defamiliarized nature suggest how the unlikely prospect of human habitation in them is analogous to the decreasing prospects of human presence in the transfigured landscapes of real environmental catastrophes. Moreover, in both types of site, humans apprehend nature’s astonishing resilience. With shock, we say about many of these sites that nothing ought to thrive there, and yet it does. But, in this instance, nature’s resilience may seem more like a perverse tenacity—perverse, because it thrives while excluding us. Nature’s fecundity has become excessive and unbearable if we suddenly cannot be involved with it.

This changed attitude toward nature’s resilience can be glimpsed in an oath Verney suddenly makes during his southward journey: “No, no, I will not live among the wild scenes of nature, the enemy of all that lives. I will seek the towns,” he asserts, after losing the nerve to stalk and kill a goat (358). Having seen first-hand England and continental Europe deserted and in ruins, he now faces the prospect of a feral nature overtaking the globe; consequently, nature is suddenly intolerable since it can no longer be enjoyed in comforting doses. The most direct explanation for his reaction lies in the two distinct categories of nature—benign and hostile—that arise out of a series of old polarities: pastoral and wasteland, forest and wilderness, domesticated garden and untamed spaces, and so forth. Elsewhere, Verney by his own admission longs for “the
dear soothings of maternal Nature" (221)—a nature that he experienced in the pastoral
Cumberland cottage of his youth (spent significantly as rustic, shepherd, and poacher) and
in Windsor forest, which has in the past provided an escape from his adult duties as
diplomat.

The great irony, then, about all these toxic, post-apocalyptic, or otherwise lethal
spaces is that nature has not been entirely effaced from them; in fact, it can appear in
them to proceed according to the restorative patterns made visible to us most notably by
the consoling vistas of Wordsworthian romanticism; or, nature can appear in them to
invite us by invoking more distant nostalgias and presenting landscapes restored to an
even more pristine condition, as rendered in the wilderness-wasteland fantasies of Abbey;
or, nature can simply appear in them as barbaric spectacle.

One reading of the environmentalisms of Leopold, Naess, and Abbey would have
us overcome Verney’s type of anguish and prefer nature in any form (and on any
appreciable scale) to urbanism in any form. Indeed, the affirmation of primitivism in
radical environmentalism is pronounced, and would always have us appreciate some
approximation of wild nature. Certainly Abbey may be placed in this radical group. But
we might also consider, for example, Christopher Manes who argues that ecology ought
to reaffirm its “subversive” roots and that the environment’s current state justifies eco-
sabotage and radical calls to dismantle civilisation and infrastructures. Manes’s Green
Rage, contains a chapter revealingly titled “Civilization and Other Errata” which is
bracketed by two slogans he tacitly endorses: “Visualize industrial collapse” and “Back to
the Pleistocene!” (225-35).\textsuperscript{37}

But what if this nature that we desire and fight for is in fact proceeding along entirely unforseen paths: eclipsing humans (as in On the Beach, The Last Man, and Roadside Picnic), making an evolutionary detour around us (as in Solaris), demanding biological mutation (as in Canticle, Riddley Walker, and Roadside Picnic), or demanding our extinction (as in On the Beach, and The Last Man)? The precision of these groupings is less important to me than the range of readings of transfigured landscapes they make possible. Their common denominator, however, is an object lesson in human insignificance. Nature may ultimately get rid of not only our civilization’s pollution and mistakes, but us as well. How are we to regard primitivism when it is forced upon us just before we are peremptorily snuffed out? Furthermore, how are we to continue regarding nature and landscape according to consoling romantic paradigms?

Consequently, I read the Strugatskys’ many descriptive nature-passages collectively as the harbingers of a “new” nature which, in appearance, is merely the old nature restored to a more desirable pristine condition; in reality, however, this new nature will quite likely remain permanently lethal to humans, as if a misanthropic or simply inscrutable force were edging us out once and for all. If we read the Strugatskys’ Zone (with some debt to McKibben’s notion of “postnatural”) as a metaphor for all the toxic

\textsuperscript{37} See chapter two of Lewis, \textit{Green Delusions} (1992) for a critical survey of radical primitivism in contemporary environmentalism. It concludes, “A large portion of eco-radicals believe that human social and ecological problems could be solved if only we would return to a primal way of life. Ultimately, this proves to be an article of faith that receives little support from the historical and anthropological records” (81).
and radically altered landscapes that we have created or imagined, ranging from Mary Shelley to Rachel Carson to Shute to Miller to Hoban, then the stalker’s excessive love for his Zone comes to seem misanthropic and by implication begins to unveil the secret misanthropy inherent in the concern for nature espoused by certain forms of environmentalism. The love of nature in and of itself comes to equal a love of nature without humans. In one essay, Abbey jokes that most wildlife biologists are misanthropes (Beyond the Wall 135). But as Luc Ferry points out in The New Ecological Order (1992), the evolutionary trajectory of these ideologies can lead to fascist forms of environmentalism as evidenced by the ecological imperatives of the Third Reich.  

In the previous chapter I touched upon the worrisome militarism in Ernest Callenbach’s Ecotopia, in which weapons and lethal combat become part of the ecologically-sound curriculum and, furthermore, part of a necessary, defensive geopolitical strategy by which to guarantee the integrity of the ecologically-sound state. While I do not want to skirt these political and ideological issues, I would like to keep my discussion focused upon the aesthetics of post-apocalyptic fantasies and cultures in ruin.

The shock (or faith) that the post-apocalyptic and toxic landscapes that are inhospitable to us are not in fact absolute wastelands leads to speculations about their

See especially chapter five, in which Ferry writes: “the philosophical underpinnings of Nazi legislation often overlap with those developed by deep ecology . . . in both cases we are dealing with the same romantic and/or sentimental representation of the relationship between nature and culture, combined with a shared revalorization of the primitive state against that of (alleged) civilization” (95). On the history and future of the affinities between ecology and ultra-right politics, see Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience (1995).
aesthetic properties—perhaps one might even say—a fantasy about their uncanny beauty. Abbey, to take a germane example, boasts that he would “rather take [his] chances in a thermonuclear war” if faced with the prospect of “a completely urbanized, completely industrialized, ever more crowded environment” that edges out the imperatives of wilderness conservation (Desert Solitaire 52). What might he expect to find there that he cannot find in the metropolises or crowded cities of some technocratic utopia, taking these for the moment to be the hypothetical counterpart to both the desired pristine desert and the post-nuclear landscape? How is the wasteland that ensues after a nuclear apocalypse a fair approximation of wilderness and nature in the raw? I pose these questions as a means of entering into a discussion about the pervasive desire of revisiting, re-inhabiting, and imagining the materiality of toxic and lethal landscapes.

Imagining Returning

*Trying to imagine that empty space at the center of the city, we find only differences from the absolute absence it claims to represent . . . . It fills above all with our own imaginings.*

--Peter Schwenger on Hiroshima (93)

The environmentally-minded apocalypticists of the nuclear age generally envision a post-cataclysmic landscape that lies somewhere between the “dead” landscapes of Carson’s Silent Spring and the universe’s posited heat-death after entropy has run its course (the latter suggesting an absolute, lifeless void where neither life-forms nor fictions can find a setting). We glimpse such a landscape in Jonathan Schell’s The Fate of the Earth (1982), in which the author imagines the United States, and by implication the
entire world, after the Cold War's worst-case scenario is realized:

[A] full-scale nuclear attack . . . would devastate the natural environment on a scale unknown since early geological times, when, in response to natural catastrophes . . ., suddenly mass extinctions of species and whole ecosystems occurred all over the earth. How far this "gross simplification" of the environment would go once virtually all animal life and the greater part of plant life had been destroyed and what patterns the surviving remnants of life would arrange themselves into over the long run are imponderables; but it appears that at the outset the United States would be a republic of insects and grass. (64-65 emphasis added)

As if to update Schell's apocalyptic scenario for the geopolitical thaw of the 1990s, Christopher Manes, writing about our ecological callousness (significantly characterized as our "culture of extinction"), offers a similar vision of the world after a cataclysmic "biological meltdown": "The environment of a postextinction landscape favors what biologists call r-selected creatures—that is, species that are highly mobile, adaptable, and opportunistic. In our world they are represented by rats, roaches, sparrows, gulls, and weeds" (Green Rage 26). Significantly, there persists in both scenarios an abundance of nature if we could but learn to see on a different scale. Such a corresponding adjustment of our perceptions is encouraged by both Abbey and Naess: the ability to appreciate, first, so-called ugly landscapes; and next, the ability to see and learn to appreciate nature on a microscopic scale. Arctic vegetation, mosses, one-celled animals, bacteria—"tiny beings," Naess calls them: these are the ideal character traits of the mature, ecologically minded individual, no longer interested in merely spectacular nature, as if the latter were

59 Manes takes the term "biological meltdown" from Jasper Carlton, an Earth First! activist whom he interviewed for the book (26, n.11). Not surprisingly, nuclear weaponry, which belongs evidently to a different historical epoch, is not discussed in Manes's book, although nuclear power is.
somehow vulgar. Both Schell and Manes are horrified at the prospect of the radical
eclipse of humankind; however, Abbey (clearly) and Naess (just barely) envision
themselves somehow reinserted into such a world and pondering without human
distraction this new, uncannily fertile nature.60

Similarly consoling perceptual shifts can be found in Mary Shelley’s The Last
Man. After all other members of his party die and he has finally become the last man of
the novel’s title, Verney continues southward, clearly with renewed vigour after he has so
decisively forsaken “the wild scenes of nature.” Arriving in Rome, he is again able to
place nature into a familiar paradigm: “I sat at the foot of these vast columns. The
Coliseum, whose naked ruin is robed by nature in a verdurous and glowing veil, lay in
the sunlight. . . . Triumphant arches, the falling walls of many temples, strewed the ground
at my feet” (360 emphasis added). Immediately thereafter, he utters a lyrical outburst
celebrating Roman history and culture, and he spends the following year living in the city,
sightseeing and visiting libraries as if undertaking a grand tour. Although the world lies in
ruin, Verney can delight in the spectacle of Europe’s preeminent ruin-site, a distinction it
enjoyed before the catastrophe; here, the prospect of architecture and nature (even
excessive, encroaching nature) somehow ensure that culture (represented by the cultured

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Abbey mockingly writes, “[t]o most . . . natural beauty means the sylvan—pastoral and
green, something productive and pleasant and fruitful—pastures with tame cows, a
flowing stream with trout, a cottage or a cabin, a field of corn, a bit of forest, in the
background a nice snow-capped mountain range” (Beyond the Wall 54). See also, Naess
who states, “I have learned an admiration for the minute, to say it very simply: Where
others see adversity. I see the Self-realization of tiny beings in nature” (Rothenberg, Is It
Painful to Think? 65). The perceptual adjustment Naess tacitly advocates is at the heart of
both his philosophy and the ascetic lifestyle he practices to exemplify it.
spectator Verney) and nature are restored to their proper boundaries. On some level, Verney may well recognize that this intellectual manoeuvre amounts to what Robert Wilson, in a roughly similar context, calls a “pyrrhic victory of the imagination” (254).61

It remains unclear throughout Verney’s narrative, however, to what extent he recognizes the ironies inherent in his vacillating perception, and it is equally unclear to what extent he is willfully creating his own mental space. Earlier, immediately after rejecting a rustic life among “the wild scenes of nature,” Verney anticipates that in Rome he will not

find every thing forgetful of man; trampling on his memory, defacing his works, proclaiming from hill to hill, and vale to vale,—by the torrents freed from the boundaries which he imposed—by the vegetation liberated from the laws which he enforced—by his habitation abandoned to mildew and weeds, that his power is lost, his race annihilated for ever. (358 emphasis added)

In short, he initially seeks Rome precisely because he hopes not to find encroaching vegetation there. Once there, however, he becomes Mephistopheles’ archetypal cultured-Englishman, versed in history and in romantic texts and aesthetics, able to forget the “real” ruin lying beyond the periphery in order to focus on the properly antiquarian one. The abhorrent spectacle of “vegetation liberated,” “mildew,” and “weeds” has been transvalued into a poeticized “verdurous and glowing veil” that consoles the last man in

61 Citing post-World War II poets like Robert Lowell, John Ashberry, Bob Perelman, and Alan Ginsberg to make the claim, Wilson is referring to the contemporary poetic-imagination’s enduring ability to create a “Romantic sublime” in the face of a vast nuclear-laden “technoscapes”—not a vast wild landscape, as the tradition would have it (254). See especially the final chapter of his American Sublime, revealingly titled “Towards a Nuclear Sublime: Representations of Technological Vastness in Postnuclear America” (228-63).
his loneliness.52

The cultural spell of Rome eventually wanes, however. Verney departs not
because the city is unlivable in a practical sense, but because he has become restless. He
reasons that a “solitary being is by instinct a wanderer” (365). He plans to travel by sea
until his death, and to that end conceives a long and intricate itinerary of cities beyond
continental Europe, which, significantly, he imagines viewing only as distant outlines
from his boat: “keeping near the land, I would coast the beauteous shores and sunny
promontories of the blue Mediterranean, pass Naples, along Calabria . . .; then . . . skim
[the] ocean’s surface towards Malta and further Cyclades . . . I would coast Asia Minor,
and Syria, and, passing the seven-mouthed Nile, steer northward again, till losing sight of
. . . Carthage and . . . Lybia, I should reach the pillars of Hercules” (366).53 His planned
departure is ostensibly a farewell to “these prodigious relics” (364) and to the stasis of
“civilized life” (366); metaphorically, however, it is a merely a farewell to one type of
interaction with urban spaces filled with architecture and cultural associations. “[F]or
ever round another promontory, anchoring in another and another bay” (366) is Verney’s
new mantra; he hopes that by trading the perspective of landlocked inhabitant for that of a
sea-farer he will be able to view cities in ruin only as distant or depersonalized

52 Hovering in the background of my reading of Verney at this juncture--much as he
hovers in the background of romanticism in general--is Milton’s Satan, or, more
precisely, his famous line from book one of Paradise Lost: “The mind is its own place,
and in itself / Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven” (255-56).

53 Anne McWhir, the editor of the text of The Last Man which I am using, suggests
that Mary Shelley is alluding here to Odysseus’ journeys and Dante’s account of
Odysseus/Ulysses’ suicidal voyage in canto twenty-six of the Inferno (367 n.120).
silhouettes. A new scale of perception makes Verney’s post-apocalyptic world tolerable again.

John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* (1946), a widely-read novelization of the lives of several survivors, records a similarly mixed reaction elicited by the spectacle of vegetation intermingling with ruined architecture. Amidst a now familiar atomic-aftermath iconography—of blasted cityscapes, freak rains, and corpses—of bewildered survivors, many inexplicably thirsty and nauseous, and suffering from grotesque and mysterious burns despite the absence of fires—comes this startling description of the city, as seen through the eyes of Toshiko Sasaki:

This was the first chance she had to look at the ruins of Hiroshima... Even though the wreckage had been described to her, ... the sight horrified and amazed her, and there was something she noticed about it that particularly gave her the creeps. Over everything—up through the wreckage of the city, in gutters, along the riverbanks, tangled among tiles and tin roofing, climbing on charred tree trunks—was a blanket of fresh, vivid, lush, optimistic green; the verdancy rose from the foundations of ruined houses. Weeds already hid the ashes, and wild flowers were in bloom among the city’s bones. The bomb had not only left the underground organs of plants intact; it had stimulated them. Everywhere were bluts and Spanish bayonets, goosefoot, morning glories and day lilies, the hairy-fruited bean, purslane and clotbur and sesame and panic grass and feverfew. Especially in a circle at the center, sickle senna grew in extraordinary regeneration, not only standing among the charred remnants of the same plant but pushing up in new places, among bricks and through cracks in the asphalt. It actually seemed as if a load of sickle-senna seed had been dropped along with the bomb. (91-92)

The unleashed atomic power has endowed nature with a fickle fecundity whereby some life forms and cell-types are jolted into excessive growth-spurts while others are obliterated. An older, consoling agrarian vision of plenitude, such as Walt Whitman’s glimpse in an orchard of “quintillions ripen’d... quintillions green,” sounds here as an uncanny echo (“Song of Myself” 799). A mathematical sublime of unfathomably high
numbers was once necessary to tally excessive vegetable growth and once could evoke only prosperity; now excessive growth seems strangely perverse. Sasaki intuits a rupture with the past that is even more violent than the catastrophic death toll and the material destruction.

The horror conveyed here is akin to that arising from the more subtle apprehension of McKibben more than forty years later, one that he makes into an equally important, albeit less immediately traumatic, rupture: that nature, having become thoroughly contaminated on a global scale, is no longer a model of reliability (97). Hersey’s survivors soon learn, for example, that the human wounds caused by the bomb no longer heal according to the patterns anticipated by medical science. During the immediate aftermath of the raids on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the type of bombs used, much less the effects of lingering radiation, were still largely unknown to the general population. According to Spencer Weart’s history of the popularization of nuclear imagery, the fact that x-rays as well as other types of radiation can cause cell mutation and stimulate growth was understood (and experimentally demonstrable) by science as early as the mid-1920s; however, widespread popular fears of mutated growth triggered by nuclear-fallout only began after the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, and there was considerable disagreement about—if not outright ignorance of—the biological consequences of all types of radioactivity, disagreement which arguably persists to this day.64 To that end, Hersey’s narrative depicts survivors living in a terrible state of

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64 For a highly detailed account of the intermingling of political, scientific, military, and fictional discourses about nuclear power and weaponry, see Spencer R. Weart,
unknowing, where persons who experience mere nausea suddenly die, where bodies have
been violated by a mysterious force, and where some survivors recall a sense of being
already among the dead (51). Consequently, it is not surprising that the spectacle of lush
vegetation is at best an ambivalent one, eliciting a horror that is based upon an intuition
about the spectacle’s symbolic meaning (as it is for Verney), rather than a horror based
upon its encapsulation of later twentieth-century fears about irradiated environments.

But how does the weeds passage relate in a metaphoric sense to the larger
question of renewal? Given Hersey’s choice of a style which, according to terms defined
by Gerard Genette, may be characterized as heterodiegetic (the narrator does not appear
as a “character” in the account) and which favours narratized speech (persons’ words are
summarized or narrated, as opposed to being quoted), it is difficult to distinguish the
boundaries between the interviewees’ impressions (and diction) and the author’s
investigative journalism.65 Grammatical indices of the actual interviews, most notably
quotation marks, have frequently been erased. In addition to Hiroshima’s virtually
omniscient narrative-style, one might, furthermore, consider the semantic slippages that
inevitably accrue during translation and the fact that Hersey undoubtedly amassed

Nuclear Fear: A History of Images (1988), especially chapter ten for some of the
questions that I have raised here. Weart suggests that health hazards from non-military
nuclear applications, although a frequent subject of pulp science-fiction in the 1930s, did
d not become a popular concern until the mid-1950s when two real fears arose: that a
nuclear incident “at one locality could physically affect the environment across vast
distances”; and that “bizarre nuclear damage [including peacetime fallout] could strike
anywhere in the world” (187).

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See Gerard Genette, Narrative Discourse (1980), especially chapter four, for
concise definitions of these terms (171).
additional information and edited his raw material during the year leading up the book’s initial publication in November 1946. The ambivalence of the weeds passage, I suggest, may be traced to a bifurcation in the narrative point of view. From the passage we learn that it is the spectator, Sasaki, who beheld the spectacle of growth and was horrified; but it is the author, Hersey, who seizes upon (or perhaps even supplies) the adjectival metaphor “optimistic green.” Hersey will conclude this latter theme in a chapter appended in 1985, in which, surveying the culmination of the city’s post-War prosperity, he describes a “phoenix [that] had risen from the ruinous desert of 1945,” an image focalized through the perspective of another survivor, Dr. Terufumi Sasaki (no relation) (141-42). Hersey’s biography of Toshiko Sasaki, on the other hand, is less immediately hopeful; the author begins her narrative in the 1985 chapter with an account of her spiritual crisis—the setback in her burgeoning Catholic faith: “she could not accept that a God who had snatched away her parents and put her through such hideous trials was loving and merciful” (154). A mistrust of nature begets a mistrust of God, we might deduce. Significantly, her subsequent religious epiphany occurs amidst a nature that now no longer seems to be operating perversely: “Her house stood by a cliff, on which there was a grove of bamboo. One morning, she stepped out of the house, and the sun’s rays glistening on the minnowlike leaves of the bamboo trees took her breath away. She felt an astonishing burst of joy—the first she had experienced as long as she could remember. She

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66 On numerous occasions Hersey discreetly inserts information in parentheses which clarifies a “character’s” immediate impressions in light of later information (8, 9, 19, 23, 25, 52).
heard herself reciting the Lord’s Prayer” (155). In 1957, Hersey reports, Toshiko Sasaki became a nun, thereby completing her spiritual path (159-60).

Of the countless types of historical narrative which Hersey’s investigation might have yielded (for example, geopolitical, ethical, environmental, or other broad questions raised by the bombing), the extant narrative of Hiroshima is essentially an intimate history; it is an account which focuses ultimately upon the rebuilding of a city, viewed through the efforts of inhabitants to restore their personal and professional lives. In an influential essay on the narrative choices confronting any historian, Hayden White introduces the term “emplotment” to describe the historical narrator’s “encodation of the facts” (397). “Historical situations,” White explains, “do not have built into them intrinsic meanings in the way that literature texts do. Historical situations are not inherently tragic, comic, or romantic . . . . How a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian’s subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind. This is essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation” (398). Applying White’s logic, I would argue that the weeds passage focuses Hersey’s historical narrative by providing a metaphorical core around which the six survivor biographies--especially in the final chapter, which stresses the varied and fruitful lives lived--are made to configure. The tragic aspect of the bombing recedes, and a vaguely Romantic metaphor of growth now triumphs. Hersey closes his account of Sister Sasaki with a direct quotation: “I shall not dwell on the past. It is as if I had been given a spare life when I survived the A-bomb. But I prefer not to look back. I shall keep moving forward” (163).
Her words occur in the book’s final chapter, which is interspersed with a chronology of bulletins confirming Cold War nuclear-weapon tests, ranging from 1946 to 1974. Hersey hereby evokes a more ominous historical context and complicates the unambiguous optimism of the personal narratives; however, this juxtaposition (of optimistic biographical narrative with blunt, monological data) affirms, I believe, Hersey’s unwillingness to emplot the greater trajectory of geopolitical history (as, say, tragic or darkly ironic?). Such an account, properly developed, would belong to a different category of history and would require a different set of generic principles; in such a history, narratives of small, personal triumphs run the risk of seeming sentimental. 

Hiroshima shows how one might read the closest approximation of an apocalyptic ruin that has yet occurred. It is the earliest text anticipating Schwenger’s notion that we cannot conceive an absolute absence at the cataclysmic site, because such an absence would be unnarrateable. As in the scenarios of Schell and Manes, the post-apocalyptic space fills with our own imaginings.\(^\text{67}\)

Just as the vegetable spectacle among the ruins of Hiroshima provides an initially ambiguous symbol of the fate of the city, the broader significance of the spectacle of disused technology that confronts Ballard’s Ransom and his party upon their return to the cities is not immediately apparent. At first, the sand dunes that have encroached upon urban areas since the rains ceased and the oceans dried out merely defamiliarize old settings: “The metal refuse scattered about the dunes provided the only floral decoration--

\(^{67}\) See also Wilson, who, in reference to imagined environmental consequences of the nuclear threat, writes “this remainderless abyss is not fully remainderless” (258).
twisted bedsteads rose like clumps of desert thorns, water pumps and farm machinery
formed angular sculptures, the dust spuming from their vanes in the light breeze” (The
Drought 135). Many similar descriptive passages follow, and these exist largely to convey
to the reader the apocalyptic impact of the drought. Eventually, though, one such scene
elicits an apparently deeper insight from Ransom; upon entering one small town, he finds
himself

plough[ing] his way down the centre of the road, passing the submerged
forms of abandoned cars. The succession of humps, the barest residue of
identity, interrupted the smooth flow of the dunes down the street. He
remembered the cars excavated from the quarry on the beach. There they
had emerged intact from their ten-year burial, the scratched fenders and
bright chrome mined straight from the past. By contrast, the half-covered
cars in the street around him were idealized images of themselves, the
essences of their own geometry, the smooth curvatures like the eddies
flowing out of some platonic future. Submerged by the sand, everything
had been transvalued in the same way. (143)

Much like Verney in Rome, Ransom is lulled by the picturesque spectacle of a ruin;
where Verney forgets the wasteland beyond Rome, Ransom forgets that the global
drought has been directly attributed to polluting technologies of which the automobile
industry is a pre-eminent example (30-32; see also my chapter three). Couched in terms
of an epiphany, Ransom’s notion of the “smooth curvatures” of utopian technology seems
as self-deluding as the one it supplants (of unearthing now-benevolent technological artifacts
like an archeologist). Both notions displace the environmental impact of technology by
enacting a forgetting of the real, disastrous past; as well, both notions suggest in more
general terms the inability of the survivors to extract a more pertinent cautionary narrative
from recent history.
Notwithstanding Ransom’s seduction by the aesthetics of technology, his initial impression—that the excavating survivor inevitably “mines” the “past”—is essentially correct, and this metaphor recurs in subtly altered forms throughout the narrative of the expedition, most notably when the party re-enters the city to find “the roads . . . deserted, [like] canyon floors filled with sand. The buildings receded in dusty tiers, transforming Mount Royal into a prehistoric terrace city, a dead metropolis that turned its forbidding stare on them as they passed” (146-47). The party’s sense of estrangement prevents them from envisioning the city’s inhabitability. Their exploration and any potential interaction with this environment are guided by Ransom’s restrictive original notion of mining (as the unearthing of aesthetic but useless artifacts); thus, the party enters as archeologists might, not as would-be settlers, foragers, or prospectors with a more utilitarian motivation to uncover (or to mine) something in the sand. When Ransom and his party encounter the extended family of Quilter, Miranda, and Lomax, and their various associates, however, they recognize that not everyone became estranged from the city. The prosperity of these city dwellers stems largely from their ability to forage and to put recovered objects to unexpected use in a manner akin to the often ironic recontextualizations of technology that occur in the daily lives of people in A Canticle for Leibowitz and Riddley Walker, who purposefully mine their respective cities (and their pasts) in an equally literal sense. Ransom, the nominal leader, essentially hampers the efficacy of the expedition because he remains locked into a purely intellectual, contemplative interaction with whatever he encounters in the post-apocalyptic environment.

In an influential 1954 essay, Martin Heidegger argues that modern technology
causes us to apprehend nature via a series of revelatory instances as a “standing-reserve” of raw materials for human use (298). A “tract of land,” he explains, “is challenged [herausgefordert] in the hauling out of coal and ore. The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit. The field that the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order [bestellte] appears different from how it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and maintain” (296). Heidegger’s essay enjoys great currency in environmentalism because it points to the norms that underwrite various kinds of environmental exploitation. By contrast, the post-apocalyptic struggles depicted by Ballard, Miller, and Hoban, although lamentable, show a benign land-use whereby environmentalist calls for the reduction of harmful technologies are realized in an unexpected fashion. The post-apocalyptic scenario always shares a covert affinity with radical strains of environmentalism, for it “promises” a return to more primitive forms of social and technological organization.

In Heideggerian terms, nature as standing-reserve is realized in post-apocalyptic narratives in ironic and somewhat nostalgic manner. Lacking pernicious high-technologies, the survivors are out of necessity restricted to primitive forms of “challenging” their environment. Ballard’s city dwellers, for example, discover their standing-reserve to be filled with serendipitous treasures: buried cars are used as ready-made coffins (154); Quilter digs among the sand dunes for canned goods (158, 166); and more extravagantly, Lomax constructs “from assorted pieces of chromium and enameled metal--the radiator grilles of cars, reflectors of electric heaters, radio cabinets and so on--

... what appeared at a distance to be a bejewelled temple” (162). High-tech products are
put to low-tech use; meanwhile, coal, ore, soils, and minerals revert to nostalgic, pre-Heideggerian forms as undisturbed elements in the landscape and thereby meet the most stringent environmental criteria. Furthermore, the spell of the technological sublime (as outlined by Leo Marx and experienced briefly by Ransom) is effectively neutralized when the desire for technology is satisfied in an unforeseen way—as when, for example, the cars used by Lomax become quasi-fetishistic items, prized now for their largely aesthetic and purely benign properties. A final detail of the description of Lomax’s pavilion makes this last point abundantly clear: “In the sunlight the gilded edifice gleamed among the dust and sand like a Fabergé gem” (162).

While the city dwellers are no better than Ransom at learning from the environmental abuses of the past, their rudimentary economy thrives in a harsh terrain where merely survival was thought to be impossible. The city dwellers, in addition to meeting their basic sustenance requirements, manage to satisfy their more capricious desires. In the sea-harvesting community, by contrast, Ransom toils alone with little success, as if doing penance. While neither community is desirable to Ballard, he perpetuates the idea that the post-apocalyptic environment is habitable if one can but learn to adapt or, more aggressively, to find ways of subjugating existing materials (the total urban ruin) to satisfy innate needs and old desires. Like Abbey and other radical environmentalists, Ballard is suspicious of modern, urban society; however, unlike them his vision of the post-apocalyptic future is clearly dystopic.68

68 Jameson regards him as “one of the greatest postcontemporary dystopians” (Postmodernism 385). For more recent examples of Ballard’s urban and technological
An objection could be made at this point that by focusing largely on fiction and hypothetical situations I have not truly (or realistically) dealt with the most tangible barrier to reinhabiting post-cataclysmic or post-industrial spaces; that is, the lethal toxicity of soils and environments—the real remainders that threaten our health and routinely generate headline news. I have in mind here news stories such as Wiebo Ludwig’s ongoing battle with the Alberta Energy Company; the toxic legacy of the former Soviet Union; the Chernobyl nuclear disaster; the recent reactor mishap in Japan (September 30, 1999); and the toxic sites in east Toronto, recently made newsworthy again because they stood to jeopardize the city’s bid for the 2008 Olympic games, a bid which ultimately did fail although perhaps for other reasons. Such accounts would seem to discredit from the start the perspicacity of the romantic notion of weeds devouring ruins and the Wordsworthian notion of returning again and again—or would make the entire project of applying a nineteenth-century poetic fiction to very non-fictional environmental hazards seem misguided and irrelevant.

Indeed, the fictions I have been considering tend to reduce the biological health risks of nuclear mishaps and other toxic residues to the horror effects peculiar to science dystopias, see High-Rise (1975) and, in light of the recurring automobile motif, Concrete Island and Crash (both 1973).

fiction, as is the case with Miller’s Mrs. Grales (the “two-headed woman and her six-legged dog” [271]), the stalker Redrick’s daughter, and the various mutations that occur in *Riddley Walker*. In Abbey’s novels, concerns about toxicity are conspicuous by their absence in. Although the Monkey Wrench Gang’s chief intellectual, a medical doctor, ascribes his personal commitment to eco-sabotage to “seeing too much insulted tissue under the microscope... [Blood] [p]latelets eaten up... Acute leukemia on the rise. Lung Cancer”--phenomena which he directly attributes to “the evil... in the food, in the noise, in the crowding, ... in the water, in the air”--the gang never worries about pollutants seeping from the spectacular wrecks they create (*Monkey Wrench Gang* 159). Evidently Abbey regards these problems as collateral risks in a war of attrition where some parts of the environment must be sacrificed in order to save the whole. When Abbey envisions a collapsed society, as he does in *Good News*, and in the post-apocalyptic celebration which I quoted at the outset, there are no toxic zones, no illnesses, and no piles of corpses. Are we to understand that a somehow bloodless culling of the herd has taken place, the result being a hardier stock of humans? Ruin and wasteland will simply be there--in pristine splendour--for the taking, he suggests in the novel and states quite bluntly in the interview.

Even Weart, although devoting a great deal of space to the sufferings of the “hibakusha” (in Japanese, literally, “explosion-affected persons” [120]), reports only the initial fear that Hiroshima would be completely uninhabitable for seven years and does not return to the subject again. The narrative tropes of “optimistic green” and arisen phoenix helps him to elide the issue. What all these projections, narratives, and
emplotsments have in common, I suggest, is that in focusing upon human or anthropological problems in romanticized terms, they slight the real, un-Romantic consequences of toxic terrains and architecture, turning these into a narrative backgrounds--into exotic settings among which adventures or more mundane struggles take place (for example, Riddley’s quest, the hazardous desert journeys of Miller’s monks, Sasaki’s economic deprivation, or the reconnaissance mission in On the Beach).
The broad narrative trajectory which can unify these varied accounts is the progress from exile to recovery. With respect to this point, Deitering’s study of contemporary fiction finds it rife with “environmental exiles . . . who while resolutely acknowledging their polluted environments, nonetheless hold fast to the imago of . . . [the] pastoral home site” (Glotfelty and Fromm 200-01). Deitering suggests here the Romantic paradigm of estrangement and the various attempts to overcome it that I have outlined. The deeper irony, however, is that return may in many cases be impossible because the “home site” may be too contaminated. In such cases a new relationship between humans and environment will have to be negotiated.

In On the Beach, for example, one sailor escapes from the safe confines of the submarine into a certain radioactive death when the reconnaissance-mission brings the craft close to his home. His pastoral return is a suicidal one. But Shute does not treat the incident as aberrant behaviour; many characters act out last-wish fantasies of various sorts, and committing suicide by taking cyanide tablets is publicly regarded as a noble alternative to a slow fallout-induced death. Post-war absurdist fictions (Beckett and Pynchon, for example) have rendered the solemnity with which Shute treats such subjects
thoroughly melodramatic. I am thinking in particular of Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove* (1963), where the notion of following "proper" procedures with a stiff upper lip to the very end yields not pathos but rather the blackest humour, and where the endgames of human existence become the highest farce. There is, however, in Miller's novel a noteworthy moment in which we can see an alternative to despair and sentimental return, an alternative which is pertinent in light of toxic ruins and environments.

When the mission ascertains that there are no survivors on shore but that an unattended generator is still running, one officer solemnly shuts it down:

> He went to the powerhouse where the converter was running, inspected the switchboard carefully, and tripped two switches. The note of the machine sank progressively in a diminuendo; he stood watching it till finally it came to rest. It had done a swell job and it would be good as ever when the bearings had been overhauled. He could not have borne to leave it running until it cracked up. (203)

The officer is still operating under naval protocols and decommissioning military equipment seems merely to lie within his duty; however, the scene, with its brief ode to the technological sublime—surely somewhat beyond the strict interpretation of duty—suggests that we ought to enter into a custodial relationship with our technological legacy and that our duties more broadly conceived out to include the carrying out of certain protocols which must extend to an ethic of remainders. The officer's gesture arises out of a belief that is diametrically opposed to Abbey's anarchistic philosophy, although the aims are similar. Saving the machine from "cracking up"—not out of any self-interest—is a purely symbolic gesture; there is no one left to inherit this technology and the environment is already lethal. Shute suggests that the human operators, not the machines,
are responsible for their deployment. While this attitude is technocratic and problematic—especially in light of Cold War nuclear-proliferation in which stockpiling evermore military machinery, it is argued, functions as a deterrent to war—it nonetheless accepts conceptually an obligation to environments as they currently exist, not only as we would like them to exist. To spare the environment, Abbey would have us return to a pre-technological state, by violence if necessary, and, moreover, would have us ignore our technological and toxic legacies. Shute, however, suggests an attitude that would have us accept responsibility for the maintenance of the toxic ruins and the unwanted monuments that we have situated in the environment.70

An acceptance of responsibility through custodianship is what Alexander Kluge finds in Chernobyl ten years after the Ukrainian nuclear-reactor suffered the catastrophic explosion of April 26, 1986. The site and the accident have become as much a symbol as an ongoing environmental concern, and with Die Wächter des Sarkophags [The Guardians of the Sarcophagus] (1996) Kluge deliberately sets out to expand the metaphoric dimensions of the incident without, it should be added, slighting its other aspects. The consequences in the form of lethal radioactive-decay, Kluge reminds us, will remain with “us” for forty-thousand years, and in a desperate effort to contain this

70 On the type of opposition I have created by pitting Shute against Abbey, see Lewis, who writes: “[t]he eco-radical critique of technology becomes most vehement on the subject of toxic by-products and . . . pollutants. Although concerns here are absolutely on target, the solutions proposed are fundamentally misguided. Rather than dismantling our technological infrastructure . . . we should reengineer it so that . . . contaminants never reach the environment in the first place. Developing clean production systems will require sustained technological advance” (132).
problem at once, the reactor was housed in concrete. It is primarily this staggering time-
scale and this makeshift piece of architecture—which Kluge identifies as a ruin-
encasement (Ruinen-Überbauung) and as the sarcophagus of the title—that guides Kluge’s
speculations.

Kluge argues that, paradoxically, the sarcophagus is ownerless yet simultaneously
the property of all humankind (Objekt der Menschheit); as its lethal effects extend across
generations and exceed geographical boundaries, the responsibilities that it entails are
widely dispersed. Like the pyramids of Egypt, it will be among the planet’s most enduring
man-made structures; and like these, it will exist in a ruin-like state of decay yet will
affirm its presence and near permanence (Kluge 22). It commands the entire world’s
attention and custodianship; given its hasty construction, the sarcophagus will require
frequent repairs, and another encasement project will likely need to be undertaken at
some point, Kluge speculates. Like Percy Shelley’s desert traveller pondering the statue
of Ozymandias (and thereby occasioning reflections about history), Kluge ponders a
nuclear remainder but mediates on the future. By likening the nuclear remainder to an
archaeological artefact, Kluge anticipates a final irony: while our custodianship of
desirable ruins is willingly and—when funding is available—ostentatiously supplied, the
much more urgent custodianship of toxic sites is only reluctantly acknowledged and then
only grudgingly supplied.

All this might suggest that we only return to such sites out of necessity—because it
lies in the best interest of our collective health. However, Kluge reports a finding that is
startling in light of the exile-return pattern I have been tracing. Although heavily guarded,
the forbidden zone surrounding the reactor ruin attracts civil-war refugees and displaced persons who attempt to settle in disused buildings like the disenfranchised squatters of large urban areas. In an interview with the Russian journalist and author Swetlana Aklexjewitsch, Kluge learns their tragic motivation: “better this terror, whose outcome one does not know, than a terror without end” (18 my translation).\textsuperscript{71} Evidently, this zone offers the best available approximation of the sort of pastoral freedom sought by the Romantics and by their contemporary descendants who anticipate finding such enclaves among post-apocalyptic or post-industrial terrains. Despite health risks, the appearance of abandoned architecture intermingling with pristine nature—even illusory pristine nature—draws us.

\textsuperscript{71} Kluge quotes Alexejewitsch in German but does not indicate whether her words were translated. The text of the quotation: “Lieber ein Schrecken, dessen Ende man nicht sieht, als ein Schrecken ohne Ende.”
CHAPTER 5
THE FILMS OF ANDREI TARKOVSKY

*In commercial cinema nature often does not exist at all.*
*Has man any hope of survival in the face of all patent signs of impending apocalyptic silence?*

--Tarkovsky (*Sculpting in Time* 213, 229)

One need not search far to locate Tarkovsky’s apocalyptic anxieties. In print and now readily available are the posthumously published diaries and the collection of theoretical writings that he intended for publication, *Sculpting in Time* (1986). The diaries contain numerous entries describing nightmares and private anxieties specifically about nuclear war; the writings conclude with two bleak chapters about the “relentless march of technology” and “the pitiless insanity of modern civilisation” (222, 205). It is unlikely that one would dispute the existence of genuine modern social ills any more than one would dispute the importance of Tarkovsky’s recurring concerns: materialism, consumerism, technology, and a lack of spiritual values, topics debated in many fora. However, one might rightly criticise him for writing hyperbole and cliché or for stating

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72 There are three important editions of the diaries: in English, *Time within Time: 1970-1986* (1991); and in German, *Martyrolog: Tagebücher 1970-1986* (1989), and *Martyrolog II: Tagebücher 1981-1986* (1991). As the dates suggest, there is a considerable overlapping of entries; however, no single edition can be considered complete or definitive, and entries truncated in or omitted from one edition often appear more fully in another. For a complete list of Tarkovsky’s published writings (including interviews and published filmscripts) in Russian, German, French, and English, see Johnson and Petrie (319-20).
too bluntly what the films suggest only obliquely. One might ask, where precisely are the “patent signs” that Tarkovsky sees? Does attaining this sort of insight require the hypersensitive intuition of his protagonists? Maddeningly vague pronouncements about human history characterize his prose: “our age is the final climax of an entire historical cycle”; “[w]e have created a civilisation which threatens to annihilate mankind”; “the present has essentially merged with the future, in the sense that it contains all the preconditions for immanent disaster; we recognise this and yet we can do nothing to stop it happening” (Sculpting 231, 234, 235).

Through such passages, Tarkovsky betrays a logic that is based upon an idiosyncratic or, one might even say, a mystical religiosity which attributes a special premillennial significance to the latter half of the twentieth century. We can see him vacillating throughout his writings between gloomy, nebulous prophecies and cynical, pragmatic apprehensions of environmental and geopolitical conditions. To put it another way, Tarkovsky’s aesthetic and religious principles (the two are invariably intermingled) prevent him from overtly participating in a more recognisable environmentalism or in some other form of activism. More importantly, this curious reluctance can be found, I believe, in the films as well as in the writings, and hence, his legacy has been foremost that of an esoteric art-house film director and, after 1983, that of the Russian artist in exile. A cinema of rigorous political engagement, however, has not been his legacy.73

73 After he finished shooting Nostalghia in Italy, Tarkovsky extended his stay in the West and while in London visited St. James’ Church on June 18, 1984 to give a public lecture on the Apocalypse (Time within Time 337). In 1986, even while undergoing chemotherapy treatments, he made extensive notes toward future projects, including a
But in 1970, almost twenty years before completing his book of essays, Tarkovsky did ponder one extreme form of activism. He writes uncharacteristically in his diary that “a new heresy . . . could topple all the ideological institutions of our wretched, barbaric world” and that the “greatness of modern man lies in protest.” But then he adds: “[t]hank God for people who burn themselves alive in front of an impassive, wordless crowd, or who walk into squares with placards and slogans condemning themselves to reprisals, and all those who say ‘No’ to the go-getters and the godless” (Time within Time 16-17). Characteristically, the longed-for revolution collapses into sheer spectacle. He champions the individual who confronts earthbound problems not with a brash political strategy but with the fatalism of a religious martyr. What probably seems to us an affirmation of political dissidence becomes in Tarkovsky’s mind a valorization of extreme gestures that carry strictly symbolic meaning. Even these hypothetical protesters are less conspicuous for their principles and goals than for the risks they take. The gesture and psychology of protest, it seems, hold greater interest for him than the initial problem, which is once again defined in only the vaguest terms. Indeed, one might ask, what is it exactly that should speak to us in such tones of apocalyptic urgency? Corrupt institutions? The progress of “go-getters”? Moral or spiritual vacuity?

In such instances, Tarkovsky seems like several of his protagonists in their darkest and most paranoid moments. We can probably assume they are speaking publically for him. Where he warns of “grand inquisitors,” “leaders,” and “outstanding personalities”

film of the Book of Revelations (Martyrolog II 244). The Apocalypse in the most abstract terms finally interested him most.
who hold “supreme power” in current apocalyptic times (Sculpting 231), a character like his Domenico, the visionary mad-figure in Nostalgia, similarly decries the “the so-called healthy who have brought the world to the verge of ruin.”74 Where Tarkovsky the essayist and diarist is by turns obsessive, hyperbolic, and cryptic, he is so only within a very self-consciously literary construction. Domenico, however, unexpectedly enacts his outrage and despair in public. He is a disenfranchised visionary who is prone to lapses in rational thought, capable of supreme sacrifices. He is the director’s surrogate, it would seem, who, in the tradition of Dostoevsky’s Myshkin or Cervantes’ Don Quixote (two of Tarkovsky’s favourite literary figures), proselytizes but then also viscerally confronts the evil he perceives. The outcome is unimportant.

Nostalgia situates the potentially political gesture within a context which finally owes more to symbolism than activism. Take for example Andrei Gorchakov, Domenico’s spiritual protégé, who crosses the drained pool of St. Catherine with a lit candle as a gesture of pure faith. The crossing is simultaneously a fool’s errand and the film’s climax, a remarkable sequence of characteristically Tarkovskian cinema and the end of the protagonist’s life. No witnesses are present, and it is in any case not clear that anyone could understand the private symbolism of this gesture. Such moments approximate the micropolitics of Anglo literary-modernism, the epiphanal moments in Joyce and Woolf when, for example, Molly Bloom reaffirms her love for her husband. For a cinematic context, we might look toward the existentialist characters of the

74 All film dialogue is given according to the English subtitles of the Fox Lorber Home-Video Series (1991) versions of the films.
canonical auteurs of the 1950s and 60s--of Bergman, Antonioni, Bresson, and to a lesser extent Fellini--world cinema’s high modernists. Similarly, Tarkovsky’s characters experience muted crises: they are tragic figures living in the shadow of a contemporary apocalypse real or imagined; they are destined to fail as if adhering to traditional religious or literary paradigms of martyrdom and noble demises. Like his life and spectacular death, Domenico’s oration--a combination of apocalypticism and eco wisdom--is ultimately hampered by incoherency. The apocalyptic dread is so overpowering, the films suggest, that it induces irrational states. Always in Tarkovsky’s thought only the disenfranchised individual is uniquely positioned to observe history’s trajectory of impending doom. Since the end is truly near and actions are futile, it is a time for symbolic gestures. The time for political action has long passed.

Specifically an Eco-Apocalypse

Nowhere does Tarkovsky provide a thoroughly environmental prose to fit the ecological images, yet tracing the gradual emergence of an ecological conscience within his films is, I suggest, the most profitable approach to his work. Thus, if we examine the films in chronological order, we can trace this emergence, beginning with a very nostalgic and sentimental Romanticism and culminating with stark contemporary parables about nuclear disarmament and environmental degradation. Taken together, the films provide a spectrum of nightmarish images which become a virtual iconography for many types of contemporary ecological concern: Ivan’s Childhood (1962), with its images of war-ravaged, defoliated landscapes; Andrei Roublev (1966), for its depiction of an epoch in
which humans are directly and palpably dependent upon the landscape for their existence; *Solaris* (1972), with its sentient ocean-planet threatened with destruction by scientists from earth; *Stalker* (1979), with its industrialized and polluted landscapes; and finally, *Nostalghia* (1983) and *The Sacrifice* (1986), with their colour-drained environments.

Moreover, the last three films explicitly link environmental concerns to full-blown apocalyptic fears at the narrative level. In their book, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, Vida Johnson and Graham Petrie suggest but leave unexplored the idea that these form a kind of apocalyptic trilogy (142).

In an analogous sense, the earlier films provide the preconditions for reading the later ones; that is, the iconography and visual style of the early films, I want to argue, is recontextualized by the later ones. *The Sacrifice*, for example, can be seen as the explication of concerns long intimated. Specifically, the ravaged landscapes of *Ivan’s Childhood*, *Andrei Roublev* (and to some extent *Mirror*) that form the backdrop for modern warfare and medieval barbarism now reappear, in a manner of speaking, as the manifestation of Alexander’s apocalyptic anxieties—anxieties particular to the late twentieth-century insofar as these arise specifically out of a fear of nuclear weapons (and even more specifically, out of a fear about a global nuclear war that may—may not—have broken out)\(^75\). The landscapes of Alexander’s contemporary nightmares are shot with a

\(^{75}\) What I shall call *The Sacrifice*’s narrative doubling causes some confusion upon a first viewing: the famous sequence in which jets or missiles passing overhead (indicated only by asynchronous sound) presage the shattering of the milk-jug signals a point in the film beyond which simple realist plot-synopsis will not suffice. The subjective camera sequence of Alexander’s earlier vision (the debris-strewn courtyard with burnt-out car) and auditory hallucination (thunderclap) can be explained as owing in varying degrees to...
film stock that drains colour from the image in order to echo in visual terms the black and white stock of the 1960s films. The ravaged landscapes of the first two films, on the other hand, are for their respective audiences safely and purely historical, despite all the horrors they contain; they belong to the traumas of a bygone era, to two dark periods in Russian history, periods when it seemed that two similarly besieged societies and ways of life might be erased. In these two films, ravaged landscapes are quite simply part of the historical setting. The inclusion in Ivan’s Childhood of newsreel footage of precise historical moments (of Berlin after the German surrender, of the charred bodies of Goebbels and his family, for example) helps to situate the film temporally and spatially. In Mirror, the newsreel footage of the Red Army crossing Lake Sivash does the same.

Similarly, it is difficult to find in Andrei Roulewy’s spectacle of a medieval Russia looted and pillaged by invaders a xenophobic metaphor about the present. In such instances, Tarkovsky is practising a realism that, despite poetic embellishments, can join seamlessly with personal or innocuous textbook history.

The Sacrifice, on the other hand, is clearly Tarkovsky’s anxious speculation about the future. To shoot a landscape using technically sophisticated, modern colour-film technology so that it appears to be virtually black and white, so that it is visually reminiscent of the bombed-out landscapes of Ivan’s Childhood, is to deliberately resurrect preternatural sight, phobias, or epilepsy, but, after the milk-jug sequence, events involving all the major characters take place which are contradicted by later events; most crucially, the house guests are gathered before the television to hear the dire broadcast about the military situation, but in the film’s climax Alexander alone believes that there is/was a global crisis. By both isolating nuclear fear in the ballistophobic Alexander and characterising it as a broadly felt, contemporary anxiety, Tarkovsky is able to render the subjectivity of martyrdom and speak obliquely about genuine geopolitical issues.
old traumas for the present day—traumas that the earlier films resurrect largely to reveal as sheer history. Thus, where Ivan’s Childhood, seen in formalist terms, can be said to rely on an uncannily Blakean landscape-iconography of innocence (Ivan’s idyllic childhood memories with his mother and sister) and experience (Ivan’s career as an army scout), the later films now reveal that there are even bleaker sites of experience that Tarkovsky had not yet shown us, that the twentieth century is going from bad to worse. Ivan’s Childhood, to be sure, ends in tragedy; but, as I said, it is a tragedy that is clearly a mere footnote of history, a history in which Russia and its allies survived as the ostensible victors. The Sacrifice evokes a much broader tragedy (if that is even the right word) which affects everyone—“the ultimate war”—a global tragedy with the potential to destroy the entire human species as well as the ecosphere.

Tarkovsky’s final film has been decisively cast out of the realm of sheer allegory (as well as science fiction and propaganda) by history: The Sacrifice premiered at Cannes less than a month after the Chernobyl disaster (April 26, 1986) and this near coincidence has cemented the association of Tarkovsky and contemporary environmental, anti-nuclear, and disarmament discourses.76

In Solaris the astronaut-scientists direct radiation at the sentient ocean in a desperate effort to rid themselves of the “visitors” (the animated clones of persons from

76 Accordingly, Vlada Petric suggests that the cordoned-off zone in Stalker may be Tarkovsky’s oblique reference to a lesser-known environmental disaster of the Soviet era: in 1957, near Cheliabinsk (in west central Russia) an explosion of chemical and nuclear materials resulted in a toxic region, although the incident “was never officially reported” (30-31).
their personal pasts) that it generates. The psychological symbolism of their actions
(whereby destroying the visitors represents destroying a part of yourself) notwithstanding,
it is instructive to view their solution as a metaphor for our collective assaults upon the
ecosphere, insofar as a living and, to the best of their knowledge, sentient organism is
being deliberately and perniciously maimed for the sake of expediency. We can even read
a broader environmental message here: an ecological apocalypse is being perpetrated by
brutally pragmatic scientists who are incapable of exercising proper ethical custodianship
of their “terrain”; they lack empathy toward alien life to the same extent that they have
been callous in their interpersonal relationships.77

As if to defy genre expectations, Tarkovsky frequently shoots his futuristic
astronaut, Kris Kelvin, amidst nature. In marked contrast to all other Tarkovsky
protagonists, however, Kelvin seems to have forgotten entirely how to savour it. In the
film’s opening sequence, he appears strangely wooden in the lush surroundings of his
father’s semi-rural dacha, and his blue leather-jacket (an organic material dyed an

77 In the film the details of the radiation procedure are vague, and in Lem’s novel
several such attempts are given in science-fiction jargon so that it is difficult for us (as it
is for the scientists) to assess ecological impact. In both versions, beamed x-rays are
finally used as a carrier to allow Kelvin’s encephalogram to irradiate the ocean and
thereby “liberate” the astronauts (147, 155, 176). It is also worth noting that in the novel
we learn in passing of a much earlier mission during which the astronauts debated
launching “a thermo-nuclear attack on the ocean” in retaliation for “an eruption of
glutinous mud [which] swallowed . . . up” one-hundred-six men in an instant (124).
Somewhat like Moby Dick, ocean and planet are clearly for both Lem and Tarkovsky
immense and ultimately inscrutable natural forces onto which humans project their
designs and fears. For a Lacanian psychoanalytic reading of the astronauts’
destructiveness in Solaris, of Tarkovsky’s films generally, and of several contemporary
films, see Slavoj Žižek’s recent essay “The Thing from Inner Space.”
unnatural colour) further codifies his estrangement. The narrative logic suggests, via reverse-angle shots, that, even though many of the opening sequence’s extreme-close-up shots of vegetation and flowing water are, in fact, his point of view, he remains unmoved. Indeed, we learn that, although his stroll is now part of a daily routine, he must be urged to it by his father, and this bit of information imbues all of Kelvin’s off-duty behaviour with a kind of somnambulism. Evidently he is the proverbial workaholic who must be told to take a break now and then; the intense pressures of his work (“Solaristics”), we surmise, have made him so, and moreover, have contributed to his failed marriage and ultimately to his wife’s suicide. Similarly, the shots of Kelvin remaining still on the dacha’s balcony while a freak summer-shower douses him suggest that his obliviousness to external stimuli is related to more profound, unresolved traumas, to something deeper than simple self-absorption at any rate.

Great importance should also be attached to the opening sequence because within Tarkovsky’s oeuvre it represents the inaugural moment of his colour filmmaking, and so it is doubly ironic that this first burst of colour—comprised of natural colours and scripted exclusively for the film (Lem’s novel takes place entirely on the alien planet) by nature’s great cinematic valorizer—should be such a sombre affair at the narrative level, occurring, one might say, for the benefit of Kelvin’s blind eyes.  

However, perhaps the crucial question regarding Solaris is: what would the class

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78 The epilogue of the previous film, Andrei Roubliev, in which Tarkovsky’s camera explores in detail a painting by the historical Roubliev, is shot using colour film-stock and is strictly speaking Tarkovsky’s first use of colour (see below). For a positive reading of Kelvin during the pond sequence, see Ludmila Koehler (108-14).
of pragmatic scientists that Kelvin represents do if given free reign to terraform entire planets as they deem appropriate? Would Kelvin not perform the same extermination procedure on a particular parcel of terrestrial land should it hamper science? The science-fiction genre and Kelvin’s seniority in this monumental project (in Lem, it spans four generations) suggest that the future will be a technocratic one where natural environments are expendable. During the discussion about scientific ethics, Kelvin’s father emphasizes this very point, telling his son: “It’s dangerous to send men like you into space. Up there, everything’s too fragile. Earth has adapted itself to your kind, but at a heavy price.”

In Nostalghia Domenico’s obsession with the imminent end of the world is paired with Gorchakov’s self-absorbed nostalghia, or homesickness we would probably say. In the metaphoric and spiritual dimensions that Tarkovsky maps out, it is finally not the apocalyptic fear that is aberrant but rather Gorchakov’s excessive melancholia and his crippling obsession with his family and homeland. In a sense, Domenico cures him of one passion only to replace it with another when he charges him with the symbolic task that has long eluded him (the pool crossing). Significantly, we learn through the gossip of local bathers and a flashback sequence that Domenico too once had what he now recognizes was an overbearing and overprotective love for his family; in fact, it bordered

79 Regarding the particular emotion, mood, and point of view he wanted to capture, Tarkovsky writes: “I wanted to make a film about Russian nostalgia--about that state of mind peculiar to our nation which affects Russians who are far from their native land. . . . I wanted the film to be about the fatal attachment of Russians to their national roots, their past, their culture, their native places, their families and friends; an attachment which they carry with them all their lives, regardless of where destiny may fling them. Russians are seldom able to adapt easily . . . [and generally bear] out the Western view that ‘Russians are bad emigrants’” (Sculpting 202).
on abuse: years earlier he barricaded himself and his family in their home for seven years to await the end of the world. On that earlier occasion, the authorities intervened and freed the family. Domenico’s motivation and logic remain obscure to all but himself—was it a fundamentalist religious gesture in anticipation of a New Testament Revelation, or did he fear a mundane conflagration involving bombs and hostile armies?—and he now has a reputation among locals for “religious fits.”

In metaphoric terms, Domenico re-directs Andrei’s spiritual potential, turning him from a narrowly patriarchal family-man (a role in which he is in practical terms hopeless, for in his dreams he conflates Eugenia, his sexually-available interpreter, with his pregnant wife) into a potential martyr. As a questing existentialist, Gorchakov, we might say, has been looking for signs on this literal journey but so far he has found none.80 Through Domenico’s tutelage, he recognizes implicitly his failures as an artist, husband, and family-man. Confessing his own error, Domenico tells him: “We need bigger ideas. . . . I was selfish. I wanted to save my family. Everyone must be saved, the whole world.” These words could also apply to Gorchakov in the last quarter of the film, during which he unexpectedly breaks off his return to Russia, even though the anticipation of returning home has seemingly been the only thing sustaining him all along, and performs the task with which Domenico has entrusted him. Meanwhile, Domenico delivers his climactic

80 An ambiguous voice-over has a female voice (St. Catherine?) conversing with God about Gorchakov as he strolls through a roofless abbey:
[St. C:] Lord, do you see how he’s asking? Say something.
[God:] But what would happen if he heard my voice?
[St. C:] Let him feel your presence.
[God:] I always do but he’s not aware of it.
oration, which urges humans to become ego-less in order to avoid "the pit into which we are plunging":

We must listen to the voices that seem useless--into brains full of long sewage pipes, of school walls, tarmac and welfare papers the buzzing of insects must enter.

We must go back to where we were, to the point where you took the wrong turn. We must go back to the main foundations of life without dirtying the water.

What gives his oration a degree of coherency are its ecological motifs, and it is this aspect of the speech that communicates most forcefully, if not at the narrative level (again, as a lunatic figure, his problem is finding a sympathetic audience or a context where his words will become lucid) then at the metaphorical level, in the context of Tarkovsky’s entire body of work. Domenico is the incarnation of the unnamed, possibly imaginary activist-martyr that Tarkovsky admired two decades earlier, only now the message--his "No" to the go-getters--is given meaning and poetic force by the images Tarkovsky provides through the film medium. Furthermore, Gorchakov dies in silence so that it is Domenico who disseminates the ecological meaning of their tandem martyrdom. Shortly before he douses himself with gasoline and sets himself alight, Domenico asks, in a rare moment of lucidity, "What kind of a world is this if a madman has to tell you to be ashamed of yourselves?" It is a world in which even the impossibly pristine post-card splendour of Bagno-Vignoni, Tuscany, which the director shoots as a rural enclave comprised of timeless romantic motifs (rolling hills, winding roads, thermal baths, villas, churches, cathedrals in ruins, tiny sawmills), cannot lull one into complacency and cannot safeguard against the eruption of an environmental consciousness so overwhelming that it drives
one character to lay down his life. To what extent, however, is Tarkovsky aware of the anti-humanism implicit in this new broadened consciousness?

Although Tarkovsky equivocates at the narrative level about the origin of the zone in *Stalker*, most critics and viewers agree that the landscapes that are depicted, Zone or otherwise, either portend an environmental collapse or are the result of one. The film’s opening sequence is interrupted by a crawl of a transcription of an “interview with Professor Wallace” (who does not appear elsewhere in the film):

> What was it? A meteorite that fell to earth? Or a visitation from outer space? Whatever it was, there appeared in our small land a miracle of miracles: the ZONE. We sent in troops. None returned. Then we surrounded the ZONE with police cordons... we did right... although I’m not sure... (ellipsis in original)

Is this a red herring? Clearly Tarkovsky wants to retain the science-fiction kernel of the Strugatskys’ story; however, no one in the film explicitly refers to aliens, and the film’s ontological logic is distinct from the “purer” science fiction of Tarkovsky’s *Solaris*. As if to confound the issue further, the explanations about the Zone offered to the unnamed writer by the unnamed professor (i.e., the character played by Nikolai Grinko) upon their arrival in the Zone suggest that, in the absence of any hard scientific facts, all speculation about its origins has come to assume the status of gossip or, at best, folktales, concocted perhaps to mask the banal truth of environmental neglect. In any case, I believe it would

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81 J. Hoberman sees in *Stalker* a “polluted, post-apocalyptic industrial wasteland” but fails to clarify that while this accurately describes the periphery surrounding the Zone, the Zone itself is very lush and green (75). Similarly, Tony Mitchell describes a “wasteland of junk which seems to reflect an apocalyptic vision of the atrophy of freedom, individualism, and industry” (4). Ludmila Koehler recognizes the contrast of Zone and urban periphery, emphasizes the latter’s dire state, but uncritically repeats Tarkovsky’s pronouncement that the Zone too is “diseased” (112).
be a colossal misreading to ascribe the degraded condition of the film’s landscapes, as the
genre logic of paranoid, alien-invasion science fictions tempts us to do, solely to
extraterrestrial interference and to avoid thereby pondering real, contemporary land-use
practices. The significance of the Zone’s precarious status—nature slowly repairing itself
or a worsening toxic hot-spot—is properly understood only by the Stalker.

Ethical Expansion

Although frequently bound to older quasi-religious codes and traditions,
Tarkovsky’s protagonists are in ethical terms the most inquisitive or progressively
minded figures of their immediate social milieu; that is, they wrestle with their
consciences and with the normative moralities of their times and finally arrive at a higher
(or simply newer) truth which frequently leads them to assume a martyr’s posture or to
suffer a deep mental scar. The selfless Ivan, for example, wants only to avenge the deaths
of his family members. His inadvertent xenophobia notwithstanding (German soldiers
killed his family), he emerges as a sentimentalized freedom fighter, and finally martyr,
whose short life the film’s iconography compels us to read as an uncannily Blakean
maturation from innocence into experience. The film can also be read as a romantic
allegory in service to Russian nationalism, an almost nostalgic look at the sacrifices
ordinary citizens were capable of during the war and at the camaraderie of men at the
front. In later films, Tarkovsky jettisons the Russian nationalism, retaining, however, a
deep Slavophilia and an increasingly personalised nostalgia for, if not the nation, then the
homestead.
Ivan's ethical growth is severely circumscribed, but it is a growth nevertheless. The deep love he feels for his now-dead mother and sister, as evidenced in the flashback sequences, torments him but also strengthens his resolve to fight on. In one sense, what Tarkovsky gains in metaphorical or allegorical terms by scripting an immature boy (the romantic child in nature) he loses in ethical terms: Ivan is a pure product of his environment, and his decision to fight a martyr's fight does not result from a dramatised inner torment or debate, unlike the torments of later Tarkovsky protagonists. Ivan never truly tests received truths (love for family, home, and nature; patriarchal duty), nor does he undergo a spiritual or ethical conversion comparable to those of Kelvin (Solaris) or Andrei (Nostalghia). Collectively, Tarkovsky's films suggest that the capacity to recognize these ethical truths and values is innate, but that they may lie dormant within our conscience, and that humans need to be roused by a decisive spiritual crisis in their lives. Ivan certainly faces crises, but never the crisis; his entire wartime life is a kind of shell-shocked existence. Ultimately, however, he is a metaphor for an innocence-experience polarity, although we do not ever witness a conscious transformation from one state of being to another. His love for nature is intuitive, Tarkovsky suggests. But in wartime, the knowledge of forest and terrain acquired in play has become the object of deadly earnest, adult concerns. When, for example, he returns from a reconnaissance mission with pockets full of acorns, nuts, and twigs—the rustic toys of the rural youngster—we see that they have become mnemonic devices that allow him to count and keep track of enemy positions. A spiritual transformation has occurred, but Ivan can hardly be said to understand it in such clear terms; when he is left alone, for example, he reverts to
childish war-games that fuse with the real war-experiences he has undergone.

Another such potential innocent is Tarkovsky’s Roublé, a religious-icon painter of the Andronnikov monastery. Although his religious vows pledge him to a life of non-violence, Roublé picks up an axe and slays an invader (offscreen) who is attempting to rape a female simpleton who leads a kind of vagabond existence, roaming the countryside at the mercy of vaster historical forces (episode 6). His decision to take up arms now must be seen in terms of earlier “failures” or instances when he and his fellow monks behave in accordance with their monastic code and do not interfere with “worldly” affairs: during the assault on the entertaining buffoon (episode 1), in the proximity of the incidental torture of an unidentified man during Kirill’s visit to Theophanes the Greek (episode 2), and most notably during the pursuit of the pagan revellers by the Grand Duke’s men (episode 4). Through such incidents, Tarkovsky examines the monastic principle of non-interference from a broader historical perspective, as if to ask: is this a fundamental Christian virtue regrettably lost over time or a notion that is antiquated? We might also imagine here Tarkovsky examining in sublimated fashion his own “apolitical” artistic practices.

Tarkovsky does not finally settle the matter. Clearly, however, he would have us recognize that Roublé’s particular virtues often lie in his expediency, in his ability to forget his vows momentarily and to take action; that is, in his ability to find a compromise. Later, when Roublé and the simpleton emerge as the sole survivors of the Tartar massacre, his conscience returns; he feels remorse, and, in a hallucinatory sequence, he even makes a quasi-confession to the ghost of his mentor, the now-deceased
Theophanes. Similarly, when the simpleton first arrives at the cathedral, she innocently enters to escape the rain. Because her hair is uncovered in a holy place, she is technically committing a blasphemous act and is sharply rebuked, but Roublev springs to her defence (episode 5).

More pointedly, in the *kino-roman*, or screen novel, written by Tarkovsky (published posthumously and translated in 1991), the simpleton eventually gives birth to an illegitimate child while staying at the monastery. Roublev has sponsored her sanctuary and has endured the suspicions and gossip of his fellow monks, one of whom argues that Roublev "brought her here for his own shame, . . . so as to have his sin in front of his eyes at all time" (134-35). Immediately following the birth of the "little Tartar," the mother regains her speech and mental faculties while the monks declare that a miracle has taken place and, at their abbot's behest, venerate mother and child (140-42). The film leaves out this pregnancy-birth-cure subplot, but there too the monastery grants her asylum. In both versions, Roublev's instinctive charity is validated, and, through his actions, the monastery's ostensible purpose (facilitating asceticism, fraternity, apprenticeship, and penance) is expanded to include tolerance, charity, and broader social purpose. The episode shows Tarkovsky's hero behaving according to the dictates of an increasingly personalised conscience.\(^2\)

\(^2\) The *kino-roman* must not be confused with novelisations of popular films. In her translator's note, Kitty Hunter-Blair explains that the genre is "a well-established convention in Soviet and Polish cinema, [and] is in effect a present-tense novel written as a first, prose version of the film. It is the basis for the screenplay or shooting script which will be used by the director during filming" (Tarkovsky, *Andrei Rublev* 4).
While Tarkovsky’s account of Rouleve’s life has many of the characteristics of a religious allegory (travels, temptations, errors, struggles, moments of despair, and so forth), there are too many deliberate chronological gaps and the narrative is finally too open-ended for this definition to apply meaningfully even as a structuring principle. No, what finally emerges is a fallible monk who is, in Bakhtinian terms, thoroughly novelised or, to put it another way, humanised according to literary conventions that came to full fruition in the nineteenth century. What matters most, I believe, are his pangs of conscience, the dilemma of secularism versus asceticism, and his conflicted motives: he is an artist, a holy man, a patriot, a soldier, and symbolically a father (to Foma, his apprentice, and later to Boriska, the young bell-caster). Accordingly, the episodes of his life do not finally cohere neatly as a symbolic paradigm; instead he emerges as the film’s exemplary albeit fallible ethical figure, a character who anticipates the director’s thoroughly conflicted modern protagonists.

Conversely, one might ask whether the sacrstian who is tortured to death by the invaders becomes, in Tarkovsky’s mind, a true Christian martyr or whether his defiance is foolhardy and his death is merely another random occurrence in a barbaric age (episode 6)? I pose these questions because the film offers none of the consolations typical of later Tarkovsky—moments when, for example, we briefly glimpse some sort of a transcendent realm (often via the anguished consciousness of a protagonist) or when we are made to see as someone possessing great faith or preternatural insight might see in an epiphanal moment. Here I have in mind the hallucinatory sequences of Kelvin’s mental breakdown and the climactic high-angle shots of his homecoming in Solaris; the daughter’s
telekinetic feat at the end of Stalker; the voices of God and Saint Catherine conversing in Nostalghia; and Alexander’s numerous hallucinatory spells in The Sacrifice. Typically, in these later films, suffering (if not outright martyrdom) and preternatural seeing are closely linked; at times the latter seems to be obtained at the cost of the former, and one could argue that in the later films Tarkovsky follows obscurely the Book of Job’s Old-Testament logic whereby sufferings and deprivations are preludes to enlightenment.

With Andrei Roublev, however, Tarkovsky celebrates a protagonist who, given his environment, suffers relatively little—that is, less than many of his contemporaries and less than other Tarkovsky protagonists. His role in the film is far less determined by the ending; the end is not marked by his descent into madness or despair, nor by his death. What, then, does this characterization suggest? Roublev, I believe, represents Tarkovsky’s first portrait of an artist conceived in modern terms, a kind of medieval Bildungsroman. Again, the kino-roman is revealing in that it contains numerous climactic instances omitted from the film, instances in which the painter apprehends and, thinking in leaps and bounds, at once articulates revolutionary insights about aesthetics: “Those pupils are so full of light,” he exclaims when seeing Theophanes’s icons for the first time. “And I might have lived my whole life through and never seen it . . . . How long does a man have to study to be able to paint like that? Or maybe you don’t have to study at all?” (emphasis added 27). Accordingly, we do not find Roublev working in a cubicle or poring over the works of other painters in a monastery archive. Instead Tarkovsky envisions the monk having numerous, similarly epiphanal moments out-of-doors: each chapter opens with or contains at least one meticulously detailed description of nature that suggests that
he had in mind for the film a series of very specific and complex establishing-shots, increasingly irrelevant to the simple advancement of the plot and, moreover, probably unfilmable:

Evening is drawing on. The murky red sun is growing colder in the frosty air. The pine forest is as still as if it were made of wrought iron, transfixed, resonant; and the heavy snow of several weeks lies sleeping on the dark, springy, green needles. (31)

The spring woods, still transpicuous, have fallen into the dark River Kliazma. The sun is setting; the faded sky has not had time to draw up the density of evening before it lightens to meet the sunset. (90)

In the evenings it is shivery and sinister among the black, damp trees looming through the mist that gnaws away at the snow. (151)

The sky, cold and pale, is mirrored in a clear March puddle lying by the doorway of a sagging hut. Towards evening there will be a touch of frost, and even the first star will not have time to see itself reflected, for a matt, fragile film of ice will be drawn across the blue water. That is, of course, if no one comes out of the hut and stumbles into it in the dark. Then there will be a gentle crunch, and on the dark, disturbed surface, along with splinters of ice, the reflection of that first star will rock for a little, then gradually grow still, as if frozen into the fresh sheet of ice spreading over the thick, cold water. (162)

Herein, I would argue, lies one possible genesis for the mature nature-aesthetic that Tarkovsky will demonstrate throughout the later films. His protagonist's insight notwithstanding, turns in the library were useful to the director. Often seeming like an artist's sketchbook of random ideas, Tarkovsky's diaries reveal that he read widely in the Western canon and was a great admirer of such avid nature observers as Goethe, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and Darwin. Consequently, it is probably no great surprise that he had thought long about the representation of nature not only by visual means (film and painting) but also by textual ones. In Sculpting, for example, he discusses how he
once planned to translate a lyric poem into a short film (91-93). The envisioned film was not to be a true translation but rather an integration of two genres because the words would have been heard in voice over. As well, it was to include a musical fragment from Hayden. Of course, the bringing together in film of older artistic forms (painting, music, poetry, literature in the form of very tactile books) becomes a Tarkovsky signature in all the later films. However, what I want to point out here is that by the very act of writing the *kino-roman*, by accepting fully the conventions of another genre, by accepting that it is not simply a matter of writing rough notes from which to make the film, he demonstrates the belief that through writing prose he can somehow hone his cinematographic skills. Doing one thing teaches you to do another, is the implicit lesson. By his admission, mechanical translating ought never to be a goal when moving from text to celluloid: “It is a grave . . . mistake to try to make a film correspond exactly with what is written on paper, to translate onto the screen structures that have been thought out in advance” (*Sculpting* 93-94). It is in this light that we should also read his quoting of Goethe: “it is as hard to read a good book as it is to write it” (*Sculpting* 46), an aphorism which suggests the director’s readiness to regard his task as the furthering and refining of earlier ideas. In this spirit Tarkovsky rewrites nineteenth-century romanticism: in order to form an ecological aesthetic that is relevant in the late twentieth century.

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83 The poem, “As a child I once fell ill,” written by Tarkovsky’s father, Arseny Tarkovsky, a noted figure in his own right, is featured in *Nostalghia* in a different context than imagined here. Gorchakov recites it in fragments when, after Eugenia’s departure, he wanders drunkenly into the flooded church. The full, translated text as well as the original appear in *Sculpting* (91-92, 246).
This tutelage ideal first finds clear expression at the level of plot in the Theophanes-Roublev-Foma hierarchy, whereby the artist-mentor takes on an apprentice who in turn takes on another apprentice. What in reality might have yielded a violent Oedipal struggle or, given the era of serfdom, a brutal form of exploitation, Tarkovsky envisions as a benign and ego-less relationship in which the pupil’s sight is guided by a kindly father-figure. But, as many of the film’s episodes attest, such harmony can only be sustained within the monastery. Significantly, disruptive elements are expelled, or relegated to a sub-plot. For example, Kirill, Roublev’s artistic rival, is characterised as self-righteous and vicious (he beats a dog to death in episode 2). When he returns to the monastery after a long self-imposed exile, he is a broken man, finally contrite only after having squandered his talent (episodes 1 and 8). Tarkovsky refuses to equate his rebellion against the order (in, say, Miltonic or Blakean terms) with a unique, volatile creativity, one that could have thrived in a different environment, and so Kirill remains a stock-figure of the jealous, inferior artist.

On the other hand, a minor quarrel between Foma and Roublev is more comical than serious: Roublev berates his pupil for lying, inattentiveness, and stealing honey from the apiary. After chastising him at some length but to no avail, he tries to be conciliatory in a roundabout way by forcing the youth to examine a hop-vine and then inviting him to crawl through the forest on all fours to examine ant-hills and to observe swans, the implicit lesson being that provided one knows how to look at nature, every detail is instructive: “Hop [he tells Foma, is] . . . something quite special. It doesn’t recognize any of the rules. Look it’s thrown this shoot off to the right, and it wanted to swing this one
out to the left, but there's no room, so it made it hang down--and again it's beautiful” (44). It seems to be a lesson about Foma's disobedience and about tolerance: even in wild growth (as in a pupil's prankish impulses) the vigilant teacher can discern a pattern and can learn to find something valuable, for example. But Roublev simply continues: “As far as the drunken hop is concerned, rules just don't exist. Trees and grass and flowers all grow upwards, but this one, look at it, it crawled up to the top of the trunk, and when it couldn't go any further it started growing downwards. And it always looks good. It makes things beautiful in whatever way it wants . . .” (44). Too engrossed perhaps in his narration, Roublev never delivers the expected lesson, in which, say, he emerges as the gardener who will prune the wild growth into order, or in which we learn of God's hand in designing all things. In such passages and in the later films, nature is an endless allegory, but there are no discrete symbols and no paraphrasable messages. Roublev ends his lecture, but the impromptu excursion continues at some length until a hunting party shatters the idyl by killing one of the swans that the two monks have been quietly observing (50).

While this long sequence was never filmed as planned, its text form is noteworthy, I believe, because it brings together several thematic strands crucial to the film and to Tarkovsky's oeuvre, especially to the later films.84 First, direct contact with

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84 In the film, as the two are passing through a forest, a much sterner Roublev similarly berates Foma (whose face is comically swollen from bee-stings) and then tries in vain to get him to notice a snake at the edge of a pool of water. After an unmotivated, close-up panning-shot of the ground, with mud, roots, and delicate wild flowers, Roublev warns: "only by prayer can the soul transcend the flesh." Then, en route to an errand, Foma discovers the dead swan. The sequence is remarkable in that, as Johnson and Petrie
nature—not through study, but through excursions undertaken spontaneously or for their own sake entirely—is vital to the growth of the artist and is, moreover, a vital component of the virtually secular humanism that Tarkovsky espouses. As the director places his protagonist—and by extension the audience—into vibrant landscapes, the monk in turn guides his pupil into a more intimate visual contact with his surroundings. No lessons need to be drawn; one benefits simply by being immersed in nature, as if by osmosis. It is a spiritual exercise, but one that remains focused on the material, sensuous here-and-now. Nature remains other. "Opening up in front of Andrei and his pupil is a beautiful, fabulous world," writes Tarkovsky (46). Following a similar logic, the Stalker hopes that his clients will shed their world-weary cynicism after simply spending time in the Zone (in fact, when he enters the Zone, he rolls in its long grass, seeking the same tactile proximity to nature that Roublev teaches). As well, we can find a similar belief in nature underwriting Nostalghia and The Sacrifice, although the landscapes are materially very different.

Furthermore, the nature excursions planned for Andrei Roublev's painter-monks are exercises in aesthetic appreciation in the broadest sense. However, suspicions of any narrowly utilitarian or vocational purposes are misguided since the apprentices are learning to paint religious icons not landscapes; they are observing nature's details not simply to reproduce them. Significantly, we can gather from subtle clues that Foma is

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note, "the camera focuses as much on the tree trunks, roots, mud, and the surface of the water as on the human figures" (267). Comparing the two versions, we can clearly see that there was uncertainty developing in Tarkovsky's mind about how to delineate and arrange hierarchically God, nature, and humans.
interested in the colours themselves rather than the actual content of the paintings, religious or otherwise (41, 44, 46). What Tarkovsky evidently imagined the Andronnikov monastery to symbolise is a kind of medieval liberal-arts collective, espousing in inchoate form his personal ideal that a series of seemingly unrelated artistic practices (film, literature, poetry, painting, prose, music, adaptation, translation, etc.) can provide a psychological sanctuary that keeps the horrors of the real world at bay or neutralizes them, just as the monastery walls do. In fact, the intangible barriers are probably more important, for in the film, although the Tartars come to the monastery after the horrific raid on the cathedral (episode 6), they are invited in and there is no bloodshed, the monks practising a kind of passive resistance by largely ignoring them (episode 7). Accordingly, these ideals as well as the characterisation of Roublev help to explain the ongoing presence in Tarkovsky's later films of the self-effacing teacher, who suggests with great subtlety, who may place little value on his or her own life, and who sometimes reappears as a sterner, more resolute prophet-figure when the apocalyptic crises become dire. To understand, for example, Kelvin's father, Snaut, Hari, Berton (the discredited pilot in Solaris), Gibarian (the astronaut who has committed suicide but has left a video message for Kelvin), the Stalker's wife, Otto (the postman in The Sacrifice), and Maria (the servant and possible witch in The Sacrifice)—not to mention the Stalker and Domenico—we might look toward Roublev. The self-effacing teacher aids the protagonist but is not typically the figure upon whom the central sacrificial act hinges.

Furthermore, the film medium is uniquely able to mediate the nature mysticism that gradually occurred to Tarkovsky during the making of his first two films. At present,
however, film has failed notoriously to accomplish this task, even in superficial terms (see the epigraph for this chapter). In Tarkovsky’s later work the celebration of nature comes increasingly to seem like an ideal that eclipses all others. Most tellingly, the climactic unveiling of the historical Rouleev’s artwork—via a sequence of panning shots we catch glimpses of painted Christian figures such as apostles, angels, the Virgin, culminating with a dissolve to the face of Christ—is upstaged by a final shot of a rainy, green landscape with horses! Christ, then, is actually the penultimate shot in this film of the life of a celebrated religious artist. In the *kino-roman*, we learn that Rouleev’s human contacts, as much as nature, have inspired all of his artistic endeavours and are, in fact, *in* the paintings as models drawn from life who stood for the religious figures: “the faces of . . . women have been taken by Andrei, and . . . elevated into the throng of the Righteous” (187). In the film, however, the epilogue recalls Rouleev’s nature “lesson”: like the pious monk, Tarkovsky is unable—or unwilling because he finds it unnecessary—to fully reconcile nature with God. Yet, there is no hint of a conflict or a lack of artistic vision; the two realms merely lie next to each other like a diptych that will not yield a synthesis.  

Within the unique variant of romanticism that Tarkovsky is developing, then, nature begins to insinuate itself into all of the protagonists’ minds. That is the backbone of all the plots. On a more properly aesthetic and cinematographic level, Tarkovsky

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85 About the historical Rouleev’s work, Philip Strick writes, “[a]lthough a further stage of iconic development was to follow Rublëv’s [sic] innovations, his work was the pivot on which Byzantine art turned into Russian, providing a model which, by Church decree, was faithfully copied from then on” (xi). For a discussion of Tarkovsky’s portrayal of Rouleev and an analysis the icon sequence, see Johnson and Petrie (89, 272, 313 n.12).
clearly wanted from here onward to explore the visual properties of filming nature
without metaphysical baggage, or, at any rate, with a new kind of metaphysical baggage,
hence the proliferation of unexpected close-up and extreme close-up shots of flora, muds,
soils, waters, oils, debris, etc. I use the plural forms because, through the proliferation of
these shots, we learn that the stuff under our feet does, in fact, possess variety. But the
director’s enthusiasm contains perhaps a myopia since the need for complex
anthropocentric narratives diminishes. The tightly plotted, suspenseful *Ivan’s Childhood*
(it is despite its sentimentalism, after all, a film about the preparations for a military
mission) gives way to the rambling, episodic *Andrei Roublev*. Beyond these two films,
plots become increasingly loose and characters increasingly stylized. In the early films
(*Ivan’s Childhood, Andrei Roublev*) the protagonists wrestle with familiar human
concerns (duty to family, God, work; mortality; faith; alienation), while the romantic
landscapes simply provide a metaphoric and literal ground against which these narratives
take place. In the later films (*Solaris, Stalker, Nostalghia, The Sacrifice*), this hierarchy is
reversed: the landscapes and nature are foregrounded while characterisation recedes,
becoming increasingly stylised and even non-representational. Cinematography, dialogue,
and narrative all underscore this alteration. Essentially, what had been peripheral or
merely scenic becomes central to Tarkovsky’s cinematic aesthetic. His eco-conscience,
onece dormant or coded only in romantic tropes, now emerges fully. The erasures of the
latter protagonists are self-willed or self-inflicted and suggest that the endpoint of the eco-
conscience’s development could well be a profound anti-humanism, not a neo-
romanticism. Tarkovsky tries to mask this polarity or rift, but the terms are not properly
reconcilable. The later films, I am arguing, are distinctly trifurcated into: (1) virtuoso displays of cinematography; (2) the long-winded, cryptic philosophizing of the main characters; and (3) skeletal, deliberately impoverished plots. That is, where Andrei Roulelev presents in cinematic terms a kind of Bakhtinian, fully-integrated humanist character, characters like Stalker, Gorchakov, Domenico, and Alexander are starkly stylised (for example, because of how they appear under specific lighting conditions, how they state their despair in anecdotal or philosophic terms, and how they serve the plot). Regardless of personal background, they all speak in a similar world-weary tone, suggesting a formulaic characterisation and, moreover, the director’s latent postmodernist tendencies.

Functioning like the random close-up shots of nature in Andrei Roulelev, are the high-altitude shots of the swirling Solaris ocean as seen from a space-station porthole. These impinge upon Kelvin’s consciousness, as if to suggest that, by staring into the ocean, he is finally learning somehow to accept the guilt for his wife’s death, something he was unable to do while looking contemplatively into the pond on earth. However, the ultimate trajectory of Kelvin’s journey--its meaning--is perhaps the most elusive one in all of Tarkovsky. Of all the protagonists, he is the most difficult to place on the ethical scales I have been outlining. Viewing the films chronologically, we see that he is the most

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Seven virtually identical, high-altitude shots punctuate the film upon Kelvin’s arrival on the station. The first two can be understood as true point-of-view shots because we see Kelvin motioning towards the porthole as if to look out; the remaining five, however, are not set up in this manner, but I suggest they are to be read as his traumatic recollections of looking at the ocean.
ambiguous character thus far, in particular with regard to his motivations. Tarkovsky’s unmistakable admiration for the sentimentalised Ivan and conflicted Roublev is, in the end, beyond debate. Kelvin, however, ultimately does succeed in ridding himself of the unwanted clone of his fatally devoted, formerly deceased wife—his fear, remorse, mental breakdown, and guilt-induced acceptance of her return(s) notwithstanding. The initial scenes of her (re)appearances, in particular, are chilling in their unwitting misogyny, insofar as we are being asked to identify with a man who is in cold blood killing an innocent woman (albeit a “synthetic” version of a woman) and are being asked, according to the logic of earlier Tarkovsky films, to identify with his great anguish. Finally, at the end of his ordeal, there occurs a conciliatory homecoming in which he kneels before his father in such a manner that their positions suggest Rembrandt’s Return of the Prodigal Son, although extravagance has been the least of his sins.

Tarkovsky’s blindspots, I suggest, are many and may include an unchecked nationalism. But Kelvin’s return makes better sense to my mind if we read him as accepting, perhaps unwittingly, the simulacra of father, homestead, and nature that are provided by the ocean planet. Besides Hari, Kelvin’s father has been the strongest voice of the humanistic values that Tarkovsky celebrates throughout. Metaphorically he represents the nature enclave that surrounds the dacha. Also, he is literally a spokesperson for ecology—the self-effacing teacher, although he quarrels openly with Kelvin—in this film. By accepting the simulacra of return, Kelvin is finally accepting nature—that is the new, alien ecology of the planet—and is admitting, as much as he can, the error in his earlier emotionally callous, technocratic value-system, which could not fully embrace
terrestrial nature. Here, then, Kelvin’s somnambulistic return “home” represents a greater triumph than the eventual acceptance of his “wife.” Having developed an empathy for the old landscape is his final consolation.

The Child in Nature

“A poet has the imagination and psychology of a child” (Sculpting 41)

Taken collectively, Tarkovsky’s filmic images and narratives attempt to invigorate what is potentially a rather hackneyed and sentimental formulation. In Tarkovsky the idealised “child” may take on many guises: for example, a hypersensitive subject with a smattering of spiritual beliefs that are outpaced by the contemporary world’s geopolitical and technological developments. This is the voice Tarkovsky assumes in the essays, albeit with a less than poetic timbre. As well, in the films, fragile characters seem to approximate best the child-like qualities Tarkovsky has in mind. Being romantically attuned to nature, in ideal circumstances, or simply to the physical environment (as opposed to, say, the political one), in most circumstances, allows the subject to register the true despair of the age and to sense imminent crises.

In the kino-roman of Andrei Roublev, Tarkovsky attributes an immature subjectivity to the mute, female simpleton, or holy fool, whom he envisions living her own self-contained, concentrated life. . . . [Her] round gentle face . . . is like the face of a child which reflects, instantly and directly, all the awareness and feelings evoked by the world around it. The simpleton is natural and primitive in the way that a rainbow or a stream are natural and have one meaning, because she has a mysterious, organic connection with every phenomenon of nature—with rain, fire, or the croaking of frogs—for she herself is a fragment of nature. (137 emphasis added)
Here we see a sizable blind spot in Tarkovsky’s humanism, for his gender biases prevent him from exploring the world through her eyes, let alone scripting her as a protagonist; to Tarkovsky she is, as readily as a hop vine, a “fragment of nature,” only with a human face—an inscrutable object, finally, that Roublev can marvel at. Similarly, the naked pagans (who much like Homeric sirens nearly seduce the hero) enjoy a proximity to nature that Tarkovsky admires; yet he cannot articulate in the film their radically other, non-Christian perspective, and, of course, Roublev tellingly flees from them. We see them, but there is no attempt to use the camera subjectively to let us see how they see. This motif is in some sense repeated in The Sacrifice when Alexander, at Otto’s urging, seeks out his housekeeper, Maria (who is a witch, he is told), so that he can sleep with her and thereby save the world from nuclear destruction. He has at this point already promised God he will relinquish all his possessions and his power of speech to secure the same result, but apparently it does not hurt to be doubly sure. Maria alone shares Alexander’s despair and compassion for humanity, but, again, the film does not accommodate her undoubtedly unique view of the crisis.

After Ivan’s Childhood, then, the notion of the psychology of the child, while not necessarily embodied in a single protagonist nor even in an adolescent character, remains a romantic, largely masculine ideology that runs through all the films. It is in the name of children, or the next generation, that the symbolic tasks of the later films are completed. Revisiting a theme he first addressed in The Sense of an Ending, Frank Kermode writes on this very subject in a recent essay: “[o]ne reason why we do not lead our lives as if they existed solely in an order of simple chronicity [that is, we lead them with an intuitive
need for apocalyptic closures] is that we cannot cease to be conscious of the existence of our parents and our children, which simply requires us to attend to a time that is not merely our time” (Carey 16). Herein lies one possible reason for Tarkovsky’s anguished juxtapositions of childhood and apocalyptic dread. While the sensitive, adolescent psychology suggests to him a model for apprehending global crises in a microcosm, it is the selfless adult alone who can take action. But there are further affinities between sensitive children and adults.

In an important sense, the early protagonists are the rough drafts for the later ones; the problems first encountered in historical or sentimental guises are later re-encountered in ephemeral and largely apolitical terms. For Tarkovsky, the later formulations of ethical problems represent a refinement. I suggest that he was working through a series of questions that plagued him for much of his adult life, questions regarding, for instance, the proper role of activism and political engagement, which he could envision only in his diaries, and which he does not include in any of his films even when he might have been able to do so while in exile. We might say that the mature Tarkovsky, then, chose to forge an elitist, quasi-modernist cinema that increasingly valued abstraction, loose allegorising, and formalistic aestheticism despite his awareness of real-world strife and, of course, the environment.

Accordingly, Ivan and Roublev participate in real wars, are witness to (or suffer) torture, trauma, and deaths; but Alexander fears a nuclear war that is perhaps only theoretically possible, and his real trauma may be a displaced version of something else entirely, something intangible (for example, his sexual impotence, his wife’s infidelity
and regret, his failures as an artist, or the gnawing, more general environmental anxiety that Tarkovsky believes we all share). Likewise, Rouleve overcomes a creative block and self-doubt in order to create religious art under the oppressive conditions of his time; Gorchakov’s torpor of self pity, meanwhile, festers in one of the most harmonious environments imaginable, until he encounters Domenico, who teaches him to ponder a greater despair. Reading him uncharitably, we might say that, like Kelvin, he forsakes his wife to devote his last energies to ecology.

Also, we may think of the Stalker here, whose material deprivations Tarkovsky shows but does not narrate in detail; is he, for example, a war veteran, an ex-prisoner, a shanty-town dweller representing a new global underclass? What sort of socio-political structure are we seeing here? In the absence of strong indicators, one may be inclined to look immediately toward literary (or allegorical) models. Like a Dickensian ragpicker or like Ballard’s Quilter, the Stalker has become a solitary forager, presiding as if by squatter’s rights over an area that has been disowned by state, municipality, and industry alike, and of which no one will assume proper custodianship. The Zone is devoid of everything but the interplay of ruins and nature. In the Strugatskys’ novel, however, an entire economy accrues to the Zone, and there are complex ramifications: the town’s economy is dependent upon the Zone; people move away or are relocated; there is government assistance; there is both a legitimate and illegitimate traffic in Zone plunder; stalkers are injured and even killed; etc. Where the novel seems to offer an infinitely suggestive critique of Western capitalism, Tarkovsky’s film eliminates the Strugatskys’ framework of social realism almost entirely in order to construct an allegorical narrative
about nascent environmentalism arising from amidst the disenfranchised. Here, ecology trumps anthropocentric social concerns, in Tarkovsky’s estimation.87

In a similar sense, the central characters collectively represent one life, a kind of composite Tarkovskian protagonist: for example, childhood, full of romantic potential, is represented by Ivan, Boriska, Foma, and Kelvin (in the home-movie footage); middle-aged adulthood, in which duties come into focus, by Galtsev, Roublev, the adult Kelvin, the Stalker, the writer, the professor, and Gorchakov; and finally, old age by Theophanes, Alexander, Domenico, and Kelvin’s father. The childhood spent in the proximity of nature is seemingly a pre-requisite for the drive to become a prophet or martyr in old age.

Typical as well are childish weaknesses and vulnerabilities that are revealed as sources of an uncanny strength. Most obviously this transformation occurs in Ivan, whose small size, youthful agility, and knowledge of the terrain, make him the ideal reconnaissance soldier. He is a proto-naturalist insider who is, somewhat like Shakespeare’s Caliban and Sarah Orne Jewett’s Silvy, bartering with vast forces from the outside to preserve the ground that is sacred to him in a way that he cannot articulate.

Similarly, the rules and complicated Zone protocols that the Stalker follows and insists his party also adhere to, one suspects, are part of a child-like delusional state; he carefully

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87 Jameson has soundly criticised the film as a “lugubrious religious fable,” with the Stalker standing as a suffering Christ figure (Geopolitical Aesthetic 92). He ignores, however, how readily any reading of the film as fable becomes incoherent or complicated when pushed a little. Staying with the idea of religious fable, one might just as well ask whether the Zone is a tainted Eden that has been vacated not by the human sinners, but by the presiding deity (in this case, the aliens)? Is the paradise still worth having if the gods have abandoned it?
outlines idiosyncratic rituals that suggest play but also a quasi-pantheistic faith in nature. Entering the Zone under fire, however, he is a grim and determined professional.

Unfettered play can also recur in a new guise. Domenico compulsively peddles a stationary bicycle, appearing as much an obstinate Quixote as a child engaged in a game. The locals believe he cannot care for himself and that he must be prevented for his own safety from entering the pool. Perhaps most important though is his studio space, which is arranged as if to emulate (or parody) an artist's workspace filled with unfinished projects. His ultimate project, of course, is his own immolation, but he has also apparently constructed in one section of the room the miniature landscape which in some sense can be taken as triggering Gorchakov's ecological awakening. Seeming to be nothing more than aimless childlike play and the symbol of a deranged mind, the miniature landscape when treated by the camera, creates the illusion of being linked to the real landscape outside, which can be glimpsed through the window. Like Gorchakov, we suddenly recognize the bonsai-like intricacies that Domenico is capable of creating. The characters who are, like children, weak, idle, unsuccessful, frustrated, or unworldly throughout their adult lives emerge finally as the ecological custodians needed to save the planet. Art, like play, is necessary to this emergence, but in the later films it is not the end point of ethical development.

The first three protagonists (Ivan, Roublev, and Kelvin) hold circumscribed views when seen in the vaster global contexts of the later films: they want mostly to save themselves (and perhaps a few persons of their circle); in contrast, the last three--the Stalker, Domenico, and Alexander--want to save humankind almost from the start,
extending the Kermodian desire to save immediate family and kin to subsequent
generations, conceived in the broadest possible terms. The later films represent the
discovery of deeper ethical concerns about a common humanity: ecological and global
threats, but without the early sentimentalised or nationalised version of that threat.
Accordingly, the war that looms over The Sacrifice is not geopolitically real like the ones
in Ivan’s Childhood and Andrei Roublev; it is nuclear war in the abstract.

If the adult protagonists do not directly speak about childhood experiences—or
even indirectly, like Gorchakov who recites the poem about youth—then they often haunt
or are a haunted by an idyllic landscape to which they return repeatedly in figurative
terms. This compulsion is ultimately an integral part of their ethical triumphs. Thus,
Rouleb tries to get others to see nature as he does (that is, somewhat like a landscape- or
nature-painter before the advent of scenic painting). Kelvin tries to find catharsis or
therapy in the pond and dacha setting, but he cannot do so until it has been lost. Similarly,
watching home movies with one of the resurrected Hari’s, he re-inhabits the space of his
childhood (significantly, it is largely a rural setting) and tries hereby to acquaint this new
wife with his memories, the two seemingly enacting a science-fiction version of “Tintern
Abbey.” Gorchakov, haunted by the landscape of home, is finally able to return to it after
his selfless death. Alexander’s nightmarish encounter with the miniature of his own house
and the grounds that surround it presage his successful martyrdom in some obscure way.
Ivan, who first brought the landscape inside in the form of twigs and pine needles, who is
haunted by memories of his earlier, happy childhood, and who must now repeatedly
traverse the terrain of his childhood, inaugurates a Tarkovskian motif: Ivan’s lost
childhood is the trauma seemingly suffered by all the characters.

Ruins in the Landscape

Already in *Ivan’s Childhood* we can see Tarkovsky developing his signature iconography whereby conventionally romantic ruins (well, windmill, churchyard, remote farmhouse, chimney) are combined with the ugly debris of twentieth-century warfare (the crashed airplane). The mobilization of troops provides the backdrop for Ivan’s metaphoric transition from innocence to experience and also literally churns up the landscape to help bring about the decisive change from a seemingly perpetual, full-bloom summer (the time of Ivan’s recollections) to a defoliated and muddy late-autumn or winter (the war). The forests are rife with enemy soldiers and flooded to what seems an unnatural degree. In *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky refers to a “flooded dead forest.” Trenches now mar the landscape that once seemed Ivan’s privileged adolescent realm, and the birch forest that provides the setting for the brief pastoral interlude of two would-be lovers (who significantly hear both woodpeckers and gunfire) also supplies the lumber for a bunker. The beach (or one very much like it) that was once the playground for Ivan and his playmates, is now within enemy sniper range. The apple orchards that supplied the truckload of apples in the next-to-last dream sequence are echoed by denuded trees.

Also noteworthy is the shelling sequence, which consists mostly of a rapid montage of sites recognizable from earlier shots (trenches, beach, churchyard, water) but now under heavy fire. It is perhaps also the first time that one can clearly recognize that Lieutenant Galtsev’s post is a church basement and that it is, in fact, all that remains of
the original structure; everything above the ground has been obliterated. While one might charge Tarkovsky with creating a manipulative, sentimental nationalism based on a poetic notion of innocence and experience, one cannot accuse him of a merely derivative use of romantic ruins. He makes no attempt to hide their history; that is, he shows us how they came to be and does not simply present them as static structures appearing in the landscape, existing, as it were, strictly for the benefit of the camera or merely for our visual pleasure. Similarly, the liberation sequence, beginning with a montage that includes extensive newsreel footage, shows victorious Soviet troops within a fallen Berlin, most notably amidst the urban architecture that we have come to associate with Nazi Germany, which is on the verge of becoming one monumental ruin.\footnote{88}

Within Tarkovsky's oeuvre, the blighted landscapes of Ivan's Childhood re-appear as the recovering landscapes of the Stalker's Zone. Seen alone, Ivan's Childhood concludes--the final sequence of Ivan playing on the beach notwithstanding--in perhaps the bleakest possible terms: the war has ended, but of the principal characters, Galtsev alone has survived. Through recovered German documents he confirms Ivan's capture by enemy intelligence and, in an impressionistic montage, imagines the boy's gruesome execution.

Earlier, Kholin and Galtsev do manage to give a proper burial to two Russian

\footnote{88 In this sense, the German military buildings in the newsreel footage are reminiscent of Alexander Kluge's seminal German New-Wave film, Brutalität in Stein [Brutality of Stone](1960). Both films show the abandoned ruins of Germany's military past, but Kluge shows them as spokesperson for a new generation, eager to understand the ideology behind fascist architecture.}
soldiers, whose decaying bodies the Germans had grotesquely propped up in no man’s land to demoralize their enemy. Through its blend of tragedy, historical realism, and nostalgia, the film does, as I have suggested, locate these horrors of war squarely in a historical past; moreover, it offers a traditional anthropocentric closure (that is, the narrative ends when the main character dies and the enemy is vanquished). However, in this film Tarkovsky does not yet offer us what the later films tacitly yet relentlessly show: the ambiguous consolations of ecology, of enduring vegetable processes—of nature outliving human strife—of growing over and effectively burying everything from our sight and collective consciousness. Always we are reminded of the detritus generated by human conflicts—conflicts which, it turns out, were not themselves the true “end of the world,” although Tarkovsky implies in visual terms that their lethal legacies just might be.

Had Tarkovsky never re-examined such landscapes, Ivan’s Childhood might not seem as prophetic and ecologically-minded as it does. When, however, the Stalker and his party traverse the hazards of the Zone, it is difficult not for the viewer not to remember Tarkovsky’s earlier landscapes, and by extension of the real toxic landscapes that result from military and peacetime technologies. And it is then only one step further in associative logic to imagine dwelling in similarly contaminated landscapes the disenfranchised of the underdeveloped world, for whom such environments have become at once home and foraging grounds.89

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89 See for example two films by the similarly eco-minded Werner Herzog: the travelogue-documentary Fata Morgana (1970) and the narrative Where the Green Ants Dream (1984), in which “third-world” north-Africans (in the former) and Australian indigenes (in the latter) build their homes out of discarded first-world technology such as
With *Ivan's Childhood*, Tarkovsky forged a perceptual intersection between romantic ruins and contemporary junk; if they are not exactly identical, one can at least be made to look like the other with the right deployment of lighting, camera, and editing techniques. Within his oeuvre, World War II is the symbolic and decisive event which contaminated landscape and nature to the core. Tarkovsky’s cinematographic signature—the extreme close-up shots of the ground—remind us of this fact at every turn. The shelling in *Ivan's Childhood* leaves its remnants in the shallow pools of debris in *Nostalgia* and *Stalker*. The earlier film’s military hardware seems to have migrated to the Zone, which, within Tarkovsky, seems now to be burdened with all the refuse and disasters of the earlier films, if not of all of contemporary society: we see hyperdermic syringes, broken glasses, tins, automatic pistols, a broken clockwork mechanism; but also mosaic tiles, coins, and pieces of art in bric-a-brac form. The early films are more clearly anthropocentric than the later ones, in which typically a vaster time scale of ecological processes is registered through the intermingling of ruin and vegetation. Working upon the ruins and vegetable life are similarly vast processes like the swirling atmosphere of *Solaris*.

In *Nostalgia*, the sequence of Domenico’s dilapidated house forms a clear visual analogue to the flooded structures of the Zone: its floors too are flooded and strewn with now-unusable debris (bottles, jugs, and books); rainwater drips from the ceilings; and, along with the potted plants and vegetation, the mouldy dankness creates an environment that is at once fecund and inhospitable. While it gives a clear indication of Domenico’s airplane parts.
disturbed mind, the house, more importantly, forms an apt metaphor for our ambivalent relationship to ruins. Their gradual reintegration into nature via ivy, moss, and other forms of vegetation have long been symbols of nature’s recuperative powers, human transience, and romantic sublimity. Domenico’s house comes close in visual terms to the abandoned, rural houses of romanticism, most notably, perhaps, to the “rustic inn” of Wordsworth’s “The Ruined Cottage,” but perhaps also to Hawthorne’s damp and tragically decaying Pyncheon House in The House of Seven Gables (1851). Tarkovsky’s establishing shot from the exterior evokes the beauty of the Tuscan countryside in exact accordance with traditional painterly landscape-aesthetics, but the interior provides a strong dose of reality; the house is, of course, quite uninhabitable, a condition heightened by the perpetually dripping ceiling and the quite unexpected (and somewhat incongruous) interior rainfall. Divisions between indoor and outdoor blur. Perhaps the favoured sites of romanticism, too suffused with nature, are uninhabitable.

At the level of image and mise-en-scene, the ecological concern is delineated with much complexity. Also, I am arguing that Tarkovsky is supplementing his own landscape aesthetic so that it does not reduce nature to merely beautiful (or now-hackneyed) images that are strictly defined according to traditional preconceptions. “I’m tired of seeing these sickeningly beautiful sights,” exclaims Gorchakov in the film’s opening sequence, wearied by the prospect of visiting a church located within a misty Italian landscape; his words could well be articulating Tarkovsky’s deep ambivalence toward a too-conventionalized landscape aesthetic. “[T]ired of seeing these sickeningly beautiful sights,” could also be a comment upon the untroubled nostalgia of Mirror which, like
Nostalgia’s nostalgia, is inextricably linked to landscape, and which is perpetually in
danger of becoming mere postcard scenery—mere commodity within a consumer
economy. (To that end, we might recall that Andrei, in his drunken monologue,
complains of the availability here of “too many Italian shoes.”) That there is a danger of
reducing nature merely to scenery which pleases us is a message that none of Tarkovsky’s
vocal, environmental martyrs utter, but one which is everywhere immanent in the films.

In the films of the trilogy in particular, environmental concern is as often
conveyed through images as through dialogue, as Tarkovsky’s camera pores over
perpetually-damp soils in close-up and extreme close-up shots, conferring upon them an
aesthetic dimension ordinarily associated with the objects in still life paintings. Never
clearly a character’s point-of-view and never clearly linked to the narrative, these “eco”-
shots have caused some bewilderment, and they have become synonymous with
Tarkovsky’s visual style.⁹⁰

Of particular interest to me is the way in which these close-up shots attempt to de-
aestheticize nature. Those shots in which the ground or earth is particularly unaesthetic or
in which, roughly stated, Tarkovsky departs from conventional eighteenth- and
nineteenth-century landscape-aesthetics (of which the cinematic equivalent might be the
long shots near the dachas of Mirror and Solaris as well as much of Nostalgia and some
of the Zone sequences in Stalker). Such departures from showing landscapes romantically

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⁹⁰ In The Medusa Frequency (1987), Russell Hoban probably has Tarkovsky in mind
when he refers to a film-director character Gösta Kraken, in whose films “you can see his
obsessions developing, his preoccupation with wetness and ooze as primal mindscape and
his vision of a discarded world” (105).
force the viewer to look at the materials of nature in an unsentimental way that attempts to move beyond the anthropocentricisms of the earlier narratives. Some form of environmentalism, Tarkovsky assumes, ought now to have a primary place in all revolutionary value systems. In this sense, he very much resembles a deep ecologist; however, the route by which he has arrived at this position is unexpected; what guides him to this position is a Western liberal-humanism that was informed by a curriculum of canonical artworks—a humanism heavily accented with the ideals of the Renaissance and romanticism. Finally, these ideals too might have to be discarded, like the icons which represent them and which, lying beside junk and debris, give way to vegetative processes in the shallow, oily pools of the Zone.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

When we assemble contemporary environmental writings and apocalyptic narratives we see a great dovetailing of concerns and ideologies. Equally important are the many oscillating meanings and metaphors. Even within Blake’s lifetime, his echoing green, a sight of pure pastoralism and unfettered nature, was re-imagined very differently by Mary Shelley. Wild nature has since been regarded as the ideal home of philosophers and misanthropes, but also of the mad and children, all of whom are drawn there in part by acute ecological sensitivities.

Post-apocalyptic landscapes are frequently conceived as a contemporary naturalists’ best hope for a paradise, but these landscapes are also filled with innumerable hazards. The lethal zones and scarred landscapes that we find in the narratives of Ballard, Tarkovsky, Hersey, Shute, Miller, and Hoban, for example, have in some sense eclipsed moderate environmentalism’s calls for restoration, conservation, and protection, and have achieved an eerie natural beauty all their own, a beauty that exists at the exclusion of humans. As well, in many of the narratives I have examined, the demands of Naessian deep ecology to leave the land alone have been met in an ironic way. We find such Pyrrhic green-victories celebrated explicitly in Abbey but also, in a conflicted way, in Tarkovsky’s films, in which, enticed by familiar romantic notions, we see consoling
spectacles of ruins and detritus. The scientists and professionals in Ballard, for example, are seen rekindling long-dormant impulses to explore and understand with renewed vigour their radically altered environments, not simply to live out latent survivalist fantasies. In these narratives, post-apocalyptic landscapes foster a renewed appreciation for nature, altered and hostile though it may be. Also, we must not disregard the appeal of the adventure narratives, which run (at least) from Mary Shelley’s The Last Man through science fiction to Hoban’s Riddley Walker, and for which a post-apocalyptic terrains provide ideal settings, particularly in light of modern, global-wide urbanization.

If in McKibben’s postnatural world nature begins to behave so wildly that great regions of the globe are restored to an uninhabitable and therefore truly pristine, wild condition thriving at the expense of humans, then could it be consoling on some barely acknowledged level, not solely for a radical environmentalist but also for, say, a member of the moderate Sierra Club, to anticipate a region of the earth becoming uninhabitable to human life, like a toxic Eden from which he have exiled ourselves?
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