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# Writing the Environment

## Changing Attitudes to the Aotearoa New Zealand Environment

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for the degree of Master of Arts in English  
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## Preface

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There is a long-standing and irrational opposing discourse between the sciences and humanities as to which is the most relevant discipline for meeting the environmental needs of modern society. In a business, technological and industrially focused growth economy, there seems on the surface little room for writers, poets, historians and philosophers. However, it is in part due to the growth economy, the consumer, capitalist, scientific and industrial society, that our planet is suffering from overpopulation, pollution, and in many cases irreversible environmental degradation.

In order for human beings to understand what is happening to the environment and why, and before we can begin to restore the ecological balance, a holistic approach must be fostered between the different disciplines that are involved with environmental issues and in writing the environment. As with the medical profession in an age of specialisation, where the 'bone men' don't talk to the 'muscle men' and the 'muscle men' don't communicate with the psychologists, we are in danger of becoming increasingly fragmented from the planet's ecology of which we are a part and which supports us. Those who write the environment are rediscovering the advantages of an ecological, interdisciplinary discourse.

Writers from many disciplines address environmental issues from many points of view. Attitudes to the environment have changed radically in the last two thousand years from a more or less holistic view, a recognition of the interconnectedness of things, to one where we dominate and re-order our environment to suit ourselves, regardless of ecological consequences. The tide, however, is turning and attitudes changing. Part of this change is the growing environmental discussion between literary scholars, ecologists, psychologists,



scientists, historians, environmentalists, writers, photographers painters, film makers and the business sector. This dialogue is producing an ecological discourse, recognising that all disciplines are interconnected, just as we are part of the ecology of our environment.

As landscape architect Simon Bell in *Landscape: Pattern, Perception and Process* writes: “There is a reluctance to consider all the interactions between different facets of the environment and all those who write about it. . . . There is a relationship between every process and facet of activity in the world. If we can understand these relationships, maybe we can achieve a unity of thought and action between the physical, biological, cultural and aesthetic components of the landscape and environment.”<sup>1</sup>

Simon Bell is just one of many who acknowledge this need. Historian Theodore Roszak is another<sup>2</sup>. He emphasises the environmental role of the creative artist and writer in *Where Psyche Meets Gaia*. He writes: “Even though many environmentalists act out of a passionate joy in the magnificence of wild things, few, except the artists - the photographers, the

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<sup>1</sup>Bell, Simon. *Landscape: pattern, perception and process*. New York: E & F.N. Spon. 1999. Introduction, 4.

<sup>2</sup>Theodore Roszak is Professor of History and Director of the Ecopsychology Institute at California State University.

filmmakers, the landscape painters, and the poets - address the public with any conviction that human beings can be trusted to behave as if they were the living planet's children."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Roszak, Theodore. "Where Psyche Meets Gaia" in *Ecopsychology: Healing the Earth Healing the Mind*. ed. Roszak, Theodore et al. San Francisco: Sierra Books, 1995. 2.