

In my view, ecocriticism needs a foundation in something akin to metaphysics. This work in progress began as an effort to find such a foundation. In the course of working on it, I discovered philosophers today, mostly young, clearly a new generation, philosophizing under the umbrella term "speculative realism" what amounts to a new metaphysics, even when the term "metaphysics" is not embraced. That discovery led me to put this work aside to study this new philosophy, a decision that has evolved into a book-length project assessing this new metaphysics. When that is done I will be better prepared to ground ecocriticism in metaphysics. Material from this work in progress will be relevant but will no doubt have to be recast in radically different form.

Parts of chapters 1 and 4 have been published in revised form (see "The Theory Ecocriticism Needs" and "Geocentric Ecocriticism" at academia.edu).

Geocentric Ecocriticism (work in progress)

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An introductory overview of chapters 2-4, chapter 1 centers on differences between Neil Evernden's *The Social Creation of Nature* and Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern*. Evernden seeks a nature independent of cultural and institutional mediations, whereas for Latour escaping these mediations is impossible. Chapter 2 elaborates on Evernden's ecocritical strategy by comparing and contrasting it with Lawrence Buell's, particularly Buell's ideas of the "fallacy of derealization" and "extrospection." Chapter 3 elaborates on Latour, particularly his theory of hybrids, concluding with an evaluation of his "parliament of things." Chapter 4 then reconciles the two within a framework large enough to incorporate both. This framework revises Spinoza's monism, cleansing it of its cosmocentric tendencies in the name of geocentricism.

In these chapters (pp. 21, 32n8, 53-54, 58, 81, 94) promises appear that at the time of their writing were envisioned as appearing in later chapters.

Chapter 1

Ecocritical Strategies in a Postmodern Age

Among the sciences, there is one little fellow named Ecology, and in time we shall pay him more attention.

Kenneth Burke, 1937

Epochal change is no doubt easiest to see in the rearview mirror. Despite such uncertainties, the present inquiry is interested in the signs around us today suggesting that we may be at the beginning of such a process. Many if not most of these appear to be effects of the ecological crisis emerging into prominence in our time. What Kenneth Burke saw on the historical horizon in the 1930s made its way to the popular media in 1970, appearing in a *Fortune* article, "Our New Awareness of the Great Web":

we may assume that most predictions put forward in 1937, like those of other years, would now be worth recalling only as examples of fallibility. But at least one prediction published in that year has since come to seem exceedingly perspicacious. It appeared in a book by Kenneth Burke, a literary critic. "Among the sciences," he wrote, "there is one little fellow named Ecology, and in time we shall pay him more attention." (Bowen 198)¹

Since the 1970s, this "new awareness" has continued in the popular media and in mainstream politics in the form of one of the problems to be solved on a list of problems seen as more or less of comparable significance. But for

some, the significance of what we are doing to the earth is epochal, constituting a historical event that calls into question philosophical premises that helped to forge the experiment of modernity. In *Regarding Nature*, for example, Andrew McLaughlin suggests that the enlightenment thinking characteristic of modernity is a "mistake" (117) and distinguishes responses to the ecological crisis on the basis of whether this epochal mistake is acknowledged. The "reactive" response, which dominates public discourse, sees the crisis as one more problem that modernity will solve just as it has solved all others in the past, however many bumps there may be in the road to the solution, whereas the "ecological" response sees this crisis as much deeper, calling for nothing less than an epochally "new way of thinking" (126).

The most influential form of the distinction that McLaughlin makes is Arne Naess's between "shallow" ("reactive") and "deep" ("ecological"), from which came the familiar term "deep ecology," which now sometimes circulates untethered from its origin. Naess introduced his distinction in a 1973 article. Later, in 1985, *Deep Ecology* made the term familiar to a wider audience by elaborating on the article's argument: "Deep ecology goes beyond a limited piecemeal shallow approach to environmental problems and attempts to articulate a comprehensive religious and philosophical worldview" (Devall and Sessions 65). By 1995, the conversation clustered around the concerns of deep ecology was extensive enough to prompt Warwick Fox (1) to offer an astute, comprehensive, and sympathetic critical review of it and (2) to propose substituting the term "transpersonal ecology" for "deep ecology."

While I share with deep ecologists the sense that the magnitude of the ecological crisis will ultimately prompt an epochal shift from modern to ecocritical thought, I should stress, to avoid confusion, that I'm not a deep

ecologist. A later chapter will even take issue with some of Fox's specific claims. The argument here, which begins in the present chapter with consideration of ecocritical strategies in a postmodern age, is that ecocritical thought needs a new monism, one that displaces the dualisms characteristic of modernity. These dualisms are so deeply embedded in modernity that one finds that even critiques of modernity are sometimes conceived in frameworks that ironically end up being dualistic themselves (chapters 2 and 3). This new monism will look to the text of Spinoza for conceptual guidelines even as it revises this text to narrow its scope (chapter 4), for this new monism must be resolutely geocentric, a new paganism without gods. Later chapters will translate this geocentric monism into geocentric ecocriticism of 18th and 20th century texts.

Evernden vs. Latour

In the field of literary and cultural studies, work in search of epochally new ways of thinking began during the 1990s to cluster visibly around the term "ecocriticism."² Ecocritics may be imagined as sharing the situation of ecological crisis on one level but differing among themselves in a conversation over precisely how best to discourse about it on another. Two texts exploring issues relevant to this conversation--Neil Evernden's *The Social Creation of Nature* and Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern*--will be considered at length in the present chapter and the next two. Evernden's is even included in a "top 15" list in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*.³ Latour's appeared after the compilation of this list, but it does receive extensive attention in an essay included in *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and the Environment*.⁴

Evernden and Latour are paired here for two main reasons: they both address issues relevant to an epochal shift in thought because they both seek explicitly to displace modernity; their strategies for displacing modernity, however, are in many ways diametrically opposed. If one thinks of the various ecocritical strategies for discoursing about the ecological crisis as forming a spectrum, Evernden and Latour could be positioned at opposite ends.

To start, it will be useful to begin with passages from Evernden and Latour illustrating core differences in concrete terms that may help us keep our bearings when we turn to the more abstract theoretical issues that these texts raise. The passages will be relatively long because they contain material to which we'll return again and again. One might almost say that the passages cluster together motifs that help to organize the present chapter and the next two.

The passages from Evernden center on his reading of Annie Dillard's narrative in *Teaching a Stone to Talk* of her surprise encounter with a weasel. It comes in Evernden's final chapter, which founds itself on Thoreau's aphoristic thesis, "in Wildness is the preservation of the world." Wildness

lies beyond the objects in question. . . . [It's] not polar bears, not whooping cranes or Bengal tigers, but that which they as individuals exemplify. These creatures are "made of" wildness, one might say, before they are made of tissue or protein. But perhaps even wildness is an inadequate term, for that essential core of otherness is inevitably nameless, and as such cannot be subsumed within our abstractions or made part of the domain of human willing. (121)

Evernden turns to his Dillard example later on the same page:

she is surprised by a weasel, and it by her. . . . She did not observe the "behaviors" of the beast, did not retain the proper, adult detachment requisite to the study of nature. Instead, she momentarily lost her self-consciousness and encountered otherness directly and with astonishment. It was, she is certain, no fantasy. . . . "I tell you I've been in that weasel's brain for sixty seconds, and he was in mine.". . . So: "What does a weasel think about? He won't say. His journal is tracks in clay, a spray of feathers, mouse blood and bone: uncollected, unconnected, loose-leaf, and blown." The weasel doesn't "think about." There are no abstractions, just a celebration of animate being that can only be fleetingly encountered, and never understood.

(121-22)

Evernden's last sentence in his book advances the ecocritical proposal that writing such as Dillard's "may help us acquire the vocabulary needed to accommodate wildness and extinguish the technological flashfire of planetary domestication" (133).

Turning to Latour, we find nothing remotely like Evernden's attempt to recover an immediate experience of "wildness," so immediate that it is ultimately "nameless." Evernden's theoretical argument even presents the child as the subject most suited for such an experience (111-16): "While the idea of a naive infant may be a fiction, it is at least a useful one for our purposes, for it allows us to imagine the encounter of a non-enculturated human with 'nature'" (111). Where Evernden seeks immediacy independent of enculturation, Latour seeks to chart the complexities of cultural mediation. One elaborate example begins his book:

On page four of my daily newspaper, I learn that the measurements taken above the Antarctic are not good this year: the hole in the ozone layer

is growing ominously larger. Reading on, I turn from upper-atmosphere chemists to Chief Executive Officers of Atochem and Monsanto, companies that are modifying their assembly lines in order to replace the innocent chlorofluorocarbons, accused of crimes against the ecosphere. A few paragraphs later, I come across heads of state of major industrialized countries who are getting involved with chemistry, refrigerators, aerosols and inert gases. But at the end of the article, I discover that the meteorologists don't agree with the chemists; they're talking about cyclical fluctuations unrelated to human activity. So now the industrialists don't know what to do. The heads of state are also holding back. Should we wait? Is it already too late? Toward the bottom of the page, Third World countries and ecologists add their grain of salt and talk about international treaties, moratoriums, the rights of future generations, and the right to development. (1)

In his concluding section, "The Parliament of Things" (142-45), Latour repeats this example in a shortened form as a "network extend[ing] from [his] refrigerator to the Antarctic by way of chemistry, law, the State, the economy, and satellites" (144). Here, Latour imagines representatives at each station in such networks and looks to their parliamentary deliberations to address the ecological crisis.

Never for a moment does Latour imagine exiting from these complexes of mediations between "us" and "nature" to seek an unmediated encounter with nature. "Network" is one of his terms for these complexes. He values it as a term more supple than "system" and more historical than "structure" (3). Another term for these mediations is "hybrid," which accentuates the mixture of "nature" and "culture" in a "network" such that it becomes difficult to discern where one stops and the other begins (30). Rather than seek a way

out, Latour seeks to penetrate these hybrids ever more deeply to comprehend their significance. They are, in a sense, the mark of our modernity. They are what we moderns have put on the planet. But it is Latour's ironic conclusion, as we will see, that these supposed marks of modernity really demonstrate the claim in his title: "we have never been modern."

Rather than imagine exiting from such "networks," Latour reflects on the gap between the reality they constitute and the academic disciplines we bring to investigate them. "Networks" are typically "imbroglios of science, politics, economy, law, religion, technology, fiction" (2). But our disciplines respond by seeming to say "let us not mix up knowledge, interest, justice and power. Let us not mix up heaven and earth, the global stage and the local scene, the human and the nonhuman. 'But these imbroglios do the mixing,' you'll say, 'they weave our world together!' 'Act as if they didn't exist,' the analysts reply" (3). An analysis of the total reality involved in an event like the ozone hole seems relegated to the genre of book journalism, as in *Between Earth and Sky: How CFCs Changed Our World and Endangered the Ozone Layer*, where in a cautionary tale for our time, Seth Cagin and Philip Dray recount the career of CFCs, encompassing the career of the scientist who synthesized them, the conditions in consumer culture prompting their invention, the later scientific discovery of their effects in the upper atmosphere, etc. It is a narrative that pulls together many things that disciplines pull apart.

Latour sings here a familiar tune, of course, insofar as we commonly feel that our disciplines are in some sense "abstractions" from the reality of our lives.⁵ Calls for interdisciplinary work are perhaps as common as laments about its failure. What is needed perhaps is a conceptualization of the "concrete" from which varying disciplines "abstract." With a common

subject matter, disciplines might be able to interact to better effect. Exploring this possibility will be among the concerns of chapter four.

Wildness vs. Postmodernism

Evernden is more uncomfortable in the postmodern world than is Latour. When Evernden proposes his Thoreauvian thesis--"in wildness is the preservation of the world"--he in effect suggests that there is a way to leave the postmodern world for another. He also gives reasons, to be examined later, for his preference for the term "wildness" over "wilderness." "Wilderness" is generally the more prominent of these two terms among the ecocritics with whom Evernden may be aligned, as illustrated, for example, by Max Oelschlaeger's title *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology*. Oelschlaeger, moreover, moves from one term to the other without Evernden's reservations as he, like Evernden, finds a foundation in Thoreau's aphoristic thesis: "Humankind's apparent success in dominating and transforming *wilderness* into civilization not only endangers the web of life itself but fundamentally diminishes our humanity, our potential for a fuller and richer human beingness. And so, in the beginning, I can do no better than repeat Thoreau's admonition: `In *wildness* lies the preservation of the world' (2; italics added). The wilderness that interests ecocritics is generally akin to the wilderness that David Ehrenfeld, in *The Arrogance of Humanism*, defines as "not any particular species or habitat type, but a higher class of life form with its own nobility derived from its complete independence of human beings" (255). Oelschlaeger even gives wilderness cosmic significance, raising issues that will occasion extended consideration in our next chapter.

Evernden shares Ehrenfeld's and Oelschlaeger's viewpoint, but sees in the term "wildness" a better way to articulate it.

N. Katherine Hayles defines "postmodernism as the realization that what has always been thought of as the essential, unvarying components of human experience are not natural facts of life but social constructions"; she adds, "We can think of this as a denaturing process. To denature something is to deprive it of its natural qualities" (*Chaos* 265-66). Ecocritics who seek to ground their project in wilderness or wildness are, in effect, seeking a foundation that is not and cannot be "denatured." By contrast, Latour's world of hybrids and networks is denatured through and through.

Whether the postmodern era is or is not behind us, postmodernism undoubtedly continues to exert effects. For one thing, because of the hegemony postmodernism has enjoyed in the context of theoretical debates in recent decades, any new critical school is automatically seen in relation to it. Hence, the ecocritical positing of a wildness/wilderness independent of postmodern denaturing may be seen either negatively as a scandalous departure from postmodernism or positively as an attempt to displace it from the hegemonic position it's enjoyed too long.

For another thing, postmodernism's closeness may prompt some to resist generalizations like Hayles's. But perhaps resistance lessens when it is remembered how in recent decades postmodernists themselves commonly generalized about the New Criticism, which had its heyday during the middle decades of the 20th century. New critics differed among themselves in notable ways but over time these differences seemed less notable than the "family resemblances" they shared. Analogously differences among theorists working during the postmodern era that seem prominent to us because of our proximity to their work are likely to recede over time as the lasting historical

effects of postmodernism are seen to result less from these differences than from overlapping similarities bridging across them. Used most often initially to designate the period covering roughly the last 3-4 decades of the 20th century, the term "postmodern" was gradually broadened to encompass critical methods distinctive of this period. For example, in a text that quickly became a locus classicus among characterizations of the period, Fredric Jameson refers to "poststructural critique . . . as a very significant symptom of the very postmodernist culture which is our subject here" (*Postmodernism* 12). One can imagine poststructuralists resisting such assimilation of their method to the wider period term, because it tends to lessen differences between their method and other methods such as new historicism that might be considered equally symptomatic of the period. While differences among these methods are important in some contexts, they nonetheless share enough "family resemblances" to justify generalizations about postmodernism as theorizing "constructs" of various kinds that mediate, denature, or stand in some sense between us and immediate experience of unchanging natural realities, including the immediate experience of our bodies and minds. Derrida proposes in a 1960s text that "pure perception does not exist: we are written only as we write. . . . The `subject' of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author" (*Writing* 226). Even perception is thus constructed and constructed by a writing process that extends beyond the subjective control of writers. In subsequent decades, the implications of constructivism have been thoroughly explored and have become common parlance, thus facilitating generalizations like Hayles's.

Latour's version of these postmodern themes appears in a context in which he associates himself with postmodernists' main conclusions while

dissociating himself from their "despair, their discouragement, their nihilism," which he attributes to postmodernism's acceptance of "a conception of modernism that modernism itself has never really practiced." As Latour sees it, modernism preached in its philosophy dualistic separations (object and subject, nature and culture, immediate experience and mediated experience, etc.), but practiced in its activities the construction of hybrids that obscure the line between these separations. "Take away from the postmoderns their illusions about modernism [i.e., its preaching rather than its practice], and their vices become virtues":

For instance, we can save deconstruction--but since it no longer has a contrary [dualistic separation], it turns into constructivism [hybridization] and no longer goes hand in hand with self-destruction. We can retain the deconstructionists' refusal of naturalization--but since Nature itself is no longer natural, this refusal no longer distances us from the sciences but, on the contrary, brings us closer to sciences in action. (134)

For Latour, then, hybridization takes postmodern premises to their logical conclusion, a point to which we'll return later.

Constructivism appears in Evernden as well, in a passage in his earlier book, *The Natural Alien*, that is interesting because it in effect lays out the project of the later one. Evernden sees constructions as inevitable, but unlike Latour, he thinks they can be put aside:

Obviously we cannot avoid the creation of categories, any more than we can avoid the social *construction* of reality. . . . We can only hope that when the story turns out to be too far removed from actual experience to be reliable, we still have the skill to return to the

world beneath the categories and re-establish our connection with it.

(56; italics added)

Evernden's reference to "social construction" anticipates "social creation" in the title of the later book, which depicts modernity's version of nature as a construction "too far removed from actual experience to be reliable." Coming after his critique of modernity's unreliability, his Dillard example appears in the final part of the book, "The Liberation of Nature," where Evernden "returns to the world beneath the categories" of the modernist construction.

As noted earlier, ecocriticism became visible as a critical movement during the 1990s. Writing in 1990, Glen A. Love points tellingly, in "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism," to a seeming anomaly in literary and cultural studies:

our society as a whole and our profession in particular have, as Cheryll [Glotfelty] points out [in a 1989 conference paper], been faced with three crises in the last thirty years: civil rights, women's liberation, and environmental degradation. All three of these problem areas have been the subject of widespread social concern. All have become, to a greater or lesser extent, world issues. The discipline of English has addressed the concerns of civil rights, equality for minorities, and women's liberation through widespread attention and no small amount of action in such crucial areas as hiring and promotion practices, literary theory and canon-formation. Race, class, and gender are the words which we see and hear everywhere at our professional meetings and in our current publications. But curiously enough . . . the English profession has failed to respond in any significant way to the issue of the environment. . . . (226)

Love's explanation is that "those of us who profess English" (227) are too humanistic in the sense that we are concerned far more with relations among humans--e.g., race, gender, and class--than with relations between humans and nature (227-29). Another explanation--or an additional one, whichever seems preferable--would trace this neglect of the environment to premises distinctive of postmodern theory in particular rather than humanism in general.

Attention to race, gender, and class has indeed been prominent during the era of postmodern theory. This trio has served in some ways as the simplification and popularization of this theory insofar as it made constructivism familiar through relatively simple examples rather than through a complex theoretical genealogy involving figures such as Derrida and Foucault.

The prominence of this trio has prompted opponents of constructivist critical practice to charge that it boils down to a mere politicizing of literary studies. But if this critical practice is mere politicizing, then it is difficult to see why it produced this trio instead of a quartet that included the environment. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, after all, appeared in 1962, one year before Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. The first Earth Day was 1970. The politics of the environment and the politics of race, gender, and class became prominent at roughly the same time. Love accentuates the point that the neglect of the environment in literary studies during the 1970s and 1980s cannot be attributed to the politics of professors: "most of us in the profession of English would be offended at not being considered environmentally conscious and ecologically aware" (227). Professors attending to race, gender, and class in the classroom often no doubt attended to the environment as well, but only outside the classroom. To comprehend this

discrimination, one needs to attend not just to politics but to theory as well. Politics and theory married happily in the areas of race, gender, and class, but not in the area of the environment. The emergence of ecocriticism in the 1990s may be a sign not of belatedness, but of a new stage in theoretical debates during which postmodern constructivism may be displaced or undergo a significant transformation.

A good place to see the marriage of politics and theory is Myra Jehlen's "Gender," well known by virtue of its appearance in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, a popular text for theory courses now in its second edition. The principal text Jehlen considers in this text is *Huckleberry Finn*, so that race gets nearly as much attention as gender, and by virtue of Huck's and Jim's social status, class figures as well, though less prominently. Jehlen's thesis is that of the three, gender is the most fundamental. Maybe yes, maybe no, but either way her analysis shows how the marriage works.

Jehlen focuses mainly on two scenes. In one, Huck fails at disguising himself as a girl under the careful eye of Judith Loftus, while succeeding in gaining information, specifically that a reward has been posted for Jim's capture. In the other, which immediately follows the first, Huck returns to Jim with news, "They're after us," and the two set off down the Mississippi. The sequence is crucial for Jehlen. The scene in the Loftus kitchen exposes gender as a construct rather than a biological essence, after which, Jehlen argues, "anyone can be anything" (271). The embeddedness of gender, in other words, is so deep that when it is as exposed as a construct, it becomes easier to see other constructs such as race as the constructs they are rather than as the biological essences they pretend to be. "De-naturalizing the character of women is part of a larger de-naturalization of all the categories of human character, which emerges as both a social and a

linguistic construction" (264). Hence, there is a logic to Twain's narrative as it moves from gender to race. When Huck says, "They're after us,"

he has come to see that in the cavalier South the blackness of an enslaved black man refers not to a set of inherent attributes but to a situation, to an oppression such as can also torment a poor white boy. . . It is in the context of a temporary displacement of his gender identity, and of the questions Judith Loftus raises about gender identity as such, that Huck moves permanently into a new social identity in which, resuming an unquestioned maleness, he questions the other conventions of his culture far more radically than he ever has before. (270).

Sexism and racism, in other words, are social hierarchies legitimated with the claim that they are "natural," rooted in biological essences. Theory equips Jehlen to expose them as cultural constructs rather than essences, and the exposure is politically liberating. Theory and politics reinforce one another as politics uses theory as its weapon and as theory uses politics to valorize itself.

Things are different when one turns to nature and the environment. Whereas the criticism of race, gender, and class seeks to shift from natural essences to cultural constructs, ecocriticism would seem necessarily to seek to shift from constructs to a nature independent of culture imposing limits and necessities that culture can do nothing to alter. Seeing nature as a construct is a problem not a liberation.

For example, Stephen Greenblatt notes that a popular wilderness area in Yosemite National Park is marked by a boundary at which asphalt ends and a sign appears listing all the rules one must follow in the wilderness. What kind of escape from culture to nature is this? "The wilderness is at once

secured and obliterated by the official gestures that establish its boundaries," Greenblatt observes, "the natural is set over against the artificial through means that render such an opposition meaningless" (9). In other words, as one tries to escape to a nature independent of culture, one simply finds more signs of culture. Human fingerprints seem to be everywhere. A wilderness that is a wilderness only by virtue of rules and their enforcement seems to be more a cultural construct than an independent nature. Maybe such a wilderness is still "real" in some sense, but no more so than the sense in which constructs of race and gender are "real." The enduring truth of postmodernism may be its teaching that the line between nature and culture, even if there was a time when it existed, is now so blurred that it no longer exists. This is good news in the areas of race, gender, and class, but not in the area of the environment.

The elusiveness of that line is precisely Evernden's concern when he explains why he prefers the term "wildness" over "wilderness." In Evernden's words, "[W]ilderness can be regarded as a thing, and as such, susceptible to identification and management. Wildness, however, lies beyond the objects in question, a quality which directly confronts and confounds our designs" (*Social* 121). One may concede to Evernden the point that while rules obliterate a wilderness in the very process of protecting it, they cannot have quite the same effect with the wildness one can encounter in animals. But one can still ask if "wildness" is ultimately any more successful than "wilderness" in securing a "real" independent of culture. This question may be put aside here, but the next chapter will return to it.

In any case, Evernden clearly exemplifies one ecocritical strategy in a postmodern age. Going against the grain of postmodernism, this strategy seeks to find, however rare they may be, sites when one may find a real nature

independent of culture. It would appear that to succeed this strategy would have to displace postmodernism altogether. The Latour strategy would be at home with postmodernism, but vulnerable to the charge from the Evernden side of the conversation that it can never really be an ecocritical strategy if it fails to find a theoretical path to an independent reality. Chapters 2 and 3 consider Evernden and Latour in greater detail.

A third strategy might try to combine the advantages of the Evernden and Latour strategies without the disadvantages of either. This strategy would accept as truth the postmodern teaching that there is no longer a line between nature and culture. But it would simultaneously seek to find in this fusion of nature and culture a theoretical path to an independent reality. This strategy would seek to transform postmodernism rather than to displace it. The possibility of such a strategy is the subject of chapter four.

Chapter 2

The Elusiveness of Wildness

Rooting his ecocritical strategy in Thoreau's "in wildness is the preservation" of the world," Evernden argues that, in the world modernity has bequeathed to us, a direct encounter with wildness, such as Dillard's with a weasel, is the only access to a reality independent of culture that remains. As noted in chapter one, Evernden sees in writing like Dillard's the "vocabulary needed to accommodate wildness and extinguish the technological flashfire of planetary domestication."

The present chapter, after considering Evernden's argument in greater detail, concludes that the closer one looks, the more it appears that this argument defeats its own purposes by ultimately affirming the very things it seeks to displace. Evernden is exemplary in the radical steps he takes to find access to an independent reality, but in the end his effort, precisely because it is radical, suggests that such access must be found elsewhere.

The Fallacy of Derealization

Encountering wildness is the way that Evernden would have us correct what Lawrence Buell calls "the fallacy of derealization" (111). Buell's definition of this fallacy appears in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, a text notable for its astute translation of the larger concerns of ecocritical thought into strategies for reading texts in the field of literary and culture studies. Like Evernden's *Social Creation of Nature*, this text is included in *The Ecocriticism Reader's*

"top 15" (see chapter one).

It remains to be seen whether the fallacy of derealization will become identified with ecocriticism as closely as the intentional fallacy is with the New Criticism. In any case, this fallacy would seem to qualify as a trademark of ecocriticism insofar as it defines shrewdly and incisively ecocriticism's interest in grounding itself in an independent reality, a foundation in some sense prior to culture. An arresting conceptualization of such a foundation appears in *New Literary History*, in its editorial for the issue it devoted to ecocriticism (Summer 1999). Deploying Hans Robert Jauss's term "horizon," the editorial proposes,

This issue of *NLH* features a newly prominent movement in literary studies that illuminates with special privilege this paradox of the interpretive horizon. For ecocriticism challenges interpretation to own its grounding in the bedrock of natural fact, in the biospheric and indeed planetary conditions without which human life, much less humane letters, could not exist. Ecocriticism thus claims as its hermeneutic horizon nothing short of the literal horizon itself, the finite environment that a reader or writer occupies thanks not just to culturally coded determinants but also to natural determinants that antedate these, and will outlast them. . . . It asks literary study . . . to fuse its horizon with--to situate its interpretative practice expressly within--the physical surroundings by which human invention and meaning, language and story, have always been sustained, even as these cultural activities have in turn subjected their surroundings since prehistory to increasingly insistent transformation. (Cohen 505)

Insofar as ecocriticism seeks its "bedrock" in planet earth, it may be considered a geocentrism. Subordinating the human to the earth itself--or,

alternatively, identifying the human viewpoint at the deepest, most authentic level with the viewpoint of the earth--ecocriticism needs to be resolutely geocentric. It must resist temptations to see itself in terms larger than the earth itself. More on this in chapter four, where it is argued that geocentrism, by positing the earth simply as a viewpoint in the cosmos rather than the viewpoint of the cosmos itself, may be seen as an antifoundational foundation. For the present, it suffices to note that the fallacy of derealization occurs when the viewpoint of the earth is repressed, forgotten, or ignored.

Buell shrewdly contrasts this fallacy to Marxist reification theory, according to which, as he puts it, "the bourgeoisie succumbs to a false impression of the givenness of the environment that has actually been created by the efforts of humankind" (110). Capitalism, in other words, is a historical event, but it naturalizes itself to discourage any revolutionary event that would transform it into something else. Marx argues, for example, that the isolated individual in pursuit of individual economic interests does not appear in history until the 18th century, but bourgeois ideology projects this individual back into a state of nature out of which history evolved (*Grundrisse* 84-85). The economistic individual thus becomes natural rather than historical. *Robinson Crusoe*, to be considered in a later chapter, is perhaps the paradigmatic example of this process, as Crusoe isolates himself by leaving home against his father's command and then spends a career as an individual in a state of nature on his uninhabited island, which in the end becomes his "new Collony" [sic] (305).

Marxism has devised penetrating analytic strategies to demystify this false naturalization, but perhaps the *coup de grace* will ultimately be delivered in our time by none other than history itself. For as the

ecological crisis deepens, capitalism looks less and less natural, more and more like an engine of denaturalization. In the end, history itself may demystify the naturalizing of capitalism better than all the analytic strategies devised toward that end. The new problem may be the new mystification to which Buell's fallacy points. The fallacy of derealization arises from the sense that we are bigger than nature, that we are no longer dependent on it in any way beyond our control. "The impression that human affairs are not in fundamental ways subject to regulation by the environment is created by our ostensible success at regulating it" (110). This fallacy's misperception is rooted in "the bourgeoisie's false assumption that environmental interventions in its planned existence are nothing more than fortuitous occasional events" (111); "skin lesions from the ozone hole" are one example of such interventions. Confidence in our "planned existence" entails as its counterpart a "derealization" of nature as an independent force and a false confidence that ecological ills can be repaired with a band-aid or two. In the past, capitalism encouraged us to naturalize too much; now it may encourage us to naturalize too little. Immunity to nature's power is becoming the new mystification.

Postmodernism, in Buell's view, diagnoses conditions in contemporary culture that, by distancing culture from nature, foster the fallacy of derealization. Baudrillard, for example, uncovers

an arrogant displacement of reality ("the demiurgic ambition to exorcize the natural substance of a thing in order to substitute a synthetic one") that paradoxically has brought us, in the age of VR [virtual reality], "to the collapse of reality into hyperrealism, in the minute duplication of the real," since machines can now generate "a completely imaginary contact-world of sensorial mimetics and tactile

mysticism"--"an entire ecology," he tellingly adds. (112)⁶

Buell also credits Jameson for his well-known analysis of "the `hyperspace' of postmodern architecture like the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles" (112). Jameson sees the Bonaventure as not, in his own words, "wish[ing] to be a part of the city but rather its equivalent and replacement or substitute" (*Postmodernism* 40).

For Buell such diagnosis of the postmodern condition offers insight into the cultural conditions fostering the fallacy of derealization, but it does nothing to correct this fallacy. As ecocritics, Buell and Evernden both offer strategies of correction. Of the two, Evernden's is arguably the more radical.

Buell is postmodern enough to concede that we are "the environment's constructor, and the sense of place is necessarily always a social product and not simply what is `there.' . . . [T]his condition imposes an asymptotic limit on anyone's environmental responsiveness" (77). Nonetheless, Buell insists, "we would be obtuse in lumping all environmental representations together as fabricated impositions" (77). Constructivism imposes a limit, but some representations still bring us closer to nature than others. "From an ecocentric standpoint a criterion built on a theoretical distinction between human constructedness and nonhuman reality . . . is far more productive than a criterion based on the presupposition of the inevitable dominance of constructedness alone" (113-14).

In "Nonfiction Aesthetics: Dual Accountability" (91-103), Buell proposes a method that considers both reality and textuality in an aesthetics of "re-realization" of the natural world. One particularly striking example that seems to inspire Buell's method comes from Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*. Citing a passage in which Abbey self-consciously contrasts the romantic

constructions he wants to impose on the wilderness before him and the bald reality that resists such imposition, Buell comments that the "beauty" of Abbey's contrast is that it "aspires to go beyond an aesthetic misprision of the nitty-gritty while recognizing how hard it is to part with the romantic furniture we say we want to jettison (72). What Buell valorizes in writing is this tension between two sides of an unbridgeable binary: on one side, the constructs that mediate our relation to reality; on the other, the unmediated reality that acts like a beacon forever just beyond our reach. Buell proposes at the outset of his book that reevaluating assumptions about representation is among the tasks ecocriticism needs to undertake (2). By means of his deployment of the mediated/unmediated binary, he turns on its head the notion of "correspondence" that typically goes with representation. For as his reading of Abbey suggests, a representation is a construct that gets closer to reality not by corresponding to it but by recognizing its difference from it.⁷

The power of Buell's book resides in its enactment of the very tension valorized in the Abbey passage. Buell is masterful at detecting in the texts he examines the presence of romantic, pastoral, and related constructs. These constructs come from traditions that precede the texts, writing the writers as they write their texts. On virtually every page, Buell offers examples that confirm Derrida's thesis that there is no "pure perception." Buell makes it difficult for himself to find the textual moments of that "re-realize" a reality independent of constructs but this difficulty, in turn, helps to persuade us to trust his judgment when he does identify them. In Buell's readings, the cardinal literary virtue thus becomes "extrospection."

Thoreau's writing is held up as an exemplary model of this tension between construct and reality. His career, in Buell's account, is a record of

a transition from one side of the tension to the other. Over time, Thoreau's *Journal* "became less a repository for thoughts, quotations, anecdotal vignettes . . . and more a record of regular, meticulous daily extrospection"; transcendental spiritualization of nature gives way to "a more empirical and . . . exact observation" of it (117).

The last entry in his immense *Journal* epitomizes the directional movement of his career in this regard. Thoreau contemplates the gravel of a railroad causeway. The individual pieces loom with a Brobdingnagian hugeness, the gravel "stratified like some slate rocks, on their edges, so that I can tell within a small fraction of a degree from what quarter the rain came . . . Behind each little pebble, as a protecting boulder . . . extends northwest a ridge of sand an inch or more, which it has protected from being washed away." (105; Buell's ellipses)

Walden's greatness, for Buell, resides in the way "that the transitional struggles of a lifetime are so fully reflected in it" (118). In Thoreau, finally, Buell finds the solution to our problems: "If everyone lived like him, had the degree of environmental sensitivity at which he arrived, there would be no environmental problem" (139). "[B]asing art on disciplined extrospection is," Buell argues, "in the first instance an affirmation of environment over self, over appropriative homocentric desire" (104). He praises literary nonfiction for sometimes relegating humans to "the edges of the text" and generally "deny[ing] itself some of the most basic aesthetic pleasures of homocentrism: plot, characterization, lyric pathos, dialogue, intersocial events, and so on" (168). Dissolving the self, extrospection is an "aesthetic of relinquishment" (168).

In Buell's subordination of homocentric desire to extrospective

affirmation of the primacy of the "facticity of the environmental other" (111), one sees his strategy for correcting the fallacy of derealization. A sign of the distance between this strategy and Evernden's appears in Buell's comment on Evernden. Praising Evernden's books as "first-rate pieces of environmental reflection," Buell nonetheless faults their critique of realism insofar as it leads "to underestim[ing] [realism's] capacity for expressing and inducing the kind of awe and wonder at the sense of objects realized in their `isness'" (465n42). In other words, the "isness" or "facticity" that is for Buell a "re-realization" of natural reality is for Evernden yet one more level of "de-realization." Buell's Thoreau is not the same as Evernden's. The "extrospection" that Buell locates in Thoreau's empirical and exact observation fosters precisely the "observ[ation]" and "adult detachment" that Evernden praises Dillard for eschewing. Dillard is memorable for Evernden for an experience that has nothing to do with empirically exact observation. There is extrospection in her encounter with the weasel, but it is not the extrospection of scientific detachment. The encounter is, instead, "a celebration of animate being that can only be fleetingly encountered, and never understood." Dillard is praiseworthy for Evernden precisely because "[s]he did not observe the `behaviors' of the beast, did not retain the proper, adult detachment requisite to the study of nature."

The "isness" that is so central for Buell is for Evernden nothing less and nothing more than the construction that sustains modernity. The scope of constructivism is for Evernden thus much broader than it is for Buell. "Isness" for Buell is the beacon beyond our constructs. While we cannot encounter it in absolute immediacy, we can come close enough to achieve the "re-realization" that Buell sees as propaedeutic to the changes needed to address the ecological crisis successfully. But for Evernden, "isness" is

another construct, an encompassing one that needs to be added to the constructs Buell detects in his acute analysis of a broad range of literary conventions. To dislodge this "isness" from its hegemonic perch is the object of Evernden's critique of modernity.

Evernden's Critique of the Cartesian Dualism and Its Progeny

Evernden and Latour both locate the core of modernity in its hard and fast dualism between the human and nonhuman worlds. Latour thinks moderns preached the dualism more than they lived it, but he doesn't question its centrality to modernity's conception of itself. Of all the versions of this dualism, no doubt the locus classicus is the Cartesian distinction between these two worlds as two substances, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, which Evernden translates as "thinking matter" and "extended matter" (*Social* 98).

Descartes's legacy is less in the details of his philosophical doctrine than in the theoretical model of dualism built around the binary separating the nonhuman from the human. This model continues to flourish even if the doctrinal details of Cartesian philosophy do not. Dualism is a common source of discontent within modernity, but as we'll see later in the present chapter, expressions of this discontent seem oddly to end up within rather than without the framework of the dualistic model, suggesting the possibility that this model has penetrated modernity so deeply that it has become difficult to impossible to think without it. It is perhaps no exaggeration to suggest that this model is the deep "family resemblance" that distinguishes the face of modernity.

The Cartesian dualism is, of course, at the headwaters of modern science. In *The Social Creation of Nature*, Evernden conceives this dualism as

a social construction, aiming to leave it behind for Dillard's wildness. But in the end, one may ask whether he ultimately succeeds or produces yet one more variation on the dualistic model, thus ironically reaffirming the model rather than showing how to get beyond it once and for all.

One notable difference between Latour's and Evernden's accounts of modernity is that Latour begins in the 1600s, in Robert Boyle's laboratory, whereas Evernden goes back farther, to the Renaissance, depicting it as a "watershed to modernity" (40). Evernden's starting point is a 1496 text "from the beginnings of humanist writing . . . Pico's Oration on the Dignity of Man" (39). Evernden's distinctive starting point follows from the distinctiveness of his approach to the issue of theorizing constructivism.

Evernden formulates his approach by reading with and against Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*. He takes as his premise Barthes's proposal "to scour nature, its `laws' and its `limits' in order to discover History there, and at last to establish Nature itself as historical" (27; see *Mythologies* 101). In other words, one can deconstruct "nature" by uncovering the human agenda informing the different constructions of nature in different historical periods. Evernden concludes, "The revelation of our ability to construct `pseudo-natures' exposes . . . our need for some external absolute to which we can look for authorization" (*Social* 28). If one "scours" closely enough, one can see through the authorization to the human face that put it there.

But what about modernity's version of nature as matter in motion that one can subject to scientific knowledge? Can one find a human face there too? After all, this version of nature distinguishes itself by systematically excluding anything remotely resembling the human to leave us with a purified matter in motion that one can chart with the help of mathematics. Evernden doesn't find an answer in Barthes, suggesting that Barthes himself may in

effect gives us yet one more version of dualism, one where the process of sign formation is on the human side and a realm to be transformed into signs is on the nonhuman side (28, 51). It is at this point that Evernden needs to read against Barthes to look for the human face in the dualism that modernity put in place and that Barthes seems to leave there.

Evernden finds this face taking form in Renaissance humanism, which is, in his words, "properly understood as a form of philosophy which places humanity at the center, displacing God, nature, and all other deities" (31). Pico provides Evernden his keynote:

He [Pico] has God proclaiming to Adam that "the nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature." The humanist rejects the very possibility of limits on humanity and asserts that nature is strictly constrained. With that assertion goes the implicit belief that nature is thus knowable: if nature is shackled by law and cannot move, it is ours to interrogate at will. (39-40)

Apart from nature rather than a part of it, the human is rigorously excluded from nature to give humanity exclusive sovereignty over it. "Nature is the realm of necessity, and there is no room for self-willed beings with purposes of their own. The conceptual purity of the domain of Nature is a condition for the security of the realm of Humanity" (56). In this fashion, Evernden argues, the way is paved for modernity and its dualism.

The status of empirical observation is thus very different in Buell's and Evernden's texts. For Buell, the exemplariness of Thoreau's eye is illustrated by its capacity to detect in the formation of pieces of gravel

"from what quarter the rain came." Such exact observation effects a "re-realization" of nature on the one hand and a dissolution of the human self in an "aesthetic of relinquishment" on the other. But for Evernden, such observation is one of the strategies of representation devised within the dualistic construct of modernity.

Remember, the prerequisite to knowledge of the new Nature is the relinquishing of all notions of human involvement in it. . . . Once it is accepted that the reality of Nature is devoid of patently human involvement, then what will be discerned as most truthful is that which appears free of human content and authorship. The "externalities" of the painting, the inconsequential detail of leaf or flower, bear no impress of artistic message or intent: they appear as simple reports of what is "really there," regardless of the whims of humanity. That is their power: their *apparent independence* of human intent. (73-74)

For Evernden, behind this "apparent" relinquishment of the human from nature, there is the human hand informing the construct of dualism that divides the human from the nonhuman. The more exacting the observation, the more deeply embedded the construct becomes. The human is absent from one side of the dualism, but this absence belies on the other side a magnification of the human to proportions unprecedented prior to Renaissance humanism and the seed of modernity that it planted. The human is not relinquished but enlarged to godlike power. From Evernden's standpoint, then, Buell's attention to facticity doesn't "re-realize" nature but instead deepens its derealization. For Evernden, the path to the correction of the fallacy of derealization is not through "isness," but through a "shock of recognition" (*Social* 117), a shock akin to the experience of the sublime or even religious awe.

Evernden and the Ecological Sublime

Evernden's strategy for correcting the fallacy of derealization may be characterized as the "ecological sublime," as Christopher Hitt defines it, in his essay in the *New Literary History* issue devoted to ecocriticism. Evernden actually serves as one of Hitt's main examples.

The possibility of an ecological sublime, Hitt argues, depends on whether earlier forms of the sublime can be decisively transformed. For while these forms involve being humbled before nature, whether it be an object like a mountain or an event like a lightning storm, one is in the end elevated more than lowered by the total experience. "Crudely put," Hitt suggests, "the contradiction of the sublime is that it has tended to include *both* humbling fear *and* ennobling validation for the perceiving subject" (605). In his *Critique of Judgment*, for example, Kant situates the humbling side of the experience in nature and the ennobling side in thought. In nature, the human subject is humbled, but the humbling prompts the recognition that thought can surpass anything in nature. "Therefore," Kant concludes, "nature is here called sublime merely because it elevates the imagination to a presentation of those cases in which the mind can make felt the proper sublimity of its destination, in comparison with nature itself" (101; Part 1, Book 2, Chapter 28). Hitt shows that the pattern in Kant is the typical pattern in the tradition of the sublime. Whether an "ecological sublime" is possible, therefore, turns on whether there can be a form of the sublime in which the human subject is definitively subordinated to some foundation in nature that is independent of and prior to the human. Evernden is one of the places where this possibility is realized.

[Evernden] "liberate[s]" nature, leaving it outside the domain of mind

. . . as a mysterious, alien "divine chaos." . . . This move would involve seeing nature independent of any conceptual categories. . . . Whereas our everyday perception of phenomena is governed by the strictures of language and reason, if nature is "accepted *in its full individuality*, as a unique and astonishing *event*, our encounter is entirely different, and is perhaps fundamentally religious in the nonecclesiastical sense." (Hitt 613, quoting *Social* 120, 117)

The ecological sublime thus reverses the Kantian sublime: instead of being reduced in comparison with thought, nature defeats thought. Nature is elevated over mind. Hitt's "most fully illustrated" example appears in Thoreau's "Ktaadn" (615). One of the textual details singled out is the recurrent use of the term "matter," which Hitt construes as a reference to "the ineffable 'solid earth,' the recalcitrant 'actual world' that he [Thoreau] perceives. The 'contact' he makes with the world is wholly beyond the realm of language, reason, *logos*" (616).⁸

Nature's elevation over the human mind occurs for Evernden in an encounter with the "ultrahuman," a term Evernden borrows from Richard Jefferies, a naturalist who invented the term to designate nature's absolute indifference toward humankind and every last one of its undertakings. "No doubt this was an extraordinarily difficult conclusion for a devout naturalist," Evernden concludes, "But to realize that despite his devotion to nature, it remains indifferent to him is both devastating and liberating. For it releases nature from being *mine*, a personal interpretation and a wishful thought, to being *its own*" (118). What is recognized in Evernden's "shock of recognition" is thus the "ultrahuman." It is this recognition that "liberates" nature.

Evernden's version of "extrospection" thus comes not from exacting

empirical observation but from an encounter with the radical otherness of the "ultrahuman." "It might be fair to say," Evernden suggests, "that the experience of radical otherness is at the base of all astonishment or awe, all 'numinous' experience. It is that shock of recognition that generates the acknowledgment of mystery that we can characterize as religious" (*Social* 117). What Dillard experiences during the "sixty seconds" she is in the weasel's brain is the otherness of "animate being" divorced from the burden of abstract thinking, a being whose "journal is tracks in clay, a spray of feathers, mouse blood and bone." However religious the experience, there is nothing supernatural here, only the naturalistic mystery of the otherness of a weasel's "animate being." Religious experience is for Evernden compatible with naturalistic materiality. What's divisive is the encounter with the nonhuman in a dualistic world in which the human is divided from the nonhuman. The human subject's participation in both sides of the dualism allows it to cross from one to the other, though the crossing requires the encounter with the nonhuman other.⁹

Evernden's Reaffirmations of Dualism and Postmodernism

One dialectical danger is that in opposing an antagonist one may, however much one opposes it on one level, end up with a mirror image of it on another. One must define one's antagonists carefully. About Descartes, the *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* reports, "But despite the wealth of physiological detail Descartes provides, the central philosophical problems associated with his dualistic account of humans as hybrid entities made up of physical body and immaterial soul are, by common consent, not properly sorted out" (196). But in opposing Descartes, what exactly should one target? One

may ask whether in many cases, it is the valorization of the human or nonhuman sides that gets targeted rather than the dualistic separation itself. Hence, one may (1) revalorize *res extensa* upwards by identifying it as organic and vital rather than as mere matter in mechanical motion or (2) revalorize *res cogitans* downwards by characterizing thought as abstract, a reduction of the rich concreteness of immediate experience into categories arranged and rearranged mechanically. With these revalorizations, one can oppose the Cartesian dualism but in a form that nonetheless mirrors it. Even the problem of the human hybrid remains, though now the problem is not to explain how mechanical matter can think but how the human who thinks can recover a more instinctual, childlike self, or, in Dillard's case, enter a weasel's brain for sixty seconds.

One needs to distinguish two antagonists: (1) the division between mutually exclusive realms or substances that underwrites dualism, or (2) the homocentrism behind all constructs. Evernden's principal antagonist proves to be homocentrism and its constructivism, as he ends up affirming not a monism in opposition to dualism, but an "ultrahumanism" in opposition to homocentrism. The "ultrahuman" is nature's absolute indifference toward humankind as well as its resistance to humankind's efforts at comprehension and construction. In the weasel's brain, "[t]here are no abstractions, just a celebration of animate being that can only be fleetingly encountered, and never understood." Hitt sees the ecological sublime as "adumbrat[ing] the ontological autonomy of the nonhuman by forcing us to recognize this limitation [on human understanding]" (615). A dualistic separation of realms thus remains just as essential for Evernden as it does for Descartes.

Evernden theorizes his dualism from the standpoint of the phenomenological tradition. Phenomenology, he suggests is

a kind of deliberate naivety through which it is possible to encounter a world unencumbered with presuppositions. It is a formal resistance to the kind of reality-censorship practised by Galileo when he declared size and shape to be real, smell and colour unreal. Whatever is encountered simply is, without qualification. (*Natural* 57)

Dillard's sixty seconds in the weasel's brain is a time without presuppositions, but her encounter with "animate being" is as much an effect of a dualism as is Galileo's with "size and shape." Both encounters bridge the dualism: Galileo's on the abstract level of scientific knowledge; Dillard's on the concrete level of phenomenological experience. Evernden opposes the concrete to the abstract and that is a real difference, but it is a difference inscribed with that upholds a division between human and nonhuman realms. Dillard seeks the immediacy of the weasel's animate being and must get beyond mediating abstractions. Galileo seeks the immediacy of shape and must get beyond the mediation of concrete smells and colors. The immediate/mediate binary reverses itself from one to the other, but it is equally the effect of dualism in each case.

As noted in chapter one, Evernden prefers "wildness" to "wilderness," but he then adds a significant qualification: "perhaps even wildness is an inadequate term, for that essential core of otherness is nameless, and as such cannot be subsumed within our abstractions or made part of the domain of human willing." In other words, the very word "wildness" is itself a denaturing human assertion that finally falls in defeat before the otherness of nature.

Furthermore, in valorizing "the idea of a naive infant . . . to imagine the encounter of a non-enculturated human with `nature,'" Evernden adds, "The point of this exercise is simply to consider what it must be like to

encounter something without any conception of what it might be or mean, and perhaps even without the language that would encourage naming" (111). While the example of Dillard is the kind on which we must rely in the world of words, it ultimately falls short of capturing the full subordination of the human, at least as Evernden conceives it in his version of the ecological sublime, where we not only transcend downwards but also regress backwards to the "shock of recognition" that before the "ultrahuman" we are as an infant without words.

Evernden's version of the ecological sublime is perhaps vulnerable to an infinite regress to silence, maybe even to a silence beyond silence. For to say the "core of otherness is nameless" is still to say something about it and to comprehend it to that extent. Silence would seem to be the only alternative, but even silence, by virtue of its difference from speaking, is still a way of saying and comprehending. Is there a silence beyond this silence?

More importantly, by virtue of his theoretical precision and sophistication, Evernden does and does not affirm postmodernism in the very act of defining a mode of exiting from it. For the human best suited to encounter the otherness of nature beyond the reach of constructivism is "non-enculturated." The exiting thus depends on the possibility of non-enculturation, which confirms the postmodern truth that to be enculturated is to be in a world of constructs. Evernden is so precise in stating what needs to be done to get beyond postmodern constructs that he ends up making the postmodern case about the impossibility of doing so. The infant may well be outside the postmodern world, but once we are in this world it is not possible to exit it to return to infancy, except in the form of a theoretical thought experiment.

Dualism vs Monism

In contrast to Evernden, Latour gives us a world of nature-culture hybrids and argues, as we will see in the next chapter, that modernity fooled itself in thinking it ever exited from them. Evernden, by conceiving postmodernity's constructionism as something from which to exit, ends up reaffirming both postmodernism and dualism. Latour suggests an alternative possibility, one in which postmodernism appears less as part of a dualistic structure than as a transition to a world of hybrids without dualism.

In a sense, Latour's alternative seems more realistic than the encounter with the otherness of the "ultrahuman" that Evernden projects. But in another sense, it may be Latour who is the more unrealistic of the two. For if one forgoes Evernden in favor of Latour, that would seem to mean that one is surrounded by mediating constructs, and thus cut off forever from the possibility of theorizing a geocentric foundation for ecocriticism.

Evernden and Latour thus seem to leave us with a dilemma. Finding a way through its horns would seem to require theorizing a way for Latour's mediating hybrids to become themselves the mode of accessing the unmediated foundation that Evernden seeks, a thought that seems oxmronic on its face. But is it oxmronic through and through, or only because the mediated/unmediated binary is embedded in a metaphysics deeply entrenched in modernity?

In the last speech she gave, "The Pollution of Our Environment," Rachel Carson recounts the widespread scientific view that when life on earth started there was neither oxygen in the atmosphere nor an ozone layer to shield the earth from the sun's ultraviolet rays. It was the full energy of

these rays that triggered life. But life itself then ironically ended the nature that saw its creation, for as oxygen, a by-product of life, entered the atmosphere an ozone layer formed to shield out the ultraviolet rays that started the process. "From all this," Carson concludes,

we may generalize that, since the beginning of biological time, there has been the closest possible interdependence between the physical environment and the life it sustains. The conditions of the young earth produced life; life then at once modified the conditions of the earth, so that this single extraordinary act of spontaneous generation could not be repeated. In one form or another, action and interaction between life and its surroundings have been going on ever since. (*Lost* 230; see also *Levins* 277)

It is fair to distinguish this radical change in the earth's atmosphere accompanying the origins of life from changes occurring today such as global warming and the ozone hole. Using the term "culture" to encompass the totality of human economic and social actions, one can distinguish these two "ends of nature" by saying that the first resulted from nature interacting with nature, whereas the present one results from nature interacting with culture. But even so, one must still insist that in both cases interactions on the earth constitute the earth in its ever-changing reality. Culture is as much a part of nature as it is apart from nature, because culture is an event on the earth. Further, if Carson is right that "action and interaction" are an ongoing process constituting the earth, then perhaps interactions change the interactors so that none are divided from one another cleanly enough for there ever to be a dualism with pure forms of the human on one side and the nonhuman on the other. This last speech is the first place where Carson publicly identified herself as an ecologist (227), and she does so precisely

to emphasize wholeness over dualistic division: "We cannot think of the living organism alone; nor can we think of the physical environment as a separate entity. The two coexist together, each acting on the other to form an ecological complex or an ecosystem" (231). The story of the ozone hole, both its formation and discovery, confirms the accuracy of her vision: we "need to see the problem as a whole; to look beyond the immediate and single event of the introduction of a pollutant into the environment, and to trace the chain of events thus set into motion. We must never forget the wholeness of that relationship" (231).

Dualism may be so deeply embedded in modernity that it is hard to think without it. The human viewpoint seems to need it for its own self-definition, but if Carson is right, a new monism may be needed no matter how difficult it may be to forge it.

Chapter 3

Latour and the Possibilities of Monism

Latour's world of hybrids seems clearly to point toward a monistic displacement of modernity's dualism. One difficulty, as suggested in the last chapter, is that such a world seems, at least at first blush, to leave us with no access to a geocentric foundation whereby the fallacy of derealization could be corrected. Latour himself seems largely unconcerned with securing such a foundation, as his primary concern is to sustain the thesis announced in his title *We Have Never Been Modern*.

As a result a large unintended irony hangs over this masterful text. In the end, by affirming an "enlightenment without modernity," Latour seems to try to have it both ways. On the one hand, "we have never been modern" but on the other we are "enlightened," and this enlightenment brings with it a dualism, one that is radically modified to be sure, but one that is nonetheless just dualistic enough to shy away from the ultimate monistic implications of hybridization.

Anti-Dualism

Latour separates himself, as noted earlier, from nihilistic forms of postmodernism because he thinks their negativity arises from taking modernity's version of itself too seriously. Taking Latour at his own self-estimation, one may place him beyond the negative rejection of modernity and moving toward the completion of a paradigm shift.¹⁰ But his formula for his new paradigm--"Enlightenment without modernity" (12, 135)--risks reinscribing the dualism he does so much to displace if only in the form of a

construct of constructs. His main strength is his anti-dualist analysis of modernity. The next chapter will have to pick up where he leaves off to continue down a road leading to a postmodernity in the form of a monism defined in opposition to modernity's dualism, although if such a postmodernity were ever to materialize in our culture, the term "postmodern" might very well be obsolete.

What is the source of Latour's differences from Evernden? The question is not easy to answer. As noted above, both locate the core of modernity in its dualistic separation of human from nonhuman. Further, their critiques overlap insofar as they are equally concerned with modernity's domination of nature and the resulting ecological crisis. Displacing modernity is the aim of both. Why, then, does Latour map an anti-dualistic theoretical road to follow while Evernden does not?

Perhaps the best way to begin an answer is to return to a distinction noted earlier while stressing the importance of choosing one's antagonist carefully. Evernden, it was suggested, selected as his principal antagonist, not the division between realms that defines dualism, but the homocentrism he sees behind all constructs. Latour, by contrast, selects the division. His thesis "we have never been modern" centers on this selection.

The story modernity tells itself is that it displaced premodernity's illusory monism with a true dualism. Chinua Achebe's widely read *Things Fall Apart* recalls premodernity for us. One prominent example appears near the end of part one. Guns are fired to salute Ezeudu in death. Okonkwo's gun explodes and a piece of it pierces the heart of Ezeudu's son, killing him. Even though the killing is an accident, Okonkwo is forced to go into exile. Furthermore, a large crowd of men from Ezeudu's quarter stormed Okonkwo's compound, dressed in garbs of war. They set fire to his houses, demolished his

red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman. (117)

In this premodern monism, human and nonhuman realms are interdependent. Modernity sees itself as knowing better: it might prosecute Okonkwo for involuntary manslaughter but not for polluting the land. Modernity's dualism renders the idea of such pollution unintelligible. But in Latour's account, modernity's self-conception is a self-repression insofar as what modernity does in thought represses what it does in action. For Latour, modernity is a paradox: it thinks obsessively about the dualistic separation of the human from the nonhuman, while it acts tirelessly to incorporate the nonhuman realm into human life in the form of hybrid atop hybrid. For Latour, it is in the interdependence between the contradictory sides of this paradox that one can find the clue to modernity's "success."

Readers familiar with Latour's important work in the sociology of scientific knowledge would not be surprised by his choice of Boyle's laboratory as a starting point in his account of modernity. But Latour's choice is also shaped by his "we have never been modern" thesis. Rather than begin, like Evernden, with Pico, that is, with a statement exhibiting modernity's self-definition through the philosophical opposition between the human and nonhuman, Latour begins with Boyle's air pump, an elaborate piece of equipment that removed air from a glass container to allow onlookers to see effects of a vacuum (partial if not absolute). These effects varied from experiment to experiment, the simplest being the suffocation of small animals (17). In such experimentation, dualism crisscrosses with the hybrid of the

experimental device itself:

the key question of the constructivists--are facts thoroughly constructed in the laboratory?--is precisely the question that Boyle raised and resolved. Yes, the facts are indeed constructed in the new installation of the laboratory and through the artificial intermediary of the air pump. . . . But are facts that have been constructed by man artifactual for that reason? No. . . . We know the nature of the facts because we have developed them in circumstances that are under our complete control. . . . [T]hese facts will never be modified, whatever may happen elsewhere in theory, metaphysics, religion, politics or logic. (18)

In other words, it is the experimental design itself that insures that the "fact"--the effect occurring in the glass container when air is removed--is a nonhuman "witness" to be trusted precisely because it is not human (23). "[F]acts speak for themselves" (29), but the irony is that one needs the carefully constructed experiment--the human intervention--to be sure that they speak independently of human intervention.

The centrality of experimentation in Latour's account of modernity exemplifies the methodological innovation that Latour calls his "Copernican Counter-revolution" (76-79). The reference point of this "counter-revolution" is "Kant's Copernican Revolution" (79). Kant appears in Latour's text as an exemplary modern. By starting with the dualistic assumption of two realms that on some "pure" level are independent of one another, modernity defined for itself the epistemological task of finding "intermediaries" by which the human can gain knowledge of the nonhuman. Kant multiplies such intermediaries in a complex account that distinguishes what can be known on the phenomenal level from what can be known on the noumenal level of things in themselves.

Kant offers "a perfected model . . . multiplying the intermediaries to cancel out distance between between the two poles little by little" (79). Evernden's analysis of Dillard is analogous insofar as it too seeks "to cancel out distance between the two poles," albeit on the level not of knowledge but of its absence, where knowing is instinctual rather than conceptual. Further support for Evernden's analysis appears in Dillard, as she recounts aspiring to (1) "mindlessness . . . the purity of living in the physical senses" and (2) immersion in the present, "noticing everything, remembering nothing" (15).

Latour's "counter-revolution," by contrast, begins with the hybrid, or collective as he sometimes also calls it.¹¹ As a result, Latour concludes,

We do not need to attach our explanations to the two pure forms known as the Object or Subject/Society, because these are, on the contrary, partial and purified results of the central practice that is our sole concern. The explanations we seek will indeed obtain Nature and Society, but only as a final outcome, not as a beginning. Nature does revolve, but not around the Subject/Society. It revolves around the collective that produces things and people. The Subject does revolve, but not around Nature. It revolves around the collective out which people and things are generated. (79)

Latour's world is thus more monistic than dualistic, echoing Carson's claim, noted earlier, that from the beginning of biological time "there has been the closest possible interdependence between the physical environment and the life it sustains." Not two independent parts that need to be put together (dualism), but one whole consisting of interdependent parts (monism).

Furthermore, if the interaction between the interdependent parts is reality, then reality resides in the hybrid, where the mediated (culture) and the

immediate (nature) coexist in a form that makes the mediated/immediate binary an unreal abstraction that is no longer pertinent. More pertinent is the relation of hybrids (parts) to one another to constitute reality in the most complete sense (whole). To conceptualize this relationship, the next chapter will turn to Spinoza, or more precisely, to a modified version of Spinoza.

Latour vs McKibben

It is informative to contrast Latour anti-dualism with Bill McKibben's thesis in his well-known *The End of Nature*, which was serialized in *The New Yorker* before becoming a best-seller (Mazel 137, White 182). Written more for a popular than an academic audience, it is not a theoretical text, but it nonetheless has theoretical implications that have received attention in academic commentary. McKibben's main ecological concern is with global warming. Other atmospheric phenomena such as the ozone hole and acid rain are considered as well, but global warming is his primary focus. DeLillo's "postmodern sunset[s]" (227), assumed in *White Noise* to be an unintended consequence of pollutants added to the atmosphere (22, 170, 324-25), are atmospheric events comparable to those that interest McKibben.

McKibben's concerns thus echo Latour's in the passage quoted in chapter one, where the ozone hole is linked to a complex network of human practices working together in a hybrid fusing natural and cultural processes such that neither nature nor culture can be found in a pure form. But for Latour such hybridization is the basis for an anti-dualist reevaluation of modernity, whereas for McKibben it prompts his famous thesis that we are witnessing a tragic "end of nature."

In chapter one, we saw Latour in effect distinguish two postmodernisms,

associating one with the negativity he rejects and identifying the other with the constructivism that he affirms in his theory of hybridization. The constructivism he affirms, however, is a logical outgrowth of theoretical debates during the postmodern era. Debates among theorists sometimes look different in hindsight. Writing on debates current in the 1980s, Mark Maslan writes toward the end of the decade, "The central issue in literary studies is no longer textuality but power. Indeed, one is tempted to say that Foucault's claim 'power is everywhere' has replaced what now appears to be the excessive formalism of Derrida's dictum 'there is nothing outside the text' as the guiding assumption of criticism" (94). Writing a few years later, Jeffrey T. Nealon echoes Maslan: "one could easily tie the rise of Foucault's genealogical discourse to the fall of another contemporary French discourse, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction" (97). But what was experienced at the time in terms of conflicts with winners and losers may, with the advantages of hindsight, be interpreted more profitably as a process in which constructivist premises were working out their logic in a fashion that transcended the particularities of any particular theoretical discourse.¹²

It is convenient to distinguish two sides of constructivist theory. Constructs separate us from reality but they nonetheless take form in reality and they therefore leave their mark on reality. One side emphasizes the separation; the other, the effects. Derrida in particular and deconstruction in general belongs mainly on the first side. However it is construed, "there is nothing outside the text" (*Grammatology* 158) imposes linguistic processes as a mediating separation from the unmediated. Jameson's well-known metaphor, "the prison-house of language," in his book by that title, characterizes the separation in negative terms. As a result of such mediation, as Hayles puts it, nature is denatured by a human intervention that adds the artifact of

constructedness.

Ironically, deconstruction's success in the 1970s insured its eventual defeat in the sense that the more widely the mediating role of language was recognized and conceded, the less need there was for deconstruction. Making us aware of the independence of language even from speakers, deconstruction provided a context in which the mediating role of language throughout culture became visible such that, by the 1980s, constructionist premises were firmly enough in place to prompt a shift to the second side of constructivist theory: constructs may arise from cultural uses of language but they nonetheless have effects experienced in a reality that is irreducible simply to language. Attention to such effects marked "the eighties as the period when race, class, and gender became the holy trinity of literary criticism" (Appiah 625). Constructs of race, gender, and class have effects on living people and their life experiences. These effects explain the intensity of struggles in the historical process over the transformation and transformation of such constructs. In this context, theorists paid more attention to Foucault's "power is everywhere" (*Sexuality* 93), and historicity began to get more attention than textuality.

Once one moves beyond the linguistic construction of constructs to the effects these have beyond language, one broadens the scope of the denaturing mediation of constructs to the encompassing level of Latour's hybrids, which designate fusions of cultural practice and real effects that are interrelated in complex "networks." Race, gender, and class became a "holy trinity" because theory and progressive politics reinforced one another in the exposure of histories of racism, sexism, and classism as based not on natural essences but on historical constructs held in place by structures of power. But these constructs do not exhaust constructionism, which is everywhere. A

locus classicus of postmodernism appears early in *White Noise* in the form of a tourist visit to a barn. The history of this site is not recounted but one imagines a local entrepreneur one day putting up alongside the highway a sign--"The Most Photographed Barn in America"--and drivers obediently stopping to take their picture. In the visit DeLillo records, there is a sea of visitors photographing the barn, and even the act of photographing itself. By this time, it is no doubt true that this barn has been photographed more than any other in America but this reality is constructed through and through. The episode serves among other things as a synecdoche for the constructedness of consumer culture that pervades the world of *White Noise*. The postmodern sunsets in this world add to such direct effects of constructs the indirect effects of unintended consequences of cultural processes.

When the scope of mediation is broadened in this way, it becomes, of course, all the more difficult to find any reality without human fingerprints on it. Already ambiguous because of differences like those between Buell and Evernden, "isness" becomes more ambiguous. An example pertinent to the theme of wilderness involves a 1980s debate in a New England town over the issue of whether to adhere to a "wilderness ethic" according to which "nature should be left alone" because any human intervention of any kind "constitutes harm." This issue arose in the aftermath of a tornado that blew down an "old-growth forest known as Cathedral Pines." One side wanted the area cleared and replanted. The other wanted it left alone, arguing that regardless of what humans think the blowdown "is just a natural occurrence." But research prompted by the debate discovered that "Cathedral Pines actually was cleared in the late eighteenth century and thinned of hardwoods some years later" (Proctor 285). It was not a pristine, absolutely unmediated wilderness after all. Analogously, one may ask questions about the binary making unmediated

wilderness and human civilization mutually exclusive in narratives of Europe's "discovery" of the America. Gary Paul Nabhan, for example, reports on research on ways that aboriginal peoples in America altered the earth long before the Europeans arrived. Nabhan quips, "Is it odd that after ten to fourteen thousand years of indigenous cultures making their homes in North America, Europeans moved in and hardly noticed that the place looked 'lived in'?" (94). Such examples confirm Latour's claim that hybrids appear at all times and places. Modernity differs only in allowing hybrids to proliferate without scrutinizing their effects.

Ironically, though, when constructivism is broadened thus it becomes less a "prison-house" than a way--perhaps the way--humans live in reality. A postmodern truth that may endure is that the line between nature and culture has become too fuzzy to keep one unambiguously separate from the other. By thinking of constructivism less as a separation from an unmediated reality and more as a mode of existence in reality, it can become a way back to reality.

For McKibben, however, the impossibility of finding any wilderness free of human mediation is tragic. It is not "Cathedral Pines" examples that ended nature for McKibben, although his survey of explorers enjoying first-time encounters with wilderness areas indicates that he dearly would have loved to have been one of them. His survey concludes with the 1930s, "when Bob Marshall, the founder of the Wilderness Society, set off to explore Alaska's Brooks Range. . . . [He] was very near the last to see surroundings *unpolluted* even by the knowledge that someone had been there before" (52-53; italics added). McKibben acknowledges that even before the "end of nature" his own home in New York's Adirondacks was a "second-chance wilderness" in the sense that it was the effect of state action nearly a century before to

reforest the area and to declare it "'forever wild'--off limits to loggers and condo developers alike" (32). A second-chance wilderness was better than no wilderness at all because it meant that even if there were no longer places where no human had ever been there were at least spots where no one was "at the moment" (55).

Stated in terms that are experiential and deeply personal, McKibben's account of the "end of nature" is perhaps best considered from the standpoint of his own account of the difference it makes in his life:

Almost every day, I hike up the hill out my back door. Within a hundred yards the woods swallows me up, and there is nothing to remind me of human society--no trash, no stumps, no fence, not even a real path. Looking out from the high places, you can't see road or house; it is a world apart from man. But once in a while someone will be cutting wood farther down the valley, and the snarl of a chain saw will fill the woods. It is harder on those days to get caught up in the timeless meaning of the forest, for man is nearby. The sound of the chain saw doesn't blot out all the noises of the forest or drive the animals away, but it does drive away the feeling that you are in another, separate, timeless, wild sphere.

Now that we have changed the most basic forces around us, the noise of that chain saw will always be in the woods. We have changed the atmosphere, and that will change the weather. The temperature and rainfall are no longer to be entirely the work of some separate, uncivilizable force, but instead in part a product of our habits, our economies, our ways of life. Even in the most remote wilderness, where the strictest laws forbid the felling of a single tree, the sound of that saw will be clear, and a walk in the woods will be

changed--tainted--by its whine. (47-48)

Global warming, acid rain, depletion of the ozone layer--these "end" nature because they are denaturing mediations. "[O]ur habits, our economics, our ways of life"--from the standpoint of postmodern theory these can all be analyzed in terms of the formation of the social constructs that inform them. But in such analysis, there is typically a direct relation between a construct and its effects, as when a gender construct can be related to real effects experienced by men and women, or a consumer construct (advertising) can be related to the realities of a consumerist life style. But the changes in the atmosphere that end nature for McKibben add a level of unintended consequences--a level whose significance later chapters will examine from additional perspectives--that broadens the scope of denaturing mediation still further to encompass indirect as well as direct effects of constructs.

Global warming may stand as the counterpart to the impurity of all perception that Derrida attributes to writing. The two may be seen as the ends of a spectrum of constructivism that is the point of departure for Latour and an obstacle to transcend for Evernden. What is most fundamental of all for Evernden is the absoluteness of the dualism separating the human from the nonhuman, of social constructions from wildness. This dualism is important for Buell too, but from Evernden's standpoint, as we've seen, Buell misplaces the line of separating the human from the nonhuman. Whether the same is the case with McKibben is more difficult to discern. Whatever difference there may be between Evernden and McKibben on this score may be less substantive than an effect of Evernden's greater theoretical precision.

Part of the overlap between Evernden and McKibben is evident in the way that for each the dualism between the human and nonhuman is so great that the passage from one to the other is conceived as a religious experience.

McKibben reconstructs these experiences to recount what has been lost with the "end of nature." At bottom, they involve leaving the human sphere for the "separate, timeless, wild sphere" of the nonhuman or nature. When he remarks that the sound of a chain saw is enough to blur the dualistic separation from the human sphere he left behind, one might wonder why his own presence is itself not enough to blur it. The question is not addressed theoretically but McKibben suggests an answer a few pages later as he contrasts swimming in a nearby lake when waterskiers are present with swimming there when they are absent and "[you are] able to forget everything but yourself, and even yourself except for the muscles and the skin" (49). He becomes, it seems less a man with a mind than an animate body with instinctual responsiveness. He moves from the human to the nonhuman within his dualistic self, perhaps the way Dillard does when she enters the weasel's brain for sixty seconds. In this state of identification with nature, McKibben is with God:

It is not a novel observation that religion has been in decline in the modern era. . . . Many people, including me, have overcome it to a greater or a lesser degree by locating God in nature. Most of the glimpses of immortality, design, and benevolence that I see come from the natural world--from the seasons, from the beauty, from the intermeshed fabric of decay and life, and so on. (71).

The decisive thing about this God, however, is not anything supernatural but simply being independent of and prior to the human. Whether or not this independence is rooted in materiality is seemingly immaterial. Before the "end of nature," McKibben laments, "we lived in a world that we found made for us, by God, or by physics and chemistry and biology. . . . But now we make that world" (84). A realm absolutely separate from human manipulation is "a category like God--something beyond our control" (210). It is fitting,

then, that the last word in McKibben's book is "inhuman." Now that nature has ended on earth, McKibben looks to the stars, recounting an August night his family climbed high in the Adirondacks to watch "the annual Perseid meteor shower" (216). This is the context for his final paragraph:

As I lay on the mountaintop that August night I tried to pick out the few constellations I could identify--Orion's Belt, the Dippers. The ancients, surrounded by wild and even hostile nature, took comfort in seeing the familiar above them--spoons and swords and nets. But we will need to train ourselves not to see those patterns. The comfort we need is inhuman. (217)

Above all else, McKibben thus concludes, we need to identify ourselves in a dualistic world. To place ourselves we need a context that is other than ourselves. The stars constitute the only wilderness that is left.¹³

The picture of McKibben gazing at the stars, however romantically appealing, may stand as an exemplar of a dualistic sensibility in its last days. However much McKibben questions modernity, in the end he affirms it at the deepest level. Latour's theory of hybridization points toward a very different monistic sensibility, one that appears with detailed clarity in Richard White's critique of McKibben. White is worth quoting at length, moreover, because he offers a glimpse of the totalized reality that the next chapter will seek to theorize. This reality may be termed the "eco-concrete," in contrast to the "bourgeois concrete." The latter privileges details of the natural world as recorded within the context of the contours of individual experience, such as Dillard's or Thoreau's. To the extent that ecocritics like Buell and Evernden privilege such experiences they reinforce the reigning hegemony of the bourgeois concrete. Such ecocritics might do better to direct their attention to the very different eco-concrete. Later chapters

will suggest that the literary form best suited to capture this concrete is not the lyric or the novel centered on individual experience but the epic. With the eco-concrete the relevant context is not the contours of individual experience but the "horizon" or "circumference" of the planet.

White focuses on a passage in which McKibben accentuates the separation that existed before the "end of nature" between his office and the natural world outside, particularly a nearby mountain he can see through his window. McKibben observes, "The mountain and the office are separate parts of my life; I do not really think of them as connected. . . . What happens in here I control; what happens out there has always been the work of some independent force" (65). Two realms divided: in one, the human is in control; in the other, the nonhuman. White comments:

[U]nlike McKibben, I cannot see my labor as separate from the mountains, and I know that my labor is not truly disembodied. If I sat and typed here day after day, as clerical workers type, without frequent breaks to wander and to look at the mountains, I would become achingly aware of my body. I might develop carpal tunnel syndrome. My body, the nature in me, would rebel. The lights on this screen need electricity, and this particular electricity comes from dams on the Skagit or Columbia. These dams kill fish; they alter the rivers that come from the Rockies, Cascades, and Olympics. The electricity they produce depends on the great seasonal cycles of the planet: on falling snow, melting waters, flowing rivers. In the end, these electrical impulses will take tangible form on paper from trees. *Nature, altered and changed, is in this room.* But this is masked. I type. I kill nothing. I touch no living thing. I seem to alter nothing but the screen. If I don't think about it, I can seem benign, the mountains

separate and safe from me as the Adirondacks seem safe from McKibben as he writes his essays for the *New Yorker*. But, of course, the natural world has changed and continues to change to allow me to sit here, just as it changes to allow McKibben to write. My separation is an illusion. (184; italics added)

The italicized sentence points to the paradox that defines modernity for Latour perhaps more than anything else. White's room participates in a hybrid consisting of a complex network of connections between the nonhuman and the human. White calls attention to the nature in his room because it is hard for moderns to see it. Premoderns are very different. In Latour's words, "It is the impossibility of changing the social order without modifying the natural order--and vice versa--that has obliged the premoderns to exercise the greatest prudence. Every monster becomes visible and thinkable and explicitly poses serious problems for the social order" (42). The nature in White's room is the first thing the premodern would see and assess.

Modernity's dualism, by contrast, renders this interdependence of the nonhuman and the human invisible. Whatever interactions between the two occur does nothing to alter the dualistic ontology that conceptualizes the nonhuman as "out there" and the human as "in here." Consequently, modernity thinks nothing of altering the planet to allow White to type on his computer in his home office. "By rendering mixtures [of human and nonhuman] unthinkable . . . the moderns allowed the practice of mediation to recombine all possible monsters without letting them have any effect on the social fabric, or even contact with it. . . . What the premoderns have always ruled out the moderns can allow" (42). Hybrids proliferate precisely because dualism guarantees that they "will be absolutely and irreversibly transformed, either into objects of external nature or into subjects of society" (111). Conceptually

the dualistic divide remains intact. It is taking an ecological crisis of unprecedented proportions to awaken modernity to the truth that the social order it constructs is interdependent with a profound alteration of the planet with uncertain and unknown consequences. "To put it crudely," Latour suggests, "those who think the most about hybrids circumscribe them as much as possible, whereas those who choose to ignore them by insulating them from any dangerous consequences develop them to the utmost" (41). The irony is that the premoderns worried about illusory hybrids like Okonkwo's "pollution" and kept the planet in good health, whereas the moderns, troubled by no such illusions, proceeded to pollute the planet to a degree that we may be only beginning to comprehend.

Critique of Latour

Monistic implications reside most prominently in Latour's substantiation of his thesis that "we have never been modern." Modernity's dualism is exposed as an illusion. The reality is a whole consisting of interdependent parts that persists from premodernity through modernity. Latour's primary attention, however, is less on pursuing these philosophical implications than on retelling the shift from premodernity to modernity in the context of the unchanging reality of this foundational whole. "Cultures . . . do not exist, any more than Nature does. There are only natures-cultures, and these offer the only possible basis for comparison" (104). Much of the book, consequently, is devoted to explaining this shift as a move not from a false monism to a true dualism, but from a "nature-culture" that restrained the production of hybrids to a "nature-culture" that used dualistic philosophy to justify the removal of this restraint, igniting a proliferation of hybrids to

the point that, as his example at the beginning of the book suggests, a refrigerator in one's kitchen is linked to the ozone hole in the atmosphere.

Perhaps because his attention is less on philosophy than on disputing the standard account of the shift from premodernity to modernity, Latour, at the end of his book, shies away from the monistic implications of his powerful argument. In any case, to keep experimentation as we know it more or less intact, Latour ironically ends up upholding dualism if only as a heuristic device:

[W]e do not wish to become premoderns all over again. The nonseparability of natures and societies had the disadvantage of making experimentation on a large scale impossible, since every transformation of nature had to be in harmony with a social transformation, term for term, and vice versa. Now we seek to keep the moderns' major innovation: the separability of a nature that has no one has constructed . . . and the freedom of maneuver of a society that is of our own making." (140)

Latour's "enlightenment without modernity" thus keeps dualism insofar as enlightenment experimentation presupposes it but dispenses with modernity's repression of hybrids. The combination

consists in using the premodern categories to conceptualize the hybrids, while retaining the moderns' final outcome of the work of purification--that is, an external Nature distinct from subjects. . . . To maintain all the advantages of the moderns' dualism without its disadvantages. . . . To keep all the advantages of the premoderns' monism without tolerating its limits. . . . (134)

Latour thus sees himself marrying premodernity to modernity after the divorce that distinguished them in the first place (35, 99).

But whether such a happy ending is possible or desirable remains to be seen. One may agree that scientific experiment will be essential to work through the ecological crisis, but it would seem that part of working through this crisis would also involve a reevaluation of experimentation. The question is not whether to return to a world in which experimentation could be punished as an offense to an earth goddess, but whether the monistic interdependence of nature and society should be the context within which science is governed to insure its ecological responsibility. A later chapter will return to this issue from the standpoint of the theme of science in *White Noise*.

Latour's privileging of experimentation may also explain a curious blind spot in his text that appears in its treatment of the ozone hole and global warming, defined earlier as indirect rather than direct effects of constructivism. Such indirect effects are also central in *White Noise*. By virtue of this blind spot, Latour fails to complete the paradigm shift he seeks to define in his closing pages, but instead regresses to his "enlightenment without modernity" compromise. The next chapter will have to pick up where he leaves off.

The ozone hole appears, of course, in the example of a hybrid that begins the book. Global warming also gets mention, although Latour never tries to define a detailed network for it like the one he defines for the ozone hole. The blind spot appears in the company these examples keep in passages listing multiple examples: (1) ozone hole and global warming are grouped with deforestation in one sentence and a long list of examples in a nearby sentence: "frozen embryos, expert systems, digital machines, sensor-equipped robots, hybrid corn, data banks, psychotropic drugs, whales outfitted with radar sounding devices, gene synthesizers, audience analyzers

. . . our daily newspapers display all these monsters on page after page" (49-50); (2) "a nuclear power plant, or a hole in the ozone layer, or a map of the human genome, or a rubber-tyred metro train" (108). Compilations of monstrous hybrids reinforce the point that their proliferation makes it harder and harder for modernity to sustain its dualistic thinking. When the monsters were few, it was easy to sustain the clear opposition between the human and the nonhuman, but as monsters proliferate, the binary is blurred.

Hybridization is the basis of Latour's classification of the ozone hole and global warming with things ranging from robots to nuclear power plants. In all these examples there is a "monstrous" mixture of cultural practice with natural materials and processes. This classification is unobjectionable as far as it goes. The difficulty is that within this general class of hybrids there is a difference between such things as global warming on the one hand and nuclear power plants on the other. A nuclear power plant is like Boyle's air pump insofar as each is a hybrid constructed for specific purposes. Boyle ushered in the regime of experimentation that continues to this day. Latour reaffirms this regime's freedom from monistic restraint as "enlightenment" even as he rejects "modernity" for its inattention to hybrids. But it would seem to be this reaffirmation that blinds Latour to global warming's difference. Global warming and the ozone hole are hybrids but not hybrids designed for human purposes. As unintended consequences, they fall outside the regime of experimentation--an issue to be addressed later is whether such hybrids can ever be brought under this regime or elude comprehension in a form of the "ecological sublime." Dangerous changes in the atmosphere on the one hand, toxic air, water, and earth on the other--all such major components of the ecological crisis fall similarly outside the jurisdiction of experimentation. There are monsters and there are monsters.

Furthermore, the needed distinction between monsters that eludes Latour's theoretical comprehension seems to fall on a line dividing dualism from monism. As Latour's reaffirmation of experimentation suggests, experimentation entails dualism insofar as it needs to assert its freedom against monistic restraint. Global warming, by contrast, entails monism, as it is an effect of the "action and interaction" that Carson speaks of in accentuating the interdependence of the physical environment and the life it sustains. Global warming is a hybrid, but it is not an experiment or technology designed by humans for human purposes. Such hybrids are without an intention, signs not of human designs but of immanent effects of the monistic whole.

Further evidence of Latour's blind spot appears in the closing section in the book, "The Parliament of Things," where Latour envisions, as a way to resolve the ecological crisis, a new kind of Parliament. This Parliament includes not only the customary representatives of human constituencies but also representatives of "the ozone hole" and "the meteorology of the polar regions" (144). The focus of this Parliament is the "hybrid," the "quasi-object" all participants have helped to create, "whose network extends from [Latour's] refrigerator to the Antarctic by way of chemistry, law, the State, the economy, and satellites. . . . They are the ones that have to be represented; it is around them that the Parliament of Things gathers henceforth" (144). In this example, the "ozone hole" is ambiguously both a specific unintended consequence and an instance of the principle of unintended consequences in general. This ambiguity, however, goes unrecognized, as Latour fails to note that at any such Parliament a representative of the possibility of unintended consequences needs to have a permanent seat. As a result, Latour's Parliament remains within the tradition

of democracy initiated by John Locke and others, whereby democracy is envisioned as a voluntaristic enterprise that ultimately recognizes no principle of necessity beyond that which it imposes on itself through the democratic action of the individuals involved. Such voluntarism is precisely what needs to be modified by formal inclusion of the necessitarian principle of the monistic whole, which exists immanently in its effects, all of which can never be fully anticipated in advance. Such a principle does not inhibit action, since unintended consequences can follow from inaction as well as action, but it does foreground the need for a level of caution and humility that is not to be found in the arrogance of modernity.

Hybrids resulting from unintended consequences, moreover, are the kind that prompts us to reevaluate experimentation, as when we worry about what kind of unintended hybrids might eventuate from experiments in the name of genetic engineering.¹⁴ It is the kind of hybrid that even complicates experimentation by adding a new issue. Boyle's experiment is designed to discover "facts" independent of human intervention. In other words, it seeks to discover naturalistic thoroughbreds, not monstrous hybrids. That has been the traditional mission of experiment. But phenomena like global warming pose the threshold issue of whether they are thoroughbreds or hybrids. Is it an effect of human action or an increase in solar radiation, or some other purely natural phenomena? Consensus among scientists seems to be that global warming is a hybrid but dissenters remain. Latour points to a similar debate about the ozone hole in his opening paragraph, but the significance of such a debate does not become an issue in the book, even though it is a new kind of issue that is likely to recur, as science becomes not just itself a hybrid but develops a science of hybrids to complement its traditional science of thoroughbreds.

Latour's anti-dualism thus points down the theoretical road to monism, but his "enlightenment without modernity" fails to get us all the way there. Monism would be an alternative to the dualism reigning over our world today as well as to revalorizations of this dualism, like Evernden's, that seek to exit this world for parts seemingly unknown. But it needs to be a monism that is more down to earth than up to metaphysical heights. Ecocriticism needs a "circumference" for its interpretive practice that is more planetary than cosmic. Ecocriticism needs, in short, a monistic geocentrism.

Chapter 4

Geocentrism and Ecocriticism

[T]here is no place for purely human boasts of grandeur, or for forgetting that men build their cultures by huddling together, nervously loquacious, at the edge of an abyss.

Kenneth Burke, 1935

As noted in chapter two, the editors of *New Literary History* plausibly see ecocriticism as staking out as its "interpretive horizon" the "literal horizon" of the earth itself. Geocentrism--the horizon of planet earth--would thus seem to be an essential characteristic of all versions of ecocriticism, no matter how much they might vary in other respects. Is that the case? Or are there versions that go beyond the earth to something larger? If so, is there any value to limit ecocriticism rigorously to the horizon of the earth? Finally, the mere mention of "centrism" reminds us that during the closing decades of the 20th century, centrisms ranging from logocentrism to Eurocentrism were, of course, theoretically suspect. To speak in the name of centrism of any kind is likely to raise eyebrows even in readers otherwise sympathetic. Constructed by human beings in particular circumstances, discourses are situated, not transcendentally centrist. Some discourses may dominate others but that is power, the argument goes, not transcendent centrism. By claiming independence from situatedness, centrisms claim for themselves what is not available to human beings. Stanley Fish sums up the core claim succinctly: "We are never not in a situation" (276). Is ecocriticism, even if rigorously geocentric, necessarily subject to this general critique of centrism? Or is geocentrism paradoxically both transcendent and situated? A decentered centrism? An antifoundational

foundation? All these questions would seem to be useful one for ecocritics to address, particularly those interested in strengthening ecocriticism's position in theoretical debates.

Before venturing answers to these questions, however, it will be necessary to begin with a different centrism, namely, cosmocentrism. Ironically, cosmocentrism is pre-Copernican but still very much with us.

The Pre-Copernican Fallacy; or, Cosmocentrism

On earth, life flourishes, perhaps not as much as in the past but relative to the lifelessness of other planets it is flourishing. Astronomy is, of course, seeking evidence of other solar systems with the hope that in such systems there may be other "earths." But judging by our own solar system, even if another "earth" were to be found, one would expect it too to be an exception to the rule of lifelessness. Even in our solar system, after all, the odds are stacked heavily against life.

The evidence available indicates that life is exceptional and its rarity suggests that it is contingent. Rachel Carson's title--"silent spring"--is famous at least in part because it evokes this contingency. The "Fable for Tomorrow" with which *Silent Spring* begins sketches a scene of vibrant life turning into a place of slow death--a cautionary tale if there ever was one. The contingency of life on earth is even certain insofar as we know that our sun, like any star, will not last forever. It is true that the end of the sun's light and heat is projected into an unimaginably distant future, but it is routine for philosophical discourse to deal with eternities and infinities, so perhaps it is fair to ask that the contingency of life on earth be one of the premises in any philosophy for the twenty-first century.

That it is difficult to conceive life as contingent is suggested by the tendency to elide this thought, particularly with respect to human life. How, for instance, should one construe Heidegger's line, "Being's poem, just begun, is man" (4)? Does this mean, as Michael E. Zimmerman suggests, that humans possess "cosmological significance . . . [as] manifestations of the universe's capacity for bringing itself to awareness" (77)? These questions are posed not to launch into a reading of Heidegger but to offer an example that can serve--independently of Heidegger if you wish--as a simple illustration of how humans can be construed as central to the meaning of the cosmos. In this example, the human capacity for "awareness" becomes evidence that the cosmos itself is the kind of thing that has such a capacity. Human life then becomes essential to the cosmos, not a mere contingent flame that could burn out without consequence beyond the earth itself. Even after Copernicus, in other words, there continue to be reaffirmations of a pre-Copernican centering of the earth and humankind not in space but in "cosmological significance." Such discourses may be said to function as a "strategy of containment" (Jameson, "Symbolic," 517) whereby the Copernican revolution is limited to astronomy to allow a pre-Copernican cosmocentrism to continue elsewhere.

Cosmocentrism conceives life on earth, particularly human life, to be in some sense at the center of the universe. That is the pre-Copernican fallacy, which is doubly questionable as it assumes both that the universe has a center and that in some sense humankind speaks for it. Even though the available evidence suggests both that lifelessness is the norm throughout the cosmos and that there is nothing significant about the earth's position in space, the earth is nonetheless conceived as just happening somehow to be at the center of things. An odd design if there ever was one. Such a design

calls into question the very idea that there is a design.

Darwinian evolution would seem to confirm the contingency of life, both human and nonhuman. Evolution shows that species of life are not fixed essences but contingent formations that undergo transformations in the evolutionary process. The available evidence suggests that in this process life itself is as contingent as any species of life. Life seems to have originated in contingent environmental conditions, conditions that life, once it emerged, profoundly altered, as Carson recounts in a passage discussed in chapter two. Furthermore, extinctions of some forms of life have often followed changes in the conditions of the earth. These suggest that total extinction is possible.

In sum, life on earth proves only that life is possible in the cosmos. But it does not prove that life is eternal, a telos, or in any way essential to the cosmos. For all we know, life on earth may be a freak of nature.

Being an inhabitant of the earth is to be in a concrete situation, one so concrete that the conditions for life on earth make possible each breath one takes throughout all the years of one's life. Life in the situation found on earth is the premise of geocentrism. Cosmocentrism transforms this situatedness into an unsituatedness independent of the earth. The earth becomes a place for cosmic beings who speak for a cosmic center. Life on earth is thus affirmed forever by a cosmic guarantee. Such tempting thoughts suggest why cosmocentrism continues in the absence of evidence to support it. Geocentrism, by contrast, directs our attention to life on earth, away from thoughts of immortality in the heavens above. Geocentrism is paganism without gods, or at least only with unambiguously earthbound gods. Geocentrism affirms that human life in particular and life on earth in general amount to no more than a viewpoint in the universe. Cosmocentrism translates this

viewpoint into the center of the cosmos, a transcendent point beyond viewpoints.

Cosmocentrism vs. Geocentrism

Geocentrism is a decentered centrism, an antifoundational foundation. Post-Copernican through and through, without any "strategy of containment," geocentrism is a standpoint from which cosmocentrism can be demystified.

Burke's structure of motivation in *A Rhetoric of Motives*--generic, specific, and individual motives--can help one to distinguish cosmocentrism's rhetorical appeal from geocentrism's philosophical foundation. This tripartite structure, is ambiguously rhetorical and philosophical as is *A Rhetoric of Motives* itself, which Burke introduces as a "philosophy of rhetoric" (xv). In Burke's snapshot of humans "build[ing] their cultures by huddling together, nervously loquacious, at the edge of an abyss" (*Permanence* 272), rhetoric appears in the loquaciousness and philosophy in the situation all humans share on earth in a cosmic abyss.

The terms "individual," "specific," and "generic" are defined in relation to one another so that their meanings can vary from discourse to discourse.¹⁵ On the specific level, motivation typically arises from social relations, but as we'll see below, it can be conceived more broadly. Specific motivation in the Marxist historical narrative--which illustrates a number of Burke's theoretical claims in particularly clear form--appears in the motives of economic class. Generic motivation makes possible what Burke sees as the "transcendence at which all men aim" (*Rhetoric* 195), but achieving it may entail a price. Near-term concerns at the specific level, for example, may need to be sacrificed to long-term concerns at the generic level. In the case

of Marxism, generic motivation is located in the long-term design of history. The trade unionist is attached to the specific level, preoccupied with immediate issues like a wage hike. Transcendence is reserved for the revolutionary proletariat, who ascends to the generic level of history as a whole:

The worker whose understanding becomes infused with this [historical] doctrine then sees himself not merely as an individual joining with other individuals to improve his bargaining position with his employer. . . . For he sees his role in terms of an *absolute*, an ultimate. In participating *locally*, he is participating in the total dialectic, communicating directly with its universal logic, or ultimate direction. . . . [H]e now sees himself . . . not just as Mr. So-and-so working under such-and-such conditions, but as "*the Proletarian*," with a generic personality calling creatively to ways of action that transcend his limited nature as Mr. So-and-so, and derive their logic from motives of universal scope. (*Rhetoric* 196-97)

Transcendence thus offers the incentive of hierarchic elevation. Through transcendence, one becomes "bigger" in a generic sense, elevating one's place in history. With cosmocentrism, one assumes a "generic personality" whose scope extends beyond history to the cosmos. It is hard to get "bigger" than that.

In Burke's tripartite structure, it is important not to confuse "individual" with individualism. "Individual" refers to "the `centrality of the nervous system,' and to the ambiguously divisive and unitary conditions that go with it" (*Rhetoric* 147). Individuals are first and foremost the *bodies*, each organized by the centrality of its nervous system, that Burke sees "huddling together, nervously loquacious, at the edge of an abyss." Bodies are divisive insofar as to be a body is to be divided from other

bodies, but there is also a "unitary" dimension insofar as humans are "bodies that learn language."¹⁶ A language joins bodies, making them "loquacious," even as it creates new divisions, particularly at the specific level. Speaking English is a specific motivation that divides English speakers from speakers of other languages. Language also contributes to the definition of specific differences such as those of gender, race, and class.

The level of the individual is the resource to which one turns when contrasting generic to specific to define "the rhetorical motive indigenous to all men, not local to their social position, but characteristic of the human situation universally" (*Rhetoric* 148). The combination of divisive and unitary conditions on the individual level becomes in effect a resource for signifiers to define generic signifieds. The individual Locke conceives in a state of nature is the generic individual in individualism, the individual for whom property is a natural right when one's labor is mixed with the earth. Locke, in other words, in conceptualizing the generic level emphasizes the divisive over the unitary conditions at Burke's individual level. The emphasis in Marx is the opposite. For Marx, property is specific, not generic. "[A]ccording to Marx, only by the abolition of property relationships that make for specific, or class motives, might we hope to get truly universal motivation. And such universal or generic motivation would, by the same token, mean the freeing of the individual. Hence, dialectically, all three levels of motivation are involved (generic, specific, and individual)" (*Rhetoric* 110).

As noted earlier, specific motivation is typically a social position, but it is not necessarily so because of the relationality of the terms in Burke's tripartite structure. In the Dillard text Everden valorizes, for example, the specific is broadened beyond the social to encompass the human species, as humans are distinguished from animals: "The weasel lives in necessity and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at the last

ignobly in its talons." The generic level, in turn, is broadened to encompass the wildness both in animals and deep within humans. Dillard depicts herself as wanting "to learn, or remember, how to live," implying that wildness is within each of us, if we can only allow ourselves to remember it. Reminding the reader that weasels bite their prey at the neck, Dillard laments letting the weasel get away:

I missed my chance. I should have gone for the throat. I should have lunged for that streak of white under the weasel's chin and held on, held on through mud and into the wild rose, held on for a dearer life. We could live under the wild rose wild as weasels, mute and uncomprehending. I could very calmly go wild. (15)

Dillard missed her chance for transcendence. Transcendence is usually in some sense "upward," but for Dillard it is decidedly "downward" to wildness. Thoreau's aphorism "in wildness is the preservation of the world" is similarly a transcendence downward, at least as construed by Roderick Nash: "Thoreau grounded his argument on the idea that wildness was the source of vigor, inspiration, and strength. . . . Human greatness of any kind depended on tapping this primordial vitality. Thoreau believed that to the extent a culture, or an individual, lost contact with wildness it became weak and dull" (88). Oelschlaeger's *Idea of Wilderness*, which reaffirms Thoreau's aphorism, explicitly identifies wildness with the cosmos in a variant of cosmocentrism to be considered below.¹⁷

Texts can often be read as cosmocentric or geocentric. This ambiguity could arise in a cosmocentric text simply because pre-Copernican assumptions are so deeply embedded that the distinction seems unnecessary. Where geocentrism might need the distinction to define itself, cosmocentrism can ignore it. The generic level is typically where one would find this ambiguity.

In Wordsworth, for example, nature is the setting for the generic. The

move from society to nature is a move from specific to generic. Identity is ultimately determined by one's position in nature, not society. The well-known autobiographical section of "Tintern Abbey" recounts different stages of Wordsworth's relationship with nature, culminating in his maturity in

a sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. . . .
 [.]
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being. (95-111)

Is this "spirit" cosmocentric or geocentric? Does it roll "through all things" in the universe? Or only on earth? Is the "horizon" or "circumference" of Wordsworth's generic identity the cosmos or the earth? Burke often uses his term "circumference" to say that a supernatural "scene" is to a natural one as "broader" is to "narrower" (*Grammar* 77). Applying the term to the difference between cosmos and earth, one can use it literally.

Connotations of divinity--"spirit," "soul"--almost always tempt one to the cosmocentric reading, but a narrower reading is possible. Such a reading could borrow from *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, where Spinoza notes that "wind" is the basic meaning of the Hebrew word commonly translated as "Spirit" and then compiles a list of the different meanings the word is given

in its Biblical uses to determine "what is meant in the Bible by the prophets' being filled by the Spirit of God" (65). The two meanings to borrow begin Spinoza's list:

1. Breath. Psalm 135 v. 17, "Neither is there any Spirit in their mouths."

2. Life, or breathing. 1 Samuel ch. 30 v. 12, "His Spirit came again to him," that is, he started breathing. (65)

The "Spirit of God," then, may be construed as life itself, a meaning that can limit God to the context of geocentrism--an earthbound god for a new paganism?--if one accentuates the difference between lifelessness on earth and lifelessness elsewhere in the universe. Support for such a reading appears in the Wordsworth passage insofar as the spirit's "dwelling" is identified with "ocean," "living air," "blue sky," and "mind of man." Any limitation of this spirit to the earth, however, would make it fragile and contingent, an antifoundational foundation. Permanence may be too important in Wordsworth's discourse to accept this limitation. At the end of "The Ruined Cottage," for example, the wise pedlar finds in nature more than enough consolation for the passing of Margaret precisely because nature's calmness and tranquility make the changes humans suffer appear to be mere "passing shews," "an idle dream" (522-23). These lines seem to suggest a Parmenidean structure in which an eternal and unchanging spirit is contrasted to "passing shews" on the "dream" level of mere earthly phenomena. It may be easier to think of such a spirit as rooted in the cosmos rather than the earth.

A geocentric ecocriticism would be sensitive to the difference between the generic modes of subjecthood in these two readings of Wordsworth. If the generic subject is geocentric, then there are two situations involved, both located on the earth. One is the social situation giving rise to specific

motives. The other is the generic situation of inhabiting the earth and being dependent on the conditions of life available on earth and no where else, as far as we know. The specific situation entails the generic, which transcends it, but only to the earth, not the cosmos. The human subject is simultaneously an inhabitant of the earth (generic) and a social position (specific). Geocentrically considered, the generic situation is common to all however much social situations may divide humans in other respects.

There is in this generic situation a centrism but it is not a centrism that assumes either that the universe has a center or that humankind speaks for it. Rather it is a centrism that is situated, transcending social differences but transcending only to the situation of the conditions of life on earth on which all living things, human and nonhuman, are equally dependent.¹⁸ This centrism is a universal relative to social differences, but relative to the cosmos it is a mere viewpoint situated on earth. It is very much a decentered centrism, one whose circumference coincides with the earth. This centrism's situation, moreover, is contingent insofar as life is the exception rather than the rule in the universe and not guaranteed to last forever. It is an antifoundational foundation.

It is important to distinguish the term "earth" from the term "nature" in one respect. "Nature" is ambiguous insofar as some natural processes on earth occur elsewhere; there is no binary dividing the earth from the cosmos in a mutually exclusive opposition. With the term "nature," therefore, it is easy to broaden one's circumference from the earth to the cosmos. But what matters most is what makes earth exceptional, maybe even absolutely unique. Stressing "earth" helps to keep one's geocentrism from sliding into cosmocentrism. Rigorous substitution of "earth" for "nature," however, is difficult because "nature" is so embedded in our language that substitution

would sometimes be awkward. The reader is thus asked to keep this distinction in mind when "nature" is sometimes used instead of "earth."

"[H]uddling together, nervously loquacious, at the edge of an abyss"--in our loquaciousness, we invent discourses of motivation that compete with one another. These differ greatly, as the examples of Marx, Locke, Dillard, and Wordsworth illustrate. These differences can be profitably charted in rhetorical analysis based on Burke's tripartite structure. But our rhetorical loquaciousness, however great the range of "worlds" it can construct, can never alter our condition. We are huddled together on the earth in a universe indifferent to our fate. This is the philosophical foundation on which geocentrism rests.

From the standpoint of this philosophical anchor, one can demystify cosmocentrism. Such demystification does come with a price. For example, contributing to William Cronon's anthology of ecocritically sensitive essays, *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, Robert P. Harrison writes,

Those realists who insist on reminding us that human beings are nothing but tiny microorganisms on a speck of cosmic dirt called Earth are not wrong in their analogy. They are merely feckless. Humans are those beings for whom being nothing but tiny microorganisms on a speck of cosmic dirt is a source of anguish. (434)

Maybe yes, maybe no. Maybe the more one sees that such anguish is simply a side effect of the rhetoric of generic "bigness," the more ready one will be to pay the price of demystification. Surely it is better to be a "microorganism" than an inorganic rock. Life on earth is generic "bigness" enough.

One would think that ecocriticism would be at home with geocentrism. But that is not always the case. Cosmocentrism is a temptation hard to resist. One needs to distinguish the geocentric ecocriticism advocated in the present text from the cosmocentric ecocriticism found elsewhere.

Not cosmocentrism but anthropocentrism is the target attacked in much ecocritical writing. Anthropocentrism sums up the cluster of assumptions underlying the human-centered domination of the earth that has created the ecological crisis. Warwick Fox comprehensively identifies sources for these assumptions ranging from the theological conception of "man" as made in the image of God to Bacon's and Descartes's conceptualization of science as a way to dominate nature (9-10). That such ideas are "obviously *self-serving* assumptions" (14), Fox adds, is among the reasons that it is difficult to dislodge them from their hegemonic position in modern culture.

The nonanthropocentric alternative to anthropocentrism might be usefully introduced by explaining my preference for the term "ecological crisis" over "environmental crisis." "Environmental crisis" is, of course, by far the most commonly used term in public debate. The difficulty is that it implies that the crisis is in the environment around humans, who exist basically apart from it and simply need to learn how to manage it more carefully. "Ecology," by contrast, is about a web of complex relationships involving humans, not an environment that surrounds them.¹⁹ Humans are not "apart from" but "a part of." The "crisis" is in these relationships. Hierarchical structures in these relationships have created the crisis. To get beyond the crisis, nonanthropocentrism encourages "an egalitarian attitude on the part of humans toward all entities in the ecosphere" (Fox 20). From the nonanthropocentric standpoint, in other words, the crisis is a problem of relationships that

need radical alteration. It is not a matter of better managing an environment that surrounds us but of changing the way we live as inhabitants of the earth. We might recall White's debate with McKibben, reviewed in the last chapter, where White calls attention to the way we are deeply enmeshed in webs of relationships that modernity's dualism represses in making us think of the nonhuman realm as an environment around us. White's attempt to raise ecological relationships to consciousness may be seen as a necessary step in a nonanthropocentric strategy of transformation.

One might think nonanthropocentrism would readily identify cosmocentrism as one additional dimension of anthropocentrism, but that is not the case. Nonanthropocentrism does not automatically limit itself to geocentrism's circumference of the earth. Fox, for example, grounds his nonanthropocentrism in a "realization of the fact that we and all other entities are aspects of a single unfolding reality" (252), one in which life is rooted in the cosmos: "[A]ll entities in the universe are aspects of a single unfolding reality that has become increasingly differentiated over time" (254). Fox considers various metaphors for this process and concludes that a tree best "fits the facts" (261):

If we emphatically incorporate (i.e., have a lived sense of) the evolutionary, "branching tree" cosmology offered by modern science then we can think of ourselves and all other presently existing entities as leaves on this tree--a tree that has developed from a single seed of energy and that has been growing for some fifteen billion years, becoming infinitely larger and infinitely more differentiated in the process. A deep-seated realization of this cosmologically based sense of commonalty with all that is leads us to identify ourselves more and more with the entire tree. . . . At the limit, cosmologically based

identification . . . therefore leads to impartial identification with
all particulars (all leaves on the tree). (255-56)

In this tree of life, then, life is not earthbound but the essence of the cosmos. How does this "branching tree" metaphor "fit the facts" of lifelessness that abound in the universe? The question does not arise.

Fox's nonanthropocentrism is thus a balancing act in which humans are demoted from the anthropocentric subjecthood they have long enjoyed, but in return they are granted a new form of generic subjecthood of cosmic proportions. Anthropocentric assumptions are self-serving in one way; nonanthropocentric, in another.

The same balancing appears in *The Idea of Wilderness*, where Oelschlaeger's affirmation of Thoreau's "in wildness is the preservation of the world" culminates in his final chapter, "Cosmos and Wilderness," in an identification of wildness with the cosmos itself, not just wild places on earth. Like Fox, Oelschlaeger conceives evolution in cosmocentric terms, but the cosmocentric twist he gives it allows him to come full circle from Victorian times. Random variation and natural selection--the contingencies informing the evolutionary process--leave no room for structures that are progressive if not teleological, but Fox elides Darwin's core principle of contingency to give evolution such a structure (a "branching tree" of increasing differentiation). This ironic transformation of evolution reaches a climax of sorts in Oelschlaeger. Darwin shocked the religious sensibilities of his contemporaries (and maybe his own as well), but for Oelschlaeger, Darwin becomes the basis for reviving instead of shocking the religious sensibility.²⁰

Echoing Thoreau, Oelschlaeger suggests that "[o]nce we abandon the signposts, the directions that define the conventional world, we see wild

nature, and there, in wildness, lies preservation of the world" (321). Oelschlaeger thus contrasts the specific ("the conventional world") to the generic (the earth we inhabit), but like Evernden he uses wildness/wilderness to make the contrast in dualistic terms, although he differs from Evernden insofar as he implies spatial differentiation, as one might imagine a city in one place (specific) and a wilderness area in another (generic). Geocentrism would stress, rather, that the specific and generic coexist, albeit at different levels. It is through the specific level of cultures and their economies that humans act collectively as inhabitants of the earth, and from the standpoint of the earth, it is this collective action that matters. Geocentrically considered, what we are first and foremost is what we do as participants in this collectivity.²¹ Geocentric generic subjecthood would heighten awareness of this collective action and lead to changes at the specific level to alter the effects of this collective action. Oelschlaeger, however, directs attention away from this geocentric emphasis to lead us to a wilderness that extends beyond the earth. The idea of wilderness is, he suggests,

a search for meaning--for a new creation story or mythology--that is leading humankind out of a homocentric prison into a cosmic wilderness. And if that new creation story is to ring true in a postmodern age, then it must have both scientific plausibility and religious distinctiveness.

The second scientific revolution of Darwin and Clausius is just now, in its cosmological implications, reaching critical mass. Who am I? echoes a questioning voice from the nineteenth century. What are we? Where are we going? (321)

Oelschlaeger finds answers at a level that is cosmic and sacred, however

nonanthropocentric, as he fuses evolutionary science and myth or religion. "[T]he second scientific revolution encourages the possibility of religious experience: that is, the reality of creative evolution is fully consistent with the possibility of reawakening a primordial sense of the fundamental mystery and gratuitousness of human existence, some sense of the infinite and transcendent beyond merely human purpose and life" (341).

Equating the "body of God" to "the cosmos of the present" and the "deity" to the "restlessness of time that leads to emergent novelty" (343), Oelschlaeger states his conclusion "[s]ummarily":

Humankind, a part of cosmic process, must stand in awe of that sacrality which envelops (God as body) and transcends (the restlessness of time). Further, humankind can here enjoy fellowship . . . with deity (though not in anthropocentric fashion, since we are not the goal of evolutionary process). (344; Oelschlaeger's italics).

Humankind may not be the goal, but the earth certainly is. Evolution on earth reveals the central essence of the cosmic process of life. Why does the cosmos single the earth out in this way? Oelschlaeger never poses the question. In the absence of any evidence to explain the cosmic privileging of the earth, the cosmocentric strategy is to ignore the question to allow the rhetorical appeal of a generic subjecthood of cosmic size to have its persuasive effect.

Oelschlaeger's deployment of religious terminology in the name of nonanthropocentrism suggests how the dialectic of anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism can work itself out in ironic ways. On one level, anthropocentrism is apart from nature, as in modernity's dualism, whereas nonanthropocentrism attempts to reverse this separation to make humankind once again be a part of nature. But on another level, perhaps it is

anthropocentrism that is "a part of" and nonanthropocentrism that is "apart from."

Consider that in being anthropocentric humans may ironically be a part of nature in the sense that like any species they struggle to survive, differing only in that they have been so successful that nothing on earth threatens them (except themselves). One thinks of news stories of a species of insects overrunning an area because, their natural enemies being absent, there is nothing to keep their numbers in check. Humans are similarly overrunning the planet because there is no other species to limit their expansion. In *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, John Bellamy Foster reports that E. Ray Lankester, writing early in the 20th century, forecasted ecological disasters because of an "insect-like increase of humanity" (223).

Turning to Oelschlaeger's nonanthropocentrism, it is plausible to argue that his religious sentiments are distinctively human insofar as it is difficult to imagine any other animal species having any. Distinguished thus from all other species, humans become in a sense apart from nature. Fox almost gets to my point when he defends nonanthropocentrism from the charge of misanthropy (19-20). McKibben ironically makes it all the way when he in effect defines nonanthropocentrism as distinctively human:

As birds have flight, our special gift is reason. Part of that reason drives the intelligence that allows us, say, to figure out and master DNA, or to build big power plants. But our reason could also keep us from following blindly the biological imperatives toward endless growth in numbers and territory. Our reason allows us to conceive of our species as a species, and to recognize the danger that our growth poses to it, and to feel something for the other species we threaten. Should we so choose, we could exercise our reason to do what no other animal

can do: we could limit ourselves voluntarily, *choose* to remain God's creatures instead of making ourselves gods. What a towering achievement that would be, so much more impressive than the largest dam (beavers can build dams) because so much harder. Such restraint--not genetic engineering or planetary management--is the real challenge, the hard thing. Of course we can splice genes. But can we *not* splice genes?

(214-15)

In other words, humans may ironically become truly a responsible inhabitant of the planet ("a part of") when they exercise in the name of ecology the reason that distinguishes them from all other species ("apart from").

Nonanthropocentrism may be a rough draft of what could evolve into a new ecological humanism. What would a humanistic subjecthood endowed with ecological reason look like? How could it appear in literature? If ecological reason has always been with us, however much it has been repressed, how could it help one to reread history ecocritically? Answers to such questions will be the burden of the chapters to follow.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, one should wonder why ecocritical thought would even want to define the circumference of life as the cosmos rather the earth. By broadening this circumference to the cosmos, the ultimate ecological danger--not McKibben's "end of nature" but the end of life--is eliminated in advance. If life is rooted in the cosmos, it can change, but it cannot disappear, a formula perfectly suited to consumerism's cult of novelty, which, with the advent of genetic engineering, promises to venture into new frontiers. Insofar as writing about the ecological crisis is inevitably a cautionary tale on some level, one would think that the best strategy would be to hold out as a possibility the ultimate threat.

Ecological decay proceeds more slowly than nuclear catastrophe, but may be

more deadly in the long run. Who can say that thresholds may not be passed beyond which restoration of ecological health may be impossible? In some of its research, science presupposes the possibility that life appeared and disappeared on other planets. Why not here? Evolution teaches how life changes, but it does so by presupposing life's contingency.

Furthermore, the evidence of the contingency of life would seem to make a rigorous geocentric circumference a good "fit [with] the facts." Both strategy and evidence, in other words, argue for narrowing the circumference of life to the earth. Life both emerged and continues by virtue of a conjunction of conditions on earth and conditions beyond the earth, but life itself is earthbound, an effect of a conjunction that to the best of our knowledge is unique. Living in the truth of what we are may be the first step we need to take to keep what we have.

Geocentricizing Spinoza

Spinoza may serve to conclude chapters 1 through 4 in the form of a theoretical model to be tested in the remaining chapters. This model will be based on a modification of Spinoza's doctrine designed to make it possible to take advantage of the conceptual strategy informing his monism. As the example of Evernden suggests, one major viewpoint in the ecocritical conversation opposes itself to the Cartesian dualism and its progeny, but it deploys a strategy that ends up revalorizing dualism instead of displacing it. Human and nonhuman remain separate worlds, however much the nonhuman is valorized upwards as "wildness" or "wilderness." Perhaps Spinoza's model may serve to forge a more radical alternative.

Spinoza needs to be modified in a geocentric direction, even though for

his contemporaries, he was too geocentric, not cosmocentric enough. Stuart Hampshire suggests that in the context of the 17th century, Spinoza was exceptional in his departures from the cosmocentric norm: he alone seems to have grasped humankind's "relatively infinitesimal place" in the universe, whereas "in Descartes and in Leibniz, and in most of the literature of the age, one is still in various ways given the impression of a Universe in which human beings on this earth are the privileged centre around whom everything is arranged" (160). In *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries*, Warren Montag suggests that for his contemporaries Spinoza's

concept of the immanent cause, God's complete immanence in his creation, neither preceding nor exceeding it, nor creating it to fulfill a purpose the means for which did not heretofore exist, became a cunning way of turning God into "what exists" or even "all the things that are." The world thus deprived of God possessed neither unity nor coherence nor purpose: an infinity of singularities (xvi).

Compared to the "hard" cosmocentrism of his contemporaries, Spinoza's cosmocentrism is "soft."

Its "softness" is especially evident in the Appendix to the first part of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza dismisses finalism with absolute clarity. "All the prejudices I here undertake to expose depend on this one," Spinoza accentuates, "that God has made all things for man, and man that he might worship God" (439-40). Althusser calls Spinoza's critique of finalism the "first theory of *ideology* ever thought out" (*Essays* 135). Althusser finds particularly praiseworthy the way that Spinoza treats finalism not as "simple error" but as a materialist effect of "the relation of men to the world 'expressed' by the state of their bodies" (*Essays* 136). Spinoza, for example, reasons that humans found

many means that are very helpful in seeking their own advantage, e.g., eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing, plants and animals for food, the sun for light, the sea for supporting fish. . . . And knowing that they had found these means, not provided them for themselves, they had reason to believe that there was someone else who had prepared those means for their use. . . . Hence, they maintained that the Gods direct all things for the use of men in order to bind men to them and be held by men in the highest honor. (440-41)

Althusser's materialism needs, however, to be complemented with Burke's rhetoric. For Spinoza stresses that humans remain committed to finalism even in the face of both the negatives in nature ("storms, earthquakes, diseases, etc.") and the evidence that these negatives "happen indiscriminately to the pious and the impious alike" (441). Materialist reason provides no explanation for such illogic, but the rhetoric of generic motivation does, since it is easy to see why one might avow that God acts in ways beyond one's comprehension in order to be able to continue seeing oneself in cosmic proportions.

In dismissing the cosmocentrism of finalism, Spinoza goes a long way toward geocentricizing himself, but a cosmocentric strain remains nonetheless by virtue of the metaphysics of substance informing his conception of God. In his critique of Spinoza, Hegel provides a concise statement of the metaphysical model informing the medieval tradition of metaphysical thought that Spinoza paradoxically both reaffirmed and profoundly transformed. Hegel begins, "[W]e must make mention of the former metaphysical concept of God. . . . God was defined as the Sum-total of all Realities; and of this sum-total it was said that it contained no contradiction, none of the realities cancelling the other" (1: 124). Lists of such realities in the work of

various philosophers are surveyed by Harry A. Wolfson, in his authoritative and exhaustive reading of the letter of Spinoza's discourse. Lists in Wolfson's survey include (1) "life, power, and knowledge"; (2) "existence, unity, and eternity"; (3) "existence, power, knowledge, abundance, justice, goodness, mercifulness, life, truth"; (4) "unity, truth, existence, eternity, life, knowledge, will, and power"; and (5) "eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, the source of all goodness and truth, creator of all things, and infinite perfection" (1: 226-27). All such lists, however, were seen as partial. "The infinity of God's attributes," Wolfson notes, "is implied throughout the mediaeval discussions of the nature of God, especially in the oft-repeated statement that God is indescribable" (1: 225). This conceptual model, in other words, makes it possible to identify attributes of God and to discourse about them, but the rule of indescribability insures that such discourse will always fall short of God. A reverential subordination of human knowledge to God is thus built into the model.

From the standpoint of this tradition, Spinoza's list of God's attributes is startlingly innovative: "thought" and "extension" (448-49; *Ethics*, II, Prop. 1 and 2), "extension" being matter, or technically, the property of a body by which it occupies space. For Descartes, thought and extension constitute a dualism. For Spinoza, they are parts of one monistic whole; material creation is just as much a part of God as is thought in the intellect. Spinoza remains traditional in reaffirming the infinity of God's attributes (see below), but thought and extension are the ones that get his attention, and in focusing on these, his discourse of God moves pantheistically away from supernaturalism toward naturalism.

Burke speaks of Spinoza's move as a "narrowing of the circumference. . . . [B]y proclaiming the two circumferences [supernaturalism and naturalism]

to be identical in scope, Spinoza leaves you somewhat undecided whether he has naturalized God or deified Nature" (*Grammar* 138). But whatever he does, it is clear, he does it on a cosmocentric scale by virtue of his conception of substance:

-Whatever is, is either in itself or in another (410; *Ethics*, I, Axiom 1).

-Every substance is necessarily infinite (412; *Ethics*, I, Prop. 8).

-Except God, no substance can be or be conceived (420; *Ethics*, I, Prop. 14).

Therefore, everything is in God, who is in effect a container of containers, a container that cannot itself be contained.²²

The narrowing of circumference that is needed, consequently, is one that unambiguously eliminates Spinoza's cosmocentric strain. Spinoza moves decidedly away from supernaturalism toward naturalism, but as noted earlier, "nature" is an ambiguous term whose scope can easily be broadened from the earth (camping in nature, away from the city) to the cosmos (the natural law of gravity). The needed narrowing must be to the geocentric circumference of life on earth. In its contingency, life is not a God but an antifoundational foundation.

Hegel's concern in his critique is with "Realities" coexisting in a whole (God) with "no contradiction."²³ This kind of whole suggests one reason for Spinoza's definition of an "attribute" (i.e., a "reality"): "By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence" (408; *Ethics*, I, Def. 4). It is perhaps more normal to think of an essence as constituted by a combination of different attributes, but for Spinoza, a single attribute itself constitutes an essence: "God, or a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal

and infinite essence, necessarily exists" (417; *Ethics*, I, Prop. 11). It is possible, perhaps, to glimpse Spinoza's reasoning if one thinks of how even today we sometimes speak of God as omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and so on. Such attributes are each conceived as constituting God's essence in some sense, yet not exhausting the totality of God. Further, we do not think of interrelating such attributes in some organized structure. Rather, it is enough to say that they coexist in the God who integrates them, however much we may remain in the dark about the details of their coexistence.

To geocentricize Spinoza, then, one must determine what attributes will take the place of attributes of God. And, in the absence of God, one must look for a "center" with the capacity to integrate them. Rather than look for leads in Hegel, who finds serious shortcomings in Spinoza in any case, it will be more profitable to turn to Althusser, whose indebtedness to Spinoza in his seminal rereading of Marx is explicit and extensive.²⁴ While Althusser must eventually be left behind, it is ironically Althusser himself who is best suited to help one reach the point at which one can leave him behind.

Spinoza Geocentricized

Particularly suggestive is Althusser's modification of Spinoza's principle of causality: "*God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things*" (428; *Ethics*, I, Prop. 18). For Althusser, instead of God there is "structural causality," which theorizes

that the structure is immanent in its effects in the Spinozist sense of the term, that the *whole existence of the structure consists of its effects*, in short that the structure, which is merely a specific combination of its peculiar elements, is nothing outside its effects.

(Althusser and Balibar 188)

The integrative cause is thus an absent cause, a center that is always elsewhere, in its effects.

This absent cause, Jameson suggests, takes one to the heart of the Althusserian revolution. As Jameson explains, this structural cause is absent because it "is nowhere empirically present as an element, it is not a part of the whole or one of the levels, but rather the entire system of *relationships* among those levels." It is this structural causality that explains "the otherwise incomprehensible prestige and influence of the Althusserian revolution--which has produced powerful and challenging current in a host of disciplines, from philosophy proper to political science, anthropology, legal studies, economics, and cultural studies" (*Political* 36-37).

A core analogue between Spinoza and Althusser appears if one juxtaposes Spinoza's denial of the separation of Creator from Creation (in his pantheistic move from supernaturalism toward naturalism) with Althusser's denial of the separation of "base" from "superstructures," in the rigid economic determinism of "vulgar Marxism." Structural causality is opposed in Althusser's discourse to expressive causality, which Althusser identifies with Hegel. Expressive causality is based on the distinction between essence and phenomena whereby an inner essence can be conceived as the sole determinant of the phenomena that express it. This causality, Althusser argues, led to the mistaken notion that in a social formation the economic "base" is the godlike determinant of "superstructures." Structural causality reconceives a social formation as consisting of relatively autonomous levels that interact with one another. The social formation consists of effects not of an economic "base" but of an absent immanent cause.²⁵ In sum, for Spinoza the Creation ceases to be an effect of the will of a Creator who is apart

from the materiality of Creation just as for Althusser "superstructures" cease to be effects of a "base" that exists apart from them as the essential reality of which they are mere secondary appearances. Spinoza's problem, as Hampshire observes, was to decide whether the whole order of Creation was intelligible to reason or whether at some points one must depend on revelation to disclose mysteries of God's will beyond the reach of reason (52-53). By identifying Creator with Creation, Spinoza decided unambiguously in favor of reason. Althusser's problem was to overcome the rigidities and excessive reductiveness of economism. Structural causality was his solution.

In this fashion, Althusser may be said to transform Spinoza's cosmocentrism into a socioeconomic centrism. In the process, the earth is bypassed, except insofar as the socioeconomic interacts with the earth it inhabits, but that is not a process that gets Althusser's attention. Geocentrism departs from Althusser by factoring in the earth, indeed, by privileging the earth insofar as it subjects the socioeconomic, as we will see, to a principle of necessity.

A step in this direction appears in Marxist theory itself in Foster's *Marx's Ecology*. On the side of the earth, Foster draws on Darwin for a principle of "coevolution" (11). In the dialectic of coevolution, organisms and their environment change one another, evolving together to blur the distinction between them. On the side of the socioeconomic, Foster uses not Althusser but a traditional dialectic of alienation and its overcoming. Foster bases this dialectic on a passage from Marx wherein unity between humanity and nature is presupposed and the separation of the two is the alienating condition, introduced by capitalism, that needs to be overcome (1, 159).

A difficulty in Foster is that the relation between these two dialectics

is left untheorized and unclear. Overall the alienation dialectic seems dominant, so much so that Foster envisions, when this alienation is overcome, a "rational ecology" (256). Such an ecology would seem to subject coevolution itself, supposedly based on random variation and natural selection, to rational calculation, maybe even as "rational" as genetic engineering. At least that is the implication--the issues are never really addressed.

In a forum on the book published in *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, Costas Panayotakis proposes a kind of dialectic of Foster's two dialectics, one in which the socioeconomic dialectic and the coevolution dialectic are explicitly integrated (71). Panayotakis thus moves beyond Foster, taking a step closer to geocentrism. Panayotakis bases his proposal on a passage from Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin:

In human evolution the usual relationship between organism and environment has become virtually reversed in adaptation. Cultural invention has replaced genetic change as the effective source of variation. . . . Beginning with the usual relation, in which slow genetic adaptation to an almost independently changing environment was dominant, the line leading to *Homo sapiens* passed to a stage where conscious activity made adaptation of the environment to the organism's needs an integral part of the biological evolution of the species. . . . Finally the human species passed to the stage where adaptation of the environment to the organism has come to be *completely dominant* [italics added], marking off *Homo sapiens* from all other life. (69-70).

This is an astute characterization of a humanism conceived in rigorously geocentric terms except for the "completely dominant." Geocentrism incorporates a necessitarian principle that Levins and Lewontin seem to eliminate.

The center in geocentrism is an absent immanent cause that exists in its effects as it integrates through processes of interaction, not Spinoza's cosmic thought and extension, but earthbound nature and culture, with culture being conceived broadly to encompass the socioeconomic modes of production that constitute the principal way that humankind acts as an inhabitant of the earth, at least from the standpoint of the earth. The climate, the air we breath, the water we drink, the soil in which we grow food--increasingly these are all more denatured mediations than immediate realities. Culture alters nature. Yet these alterations paradoxically reveal limits to what culture can do voluntaristically. In the case of global warming, for example, we cannot simultaneously continue to do what we're doing and "will" a global temperature to our liking. Limits appear at the point at which choice is necessary. Such limits, recognized through this necessity, may be identified with a Spinozistic whole, which is neither pure nature nor pure culture but, rather, immanent in the effects of their interaction.²⁶ This whole does not exist apart from its effects, just Spinoza's God does not exist apart from nature.

The "hybridity" to which Latour directs our attention is thus becoming a monism that supercedes dualism once and for all. This monism perhaps lacks the metaphysical rigor of Spinoza's, where thought and extension are equivalent conceptual avenues to a God of infinite attributes. As Spinoza puts it, "whether we conceive nature under the attribute Extension, or under the attribute of Thought, or under any other attribute, we shall find one and the same order" (451; *Ethics* 2, Prop 7, Schol). Nature and culture do not have this kind of equivalency. A hybridized monism is marked rather by effects commonly overdetermined by multiple natural and cultural conditions. A hybridized monism overlaps with Spinoza's perhaps most closely in the

principle that "[t]he more reality or being each thing has, the more attributes belong to it" (416; *Ethics* 1, Prop 9). In the earth we now inhabit, the nature-culture hybrid increasingly has more reality than either nature or culture in isolation.

In this monism, if one is careful to reduce both nature and the human to geocentric proportions, one may discern what Marx envisioned as a "society" defined by the simultaneous "naturalism of [hu]man" and "humanism of nature" (*Economic* 298). Interpreted geocentrically, this would be a "society" of the earth where paradoxically the more air, water, soil, etc. become a function of human action (the "humanism of nature"), the more clearly appear the ultimate limits to human voluntarism (the "naturalism of [hu]man"). This "naturalism" adds the necessitarian principle that Levins and Lewontin neglect. Levins and Lewontin pinpoint theoretically why humankind's actions have profound effects on the environment, for good or ill. But these effects are not simply the result of humankind's "will." They are, rather, effects of a conjunction of this "will" and limits imposed by nature. Together, this humanism and this naturalism determine the state of the earth.

Geocentric Ecocriticism

While the burden of the remaining chapters in the present study is to deploy and thereby test this monistic conceptual model, an outline of the main tenets of geocentric ecocriticism may be appropriate here to further orient readers as they turn to these chapters and to sketch for interested readers possible topics for inquiry in geocentric ecocriticism's program of research.

The center in geocentrism is nowhere, in the sense that it cannot be located, but everywhere in its concrete effects on planet earth. The concrete

is the totality of these effects. This concrete totality is reality in the most complete sense. For Spinoza, complete reality is equivalent to God, the container that cannot be contained. For geocentrism, this complete reality is narrower and without divinity unless one wants to identify divinity with life itself. The task of ecocriticism may be defined in part as recovering this concrete insofar as it was ignored, even repressed from consciousness, during the era of modernity. Further, as this concrete becomes increasingly visible during our age of ecological crisis, ecocriticism may help to find language to make it visible, particularly critical language to discuss new literary texts that finds ways to register this concrete in speaking to this crisis. Later chapters, particularly the last, will address this issue.

A discourse of nature abstracts from the concrete by ignoring culture. A discourse of culture similarly abstracts but in the opposite direction. The problems, noted in chapter 1, that Latour sees with the fragmenting effects of academic disciplines may be defined, from the standpoint of geocentrism, as effects of varying ways these disciplines abstract from the concrete. Abstracting from the concrete may be considered geocentric ecocriticism's version of Buell's "fallacy of derealization."

But however much nature and culture abstract from the concrete, they are far surpassed by the abstraction of the individual in the bourgeois individualism that dominated the era of modernity. It is hard to imagine how one could be more abstract. The abstractness of the bourgeois individual is responsible to a large degree for the repression of the concrete during the modern era. For during this period, the concrete has commonly been defined within the contours of individual experience, often immediate sensory experience. What has been celebrated as the most concrete has ironically been in fact the most abstract.

A later chapter, with the oxymoronic title "Bourgeois Collectivism," will focus on 18th-century texts to suggest how one area of profitable ecocritical historical inquiry would be the map the processes by which the abstraction known as bourgeois individualism occurred. The chapter's thesis is that the oxymoron "bourgeois collectivism" can uncover the terrain that needs to be mapped ecocritically.

Perhaps bourgeois individualism may be said to end ironically in the reversal whereby the individual's authenticity is located in the "unconscious" (for example, Lionel Trilling's historical narrative in *Sincerity and Authenticity* suggestively ends with a chapter called "The Authentic Unconscious"). If so, geocentrism may be said to locate authenticity at the opposite extreme, in the capacity for reason that makes possible recognition that in the realities of existence we are at bottom what we do collectively as inhabitants of planet earth. Realizing this recognition fully in the sense of actually "living" it may well be as elusive as the "unconscious." We may all wear ideological blinders that make it impossible to rise to the level of ecological "reason."²⁷ Even so, the elusiveness of the "id" is one thing, whereas the elusiveness of "ecological reason" would be something very different.

Finally, given the abstractness of the individual at the center of so much literature during the modern era, it may be expected that new literature deeply responsive to the ecological crisis will move in the opposite direction, toward a literature with an expansive, geocentric viewpoint, more akin to epic than to the bourgeois novel. The agent of greatest concern to the earth is not the individual but humankind. What form a new epic might take in the 21st century in an age of ecological crisis is a job for literary genius, but geocentric ecocriticism may properly be on the lookout for signs

of its emergence.

From a geocentric standpoint, Spinoza's distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas is more valuable than the distinction between true and false that a correspondence theory of truth would privilege. Adequation goes beyond correspondence. Adequation "defines knowledge as *adaequatio rei et intellectua*--the understanding of the knower must be *adequate* to the thing known" (Schumacher 39). In the Spinozist model, adequation is measured by adequation to the whole. For Spinoza, of course, the whole is God. "For when we say that an idea in the human Mind follows from ideas that are adequate in it, we are saying nothing but that in the Divine intellect there is an idea of which God is the cause . . . and therefore it must be adequate" (475; *Ethics* 2, Prop. 40, Dem; see also Wolfson (2.109)). As Hampshire summarizes, "God or Nature is a single system, and to come to understand any particular part of it is necessarily to come to understand more of the whole; if we are to understand ourselves and the causes of our own states and reactions, we must in the process come to learn more about Nature as a whole" (168).

Adequation to the geocentric whole--the concrete--is a standard that would tend to render inadequate the individualistic orientations that flourished during the epoch of modernity. Perfect adequation is no doubt impossible. The "center" integrating the geocentric concrete is even "absent" in a strict sense. It is unrepresentable. But one can come comparatively close or fall woefully short of the concrete. One perhaps can at best imply or suggest the concrete by means of the strategy one deploys in making a selection from the concrete, but one can do this more or less successfully. Hence, for example, one might expect the expansive, collective viewpoint of the epic to be more adequate than the narrow bourgeois individualism of the novel. It may be easier to imagine models of ecological reason appearing in

forms more akin to the epic than the novel. In an ecological world, where everything is more or less connected to everything else, the overall tendency would be for adequation rather than correspondence to be the key issue to consider.

From a geocentric standpoint, it may even be possible to envision a transformation of enlightenment reason, at least as exemplified in Hobbesian and Lockean individuals in the state of nature. The reason of these individuals is self-interested. Maybe it is a more enlightened self-interest in Locke than in Hobbes, but it is self-interested nonetheless. It is the reason of "possessive individualism," to recall Macpherson's famous term. This reason may undergo a transformation into its opposite if the ecological crisis becomes sufficiently catastrophic. For the reason of possessive individualism is "down to earth" in the sense that it is a reason that works from "real life" conditions (e.g., the state of nature). But the greater the ecological crisis, the more "down to earth" thinking becomes securing what is needed to sustain life on earth. What is good for the individual (what "I" need to live) becomes increasingly what is good for everyone (what is needed to sustain life) because without life there is no individual. At some point, the needs of the earth become indistinguishable from the needs of the "I." Collective interest becomes the same as individual interest.

Perhaps, then, it may not be too far-fetched to suggest that the task of geocentric ecocriticism is--recalling book 4 of *Gulliver's Travels*--to make us less like yahoos and more like houghnahnms. The yahoos, in their abstract selfishness and cunning have no more than a "pittance" of reason. More concrete, the houghnahnms emerge as the true bearers of reason, at least to a greater extent than the yahoos, as they reason from the standpoint of their needs as a species rather than their needs as individuals. Geocentrism would

admonish the houyhnhnms to go beyond their species-centeredness to a planet-centeredness. Ecological reason must be universal from the standpoint of the multiple inhabitants of the earth, however much it may be a mere viewpoint situated on planet earth.

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1. The passage Bowen quotes appears in *Attitudes toward History*, p. 150.
 2. William Rueckert introduced the term in a 1978 article. Rueckert is perhaps the most widely known Kenneth Burke scholar, so that there is a link from Burke's 1937 prophecy, which provides the present chapter its epigraph, to the term "ecocriticism" itself. While the term dates from 1978, it didn't become prominent until (1) the formation in 1992 of ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment); (2) the establishment in 1993 of a new journal, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*; (3) *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996); (4) the special forum on "Literatures of the Environment" in the October 1999 *PMLA*, which is the journal of the Modern Language Association, the major professional organization in English; and (5) the "Ecocriticism" issue in *New Literary History*, a major theoretical journal, in the summer of 1999. The editors of *The Ecocriticism Reader* identify 1993 as the year by which "ecological literary study had emerged as a recognizable critical school" (xviii).
 3. The list is compiled from a survey of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (393):
 - Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*, 1991
 - Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, 1995
 - Michael P. Cohen, *The Pathless Way: John Muir and American Wilderness*, 1984
 - David Ehrenfeld, *The Arrogance of Humanism*, 1978
 - John Elder, *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature*, 1985
 - Neil Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature*, 1992
 - Robert Pogue, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, 1992
 - Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*, 1975
 - Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, 1964
 - Joseph Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*, 1972
 - Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, 1980
 - Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 1982
 - Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology*, 1991
 - Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, 1990
 - David Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 1977
 4. See Smith, Eric Todd.
 5. For example, one might juxtapose Latour with Edward Said: "From the details of daily life to the immense range of global forces (including what has been called 'the death of nature')--all these importune the troubled soul, and there is little to mitigate their power or the crises they create. The two general areas of agreement nearly everywhere are that personal freedoms should be safeguarded, and that the earth's environment should be defended against further decline. Democracy and ecology, each providing a

local context and plenty of concrete combat zones, are set against a cosmic backdrop. Whether in the struggle of nationalities or in the problems of deforestation and global warming, the interactions between individual identity (embodied in minor activities like smoking or using of aerosol cans) and the general framework are tremendously direct, and the time-honored conventions of art, history, and philosophy do not seem well-suited to them. Much of what was so exciting for four decades about Western modernism and its aftermath--in, say, the elaborate interpretive strategies of critical theory or the self-consciousness of literary and musical forms--seems almost quaintly abstract, desperately Eurocentric today" (330).

6. Buell's quotations of Baudrillard comes from *Simulations* 88, 141, 140.

7. Leonard M. Scigaj has developed a comparable ecocritical reading strategy: "In practice, *référance* turns the reader's gaze toward an apprehension of the cyclic processes of wild nature after a self-reflexive recognition of the limits (the *sous rature*) of language" (38). For a strong critique of Buell's strategy, particularly its claim to see around the edge of the constructivism of language, see Phillips.

8. To digress briefly in anticipation of one issue to be addressed in a later chapter, one might ask Hitt at this point to define more precisely what is beyond reason in these examples. The structure of the ecological sublime is clear. If nature can defeat mind, that would qualify as a form of the sublime distinctively ecological. But considering that science has penetrated "matter" in astounding ways, one looks for more precision in defining what science misses than the mere assertions appearing in Hitt's examples. It is hard to imagine science seeing itself defeated by these assertions. Something definitively beyond the reach of science, especially when considered even by science's own standards, would indeed undermine modernity's confidence in its epistemological prowess, but whether Hitt has found examples that meet this test is open to question. Chapter five will return to the ecological sublime to offer a perhaps more telling example.

9. Unlike traditional religious experience, transcendence is here not upward but downward to muscles and skin, to a weasel's brain. Chapter four will reconsider such conceptualizations of religious experience from the standpoint of Burke's *Rhetoric of Motives*, which will serve as a basis for proposing a mode of transcendence appropriate for ecocriticism to valorize.

10. Elsewhere, drawing on the work of Kenneth Burke, I've distinguished two stages in historical transformation: "yes vs. no" and "yes vs. yes." The first is the negative reaction against a reigning orthodoxy that prepares the way for something new, but is not a new orthodoxy in itself. The transformation process gets to "yes vs. yes" only when a new orthodoxy emerges with sufficient clarity to offer a positive alternative to the old one. Whether Latour's "yes vs. no" ever gets to "yes vs. yes" is debatable. See Wess 34-35, 223.

11. In Latour's words: (1) "If we consider hybrids, we are dealing only with mixtures of nature and culture" (30); (2) "I will use the word 'collective' to describe the association of humans and nonhumans" (4).

12. The heat in the debates to which Nealon and Maslan refer may have been lessened if Derrida's "there is nothing outside the text" had been read as broadly as Derrida recommends in his own retrospective comments on its interpretation. I've discussed this issue elsewhere, suggesting that it might

be interpreted as proposing not a "textuality of words" (the standard interpretation) but a "textuality of existences." See Wess 6, 167-73.

13. See Mazel for a theoretically precise formulation of the structure of subjecthood that McKibben's text presupposes.

14. For a useful formulation of this problem and a literary application, see Hayles, "Postmodern Parataxis," pp. 404, 412.

15. For additional discussion of these terms, see Wess, *Burke*, chapter 7.

16. In "Definition of Man," "man is the symbol-using animal" (*Language* 3). Later, Burke prefers "bodies that learn language," as in "Poem," which also registers a shift from "man" to "humans" being symbol users.

17. We'll leave it to readers to decide whether to class Dillard and Thoreau with Oelschlaeger on this point.

18. Questions of geocentric ethics arise as one asks to what extent this equal dependency on the conditions of life should be translated into equal entitlement to a fair share.

19. See McIntosh 301-08 for a review of discussions among ecologists over whether ecology encompasses humans.

20. Seeing in Marx and Darwin the forging of a radical materialism useful for ecological theory, John Bellamy Foster records in some detail both (1) how the contingent principles of random variation and natural selection at the heart of evolutionary theory scandalized religious and teleological thought and (2) how from the beginning there were attempts to revise evolution to make it compatible with teleological or at least "progressive" structures (see especially chapters 1 and 6). Not even Darwin, in later revisions of his own text, was immune to such revisionary lapses (189). Oelschlaeger takes an extra step to make evolution compatible with the religious sensibility itself.

21. Of course, while we are all participants, we are not all equally responsible for the direction the collective action takes. This action is best conceived as a site of ongoing struggle.

22. Spinoza's cosmocentric strain prompts Fox to cite Spinoza in support of his own "branching tree" theory of cosmological identification (259-60). As Fox stresses, Arne Naess, the father of "deep ecology," deploys Spinoza similarly.

23. The one step Spinoza takes that Hegel applauds is the principle "determinateness is negation" (1: 125; 2: 168), a formula that appears in Spinoza's *Correspondence* (270; Letter 50; "determination" is sometimes translated "limitation" [*Correspondence* 431]). By virtue of this principle, Hegel finds that "thought" and "extension" have sufficient dialectical determination (1:126), or, more precisely, they would have sufficient determination if Spinoza did not also affirm the infinity of God's attributes. Hegel uncovers a fissure in Spinoza's discourse, in other words, between "thought" and "extension" on the one hand and "infinity" on the other hand. In Hegel's words, "Spinoza further determines the Attributes as infinite, and this in the sense of an infinite plurality. In the sequel,

however, only two occur--Thought and Extension, and it is not shown by what necessity the infinite plurality reduces itself to an opposition, namely this definite opposition of Thought and Extension. These two Attributes are, then, accepted empirically" (2: 169).

24. Explicit references in Althusser to Spinoza include "The Only Materialist Tradition"; *Essays* 126, 132-41; *For Marx* 78; and *Reading* 16, 40, 102, 107, and 189. For a concise detailing of a number of ways that Spinoza appears to have influenced Althusser, see Anderson 64-65.

25. For a more detailed discussion of these matters in Althusser's work, see Wess, "Notes." Althusser has even provided a basis for linking "postmodernism" to "materialism" in a title that no doubt sounds oxymoronic to some: *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition*. The editors of this volume justify their linkage by arguing that Marxist "materialism, when interpreted in the light of Althusser's work, has little to do with some essential role of 'production' or a presumed primacy of the economic but refers instead to the irreducibility of processes and practices to any single (and therefore inescapably idealist) principle" (3-4). In other words, essentialism is idealism, even essentialisms that might appear to be materialistic. For example, economism--that is, the derivation of all elements in a social formation from an economic essence--is essentialistic and therefore idealistic not materialistic. True materialism is equivalent to the postmodern rejection of all essentializing. For postmodern materialism, then, everything is a "construct," open to formation and transformation in "processes and practices [irreducible] to any single . . . principle."

26. For a more detailed theorizing of this identification of the real with the necessity of choice, see Wess, *Burke*, especially chapters 1 and 6.

27. Althusser went against the grain of reductively economic Marxism also by arguing that there is no way to get beyond ideology (*For Marx* 235). Ideology is for Althusser an imaginary relationship to the reality of one's existence that can never be eliminated altogether.