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BLENDING FRAMEWORK:
BILL MCKIBBEN'S USE OF MELODRAMA AND COMEDY IN ENVIRONMENTAL
RHETORIC

By

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Abstract

In the last five years, as climate change became less abstract and more noticeable, conversations surrounding the issues have begun to change. In the past, solutions to climate change were framed in terms of how individuals can make a difference—and yet, no significant changes have occurred. Research shows that the main contributors to climate change are the fossil fuel industry, as both extraction and consumption of fossil fuel products are irresponsible and unsustainable. Thus, it is important for climate change conflict to leave the personal sphere and become more prominent as a political controversy.

Bill McKibben's blended framing of climate change incorporates elements of self-reflexivity and identification needed to keep citizens involved in the conflict, but also requires that the biggest contributors to the problem be held responsible. His melodramatic frames demand that audiences reconsider societal values and complicity to power structures, as their allegiances with the fossil fuel industry allows for continued international exploitation of both people and natural resources. From here, his application of learning based, comic frames combat the limitations that arise from victim/villain frames. His rhetoric offers audiences an opportunity to see themselves reflected in the learning and mistakes of their friends and neighbors, and encourages people to unify together as communities to both challenge one another to live more sustainably, but also to combat this exploitation and complicity from local levels, and then on up through the government.

By combining contrasting frames together, McKibben is able to not only create well constructed examples of both comic and tragic frames in environmental rhetoric, but he is able to address the limitation that occur when complex situations are simplified by framing techniques. The combination of these frames, and their insistence of both political involvement and citizen engagement, allows for the discovery of potential solutions which may not have been visible had either frame been used simply by itself.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In January 2008, United States climate change scientist James Hansen published a paper explaining that if the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere rose above 350 parts per million, earth as we know it would change drastically (McKibben 2013; 12). The damage to the planet will likely render it unrecognizable--with dramatic weather shifts as opposed to seasons, and temperature extremes unlike anything we've ever recorded. In the six years since this publication, climate change effects have been continually documented (Ceccarelli 205), and the issue has spread to a wider audience. As a result, politicians and pundits have begun to encourage "green" behavior and personal lifestyle changes to United States citizens in order to combat individual contributions to climate change. Unfortunately, due to a worldwide dependence on fossil fuels, the major contributors to environmental damages are coming from industrial development, primarily from fossil fuel corporations. Resource extraction for fossil fuels is dirty, polluting, and heavily contributes to the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Thus, despite public interest and people's commitments to "going green" and fostering a cleaner environment, climatologists state that even if the entire world stopped burning fossil fuels tomorrow, the damages would continue on for several decades. Further, we are not going to stop burning fossil fuels tomorrow. With a lack of affordable access to alternative energies and fuels, the American public faces an inability to entirely change their behaviors and to "power down" from their energy dependencies.

The environmental movement has thus far struggled to bring climate change responsibility into the political plane. Their attempts to share the message that fossil fuel dependency has dangerous consequences have not led to major changes in industry politics, and yet, the movement *has* managed to spread awareness of the need for more sustainable living on a

more personal plane. Hundreds of campaigns have emerged to help American citizens begin to make small changes to their lives in order to promote a cleaner earth. A prime example of this can be seen in the credits section of Al Gore's famous 2006 documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. Perhaps because of these campaigns, personal change commitments have been taken much further. As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, "sustainability" has become a household term, and green products are all over the markets. These personal changes and solutions are helpful on a small scale, as they draw attention to personal responsibility.

Unfortunately, climate change is not a personal issue--it is mainly political. While everyone in the western world has taken part in contributing to climate change, the real problem is a societal structure favoring "progress" and "economic growth" over the environment and the lives of people and things. In his piece *Forget Shorter Showers: Why Personal Change Does Not Equal Political Change*, journalist Derrick Jensen explains that "even if every person in the United States did everything [an *Inconvenient Truth*] suggested, U.S. carbon emissions would fall by only 22 percent. Scientific consensus is that emissions must be reduced by at least 75 percent worldwide" (2). In short, small personal changes to everyday civilian life are not enough to counteract the damages that have already occurred or even those that are still being created.

Environmental scientists and activists across the nation have explained that to save the Earth-as-we-know-it, we really need to create industry change. We need a wide scale cutback on fossil fuels, we need investments in alternative, sustainable energies, and we need to act now. But how are we as a nation to go about doing this, when prominent solutions are aimed at personal change?

One problem for the environmental movement is the way that climate change solutions are being framed--or to put it more simply, how these issues are being presented to audiences.

The concept of personal change is largely based in what rhetorical scholars refer to as comic framing, which aims to teach the virtues of dialogue and speaking honestly. As I discuss in detail below, comic framing encourages an examination of both (or multiple) sides of an issue, and suggests a result based in fairness and compromise. This framing essentially asks that the audience reflect upon *themselves* to solve the problems of the system. In short, the current structure for solving climate issues is based in personal change: “what can *I* do to be more environmentally conscious?”

While comic framing promotes self-reflection and learning, it is not always the right frame for every situation. Tragic framing offers a valuable alternative to more traditional approaches to the rhetoric surrounding environmental issues. As I discuss below, this framing creates a multi-step process wherein an “enemy” is identified as the source of a social, large scale problem and audience members are urged to band together to fight the enemy and thus solve the problem. Additionally, melodrama, a subset of tragic framing, presents and privileges concerns and voices that are often ignored or hidden by our culture of “progress” and “economic growth.” According to literary theorist Robert Bechtold Heilman, “the realm of melodrama is the realm of competition and rivalry, and therefore melodrama often constitutes special conflicts produced by public situations: this or that group fights to compel a community or nation to adopt a program or pattern of life” (49). In short, melodrama allows audiences to examine the problems with the social structure and explore ways in which it could be improved. The unification processes promoted by polarizing villain/victim dichotomies allows for communities to come together to fight against the parts of the system that create villains and victims. Unlike comic framing, then, tragic frames bring issues to the political plane, and allow audiences to examine the problems with the social structure. While it is necessary that American citizens agree to take

part in acknowledging and attempting to fix their contribution to the damages that have been made to the earth, the vast majority of damages are caused by industrial progress and fossil fuel extraction. Because of this, environmental campaigns that function on the personal plane cannot be successful if the political plane continues to be ignored. Non-traditional application of tragic frames has the ability to bring these issues to the political plane.

While much of the environmental movement currently focuses on how citizens can individually make a difference, a few key environmental leaders have begun taking the case of climate change to the government. One of them, author and activist Bill McKibben, has gone even further, and has blended comic and tragic framing styles together to create a new platform for change. McKibben's blend of comic and tragic frames are helpful to the environmental movement because comic framing encourages the public to take responsibility for their own complicity in climate change, while tragic framing encourages the public to challenge the system and in turn, to challenge the largest perpetrators of climate change--the fossil fuel industry. While McKibben's comic and tragic frames are valuable for spreading a message on their own, the combination of these frames removes many of the limitations that rise from the simplicity of either frame by itself. In the chapters that follow, I offer a rhetorical analysis of McKibben's work to argue that when applied in tandem these framings have great potential for achieving social change, as together they function to unify audiences and encourage problem solving or rejection of power systems that only benefit a few.

First, however, I offer background on the environmental movement and an examination of climate change and our society, followed by a theoretical background of Burke's *On History*, criticisms of tragic framing, and the value of melodrama in environmental conversations. I finish by introducing McKibben's work and laying out a plan of study.

Examination of the Environmental Movement Shift toward Social Concerns

One struggle with message presentation and framing of issues is likely caused by the fact that the environmental movement hasn't always paid attention to large-scale environmental concerns. Despite a recent boom in environment friendly and sustainable activities from the public, the environmental movement constantly faces struggles with cohesion among its many factions, as well as the old standing problems of how to initiate changes in a timely manner. One long lasting and common problem for environmental groups is the focus on protection and preservation: saving pristine and beautiful wilderness for future enjoyment, and privileging spaces that are untouched by civilization over those where people already live. According to Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo in *Imagining Nature: Watkins, Yosemite, and the Birth of Environmentalism*, "the rhetoric of nature as pristine and separate from human culture set in motion the trajectory of environmental politics for its first one hundred years" (257). This trajectory, unfortunately, resulted in many environmental organizations ignoring larger environmental struggles that arose from cities, towns, and industry. DeLuca and Demo explain that the "narrow focus has had the major effect of reproducing the nature-culture dichotomy...in taking as their charge the preservation of wilderness, environmental groups relieved themselves of the responsibility of protecting the non-pristine areas and of critiquing the practices of industrialism that degraded the general environment" (257). In short, while not all of the environmental organizations are responsible for this, the overarching focus on protecting small pockets of wilderness led to many environmental groups ignoring how industry progressively polluted the rivers, watersheds, living areas, and the air.

This is additionally problematic because of the social justice issues that arise from preserving wilderness while allowing water systems and clean air to deteriorate. In the United

States, those who are most affected by pollution are those who live in the more industrial areas, or the areas where there are industrial wastes and toxins being pumped into the water and/or the air. These areas are not prime real estate, meaning that those affected by this pollution are usually poorer, often less educated, and least likely to have the resources to prevent the degradation of *their* environment. There is also a strong racial aspect, as research from environmental communication scholar Phaedra Pezzullo shows that “toxic assaults tend to occur in or on communities that historically have been segregated from elite centers of power, areas [that] are deemed culturally to be ‘appropriately polluted spaces,’ such as neighborhoods of people of color and low-income communities” (5). This action and behavior allows for a “psychological and geographical distance between dominant public culture and the cultures of those who live in places where both waste and people are articulated together as unnecessary, undesirable, and contaminating” (5). Thus, an environmental movement that ignores large-scale pollution abandons civilian problems and, in the long term, abandons the nature they intend to protect as well. Large-scale pollution is far more detrimental than a loss of wilderness, as the two will eventually go hand in hand. DeLuca and Demo explain that fortunately, “in response to these criticisms mainstream environmental groups have expanded their range of issues beyond just wilderness issues, have started to think of humans as embedded in nature, and have forged links across racial and class lines” (257).

The narrative of the industry as the enemy first appeared in 1962, with Rachel Carson’s masterpiece *Silent Spring*. The book built off of the traditional narrative of unnatural and dangerous human creations vs. the purity of the natural world, but then took it further by focusing on the importance of addressing public health and safety concerns. In short, Carson created a war metaphor to express the dangers of man-made chemicals and industrialization and

the resulting effects on *human* health. According to Cheryll Glotfelty in *Cold War, Silent Spring*, Carson is at least partially responsible for this newer narrative becoming the “entrenched way of thinking in the environmental movement, and the lexicon of war continues to pervade environmentalist discourse” (159). Glotfelty states that the “critique of the widespread use of what were regarded as wonder chemicals was nothing less than an indictment of modern life itself” (159). This concept of bringing citizens to question their complicity to economic progress over the environment and thus “indicting modern society” was vastly important for the environmental movement, as it steered toward social change. If citizens were to truly achieve any changes within the government and the systemic values of “economic growth” and “progress” that they had created, they needed to be able to come together to confront the system.

Although industry versus citizen has now been a discourse for a few decades, there was a long-standing focus on wilderness preservation greatly harmed the environmental movement’s future messages due to allowing industry to endanger human health and safety in return for economic expansion. Although many factors contributed to this, industrial damages were widely ignored for a long time, and the environmental movement has struggled to rectify this. Industrial corporations had the time to grow remarkably wealthy and powerful, which turned them into formidable foes for the environmental movement. Further, the idea that industry is the major problem causer is hard for the environmental movement to express because industrial progress has been a key part of our society for so long. Continued growth and success for the fossil fuel industry in particular is encouraged by the mainstream as it provides jobs and continued access to resource-based comforts like heat, electricity, and transportation.

Climate Change and Society

Although the vast majority of scientists now agree that climate change is a very real threat (Ceccarelli 196), the issue of climate change was widely debated at first. For a decade corporations were able to argue that it was a natural occurrence on earth (Mellor 138), despite the fact that they also employed some of the best scientists in the world who would have informed them otherwise (Peterson 100). As the environmental movement sought to grab more control over the debate about climate change, it was easy for corporations to take ownership of the issues, and focus the fight against climate change on personal as opposed to industrial changes. For example, environmental communication scholars Smerecnik and Renegar note that “the past CEO of Philips Petroleum Company (now ConocoPhillips) explained this idea when he stated, ‘there’s no reason we can’t make the environmental issue our issue. If we wait to be told what to do--if we offer no initiatives of our own and react defensively--we’re playing not to lose, and that’s not good enough’” (158). Before the publication of Hansen’s 2008 paper regarding the almost certain effects of climate change, environmental activism’s best bet was also simply to warn people that they needed to take precautions against adding green-house gasses to the atmosphere. Without the help of the government, which refused to act while there was a debate in progress, the movement was left finding ways to frame solutions to the problem in terms of individual action. Thus, we were given the personal change options seen in Al Gore’s 2006 documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, and countless other publications in the years following the film. The campaign worked: as the concept and action of eco-responsibility skyrocketed in the mainstream personal plane, citizens began to find themselves questioning what they could do. This, in turn, led to scientists, environmentalists, private companies, non-profit groups, and even

corporations suggesting more ways in which people could get involved with sustainability processes and work together to “save the earth” from the comfort of their own homes.

For nearly a decade then, the environmental movement has asked the American people to reflect upon themselves and how they can achieve personal changes to help inhibit climate change. With continuing changes and new information, United States citizens have seen an influx of eco-positive messages being spread throughout the media, and as a result, the public’s environmental consciousness is at an all-time high. Polls have consistently reported “that the majority of people in the U.S. consider themselves to be environmentalists” (Pezzullo 346), and it has even been estimated that “more Americans now recycle than vote for president” (Pezzullo 346). Despite this, changes are not happening quickly enough (McKibben 2013; 109). The issue now is that the individual actions of the American people are no longer the problem. While it is still vastly important that the public enact personal lifestyle changes for the sake of the environment, at this point, the problem lies with the fossil fuel industry. Derrick Jensen states that we have two options: we can attempt to make personal changes and feel good about our decisions, but ultimately change nothing, or “we can follow the example of those who remembered that the role of an activist is not to navigate systems of oppressive power with as much integrity as possible, but rather to confront and take down those systems” (3). What we need is citizen participation for enacting social change to rebalance power structures. We need climate change discourse to be as present on the political plane as it is on the personal.

Theoretical Lens

Over the last decade, there has been growing attention and discourse regarding framing within environmental communication literature. Framing theory draws attention to how something is presented to an audience in order to influence the choices they will make and

determine how they will process information. In short, the concept of framing expands research by focusing on the *essence* of the issues at hand, rather than focusing on a particular topic, so when addressing environmental communication, it is necessary to examine exactly how this presentation of an issue can influence an audience. Environmental communication scholar Tarla Rai Peterson explains that many scholars tend to defend the use of comic framing, which is essentially a process of self-reflection and learning, as the traditional rhetorical structure for issues of the environmental movement (99). Self-reflection can result in personal changes that are helpful on a small scale, as they draw attention to personal responsibility.

Kenneth Burke defines the comic frame as “neither wholly euphemistic, nor wholly debunking—hence it provides the charitable attitude towards people that is required for purposes of persuasion and co-operation” (166). Essentially this means that comic framing is based in fairness and compromise. The goal is to acknowledge one’s own role in conflict as well as the role of one’s opponent. The “charitable attitude” provides audiences with a way to avoid potential scapegoating that Burke warns us occurs in tragic frames. In short, the goal is to achieve change by pointing to the faults and flaws in a given circumstance in order to promote self-correction.

Both comic and tragic framing follow traditional literary structures. With literature based in the tragic, the end goal is to defeat or kill the villain despite the fact that this can include the villain within. In comic literature, however, the aim is to chastise “the clown”—who is almost certainly the main character. The structure is set up this way so that the audience will identify with the clown, and then end the story with a moment of self-reflection regarding the lessons learned in the story. In short, the goal is to achieve change by pointing to and poking fun at the faults and flaws in a given situation. While comic framing usually sets a good example rooted in

self-reflection and learning, and is not limited by the polarization and simplification of other frames, it is limited in other ways. When higher levels of power are causing an imbalance to the system, self-reflection and learning cannot always solve the problem by themselves. Thus, when applied as the only option, comic is not always the best choice of framing.

Tragic frame, meanwhile, pursues a ritual of redemption. A tragic frame recognizes that “social problems cause guilt, guilt requires ‘redemption,’ which takes the form of some kind of sacrifice” (Carlson 447). Social problems cause “guilt” because we have allowed harm to occur; in order to relieve the guilt, society must “sacrifice” –or “punish” who is to blame for the harm. Thus, the “sacrifice” purges the guilt of the social order via victimage and purification, which occurs with the identification of a scapegoat upon whom evils can be blamed. Burke denounced tragic framing by arguing that when aimed at persecuting the scapegoat, tragic framing allows us to “solve no problem even for ourselves, since the factors pressing towards calamity remain” (251). By scapegoating other humans, we do nothing for ourselves, we inhibit our ability to learn, and we become unable to transcend the system we wish to change. But what happens when the problem prohibiting social change is not blamed on a scapegoat, but can be traced back to a real, fixed source? A tragic frame has the opportunity to be so much more than just a tool of manipulation when it frames situations as confrontation between the virtuous and the villainous. This moral dichotomy pushes on the pressure points of society in order to spur social changes and *societal* self-reflection. In short, tragic framing is an approach that can be used to tear down a system.

A discussion of reinforcing or tearing down a system brings to light a key insight of Kenneth Burke’s (1937) work: namely, that societies will inevitably form hierarchies, as social, political, and economic powers are unevenly divided. These hierarchies, in turn, serve as the

structure of our society. Power provides individuals with authority, and authority defines relationships among people. To put this in context, wealthy corporations have a certain amount of power and authority over ordinary citizens, as money allows them more say in distribution of resources, more leeway with law enforcement, and naturally, more control over the people whom they service and employ. According to Brock, “as people accept their positions and work within a hierarchical structure, the structure is ... given a definite organization” (185). This definite organization, then, creates order in society. In theory, societal order intends to be perfect, fair, and good, but humans consistently struggle with perfection; we can visualize it, but we lack the ability to achieve it. Thus, despite our best attempts, society often fails to achieve equal treatment for all citizens.

In our attempts to create better and better societies, however, social order as defined by hierarchies is not permanent--hierarchies can be rejected by the very society to which they attempt to bring order. Societal hierarchies can be rejected when conditions change, when social institutions each have their own hierarchical structures that overlap with one another, or when people on the fringes of the hierarchy resist in the hope of receiving better treatment. When it comes to the political power of the fossil fuel industry, there are several reasons for citizens to reject the hierarchy. Poorer communities are constantly being exposed to toxins and pollutants as a result of resource extraction (Pezzullo 5), and this exploitation of those without the resources to protect themselves is an injustice. Further, in the last thirty years environmental conditions have changed, which has forced people to examine whether or not our old methods for energy, fuel, and resource extraction are still sustainable.

That said, Brock explains that the rejection of a hierarchy is difficult, because when “people cannot satisfy all the requirements of their traditional hierarchies, they are saddled with

guilt” (185). This element of guilt “reduces social cohesion” (185) or shakes the identity of the people within the rejected hierarchy, leading them to strive to reduce that guilt in order to feel whole again. People seek redemption for their guilt, which leads to “purification” or a purging of that which is bad or problematic. This can be achieved through three paths: mortification, victimage, or transcendence. Mortification and victimage are the most common options, and victimage is the more common of those two. While mortification is self-sacrifice to relieve guilt, victimage is the process of purging guilt via a scapegoat or a third party. The final option, which is much rarer than mortification or victimage, is transcendence. This is a process of examining the hierarchies in place and pinpointing what makes them unfair/unequal. There is also an element of identification in transcendence, as it forces people to think about how *they* personally feel guilty, but also how *other members* of the system are guilty as well. This guilt and recognition allows for group identification, and in turn unifies people to determine how to keep what is productive or good about the system, while eliminating that which is destructive. Thus, transcendence leads to societal change. In regards to the environmental movement, transcendence can be achieved only when people acknowledge both their personal responsibility for climate change, *as well as* their collective responsibility, thus taking the issue from the personal plane and into the political to challenge power systems that allow for resource exploitation and continued use of known pollutants. While people are still incapable of creating a perfect society, the process of transcendence can allow for something better to emerge. Regardless of positive change, however, society is a cycle that repeats itself constantly---new hierarchies will always come into place, and new rejections and changes will always need to be made.

Burke describes the process of transcendence and the process of victimization as inherently dissimilar. He denounces victimization as a tool of manipulation, and refers to it as “panacea, a ‘cure for what ails you,’ a ‘snakeoil,’” (239). He further expresses the evils of scapegoating other humans to attempt to heal societal order. That said, it is important to note the distinction between *people* and *corporations*. Regardless of what the United States government says, most environmental leaders view corporations and humans as separate entities. According to Bill McKibben, a corporation functions like a machine, highly efficient, and with one overarching task--to create a product and earn a profit (McKibben 2012; 102). This is a stance he, and many other leaders, faithfully hold to, in order to highlight the differences between people and corporations. The villain versus victim dichotomy is inherently dehumanizing when applied to people, but can one dehumanize a machine? For environmental leaders, who argue against the “corporations are people” ruling, there is nothing inappropriate about a process of dehumanization towards corporations, as corporations are not human—and thus cannot be dehumanized. So while tragic framing via victimization can be bad and manipulative when applied to actual human beings, it has the potential to be quite useful when applied to corporations.

Therefore, the tragic frame provides an alternative rhetorical framework for the environmental movement. A particularly potent version of tragic framing for environmentalism is melodrama which is explained in rhetorical theorist Steve Schwarze’s 2006 piece, “Environmental Melodrama.” Environmental melodrama offers an opportunity for audiences to examine power imbalances and the subsequent problems with the social structure. This approach has the potential to create productive outcomes, as melodrama creates an outline shaped around moral values and pathos appeals, thus drawing together broad audiences who can identify with

the previously voiceless victims of said “progress.” The unification processes promoted by polarizing villain/victim dichotomies allow for communities to come together to fight against the structured parts of the system that allow for their victimization.

In “Environmental Melodrama”, Schwarze states that in cases where compromise is not likely to resolve a problem, using melodrama is a strategic alternative. He explains that sometimes melodrama can be more useful than comic framing, as comic framing is rooted in compromise, while melodrama is not. Further, Robert Bechtold Heilman’s work is applied to explain that “melodrama would do something about [the situation], comedy would strive for ways of coming to terms with it... melodrama is for victory or defeat, comedy is for compromises” (Heilman 96). Thus, comic framing of solutions to environmental issues is limited when applied as the only frame, because it directs discourses onto the personal plane in search of compromises rather than more political efforts to get at the root cause of problems. Further, Schwarze points out that “promoting division and drawing sharp moral distinctions can be a fitting response to situations in which identification and consensus have obscured recognition of damaging material conditions and social injustices” (Schwarze 242). Essentially, this means the polarizing qualities of melodrama allow for the emergence of voices that are otherwise ignored by mainstream arguments, and moral distinctions respond to the injustice of these voices being ignored, as well as to the injustice of a system that has allowed its people to become victims of a power imbalance. A melodramatic focus on climate change reframes the issue in moral terms that have potential for disrupting audience allegiance to the fossil fuel industry and providing a new basis for movement identification.

Melodrama and the Environmental Movement

Although confronting the system offers opportunities for positive change, it does often result in resistance--much of which will come from those who are currently in power. Tarla Rai Peterson argues that “economic and political forces resist change that threatens their preeminent position within current hierarchies” (100). In the case of climate change, it is the fossil fuel industry as a whole that resides in a position of high political and economic power. Peterson examines this, stating “the material reality is that a small group of humans continues to engineer a policy that is destroying the earth as a habitat for humanity and many other species” (101). Although the powerful fossil fuel industry will resist social change and regulations by any means possible, Peterson explains that “a melodramatic account may destabilize power configurations used to maintain current policy” (100). Despite melodrama’s destabilizing abilities, however, communicators must be careful to avoid greatly limiting their rhetorical abilities by closing off further thought and discussion.

In a response to Schwarze’s article and application of environmental melodrama as a rhetorical strategy, theorist Terence Check explores the concept of environmental devils, or “secular agents that constitute the villains in environmental melodramas” (93). Environmental devils are described as being associated with greed and indifference towards the future, with no ability to self-reflect or consider consequences of their actions. Check explains that they are “users” that only see the natural world as a series of resources to be exploited for profit (94). This concept features into Schwarze’s melodrama, as environmental devils draw a stark moral contrast between the “heroes” and the villains or devils. Heroes are capable of self-reflection, heroes do not willingly exploit natural resources, and heroes are cognizant of the needs of future

generations--in short, heroes think and function like responsible humans. From there, Check builds up the definition of an environmental devil, stating:

An environmental devil must be powerful; it must ubiquitous; it must be greedy or indifferent about the violence it causes; it must be ubiquitous in its physical scope or in the evils it represents; ... it must be deceitful and cunning; it must prey on those who are defenseless; and despite all of this, it is attractive to many who admire its qualities. (95)

Wealthy international fossil fuel corporations fit the description perfectly. They're notorious for their monetary power and political sway, and while they may not be intentionally greedy, corporations are inherently focused on profit. Further, the reach of international corporations spans the entire globe, hence the label "international." Their effects on global communities vary from economically helpful to environmentally detrimental, and while the two often overlap, it has been widely accepted that one of the greatest ironies of climate change is that those who have done the least to cause it will suffer the most (McKibben 2007; 89), as wealthier nations will create and consume the majority of fossil fuel products. That said, even in the United States, there are those who are greatly affected by fossil fuel pollution--those who live in the areas where there are industrial waste and toxins being pumped into the water and/or the air. As mentioned previously, these areas are not prime real estate, meaning that those affected by this pollution are usually poorer, often less educated, and least likely to have the resources to prevent the degradation of *their* environment. Thus, wealthy fossil fuel corporations fulfill another quality of an environmental devil, as they are able to prey on the defenseless, or pollute the homes of those who lack the ability to protect themselves from ecological damages.

Additionally, the fossil fuel industry is remarkably cunning and devious. Naturally, this idea of stricter regulations, cutbacks on fossil fuels, and competition from alternative energies is in direct opposition to the wants and needs of the fossil fuel industry. Those who have made their entire lives off of fossil fuel money are loath to have to give it up, which means that these corporations will apply every lobbyist and public relations campaign they can in order to deflect suggestions like putting a stop to drilling in oil reserves. Even ExxonMobil admits that their stock would be adversely affected should the government create regulatory changes regarding their development and production (ExxonMobil). Meanwhile a report from HSBC, the world's second largest bank, points out that should Exxon be restricted from pumping out their oil reserves, their stock value would decrease by half, thus destroying the value of the company (McKibben 2013; 148). Therefore, when facing countless scientific reports that fossil fuel usage is detrimental to the environment, these companies have two choices: change their entire way of operating or vehemently deny that they are the problem--using any means possible to distract the public from the idea that their products may be harmful. Check explains that “theologically, in the struggle with God for the winning of souls, the devil has to play tricks to win over admirers who might otherwise recognize it” (94). The fossil fuel industry tricks include a number of half-truths and outright lies, like false green practices and public relations propaganda, stretching the truth about job opportunities, and buying congressional support.

The first strategy, false green practices, is explained by Phaedra Pezzullo as a distraction technique used by corporations to give off the appearance of being “earth friendly” while really making no effort to be so. These practices can be anything from running a very public office recycling campaign while quietly dumping toxic waste into the local water sources, to putting a great deal of ad energy into stating that they are focusing on greener alternatives while failing to

do so. For example, in 2000, BP launched a \$200 million advertising campaign claiming a transformation into “Beyond Petroleum,” which was aimed at highlighting their environmental side, and earned them a 2001 award for “product brand development” from PR Week (Walker 2). Aside from revealing a new logo and some catch phrases, however, BP failed to deliver on moving “beyond petroleum.” Greenpeace UK calculated information from BP financial documents and found that “the company’s investments do not match their public relations statements. BP invested 93 percent of investments into oil and gas in comparison to 2.79 percent on biofuel and 1.39 percent on solar initiatives” (Walker 2). Further, Greenpeace reports that “in 2009 BP further affirmed that it was never truly committed to alternative energy when that division of the company in London was shut down... the director of solar and wind power for the company resigned at the same time. Shortly before the entire division was cut, BP’s solar projects in both Spain and the United States were ended, cutting hundreds of jobs” (Walker 3). These details are important because, as Pezzullo points out, in popular environmental discourse it has become “increasingly difficult for the public to discriminate between talk about being green and action taken to stop environmentally destructive practices” (346).

The industry is also notorious for derailing environmental conversations with arguments about the state of the economy, as their standard argument for any new drilling site, pipeline, mine, etc. is that it will create jobs. One contemporary example of this sort of deflection is the controversy over the Keystone XL Pipeline, where TransCanada stated that it “is poised to put 13,000 Americans to work to construct the pipeline—pipefitters, welders, mechanics, electricians, heavy equipment operators, among other jobs—in addition to 7,000 manufacturing jobs that would be created in the U.S” (TransCanada). Exxon Mobil, a strong supporter and potential beneficiary of the pipeline, makes the statement that the “Keystone XL would have

created more than 20,000 construction jobs and more than 118,000 spin-off jobs for local businesses along the route at a time when the economy is struggling...[and] it would have strengthened America's energy security and international competitiveness by delivering crude oil from Canada and North Dakota to refineries and manufacturers in Texas" (Cohen 1). In reality, however, a Cornell University study proved that once the pipeline was built it would only require thirty-five people to maintain it (McKibben 2013; 80), meaning that these 20,000 some jobs are temporary. This promise of thousands of jobs, then, is largely inaccurate, as obviously, once the pipeline is built all of those newly employed workers would once again be out work. Despite the logical fallacies, these types of arguments draw attention to the economy and away from environmental concerns.

The last devious strategy of the fossil fuel industry, *buying* their way out of trouble, is by far the most sinister, as it results in governmental manipulation and corruption. Because the fossil fuel industry is massively successful and exorbitantly wealthy, it has quite a bit of sway within the public sphere--and more importantly, within the government. Fossil fuel tycoons and corporations can afford to drop billions of dollars on "green washing" public relations campaigns, but they can offer even more money to--or against-- the campaigns of elected officials. During the last presidential campaign, the Koch brothers--who are notorious fossil fuel supporters and who own a tar sands refinery--personally gave \$411,000 to republican candidates (Gilson 1). Koch Industries donated 95% of a 2.2. million dollar budget to republican candidates as well (Gilson 2), and the brothers pledged \$60 million to undisclosed campaigns aimed to defeat President Obama (Gilson 2). Furthermore, candidates in the House of Representatives and the Senate receive campaign money from the fossil fuel industry left and right. Steve Kretzmann, a researcher who compiled the dirtyenergymoney.com database stated "I've been looking at this

stuff for years and it still shocks me how the thesis continues to hold up...there are always a few outliers, but by and large [members of Congress] really are bought and paid for. It really is that simple” (McKibben 2013; 83). In short, the actions and indifference of international fossil fuel corporations qualify them to be perfect candidates to be labeled as environmental devils.

Despite their propensity to be environmental devils, however, the fossil fuel industry is nationally accepted as a promoter of economic growth and job opportunities, as well as energy security and general comforts. Without a focus in social critique and a re-evaluation of national values, placing blame on the fossil fuel industry becomes difficult because their “offending acts are tied to economic progress, one of the many God terms of our age” (Check 95). This is additionally problematic, because without this focus on social-critique, blaming an expansive international industry for climate change becomes more of a doomsday message than anything else—because how does a movement take on such a large, powerful enemy? Without the re-evaluation of national values—something that citizens can actually do—the task of taking power from the industry seems impossible. So when applying a rhetorical frame, it is imperative that the rhetor examine whether or not a rhetorical devil “challenge[s] assumptions related to growth and progress” (Check 96). If there is no challenge to these assumptions, if citizens remain complicit to the power imbalances, then there can be no changes, and the narrative becomes “us verses an enemy we can’t defeat.” That said, should the focus of the message stay on the value of social change, a melodramatic frame is immensely helpful, as the “personification of villains can point precisely at a system’s pressure point and provide the motive force for sustaining social critique” (247). This is vastly important, because while a villain or devil is necessary to a melodramatic frame, that singular aspect is incapable of generating oppositional arguments or social criticisms. Schwarze explains that “without articulation to moral concerns and broader

political dynamics, the devil in melodrama loses its capacity to challenge enthymematic assumptions and reorient public controversy” (103) Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the baseline morals and values of a society.

In the search for perfection, people have accepted that, on whole, human life has inherent value. While society often fails to acknowledge or act in favor of this, the standard for any society is that the health and safety of the people is good, and anything that would degrade that health and safety is not. The claim that can be made, then, is that considering the risks and dangers of climate change, environmental degradation is mostly accepted as bad as it negatively affects public health and safety. Meanwhile, the fossil fuel industry blatantly rejects changes that could stop global climate change, thus risking that public health and safety. To put it most simply, taking advantage of the poor and lying to the public is in general morally reprehensible, despite the fact that both are strategic in a capitalist system. Regardless of how much money can be earned from these strategies, risking public health and safety is still morally bad. Thus, the moral claim here is that those in opposition to the fossil fuel industry are aligned with good based in their reasoning, while the fossil fuel industry is aligned with bad morals because of their environmental-devil behaviors. Continuing allegiances with the fossil fuel industry, or simply remaining complicit to their actions, aligns citizens and community members with the morally deficient, as the continued use and purchase of fossil fuel products provides the fossil fuel industry with a source of revenue. Voting for politicians who support the fossil fuel industry allows the industry to remain in control. Bringing this moral claim against the fossil fuel industry onto a political sphere allows audiences to examine their own monetary participation and political compliance in power structures, and in turn offers audiences the opportunity to unify together to dismantle them.

In short, without a self-reflective examination of their own responsibilities for climate change, such as personal use of fossil fuel products and political agreement with fossil fuel politicians, audiences and potential activists cannot begin to solve these issues. Simply villainizing the fossil fuel industry is not enough to create the necessary discourses, so the system itself must be challenged in order to achieve any social changes. This sets up my argument, that Bill McKibben's blend of comic and tragic framing throughout his writing functions to expose the fossil fuel industry as an enemy of public health, safety, and sustainability, but also functions to encourage audiences to work together and to take responsibility for their own participation in climate change, thus leading them to fight for the rejection of current hierarchies in favor of environmental justice.

Overview of McKibben's Work

Bill McKibben, founder of the grassroots international environmental organization 350.org, is known by environmentalists both for his activism, and for writing several powerful books regarding the importance of strong organization and solidarity within the environmental movement. Throughout his writing he transforms traditional rhetorical strategies with his application of contrasting frames, and in doing so, provides great opportunity for rhetorical analysis. I will be examining this strategy in one specific book, his 2013 publication *Oil and Honey*.

The book relies mostly on melodramatic frames, as McKibben crafts a narrative to explain power imbalances in our government and appeal for unity and societal change. Throughout *Oil and Honey*, McKibben directly challenges the systems in place, demanding that the audience consider why and how they've allowed this sort of systemic corruption to occur. Confronted as such, the audience must recognize their part in environmental degradation in more

ways than just how they can enact personal change. Instead, they are lead to feel guilt and want redemption, which leads them to unify against the systemic causes of climate change. McKibben then introduces a villain vs. victim dichotomy to show the audience who or what to unify against. He makes the argument that when it comes down to a choice between a healthy environment or economic gain, the fossil fuel industry is “willing to alter the chemical composition of the atmosphere to make money” (McKibben 44).

Despite the melodramatic focus, *Oil and Honey* provides a unique blend of contrasting frames in order to draw out identification and unification among audience members. In addition to offering a number of learning opportunities and suggestions for lifestyle changes to audiences, the book offers up McKibben as a comic hero--a chastisable clown to whom the audience can relate as he writes about his struggles in becoming an organizer and leader. This combination of frames has allowed McKibben to create a rhetorical process that has the potential to make a serious difference both in the fight against climate change, and to the base elements of our society. His appeals to identification, learning, and self-reflection provide audiences with countless data-based opportunities to advance their understanding of the problems at hand, and offers them numerous suggestions as to how they can make life changes that will help them, and their children, create a safer, better world. He then prods the audience to self-reflect not only on their own contribution to climate change, but also regarding their complicity to such heightened power imbalances within the United States. Meanwhile, McKibben’s use of melodrama offers an identification process and provides unity for various factions of the environmental movement, as well as concrete reasons for less-invested citizens to join in. He sets up a clear appeal to moral values, making his argument the obvious “good” option. He encourages the audience to resist traditional framings of “progress” and “economic growth” in favor of justice, fairness, and social

change. Further, his nation-wide appeal is unique in that it requires the unification of not just a region or a community, but an entire voting-age majority of the United States against powerful corporate opposition. Ideally, by unifying against the fossil fuel industry, American citizens can work to get the government to enforce stronger regulations and hold the industry to more responsible behavior.

Précis of Chapters

McKibben's work provides vast opportunities for rhetorical study, as his uncommon application of framing styles has set him apart from other environmental leaders. Contrary to traditional rhetorical approaches, McKibben blends comic and tragic frames throughout his writing in order to draw out different reactions from the public and create a stronger sense of identification in United States citizens. Further, his ability to craft a message that instills a sense of urgency within his audience makes him an invaluable resource for achieving change.

In this document, I first discuss how McKibben applies melodramatic and comic frames individually, and then discuss how they function together, and how this combination enhances each. In Chapter Two, I examine how *Oil and Honey* is structured in a melodramatic frame, as explained by Steve Schwarze's *Environmental Melodrama*. This discussion focuses on how McKibben's utilization of melodramatic framing proves effective and how he addresses potential limitations of the frame. In Chapter Three, I return to *Oil and Honey*, examining it through a Burkean lens to highlight how it also functions as an example of comic framing. This chapter examines McKibben's own "green performance" as a comic hero and his ability to provide learning and self-reflection opportunities to his audience despite a focus on melodrama. Finally, in Chapter Four, I discuss how the two frames work together to combat limitations and enhance one another. I also discuss my conclusions and implications for further study regarding both

McKibben's contribution to the environmental movement, as well as how a blend of comic and tragic frames has the ability to improve the rhetoric used in social movements.

Chapter 2: Tragedy and Melodrama

Bill McKibben published *Oil and Honey* five years after the publication of James Hansen's ominous 2008 climate report. The book is a series of essays that are both heartfelt and hopeful, but that also make scathing attacks on the fossil fuel industry for acting as an environmental devil, and on the government for its inaction against both corporate control and against the real life dangers of a changing climate. What makes the book worthy of rhetorical analysis, however, is McKibben's use of both tragic framing in tandem with comic, an effect that balances out McKibben's overarching use of environmental melodrama with organizational opportunities and introspective lifestyle suggestions that help transition "the problem" into "our problem." In this chapter, I examine how *Oil and Honey* utilizes a melodramatic frame, as described by Steve Schwarze, as well as how McKibben's utilization of melodramatic framing is effective.

Melodrama, as explained previously, "generates stark, polarizing distinctions between social actors and infuses those distinctions with moral gravity and pathos" (Schwarze 239). Essentially, a melodramatic frame sets up a narrative of a victim, a villain, and a hero or a solution, providing issues with "a discernible outline along easily recognizable moral and emotional contours, facilitating broad identification among diverse audiences" (Schwarze 255). In McKibben's narrative, the villain is the fossil fuel industry--as they are the primary contributors to the rapidly increasing climate change--and the victims are the people who intend to continue living on this planet. The opportunity to be the hero of this story is offered to a national audience, as McKibben makes appeals to United States citizen power as well as appeals to the moral values of protecting the earth for social justice, conservation, and balancing power structures.

For the melodramatic approach, McKibben sets up a clear appeal to moral values, making his argument the obvious “good” option, and he encourages the audience to resist traditional framings of “progress” and “economic growth” in favor of justice, fairness, and social change. This use of melodrama offers an identification process for citizens, as it brings climate discourses onto a political plane and requires audiences to examine their complicity to power imbalances, as well as the complicity of their neighbors and friends. Paired with moral distinctions that separate good behavior from bad, audiences are forced to examine their allegiances to the fossil fuel industry, which may lead to the creation of a new identity for those who wish for social change. This identification creates unity among various factions of the environmental movement, as well as concrete reasons for previously less-invested citizens to join in. Further, McKibben’s nationwide appeal is unique in that it requires the unification of not just a region or a community, but an entire voting-age majority of the United States against powerful corporate opposition.

Application of Melodrama in the Environmental Movement

Schwarze’s “Environmental Melodrama” asserts that there are four features that make up the rhetorical action of melodrama: “a focus on socio-political conflict, polarization of characters and positions, a moral framing of public issues, and development of monopathy” (245). While other rhetorical forms may also produce these outcomes, Schwarze states that “in melodrama they work in concert to constitute a coherent perspective on the world” (245). In short, these four features function together to structure a melodramatic frame, focusing on drawing out contrasting morals, polarizing sides, and bringing people together against a common enemy, but also for a systemic change.

Schwarze describes the first feature of melodrama, focus on socio-political conflict, as a way that melodrama can situate conflict to “clarify issues of power that are obscured by privatizing rhetoric” (Schwarze 246). He states that “in contrast to discourses that frame environmental issues as a matter of personal decision-making or action, melodrama can effectively place the fault line of environmentalism between the producers of significant environmental damage and those who suffer its effects” (Schwarze 246). Thus, socio-political conflict effectively moves the focus of the discourse from personal reflection, and onto imbalanced power systems. Schwarze explains that this focus may rely heavily on testimony and personal experiences, but it “positions those elements of conflict with other forces to evoke the power relationships at play in a particular situation” (Schwarze 246). The audience is provided with new or seldom acknowledged voices and is then asked to examine power structures. For example, in Schwarze’s outline of a contemporary case study in Libby, Montana, citizens were getting sick and dying due to asbestos contamination from the nearby W.R. Grace vermiculite mine. Schwarze explains that as public advocacy, resident testimony, journalistic accounts and various other examples of public discourse brought the conflict from personal and into political planes, “a consistent narrative [drew] clear lines of conflict between victimized residents and W.R. Grace” (Schwarze 246). These discourses allowed new voices to be heard, and in turn emphasized the imbalance in power as a wealthy corporation exploited the lives and safety of Libby citizens.

The second feature, polarization of characters, can “encourage reconsideration of the allegiances and shared substance that might normally lead audiences to accept a certain set of social and political arrangements” (Schwarze 248). For example, melodrama’s polarization can pull apart relationships like “society” and “economy” in order to better examine problems within

the system. He states that “the implicit moral framework provided by juxtaposition--innocent victims harmed by a powerful deceptive corporation--further crafts a clear division between residents in the community and the corporation” (Schwarze 247). Continuing Schwarze’s example, once the deception and exploitation of the citizens of Libby was exposed, W.R. Grace was ousted from the favor of the community. Schwarze explains that the polarization created by this melodramatic appeal changed the way the community thought about W.R. Grace, as the community's alliance with the company had only been profitable as long as people weren't getting hurt. Once the lives and wellbeing of the citizens were threatened by the chemicals from W.R. Grace, the mine became a threat rather than a friend. Libby provided a powerful example of this victim versus villain narrative, as the melodrama of the situation vastly separated the people from the corporation they worked for. W.R. Grace was no longer seen as a positive provider of economic opportunity for the community, but instead as a menace, the cause of disease, and as a violator of public trust and goodwill.

The third feature, a moral framing of public issues, essentially allows melodramatic frames to “remoralize situations that have been demoralized by inaccuracy, displaying concerns that have been obscured by the reassuring rhetoric of technical reason” (Schwarze 250). This sets up a moral framework offering one side up as “good” and moral, and the opposition as “bad,” “greedy,” or immoral for various reasons, in order to offer a new basis for challenging the hierarchy. Schwarze explains that this feature “often advances this position by disclosing foreknowledge of environmental hazards to suggest deception and inaction on the part of government agencies and corporations” (Schwarze 250). In regards to Libby, Montana, the public discourse made it clear that it was morally unjust for W.R. Grace to privilege profit over human lives, and it was even worse for the company to have lied about doing so. This divided

the community into W.R. Grace, as the villains, and everyone else--mine workers and other community members alike--as the victims.

Finally, Schwarze explains the fourth feature, development of monopoly, as “encourage[ing] a unity of feeling, offering a basis for identification that has been obscured by emotionally dissipating and dispassionate rhetorics” (Schwarze 251). Instead of appealing to balancing arguments, monopoly strengthens identification by unifying people in favor of one viewpoint. In Libby, Montana, a melodramatic frame was immensely successful in putting a stop to the efforts of a corporation to harm the general public, as the narrative of victim vs. villain allowed the people to identify as victims of the company, and in turn unify against W.R. Grace. While this is a small scale example, it shows that this form of framing can be applied to a situation where activists went up against a more powerful entity with a frame that portrayed that entity as an enemy of public health. By no longer agreeing to be complicit in the corporation’s exploitation of public health, the community was able to achieve change, and the corporation had to take responsibility for the harm that it had caused the citizens of Libby, Montana.

Bill McKibben’s book, *Oil and Honey* can be analyzed in terms of Schwarze’s four features of melodrama, as they shape McKibben’s perspective of the world, showing the socio-political conflict of a nation that privileges the economy over the environment, the polarization of the fossil fuel industry vs. the science of the environmental movement, stark contrasting morals of “good” and “bad” behaviors toward the Earth, and a public that needs to unify to solve a problem we have allowed to emerge. McKibben’s villain/victim dichotomy allows for the implementation of a process of public unification, thus allowing the climate movement an opportunity to harness citizen power and start making changes that will protect the people of this planet from massive environmental change.

Analysis of Melodrama in *Oil and Honey*

Bill McKibben's *Oil and Honey* is a series of essays put together chronologically to tell the story of one man's rise into environmental activism. The book takes place over a few years, although primarily from the summer of 2011 through the fall of 2012, and is part memoir, part fable, and part rallying cry intended for people all over the United States. In between anecdotes about his own life, and personal accounts of his love for his home state and the encounters with nature he is able to experience there, McKibben tells three stories. The first is based in hard facts, scientific calculations, and meticulous research aimed at exposing the fossil fuel industry as an environmental devil-- greedy, manipulative, and dangerous. The second follows McKibben's own journey to becoming an environmental leader--the steps that were taken, the processes that were required, and the emotional changes this brought. The third focuses on a man named Kirk Webster, who McKibben befriended in the early 2000's, who makes a living keeping bees. Kirk Webster lives a humble life, living off the grid and running a small farm, and throughout *Oil and Honey*, McKibben returns to discussing Webster's life, showing how the man lives based on the season, and perhaps setting a moral standard for how other people should live. Because of the three stories, McKibben's book jumps around a lot. The tone is sometimes strongly passionate, while other times it is emotionless and matter-of-fact, making sure to simply present quantifiable evidence to the audience.

McKibben often fluctuates his use of emotion and tone in order to direct the emotions and actions of the audience. To start, his descriptions of skiing through Vermont woods, farming in peaceful Vermont valleys, and relying on the kindness of Vermont neighbors paints McKibben as a simple, nature loving, small-town kind of guy--the kind of person that many people know, and whom most everyone can get along with. This agreeable, neighborly persona

allows McKibben to make an easier switch from simply offering information about himself and friends, to becoming passionate and heated in his statements against the fossil fuel industry. He cares about his home, he cares about the future of his daughter, and he cares about the public health and opportunities of people all over the United States. This draws the audience in, allowing them to feel comfortable, before McKibben includes heavier information and numerical facts and statistics. While his presentation of numbers is often neutral in tone and presented as a list, he often follows up with relatable details about how early heat waves are a nice break from the winter, and then jumps to how despite this enjoyment, these phenomena are unnatural, and then explains the negative effects. While he may not have felt these negative effects himself, McKibben acknowledges that they occurred, often in detail. This is a valuable strategy as well, seeing how one of the biggest problems with climate change is its abstract nature--people who are not experiencing it struggle to connect to it, thus allowing them to ignore it. The fact that McKibben, too, can forget about these problems makes him more relatable, but also shows the importance of considering other parts of the world.

Additionally, his acknowledgement of these dangers to human lives are shocking and often heartbreaking. In one instance, McKibben states

A series of truly striking images arrived from southern Sindh Pakistan, where the International organization for Migration was still trying to cope with the millions left homeless by epic flooding in 2010 and 2011.... Parched tea estates in Assam; survivors of the forest fires that claimed 173 lives in the suburbs of Melbourne; a group on a dry lake bed in Garissa, Kenya, where one man's sign simply said 'Drought Is Killing Me'" (121).

While these pieces complement later parts of the book to build polarization and moral claims, alone they make a different statement: there is not a fear appeal, because it is too late for fear. Instead of simply scaring the audience, McKibben wants to make them think, and what he wants them to think about is “how did we get into this situation” and “what can we do to get out of it, before really bad things start to happen?” McKibben’s imagery sets the stage for his melodramatic frame. By acknowledging that certain nations will likely disappear--some into the ocean, others into the desert--he has the basis for the moral claim of privileging lives over profits. Simply listing the maximum amount of carbon the atmosphere can take puts McKibben’s narrative on a timeline, which he later uses to show that in a literary sense we are no longer simply in the “rising action”--this is the climax of this story, and the battle is now. By highlighting the amount of carbon that the fossil fuel industry has the ability to release into the atmosphere, McKibben emphasizes the most important element of their power, which sets up his later application of an “environmental devils” storyline. When relating numbers and statistics back to the audience, McKibben maintains a neutral, factual tone, which encourages them to draw their own conclusions based on the numbers. This approach enables a different kind of audience participation, as the calm, collected coolness of the numbers is actually quite enraging, a point that becomes more obvious in other sections of the book, as McKibben’s words get more heated. McKibben sets up quantitative evidence to justify his melodrama, building this tragic frame on a base created out of facts.

McKibben’s melodramatic approach, then, is prominent throughout the book, although it heightens when he discusses the fossil fuel industry, or, oddly, Kirk Webster. Regardless, *Oil and Honey* functions to demonstrate Schwarze’s four features of melodrama, despite the changing tones, the variation of material, and the strong personal focus of the book.

Socio-Political Conflict

The first melodramatic feature, focus on socio-political conflict, can be seen throughout *Oil and Honey*, as McKibben discusses the fossil fuel industry's influence over the government. This strategy functions primarily to pull climate change discussions from the personal plane to the political, as he thoroughly blames the government for allowing climate change damages to advance as far as they have. McKibben focuses on several distinct features of both climate change and fossil fuel strategies in order to make his point. First, he draws attention to recent disasters and abnormal weather patterns in order to highlight climate change damages, and to show how they affect American citizens. McKibben describes heat waves in the spring, record breaking temperature marks in 15,785 different cities across the United States, and describes these phenomena as "something like a once in a 4,779-years event" (93) for emphasis. He drops details like this multiple times throughout the book, creating a separated, but qualitative list of evidence supporting increasing climate change dangers. This shows the rising conflict that is being spurred by climate change issues, and then moves to emphasize the fact that not only is there a measurable problem, but media outlets were not addressing it in a correct manner. Although they acknowledged the strangeness of record breaking weather and crazy storms, the mainstream media largely ignored the fact that the difference could be caused by climate change. Instead, the news labeled the weather with things like "off the scale weird" (94).

From there, McKibben builds a narrative of government "charades" showing how politicians make statements about needing to stop climate change, but then neglect to actually take any action toward doing so. McKibben almost immediately brings up past global climate conferences, stating "as it turned out, the United States never ratified the Kyoto accord, and soon China was building a coal plant a week. Carbon emissions kept soaring, and donations from the

fossil fuel industry managed to turn one of our two political parties into climate deniers and the other party into cowards” (10). This gives exigence to inactivity within the government, and the fact that despite environmental conditions and socio-political relations being fundamentally entwined, the environment is still being left out of conversations.

His layout of quantitative data supporting the increase of climate change-related risks and crises show that these problems are not only increasing, but they are starting to threaten the American people--and the country cannot afford to have a stagnant government. In one such example, McKibben offered a letter written to him explaining the plight of people in West Virginia after a “climate change driven storm that knocked out power to most of the state” (173) during the summer of 2012. According to the letter, tens of thousands of West Virginians remained without power in potentially life-threatening heat, as again 2012 was a year of record heat waves (173). Meanwhile, Washington D.C. had “just passed its ninth straight day above 95 degrees, the longest in its history” (171). Furthermore, McKibben was writing *Oil and Honey* at the beginning of Barack Obama’s second campaign for president. Several times throughout the book he expressed his disappointment with Obama’s failure to make climate change and environmental issues a priority, and often stated that despite former promises, Obama wasn’t doing much to help put a stop to the inactive government. At one point, McKibben states that “Obama has 13 months to persuade voters that they should blame not him but the GOP for his presidency’s shortcomings. He has much less time to convince the thousands of activists nationwide that he’s worth their sweat and sacrifice one more time” (58).

McKibben also puts a strong emphasis on the Keystone XL Pipeline, a project that he refers to as “a serious horror” (17), and “a fuse to the biggest carbon bomb on the continent” (18). At the time McKibben was writing, the fossil fuel industry was making desperate attempt

after attempt to convince the government to accept the project proposal. McKibben brings this to the audience's attention, stating that "Big Oil wanted the pipeline revived, and that the industry was using the congressmen it funded heavily to make it happen" (71). From there, he provides a few examples of how, despite citizen interest in climate change issues, on the political plane, they were being ignored in favor of campaign finances. For example, regarding Nebraska (R) Federal Representative, Lee Terry, McKibben states that "Koch Industries had given him \$15,000--they have a 'direct and substantial interest' in the pipeline. Exxon-Mobil had given him \$25,000. The Petroleum Marketers Association of America had tossed in \$12,500" (71). In one statement against the fossil fuel industry's hand in government proceedings, McKibben explains that "for most of us, it's no different from going to a football game where one of the teams is paying the referees. But Washington has its own set of rules" (72).

In short, McKibben makes the claim that without governmental action against continued carbon emissions, we can't make progress against climate changes, and without some sort of change to the government as it is now, this can't happen. At one point, he states "this is why we have to amend the Constitution, win public financing for campaigns, and do the other vital work of basic governmental reform" (83), but more importantly, McKibben attempts to draw personal interest in stopping climate change into the political sphere by making politics more personal. He emphasizes how politicians are ignoring the needs of the very constituents who are electing them, and instead making decisions that will make wealthy campaign contributors wealthier. Thus, he states that it is time for environmentally friendly citizens to take their lifestyle changes farther, and get involved in the political part of prioritizing climate change dangers.

McKibben argues that keeping climate change discourse solely on the personal plane renders it unsuccessful. Instead, he explains that the solution is governmental regulations for the

actions of the fossil fuel industry--and while the United States citizens need the power of their government to set these regulations in place, that government is currently ignoring this need. McKibben states that fast transformative change would require building a movement and leads the audience into the realization that building a movement is the only remaining option to create the necessary changes. This fully brings the conflict from the personal plane to the political, as he is arguing for citizens to come together to overhaul the current system. By setting the stage for a conflict on the political plane, McKibben is able to clarify issues of government inactivity and continued environmental degradation, much of which is supported by the other melodramatic features.

Polarization of Characters

McKibben exemplifies the second step, polarization of characters, by clearly setting up a structure of villain versus victim, enemy versus hero in his book. This polarization is achieved mainly by separating the fossil fuel industry from society as a whole in order to show the power imbalance, as well as how the industry is doing more harm than good. Throughout *Oil and Honey*, McKibben villainizes the fossil fuel industry, using words like “enemy” (185), and saying things like “still there’s pleasure in beating the bad guys” (86). Words like “enemy” and “bad guys” send an obvious message, thus working to polarize the good from the bad, and the people from the fossil fuel industry. McKibben takes this further, however, stating that the fossil fuel industry is clearly “cognizant of global warming--they employ some of the world's best scientists, and they're bidding, after all, on all those Arctic oil leases made possible by the staggering melt of northern ice. And yet they relentlessly search for more hydrocarbons” (149). He adds that despite their knowledge, they choose to ignore global warming, and create loopholes that allow them to continue doing so: “TransCanada’s connections were so good that

the State Department allowed it to choose the company that would review the pipeline's environmental impact" (60). McKibben also explains that the amount of accessible carbon products currently stored in the earth, 2,795 gigatons (146), is five times more than 565 gigatons, which is the amount that "scientists guess humans can pour into the atmosphere by midcentury" (145) without causing the massive changes that climatologists warn will occur should the planet's temperature rise more than two degrees. He states that "it's a lot like nuclear overkill: we've got five times the carbon that we need to cook the planet" and despite this, the fossil fuel industry fought and prevented the regulation of carbon dioxide (148). McKibben explains that "those reserves were their assets, the holdings that give their companies their value" (148). In short, McKibben explains, when the numbers were added up, and the industry finances were examined, "it was clear that [the fossil fuel industry was] planning to wreck the earth" (149).

McKibben then sets up the other side of the dichotomy. He explains that ordinary citizens are being prevented from achieving change, thus asking the audience to question their allegiances to economic progress. He states:

Left to our own devices, citizens might decide to regulate carbon and stop short of the brink--the most recent polling shows that nearly two-thirds of Americans would back an international agreement that cut carbon emissions 90 percent by 2050... But we aren't left to our own devices. The Koch brothers, for instance, have a combined wealth of \$50 billion, meaning they trail only Bill Gates on the list of richest Americans. They've made most of their money in hydrocarbons, they know any system to regulate carbon would cut those profits, and they reportedly plan to lavish as much as \$200 million on this year's elections.

(McKibben 150)

These statements create an “environmental devil” persona for the fossil fuel industry, portraying the fossil fuel industry and its leaders as the ultimate devil: “powerful; ...greedy or indifferent about the violence it causes; ...ubiquitous in its physical scope or in the evils it represents:... deceitful and cunning” (Check 95). Further, this shows that fossil fuel barons and powerful corporations are the only real barrier to social change, as the majority of the American people are willing to try something new for the good of the earth, thus polarizing the fossil fuel industry away from the rest of society. That said, it is important to acknowledge that individuals involved with these corporations are not being framed as the enemy. In fact, McKibben is careful to point this out, stating that there are many allies working within the fossil fuel industry--although admittedly, usually at the lower levels. He includes a note sent with a picture of the tar sands refinery in Fort McMurray that stated”

I am an oil fields worker and risked my job to take this picture. Myself, along with the majority of my co-workers are ready for a renewable energy revolution. We need to stand together to eliminate the corruption that exists in this industry, start taxing carbon emissions, and creating green jobs for the future. We do not work in this industry because we like supporting large oil companies; we simply have no other choice. We want jobs that provide long term economic, social, and environmental sustainability for ourselves, our country, and our planet. (124)

This even further polarizes positions, as it shows that even some of the workers in the fossil fuel industry are ready for change. It is their lack of options that removes their agency to choose to go elsewhere, much like our lack of options on whole removes citizen ability to completely cut fossil fuels from our lives. This brings us back to the element of socio-political conflict, as without societal change and a push for sustainable energy, we’re trapped in gridlock, using fossil

fuels we don't want. As voters and citizens, McKibben explains, our only power is in pushing personal wants and needs into the political sphere--an action that is helped by an "us" versus "them" mentality that unifies citizens together against fossil fuel corporations.

In regards to the criticism that this "us" versus "them" mentality of tragic frames is dehumanizing, it is important to acknowledge that McKibben is making a rhetorical argument for understanding corporations as machines rather than humans. McKibben explains that a corporation functions like a machine, highly efficient, and with one overarching task--to create a product and earn a profit. When it comes to the higher workings of a corporation, there are no individuals--only a hive mentality. McKibben states that in a corporation (or an entire industry of corporations) there is no complexity, no foresight into the future and very little examination into the past. The only real concern is profit, and the decision-making required to see that the needs of the stockholders are met--thereby excluding everybody else. Humans, meanwhile, are complicated: "we have instinctual desires... but those are tempered by strange and wonderful forces outside ourselves, such as art... We remember our ancestors, and we can imagine our grandchildren... The precise glory of humans is that we're complicated" (104). McKibben brings this back to the "honey" in *Oil and Honey*, creating a metaphor of corporations as bees to explain this uncomplicated, non-introspective, hive mentality: "if you were trying to decide if making honey was a good idea, bees would be the last creatures to ask. You know what their answer is going to be" (104). So while tragic framing can be manipulative when applied to actual human beings, it has a lot of potential when applied to corporations. Tragic framing is inherently dehumanizing, but if corporations function like machines, why not regard them as such? There is nothing inappropriate about dehumanizing a machine. Additionally, the strategy of villainizing corporations challenges the fundamental basis of our society, that "progress" and

“economic growth” are the most important goals. Thus, it tears at the hierarchies of our system by insisting that people recognize humanity and lack of humanity.

Moral Framing of Public Issues

For the third feature, a moral framing of public issues, McKibben makes a stark moral contrast between what is right and what is profitable, while also drawing on some of the socio-political conflict and power imbalances to shape the moral dimensions of his argument. Much of this argument is aided by McKibben’s continual references to Kirk Webster, whom he visits often during the several years over which the book takes place. As stated before, Webster is a prime example of the new-age, small farmer who McKibben hopes will become the norm for America in the next decade. Webster lives off the grid, grows his own food, supports himself by selling honey and beehives, and uses only enough fossil fuel to travel from hive to hive. He lives a small simple life, and doesn’t even own a computer. McKibben states “he was in that sense, un-American. He was solvent and pretty much at peace, and doing something productive that didn’t involve ever--ever--looking into a screen” (127). Of course, McKibben explains that hoping everyone can learn to live like Webster is unrealistic, but the idea that people can get by on less and begin to localize is not.

From this point, McKibben draws a moral dichotomy. He examines the behavior of the fossil fuel industry, privileging human health and survival as most valuable and important, and continued profit expansion for few as the opposite. He states that “the most powerful industry on Earth is using that power to make sure it can keep dumping its waste in the atmosphere for free” (106), and argues against the term “radical environmentalists,” stating “radicals? They work at oil companies and coal companies and gas companies. They’re willing to alter the chemical

composition of the atmosphere to make money. No one has ever done anything more radical than that” (44). Thus, McKibben draws in moral values of privileging human lives over money.

Due to power imbalances in the Western world, corporate decisions in the United States could effectively destroy other places around the globe--and ironically, it is often those that have had the least to do with climate change who will be the most affected. For example, as Presidential Candidate Rick Santorum was making the claim that global warming wasn't a problem, “the low-lying island nation of Kiribati was announcing that it had bought a swath of land in Fiji and was beginning to evacuate its 130,000 residents” (86). What this shows, is that while the United States government allows their corporations to irresponsibly extract harmful fossil fuels, people in less developed countries are losing their homes—something McKibben sees as morally wrong, as profit is being made on the misfortune of real, living people.

McKibben takes this point further by highlighting financial losses that the fossil fuel industry would face should there be stronger regulations on fossil fuels. He states that “at today's market value, those 2,795 gigatons of carbon emissions equal about \$28 trillion. Which is to say, if you paid attention to the scientists and kept 80 percent of it underground, you'd be writing off \$20 trillion in assets” (148). The implication here is that by fighting against regulations and inserting themselves in government affairs, the fossil fuel industry is willing to sacrifice human lives in the Pacific (and all over the world) for \$20 trillion. McKibben explains this further by discussing statements from Rex Tillerson, the CEO of ExxonMobil, who acknowledged that “global warming is real, but dismissed it as an ‘engineering problem’ that has ‘engineering solutions’... ‘the fear factor that people want to throw out there to say ‘we have to stop this’ I do not except,’ Tillerson said” (McKibben 163). McKibben goes on to state that if Tillerson did accept regulations to stop climate change “he'd have to keep his reserves in the ground. Which would

cost him money. It's not an engineering problem, in other words--it's a greed problem" (McKibben 163). These statements work to produce the moral framing of people vs. profit, or humanity vs. greed. McKibben, in fact, clearly states that this is a moral issue, explaining that "we have met the enemy and they is Shell" (McKibben 185). Together these statements build a moral framing of public issues, addressing the conflict on the political plane, and expressing to the audience that allegiances with the fossil fuel industry allow the continuation of exploiting resources and endangerment of massive numbers of people-- all for the financial gain of a few corporations.

Development of Monopathy

For the fourth feature, development of monopathy, McKibben applies polarization strategies and moral standards to create audience identification as former victims/future heroes, while also providing the audience with an enemy and a direction for future action. This in turn, creates a monopathy, or a "singleness of feeling" (Schwarze 251), as morals and polarized sides offer audiences something to believe in and a group to identify with, thus strengthening identification with one side of the argument. McKibben lashes out at the fossil fuel industry, further separating it from the rest of society by stating that "thanks to the size of its bankroll, the fossil fuel industry has far more free will than the rest of us. These companies don't simply exist in a world whose hungers they fulfill--they help create the boundaries of that world" (150). This statement, when paired with the information that "nearly two-thirds of Americans would back an international agreement that cut emissions by 90 percent by 2050" (150) shows that the power of the fossil fuel industry allows them to remove the agency of the people, thereby leaving United States citizens powerless to prevent climate change dangers and to save themselves. Without

disrupting these power imbalances, McKibben explains, the fossil fuel industry will continue to be able to “put its trash out for free” (141).

He further draws the audience into a unity of feeling by separating out the fossil fuel industry from society, explaining that no other business is permitted to do so, and that “special privilege meant everything to the oil barons; it’s why they were willing to spend huge amounts of money to maintain their position” (141). Creating an “us versus them” identification for the audience then allows McKibben to put a more unified audience toward a common goal. Steve Schwarze explains that “monopathic identification is not purely about victimage” (Schwarze 251)--to finish a melodramatic frame there must also be heroes to defeat the villains. McKibben ends his argument demanding that the audience unify to become the heroes of the narrative he has created. He offers a plan of action, appealing to history and providing examples where other corporations had been morally reprehensible, in order to show that a unification of the public can be and has been very successful.

McKibben outlines the anti-apartheid campaign in the 1980’s, which demanded divestment from companies that did business in South Africa due to the white South Africans’ blatant mistreatment of black people. He explains that the movement first rose on college campuses and then spread to municipal and state governments (151). Further, “the divestment movement allowed millions of Americans to cut through the obfuscation and express a clear and direct view that they did not want to profit from the destruction of the people in South Africa” (151). He then goes on to suggest that a new divestment campaign would be a powerful plan of action for a newly unified audience. He states “we might be able to take it up a notch by tying it more explicitly to carbon and turning it into a national campaign. Divestment wouldn’t bankrupt the fossil fuel companies, but at least we’d alter the geometry of the political battle a little”

(151). McKibben then explains that should the United States attempt a divestment campaign again, we'd need massive participation. Yes, the task is daunting, he explains, but now is the time to band together and stand up for our rights and our lives--the future is too late. This appeal to investor power, then, provides a rallying point for those whose voices have been excluded from dominant discourses and dominant social and political order. In short, McKibben offers his audience identification as the "us" against the fossil fuel industry "them," and a unification opportunity in the fight against the "villain" of his melodramatic narrative of climate issues. He further provides the moral frames and polarization necessary to cause enough societal self-reflection to launch an attack on both the fossil fuel industry and on *society's dependence* on fossil fuels. This strategy requires that the government recognize the need for change, but also demands that the audience hold themselves accountable for their own part in dirty energy dependence.

Discussion of Melodrama's Use for Climate Change Issues

Bill McKibben's *Oil and Honey* provides us with a few opportunities to build on what we already know about melodrama. The book is particularly interesting because of the way McKibben builds off of quantifiable evidence supporting global climate change, and shapes the melodramatic frame around a skeleton of numbers. Although often it is apparent that McKibben is angry, he balances this with occasional approaches that are fairly neutral, thus downplaying emotional appeals. Also, as explained earlier, tragic frames are commonly criticized as being manipulative and inherently dehumanizing, and scholars explain that melodrama is specifically criticized for "serving to perfect divisions between people rather than minimize them" (Desilet 76). McKibben's use of mathematics, however, sets a justification for perfecting divisions, and in turn, his neutral statements of facts help audiences to draw their own conclusions. In earlier

chapters of the book, McKibben portrays the fossil fuel industry as greedy and immoral without actually stating it. He states it in later chapters, of course, but early on he simply compares \$20 trillion in assets (150) to a currently immeasurable number of potential lives to be lost: the “entire countries” that will disappear should the temperature rise that 2° C. These bald facts, however, still create a severe contrast between people and corporations.

Oil and Honey further exemplifies a well-structured, powerful melodramatic approach as it offers a conflict for a situation where there has not necessarily been a conflict before. Climate change is often portrayed as an abstract disaster or an overarching, unfightable threat that is either created by the earth (Mellor 138) or created by mixed participation from everyday consumers (Smerecnik & Renegar 158)--neither of which allows for much of a conflict, as the earth is entirely unfightable, and faulting the entire population of the United States severely limits dialogue. By switching the onus for damages from the actions of American citizens to the actions of the fossil fuel industry, McKibben has provided an identifiable enemy. By constructing an environmental devil persona for the fossil fuel industry, McKibben is able to further solidify the distinction between it and the rest of the nation. His research of finances and stock values justify this claim, which he also backs up with quotations from fossil fuel industry CEO's who clearly admit being willing to deny climate change and risk lives for continued profit. Terrance Check warns that the environmental devil trope can be potentially limiting if it does not “challenge the assumptions related to growth and progress,” but McKibben covers this as well, by creating the moral distinction. He divides behaviors into morally “good” and morally “bad,” which then challenges audiences to examine their allegiances to the fossil fuel industry, which has been clearly set up as the “bad.” His call to action--divestment and investor responsibility-- not only offers power and agency to the audience as consumers, but also

encourages them to challenge their own complicity in consumer culture, and power imbalances created by the fossil fuel industry. McKibben's argument regarding the public's ability to participate in individual changes demands that the audience take responsibility for their own actions, in addition to holding industry accountable for their greed and mismanagement of resources.

Conclusions

Bill McKibben's *Oil and Honey* offers a valuable opportunity for rhetorical critics, as it exemplifies a new approach to environmental melodrama by setting up a base in quantifiable evidence prior to moving into an appeal to moral values and pathos appeals. McKibben's use of mathematics and a stark lack of emotion and neutrality of tone through many of his chapters forces the audience to participate in drawing the issues onto the political plane, as the numbers alone expose power imbalances. In other chapters, the tone becomes angrier and more heated, so that McKibben's application of numerical evidence functions as a reasonable justification for the moral claims and polarization he employs. Further, McKibben is able to deflect several of the criticisms of melodrama or tragic frames in the way that he builds distinctions. While melodrama is criticized for being too polarizing and for creating divisions among people, McKibben doesn't discuss corporations as if they are people. He acknowledges that people run corporations, but he addresses the fossil fuel industry as an enemy outside of the realms of humanity. He's not dividing people, but dividing people from the industry. This creates two separate categories, and provides yet another identity for his audience: human, not machine. McKibben also avoids the pitfall of the "environmental devil" trope, as he does require his audience to "challenge assumptions related to growth and progress" (Check 96). While he sets up the fossil fuel industry as an obvious "environmental devil," what he really does is draw a moral distinction between

bad actions and good actions. By framing the fossil fuel industry as a villain, he exposes their exploitation of resources and people, and frames them as morally depraved--thereby demanding that his audience question their allegiances to this industry. By creating bad morals to shun and good morals to live by, McKibben creates identification for the audience as they gravitate toward good morals, which in turn causes them to examine their own complicity in our system's power imbalances. From there, he provides a call to action in the form of divestment, which unifies the people and offers them a next move. Throughout, the qualitative evidence of environmental risks and vast power imbalances functions to draw distinctions between citizens and corporations, and the moral dimension functions to "complicate and transform" (Peterson 99) the otherwise narrowly defined conflict, moving climate change discourse beyond economic benefits and into a larger conflict: the politics of profit vs. people.

Chapter 3: Comedy

In the mid 2000's seven students from Vermont's Middlebury College started an on-campus climate change awareness group with the help of local Schumann Distinguished Scholar, journalist and author, Bill McKibben. Although the group started out as several friends and their teacher getting together to chat about climate change issues and potential impacts, it quickly morphed into a fairly prevalent environmental activist organization in the state of Vermont. By summer of 2007, the group, Step it Up, had led a five-day walk across the state of Vermont as a call to action against global warming, and had organized rallies in hundreds of cities and towns across America to demand that congress curb carbon emissions by the year 2050. Inside Bill McKibben's *Oil and Honey* are details of how a group of college students and their teacher came together to form Step It Up, how that local activist group became the precursor to the international environmental organization 350.org, and what the leaders of the organization have had to deal with ever since.

While *Oil and Honey* is primarily a warning to Americans about the dangers of global climate change, it also has the potential to be very helpful both to environmental organizers and ordinary citizens. In addition to McKibben's goal of inspiring activism, the messages shared connect to other environmental interest issues--such as strengthening community and building a local support system, making lifestyle changes and living sustainably, and educating oneself on environmental concerns. As discussed in the last chapter, McKibben devotes much of his focus to higher systems of power that will try to prevent environmentally positive changes from occurring, however his messages also function to unify the public and promote self-reflection and learning on individual and group levels. Thus, while the book is primarily set in a tragic frame, it has a twist of comic framing that encourages audiences to learn from mistakes of the

past and move forward by focusing on how people can change their lives to help fight climate change from the personal plane as well. Thus, McKibben's blend of comic and tragic framing offers up a unique rhetorical strategy. By focusing on personal and community change and learning, McKibben creates a strong comic frame, but by acknowledging the fossil fuel industry as a wealthy environmental devil, McKibben reminds the audience of systemic power imbalances, and supplements the comic frame with the material needed to prevent some of the limitations of a comic frame alone.

Despite its previously discussed potential limitations, comic frame can be a powerful rhetorical tool for motivating both individual and group action. It encourages an examination of both (or multiple) sides of an issue, and suggests a result based in fairness and compromise. This framing essentially asks that the audience reflect upon *themselves* to solve the problems of the system. Kenneth Burke presents dramatic frames as "symbolic tools for making sense of social situations and imposing order on a complex and changing world" (DeLaure 453), as both comic and tragic frames are based in literary structures. In a comic frame, the focus is on the "clown"--the flawed character-- who is chastised, but who is able to learn from his or her mistakes. As an audience, we are compelled to recognize some part of that clown in ourselves and in those who surround us. Burke explains that the comic frame enables "people to be observers of themselves, while acting. Its ultimate [goal] would not be passiveness, but maximum consciousness. One would 'transcend' himself by noting his own foibles" (171). By noting their flaws, the audience is able to rise above them. Thus, as mentioned previously, when applied to environmental issues, comic frame requires audiences to ask themselves "what have I been doing that contributes to the problem, and what can I do to be more environmentally conscious?"

In *Oil and Honey*, McKibben calls for citizen engagement, insisting that in order to change the world, the people need to take charge--we can't afford to rely on politicians to make environmentally conscious decisions without the voices of the people. McKibben explains that the individual and collective efforts are intertwined, as citizens living sustainably and locally strengthens and builds communities, which in turn leads into civic and political participation. The book encourages non-activist readers to create community connections and explains how these connections can strengthen us as a society. Further, it expresses the faults of contemporary society, citing consumer culture for its focus on instant gratification and constant production of new things, and forces the audience to acknowledge their own participation and complicity in this, and how that affects their lives, their communities, and the planet as a whole. Finally, McKibben focuses on how imbalanced power systems in the government allow the wealthy fossil fuel industry to make social change much more difficult, and how without engaged citizens, nothing will change.

In this chapter, I examine how, in addition to being structured in tragic frame, *Oil and Honey* exemplifies the use of comic framing by functioning to empower citizens to make the choices necessary to create more sustainable lifestyles and stronger neighborhood ties, while at the same time expressing the information that shows the fault of contemporary, more disconnected society. I argue that *Oil and Honey* offers audiences a chance to make connections to their own life and the lives of those around them, and provides learning opportunities to allow audiences to change on individual and more collective levels, and thus the book functions as a well-structured comic frame.

Overview of the Comedic Approach to Environmental Communication

As explained previously, comic framing, as described by Kenneth Burke, provides “the charitable attitude towards people that is required for purposes of persuasion and co-operation” (166). Peterson states that many environmental communication scholars defend the use of comic framing as the traditional rhetorical structure for issues of the environmental movement (99). This is because comic framing’s emphasis on self-reflection can result in personal changes that are helpful on a small scale, as they draw attention to personal responsibility. Comic frames allow audiences to examine their own participation in social or structural problems, and in turn encourages them to take the steps necessary to allow themselves to stop these problematic behaviors. Although comic framing can face some limitations in terms of bringing these social problems into a larger more public arena, on a personal plane, comic framing offers opportunities for self-education and learning, identification with others, and civic engagement in communities of likeminded people.

Marilyn DeLaure’s 2011 piece “Environmental Comedy: No Impact Man and the Performance of Green Identity,” focuses on how dramatic frames can function to shape a “green identity” for audiences and how this strategy is a “powerful rhetorical form for motivating individual and collective action” (448). While solutions to environmental problems have been framed in terms of personal change, DeLaure argues that when it comes to global climate change, *the problems* are “commonly framed as tragedy: the problem is grave, the stakes are high, and the final outcome seems fated to be failure” (453). She claims that this use of tragic framing by itself can be harmful to the conversation, as apocalyptic themes make the situation appear hopeless. In contrast, comic frames suggest “that mistaken humans have a capacity to influence (within limits) the end of the global warming narrative” (453). Comic frame, she states

“presents problems as arising from human limitations and mistakes, rather than from inherent evil. While tragedy invokes heroic idealism, comedy emphasizes human fallibility and faults, focusing on foolish notions, ridiculous situations, the less than exalted functions of the body” (453). While framing climate change solutions in terms of comic framing can be limiting, as the comic solutions do not push the issues into the public sphere, framing the *problem* in comic can be helpful, as it prevents the creation of an apocalyptic narrative or a seemingly unsolvable problem. Therefore, DeLaure focuses on the benefits of the comically framed “green identity.”

DeLaure explains that identity “functions both inwardly, guiding how we experience our own selves, and outwardly, shaping how we appear to and interact with others,” (451) as identity is a collection of beliefs that motivate how people interact with one another and the world. Essentially, our identity is shaped by our beliefs, but these identities draw meaning from the way in which others respond to them. DeLaure’s “green identity” then, is based in one’s beliefs and responses to the attention paid to things such as sustainable lifestyles and environmentalism. She uses Mitchell Tomashow’s definition of green identity, which states that green identity “refers to all the different ways people constitute themselves in relationship to the earth as manifested in personality, values, actions, and sense of self” (DeLaure 451). Thus, like identity in general, “green identity” is a compilation of beliefs and interactions that shape how people relate to the world around them, only with a specific focus on earth, ecology, and the environment. DeLaure goes onto explain that green identity is not a private interaction between people and nature, but a social identity, as a green lifestyle is a form of performance shared in interactions with others. She explains that it “is not sufficient to have the ‘right’ facts, values, or politics; rather, one has to enact and embody green values, and attend to audience reception” (DeLaure 451). In short, actions--not just belief-- are necessary to form a green identity.

Application of Comedy in the Environmental Movement

In her explanation of green identity via performance, DeLaure examines how dramatic frames enhance the formation of green identity for audiences. Although green identity can potentially be formed by both comic and tragic frames, DeLaure argues that comic frames are more effective because of the learning opportunities these performances offer audiences. She first examines an example of tragic green identity, explaining that “one such character type is the tragic/ mythic hero exemplified by Al Gore in his award-winning film, *An Inconvenient Truth* (*AIT*). In *AIT*, Gore encounters trials and suffers defeat, but still he soldiers on, working tirelessly to spread his message about impending climate crisis” (452). Al Gore provides a model of green identity where the tragic hero must remain courageous, and offers a “touchstone for our own desired reactions to the natural world imperiled by our actions” (452). And yet, DeLaure questions Gore’s relatability. She explains “in *AIT*, we encounter the narrative of Gore’s personal transformation, and we see him jetting around the world giving his slide show, but we don’t witness him actually changing his own day-to-day practices to address the climate crisis” (452). Intermittent pieces of Gore’s personal life are explored throughout the film, but realistically, Gore’s learning process is ignored. The audience doesn’t see him at home, they don’t see what his life is like, and therefore, there isn’t much to identify with. Al Gore may be a climate hero, but because his personal life remains unexplored (despite so many humanizing attempts to examine his past), he’s hard to identify with. While Al Gore talks about living sustainably, he doesn’t show it in the film. In fact, the only comic portion of the film is saved until the end, when suggestions for sustainable living and lifestyle changes are offered during the final credits. This offers a learning opportunity, but there are no examples for how to implement these suggestions into one’s own life--it is tell, rather than show. Thus, DeLaure explains, “we may

admire Gore-as-hero, and appreciate his mythic journey, but he is a distant and unlikely model for viewers to actually emulate” (452). In contrast to Al Gore, world-famous environmentalist and tragic hero, DeLaure introduces *No Impact Man*, writer Colin Beavan, who attempted to live for an entire year making zero net impact on the environment. DeLaure explains that the Beavan family “ate only local foods, stopped making trash, used only human-powered transportation, turned off their electricity, and did laundry by stomping it in the bathtub . . . all while living in a ninth floor co-op on Lower Fifth Avenue in Manhattan” (448). Unlike Al Gore, Beavan is a relatable character. Instead of playing the tragic hero, he is the chastisable clown. His family’s struggle to transition from the stereotypical twenty-first century urban American consumer, (relying on modern conveniences like takeout, Starbucks, and television) to a family that washes their clothing in a bathtub and relies on their own abilities for food and travel is described by DeLaure as ridiculous, theatrical, and humorous. Beavan and his wife, Michelle Conlin, DeLaure claims, “perform a green identity in a comic frame, their story filled with humor and humility, foibles and frustrations. . . . As Beavan and Conlin put their lives under a microscope, we are invited to do the same, to examine our flaws and failures, and then move to correct them” (453).

DeLaure argues that “situations are not inherently comic or tragic, melodramatic or burlesque; rather, we construct meaning and attribute motives by interpreting situations as a particular kind of drama” (458) so, environmental situations, global climate change included, can be framed as either tragic or comic--the strategy is discovering which frame to apply to which situation. When working with community organization, framing problems with comedy is much more likely to be helpful, as comedy can result in civic engagement via example. If the public are scared off by an apocalyptic message, it is likely that they will not want to engage with the issues. Meanwhile, audiences that are encouraged to self-reflect, learn, and identify with their

communities are more likely to want to change. Solutions that are framed in comedy can be limited, but a comic approach to environmental problems can make them much more approachable.

Analysis of Comedy in *Oil and Honey*

At first glance, Bill McKibben seems more like an Al Gore than a Colin Beavan. Like Gore, McKibben functions as a tragic hero, jetting around the United States and speaking against the dangers and causes of climate change. He faces constant opposition and defeat in national politics and worse, in global climate summits: Kyoto in 1998, to Copenhagen in 2009, and Rio de Janeiro in 2012. Despite constant research, writing and rallying, McKibben is harassed by the fossil fuel industry and ignored by politicians. Unlike Al Gore, however, McKibben reflects on his own personal growth and development throughout the duration of *Oil and Honey*. In McKibben's narrative, the audience is able to follow along with setbacks and victories, as he winds a tale of his own experiences through his passion for the fight and his anger at the fossil fuel industry. Readers follow along with McKibben's learning processes, discovering the difficulties of international organizing, and experiencing the different obstacles he faces along with him throughout the book. Thus, despite McKibben's strongly woven melodramatic appeal, a second look at *Oil and Honey* examines the way in which comic frames come into play throughout the book. McKibben's own green performance is perhaps the best example.

Personal Green Performance: The Comic Hero

Two of the underlying themes throughout the book are Bill McKibben's friendship with Kirk Webster, and how despite his passion for the earth, McKibben never intended to be an environmental leader. His focus on time spent with Webster functions to create a juxtaposition between himself, the everyday, the ordinary suburban dad turned activist leader, and Webster, a

small farmer and pioneer into the new/old world of minimalism and shunning convenience culture. Between the lessons provided by Webster and his struggles to accept his long-dive into leadership, McKibben is able to create a narrative where he is a chastisable comic hero, rather than an Al Gore type--a tragic hero or unquestionable environmental avenger.

While McKibben constantly uses Kirk Webster as an example of the moral “good” throughout his melodramatic appeal, Webster also functions as a guide in McKibben’s own learning experience. Like DeLaure’s Colin Beavan, McKibben struggles with his own difficult habits and moral contradictions, and he is consistently surprised by Webster’s resourcefulness and his ability to do with less. Webster’s life without technology is a constant fascination for McKibben who states “I fear I haven’t quite gotten this across. Kirk doesn’t have a computer. Doesn’t want a computer... he calls his customers on the phone--the old kind, connected to the wall” (128). He develops Webster’s character as not entirely off the grid, but disconnected from the constant media connection that the rest of us are subject to, choosing “the parts of modernity he needs and somehow [keeping] the freedom to do without the parts he doesn’t need” (128). McKibben describes Webster as “solvent and pretty much at peace, and doing something productive that didn’t involve ever--ever--looking into a screen” (127). His tone is slightly envious, as Webster leads a simple life, unburdened by the constant flow of information and social connectedness. McKibben then, of course, highlights the value of technology, stating that “I spend most of the day on the computer, the kind of organizing we do would be literally impossible without it” (128), but Webster’s uncomplicated lifestyle reminds McKibben, and in turn, the audience, that it’s okay to take a break once in a while and enjoy the simple things. The story also functions to teach a lesson, both to McKibben and to the reader--that simplicity is possible, and that it can be desirable as well. Early on, McKibben says “it’s clear to me that we

can't have precisely the same economy that we've grown up with, not the globe-spanning anything-any-time consumerism...we're going to have to change our patterns, our laws, our economies, and our expectations" (21), but he personally can't offer anything that answers what will replace the old ways. Webster's small farming, small home, local business, solar powered, lifestyle offers an answer to that question, both for McKibben, and for the audience.

In the meantime, McKibben continues to struggle with his own morals. He addresses the argument that travel-based environmental activism is hypocritical, stating that "it has, in fact, occurred to me that there's something remarkably ironic about my flying around the world to build a climate movement" (21). In the end, he justifies his travels stating "I tell myself that we fight in the world we live in, not the one we hope to build" (21), despite the fact that "it always nags at me, that surge of power at the top of the runway as the jet engines guzzle fuel to get us aloft" (21). In addition to these moments of internal conflict, McKibben offers us numerous glimpses into his personal life, where he shows himself as your average neighborly kind of guy who enjoys the outdoors. This gives him a peer-like persona, one that makes him easy to connect to, as the audience can picture him, or can picture someone like him in their own lives. At one point, he introduces a chapter with a seasonal transition, and allows the audience into his life with a story of how in the middle of March he "took the dog out for one last slushy ski, and then waxed the boards for storage and oiled the chain on my bike" (89). Although the main goal here is to make a point about how weather in Vermont was much warmer than usual, the story also functions to offer a little extra personality to McKibben as a character and a person. In *An Inconvenient Truth* tragic hero Al Gore spends screen time discussing his past, while McKibben offers details of his present--often just little details that are insignificant, and which sometimes aid the larger point he's making but that ultimately don't matter much in comparison to other

facts. These glimpses into McKibben's life make him relatable, taking him from Bill McKibben: climate change activist, to Bill McKibben: Vermont Dad who likes sports and his dog.

This use of personal narrative aids one of McKibben's other rhetorical strategies: identification. His word choices throughout his narratives further add to the comic framing at hand. McKibben often addressed the audience of the book as "we" showing that climate change is not *his* problem, it is not the audience's problem, but that it is a *shared* problem. This offers a more collective identity for all citizens--offering them a place in something bigger than their own lives. As the book continues, his use of "we" refers more to climate change movement, but he never makes this distinction. It almost seems like an accident that any reader becomes incorporated into that climate change movement "we" with a simple transition from "we the people" to "we the movement."

Public Green Performance: The "Accidental" Activist

The second underlying theme of *Oil and Honey* is McKibben's reluctant journey to becoming an environmental leader. He continually refers to himself as "an accidental activist" and at one-point claims he felt he was "making it up as I went along, and kind of sorry to bother anyone" (205). Although he met a few reproaches from other friends and leaders for this kind of language, and then eventually accepted that he had become a leader whether he had wanted to be one or not, he writes about his long-lasting struggle with his own thoughts on the matter. He refers to himself as "a bit of a coward" (206) explaining his fears that identifying as leader would drag him more into the craziness of the battle he felt was at hand--much of which would eventually come from the fossil fuel industry itself. But more than this, he explains that "as long as I was the somewhat bumbling accidental author-activist who'd stumbled into this work, then failure was okay...if you're willing to declare yourself leader, however, then failure is on you"

(207). This fear, though, he explains, wasn't from the potential that the world would see him as failing, but from the fact that "this wasn't just what I was doing for a few years until normal life could resume--it would be who I was" (207). This struggle is not something we see coming from tragic-hero Al Gore. In his narrative, he simply accepts his destiny as a climate change awareness leader, and sets out to combat setbacks and spread his message to the masses. McKibben, however, offers his audience a long glimpse at his own deliberation over whether or not this was a battle in which he was capable of enlisting. In the end, one of the messages McKibben clearly wants the audience to get is that his struggles are understandable and relatable, but also worth it, as this deliberation could "let other people see that they, too, could be leaders" (205).

Again, McKibben's use of identification and creation of a "we" is prominent. McKibben is reluctant to use "I" all that often, especially when reflecting on events and coming up on new decisions. He'll acknowledge his own ideas, interactions, and thoughts, but he largely seems to prefer to discuss actions in terms of "we" throughout the book, either to include all the other leaders he worked with, or to include the movement as a whole--addressing everyone from traveling lecturers to people who simply show up at rallies and events. For McKibben, all protesters become an "us." Direct action participants are always described as a team, and while McKibben is often leading, it is a shared leadership with many others, and there's no hierarchy to it. Perhaps a part of this emphasis on "we" and "us" is rooted in McKibben's claim that "the 'environmental movement' had largely become a collection of environmental groups, each doing impressive work, but often without enough connection to the grassroots or to one another" (54), as the focus on togetherness helps to soften the boundaries between environmental groups and

create a unified collection of organizations all vocalizing the same cause. Regardless of the reason for it, the collective address adds to McKibben's comic appeal.

Additionally, McKibben actually takes a lot of responsibility for actions and events held by 350.org in the beginning of the book, but he writes of his struggles to lead as the book progresses. This is another learning process that the audience is invited to watch, as McKibben's journey into becoming an environmental leader portrays him again as a chastisable fool rather than a tragic hero. McKibben fumbles around in his new role, struggling through trial and error, quite unlike someone who is perfectly suited to leadership from the start. He draws out one protest disaster as an example of the kinds of things he hadn't expected to face as a leader, and the lessons this taught him. McKibben and 350.org planned a protest where they would melt a huge ice sculpture that read "Hoax" on Capitol Hill during a nasty D.C. heat wave, but at the last minute, they received an email from an organizer in West Virginia, who begged them not to waste ice like that while people in his own region were suffering from a lack of electricity and cold water. McKibben shares his thought process after this, explaining that he felt trapped: call off the publicity stunt and seem indecisive and unreliable, but allowing it to continue would mock the plight of those suffering from the heat and storms in the Appalachians. He explains he found himself dreading calling off the event, as "my reluctance came, I feared, from embarrassment. To *me*. I'd have to say I'd made a mistake--which isn't a very good reason not to do something" (175). In the end, the team canceled the melting of the ice "hoax," out of sensitivity for those in the Appalachians, and received a mix of responses from 350.org supporters. Some were angry at the missed opportunity to spread the message, and others appreciated the gesture of sensitivity to the West Virginians. Regardless, McKibben included the story to share with the audience that "if anyone had been laboring under the delusion that we

were an infallible team of super-organizers, they now had a clearer sense of the truth” (179)--organizing, for McKibben and 350.org, is a constant learning process, and all they could do was their best.

Comic Framing through Learning and Self Reflection

Although the comic frame in *Oil and Honey* focuses quite a bit on McKibben’s own green performance, he also devotes quite a bit of the book to discussing the importance of other participants in the climate change battle. McKibben shares his spotlight with dozens of other international environmental activists: Naomi Klein, Josh Fox, Father John Chryssavgis, and Anthony Barnosky among them. He includes a number of short but excited and inspiring statements from participants in rallies and direct action events, and refers to these participants as brave and resilient. He has several statements that expressed the positivity that comes out of organizing and how the element of a collective group can take charge of a problem. For example, after an example that made a parallel to the actions of the Freedom Riders, McKibben states that “it was a perfect reminder that movements can work, that if we care enough we really can make massive change” (114). Even after defeats or mistakes, McKibben revels in the power of teamwork, expressing how organization itself is a learning process. After the last minute cancellation of the “hoax” ice-sculpture publicity stunt, for example, McKibben states that “by the day’s end, the movement felt stronger, not weaker” thus again emphasizing the comedic elements of self-reflection and learning, albeit on a group scale.

Additionally, McKibben focuses on this concept of “a new nature” or “new Earth” stating that bizarre weather patterns and record-breaking temperatures are a product of this “new nature.” In describing Hurricane Irene’s devastating impact on Vermont, McKibben explains that:

If you go on YouTube you can watch 150 year-old covered bridges washing away in a matter of seconds. Those bridges had stood since Abraham Lincoln's time, patiently taking everything nature could throw at them. But this was not the old nature--this was the new one that we'd unleashed, that hybrid of natural and unnatural that is now the distinctive mark of our time. (37)

While this passage follows more of a melodramatic structure, pushing at the socio-political conflicts caused by climate change, McKibben's follow-up is what exhibits comic framing. He uses examples of "new nature/earth" to offer glimpses into the future, and how people need to start to interact now in order to be prepared for potential dangers. Lifestyles cannot stay the way that they are, but McKibben focuses on the positive aspects of this. He states "the raging rivers of Irene revealed something more beautiful and durable than the woods and steel it tore away; the incredibly generous spirit of Vermonters, and the ties that bind our communities" (40). The lesson here, McKibben explains is that "neighbors were optional in the past fifty years, but they'll be essential in the decades to come" (40). By explaining disasters and tragedies in terms of how communities react, McKibben provides an example of how we as a collective can identify with one another, learn together, and survive.

Oil and Honey, then, offers more than just McKibben's green performance when it comes to trademarks of comic frame. The book provides numerous instances for self-reflection and learning, as well as guidance for organizers, examples of lifestyle changes, and a constant reminder that climate change is everyone's problem, and only by acting together as a society can we effect change.

Discussions Regarding Comedy and Climate Change

Bill McKibben's inclusion of comic appeals blended into the melodramatic frame encourages audiences to identify as a collective--citizens united against a shared problem. The audience's self-reflexivity into their own contribution to the problem offers the traditional help of placing personal value in sustainability and limited consumerism. This further helps them to identify as an "us" against the melodramatic aspect of the "us versus them." By blending comic framing with the melodrama of climate change, McKibben is able to create a stronger message that both identifies the cause of the problem, and then creates options for the audience to identify with the problem solvers and to become a movement. In terms of comic framing on its own, McKibben's performance brings to light several comic strategies that have the potential to be incredibly valuable for the climate change movement and other environmental organizations. While there are likely many helpful strategies, I have specifically identified two: the green performances of comic hero, and the accidental activist. Each functions to draw audience identification to the writer, but each functions on a different plane of conversation.

The performance of comic hero is personal. It focuses on emotions, passion, learning and individual experiences. McKibben's green performance as the comic hero, then, functions as a powerful rhetorical strategy as it builds identification for the audience through McKibben's own thoughts. As the comic hero, McKibben's interests, worries, and concerns make him easy to identify with, as he can be seen as any suburban dad or neighborhood friend. Once portrayed this way, his passion for the environment and his anger at the fossil fuel industry becomes easier to identify with as well, as the readers is able to sympathize with the root of this anger--that an environmental devil is putting the lives of ordinary citizens, other neighbors, at risk for a profit.

The second comic strategy, the accidental activist, functions in the public sphere, mainly because the very nature of the accidental activist is public. This performance follows the struggles of someone who was pulled rather suddenly from the personal into the public sphere due to a rapid publicizing of their involvement in an issue, and examines their mistakes, their learning experiences with an organization, and their very visible struggle to take charge of a movement they didn't mean to start. The accidental activist has been seen throughout social movement history, and examples in the environmental movement include Lois Gibbs and Chico Mendes, among others. Bill McKibben's descriptions of himself allow him to join the ranks of the accidental activist, as he relates his struggles with becoming a part of the public eye, facing harassment from the oil industry, learning to run an organization, and realizing that his life had basically become all about the fight against climate change. McKibben's reluctant leadership, then, is more relatable, as wanting changes and actually making changes are two entirely different things. Other suburban parents and ordinary citizens can see themselves wishing and wanting changes to be made in the fight against climate change, but actually making them happen is a different matter. McKibben's initial struggles with becoming a leader are understandable, as all he initially wanted to do was raise climate change awareness, and the next thing he knew he was responsible for not only rallies, protests, tours, and publicity stunts, but also for the other members of the organization that sprouted up around him. Following this, McKibben's "anyone can be a leader" attitude helps regulate the difference, however, as he expresses the opinion that one doesn't need to take on national responsibility: being an environmental leader in one's own neighborhood is perfectly acceptable. McKibben constantly reiterates that local activism still has the potential to bring large-scale environmental issues onto the political plane. Local organizers can garner the attention of their local and state governments,

thereby setting a chain reaction up to national decision makers. Action from organized citizens sends a message. That said: these actions must be taken. Private decisions help to change individual lives, but local activism and community action change society.

These features of comic framing, then, greatly enhance McKibben's message, as they provide new methods for audience identification. The accidental activist, especially, captures the humanity of leaders, thus showing McKibben as someone who believed so strongly in something that he was willing to dedicate his life to it. He never asks that everyone make this sacrifice, but his choice to do so greatly enhances the urgency of the conflict. So, in addition to drawing in new audiences, McKibben's green performance has the ability to bring existing participants closer together and to 350.org as a whole. Theorist George Cheney states that "with so much emphasis on distinctions and differences, identification arises as a communicative, cooperative response" (145), meaning that communication and cooperation between people is what brings them together while shared "values, goals, knowledge, activities [or] objects" (145) cause them to identify with one another. 350.org members and participants naturally all agree with the message behind 350.org, but it's McKibben's green performance as the comic hero and leader of the organization that amplifies audience identification, as his mistakes and setbacks show supporters that organizing is a constant learning process, and new problems and strategies are continually being tackled and applied. Furthering this still is his initial reluctance to take on such a high position of leadership, as that would mean leaving a part of his old life behind and becoming someone new, someone who is a representative and spokesperson for hundreds and thousands of other people, all over the world. McKibben's account of this sacrifice shows his readers and supporters that this difficult decision was not only worth it, but necessary and if he was at last willing to change his life in such a drastic way, community organization and lifestyle

changes are not much to ask from the rest of us. Living sustainably with a local focus and participating in civic engagement are choices that can require deliberation, but McKibben's journey makes the choices sound a lot smaller, seeing how McKibben, the ordinary Vermont neighbor and nature writer, was willing to change his entire life for this cause.

McKibben's identification with 350.org and his constant focus on collective pronouns like "we" and "us" further builds organizational identification among both supporters and ordinary citizen audience members, as this cements McKibben's "belonging" to the cause. His shared responsibility with numerous other environmental leaders, like Naomi Klein, Josh Fox, and others connects various other organizations together, thus making actions and rallies more about the social movement on whole as opposed to being about individual organizations. This pulls in audience members, as the collaboration disrupts the identification to environmental organizations in particular, and focuses on climate change, public health and safety, and tearing down societal hierarchies in order to create changes that will help alleviate the dangers and damages that have been caused so far.

Finally, his emphasis on "new earth" expresses the necessary results that must come out of audience learning and self-reflection. By taking the lessons offered in *Oil and Honey* to heart, supporters and citizens have the opportunity to come together in their communities and tackle climate change and the systemic structures that allow it to continue to develop. The comic appeals in this book encourage audiences to focus on the connections between themselves and people like Bill McKibben, as well as with themselves and their own neighbors. Between his green performance and his appeals to the social movement as a "we," McKibben is able to apply comic framing to decrease social emphasis on the individual, and instead focus on the importance of community and teamwork.

Conclusions and Implications from *Oil and Honey*

Bill McKibben's multifaceted comic frame in *Oil and Honey* provides a valuable example of heightened identification opportunities through audience self-reflection and learning, and via a green performance with a leader as a *comic* hero. McKibben's accounts of discovering desirable alternative ways of living in the changing world and his reluctance to claim leadership in the environmental movement allow audiences to learn with him, as opposed to *from* him, and further show that the deliberations over lifestyle changes are justified and understandable, but, in the end, are completely necessary. His exploration of a new nature/earth provides urgency to the issues of climate change, but they're portrayed in terms of community action, political participation, and civic engagement re-emphasizes the importance of people coming together, working together, and identifying as a community instead of individuals. This is increased in his focus on environmental movement participants as a "we" and an "us" as opposed to as individuals and specific groups, because the fight against climate change is not about individuals or single organizations--it's a social movement for everyone. There is no one leader, instead there are many, and all participants are on the same team--focusing on saving ourselves from the damages we've allowed to occur, and preventing any more from happening. So, through a focus on identification among communities, self-reflection, and learning, McKibben is able to not only present himself as a relatable, fallible, comic hero, but he is also able to show that anyone has the ability to take on leadership, thus enhancing civic engagement opportunities in the climate change movement.

Chapter 4: Discussions and Final Conclusions

In the last two chapters, I've examined how Bill McKibben's *Oil and Honey* provides messages that function in either melodramatic or comic framings. While McKibben's framework in both is unusually strong, it is the combination of the two together that truly make his work worthy of examination. The confusing framing of climate change issues by environmental organizations over the last few decades has created a number of problems among environmentalists and citizens alike, as neither framing fully incorporates the necessary dialogues to deal with the climate change. The environmental movement's historical focus on wilderness preservation allowed for a pervasive discourse that economic progress and growth are more valuable than clean water and air in urban areas, which resulted in corporations being powerful enough to be able to take more control of issues, and claim that they were working with them--opposed to being regulated by the government. Since then, climate changes issues have been discussed as being simply about personal change or are framed as incredibly dramatic doomsday messages. This has been largely problematic due to the vast limitations on both of these kinds of tragic and comic frames, as each frame has the potential to simplify messages. Apocalyptic and doomsday messages tend to leave audiences feeling like there is no hope and that climate change issues are unsolvable, while frames based in personal change don't do enough to push the issue into the political sphere.

Thus, Bill McKibben's use of contrasting melodramatic and comic frames offers a useful solution to the climate change movement, as it exemplifies how two well constructed frames paired together can create the strongest possible message. As seen in my analysis, the melodramatic frames push audiences to act out politically and against environmental devils and wealthy opponents, while comic frames reinforce that environmental organization is a learning

process and there is time to make a few mistakes, as well as that people have the power to make changes if they are willing to act. When combined, these frames create a powerful duo-dynamic that address the limitations faced by either framing alone.

The book *Oil and Honey* specifically exemplifies McKibben's blend of melodramatic and comic frames, as it tells the stories of McKibben's friendship with small farmer Kirk Webster, how McKibben made his rise to becoming an environmental leader, and how the last few years have shown marked differences in weather patterns and climate as opposed to the past.

McKibben builds a strong melodramatic frame for his book first by providing numerous instances of quantifiable evidence as justification for the melodrama. His use of numbers and statistics makes the divisions he draws between corporations and citizens reasonable, and his neutral tone when providing facts helps audiences draw their own conclusions on the matter. This justification of divisions leads to the actual divisions, where McKibben not only draws out good morals and bad behaviors, but where he continually argues and provides evidence for how and why corporations are not humans, and should not be given human responsibility. This argument tears at the hierarchies of our system by insisting that people recognize humanity and lack of humanity, as well as the effects that non-human control can have on public health and safety. From here, McKibben provides the audience with an identifiable enemy--the non-human, corporate control of the fossil fuel industry as an environmental devil. This further heightens moral dichotomies, as McKibben presents his audience with evidence of how, for the fossil fuel industry, \$20 trillion in assets is justifiable reason to sacrifice the lives of people in areas where climate change is already causing fatal weather changes. He compares industry greed to the simplistic, unselfish lifestyle of new-world pioneer Kirk Webster, to express how easy it is to live without harming the well being of others. This examination of good versus greed calls on

consumers to examine their own complicity in fossil fuel control. His call to action--divestment and investor responsibility-- not only offers power and agency to the audience as consumers, but also encourages them to challenge their own participation in consumer culture, as well as challenging the power imbalances created by the fossil fuel industry.

While *Oil and Honey* primarily follows a melodramatic frame, it hosts a powerful underlying comic frame as well. McKibben's own green performance makes him relatable, and encourages collective identification. His struggle to finally accept national leadership leads to his conclusion that if his process, learning, and acceptance is possible, really "anyone can be a leader." This is a point that he further exemplifies in his constant reiteration that local activism is incredibly valuable. Local organizers and community engagement create a message that sets a chain reaction up to national decision makers. Throughout the book, then, McKibben encourages audiences to identify as a collective, or as citizens with a shared problem. This functions to pull in audience members, as the collaboration between individuals with shared goals disrupts the identification to particular environmental organizations, and instead focuses on climate change, public health and safety, and tearing down societal hierarchies in order to create changes that will help alleviate the dangers and damages. Audience members are encouraged to identify as neighbors and friends, as opposed to focusing on the distinctions between national leaders and lower level participants, as climate change is a massive problem and a shared problem. Community organization is a powerful identifier, as McKibben stresses that everyone is really a part of the same international community. Finally, the audience's reflexivity into their own contribution to climate change leads to placing personal value in sustainability and limited consumerism.

So while the underlying comic frame focuses on self-reflection, collective identification, and community activism, the overarching melodramatic frame pushes the issue of climate change onto a broad political field. The use of these frames together simultaneously force audiences to examine the values of society and question their own complicity in its ills. This further helps them to identify as an “us” against the melodramatic aspect of the “us versus them.” Additionally, the blend of comic and tragic frames allows us to return to the concept of “transcendence,” which requires that audiences think not only about their own personal guilt, but also how other members of the system are guilty as well. The melodrama forces audiences to question societal values and their own complicity with power structures, while the comic frame asks them to identify with their neighbors and communities. This combination of frames enhances the process of examining how *other* members of the system are guilty of morally reprehensible behavior. This guilt and recognition through the added element of comic framing *enhances* group identification, through performance and self-reflection, as it allows audiences to see themselves in others. This in turn, further unifies people to help form the melodramatic monopoly. In short, McKibben’s argument regarding the public’s ability to participate in individual and community changes demands that the audience take responsibility for their own actions, in addition to holding industry accountable for their greed and mismanagement of resources, both of which lead to social critique and change.

Framing Limitations and Further Conversations

As discussed in Chapter 1, comic and tragic framing each face a set of limitations that can potentially hinder a message. Steve Schwarze addresses this in *Environmental Melodrama*, stating that in cases regarding comic or tragic framing it is important for the message sender to consider *kairos*, a greek word meaning “the opportune and decisive moment” (Webster). In

rhetorical scholarship, the term is used to refer to the right or opportune way of framing a message, or “to what extent does a particular rhetorical intervention operate as a timely and opportune response to contingent circumstances and particular audiences” (257). Karios allows rhetorical critics to consider the strengths and weaknesses of an artifact’s frame, but, Schwarze explains, “it also encourages critics to rethink what might count as a strength or a fault in relation to specific situations” (257). Labeling one frame as inherently superior and another as automatically problematic leads to greater limitations than either frame possibly could. Schwarze goes on to explain that even Burke, who always sang the praises of comedy, recognized the importance of choice between competing frames and recognizing the value and limits of each in any situation. Therefore, it is important to examine the limitations of both melodrama and comic frames and how Bill McKibben’s rhetoric in *Oil and Honey* responds to those limitations.

McKibben and Melodramatic Limitations

Throughout *Environmental Melodrama*, and in a FORUM response to the 2006 paper, Schwarze counters criticisms of melodramatic frames, and provides explanations as to how these criticisms are not always necessarily valid, should the frame be applied in a specific way. In turn, many of Schwarze’s defenses of melodrama can be found in the messages of McKibben’s *Oil and Honey*. Gregory Desilet, for example, states that Burke sees “factual drama” or melodrama as fueling “the narrowness of moral indignation, serving to perfect divisions between people rather than to minimize them” (76). Schwarze meanwhile, urges rhetoricians against making the “implicit assumption that division is always or necessarily a problem to be minimized” (240). Schwarze argues that in some situations, division can be beneficial and that “melodrama can offer a potentially fitting rhetorical response” (240). He further explains that melodrama “can

generate productive forms of polarization that recast the line between identification and division in beneficial ways” (240).

Bill McKibben’s achieves this productivity in *Oil and Honey*, in the way that he draws his divisions. Through his polarization of United States citizens and wealthy international corporations, McKibben is able to pull apart relationships like “society” and “economy.” Although he encourages audiences to examine their own participation in climate change, on whole he describes citizens as victims of the fossil fuel industry, and distinguishes them as not a part of the industry, but a pawn of it. This not only makes the industry an “environmental devil” but it divides citizens (including fossil fuel employees) from the industry. This division of “us” versus “them” is powerful in this case, because of the way that it can lead to social change. People are encouraged to identify with one another as humans and to see themselves as a community or collective, rather than identifying with the industry and continuing to be complicit in fossil fuel control and consumption of fossil fuel products. From there, new alliances are able to be developed separating the used from the users, and resulting in citizen activism, political engagement, and an overhaul of power structures.

A second criticism, Schwarze explains, is Osborn and Bakke’s indictment of melodrama for “its simplification of complex situations” (223), as the simplicity and rigidity of melodrama has the potential to lead to error “if not inhumanity” (224). Their largest criticism of melodrama is that “melodrama draws sharp distinctions between opposing forces, making resolutions difficult to negotiate... it blinds us to the capacity for change among others and failure among ourselves” (230). Schwarze uses the work of William Lewis to explain that just as melodrama can be criticized as restrictive and limiting, comic frame can also be an insufficient for engaging questions of social justice, as “it subordinates the pain of social life and the felt reality of

conflicts to visions and integration that somehow reconcile the vital tensions of politics and society” (242). At this point, he begins the argument that “scholars must be wary of making judgments about the comic frame--or any other frame for that matter-- as an *inherently* superior form for public discourse” (242).

McKibben addresses this a bit in his explanation of the differences between people and corporations. Simplicity and rigidity can lead to error, “if not inhumanity” but in this case, the element of the human scapegoat has been removed. Instead, the nonhuman, corporate fossil fuel industry is placed in the position of enemy. Although this does simplify things, this frame makes climate change easier to understand, which is equally important. Comic frame’s lack of simplicity also can lead to mistakes and inhumane responses. As explained in Chapter 3, climate change is often portrayed as an abstraction, a little-understood doomsday event that will claim all humanity. Additionally, the cause of the problem is often undetermined. This confusion over how to address climate change also has the potential to lead to error, and in this case, lives are at stake, as Pacific islands sink under the water (McKibben 2013; 83) and African deserts spread far beyond their usual reaches (McKibben 2012; 3). Ignoring the melodrama and not acknowledging a clear cause of the problem would indeed subordinate the pain of those whose homes and lives are being destroyed by changes in weather and climate, as society will continue to avoid addressing the problem. Further still, although the melodrama can make negotiations difficult, the addition of McKibben’s comic frame addresses the issue of being blinded to “the capacity for change among others and failure among ourselves” (230). The focus of the comic frame is to be self-reflexive and examine our own failures, such as our complicity with the control of the fossil fuel industry, and our participation in the consumption of fuels--both personally and by proxy. McKibben’s green performance and collective identity brings hope to

the capacity of change as the melodramatic frame pushes the conflict into the public sphere and demands that power structures be addressed and changed.

Another specific criticism of melodrama lies in the concept of the “environmental devil.” Environmental rhetorician Terrance Check responded to Schwarze’s *Environmental Melodrama*, explaining his doubt that melodrama could ever be effective on issues like global climate change. Melodrama, Check claims, has the potential to distract audiences from core issues. He also states that when it comes to climate change, “there is no clear villain; the causes of climate change are diverse and systemic” (95). He then questions if the environmental devil can actually “challenge assumptions related to growth and progress” or if it simply “divert[s] attention from [the] interrogation of ideals in a consumer culture” (95).

McKibben avoids the pitfalls of this criticism, first because he does provide a clear enemy in the conflict over climate change, and second because of his *blend* of tragic and comic frames. Alone, the use of melodrama could potentially overshadow the importance of examining citizen complicity to the behavior of the fossil fuel industry, and people could simply slip into the mentality that “it’s all the fossil fuel industry’s fault, and there’s nothing we can do about it.” When combined with the comic frame, however, the focus on self-reflexive thought, lifestyle change, and identification with a green performance becomes much stronger. This not only teaches the individual that change can be achieved, but the emphasis on the individual as a part of a community enforces the importance of paying attention to one’s own actions, the actions of your neighbors, and re-examining the values of the current system. Further, emphasis on organization as a learning process allows individuals and communities time to strengthen their identification and grow together as they organize in order to be heard by larger facets of the government. Thus, when blended into a melodramatic frame that shows a clear course of action

against a particular environmental devil, the comic frame encourages citizens to challenge their previously held values and behaviors in their quest to systemic change and industry regulation.

Finally, in addition to these criticisms, Schwarze examines the resistance to melodrama, pointing out that message senders may avoid it because of the polarization, and the way that melodrama can create devils or villains out of potential partners. Schwarze questions this resistance, explaining that perhaps creating a villain can be a good thing. He questions if “devils could be placed into narratives of purification and redemption that not only allow them to relieve the burden of past sins, but also imply pathways for change” (104). While constructing rhetorical villains or devils creates adversaries and opponents rather than allies, those who are acting as “users” may need to be addressed as such. Placing an offending party into a moral frame can potentially lead the offender to change, or, if not, can lead those who are complicit with the offender to change instead, thus leading to social transformation.

McKibben makes it clear throughout *Oil and Honey* that the fossil fuel industry has not been acting like a partner, and has instead actively worked against the climate change movement, before it was even considered to be an opponent. This is another case of when division is necessary and important for progress, because if one party is unwilling to participate, nothing can change. McKibben, then, consistently argues that the only solution for the fossil fuel industry is that it begin to work on changing with the times, and that if anybody has the resources to invest in alternative energy and clean fuels, it is the fossil fuel industry. This suggestion is essentially a path to redemption, as McKibben at no point suggests that the industry be dismantled or destroyed. His continual emphasis is on systemic change and dismantling of power structures that allow for industry control, but his chosen pathway for changes is that industry join up with the climate change movement to help repair the damage that has already occurred, rather than

continuing to contribute to it. As communities begin to come together to demand changes from the government, it's important that there are these lines of division between users and the used. Had the fossil fuel industry not actively worked against climate scientists (Peterson 100), had it not run smear campaigns against environmentalists (McKibben 2013; 119) and had it not purchased senators to make sure that it went mostly unregulated (McKibben 2013; 83), there would be no need to have labeled it as an environmental devil. Because all of these things have occurred before *and* since McKibben began his campaign for change, however, it was clear that the fossil fuel industry was never going to be a potential partner, and instead the only option is placing the devil that is the industry into a “narrative of purification” (104).

This is significant, because what this shows is that McKibben's melodramatic frame does not fall victim to the standard problems that arise in a typical tragic frame. The way he uses information and justifies his claims allows him to avoid the negative aspects of simplification and division, and to avoid scapegoating. Furthermore, his blend of comic in with the tragic frame keeps the messages on track instead of allowing the “environmental devil” concept to derail the conversation, as the comic frame brings the focus back onto the individual and the importance of social criticism and change. Although critics are right to point out these kinds of limitations in some tragic frames, McKibben's use of melodrama in *Oil and Honey* aligns perfectly with the ways in which Schwarze defends the frame as a useful tool for environmental communicators.

McKibben and Comic Framing Limitations

Tarla Rai Peterson defends comic framing as a valuable strategy for environmental rhetoric, explaining that “Schwarze sells comedy short when he claims it ‘seeks to reconcile conflict via compromise’” (99). She explains how, in a literary sense, “the court fool has license to utter blasphemy that would get anyone else killed. Still, it is relatively easy for a well

orchestrated few to drown out the voice of the fool in ribald laughter” (99). Peterson goes onto explain that “although I remain convinced that, in most situations, the comic frame has more potential for humane redress of harms, Schwarze makes a strong case for the importance of leaving open the possibility of melodramatic response” (99). Comic framing, she decides, is perhaps not the best method for addressing climate change due to the current collection of voices that drown the comic warnings in the “ribald laughter.” She explains that “to get an inkling of how much money goes into discrediting science, one only needs to google the term ‘climate change.’ Dozens of groups have formed to rebut the science, sometime investing significant corporate resources in clothing themselves as scientists” (100). Further, Derrick Jensen’s arguments show that framing *solutions* to environmental problems in comedy lead nowhere, as the personal element to comedy tends to keep actions out of the public sphere, which allows them to be ignored, and allows the problem to go unsolved. Thus, there is Schwarze’s argument that states while comic framing can be valuable, it is definitely not *always* the better option. He first explains that comic framing’s power comes from how it “forsakes the divisiveness of the tragic frame in favor of unification within a reformed social order” (243), but then states that comic is not necessarily the best strategy for promoting social change. He cites A. Cheree Carlson, who explains that “some social orders are so rigid that there may no wedge for accommodation at first, thus, in some cases a movement must either abandon the charitable mode, or be prepared to wage a forty year struggle” (169). Thus, Schwarze explains, “the comic frame may be invoked effectively or ineffectively, and other frames might be equally or more sensible in particular contexts” (243). The importance of this critique, is that Schwarze wants to draw attention to the criticism of division, or to question why division seen in melodrama is labeled as problematic. Schwarze claims that division’s counterpart is identification, and that the

concern with melodrama “should not be *that* it generates conflict and division; rather, it should lie in *how* melodrama constitutes particular conflicts and *whether* it promotes divisions (and identifications)” (243). Melodrama, he argues, is also good resource for drawing the line between division and identification, as it creates two sides to the issue and requires that the audience choose where they want to see themselves.

When blended *with* comic framing, melodrama can still focus on the divisions and the identification, in fact if anything, comic framing enhances the identification portion of melodrama. The problem, however, is that although climate change has multiple causes, it’s been proven that the biggest contributor is the fossil fuel industry. The industry’s continual refusal to make significant changes and their fight against regulations has shown environmental organizers that without social changes, the industry will not stop extracting fossil fuels, and solving global climate change will not be possible. Dissolving the conflict into two sides, the fossil fuel industry versus citizens who want a life without extreme and unmanageable weather patterns, fosters stronger convictions and identification among citizens, leads to more political engagement, and promotes an indictment of the current values and consumer culture, and strikes back against citizen complicity allowing the fossil fuel industry to wield so much power.

It is important to acknowledge that if McKibben’s *Oil and Honey* was only framed in comedy, the book would share an entirely different message. While McKibben would have still been able to highlight his friendship with Kirk Webster to show how one can simplify life and live in a localized, sustainable manner, he wouldn’t have been able to express the reverse of this as well, and the identification created by the emphasis on morals would have been weaker. Without the reverse, which focused on fossil fuel greed, audience members may have reacted negatively to Webster, as his lifestyle could have been read differently. DeLaure explains that

there is an unfortunate perception which states that “what drives many environmentalists is, above all, the need to feel superior to their neighbors and fellow citizens” (449). Instead, when framed as the moral dichotomy of the small farmer versus the government lobbying, propaganda spreading, international oil conglomerate, Webster doesn’t look superior, but tiny and insignificant. The moral aspect to this division asks audiences to place themselves in identification with the small farmer--as ordinary citizens who are just trying to live their lives. From there, Webster’s sustainability becomes an achievable goal, rather than bragging rights.

Further still, McKibben could have talked about himself and becoming an environmental leader, but his learning experiences become meaningless without the exigence behind them. Although McKibben is not a tragic hero like Al Gore, he does have a tragic urgency to his leadership. Thus, it is the blending of the comic and the tragic that makes McKibben’s comic appeal useful. The learning, self-reflection, and community focus are undeniably valuable in the fight against climate change, but the melodrama of the situation is necessary, both to fully draw divisions and sides to foster identification, as well as to push the issue into the public sphere, making a habitat issue into a political one. Just as melodrama is enhanced by comedy, comedy is enhanced by the melodrama, as each fills the gaps left by the other.

The Effects of Balancing Tragic and Comic

In his concluding remarks, Schwarze discusses the use and value of melodrama in environmental rhetoric, explaining once again that while comic framing is heralded as a better and more progressive frame, tragic frames can also be valuable to the cause. The key point he makes in this section once again spawns from *kairos*, encouraging scholars to rethink what constitutes strengths and weakness in environmental rhetoric. Rhetorical tactics, Schwarze explains, “ can migrate easily between different frames” (256). He further states that “while

scholars have identified perspective by incongruity and juxtaposition as useful tactics within a comic frame, these also emerge in melodramatic rhetoric, especially as they position moral and emotional appeals alongside dominant discourses that displace those concerns” (256). Essentially what this means is that because rhetorical tactics like these can easily be applied in either comedy or tragedy, it is important to recognize the similarities between the two, and how the message, whether framed as comic or tragic, still contains the same end goal: change. Each aims for social transformation--but in a different format. Thus, it is important to examine McKibben’s use of frames in *Oil and Honey*. McKibben’s blend of both comic and tragic frames not only exemplifies the similarities between the two frames, but it also employs the both transformative ventures. The comic frame encourages audiences to be self reflective about their own participation in climate change and consumer culture, to make lifestyle changes and become civic participants, and to identify as one community among many. Meanwhile, the tragic frame works in tandem with the comic frame, using audience identity to motivate citizens to push the issues into the political sphere, tearing at the hierarchies and power imbalances within our country, and encouraging social change. The combination of the two frames, then, not only addresses much, if not all, of the criticisms aimed at either melodrama or comedy, but also creates a powerful dual frame that approaches the issue from both sides of the dramatic spectrum.

That said, it is important to note that although McKibben employs a blend of both tragic and comic, *Oil and Honey* is primarily framed in melodrama. His use of comic framing winds in and out throughout the book, but the major appeal is melodrama: as seen in the ways in which McKibben focuses on socio-political conflict, polarizes characters, provides a moral framing for climate change, and develops a monopathy. The overarching goal of *Oil and Honey* is to

villainize the fossil fuel industry and to provide a course of action for the audience that can lead to tearing down the hierarchies that have allowed the fossil fuel industry so much control over the rest of the United States (and the world).

Implications, Future Research, and Conclusions

At the end of “Environmental Melodrama,” Schwarze responds once more to the claim that “melodrama may be a more productive rhetorical choice for inventing and transforming controversy that resolving it” (256) stating that “these assertions about when melodrama “works” are speculative” (256). I disagree with this statement, as the climate change solutions framed in comedy have been shown to be mostly ineffective. While melodrama is perhaps most effective for inventing and transforming controversy, that transformation may very well be the answer to finding a solution. Personal changed based “fixes” are not effective enough to solve climate change on their own, so when the conflict is pushed into the political sphere, new solutions will have to arise.

Additionally, Schwarze suggests that further research will help rhetoricians understand how to apply melodrama to environmental issues. The FORUM on *Environmental Melodrama* provides a number of further examples of when and how melodrama is appropriate to use in environmental communication, but this research does not examine blended frames. McKibben’s use of this framework is not the only example of comic and tragic framing together, but it is one of the most prominent. *Oil and Honey* is the strongest example of this, but comedy and melodrama together can be found in McKibben’s other works as well, ranging from books, his magazine articles, and even 350.org emails. As more environmental leaders are beginning to apply this strategy to their own work, I argue that McKibben’s use of melodrama, specifically in *Oil and Honey*, sets a good standard for how to exactly melodrama “works.”

Again, while melodrama by itself may actually be better at simply inventing and transforming conflict, when blended with comedy, the messages are able to both successfully address the four points of melodrama to create an easily visible conflict, but can also foster stronger audience identification and civic engagement, as self-reflection leads to action. This is seen in how McKibben's combination of tragic and comic framing emphasizes identification as a collective as opposed to individuals. As tragic framing pulls the conflict out of the personal and into the public, the comic frame focuses on the self and the community. Alone, both tragic and comic environmental frames are too simplified. Without one or the other, the effect is limited: either because the tragic focuses too strongly on a villain, or because the comic does not necessarily require group activism with a focus on pushing conflict into the public sphere. Together, however, perhaps there is hope for addressing the conflict of climate change in a way that fully highlights the problems at hand, but in a way that also allows for the development of a solution--or solutions--through social change, community activism, and citizen and government action.

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