1985

Toward a new myth of the West | The ecological comedy in contemporary American novels

James G. McGrath

The University of Montana

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.
Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
McGrath, James G., "Toward a new myth of the West | The ecological comedy in contemporary American novels" (1985). Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers. 3926.
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/3926

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.
COPYRIGHT ACT OF 1976

This is an unpublished manuscript in which copyright subsists. Any further reprinting of its contents must be approved by the author.

Mansfield Library
University of Montana
Date: 1985
TOWARD A NEW MYTH OF THE WEST: THE ECOLOGICAL COMEDY IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN NOVELS

by
James G. McGrath
B.A., University of Illinois, 1979

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
1985

Approved by:

[Signatures]
Chair, Board of Examiners
Dean, Graduate School

Date
Jan. 3, 1986
Several recent critics have urged examining literature from an ecological perspective. Among them, Joseph Meeker and Don Elgin claim the tragic mode parallels the kind of thinking which has led to environmental problems while the comic mode is more conducive to harmonious human behavior in the environment. Working with this idea, and with Richard Slotkin's thesis of a violent myth of the American West, the author examines three American comic novels written in the West from an ecological perspective: John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*, Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, and John Nichols' *The Milagro Beanfield War*. Ecological comedies can be placed on a set of axes "individual/community" and "active/passive." There is no novel that fits on both the "individual" and "passive" ends of the scale. While Steinbeck urged a "new seeing in the West," his environmentally adaptive characters in *Cannery Row* are marginal and fail to live up to Steinbeck's ideal of commitment. He sees them as escaping from a violent reality. This work is on the "community" and "passive" ends of the axes. Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang* is very active in defense of the environment, but they are a violent team of individuals; they are "individual" and "active." In Nichols' *The Milagro Beanfield War*, a community coalesces to actively resist environmental destruction and in the end violence as well. This work is on the "community" and "active" ends, the most preferred variety because it offers an alternative model for living—a new way of seeing. The author also suggests further projects for "literary ecology" or "ecocriticism." 70 references.
Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................. ii

Introduction .......................................................................................................... 1

Ecology and Literature

Ecological literature: the Comic Novel

Chapter 1 ............................................................................................................. 18

Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*: Biological Western, anti-Pastoral

Chapter 2 ............................................................................................................. 28

Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang*: Anti-Western

Chapter 3 ............................................................................................................. 40

Nichols' *Milagro Beanfield War*: The New Myth

Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 53

Literature in Ecology: the Outer Ring

Ecological Criticism: Where Do We Go from Here?

Bibliography ........................................................................................................ 62
"Work as if you were in the early days of a better nation"--Alisdair Gray.
INTRODUCTION:

My own view is that only by shifting our collective attention from the merely political to the basic biological aspects of the human situation can we hope to mitigate and shorten our time of troubles.... How does the human race propose to survive and if possible improve the lot and the intrinsic quality of its individual members? Do we propose to live on this planet in symbiotic harmony with our environment?.... Committing that sin of overweening bumptiousness which the Greeks called hubris, we behave as though we were not members of earth's ecological community.... --Aldous Huxley, 1963 (329).

ECOLOGY AND LITERATURE

"What is 'Literary ecology'?' asks Don Elgin in the title to a critical article. Several literary scholars who are interested in ecology and environmental problems, and how literature might relate to them and help solve them, have asked the same question. These scholars vary from Maragaret McFadden-Gerber, who has used the term to apply to a genre of works "which seem at once to be confession, natural history essay, environmentalist lyric, specimen of devotional literature, and commonplace book" (3) to Elgin who calls for:
The study of literature from an ecological perspective . . . to see what the possibilities are for man to continue to exist and—if he is to do so—the conditions under which that existence may be maintained. ... It means looking at the manner in which politics, economics, science, religion, language, medicine, and hundreds of other elements go into the making of a literary ecosystem (8).

Other critics (such as Wallace Kaufman and Neil Everchdon) have called for more participation by the humanities in the environmental movement. Generally, they see the environmental problem as an indictment against science and scientific thinking and not reparable by science alone. As Everchdon says,

> It's no good passing the buck to ecologists—environmentalism involves the perception of values, and values are the coin of the arts. Environmentalism without aesthetics is merely regional planning (20).

While this is by no means a new line (see Poirier and Meyers for a discussion of this), the recent interest in ecology and literature stems from the awareness that the greatest problem for our time and some time to come is the ecological crisis. Barry Commoner stated it succinctly fifteen years ago:

> Biologically, human beings participate in the environmental system as subsidiary parts of the whole. Yet, human society is designed to exploit the environment as a whole, to produce wealth. The paradoxical role we play in the natural environment—at once participant and exploiter—distorts our perception of it (11).
What follows from that distortion of perceptions is the extensive suicidal destruction of our planet.

While much of the damage is done with technology, all of the damage is done by human beings. Commoner is concerned with perceptions, and Huxley, a decade before, uses the term *hubris*. *Hubris*, when used as a term in literature, is the classic tragic flaw in Greek tragedy. Literature is about, and to some extent shapes, our perceptions. Some scholars, like Joseph Meeker and Don Elgin, see the roots of our ecological crisis in the predominance of "tragic" thinking—thinking along the lines of the tragic mode.

If we are to "mitigate and shorten our time of troubles," as Huxley says, then we need a new mode of thinking. As William Ruekert, another critic interested in literary ecology, says, "where there is no ecological vision, the people will perish." And this ecological vision must penetrate the economic political, social, and technological visions of our time, and radicalize them" (79). And, as a literary scholar, he calls for a kind of "eco-criticism":

I am going to experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for a human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we live in of anything I have studied in recent years. ...I am going to try to discover something about the ecology of literature, or try to develop an ecological poetics by applying ecological concepts to the reading, teaching, and writing about literature (73).
That is his definition of literary ecology (the application of ecological concepts to literature) and its rationale as a critical method (relevance), one that I agree with. He proposes applying biological concepts to literature (much as Meeker has), and claims his work to be a part of human ecology.

Joseph Meeker, in his book *The Comedy of Survival* as well as elsewhere\(^1\), has done the clearest and most extensive work in the study of literary ecology that I've found. He agrees with Ruekert in many ways, but he is more hopeful. He, too, applies biological concepts to literature, but I think he knows his biology a little better. Throughout *The Comedy of Survival* he compares animal behavior to literary behavior, unlike Ruekert's abstract concept of "energy-flow" in his eco-poetics. But Meeker shares with Reukert the belief that literary works resemble ecosystems.

Literary ecology, then, is the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works. It is simultaneously an attempt to discover what roles have been played by literature in the ecology of the human species.

... Most important, literary ecology makes it possible for us to study the function of literary art as it influences the survival of the human species (1972, 9-10).

Unlike Reukert, Meeker establishes a methodology and applies it to several works.

\(^{1}\)Since I am citing several of his works, for clarity and simplicity I will include the date of publication in the citation. This is a variant of the style used in the social sciences. I will follow this practice with all other authors I cite who have more than one work relevant to this study.
Meeker shares Reukert's sense of the importance of ecology, but unlike Reukert he has a sense of the importance of literature.

Literature expresses deep human needs and represents the forms of behavior peculiar to a consciousness-bearing animal. It is not primarily a medium of communication or an educational instrument for perpetuating certain kinds of behavior but is often treated as if it were both. Because of its relative permanence, literature can be interpreted as if it were a philosophical statement and used as a model to influence the lives of subsequent human generations. Consciously and unconsciously, people imitate literary characters and often try to create in their own lives the circumstances depicted in literature or the motivations which produce its events. Literature which provides models of man's relationship with nature will thus influence both man's perceptions of nature and his responses to it (8).

For that reason, Meeker concentrates on narratives, that literature which provides models of man in action in the world.

Meeker further focuses on comedy, preferring it to tragedy. In his 1983 article "What is 'Literary Ecology'?" Elgin succinctly summarizes Meeker's case for comedy rather than tragedy. He begins by citing Meeker:

Is literature an activity which adapts us better to the world or one which estranges us from it? From the unforgiving perspective of evolution and natural selection, does literature contribute more to our survival than it does to our extinction? (Meeker 1972, 4)
Elgin asserts that literature can either help men adapt or hinder them. He summarizes Meeker on the effects of tragic thinking:

Thus tragedy has invited man to accept three basic assumptions: 1) that nature is made for mankind, 2) that human morality transcends natural limits, and 3) that the individual human personality is extremely important. ... tragedy reflects each of the three 'causes' of the ecological crisis (8).

The tragic hero is one who stands outside of nature and his society, basing his stance on *a priori* ideas of morality, ideas not developed from nature and adapting to it. Further, the tragic idea that an individual hero is overwhelmingly important, that when following an *a priori* moral idea he is more important than any non-human natural circumstances and events, allows for destructive exploitation of the environment.

Meeker elaborates the three points mentioned above:

The assumption of human superiority to the processes of nature has justified human exploitation of nature without regard for the consequences to animals, plants, or the land. Human concern with a supernatural moral order has directed attention away from the natural environment and minimized its importance to human ethical life. Humanistic individualism has encouraged Western man to ignore the multiple dependencies necessary to the sustenance of life. The search for personal identity and self-fulfillment has minimized
man's sense of responsibility both to his own species and to the other creatures with whom he shares the earth (1972, 59).

So, thinking in the tragic mode allows for poor ecological behavior.

Ruekert supplies us with another analogy:

The view we get of humans in the biosphere from the ecologists these days is a *tragic* one.... (the basic postulate of ecology and tragedy is that humans precipitate tragic consequences by acting either in ignorance of or without properly understanding the true consequences of their actions) .... In ecology man's tragic flaw is his anthropocentrism.... (78, emphasis mine).

This is another way of saying *hubris*. Actually, this is an interesting expansion of Aristotle's "blood relationship," the fundamental recognition in tragedy, and as such it is an argument for tragedy. In classical tragedy, the hero learns of a blood relationship previously obscured to him. Relationships of kinship *placed* a person in the world, within a community. If that sense of blood relationship were extended to the community of the land, we could have an eco-tragedy. It would presumably engender fear and pity and result in a catharsis or healing. But the ecologists mentioned above are describing how humans now act, how we are acting out a tragedy, following through with tragic thinking, and this description argues for the importance of a new dominant mode. Further, the tragic mode of thought is out-dated. As Meeker points out:
McGrath 8

The philosophical props and settings for genuine tragic experience have disappeared. Moderns can only pretend to tragic heroism, and that pretense is painfully hollow and melodramatic in the absence of the beliefs that tragedy depends upon. Prerequisite to tragedy is the belief that the universe cares about the lives of human beings (1972, 36).

Meeker's point here is that although modern industrial society does not have the base for real tragic awareness (which among other things requires community), we nevertheless continue to follow that mode. We act out the tragedy Reukert mentions—destroying the environment—without even the capacity to gain an understanding and cleansing from that mistake. Meeker further suggests the limits of tragedy even when fully experienced: for tragedy to work, we must assume that humans are all-important. That belief, however, is another form of hubris. On the one hand, humans need to return to a sense of relationship with the earth (which I shall call community, after Aldo Leopold), but, on the other hand, we should not understand this to be a tragic relationship.

The alternative is comedy. "Literary comedy depicts the loss of equilibrium and its recovery" (Meeker 1972, 25). Comedy moves from disorder to order. It is an important point of view to take in this time of chaos and catastrophe. In fact, many comedies end in marriage (rather than the bloody fifth act of tragedy). Further, as Elgin details, comedy is based on the ecological assumptions:

1) that the primary goal of man is the seeking after and affirmation of life, 2) that man is but one part of a whole system to which he must accommodate himself
and whose survival must be a primary concern of his if he hopes to continue to exist, and 3) that man must reject all abstractions, recognizing that they are likely to cost him his freedom or his life and being unwilling to give up either. Comedy... reaffirms man's ancient ties to the physical world and all its process in a manner which is precisely opposite the divorce which tragedy demands between man and his environment (8).

These are especially true, Meeker contends, for the *picaro* (see below, p. 10).

Finally, and not to be overlooked, comedy seeks *joy*. Living on the earth in community with nature is a joyful experience. Literature can celebrate this. Also, seeking joy is a more environmentally sound activity than seeking dominion over or waging war on the earth or its denizens. People have necessities, but if they live in balance with an earth that can provide abundantly for its children, such economic pursuits can be joyful rather than a "struggle". This calls for a complete revision of Western civilization's idea of human beings' relationship with the earth. That is one reason ecology has been called the "subversive science".

Not only does comedy offer a healthier way of seeing man in relation to nature (or simply *in* nature), but biology resembles comedy:

...structures in nature also reveal organizational principles and processes which closely resemble the patterns found in comedy. Productive and stable ecosystems are those which minimize destructive aggression, encourage maximum diversity, and seek to establish equilibrium among their participants—which is essentially what happens in literary comedy. Biological evolution
itself shows all the flexibility of comic drama, and little of the monolithic passion peculiar to tragedy (Meeker 1972, 27).

Thus, the literary and scientific paradigms are united. And, presumably, if we act out "The Comedy of Survival," we will succeed biologically.

**ECOLOGICAL LITERATURE: THE COMIC NOVEL**

Meeker argues not merely for the comic mode of thinking but for a particular genre of comedy, the picaresque. The picaro is an apt character because he does not try to control his world but to adapt to it. He does not bring *a priori* ideas or morals to the world, but learns from experience. And often he has a close affinity with the natural world. The picaro is usually of low birth and does not need to achieve glory: he is humble before nature.

Meeker contrasts the picaresque with the pastoral, a genre which often presents nature as a positive value. Meeker finds fault with the pastoral:

*Unfortunately, pastoral gardens are generally made by the machines which must eventually destroy them. ... Gardens are not images of nature, but of the human manipulation of nature* (1972, 89).

However, I do not think we should confuse the pastoral with farming, any more than we should think life is a comedy. I think it may be useful to structure the way we think of life in the same way we structure a comedy. The problem with the pastoral is the way it structures our attitudes. First, in
a pastoral the garden or the idyllic place is a temporary refuge from the terror and disorder of the city and the wilderness. Meeker suggests we should embrace the disorder (or let us say order beyond man's control) of wilderness. I would add that we should likewise embrace the disorder and terror of the city. The pastoral is a turning away from the responsibility of the city. It is crucial that we have better cities, cities which include nature, the wild, and urban farming. In other words, cities people can live in.

The pastoral idea is less useful because it implies that people can't live with nature. It is a temporary refuge. The structure of its thought derives too much from the garden of Eden, meaning that man's very re-entry into the pastoral garden of nature precipitates its doom. Some wilderness protectionists also see man's impact in that way. But to think of our idyllic place in nature as Huck Finn's raft, safe from the evils of society, peaceful, in tune with nature, but steadily, inevitably, floating south into slavery, is automatically tragic.

In the pastoral, man's intervention--creating a garden, trying to manipulate and subdue nature--precipitates his fall. But, in fact, man's very presence in the environment means that he will have an impact on it. Our need is rather to interact with nature, and farming can be the right kind of interaction. It is better to think of farming as a comic activity, a way to have community with the land, than as a pastoral, a temporary escape from the city. Joseph Meeker points out, "What the pastoral calls 'nature' is merely simplified civilization" (1972, 90). I will return to that evaluation when I discuss John Steinbeck's pastoral (or anti-pastoral) Cannery Row.
McGrath 12

I must take issue with Meeker when he presents the picaresque as the "best" form of comedy. The picaresque is comedy of the individual. To live ecologically, we must see the individual as part of the community. Using biological metaphors, Alan R. Drengson says: "The world must be thought of as intersecting fields of processes, rather than as separate individuals. ... The ecosystem is like a living body. ... The body is a community of cells" (232). Aldo Leopold extends human communities to include "soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land" (239). There are other kinds of comedy that demonstrate this sense of community better.

Other critics even view the picaro differently. In discussing the picaro Schweik (one of Meeker's examples) and comedy in particular, Robert Torrance cites Susan Langer's contention that comedy:

expresses the elementary strains and resolutions of animate nature, the animal drives that persist even in human nature, the delight man takes in his special mental gifts that make him the lord of creation; it is an image of human vitality holding its own in the world amid the surprises of unplanned coincidence...The feeling of comedy is a feeling of heightened vitality, challenged wit and will, engaged in the great game with Chance. The real antagonist is the World (11).²

²Langer does consider comedy basically biological and would probably agree with much that Meeker, Elgin and I have to say about comedy. At bottom, she claims, comedy is about Life. Torrance argues that the comic hero opposes the natural world.
This is the opposite of Meeker's claim for affinity with nature. However, genres can be pushed too far. Meeker discusses *Catch-22* as a picaresque novel, though "technically" it isn't because it doesn't have a first person narrator. Another scholar claims *Tom Jones* is not a picaresque. Pushed to the limits, only *Lazarillo de Tormes* is a true picaresque. But these ultra-fine taxonomical distinctions destroy the usefulness of these genres as structures for our understanding of literature.

In fact, if we are to use comedy as a way of seeing the world, as a proper mode of interaction with the world, we should promote comedies that describe and urge humans *acting communally* (in Leopold's sense). Both parts of the phrase are important: action as well as communion. We can place ecological comedies then on these axes.
McGrath 14

Romantic literature often places a poet outside of society, in nature. This would be on the individual end of the scale. Further, the poet-hero bemoans the rise of cities, technology and the separation from nature, but he does so from his retreat. That is to say, he really doesn't do anything about it. That falls on the passive or disengaged end of the scale. I call this the "arhat." (In Buddhism, an arhat retreats from the world alone in nature in order to meditate and purify himself. Often, an arhat lives in a cave, for example. His goal is enlightenment, but for himself.) Thoreau in *Walden* is an example of this. I will not look at any comic novels of this variety. Frankly, I can't think of any. This is really a tragic outlook in so far as the individual is standing outside of society like a tragic hero, often predicting doom. Perhaps Meeker's picaro would fit in this slot, though, because he is "just trying to get by."

I will look at three comic novels which fit into the other slots in this diagram. Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* depicts a community. In fact, he uses biological and ecological metaphors throughout this work. The primary metaphor in *Cannery Row* is the tidepool: a biotic community stranded from the main body. The community depicted in this novel does not actively promote an ecological relationship. It falls therefore at the Community and Passive side of the axes.

Edward Abbey's title characters in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* take ecological action to its extremest form. However, there are only four characters: they are hardly a community. They fit the active/individual category in my scheme.
Finally, I will look at John Nichol's *The Milagro Beanfield War*. The characters in this novel also take direct action, but above all, this is a book about the developing solidarity of a community. So I place this work at the top of my diagram, thus:

```
ACTIVE       MILAGRO       COMMUNITY
           /\               /
         /    \           /    \         
THE MONKEY  CANNERY ROW  THE ARHAT  PASSIVE
WRENCH GANG
```

It might be interesting to note here that the three novels I've chosen to examine are all written by writers from the American West. There is an ecological reason for this, I think. People living in the West can still see wilderness and can see the devastation of the land taking place even today. And since World War II, Western writers are for the first time articulating their own experience and view of the world. Until that time, the idea of the West in American culture was generated in (and for) the East. So this new articulation has naturally combined with a new awareness of man's exploitive destruction of the earth.
One of the dominant myths about the West is that of the hunter. Richard Slotkin has named this myth in the title of his book *Regeneration Through Violence*. He claims this idea of the frontier has permeated much of American culture and continues to do so. However, he points out:

> Believing in the myth of regeneration through violence of the hunt, the American hunters eventually destroyed the natural conditions that made possible their economic and social freedom, their democracy of social mobility (557).

Although Slotkin is not directly concerned with environmental issues, it is clear that this violence has been directed not only against animals and Indians but against the land as well. It is fundamental to the American Frontier ideal of mobility ("use it up and move on") that people be divorced from the community of the land. Further, one of the largest threats to the environment today is the massive stock of armaments (nuclear, chemical and biological) cued up to be triggered at a moment's notice.  

So, in my presentation of the growth from individual and passive pro-nature activity in literature to communal and active pro-environment activity, I will also present a movement away from the old myth of violence toward a triumph over violence. All three of these novelists see a great deal of violent activity in nature. But each presents a different approach for

---

3 Also, the production of these weapons creates lethal by-products which further pollute the environment. I could also mention the insane diverting of huge amounts of resources into the military which could be applied to more sound and life-sustaining projects. The so-called "Superfund" is microscopic compared to the military fund.
human beings to take. Steinbeck’s pastoral presents the unsuccessful escape from violent reality. Abbey shows us violence to nature and violence in defense of nature. Nichols shows us the triumph over violence through community.
CHAPTER 1: STEINBECK'S *CANNERY ROW*: BIOLOGICAL WESTERN, ANTI-PASTORAL

_The new eye is being opened here in the west—the new seeing. It is probable no one will know it for two hundred years._ —John Steinbeck.

The terms "Nature" and "Naturalism" in American letters are slippery ones. Part of the mutability comes from the various and changing attitudes people have towards the land and the natural community. Certainly, American writers have been greatly involved with ideas of nature and the land. The shift in the attitude between earlier writers in the long "nature" tradition and the contemporary writers I am dealing with can be seen in a similar shift from the term "nature" to the term "environment."

"Environment" is also a loosely used word, but it is far more specific than "nature" and carries considerably fewer pejorative connotations. The word "natural" brings with it two kinds of emotional baggage. First, it implies a "better" and "God-given" quality: to claim that something is natural is to claim that it is always better than an alternative. Second, "natural" always presents a series of opposites: unnatural, artificial, man-made, and therefore often technological. "Environment" does not imply either of those concepts.

The long tradition of "Nature" writing in America developed with Romanticism. In Romanticism, the poet is placed outside of and in opposition to the practical, industrial, utilitarian urban society. Similarly, nature is
placed in opposition to man, man-made cities and technology. Making the poet non-utilitarian (useless) undermines the value of poetry to society; placing human society in opposition to nature undermines man's ability to live with his biotic environment.

Leo Marx has shown the self-destructive (tragic) elements in this pastoral idea of nature. For example, Thoreau saw that technology was ending the possibility of pastoral settings (a fundamental element of the pastoral genre according to Marx). In "Sounds," Thoreau hears a train intruding on his wilderness and writes, "So is your pastoral life whirled past and away" (133). The pastoral concept recognizes, even presupposes, its own doom, and that of nature.

The pastoral is the traditional expression of the concept of nature. As Meeker points out, "The United States may be the world's largest-scale utopian experiment in creating a nation on the model of a pastoral garden" (87). The two operating elements of the pastoral--the necessary opposition to technology and the temporary refuge from the city--are present in Thoreau's Walden and carry through in a direct line to Edward Abbey.

Even Mark Twain, who is very pro-progress and pro-technology in some of his writings, e.g. Life on the Mississippi, and Pundin'head Wilson, is wrapped up in the pastoral in his best work, Huckleberry Finn. The raft is Huck and Jim's safe "holy place," but it inevitably takes them into slavery. Twain is notably one of the founders of Western writing, writing from the West about the West, and his strongest works deal with (and come out of) the land. Jackson Benson has claimed that John Steinbeck's work is directly descended from Twain's. Both writers share some of the same
strengths and weaknesses, both suffered some of the same critical receptions (humorist, folk writer, lesser figure), and both present a Western viewpoint, often in parody of the Eastern cultural idea of the West.

Steinbeck saw the West as the place where a new vision of the world would come from. This new seeing is exemplified by his shift in terms from "nature" to "environment." Steinbeck uses the latter to phrase his key theme: commitment. Man must be committed to "the one inseparable unit man plus his environment" (Owens, 7). This crucial move immediately destroys the opposition of man and nature found in traditional American thought. For Steinbeck, this move was also against the traditional myth of the West. Louis Owens summarizes this:

"...Steinbeck's emphasis is on commitment to place and on man's understanding of his relationship to the 'whole' of which he is a part. The pattern of non-commitment illustrated by the westering impulse in American history is in direct contrast to and a contradiction of the values Steinbeck asserts throughout his writing (58)."

Richard Slotkin identifies this same "westering impulse" with a myth of violence.

Unfortunately, Steinbeck's ideal of commitment is flawed, and this undermines his environmental message. Although he professes that commitment should be to "the one inseparable unity man plus his environment," in his novels commitment too often turns out to be an individual (blood) sacrifice for a human group--the rest of the environment
doesn't enter into it. For example, in *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck's hero makes a violent commitment to the economic improvement of humans, possibly at the expense of the rest of the global society. This kind of commitment requires an individual to see himself as potentially all-important, potentially a savior. It is *hubris*.

Steinbeck, as an amateur ecologist and a friend of biologist Ed Ricketts, uses environmental, biological and ecological themes, metaphors and structures throughout his books. Both men valued ecological thinking, and Steinbeck was impressed by Ricketts' philosophy of non-teleological thought. The two men discussed this philosophy in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*.

According to Ricketts's and Steinbeck's definition, "non-teleological thinking concerns itself primarily not with what should be, or might be, but rather with what actually 'is'" (*Log*, p. 135) (in Owens, 19).

Teleological thought posits an *a priori* total view (what should be) and tries to fit observations into that view. Meeker also condemns this view as poor ecology. However, Steinbeck's portrayal of commitment (and the structure of many of his novels) is teleological.

Richard Astro (1973) has pointed out the degree to which Steinbeck disagreed with Ricketts' ecological ideas (and therefore Doc's in *Cannery Row*). Astro traces these differences to Steinbeck's ideal of commitment and to the two men's different understanding of the early science of ecology based on their experiences with different teachers.
Ricketts studied at the University of Chicago under W. C. Allee, who developed a thesis of social cooperation in nature "in which animals automatically band together for purposes of survival and reproduction" (25). As Astro tells us,

> It is not difficult to see that Allee's doctrine of the automatic process by which animal aggregations form and function would appeal to the nonteleological cast of Ricketts' thinking. ... The fact of relation, not its conscious purpose, was what Ricketts gleaned from Allee's work ..." (29, emphasis mine).

Steinbeck, on the other hand, studied with William Emerson Ritter at Hopkins Marine Station in Pacific Grove. Ritter also had a theory of how animals worked together, but he conceived of a group of animals as a "superorganism." The organismal concept sees the whole as more than a sum of the parts, and the whole therefore "exercises a measure of determinative control over its parts" (29). Astro characterizes this approach as teleological. And it is on this basis that Steinbeck splits with Ricketts over the ideal of commitment. Commitment is teleological: the hero sacrifices himself to the larger organism, the human group, but this is just another "animal" in competition, each with a set of teleological goals. Steinbeck's idea of superorganism does not extend to seeing the whole earth as an organism (at least not in his depiction of committed heroes).

Steinbeck's ecological metaphors and his flawed ideal of commitment are clearest in *Cannery Row*. Almost every critic recognizes that the tidepool is the "controlling metaphor" of *Cannery Row*, and many recognize
the degree to which ecological thinking structures the book. The novel is a tribute to Steinbeck's lifelong friend Ed Ricketts and an attempt to record his philosophy of ecology and of non-teleological thought. But it is also a criticism of that philosophy on the grounds of commitment.

*Cannery Row* is very much an ecological novel in the sense that it "studies" the ecosystem of the Row and its inhabitants and, following Ricketts' method, shows how that leads us to the "toto-picture." The theme could be stated in the name of Doc's lab: Western Biological. The inhabitants of Cannery Row adapt to their environment better than most people do. The men who sleep in the metal pipes cannot be people who curl up or snore; if they are they have to "change their habits or move out" (29). Henri the painter lives in a boat which is symbolic of our boat the earth. His living in it is a process. He constantly changes it. The "lines were in a constant state of flux" (84). He doesn't want to finish building it, because then he would have to put out to sea in it--a symbol of death. Life on earth is constant change, never to be finished until death. Most men want to build a static structure of the world, the ways things are or should be, but this is not adaptive behavior. Henri also creates a piece of "living" art for Doc, a pincushion painting which is never finished and can always be rearranged.

The community of the Row works together like an interdependent organism. After the first unsuccessful party, community has been broken, and this effects every part of the community. Things are so interdependent that the single imbalance disturbs the whole: Mack and the boys make a mistake, the whorehouse gets shut down, Monterey loses five conventions the next year and four boats wreck. Finally, the puppy gets sick which
forces Mack to go to Doc for help. This heals the community. The restored balance permeates even to the sea lions whose barking "took on a tone and a cadence that would have gladdened the heart of St. Francis" (98).

The second party shows the community as a harmonious organism. "People didn't get the news of the party--the knowledge of it just slowly grew up in them. And no one was invited. Everyone was going" (104). (We shall see how the community of Milagro functions similarly.) Not only is a party, as Benson says, "a full participation in life in the now" (29), but it is also a "gift" from the entire community to the entire community. (The first party failed because only a small part of the community attended.) Doc, as "head" of this community "body", the supposed recipient of this gift, takes the lead in his own "surprise" party. He provides most of the food and drink and carefully makes his lab "as non-lethal as possible without making it dull" (110). That seems a reasonable goal in life, too.

The Row is so infused with biology that currency becomes living greenbacks--frogs. Its inhabitants live harmoniously with their ecosystem in Ricketts' non-teleological way. Doc says that Mack and the boys are the true philosophers:

I think they survive in this particular world better than other people. In a time when people tear themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness, they are relaxed. All of our so-called successful men are sick men, with bad stomachs and bad souls, but Mack and the boys are healthy and curiously clean (88).
They stand for an alternative ethic.

The things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feelings are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest are the traits of success (89).

Here, even while praising Mack and the boys, Doc admits their impracticality: this pro-environment lifestyle won't work because reality is violent.

Working with the tidepool as the controlling metaphor, we can see in its description the reflection of Cannery Row. "The sea is very clear and the bottom becomes fantastic with hurrying, fighting, feeding, breeding animals" (17). Human society is like this, too. "On the bottoms lie the incredible refuse of the sea, shells broken and chipped and bits of skeleton, claws, the whole sea bottom a fantastic cemetery on which the living scamper and scramble" (67). The denizens of Cannery Row are among the refuse of our society. If viewed from far enough back, life is beautiful, but it is always a dangerous struggle. Steinbeck sees reality as violent and the Row as a false escape. He sees the Row as a doomed pastoral and discards the positive, and workable, ecological behavior of his characters.

On the next page, Steinbeck describes Doc working in the tidepool: he "peered into the tide pools with their brilliant mosaics and their scuttling, bubbling life." Then Doc finds the body of the girl, the beautiful but very dead girl (67). Death always lurks beneath the beauty of nature. As Benson so aptly says, "we should keep in mind the fact that the Row is dominated by
factories which house machines which cut up animals and stick them in metal cans..." (20-21). Violent reality is the poison in this ecological creampuff.

Benson is identifying *Cannery Row* as a reversal of the pastoral. It is the pastoral elements of the novel which violate Steinbeck's ideal of commitment. He says, as Meeker does, that the pastoral will not work. Pleasant though this "nostalgia" may be, laudable though Mack and the boys' traits are, they are not realistic. The characters are on retreat from commitment. As Owens points out, "Cannery Row is a place of disengagement where the kind of commitment so highly prized in Steinbeck's fiction is not found" (188-9). The tidepool, after all, is separated from the main body of the sea. "Mack and the boys are the flotsam and jetsam of the American Dream" (Owens,184). They are marginal.

So Steinbeck argues against what I would call an environmental viewpoint in favor of his ideal of commitment. He closes his book with the brief story of the gopher who moves to Cannery Row. He finds it a "perfect place." But he cannot attract a female and therefore reproduce. "He had to move two blocks up the hill to a dahlia garden where they put out traps every night" (121). So Steinbeck rejects the pastoral view, but with it he rejects a positive environmental view. He describes clearly people who act out "the inseparable unity of man plus his environment," but criticizes that as an escape from commitment. He says, in effect, "This is all fine and good,
but no one can live that way." Yet he gives us no clear picture of how to live inside a commitment to the land.⁴

⁴ Wendell Berry (in his paper presented to the "On Common Ground Conference," December 11, 1985) takes a middle stance on the relationship between domestic and wild lands, refusing, as I do, the dichotomy of man/nature: "Our problem, exactly, is that the human and the natural are indivisible, and yet are different." Like Meeker (1978), Berry sees the world as a wilderness. The strength and value in the domestic is directly related to the wildness remaining in it. He also stands between the pastoral ideal and its rejection: "We are not going back to the Garden of Eden, nor are we going to manufacture an Industrial Paradise." I see this as directly critical to Steinbeck's position in Cannery Row of seeing the choice as either/or and in the end coming down on the side of the latter (the cannery, as it were). Steinbeck bases his choice partly on the idea that reality is deadly and that localized (marginal) solutions are therefore impractical and an escape from commitment. Berry, on the other hand, states: "To use or not to use nature is not a choice that is available to us; we can live only at the expense of other lives. ... It is a choice intransigently practical. It must be worked out in local practice ...." "Practice can only be local." In other words, Berry concedes Steinbeck's point about reality, but answers "marginality" with the point that only local solutions can be effected. Berry is, of course, not only committed to the land; he actively lives that commitment.
CHAPTER 2: ABBEY'S *MONKEY WRENCH GANG*: ANTI-WESTERN

*What's more American than violence?*

The novels *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *The Milagro Beanfield War* both take an activist approach to blocking a dam project. They occupy the active end of my figure. A lot happened in the intervening thirty years between *Cannery Row* and these books that might affect their approach to things.

The sheer magnitude of the environmental problem might be the most obvious explanation. Economic development often included ruining the environment. The growth of "the new seeing" Western writers paralleled the startling rape of the fragile western ecosystems. Steinbeck's activism grew out of the 1930's and therefore centered on economic recovery, thus his social activism and his ecological sensibility parted company; perhaps it would not have had he been born thirty years later. Abbey especially expresses—as Steinbeck didn't—the sense that we are running out of time, of land, of air, ... of spirit. This desperateness informs his work: WE MUST DO SOMETHING! NOW! BEFORE IT'S GONE.

While that pressure is enough to incline people to action, there is another major event that may have had some influence, one that is prominent in both later works: the Vietnam War. Perhaps this expresses a general disaffection with the establishment and therefore a radicalization. That is, after the Vietnam War there was a climate of activism (like
McGrath 29

Steinbeck's thirties). But I think there was a greater change of consciousness than that. At one point in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, the gang is watching a huge strip-mining operation. Abbey details how each of the characters in turn mentally describes this vision. He gives us the former Green Beret’s last: “But George Washington Hayduke, his thought was the clearest and simplest: Hayduke thought of Vietnam” (p. 159). On the other hand, one of the citizens of Milagro (a town which paid more than its share of the toll in Vietnam) states: “We will be like the Vietnamese” (p. 279, emphasis mine). The difference in these two statements also exemplifies the difference of approach in these two books: Abbey’s is that of a lone Green Beret, as much at war with “his side” as with the enemy; Nichols’ is that of a community determined to resist an enemy which is superior technologically and economically but not morally. Both express a disaffection with what Slotkin has called the myth of regeneration through violence: it takes a long time for a desert to regenerate.

Slotkin describes the prevalence of the frontier myth in American culture. Since 1890, the closing of the West, that myth has carried with it a nostalgic and tragic implication. Western civilization has long held that the tragedy is the highest form of literature. It is so privileged a genre that Levi S. Peterson brings it in to validate an otherwise “lesser” genre, the Western as the frontier saga.

On the one hand, we have associated with the frontier the great values defined by American Romanticism as primitive: freedom from social restraint, the exercise of justified, private violence, and a natural religion directed toward a
god manifested in the wilderness. On the other hand, we have also associated with the frontier the struggle of the 19th century American civilization to establish in a vacant wilderness its predominant values: child rearing, economic aggrandizement, social status, and a home rooted on the land. Viewed as inimical, the contrary values have formed the intense ambivalence discernable in an overview of Western literature. From this ambivalence, this conflict between values, both of which are intense and undoubted, arises a strong potential for tragedy, because our way of viewing the primitive and the civilized as irreconcilable means that one or the other must perish (245).

American culture and literature have pursued this conflict over its entire history; the final manifestation is in the ecological crisis.

Also in reference to the Western novel, Thomas Lyons pointed out the problem this vision brings with it:

One of our national magazines, in an article titled "Our New Western Frontier," extolls our military activities and preparations in Asia, saying, "The Far East is now our Far West" (59).

The same problem is explored in Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Abbey's characters are trying to live out the frontier values mentioned by Peterson and Slotkin: "freedom from social restraint, the exercise of justified, private violence, and a natural religion directed toward a god manifested in the wilderness" (Peterson, 245). They are trying to help the environment by insisting on their "democracy of social mobility" (Slotkin, 557) without realizing that that is a part of the same mythos which allows for the
destruction of the land. They are disgruntled vets, but they have not yet reached the point of view of the "enemy"—the land being destroyed, the "Vietnamese."

Lyons, in his discussion of Frank Waters, sees him as one Western writer who "has seen through the central philosophical contrast between Indian and White" (52) and in his writing presented a sense of place as spiritually regenerating. Waters, according to Lyons, offers an alternative not only to the tragic violence of the West but also to the ecological crisis itself:

In a time [1968] when a standard cliché-question is whether our technology will slowly render the earth totally polluted and uninhabitable or allow us to destroy ourselves more quickly in a bomb flash, Waters hopes for an infusion of mythical and mystical intuitive truth, and a reconciliation between it and the White Way, leading to a "fuller perspective." This, he believes, can be the great contribution of the native Americans: at the last moment, seemingly, a psychic force and meaning of the place that have informed their lives through the ages may be the means of saving the conquerors from themselves (58).

Opposed here, then, are more than literary forms, but entire ways of seeing the world. The tragic way, ending in violence and catastrophe, and another, "fuller" way (Steinbeck's "new" way). Abbey illustrates the environmental problem well, but he continues in the Western tradition of violence; we will not see the "fuller" way until Nichols' novel.
Abbey's book proceeds like a commando raid. Despite Doc's constant disclaimers that "Anarchy is not the answer," the Monkey Wrench Gang acts in the Western American anarchist tradition. In fact, this work is like a Western, or an anti-Western similar to *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. The basic functional unit here is the individual (cowboy). Individuals can at times work in pairs or even up to four, but that begins to strain their effectiveness since each individual retains autonomy. Four of course is the optimum number for a guerilla team: enough to get the job done, but as few as possible.

This is not to say that Abbey, or his characters, are unaware or uncritical of their separateness. In fact, much of Abbey's style suggests the deliberate anti-Western. His book is surrealistic in parts and frequently satirical; Abbey does not give the Tragic-End-of-the-West story free rein. His characters retain a similar perspective—Doc constantly claims "anarchy is not the answer." Even Hayduke, the most cowboy-like, most individualistic, most violent, most heroic in the end, has a revealing experience while walking alone in the desert:

The sensation of freedom was exhilarating, though tinged with a shade of loneliness, a touch of sorrow. The old dream of total independence, beholden to no man and no woman, floated above his days like smoke from a pipe dream, like a silver cloud with a dark lining. For even Hayduke sensed, when he faced the

---

5See "Get Ready for the Ride: We've Been down That Road Before," *Heartland*, Winter 1985, for a similar discussion of the movie *Silverado*. In it I make the point, also applicable here, that it is a variant of the individual hero, i.e. Shane, the Lone Ranger, etc. Here it might be called "HAVE DYNAMITE, WILL TRAVEL."
thing directly, that the total loner would go insane. Was insane. Somewhere in
the depths of solitude, beyond wildness and freedom, lay the trap of madness
(106).

This is how Abbey couches the problem time and again. His characters
realize the need for community but still dream of total personal
independence. They conceive of freedom as the ability to do whatever they
want to; this conflicts with ecological thinking which places limits on any
individual's behavior in an environment. His characters pollute freely and
make use of any technology available. This book is concerned with the
individual's freedom in the face of large institutions. Wilderness, the
opposite of restricting civilization, is the place where individuals are free.

The wilderness, the desert, and individualism are intertwined for
Abbey. Setting aside the tactical advantages of a guerilla band, we see the
desert ecosystem itself cannot support large groups of people. In fact, single
individuals spread out over large areas works best in this environment. In
the final chase, the band of four, untenable under pressure, gradually splits
until they are individual.

So, to Abbey, it makes more sense to have a few individuals in the
desert than to have huge roadways, dams, strip mines, etc. Each of these
individuals has developed a strong relationship with the land. Their
response is anger, but they must also respond inside the relationship they
have with the land.

Raymond Beniot sees Abbey in a direct descent of American writers
who find in the natural world holy places where "momentarily the spiritual
and the material draw incarnationally together" (315), from Thoreau through
Twain, Hemingway, and Faulkner—and I would add, in a slightly different way Steinbeck.

Abbey certainly fills all his works with his sense of place. In *The Monkey Wrench Gang* his characters share his sense of the desert as a holy place:

> The river, the canyon, the desert world was always changing, from moment to moment, from miracle to miracle, within the firm reality of mother earth. River, rock, sun, blood, hunger, wings, joy--this is the real, Smith would have said, if he'd wanted to. ... Ask the hawk. Ask the hungry lion lunging at the starving doe. They know (58).

It is this reality, underlying the mechanistic view of industrial society, that Abbey writes from. Often he is with the vultures (blood, hunger, wings, joy), but he also steps further back. He does not identify with the tree being bulldozed, but takes a scientific detachment:

> No one knows precisely how sentient is a pinyon pine, for example, or to what degree such woody organisms can feel pain or fear, and in any case the road builders had more important things to worry about, but this much is clearly established as scientific fact: a living tree, once uprooted, takes many days to wholly die (74).
There is no confusion here between living creatures and machines. In fact, it is the road builders who are confused because they do not see the possibility of woody pain; they do not see the "clearly established fact."

But these holy places described by Beniot are temporary refuges. Huck's raft, for example, can only be inhabited for so long--they must return to land sooner or later. And always farther South. Holy places are centers of healing, but do not represent a world to be lived in. The places Beniot identifies become more threatened and more tentative as time goes on: Hemingway's camp is a momentary and ultimately fruitless flight; Faulkner's forest clearing is hauled away. Abbey himself describes this in "Down the River" (included in *Desert Solitaire*): he argues with his partner that they must return to civilization because it needs them, and besides they need it: "... how long do you think that jar of bacon grease will last?" (205). And this temporariness is double here because the two men are traveling down the river one last time before the Glen Canyon Dam destroys it: this holy place is in immediate peril (and, in fact, by the time the account is published, gone).

The crux of Abbey's active stance, where he parts with Thoreau, where the Monkey Wrench Gang begins, is his belief in the necessity to defend these holy places from destruction. Hence, the Doctor's interest:

"The wilderness once offered men a plausible way of life," the doctor said. "Now it functions as a psychiatric refuge. Soon there will be no wilderness." He sipped at his bourbon and ice. "Soon there will be no place to go. Then the
madness becomes universal." Another thought. "And the universe goes mad" (60).

The wilderness is therapeutically necessary; it is a place of healing.

Beniot cites Faulkner's descriptions of Old Ben in "The Bear" as machinelike and the train as bearlike: "Such cross-hatching of attributes may demonstrate the confusion of value when the Kingdom of Power, in Leo Marx's phrase, replaces the Kingdom of Love: Machines live and animals operate" (326). Abbey, too, deals with the Kingdom of Power, and he consistently describes machines in animal terms:

Down below the metal monsters roared, bouncing on rubber through the cut in the ridge, dumping their loads and thundering up the hill for more. The green beasts of Bucyrus, the yellow brutes of Caterpillar, snorting like dragons, puffing black smoke into the yellow dust (75).

And nature can seem machinelike:

High on the canyon rim a rock slipped or was dislodged by something, gave up its purchase anyway, and tumbled down from parapet to parapet, lost in the embrace of gravity, into the alchemy of change, one fragment in the universal flux, and crashed like a bomb into the river (61-2).

However, this confusion only takes place in the minds of men. In this case, it is the minds of the Gang; Abbey stands clearly distant from that view. In
another scene a vulture describes a helicopter as a "metal dragonfly" (325). It seems more appropriate for a bird to think in terms of other animals. Abbey consistently identifies with the vulture; it is hisOverviewing spirit. He sides with the animals, outside the Kingdom of Power. But he does stand away from that, too. The Gang is actively trying to overturn the Kingdom of Power. After their first action:

All were impressed by what they had done. The murder of a machine. Deicide. All of them, even Hayduke, a little awed by the enormity of their crime. By the sacrilege of it (81).

They share in the confusion of machine/animal, but the sacrilege is not the murder but the very thought of going against the Kingdom of Power. Abbey contrasts the holy places with the deified machines and implies the degree to which these machines control our lives. It is as if the machines need the resources and water, and men merely serve their needs.

But it is this same sense of temporariness, which Beniot ascribes to man's presence in holy places, that undermines the Gang's action: they cannot possibly keep this going. Their conception of the desert as a place of individual freedom, including the right to "the exercise of justified, private violence" (Peterson, 245) in defense of it, undermines the possibility for success.

Built into this novel then is its own critique. One of the interests toward the end is "How will they get out of this?" (Again, a direct parallel to *Butch Cassidy*). It becomes obvious that no one can run around the desert
McGrath 38

blowing things up indefinitely. Nor is it even desirable. Abbey again in "Down the River" expresses his feeling of this. He describes a fantasy similar to the opening of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, and then comments: "Idle, foolish, futile daydreams" (188). After all, they did not stop one single road, dam, bridge or mine from being built. They simply delayed things, and made them more costly. There is also another kind of cost Abbey suggests but doesn’t make explicit: the cost in human freedom. There is already a new set of anti-terrorist legislation. The degree of response at the end of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*—helicopters, troops, etc.—does not reflect the further degree of effect a generalized fear can have—searches, dossiers, blacklists, etc. If Abbey is more concerned with individual freedom than he is with the environment, his guerrillas are even more threatening.

The Gang cannot ultimately succeed for two reasons. First, they are hopelessly outnumbered. Isolated acts cannot seriously effect what Abbey makes clear are huge consortiums. Second, the members of the gang do not themselves act significantly better than their enemies. If there were more of them, what would be the impact? Thousands of pounds of trash, millions of beer cans in the desert. The gang fails to destroy a bridge because they lack sufficient technology. What if they had nuclear weapons? One shot and there goes the dam! Would they do it? This book strongly implies that they would. The Gang does not consider the impact of its acts on the fragile desert environment any more than the bad guys do.

Here then is the complete end of the West. One extreme of violence—ecological—is only attacked with another extreme of violence. The Vietnam veteran has been so well trained that that is the only way he can react. The
myth of regeneration through violence is exposed: neither party in the "war" is regenerating anything.

Throughout the book, Abbey aligns the Gang with another desert denizen, the vulture. Is this to suggest that the Gang is filling a (new) niche, preying on the rotting corpse of technological society? The vulture, after all, does not want an end to death. Are they feeding on death? Are they combat veterans who have become violence junkies? Are we?
CHAPTER 3: JOHN NICHOLS' THE MILAGRO BEANFIELD WAR: THE NEW MYTH

What was the meaning of this so steady and self-respecting, this small Herculean labor, I knew not. I came to love my rows, my beans, though so many more than I wanted. They attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antaeus. But why should I raise them? Only Heaven knows. -- Henry David Thoreau, "The Bean-field."

Walden.

Several years ago, an acquaintance told me the following story. He and a couple of his friends had visited a Hopi teacher to learn from him. The Hopis were at that time rather upset at some previous and more famous seekers who had desecrated the temple. The Hopi teacher had looked at the men and then asked, "Where are your people? You are not a people."

So the men left and brought back their wives and children. The Hopi then said, "You are a people. We will deal with you."

The point of this story in the context of this essay is that a people cannot interact ecologically well except as a people. One of the fundamentally faulty and dangerous "tragic" stances of our culture is that we are constituted as separate individuals and not as a people. Here is the clearest difference between Abbey's novel and Nichols': there are no children in The Monkey Wrench Gang (not even, apparently, from any of Smith's three wives); it is an ad hoc group; Milagro, on the other hand, is
undeniably a community of people, with a tradition and several generations including children.

We can look at this difference in another way. In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Doc trips over an anthill and then angrily kicks it apart.

"The anthill," said Doc, "is sign, symbol and symptom of what we are about out here .... I mean it is a model in microcosm of what we must find a way to oppose and halt. The anthill, like the Fullerian foam fungus, is the mark of social disease" (79).

His response is violent and directed against a natural object which he confuses (or pretends to in rationalization for his violence) with a machine. (Thoreau at his most anthropomorphic also describes a battle between ants.)

In Nichols' novel, there is a similar battle between white man and ant. The VISTA worker, Herbie Goldfarb, fresh from New York City and unused to interacting with the natural world, is invaded by it when he arrives in Milagro. Nichols gives us several incidents where Herbie struggles unsuccessfully to subdue nature. The encounter with the ants exemplifies several themes well.

Nichols introduces the section by declaring that Herbie is deficient on "ant lore" (parallel to "woodlore"). He is surprised and angered when, after putting up a hummingbird feeder filled with sugar water, thousands of ants raid the feeder, drown in the sugar water and clog the feeder. He proceeds to go to war with ants.
He has taken action to intervene in the ecosystem in an attempt to achieve a 'positive' end (more hummingbirds), but like most Game Managers, he has failed to foresee a repercussion. This is parallel in an ironic way to Aldo Leopold's story about wolves, deer and mountains ("Thinking Like A Mountain"). Leopold and his fellow rangers were attempting to increase the deer population (a 'positive' goal), so they exterminated the wolves. This resulted in an overpopulation of deer who overgrazed the mountain, which resulted in famine for the deer. Nichols here has changed the terms somewhat, but the dynamic is the same: if people tip the balance when trying to do good, other parts of the system go haywire and disaster results.

Also like early rangers, Herbie's solution to a perceived problem is violent: exterminate the undesired animals. But the ants are befuddlingly able to circumvent his every tactic. Finally, he wages massive chemical warfare. That results in millions of horrific deaths, calling forth comparisons to Vietnam (Herbie is a VISTA volunteer because he is a conscientious objector), but millions more ants carry on. The store owner, Nick, might have told Herbie:

"Ants are indestructable," but he didn't. Every year Nick made a mint unloading various half-baked ant-poisoning devices onto the people of Milagro, who persisted in believing in the myth of the little Dutch boy with his finger in the dike, or the story of David and Goliath, and so forth (319).

Indeed, these ants resemble a mighty river which cannot be dammed but will find another, perhaps even less desirable, route to the sea. And, as
Abby is also aware, water is life, obviously essential in the desert. Nichols' book is about the struggle of a people for its water. And here, as more clearly in Abby, we see the river as a living thing in itself. These ants (and skunks and snakes and all the other animals Herbie Goldfarb struggles with) are a river; they are also the people of Milagro: little, individually greedy if offered sugar water, communal, natural, pesky—and indestructable.

The plot of the novel concerns racial and class politics, but it is phrased in naturalistic images. Nichols is easiest to access through his nature images. The main figures in this struggle are most clearly characterized in their relationship with nature. All of them “love” nature in one way or another (unlike Herbie), but Nichols clearly shows how that can mean different things.

Kyril Montana, the coolly efficient undercover policeman is also an avid woodsman.

He was... an expert and deadly shot, a good hunter, also a conservationist. He was very careful about shooting the right kind of deer in the right season, and never violated the point system on ducks and upland game. He usually applied for a special elk and bighorn sheep permit, and such were the rules of the game within various state agencies, that he was always granted a permit, and he always got his sheep or his elk. Too, the agent was an excellent bow hunter ... But he was not into overkill, and there was nothing bloodthirsty about his hunting habits. A careful and cautious man who picked his shots, never drank while carrying a firearm, and always stayed in shape, Kyril Montana thoroughly enjoyed the outdoors with or without a gun. He was a member of the
McGrath 44

Isaac Walton League, the Sierra Club, and Ducks Unlimited. He loved to backpack with his family on weekends, and he had an intricate knowledge of many mountain ranges in the state (133).

He is, in other words, a paragon of outdoorsman's virtues. Many of his positive habits, like never drinking while hunting and being careful to follow game laws, are notably lacking in most Milagrans. But his lack of blood-thirstiness is not a virtue to Nichols. Montana is too careful; he's unfeeling. He "hunts" Joe Mondragon although "it would never have occurred to him to consider Joe an enemy. Instead, he was a problem to be dealt with, and an interesting problem at that ...." (134) Montana does not consider animals "alive" in a spiritual sense, and, by suggestion, he does not consider Joe "human". Even though he "loves" the outdoors, he does not really care about the biotic community.

By community, I mean here what Aldo Leopold defined as community. He wrote, "All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. ... The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land" (239).

Nichols follows his characterization of Montana closely with those of Joe Mondragón and Ray Gusdorf. Ray, like Montana, is not a chicano and was not born and raised in Milagro. However, he becomes a full-fledged member of the community. He is accepted because of his genuine affinity for the land and his "general all-around respect for the world and its creatures that others might take for a belief in God" (173). He had started out as a sort of cowboy Dead-End Kid, and worked at the Dude Ranch, raising hell in his
spare time. "Then one morning he woke up with the first autumn snow alighting gently on the ground outside. Billy Ray threw on a shirt, some jeans, and his boots, walking outside into something he had never experienced before ...."(174) He goes on a vision quest (although he would not have called it that) into the snow covered mountains. He stays up there for three days, eating little, simply over-awed by the beauty, and almost dies. When he comes down, he is changed. He quits the Dude Ranch, marries and learns Spanish. "Ray had arrived, as few people have the good luck to arrive, at home" (176). Because of his respect for his home, in Leopold's larger sense, including the plants and animals sharing the land with him, Ray is against the development project and the dam. Despite the hardships of living with the land, he rejects the promised economic prosperity. "'I figure I can live with hunger,' he said gently, 'a hell of a lot better than I can live with fat'" (177). In other words, he would say to Steinbeck, the cost of prosperity is too high if it destroys the land.

Nichols contrasts these two characters; he explains their opposing political positions through his descriptions of their relationships to the land. Although each has a "good" attitude towards nature, only one is in community with it, and with other people. Ray could never be a cop for the same reason Bernabé "Bernie" Montoya, the local sheriff, is a lousy one, because once one is in community with nature one cannot be "cooly efficient". Montana is good at what he does because he is "objective" and "detached"--unresponsive to the interrelationships in the environment. Ray is so involved in the web that he is "a silent man, but understood and well liked" (176).
Joe Mondragón one day, for no apparent reason (the only suggestion Nichols has is that he is "tired"), illegally diverts water into the irrigation ditches so that he can grow some beans. Nichols contrasts him with Montana through his relationship with nature, also. In a long passage (164-169), Joe remembers things he did with his father (e.g. go fishing, communally clean the irrigation ditches). Joe either doesn't do these things now or does them in some more "modern", less satisfying way (e.g. he hired kids to clean the ditches, "and the kids did a shitty job" (167)). His father had respect for the land. "His father had hunted as all men hunted" (165) but "had disapproved of ... wanton murder. Certainly Joe had never seen his father kill anything, except for meat or unless it was poisonous ..." (168). We get a picture of a childhood shared with the land, a way of life that's been denied by the economic exploitation of the local bureaucrats (the villains). This book is about a people taking back the land and water they need for life; even more, it is a novel of humans returning to community with the land and with the people who share it. Human community can only exist when it is a part of the biotic community. Joe's memories of his father and the good life come back to him after he starts growing beans and immediately after the people get together for their first meeting, one that nobody has called (147).

As both Steinbeck and biologist Lewis Thomas (in *Lives of a Cell*) suggest it should, the community works like an organism. Every member, no matter how drunk he was the night before, wakes up at 5 a.m. Information travels quickly to all individuals with the aid of an archaic telephone system of party lines. Anyone making a call will be overheard by at least one other party. Although everyone knows this, people still continue to make "private"
calls which immediately leak into the community. Another way the community works like an organism is in the way it produces "organs." In a body, all cells are more or less the same, but as they are created they are designed to fulfill specific roles (eye, blood, bone, etc.) If necessary, a body or community of cells will reassign roles--skin cells can be grafted onto the eye whence they transform into eye cells, for example. In Milagro, community organs seem to rise up out of the mass. When the community needs a leader and a voice, a leader and a voice rise up. Joe cannot say why he started his beanfield and tries to avoid becoming the leader (leaders get killed), but he can't avoid it. The others coalesce around him.

Two other white men are characterized in their relationship with nature: Horsethief Shorty and the lawyer, Bloom. Each man enjoys (and needs) going off into the mountains from time to time. However, they are on opposite sides (even literally, at one point, on opposite ends of a telescope). Shorty is a loner. He could become a member of the community--he knows Spanish well, he is more or less accepted--but he refuses. Although money does not seem to be important to him, he has invested heavily in the development project. He has no particular reason for his stand (he even regrets it at times), yet he sticks to it. Bloom, on the other hand, is terribly torn. He is not a fully accepted member of the community, yet he functions (as Nichols suggestively names the underground newspaper Bloom writes for) as the Voice of the People. Like Joe's, his actions are almost involuntarily. Bloom spends quite a bit of time trying to avoid getting involved and fearing the consequences when he does. But, as a part of this community, like Joe, he has no choice.
In one way, this book is the story of two characters joining the community: Bloom and Bernie Montoya. We can see this in the contrasting image of a bird. Bernie, the sheriff, is with other cops after a baseball game erupted into a riot (271-2). A small bird, a siskin, collides with a cop and falls to the ground to lie kicking in pain. No one moves, and suddenly the bird takes off again, only to smash into a corral post and fall down stunned. Bernie picks the bird up and holds it in his hands until it recovers.

When Bernabé figured it was in possession of all its faculties, including that of flight, he threw it up in the air, expecting that it would take off. Instead, the bird never once flapped a wing, plowing back to the earth like a shot, causing a minuscule explosion of dust when it smacked into the dirt, breaking its neck (272).

After Joe’s climactic arrest and release, Bloom and his wife are at home, trying to relax from the built-up tension. They go to the chicken coop to look for eggs. They find one, and Bloom goes outside.

The lawyer suddenly threw an egg, underhand, straight up in the air. It rose about twenty yards, fuzzily gleaming, then whizzed straight back to earth only a few feet away, hitting with a hard thud, but it didn’t break. Bloom couldn’t believe it. He stared at the egg. Then he went over and picked it up--it wasn’t even cracked. And for a long time he held the egg in his hand, both frightened and astonished and unable to move, his eyes fixed upon the moon (580).
Bloom helps the embryonic (reborn) community to survive. Bernabé, as sheriff, is technically allied with the enemies, though he is very much a member of the community. He rises in importance as the community coalesces. One of the reasons he is on the edge of the community is perhaps his scientism (like Montana): he is the ecologist in the book as well as the sheriff.

Bernabé probes, questions and "tinkers" with things, trying to understand how they work. He is never able to figure out, for example, how painted cattleguards keep cows from crossing. He examines the question in many ways, all the time ignoring the fact that every time he drives over them he flinches. Nevertheless, he has always tried to figure things out. At one point, "he studied Joe's beanfield, and he studied the painted cattleguard and he wondered about the relationship between them, but he never got anywhere with either" (234). The science of ecology studies relationships, but it hasn't made much headway. Nichols further suggests why: "As a teenager, Bernabé had taken apart a 1939 Plymouth, but he had never been able to get it back together again" (234). Scientific analysis, in the sense that it is a destructive activity, will never be able to take in the whole of relationships. The science of ecology, however, as Neil Everchdon describes it, is subversive in the sense that it sets up as a task what it can never accomplish as a science:

Ecology begins as a normal, reductionist science, but to its own surprise it winds up denying the subject-object relationship upon which science rests. Ecology undermines...science itself (16).
Bernabé is contrasted throughout with his wife, the repository of "old wife's lore." She spouts cliché addages constantly and brews up herbal pharmaceuticals that don't work. Science has always validated itself in opposition to her inefficient ways. But she does not analyze and therefore does not "kill" her subject (the world, nature): in a dream her son asks "Mama, is the rain alive?" And she answered him, 'I think so, isn't everything alive and infused with the spirit of God?" (438)

As Everchdon suggests, Bernabé's scientific analyses lead him inadvertently into subversion. Bernabé is too deeply inmeshed in his community to avoid helping his obstensible enemies. No matter what, he rises at five a.m., just like everyone else in Milagro. Presumably through incompetence, he manages to completely obliterate all the clues to a weapons robbery. He is never able to enforce compliance with the one and only parking meter in town. As far as serving the powers that be, Bernabé is incompetent. He finally comes into his own during the climatic episode of Joe's arrest. The state police arrest Joe, but then do not know what to do. The citizens of Milagro show up, armed, and surround the police station. The situation seems explosive. Finally, Bernabé shows up.

The sheriff nodded to this man, that woman, slapped a teen-ager on the back and grinned, accepted a cigarette and a light, and said something joking to several old-timers on his way to the headquarters... (569).
Not only is he not threatened, but someone actually offers him a cigarette. This is no longer the bumbling sheriff. Once inside, he takes charge:

"The first thing I'd do ... And the second thing I'd do," the sheriff said going over to flick an ash into the ashtray on the counter, "is I'd formally arrest José over there for assault or for discharging a weapon illegally or something (he shot a man near fatally), and then I'd release him on his own recognizance, or in the custody of his lawyer here" (570).

He is so wrapped up that as he leaves he almost signs the petition (which everyone else who hadn't previously signed it has just finished signing because of Joe's victory).

So Bernabé plays an important part in bringing the community together in action and in triumphing over violence (a miracle with these crazy, drunk, trigger-happy folk), but he cannot quite quit the other side. Even after the "victory" he does not think they'll win. "Bernabé saw no leaders; he had no idea how folks might get themselves together and forge viable new lives" (598). He does not think the bird will fly. Yet, that is what happens. It is not a final victory at the end, but it is a method for action. Bernabé himself raises the important point:

Money, progress, numbers, and the American way of life were on the other side:

Christ, those bastards even controlled the atom bomb--!

And Bernabé knew it was all hopeless.

And then as he calmed down a little he hoped that it wasn't (604).
"These beans have results which are not harvested by me"—Thoreau.

Just as Herbie could never win his battle against nature, the powers that be can never win against a community of people rooted in their land. That is Nichols’ moral. As Joe thinks, "No matter how much you poisoned them, shot them, scared them, trapped them, hated them, caged them, or generally raked over their habitat, you could not entirely kill all the coyotes" (618). But they need to stick together, to remain a community; they need to attach themselves to each other and the land. One way is growing beans; beans which bring more than one result. "Stature. Maybe that’s what Joe felt for the first time in a long time. And maybe that’s what this beanfield could impart to a down-in-the dumps, dog-eared town like Milagro" (162). But this only works if it involves the whole community as a community.

They would harvest them the same way the churches had been built in the old days, with every family contributing some adobe bricks and pitching in with labor so that it was a symbolic labor of all with a part of everyone’s earth in it (606).

So, as in Thoreau’s account, the beanfield becomes a holy place, but more than an individual transcendence happens here: an entire community transcends, is united, and establishes a basis to forge viable new lives.

"It was no longer beans that I hoed, nor I that hoed beans,"—Thoreau.
LITERATURE IN ECOLOGY: THE OUTER RING

Now there is no question that literature can do all this, but there are a lot of questions as to whether it does in fact do it, and how effectively—Ruekert (84).

This discussion of "ecological" comedies and how some may be "better" or "worse" than others begs an important question: does literature, metaphor affect the way people act?

In his article, Ruekert lapses periodically into hopelessness because he answers this question no. He ends his discussion with a question: "How can we turn words into something other than more words?" (85) This is not an unusual question and is fundamentally disturbing. He quotes Barry Commoner's comment: "Unfortunately, this literary heritage has not been enough to save us from ecological disaster" (80).

But the literary heritage he refers to—Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman, Faulkner—is all essentially tragic or pastoral. Melville and Faulkner portray ecological catastrophe as tragedy. Thoreau positions himself outside "corrupting" civilization. James L. Machor points out Whitman's "qualified urban ideal" as an illusory urban pastoral. Since these writers work essentially within the dominant paradigm, they cannot be expected to substantially change the shape of that paradigm. In a sense, they provide a "necessary" Other for the system by criticism of the system from an untenable position on the fringe of the system: sure, anyone living
alone in the woods would say that, but who lives alone in the woods? Sure, this leads to tragedy, but isn’t that where it’s supposed to lead in a tragedy? Commoner’s comment is not so much a condemnation of literature’s powerlessness—as Ruekert takes it to be—as a description of how nineteenth century literature became stuck within the nineteenth century discursive paradigm.

Nevertheless, Ruekert’s point is a strong one. Both Kaufman and Everchdon answer his question (“can literature do this?”) affirmatively. Both demand that literature provide what science hasn’t—something that will prevent/correct our situation.

Most activists in the environmental movement are scientific, sociological, and political activists. ... [T]hey will not change the myths by which man lives. ...The creation of a new, persuasive, and useful self-conception which will be a durable pattern for behavior and survival can only be achieved in the arts (Kaufman, 138).

Kaufman praises writers like Snyder, McClure, Faulkner and Wordsworth. In fact, he is in direct line from Wordsworth, criticising science and praising imagination. He sees science “inevitably” leading to technology, and technology to materialism.

Is it an exaggeration to suggest that one of the sicknesses of Western man is a dangerous degree of mechanical autism? He relates to other men through his
McGrath 55

technology—his car, his house, his electronic sound systems, his power tools, and his vast arsenal of weapons? (147)

His affirmation of literature's strength is simply assumed, however. Also assumed is a conflict between Art and Science. This is not a new idea, nor a new conflict. Meyers details this feud from Arnold and Huxley's time to the present, but it appears in the Romantics and even earlier.

Richard Poirier tells a thorough and interesting version of that story. In a way, it forms a kind of ecological criticism because it poses (allegorically) the "unstable" terms Literature, Technology and People as characters:

Literature is a form of life, among others, and it cannot be demonstrated that it is more morally and ethically enhancing than, say sports or bird-watching. Nor is it observable that those who read and write Literature, especially as a profession, are as a result in any way morally or ethically superior to those who cannot read or write at all. It often seems the reverse is true (62).

This is a detached, ecologist's view of the species literature.

His story of the feud between Literature and Technology shows how the Romantic stand against technology in a sense supported the technological system. Literature's espousal of Technology as a threat "is in part no more than a continuing effort to secure for Literature, and for the written word generally, an immense prestige, and with it an equally immense cultural power and hegemony over the illiterate masses and over the human imagination of itself" (71). Ironically, Literature's demand for a place of
prestige, a place of unavailability, separates it from the cultural power it seeks.

The unavailability of Literature was not a problem, but a social and historical advantage, so long as the small minority, to whom it was available, was also dominant, empowered, and articulate--so much so, that it could determine the shape of culture and of its visible and audible evidences. It also determined what could not be seen or heard (71, emphasis original).

But with the rise of technology (and therefore the rise of ecological impact), the small minority to whom Literature was available was no longer so empowered. As Ruekert says, “Real power in our time is political, economic, and technological; real knowledge is increasingly scientific” (80).

Oddly, Ruekert joins Meeker in bringing science and literature together in the interdisciplinary field of literary ecology. Meeker obviously believes in the impact and import of literature, as do Kaufman and Everchdon, without opposing it to science as they do. It is Drengson, following Kuhn, who explicitly grants great power to literature. He considers scientific paradigms, but as literature:

Humans organize and orient their lives in terms of various ideals, models, symbols, and metaphors. A major function of myth is to weave knowledge, aspirations, and skills together in an intersubjective realm of image and symbol that blends art and science.....In a loose sense dominant paradigms can be forms of mythic understanding (223).
Kaufman also called for a new myth, but he did not unite science and art in myth. Yet, this seems logical. For one thing, the dominant religion of twentieth century America is Science.

Drengson points out the force of this myth in the real world—and its consequences in this particular case:

The sheer intensity of this effort, coupled with the logic of these technologies and their anthropocentric values often seems destined to literalize these metaphors. Thus the Earth comes to be seen as a machine, devoid of consciousness but for humans, and even in humans the methods of empiricist science pass consciousness by, or attempt to technologize it (228-9).

We have seen this in Abbey’s novel, for example. Drengson is explicit in his argument that our “ways of seeing”, and by implication our literature, have an important shaping effect: "We do tend to become captives of our own metaphors and models, just as we do of their associated techniques” (223).

In his book, Joseph Meeker is affirmative, but not so rigid about literature’s direct impact:

It cannot be said that the tragic view of life has caused the ecological crisis; more accurately, the tragic tradition in literature and the disastrous misuse of the world’s resources both rest upon some of the same philosophical ideas. ... Freedom from the need for tragedy is an important precondition for the avoidance of ecological catastrophe (1972, 59).
This stance is reasonable. Even if a particular view of the world does not "cause" the world, we can identify in literary modes the way a culture already deals with the world. Meeker, solid scientist here, carefully distinguishes between literature as cause and literature as correlation.

Ruekert is in the end interested in social praxis:

The central endeavor, then, of any ecological poetics would have to be a working model for the processes of transformation which occur as one moves from the stored creative energy of the poem, to its release by reading, and finally to its application, in an ecological value system...our creation of a fit environment. This work could transform culture and help bring our destruction of the biosphere to an end (84, emphasis mine).

He sees classrooms as places where this energy can be released. And he sees the goal of this release as the building of community. Literature has a purpose: "These motives are not pleasure and truth, but creativity and community" (76). This definition of literature is perhaps a very old one: oral literature, for example, often has such ceremonial purposes.

In his 1977 article, however, Meeker takes a step toward praxis, and therefore responds directly to Ruekert. He offers his metaphor to the scientist and details the various roles given to science--war, search for the holy grail (Truth), a marriage (nature as a woman, to be loved and manipulated--a sexist view of marriage) and so on. He offers in turn a picaro as his model for a scientist. He is on track here because a scientist
takes an individual role (although scientists must work together and share information, so they should not be competing as individuals). It is interesting also that he assumes that scientists choose their roles from outside sources like literature. If they do, and Drengson would agree that they do, and Ruekert is right that "real knowledge is increasingly scientific," then the promotion of an ecological metaphor among scientists would be the first move in creating a new scientific view of the world. The second move would of course be the creation of the ecological comic novel of community action.

**ECOLOGICAL CRITICISM: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

Both Meeker and Reukert suggest that "eco-criticism" should examine the use of biological metaphors in literature. Meeker concentrates on zoological metaphors. Applying them to this study, we can see the three novelists using three different sets of biological metaphors. Steinbeck, as we have mentioned, uses the tidepool as his controlling metaphor, and small sea creatures are the animals he uses. Abbey uses a vulture (or perhaps a virus) as the animal model for his guerilla band, while Nichols uses Leopold's land-as-community, Earth as an organism, model as his metaphor. (He also uses the coyote.)

I have argued that Nichols' model is "better" because it offers activity most like that suggested by Leopold. Now I will suggest that it is also a more accurate description of biological reality. Everchdon, in his article, discusses recent biology and how organisms seem to be colonies, cells or bodies. He cites Lewis Thomas (1974) who also suggests that the most appropriate way
to see the earth is as one large organism. Drengson and Everchdon also suggest this, Everchdon concentrating on the ambiguity of "discrete" organic entities, including human beings: "How can the proper study of man be man if it is impossible for man to exist out of context?" (17)

There are, of course, other biological metaphors that should be examined. Thomas uses vegetable and microbiological metaphors frequently. He suggests in *Late Night Thoughts Listening To Mahler's Ninth Symphony* that Wallace Stevens' "The Man With the Blue Guitar" can be read as being "a tale of the earth" as an organism (1984, 75).

Men have frequently chosen animals as metaphors. These metaphors, however, also change with the cultural attitude toward the animal. The obvious example is the snake which is symbolic of evil for Christians but more ambivalent and even good for other cultures such as Native Americans and Africans. Another highly charged animal is the wolf. More studies along the lines of Barry Lopez's could be done. A prime candidate would be the bear, which is featured in folk tales, Native American stories, Faulkner, other literature and contemporary oral myth in America. Whales are also animals which are frequently used metaphorically, although the degree of variation is less than with bears and wolves. Perhaps that's because, aside from Ahab, few people feel threatened by whales.

There are also other relationships to the environment that need to be explored in literary scholarship. For example, technology is at the base of all human culture; the economy and attitudes toward land and humans are organized around the technology of any culture. Jeremy Rifkin (1980) defines technology as the way in which humans exploit energy. He suggests
that the energy base has a fundamental relationship to the way men view the earth.

Since this is a large-scale view, we must look beyond the common confines of "literature." We can look at oral literature for evidence of pre-neolithic attitudes (although this remains problematic), to early epic poetry for attitudes of earlier farming peoples, and to novels and films for the modern industrial approach to nature.

If—and I fervently hope when—we are moving into a new age, a new paradigm or a new way of seeing, then a new medium will be called for. What that might be is hard to conjecture—and that does not bode well for how near we might be to it. I have only two suggestions. The first is to examine the recent "interactive" literatures: these include a puzzle book I've heard of whose author solicited artistic "versions" of the answer; "Dungeons and Dragons" and certain computer games; and even a mystery book which offered a prize to the person who guessed the right answer. All of these offer a blurring of author and reader and a new definition of literature.

My second nomination, which I have not yet seen but think is sorely needed, is what I call the "appropriate city": urban areas which are works of organic art. They would be integrated into the environment and include wild areas. Whether we can call that literature is a moot point. Whether we can continue as we are without some such drastic change is not.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

A Note on the Editions Used

For this study, I used the following editions of the novels:


Works Consulted


McGrath 63


McGrath 64


Peterson, Levi S. "Tragedy and Western American Literature." Western American Literature. 6.4 (1972): 243-249.


