

PRAGMATIC ECOCRITICISM AND EQUIPMENTS FOR LIVING

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family: my niece, brothers, parents, and especially my grandparents.

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Introduction

In 2007, Neil W. Browne's *The World in Which We Occur* gave ecocritics an in-depth introduction to pragmatic ecocriticism, in this case, an approach to environmental writing informed by John Dewey's theories of aesthetics and participatory democracy. By pairing the works of Dewey and a number of 20th century nature writers, Browne showed how the textual interactions between nature writing and pragmatist philosophy offer a participatory aesthetics and democratic theory capable of breaking down strong dualisms between science and aesthetics, ecology and democracy, and humans and nature. This dissertation also addresses pragmatic ecocriticism, but instead of engaging in detail the work of Dewey, I chose to frame this pragmatic ecocriticism using a more conceptual approach to pragmatism. This framework relies on a number of pragmatist commitments: to contingency, uncertainty, adaptation, experience, and pluralism. Inspired as this research is by Deweyan pragmatism, this framework is less explicitly framed by Dewey's primary texts and more by the secondary scholarship at the intersections of rhetoric, pragmatism, decision-making, and ethics.

Parallel to these theoretical concerns is a desire to seek out texts—primarily works of nonfiction: essays, memoir, science writing, nature writing—that somehow reinforced pragmatism through the commitments named above. Given that environmental writers can be more or less descriptive about their decisions made and actions taken in the face of contingent and uncertain situations, I chose to engage the most explicit and practical of texts. These texts are often more useful to readers encountering similar situations in their own lives, the kind of situations most riddled with ambiguity and

complexity. Simply put, these texts include in their composition what might best be termed “pragmatic narratives,” based on their potential utility to readers. But these narratives are not thereby devoid of aesthetic or literary qualities: they are rarely philosophical and technical arguments for one course of action rather than another. Instead, as narratives, they weave a multiplicity of values, constraints, understandings, estimations, and perspectives into rich stories vibrant with detail and complexity. They may acknowledge their own limits, in scope, relevance, or author’s perspective; they may leave out superfluous and sometimes important details; and they may engage particular audiences while alienating others. But rarely do they proselytize on behalf of absolutist, nature-centered values at the expense of other considerations. And neither should the criticism that engages such pragmatic narratives in environmental writing seek out ecocentric values as the pinnacle of literary accomplishment.

Neil Browne’s critical approach to environmental writing juxtaposes Dewey’s theoretical writing with the texts of nature writers in order to break down dualisms between culture and nature, art and science, aesthetics and politics. The strengths of Browne’s approach lie in his close textual reading of philosophical texts and literary prose. The weaknesses include an overemphasis on the aesthetic at the expense of the ethical aspects of Deweyan pragmatism, and a more theoretical and less practical approach to literature. Drawing insights from rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke—Dewey’s contemporary—and from pragmatist ethical theory, this dissertation offers a different pragmatic critical lens with which to approach environmental writing. This pragmatic ecocriticism begins with Burke’s notion that literature—or other texts of

any sort—be considered “equipment for living” (1941). Within this framework, situations described in a book—such as a writer dealing with an awkward neighbor or a character running low on food while camping—might be termed “in-text situations” based on their construction within a text. Major situations and the grand narratives describing them are simply called “the plot,” but the more specific situations that happen along the way—and what I call “pragmatic narratives” describing them—can influence readers in much the same ways by encouraging readers to reckon with complex and uncertain situations. The following paragraphs outline my basic interpretation of pragmatic ecocriticism, including my approach to rhetoric and decision-making, pragmatic and rhetorical situations, genre, and narrative.

Pragmatism Rhetoric, and Criticism

Seeing texts as tools useful to ethical deliberation does not diminish their literary qualities any more than recognizing the practical importance of solar radiation diminishes the beauty of sunsets. In fact, it is only in theoretical abstractions such as this one that such a distinction is interesting because the sun is responsible for both these qualities, among many others, and correspondingly, a book can be read for pleasure or insight, and few audiences will experience one without the other. Literary texts are both beautiful and useful, but rarely in equal measure, and rarely are such qualities universal or abstract; rather, they are specific to context and audience. For that reason, the critic must make choices which texts to analyze, and based on those decisions, the critic can identify and examine the particular audiences, purposes, and relevant situations.

Similarly, seeing texts as tools or equipment does not mean that all texts are created equally, which is to say, not all are equally useful in every situation. Instead, readers can choose a text most relevant to their interests or particular context, but they can also extend the meaning of a text imaginatively or analogously. In other words, a pregnant woman might read a pregnancy guidebook rather than a field guide to rocks and minerals or fantasy novel, but that is not to say that the fantasy novel is devoid of practical application and extension into the situations encountered in early pregnancy. Extension of a tool's relevance into novel situations and contexts is what is often called "being handy," but readers must refrain from being too handy in order to avoid Abraham Maslow's oft-quoted notion that, "When the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem begins to resemble a nail."

Along these lines, but from an author's perspective rather than a reader's, a nonfiction book's craft—any book's craft for that matter—requires the author to think not just about the in-text situations of characters, but also about the meta-level, or "out-of-text situation" of writing most often called the rhetorical situation.¹ A number of factors constrain an author's approach to writing, and genre is certainly one of them. Whether genre is seen as a taxonomic classification as traditionally defined, as social action responding to similar situations, as Carolyn Miller has argued,² or as following some

¹ Lloyd Bitzer. "The Rhetorical Situation." 1968. reprinted in *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*. Ed. by John Lucaites, Celeste Condit, and Sally Caudill. 1999. Bitzer's "rhetorical situation" refers to how an author responds to a situation as an entry point for communication. See also the same volume for critical responses given to Bitzer's realism, especially those dealing with interpretation of the situation and construction of rhetorical exigence.

² "Genre as Social Action." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. 1984.

tradition of discourse such as nature writing, it seems that any discussion of the rhetorical situation must address genre. Carolyn Miller's thesis itself is quite pragmatic—not just in the practical, but also the scholarly sense—and can function as a starting point for my approach to genre. But John Frow's recent analysis of genre theory in *PMLA* offers not just a wide survey of differing views, but a coherent summary to conclude his essay.³ Here, Frow concludes both that “Genres structure and represent the situations to which texts immediately or mediately respond and organize those responses,” and that “Genres give schematic guidance—which may be disregarded—to the users of texts” (1633). The first of these points connects how genres can be understood as both pragmatic responses to situations and as similar to other texts from a historical perspective based on tradition. The second of these points is an illustration of how texts can be read pragmatically—as offering practical guidance—without looking only for the apparent effects of such texts: readers can respond to the situations described without necessarily making the same decision or taking the same action as the author or characters in a book.

Similarly, the guidance that genre offers must not necessarily be used by an author constructing a text, nor by the audience reading a text. Instead, Frow states, “All texts are informed by generic frameworks; any text may be read through more than one generic frame; many texts participate in multiple genres” (1633). Because of this, I have chosen to critically examine the three focal texts not just as nature writing—the tradition within which they most clearly fall—but through other generic interpretations, which

³ “Reproducibles, Rubrics, and Everything You Need”: Genre Theory Today. *PMLA*. 122: 5 (2007).

may be more or less apt: *The Pine Island Paradox* as the pseudo-genre of beach reading, *Hunting for Hope* as a self-help book, and *Having Faith* as a pregnancy guidebook.

Part of the motivation for this use of genre criticism is playful: seeing what insights these genre classifications might yield. But more importantly, this decision is motivated by the notion that environmental writing must expand beyond the tradition of nature writing if it is to move beyond what M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer call “ecospeak,” a topic described in greater detail in the first chapter. Stated simply, there are two reasons for engaging with nature writing that does not read like traditional nature writing: first, nature writing has a limited audience based on historical contingencies and constraints, including race, class, gender, human-nature relationships; second, even the traditional audiences of nature writing often welcome nature writing dealing with topics besides hikes, cabin-living, and natural history: stories dealing with childbirth, parental bickering, and life in town offer such a respite. In general, the expansion and transformation of the genre, whether by an author or through a critic’s interpretive lens, is something that Frow encourages. Such a pragmatic understanding of genre requires an equally pragmatic approach to the rhetorical elements of a “pragmatic ecocriticism.”

As stated above, the pragmatic ecocriticism developed in this dissertation primarily emphasizes rhetoric (solar radiation) at the expense of literary aesthetics (sunsets), though again, the two are intricately connected. But this metaphor requires two additional clarifications. First, the sunset/solar radiation metaphor obscures the notion that texts are constructed rather than emergent phenomena, which means that critics must

devote some attention to their craft. And second, the rhetorical approach used in this dissertation is of a particular kind. An Aristotelian scholar of rhetoric might read pragmatic narratives and ask: how do writers encourage particular behaviors among readers? A more sophisticated and nuanced approach to such a question might ask how particular audiences respond differently to particular narratives. Yet refining the question further—taking a Burkean approach—involves examining not so much whether a particular narrative convinces readers to act a particular way, but rather whether a text helps readers navigate contingent situations. In other words, it is less important (a) that a reader make the same choice as the author than (b) that a reader thinks through a situation because a text introduced such a situation.⁴

For instance regarding Sandra Steingraber's *Having Faith*, an Aristotelian rhetorical scholar might ask how and whether Steingraber's book persuades readers to have a natural childbirth. A more sophisticated (or sophistic) rhetorical approach might ask how particular audiences might respond in convergent or divergent ways based on the arguments and narratives offered by the author. These two approaches are certainly a part of this research. But a more pragmatic, Burkean approach—like the one developed in this dissertation—asks how such a text can help readers think through the decision of having

⁴ This is not just a new look at an old argument about the benefits of a liberal education in literature, though it is certainly that, too. This insight is based not just on the theories and traditions of pragmatism, but also on cognitive psychology and neuroscience research describing how encountering new ideas and situations rewires the brain. See Jean-Vincent Le Be and Henry Markram. Spontaneous and evoked synaptic rewiring in the neonatal neocortex. *PNAS* 2006 103:13214-13219. For a more approachable summary, see "Rewiring the Mammalian Brain: Neurons Make Fickle Friends" in *Physorg.com*, August 8, 2006. Electronically retrieved (August 2009): <http://www.physorg.com/news74251628.html>.

a natural birth, even if the reader comes to a different conclusion. This is notable because at first glance, a “pragmatic” approach sounds purely results-oriented: was the reader convinced to follow in the author’s footsteps? Another interpretation of “pragmatism” might examine whether the text was crafted in ways that are practical or middle-of-the-road: does the author present “both sides” equally and fairly?

But the “pragmatic” rhetorical criticism developed here is one most concerned with the power of texts as useful tools, inspiring “dramatic rehearsal” in response to situations described by these authors. Readers then think through or work through that situation in their minds, and perhaps (or perhaps not) make the same decision or take the same action when facing a similar situation in their own lives. For this kind of pragmatism, it is less important that a reader have a natural pregnancy than it is for that reader to think about natural pregnancy as an option, albeit one riddled with complexity and ambiguity. More generally, it is important that *Having Faith* assist the reader in that act of moral imagination and deliberation by drawing out those complexities rather than presenting an absolutist point of view. In the end, the extent to which Steingraber is effective at this task is part of what this dissertation will investigate, but another part is the pragmatic narratives themselves, which leads to the final element of this dissertation’s methods: narrative.

As James Phelan writes in *Narrative as Rhetoric* (1996), thinking about narrative and rhetoric involves first discussing the rhetorical dimensions of a text: how the text, character, or author is “telling a particular story to a particular audience in a particular situation for, presumably, a particular purpose” (4), which means focusing on the “teller,

technique, story, situation, audience, and purpose” (4). But Phelan’s own theory of narrative develops over the course of the book, adding complexity to the relationships among the writer, audience, and text. As mentioned above, pragmatic narratives can take place on a grand scale and offer a general plot, theme, or storyline, but more importantly to my project are those narratives that respond to a particular situation—riddled with complexity and uncertainty—and then work through the decisions, considerations, and actions associated with such a narrative. In other words, while recognizing the tight blending of a nonfiction author’s roles as ethical agent and creator of a rhetorical text, I focus on how a particular book or narrative sequence in a book function as equipment for living, thereby expanding a reader’s experience of similar situations and offering a subtle push toward contingent navigation of such situations.

Though the author has the most well-defined relationship with the rhetorical situation of linguistically constructing a pragmatic situation, the text can move the audience to action, and importantly to a specific kind of action: a deliberation or moral imagination called dramatic rehearsal by pragmatist thinkers. Through attention to the larger and smaller scale narratives of a text, a critic can inquire as to how, and the extent to which, such narratives are woven with other stories and texts, and other contexts, whether those of the writer or the readers. Part of the critic’s approach can therefore be comparative—looking at other books and discourse—as a way of pulling apart the different decisions or approaches taken by characters and writers in similar positions. Examining such narrative differences among books of a similar (or in some cases, dissimilar) genre can serve as a proxy for the range of responses taken by readers, and

also help to contextualize a narrative within a rhetorical tradition, in this case, the nature writing tradition.

Though close textual reading has its place in any narrative criticism, the primary analytical scope of this dissertation is more macroscopic, connecting essays to a writer's larger project, and projects to the larger meaning of pragmatism. For that reason, the texts will be examined for their pragmatic commitments, illustrating a skepticism of strong dualisms, highlighting the decisions made and actions taken by these writers of essays and memoirs, and grappling with the relationship of such texts to moral imagination and dramatic rehearsal. Along the way, I reflect on the rhetorical challenges of nature writing that is not quite, or not wholly, nature writing, and how this tradition or genre constrains their texts in ways both unfortunate and important. I call these generic or traditional pressures unfortunate because they can limit the audience of such books, and have certainly already shaped or limited the authors of such books (nature writers are not all that common, nor are they a diverse bunch), but the desire to expand the nature writing genre to address more than memoir, personal reflection, and natural history is certainly a positive motivational force. I also identify how the authors construct their books in implicit accord with pragmatism, but also where a more explicit or self-aware pragmatism might be appropriate.

All of these topics—texts interpreted instrumentally (as tools/equipment), the rhetorical and pragmatic situations of authors, characters, and readers, and the relationship of these to genre and narrative theory—frame my approach to pragmatic ecocriticism, but even more so, the ideas developed in the first and second chapters offer

a more thorough investigation both of ecocriticism (Chapter 1), and pragmatism and rhetoric (Chapter 2). Just as importantly, the three analysis chapters of literary nonfiction books illustrate and extend these ideas in practice, showing how pragmatic ecocriticism works with respect to texts chosen at the outset for their pragmatic potential, which is not necessarily the same as their pragmatic power, both because of the difficulties of reaching large audiences and because of the difficulties of rhetorically constructing a pragmatic text, for certain readers, for certain purposes, and in certain situations. But this dissertation primarily concerns the potential of pragmatic ecocriticism and the potential of pragmatic environmental writing that ruffles the nature writing genre and foregrounds decisions, actions, and moral imagination in the context of complex social-environmental situations.

The importance of such a dissertation can be traced to a number of places, the first of which is how well pragmatism can be used to explain and further examine common disagreements in the environmental humanities. One example of this point is the potential for a rhetoric of adaptive management to complement the precautionary rhetoric described by Amy Patrick as a response to crisis rhetoric.⁵ Another example of pragmatism's importance to ecocriticism is the parallel of contemporary ecocritical discussions to public scholarly differences of the past, including the "so-called debate"

⁵ Though Patrick's dissertation develops this topic in greater detail, the essay "Apocalyptic of Precautionary: Revisioning Texts in Environmental Literature" in *Coming into Contact* (2007) offers a brief explanation. Chapter 2 investigates how pragmatism reframes environmental crisis and ecospeak, as does Chapter 5.

between John Dewey and Walter Lippmann taking place in the 1920s.⁶ A third recent instance found within the (more) popular conscience is the ongoing debate between two of the most read environmental bloggers—Andrew Revkin of the *New York Times* and David Roberts of *Grist.org*—over the meaning of pragmatism on the topic of climate change policy.⁷ Where Revkin sees “pragmatism,” Roberts rightfully sees centrist agreement in research and development investments, but beyond that, only a rhetoric of “criticizing their own side” and “disavowing extremism” exists whereas pragmatism has a “bias toward ‘variability, initiative, innovation, departure from routine, experimentation,’ in pragmatist John Dewey's words.”⁸ In other words, this dissertation addresses both scholarly and popular discussions of environmental rhetoric and pragmatism.

Organization and Argument

Developing a kind of pragmatic ecocriticism takes two general approaches in this dissertation. The first section is devoted to the development of a theoretical and critical

⁶ I say “so-called” because the extent to which the intellectual dispute between Dewey and Lippmann can be called a debate is under some scholarly revision. Here I am referencing the 2009 Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) Conference, where plenary speakers Greg Garrard and Cate Mortimer-Sandilands debated the contemporary relevance and future directions of environmental literary criticism, or ecocriticism.

⁷ A number of blog entries are relevant here, including Roberts’ “NYT’s Andy Revkin pens another stinker on the so-called ‘center’ of the climate debate” from November 14, 2007, in which he links to the other relevant posts. Electronically retrieved, August 1, 2009 at www.grist.org/article/centrist-dog-food.

⁸ This quote is from David Roberts’ “Progressivism is Pragmatism,” published on the *Huffington Post* website, December 16, 2008, and electronically retrieved August 1, 2009: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-roberts/progressivism-is-pragmati_b_151560.html.

framework distinct from that offered by Browne. The second section uses that framework to examine three texts of environmental writing. Each section has a purpose within the environmental humanities, and the two build on each other as I work to develop an approach to pragmatic ecocriticism firmly grounded in rhetoric and ethics.

In Part I, I argue that pragmatism and rhetoric together offer ecocriticism a useful and insightful framework. The minimal depth of scholarship combining these two areas in the field of literature and the environment betrays a weakness beyond the ways mentioned above, because ecocentric values and a focus on crisis distract from another way that environmental writing influences its readers, namely through what is called moral imagination and dramatic rehearsal. Chapter 1 addresses this shortcoming through a brief discussion of common ecocritical lenses, including the search for nature awareness, examinations of ecocentric values, and the question of dwelling in crisis. Troublingly, Frederick Buell's analysis of crisis-as-dwelling sets environmental crisis as the setting rather than as the action, development, or plot. This chapter identifies some of the pitfalls of such approaches, such as the potential for texts to further alienate and polarize readers in what is sometimes called "ecospeak." This chapter's primary argument is that another approach to ecocriticism—what Ben Minteer calls the "third way" of American pragmatism—is warranted, and that crisis-dwelling should be an active, imaginative process rather than a place.

In Chapter 2 the development of a pragmatic ecocriticism along three lines of scholarship can be seen as a response to the first chapter's identified shortcomings of ecocriticism. Each of these three approaches offers a pathway toward a pragmatic

ecocriticism framed around Kenneth Burke's notion of "literature as equipment for living" and Deweyan pragmatist ethics. The first is a consideration of the intersection of rhetoric and pragmatism, particularly with regard to communication and discourse. Beyond sharing many of the same general commitments, Burke's rhetoric and Dewey's pragmatism mesh well in both their theories of communication and of ethics, even if the two had some political disagreements. The second pathway is an examination of pragmatic decision-making in the political sphere, particularly with regard to environmental issues, known widely as adaptive management. While at first glance adaptive management appears not to be related to individual decision-making, the field serves as a model or analogue for individual deliberative activity, and thereby opens creates space for the role of literary nonfiction in such behavior.⁹ The final pathway brings this political realm of decision-making back to the personal with an examination of pragmatist ethics and speculation into the role texts may have in such ethical systems. Discussions of moral imagination, dramatic rehearsal, and deliberation among Deweyan ethics scholars offer room to make such a connection, yet little scholarly activity has worked to push these connections. In a way, Chapter 2 connects these rhetorical and pragmatic frameworks, along with the political and personal spheres of decision-making and deliberation in order to make Burke's notion into a more robust framework.

Part II builds on this framework through explicit engagement with three books of environmental nonfiction writing, each chosen in order to highlight their potential for a

⁹ Interestingly, this sets up a parallel between the work of ecocritics Daniel Payne (1996) and Daniel Philippon (2004), whose books describe how environmental texts can influence political action and decision-making.

pragmatist reading. This means that at the outset, a deliberate choice was made to work with books that seemed to offer a more pragmatic approach to writing about environmental issues, not unlike choosing to look for biodiversity in a remnant prairie rather than an asphalt parking lot or cornfield. This is not to say that texts apparently less pragmatic cannot be read with the framework I am constructing: looking for plants in a parking lot is a worthwhile pursuit, but often the results are limited. Moreover, the interpretive quality of texts as opposed to species presence makes this an imperfect analogy, but for now, the point is just that these texts were chosen quite deliberately, and that these texts share a coherence as literary nonfiction in the nature writing tradition, however much they can be said to push the tradition in new directions.

Chapter 3 examines Kathleen Dean Moore's *The Pine Island Paradox*, a collection of nature writing essays, written by a philosopher. Given her full-time job, it is small wonder her interests lie in ethics and philosophy, and her largest commitments include a feminist ethic of care and the environmental ethics of Aldo Leopold. Yet, Moore's decision-making and actions share much with pragmatist philosophy, and her training as an analytical philosopher makes the book very explicit in its reasoning, analysis, and commitments. Moore's metaphorical choices serve to break down strong dualisms often built up by western philosophy, and her narratives recognize the complexity and uncertainty of actions, even while demonstrating a high level of devotion to ethics, a sign that pragmatism's attention to complexity need not be equated with relativism or apathy. Specifically, Moore explains the complexity of her decisions regarding where to live and what to do with her property in pragmatic narratives of city

inhabitation, ecological restoration, and capacity building. I call *Pine Island* a book of “beach reading” given that her writing style is easy reading, framed around her time visiting a remote Alaskan beach during her summer vacations. While there is no well-defined beach reading genre, the accessibility of the text makes it a good entry point for pragmatic ecocriticism.

Chapter 4 explores *Hunting for Hope* by Scott Russell Sanders, an essay collection by an established nature writer working to reconcile his differences with his son Jesse. Set in the larger context of social-environmental crisis, but also the more immediate uncertainty of interpersonal relationships and anxiety, *Hunting for Hope* can be called a self-help book of sorts, describing Sanders’ efforts to make peace with his son and himself by explaining the good things in life. Though a welcome effort at reconciliation in the face of conflicting worldviews, Sanders’ narrative could go further in the direction of pragmatic commitments including adaptation and contingency, and the essays themselves could move further beyond the nature writing tradition of Thoreau. Sanders does, however, offer an important alternative to Thoreau in the sense that he wrestles with contemporary social-environmental crisis, life in community rather than at Walden Pond, and the personal anxieties and interpersonal conflicts that crisis and other worldviews can inspire. While limited in depth and scope, the unfinished narrative of reconciliation offers an important alternative to absolutist worldviews and the polarizing potential of well-trodden paths of environmentalism. Sanders may not be the one to offer a full narrative of reconciliation—and thereby the kind of self-help book needed by the environmental movement—but he is on the right track, and remains a thoughtful essayist.

Chapter 5 completes the bulk of the dissertation with an examination of the most complex and involved book, Sandra Steingraber's *Having Faith*, a mix of memoir and science writing on the environmental aspects of pregnancy and childbirth. As a pregnancy guidebook or maternal memoir, the scientific details and environmental issues are nearly overwhelming. As a book of science or environmental writing, the personal details can distract from the larger purpose. And as a pragmatic text, *Having Faith*'s problem may be that it tries to do too much: too much science, too many personal details, too big of metaphorical leaps, too many pages; in short, too much for most readers to handle. But Steingraber also accomplishes something few would even try, crafting a book of nature writing, environmental writing, science writing, social and medical history, and memoir wrapped into one volume. *Having Faith* explores the human-environment connection, the complex and uncertain decisions parents face,¹⁰ and the interactions of private-public social-environmental issues that require both personal and political decisions. And the book is profound, addressing all these in great detail, though it is at times exhausting (and thereby may not be the best pregnancy guidebook). Steingraber may lose some of her audience by her own too much, and her readers may struggle at times to stick with the book, but what *Having Faith* offers to a larger understanding of pragmatic environmental writing and ecocriticism is sizable, even in its limitations.

The framework developed in Part I and the ecocritical examinations offered in Part II are neither empirical in a social scientific sense, nor exhaustive in an interpretive

¹⁰ These decisions are unpacked in detail, accomplishing what I consider the pragmatic task of writing, even if the choices Steingraber makes are different from those of the reader. In such cases, it takes a pragmatic reading such as that described here to complete the writer-text-reader relationship of pragmatic interpretation.

or speculative sense. Issues of genre, readership, and extensibility (similarity of situations and the role of moral imagination) all remain as continued frontiers of scholarship. But this dissertation seeks only to offer an approach to ecocriticism that is pragmatic and rhetorical, that integrates Burke's notion of textual instrumentality into a Deweyan ethical framework, and that considers how authors construct narratives that might help readers better navigate the complexity and uncertainty of situations having a multiplicity of social and environmental factors, that are characterized best by pragmatist frameworks and commitments. Through the following theoretical examination and textual criticism, I offer an introductory exposition to pragmatic ecocriticism that builds on the ecocritical scholarship of Slovic, Browne, Philippon, and Patrick through an extension of Dewey and Burke.

Chapter 1: Reframing Ecocritical Scholarship

The central argument of the first two chapters of this dissertation is that a pragmatist approach to environmental rhetoric and criticism reframes many widely held views of environmental writing, literature, and public discourse, and thereby forces scholars to rethink their approaches to texts inside the nature writing tradition and beyond. Simply put, pragmatic approaches to texts first look for pluralism of values and worldviews rather than nature-centered values in solitary wilderness narratives. Second, pragmatic ecocriticism foregrounds complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity at the expense of simplistic dichotomies and dualisms. Third, these ecocritical approaches offer novel insight into the experiential narratives of writers and characters, especially those who must navigate complex situations and make decisions in the face of uncertainty. Ecocritics such as Daniel Philippon already recognize the effects of environmental writing as part of an “ecology of influence,”¹¹ yet for most scholars, the question of “how texts influence readers” still presupposes an attention to awareness of nature or environmental crisis, or the cultivation of nature-centered values. I argue that environmental writing may assist readers facing complex and uncertain decisions and actions, possibly even shaping reader responses to such situations. Without explicitly investigating the mechanism of such effects in a social scientific way, I offer interpretations of this “text-reader-world” relationship, bringing discussions of moral imagination and Kenneth Burke’s “literature as equipment for living” to bear on environmental discourse. In the end I argue that rather than developing scholarly

¹¹ Philippon (2004) addresses this “ecology of influence” in his Introduction.

explications of ecocentric values or apocalyptic tropes, pragmatism can refocus the academic enterprise of ecocriticism in the following ways:

- (a) **exploring pragmatist commitments**: taking uncertainty, contingency, and pluralism as starting assumptions; encouraging skepticism of dualisms and strong distinctions, especially in the realm of value centrality and moral absolutism;
- (b) **reframing environmental discourse**, particularly that which pertains to crisis-talk and that which polarizes and alienates particular viewpoints; by instead
- (c) **engaging more robustly “rhetorical equipments for living”**: focusing attention on the ways that texts might help readers navigate complex and uncertain decisions and actions in the face of competing interests, values, pressures, understandings, and speculations.

Because engaging texts more pragmatically can take a number of approaches, I examine this ambiguity and clarify which approaches might offer more useful and appropriate directions for both ecocritical and environmental communication scholarship. While the above arguments are developed in Chapters 3-5, the remainder of this chapter and the next tell one story of environmental humanities scholarship and present a case for the dissertation’s importance to a number of disciplines.

Therefore, I situate my work—and structure the remainder of Chapters 1 and 2—in relation to ongoing discussions in the following areas: the role of ecocentrism and awareness in ecocriticism; questions of ecospeak and environmental crisis in environmental communication scholarship; the relationships of pragmatist philosophy and rhetoric; and the role pragmatic ecocriticism might play in environmental ethics and decisionmaking. For the sake of clarity, I structure the first two chapters by pairing these questions with focal scholars and scholarship in the field, thereby supporting why a shift to pragmatist ecocriticism is fruitful to environmental humanities scholarship. Table 1

offers a simplified look at the organization of these two chapters, along with offering a bird's-eye view of the dissertation project.

Table 1: Situating Pragmatic Ecocriticism and Equipments for Living		
Previous Scholarship	Previous Work	Pragmatic Ecocriticism
Lawrence Buell's <i>Environmental Imagination</i>	Explores ecocentricity, or nature-centered values, found in nature writing	Moves beyond ecocentricity and considers the plurality of social-environmental values
Scott Slovic's <i>Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing</i>	Concerned with nature writing's role in advancing particular types of awareness of the natural world	Concerned less with awareness of nature/issues and more with decisions and actions in the face of uncertainty
Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer's <i>Ecospeak</i>	Identifies the problem of ecospeak where people are alienated and polarized by discourse petrified by ideology	Moves beyond ecospeak to engage the complexity of environmental values and understandings in individuals and communities
Bryan Norton's <i>Toward Unity Among Environmentalists</i>	Explores the middle ground of environmental action between preservation and rampant use	Offers an in-depth look at how individuals negotiate this middle ground in their experiences and writing
Frederick Buell's <i>From Apocalypse to Way of Life</i>	Title says it all: argues that crisis discourse has evolved, becoming commonplace and pervasive	Rather than crisis or apocalypse, focuses on "ways of life" and examines the narratives of this navigation
Robert Danisch's <i>Pragmatism, Democracy, and the Necessity of Rhetoric</i>	Identifies how rhetoric, when combined with pragmatism can enrich community and democracy	Extends the discussion of pragmatism and rhetoric into environmental writing and decisionmaking
Bryan Norton's <i>Sustainability</i> and Kai Lee's <i>Compass and Gyroscope</i>	Examines the role of adaptive management and public participation in political environmental decisionmaking	Takes these insights and translates them into the realm of personal decision-making and literature, with the help of the scholars below
Kenneth Burke's "Literature as Equipment for Living" in <i>The Philosophy of Literary Form</i>	Identifies one way literary texts can function pragmatically as "equipment for living," similar to proverbs and other conventional wisdom	Develops into a "pragmatic narrative criticism," a framework examining ways texts can help readers navigate complex social-environmental decisions
Mark Johnson's <i>Moral Imagination</i> and Steven Fesmire's <i>John Dewey and Moral Imagination</i>	Examines the cognitive science (former) and Deweyan (latter) approaches to ethics and decisionmaking	Explores the role of rhetoric, texts, and literature in dramatic rehearsal and decisionmaking

Genre and Ecocriticism: Ecocentrism and Awareness in Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* and Slovic's *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing*

In this section, I characterize the field of ecocriticism and examine whether searches for environmental awareness and nature-centered values—or ecocentrism—offer a scope wide enough for ecocritical perspectives. To do so, I discuss Scott Slovic's *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* (1992) and Lawrence Buell's three ecocritical texts, arguing that awareness and ecocentrism, while important, overlook key approaches to ecocritical inquiry in the realm of what might be called pragmatic ecocriticism.

According to Cheryll Glotfelty (1996), ecocriticism is “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies” (xviii).¹² Yet as Patrick Murphy (2000) reminds us, “Ecocriticism can be employed in studying any literary work insofar as that work reveals or reflects something about nature and humanity's place in, with, or against it” (1). Murphy cautions that while American ecocritical scholarship may have sprung from in-depth discussions of natural history essays—often termed “nature writing”—scholars should not forget that other forms of nature-oriented literature did not all descend from natural history essays (2). In fact,

¹² Cheryll Glotfelty. “Introduction.” *The Ecocriticism Reader*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. 1996.

Murphy offers some structural clarity to the field by separating what might be termed nature- and environment-oriented writing and literature. The “nature” and “environmental” labels signify an orientation to natural history, wildlife, and wilderness (the former) or sustainability, toxicity/pollution, and crisis (the latter) while the “writing” and “literature” signify essays, nonfiction, and first-person narrative (the former) and poetry, fiction, imagery, and plot (the latter). As is often the case, the distinctions blend in various ways, but Murphy’s analysis provides a useful framework with which to approach texts in the field of ecocriticism (5-11), one which can be codified further and filled in as necessary. The extent to which the approaches to pragmatic ecocriticism examined herein can be used to consider texts outside the environmental writing genre is addressed in the final chapter. For now, it is enough to note that the focal texts examined here in this dissertation fall within the “writing” genre more so than the literary, and that they blend “nature” and “environmental” writing in interesting ways, a topic for the following chapters.

Having described a few simple ways to understand environmentally oriented texts themselves, along with giving a definition of ecocritical scholarship, I move now to characterizing in broad strokes and criticizing in a friendly manner the general approach of ecocritics to texts. Specifically, I distinguish this dissertation’s project from that of Scott Slovic’s awareness-oriented ecocriticism and Lawrence Buell’s ecocentrism-oriented scholarship. Whether viewed as a research gap to be bridged or a more serious issue concerning trajectories of scholarship, there remains only limited attention given to

the ways in which pragmatism might foster the growth and development of ecocritical theory and practice.

Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2004), an overview and introduction to the field, identifies seven tropes, or frames scholars might use to explore the environmental dimensions of texts. Yet the one chapter on "Positions" (16-32) that considers the internal heterogeneity of perspectives on environmental humanities is interesting for two reasons. First, Garrard—knowingly or not—takes the two approaches to literature mentioned by Glotfelty above (feminism and Marxism) and explains how (among others) there are Ecofeminist and Social Ecological (Eco-Marxist) approaches to texts. The meanings here transcend mere coincidence, demonstrating instead a heterogeneous field of scholarly approaches to texts. Second and more importantly, the fact that Garrard includes these perspectives (along with Deep Ecology and Eco-phenomenology), yet does not include environmental pragmatism or pragmatic ecocriticism indicates a missing perspective on texts, notable in the work of other scholars.

Lawrence Buell has published three books on the topic of ecocriticism, moving from more historical nature writing in the tradition of Thoreau (*The Environmental Imagination*, 1995) to more contemporary efforts at environmental writing (*Writing for an Endangered World*, 2001) and even into *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), yet like Garrard, in none of these studies does he examine the relationship of pragmatist thought to environmental writing. Buell (1995) frames his research in the context of exploring "the environmental imagination" and sets forth the following task:

If, as environmental philosophers contend, western metaphysics and ethics need revision before we can address today's environmental problems, then

environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity's relation to it (2).

Glotfelty echoes Buell's hopes for the field, arguing that "literary scholars specialize in questions of value, meaning, tradition, point of view, and language, and it is in these areas that they are making a substantial contribution to environmental thinking" (xxii).

Given that this dissertation asks how pragmatism might better inform ecocriticism, it is worth noting that American pragmatist thinkers (and doers) from the late 19th and 20th centuries began contending with western metaphysics and ethics in ways quite relevant to the amelioration of social—and more recently environmental—problems. In the meantime, my contention is the following: to Glotfelty's list of what literary scholars might contribute to environmental scholarship, a pragmatist perspective agrees that attention be given to questions of meaning and value. Yet I would widen the scope of scholarly attention to include questions regarding how particular literary elements—metaphors, narratives, etc.—might help people better navigate the complex and uncertain terrain of environmental crisis generally, and the situations they face specifically. In fact, following some environmental philosophy scholars, I would argue that placing too much attention on environmental values at the expense of a more pragmatic framework distracts from the critical insights found in environmental writing and literature. Scott Slovic's *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* (1992) fails to go far enough (beyond awareness to decisions and actions), and Lawrence Buell (1995) focuses too much on ecocentricity at the expense of a richer attention to pragmatist narratives.

Scott Slovic frames *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* (1992)

around the idea of awareness, a psychological topic (rather than moral, i.e. ecocentrism).

Slovic describes the role of nature writers as,

Constantly probing, traumatizing, thrilling, and soothing their own minds—and by extension those of their readers—in quest not only of consciousness itself, but of an understanding of consciousness. Their descriptions of this exalted mental condition tend to be variable and elusive, their terminologies more suggestive than definitive. Thoreau himself (drawing upon classical sources and daily cycles for his imagery) favors the notion of “awakening”; Dillard and Abbey use the word “awareness” to describe this state, though for Dillard such activities as “seeing” and “stalking” are also metaphors for stimulated consciousness; Berry, at least in his major essay “The Long-Legged House” (1969), emphasizes “watchfulness” as a condition of profound alertness; and for Lopez, two complementary modes of “understanding” natural places, the “mathematical” and especially the “particularized” (or experiential)—serve as keys to mental elevation (3).

Slovic’s psychological ecocritical framework—awareness, consciousness, and understanding—shares with Buell an attention to how we understand the more-than-human world. More interesting to this project, however, is how Slovic frames his work around the psychological theories of perception (and experience) developed by pragmatist philosopher and psychologist William James (7). Slovic even goes so far as to identify Dillard as a “hybrid—if we were to push this hypothetical lineage to absurdity—of Thoreau and William James,” with both investigating human consciousness (9).

Though these lines of analysis could continue, the simple message is that Slovic’s psychological ecocriticism is pragmatist in origins, yet is altogether focused on how writers and readers of environmental literature expand their consciousness and understanding of the world around them in ways that are at times more scientific and at

others more aesthetic. But while this awareness—even “public awareness”—can lead to action, it is at best a good first step. In his Coda (167-186), Slovic acknowledges the limitations of awareness (169-170) and reinforces the role that ecocritics can and should work to have in the face of environmental crisis (170-171), without the need for indoctrination: just encouraging students to have “thoughts, period. Any thoughts” rather than the “right thoughts” (171).

I would argue that Slovic’s awareness—interpreted richly—is one entry point into what pragmatism offers ecocritical studies, but also that pragmatism can interpret literary and rhetorical texts as more than “awareness-raising” tools, which may help readers think through complex and uncertain situations of which they now have some awareness. In a way, this is how I choose to interpret Lawrence Buell’s efforts to examine Americans’ “environmental imaginations,” but I would caution against Buell’s incorporation of the framework of “ecocentricity” as a way of approaching these environmental imaginations based on the following analysis.

The most important point to recognize throughout the following discussion is that of correctives. What Buell and other environmental scholars and writers strive to do is to increase awareness and understanding of, value of and care for the nonhuman world. Rather than thinking in the conventional scholarly language of “first wave,” I prefer the term “first corrective” for this work. The “second corrective” then includes the work of those writers and scholars working to increase awareness and understand of, value of and care for humans and nonhumans in all their richness and relationships. Illustrating this point by putting scholarship into artificial boxes, I would put Buell’s *The Environmental*

Imagination (1995) in the “first corrective” box (with Thoreau, Muir, The Wilderness Act, etc.) and Buell’s *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001) in the “second corrective” box (with Leopold, Carson, Cronon, and Jenny Price’s “Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.”). Conceived as pressures or “forcings,”¹³ writers and scholars push their audiences in particular directions to correct oversights and inconsistencies.

Ecocentrism is a shorthand form of nature-centered, ecosystem-centered, or even earth-centered values and ethics. Like its negatively-defined twin “non-anthropocentrism,” ecocentrism can be generally understood in the following way: while ethical systems are socially constructed¹⁴ and therefore anthropogenic,¹⁵ these ethical systems and value theories need not understand all values as instrumental (or means) to a human’s intrinsic values and interests (or ends). A variety of distinctions, dichotomies, and dualisms derive from this simple point and tend to pop up in a variety of places in environmental humanities scholarship, with the “environmental turn” in moral philosophy being to advocate for intrinsic value in the nonhuman, natural world. But there exists a certain level of ambiguity in this characterization, so what does ecocriticism mean? Or following communication studies scholar Edward Schiappa (2003), a better question to ask might be, “how do people use ecocentrism to convey meanings in particular contexts?” To understand ecocentrism’s meanings, I consider first Lawrence

¹³ Analogous to climatology’s “radiative forcing.”

¹⁴ At least, I would argue this is so in most meaningful ways. It isn’t difficult to understand how a nonhuman might value someone or something, or even have a kind of ethical theory inherent in that nonhuman’s behavior, but discussions of this sort run into problems of projection, anthropomorphizing, and complexity on levels far beyond the scope of my discussions here.

¹⁵ Derived from humans, by humans, and for humans.

Buell's use of the word, and how his use and meaning changes over time; second, how discussions in environmental philosophy have approached the topic of anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism; and third, what the effects might be if ecocriticism searches primarily for ecocentrism in its strongest interpretation.

Lawrence Buell frames his ecocritical lens regarding *The Environmental Imagination* as a search for ecocentric values in American literature. In his subsequent books *Writing for an Endangered World* and *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), Buell problematizes, develops, clarifies, and perhaps weakens his ecocentrism, mirroring in many ways the same patterns of scholarship in environmental ethics and philosophy between strong non-anthropocentrists (such as Callicott or Rolston) and weak anthropocentrists (including Norton or Light). If the specific meanings of ecocentrism can be characterized in one of the following three formulations below, then Buell wisely avoids the first, and avoids the second in favor of a clearer approach similar to the third as he refines and develops his scholarly trilogy. **Ecocentrism's ethical formulations** include: (a) **de-centered**: being ecocentric means there is no central subject, just relationships among organisms, and therefore no center at all in moral deliberation; (b) **strong**: an ethical system that considers the whole ecosphere as the unit of moral consideration at the expense of human interests; or (c) **weak**: an ethical system that sees ecosystems and other "wholes" (communities, landscapes, species, populations) as worthy of consideration in ethical thinking and action. De-centered ethical systems, however consistent they might be with quantum physics, are not entirely useful to any ethical decision-making. Strong ecocentrism is "systems-based" and finds some history

in Leopold's land ethic and Callicott's philosophy, but more development in the writing of Edward Abbey. Weak ecocentrism allows for ecosystemic values, concerns, cares, and ethics to include nonhumans, but does not require that the interests of ecosystems somehow be considered at the expense of human interests. But the question remains: if Buell pushes for a weak ecocentrism at the expense of the first two formulations, has he misused the ecocentrist label or missed something else important?

In the first endnote of *The Environmental Imagination*, Buell grapples with the meaning of ecocentrism, offering a full page of citations for his choice of words, following primarily in the path of environmental management scholar Timothy O'Riordan. Buell is thereby able to avoid corralling his view of ecocentrism into the "strong" formulation and, quoting O'Riordan, conceive of ecocentrism as preaching "the virtues of reverence, humility, responsibility, and care" (425). Yet Buell's ecocriticism in 1995 first examines the relinquishment of goods and thereby consumption (144) and the relinquishment of self and thereby autonomy, plot, character, persona, and narrative consciousness (144-145), and later the ascription of personhood to nature (180-218). Though both of these critical approaches are sophisticated and complex, his attention to the textual ensures that the effects of this ecocentrism remain hard to gauge outside of the theoretical.

In short, Buell appears more interested in weak ecocentrism and therefore does not appear to be searching for Edward Abbey-esque ecocentric ideology (where human interests are of less concern than those of ecosystems and the world). But **three concerns** emerge: **first**, to what extent is Buell's work focused on the common or

theoretical meaning of ecocentrism (is weak ecocentrism really ecocentrism at all?); **second**, Buell seems to avoid the stronger interpretation of ecocentrism, but if the literary texts he engages have had a strong-ecocentric effect on the American environmental imagination—influencing not just the writing but the actions of such individuals as Edward Abbey, Dave Foreman, and David Brower)—then has Buell missed part of the relationship of ecocentric literature and environmental imagination; and **third**, with all due respect: if the environmental imagination of many Americans has to struggle to keep pace with, respond to, and/or build on Buell’s wide-ranging and very creative literary criticism, then in what ways and to what extent are his analyses all that useful?

In his second and third books of ecocriticism, Buell works vigorously to clarify, develop, and in so doing, perhaps back away from his earlier search for ecocentrism, whether it is the term itself, or the kind of environmental imagination ecocentrism spawns. In the Introduction to *Writing for an Endangered World*, Buell takes seriously the limitations of his earlier work and ecocentrism, stating,

My previous book, *The Environmental Imagination*, centered on an attempt to define “ecocentric” forms of literary imagining, as instanced especially by nature writing in the Thoreauvian tradition. I continue to believe that reorientation of human attention and values according to a stronger ethic of care for the nonhuman environmental would make the world a better place, for humans as well as for nonhumans. Pressing that argument, however, meant understating the force of such anthropocentric concerns as public health and environmental equity as motivators of environmental imagination and commitment. To those living in endangered communities, the first environmental priorities will understandably be health, safety, and sustenance, and as guarantors of these the civic priorities of political and economic enfranchisement. This is not to countenance the charge of “(eco)fascism” sometimes leveled against ecocentrism’s in-principle valuation of ecosystemic concerns relative to human rights and needs, its alleged link to Nazism, and so forth. Such claims oversimplify the diversity of actual ecocentric positions,

exaggerate their authoritarianism, and proffer a cartoon version of Nazis as Greens... environmentalism of any sort cannot hope to achieve even modest reforms unless *some* take extreme positions advocating genuinely alternative paths; rejection of consumer society, communitarian antimodernism, animal liberation...

Yet it remains that human beings cannot be expected to live by ecocentrism alone, any more than most “Puritans” were in real life altogether consistent in their Puritanism... (6-7)

Buell does indeed investigate the very complexities of pluralistic environmental concerns, juxtaposing ecocentric and anthropocentric reasoning most clearly in Chapter 7 (225-242). Here, he considers the “question of the relative claims of an anthropocentric or humankind-first ethics versus a nonanthropocentric or ecosystem-first ethics of whatever kind,” recognizing how environmental ethicists have searched out, or in some cases churned out, a “veritable cottage industry of adjudication discourse” (227). While working to mediate—or I might say navigate and negotiate—these kinds of literatures and issues, Buell’s work really becomes interesting (and actually easier to follow for those not steeped in literary theory).

In his third book (2005), also the smallest of the three and focused on the future of ecocritical scholarship, Buell recognizes how ecocritical scholarship has responded to the “second corrective” of social-environmental concerns. To a small degree, he laments the passing of ecocentric ecocriticism, stating that, “What initially made ecocriticism most distinctive from both a disciplinary standpoint and from the standpoint of mainstream, commonsense opinion—and for many still does—was its ecocentric face” (98). This was done by engaging texts that offered “suppression (if not downright reproach) of anthropocentrism” (99). But ecofeminist and environmental justice movements like those he engaged in 2001 have pushed ecocriticism toward the more “sociocentric path”

(111) of ecocriticism to engage the human elements (108-128). In a way, the “first corrective” of ecocriticism had to push literary (and other humanities) scholarship toward environmental issues, but the “second corrective”—to engage social-environmental issues in their complexity, uncertainty, and heterogeneity—is just as necessary, and it does seem to me to be part of the future of environmental criticism.

Yet this discussion of centrality in values, ethics, and worldviews seems to me a distraction from the overall goal of ecocritical scholarship: understanding how literature and other discourse might influence and even shape people’s relationships to each other and the rest of the world, and the decisions they make or the actions they take in regard to these varied relationships. Whether particular values are ecocentric or anthropocentric says more about theory (and perhaps helps scholars to develop conceptual frameworks for ethics), but less about practice and on-the-ground ethics and deliberation. In fact, like many distinctions-turned-dualisms, the ecocentric/anthropocentric distinction may in fact be distracting attention from other areas of inquiry.

As Andrew Light has summarized (2002),¹⁶ scholars in environmental ethics (and to a far lesser, yet still important sense ecocriticism, as the above summaries of Buell indicate) could be doing more to address real-world and practical manifestations of environmental crisis rather than spending so much time arguing about value theory. Light does not advocate eliminating the theoretical debates that in many cases help

¹⁶ It is worth noting that Light, like Glotfelty, Buell, and most of the other scholars referenced in this chapter, sees environmental philosophy as an applied field concerned with responding to environmental crisis, and he takes a more activist approach similar to that offered by Cox (2007) and in opposition to the more investigative approach endorsed by Slovic (1992).

people understand, resolve, or at least address environmental issues (such as ecocentrism/anthropocentrism), but he does hope more work might be done to address two “unfortunate results: (1) debates about the value of nature as such have largely excluded discussion of the beneficial ways in which arguments for environmental protection can be based on human interests, and relatedly (2) the focus on somewhat abstract concepts of value theory has pushed environmental ethics away from discussion of which arguments morally motivate people to embrace more supportive environmental views” (427). Light is pushing philosophers toward both rhetoric (motivation) and pragmatism (practical orientation with theory taking a secondary role), topics discussed in Chapter 2. The extent to which scholars emphasize the activist and/or investigator roles in their work is certainly up for debate, but the kind of meta-level (though very practical) call is this: rather than working to theorize the differences between ecocentrism and anthropocentrism (or other such distinctions), digging right in and examining the multiplicity of reasons, values, cares, and interests in particular cases is something that scholars would do well to try.

But using a different pragmatic lens to address this topic, and a lens related to Light’s second unfortunate result above, there is a potential that ecocentrism—as something to be encouraged, but also something remaining external to many Americans’ environmental imaginations—may not just lead to more pluralistic and interesting environmental values. These differences in values and therefore in discourse (language and community) might cause unforeseen, or at least unaddressed by Lawrence Buell, alienation and polarization of American subcultures. In effect, while working to

encourage ecocentrism because “environmentalism of any sort cannot hope to achieve even modest reforms unless *some* take extreme positions advocating genuinely alternative paths” (7), Buell’s work may be causing what Jimmie Killingsworth and Palmer identify as “ecospeak.”

Ecospeak: Killingsworth and Palmer’s *Ecospeak* and Environmental Discourse

Though this dissertation addresses literary environmental writing—the general domain of ecocriticism—literary ecocritics are far from the only scholars concerned with environmental discourse, and environmental communication scholars have a wealth of insights into language and rhetoric also. I use this section to clarify what can go wrong when environmental discourse moves too far in one direction, for instance by becoming too ecocentric at the expense of other worldviews and value systems.

M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer introduce their study of “rhetoric and environmental politics in America” by explaining that the environmental crisis is not just “a problem of ethics and epistemology” (6), but also of discourse. Because individuals and groups have particular perspectives and specialized understandings of the world, conflict and confrontations inevitably emerge, and through “oversimplification, stereotyping, and pigeonholing . . . , public divisions are petrified, conflicts are prolonged, and solutions are deferred by a failure to criticize deeply the terms and conditions” of particular and more general environmental dilemmas (7-8). Like Orwell’s “newspeak,” this is the problem Killingsworth and Palmer describe as ecospeak, “a form of language

and a way of framing arguments that stops thinking and inhibits social cooperation rather than extending thinking and promoting cooperation through communication” (9). Most often, lines are drawn between environmentalists and developmentalists, with “stark alignments” between the good and the bad, leaving “a huge population untouched or confused by the debate and ensuing actions” (10).

In effect, particular approaches to environmental discourse tend to alienate and polarize individuals and groups when they encounter environmental conflicts. Killingsworth and Palmer carefully examine the rhetoric of science, policy, and politics of particular environmental issues and work to uncover the complexity beneath the dichotomies, and thereby avoid or address the problems of alienation and polarization that sometimes develop by way of environmental discourse. Part of this approach guides this dissertation, seeking in a way to rethink, reframe, and identify narratives concerned less with ecocentrism—which may create more potential for alienation and polarization—and more with environmental values, understandings, and considerations less likely to drive Americans away from environmental issues.

Interestingly, philosopher Bryan Norton in *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists* (1991) works to address the very same problem investigated in 1992 by Killingsworth and Palmer, themselves communications scholars. As seen in Table 2, the pragmatist leanings of scholars in both disciplines pushes these scholars to identify two groups of Americans dealing with environmental issues (environmentalists and developmentalists for Killingsworth and Palmer, moralists and economic aggregators for Norton), similar problems (that the two groups cannot seem to agree on environmental

issues), and even similar sources of the problem (discourse and language). Yet whereas Killingsworth and Palmer advocate a closer look at language and the rhetorical situations of these groups prior to polarization (more microcosmically oriented), Norton advocates a closer look at which actions the groups support rather than the reasons (more macrocosmically oriented). This does seem to reflect a disciplinary difference between philosophers and scholars of discourse, but what matters here is first that both are looking for ways to break down the kinds of dichotomies that end up causing problems through oversimplification and stagnation, and second that Norton seems to have changed his approach to discourse and communication since his 1991 publication date. It is also important to recognize the slight dissonance between Killingsworth and Palmer's two groups and Norton's two groups: the environmentalist (or moralist) plays a part in both explications, but the opposition is slightly different (developmentalist vs. economic aggregator).

Norton's book examined what he termed "the convergence hypothesis," the view that policies and actions supporting the interests of humans will also support what might be termed the interests of nature, and vice versa (240-243). In his view, many environmentalists have already taken this hypothesis as an operating principle rather than concerning themselves overmuch with the topic of ethical centrism (human and/or nature) and value theory.

Scholar(s)	Division	Problem	Cause of Problem	Solution
Killingsworth & Palmer (1992)	Environmentalists & Developmentalists	Ecospeak: polarization and alienation through discourse	Oversimplification of language, rhetoric, and dichotomous narratives	Examine rhetorical situations more closely
Bryan Norton (1991)	Moralists and Economic Aggregators	Disagreements and polarization over land management decisions	Rhetoric of groups and reasons (though they may support similar actions)	Consider unity of actions rather than reasons or rhetoric

However the problem is conceived, ecospeak underscores one of the most important issues to which environmental humanities scholars are, and should be, attuned, as it relates not just to the late 20th century culture wars, but to the longer standing conflicts between conservationism and preservationism. Environmental historian Richard White’s seminal essay “Are you an environmentalist, or do you work for a living?” (1995) takes seriously a bumper sticker slogan that pushes the environmentalist/developmentalist dichotomy to the next level, the pejorative, but also allows White to explore the relationship between work and the environment, a subject he explores in greater detail in *The Organic Machine* (1995). In his essay, White examines the environmentalist and “working person” dichotomy and its relationship to ways of knowing. The relationships between work and the environment, according to White, “form perhaps the most critical elements in our current environmental crisis” (172). He therefore advocates a reexamination of “work” in the environmentalist’s lexicon. What is important about White’s work is that like Norton and Killingsworth and Palmer, he is

working to understand ways to avoid ecospeak, or the related implication: the dichotomization of environmentalists and other Americans, whether developmentalists, economic aggregators, or blue collar workers.

White is not alone in this task, and the approaches range widely, from Rebecca Solnit's examination of music as part of the divide in "One Nation Under Elvis: An Environmentalism for Us All" (2008) to the Green Jobs movement of Van Jones et al, from columnist Thomas Friedman's geo-green revolution to pollsters Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger's *Breakthrough: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility* (2007). In each of these cases, as in many others, there are more (Bill McKibben's *Deep Economy*) and less (Bjorn Lomborg's *The Skeptical Environmentalist*) legitimate attempts to reshape the environmental movement. But the overall point of each of these efforts has been summarized by William Cronon, who has spoken about the need to incorporate a kind of 'wise-use' to accompany the partial non-use of the world's resources, rather than leaving wise use to be a movement solely concerned with property rights and complicit with environmental degradation (public lecture, Macalester College, 10 April 2006).

All these efforts to overcome ecospeak return this discussion to its core, and bring me full circle to Killingsworth and Palmer's epilogue where they consider ways to avoid ecospeak. One of these is through "crossing the boundaries of discourse communities and creating such gap-filling texts" that require "new kinds of authors and audiences," along with "the conditioning of subject matter to multiple situations, and the adjustment of texts to broad contexts" (279). In addition to arguing that the focal texts examined in

this dissertation can move readers and the American general public beyond ecospeak, I will also demonstrate how these texts write about both science and environmental issues in ways that reach new audiences and fill the gaps in environmental literature in novel and important ways.

Refiguring Crisis: Buell's *From Apocalypse to Way of Life*

Whether viewed as an extension or an alternative framework, this dissertation responds to Frederick Buell's rhetorical, conceptual history of environmental crisis (2003). Agreeing with Buell's historical analysis that the rhetoric of environmental crisis has transformed from apocalyptic- to dwelling-oriented (the verb and/or noun), my arguments diverge from Buell's in that I seek to move beyond the crisis framework further into "ways of life" by examining how, in narratives of environmental writing, individuals navigate complex and uncertain situations and decisions. Buell certainly recognizes "how difficult and uncertain solutions" (322)—or situations—are, but he prefers to examine literary and cultural narratives in the metaphorical context of "crisis as dwelling place" rather than as pragmatist narratives. Given that so much environmental humanities scholarship is framed as a response to crisis, I agree with Buell that a closer look at this word's meanings is important. But while Buell's conceptual history of crisis rightly traces the trend from "crisis as apocalypse" toward "crisis as dwelling," I also argue that his interest in "dwelling as place (a noun)" rather than "dwelling as acting (a verb)" misses the rich critical approach to text that pragmatic ecocriticism offers.

Recall that many environmental humanities scholars (Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Killingsworth and Palmer) consider their own work and that of their

colleagues to be a response to environmental crisis. Referring to environmental historian Donald Worster, Glotfelty argues that humanities scholars can play a role addressing potential “catastrophe” and a world pushed to its “environmental limits” (xx-xxii). Lawrence Buell (1995) and Killingsworth and Palmer (1992) frame their work in the context of environmental crisis, though the latter—much like Bryan Norton (1991)—seem more comfortable with a more “difficult choice-oriented” framework of “dilemma.”

Perhaps the strongest appeal to environmental scholarship as a response to crisis can be found in Robert Cox’s call for the field of environmental communication to embrace the label “crisis discipline,” framing the efforts of scholars as a normative response to help people and institutions avoid crisis, similar to conservation biology’s commitment to conserve biological diversity (2007). Appearing as first a keynote address at the Conference on Communication and the Environment and then in print as the lead article in the first issue of *Environmental Communication*, the essay makes the case that environmental scholars have an ethical duty to work to avoid and/or alleviate the threats and pressures of environmental crisis. The journal editor printed responses from other prominent scholars, and while the collection of responses did more to address the internal heterogeneity of environmental communication scholarship than take issue with Cox’s claims, the criticism of Steve Schwarze bears mentioning. Schwarze cautions Cox (et al) to avoid ideological criticism, shorthand for being a partisan hack. To this, I would respond that a weak interpretation of Cox’s proposal seeks only that scholars not disengage themselves from the practical role their work has in achieving sustainability

(the longevity of flourishing human societies and support systems, or a socially and environmentally rich world). Rather than calling for environmental communication scholars to join the ranks of Sierra Club leaders (like Cox himself), Cox's more modest proposal remains beholden to scholarly rigor and review, but also must take some responsibility for promoting better communication in the face of environmental crises like climate change and species loss.

Perhaps more importantly, Schwarze points communication scholars to Frederick Buell's *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century* (2003)¹⁷ as a text to assist in unpacking and critically examining the metaphorical significance and complexity of "crisis." Of all the books examined, referenced, and reviewed herein, Buell's is the most relevant to the third goal of this project: refiguring crisis through the examination of pragmatic narratives.

Buell's book offers something for everyone interested in environmental crisis (politics, literature, history, science, cultural criticism), but in so doing, it also offers something not for everyone (few will relish the diversity of scholarly focal texts, or at least few would include them in the same volume). Buell begins the book by tracing the 1980s neoconservative (chapter 1) and the 1990s neoliberal (chapter 2) approaches to environmental, cultural, and economic "wars" amongst political movements and politicians. In so doing, he sets the stage for crisis as a contested concept, one which he uses the following chapters to unpack in a wide-ranging yet fascinating rhetorical history,

¹⁷ Frederick Buell is the "just-as-wide-ranging," and "just-as-intelligent" brother of Lawrence Buell, discussed in section 1.1. Frederick's note 39 on page 371 remains my favorite sibling reference in a work of scholarship to date.

moving from science to literature and film. Throughout, Buell's argument is that crisis has transformed from apocalyptic accounts warning of coming catastrophe to a more domesticated, dwelling-oriented presence in the present times with a toxic, depleted, and endangered world.

The first question to ask of Buell is, "to what does environmental crisis refer?" Buell offers what might be called a laundry list of crises, noting that these are "very different problems requiring different forms of action" and that "the intellectual and social variety surrounding each crisis further blurs the clear eyes that would grasp the whole" (74). Having offered a rundown of environmental problems, Buell examines many of them in slightly greater detail, focusing on scientific and popular scientific accounts of degradation, but mostly with the purpose of understanding these crises rather than focusing on the rhetoric of science as some scholars might. Instead, he uses this list to guide the understanding that many of these issues are complex in themselves, and that environmental crisis—understood globally and/or locally—is not an easy word to use in haste.

Buell's analysis moves then to the changing rhetoric of crisis, a conceptual history examining science, science popularization, literature, and film. This rhetorical history allows Buell to forward the following argument: "No longer an apocalypse ahead, critical environmental problems and constraints help construct society's sense of daily normality. Far from going away, environmental crisis has become a regular part of the uncertainty in which people nowadays dwell" (xviii). Buell's insightful criticism later deepens this argument, examining the characteristics of "apocalyptic" and "dwelling" frames of crisis

from metaphorical, narrative, and argumentative lenses. His analysis points to the narrative and metaphorical difference between “sudden apocalypse immediately ahead” and “slow apocalypse,” or what Ulrich Beck calls a time of “creeping catastrophe” (204). Buell examines the underlying metaphor, a comparison used by Gregory Bateson and Al Gore where people’s actions in this slow crisis are compared to frogs slowly cooked in a pot. Rather than crisis being a car crash (something people would steer clear of if they just could see it coming), the frog-in-a-pot metaphor offers a mechanism which encourages people to stay “inside [the pot] thanks to an utterly believable and banal psychological and social logic at work inside themselves” (204).

But Buell goes further in this analysis to offer his own crisis metaphor, proposing that “people today dwell in rising environmental and environmental-social risk and that they are pressed to try to domesticate themselves within this condition” (204). While it remains unclear to what extent Buell uses the verb or noun forms of dwelling (and to what extent it might be both), he does offer analysis and arguments related to what responses the dwelling metaphor rules in and out of consideration. These are framed in the noun-form of dwelling—“one knows one’s dwelling too well to be disinformed; one is too locally and intimately touched to hand all responsibility to an outside authority; and one knows that no other credible refuge exists” (205)—which I consider the less fruitful and conceptually rich of the two interpretations of dwelling. **While Buell is able to argue that perception of this crisis “does not have to lead to political passivity, to calls for inhumanist authoritarian solutions, or to trying to walk away from the damage” (208), I find the action verb of “dwelling” in the uncertainty, ambiguity,**

and complexity of crisis to be far more interesting than the physical domain, or noun, of dwelling in crisis, in no small part because the verb form is necessarily active and dynamic rather than politically passive. It is in this way that I break ranks with, or find my own work an extension of Buell's consideration of crisis.

The framework I offer in place of "dwelling in crisis" acknowledges crisis on a number of levels—individual, social, institutional, global—but does not dwell on crisis. Instead, this pragmatic framework examines the navigation and negotiation of complexity, recognizing a variety of values, considerations, constraints, and factors ranging from the scientific to the ethical, from the psychological to the sociological, from economic to political. In other words, in moving "from apocalypse to way of life," I propose moving beyond crisis and further into the ways of life, examining how exactly literary and rhetorical texts help readers work through situations they face, make decisions, and take actions based on the guidance, inspiration, or suggestion of narratives they might encounter. Like Buell, I recognize the personal and global scales of crisis-like considerations, many of which have "no clear path" (321) or escape route, but unlike Buell, I offer an interpretation of these as situations requiring navigation, not crises requiring dwelling in, or on. And though Buell no doubt chose the word dwelling with more than the noun-form in mind, I elevate the verb-form of dwelling to consider how these ways of life can be unpacked through actions and decisions as "equipment for living." This distinction could be read as splitting hairs with Buell's refiguring of crisis, but it should become clear as this dissertation unfolds that there is strength in the

diversity of these two projects, building on each other, and offering multiple approaches to similar problems.

I mention one final note on scale and crisis, which might shed additional light on the differences between Buell's approach and the one offered herein, along with offering a transition to discussions of language, pragmatism, and rhetoric in the following section. While Buell's analysis of the temporal factors of the crisis metaphors (apocalypse fast approaching vs. slow and pervasive risk) offers some metaphorical insight, the appropriateness of crisis as a conceptual metaphor must be examined with regard to the scale of appropriate entities that might respond. In other words, certain scales of situations/responses are best suited to individual response (changing to CFL or LED bulbs), collective response (choosing a farmers market over McDonalds), institutional/political response (increasing public transit options and bike lanes), and global response (ratifying the Kyoto Protocol). Note that each of these responses might be geared toward addressing global greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, but situations could be broken up earlier.

Therefore, it might be fair to argue that the individual-crisis-to-political-crisis analogies (or frog-to-society analogy for that matter) conceal, or rule out the importance of scale appropriateness to crises and may at best confuse audiences concerning best-guess responses to environmental problems, and at worst encourage fruitless efforts. Michael Maniates (2001) addresses this very issue of individual and institutional response, arguing that students at least are more likely to understand the individual response to crisis while viewing political and institutional changes as "fuzzy, mysterious,

messy, and ‘idealistic’” (36). Maniates offers some general concerns with how people approach environmental problems, or crises, but laments that many Americans understand their roles just as individuals, or collections of individuals (at best). As consumers, Americans feel they can influence the world through consumer choice, but are less able to understand their roles as citizens, having therefore at least some power to change institutions and policies (37-38). The approach indicted by Maniates could be described as the “50 easy ways you can save the environment” method, based on individual (not political) actions like recycling, planting trees, and changing light bulbs.¹⁸

Interestingly, an exchange published in 2007 by online environmental news magazine *Grist* mirrors the individual/institutional conundrum developed by Maniates, and offers some form of resolution. In the first column, guest writer Mike Tidwell used the Civil Rights movement as a reference point with which to argue for a more institutional and political movement to address climate change, rather than the predominantly individual and voluntary movement. Yet a large group of social scientists responded to Tidwell’s claim, not by arguing that only individual efforts matter, but that individual and smaller action has historically and empirically encouraged larger political actions. Perhaps the most important quote aimed at the relationship between these two kinds of actions (and therefore ways of living in times of crisis) is the following from the social scientists:

¹⁸ At times refined and extended (such as in the Union of Concerned Scientists’ *The Consumers’ Guide to Effective Environmental Choices*), these practical and solution-oriented guidebooks are just one genre of pragmatic environmental rhetoric and not the one with which I am most concerned here. These guides are to the focal texts examined in this dissertation as field guides are to earlier nature writing. The narrative and experiential content is generally missing.

The more people voluntarily engage in pro-environmental behaviors and justify it themselves and others, the more it creates social pressure to do good things for the environment. Numerous psychological studies have shown that people are more likely to agree to take a big action if they've previously agreed to smaller, similar actions. Thus, changing a light bulb may lead to higher impact behaviors like giving up plastic water bottles, insulating one's house, living closer to work, reducing meat consumption, and actively supporting legislation that will likely require personal sacrifice. When ExxonMobil hears about people changing lightbulbs and buying Priuses, they should expect public policy changes to follow.

In short, the scale of environmental crisis is not only a temporal one (apocalypse in the near future vs. slower, more pervasive crisis in which we dwell), but is also a question of scaling with regard to how Americans might respond to crisis, individually, collectively/socially, politically and institutionally, and even globally. Moving beyond the easy proverb of “Think globally, Act locally,” a systems-level understanding of crisis yields a number of relationships between and among these various scales of response to crisis. In fact, the negotiation of these scales is an area of study with which pragmatist thinking and rhetorical scholarship has been concerned over the course of their intellectual traditions, and it is to these two traditions that I turn my attention now.

Summary: Ecocentrism, Ecospeak, and Environmental Crisis

The goal of this chapter was (a) to examine some trends in ecocritical and environmental communication scholarship; (b) to consider how these trends set the stage for my own research into environmental discourse and literature; and (c) to argue that my approach to pragmatic ecocriticism moves beyond environmental crisis as a metaphorical framework for understanding complex social-environmental situations, moves beyond

ecocentrism as a lens for examining literature, and thereby moves beyond ecospeak by addressing the pluralistic and uncertain decisions and actions examined in literature.

In the next chapter, I consider the critical tools available in (1) the pragmatist tradition, (2) the rhetorical tradition, and (3) the field of environmental pragmatism, tools which can be developed and repurposed for pragmatic ecocriticism. I conclude the chapter with an explanation of my critical methods and structuring of the analytical case study chapters.

Chapter 2: Pragmatic Ecocriticism and Equipments for Living

Shortly after World War I, American philosopher and public intellectual John Dewey spent 26 months lecturing in China on his social, political, and educational philosophical theories.¹⁹ Late in this lecture series, while addressing the topic of moral education, Dewey argued that,

Courses in morals or ethics in school... can hardly be expected to influence behavior because their content is too abstract, too far removed from immediate, day-by-day experience. There are two possible explanations of the fact that abstract knowledge seldom influences conduct in any significant degree: one is that abstractions lack the power to inspire men to act; the second is that even when abstractions do stir up emotions and a disposition to take action, they do not provide sufficiently concrete suggestions for actual behaving. (287)

These two explanations for the limited power of moral theories—that they lack motivational power, and that they lack specific guidance for behavior—are two issues that pragmatic theories of ethics and ecocriticism should address. Dewey’s own approach to moral education—specifically, encouraging habits of “open-mindedness, intellectual honest, and responsibility” (289) in pursuit of what he terms “associated living” (89)—is one way to address the limits of moral theories. But Dewey’s contemporary, rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke devoted his scholarly life to a second, related way of engaging these limitations.²⁰ On the first criticism—abstract knowledge lacking motivational power—Burke worked to develop a “Grammar” and “Rhetoric” of “Motives” that more clearly investigates how rhetorical criticism can improve “human relations” through

¹⁹ *John Dewey: Lectures in China, 1919-1920*. Translated and edited by Robert Clopton and Tsuin-Chen Ou. University Press of Hawaii (1973).

²⁰ Keep in mind that despite my phrasing, Burke was not explicitly responding to Dewey’s lectures here.

attention to motives, or motivation, and purpose, perhaps not unlike Dewey's aim of "associated living."²¹ Regarding the second criticism—that abstract theories lack specific suggestions for behavior—Burke argued that literature, through narrative, offers just such a practical framework for ethical reflection, which he describes in the essay "Literature as Equipment for Living."²²

The purpose of this chapter could be described as addressing these two criticisms while placing them in the context of environmental writing and ecocriticism. Developing such a pragmatic ecocriticism—one primarily attuned to the ethical lens of literature—can itself take a variety of paths. Therefore, I examine how three approaches to pragmatic ecocriticism can be united by Burke's rhetorical framework and Deweyan moral and political philosophy. First, I argue that the intersection of Burkean rhetorical theory and Deweyan theories of communication, through a shared recognition of contingency and specificity, offers a robust understanding of discourse and texts, though these ideas have largely gone unexamined in the context of environmental literature. Second, I argue that adaptive ecosystem management—inspired by Dewey's democratic political philosophy—offers an analogue for decision-making in the face of pluralism, uncertainty, and complexity. Dewey's philosophy can serve as a model for individual, environmental ethical decisions because adaptive management shares Burke's underlying

²¹ See *A Rhetoric of Motives*. University of California Press (1950, 1969) and *A Grammar of Motives*. University of California Press (1945, 1969). The reference to improving human relations can be found in *A Rhetoric of Motives* on page xiv.

²² Kenneth Burke. *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. University of California Press. 1941. This insight is similar to that described by philosophers of literature Martha Nussbaum and Richard Rorty, though the latter two barely address rhetorical theory or Burke.

search for tools and equipment to power decision-making. Third, Deweyan theories of moral imagination and deliberation can incorporate Burke's notion of "literature as equipment for living" into a more sophisticated framework for understanding the potential of environmental writing at the intersection of philosophy and literature. These three paths converge on a pragmatic ecocriticism that is attentive to rhetorical and ethical situations; the relationship between narrative, decision-making, and action; and the potential for environmental writing and ecocriticism to move beyond the limitations mentioned in the previous chapter.

In other words, this dissertation's value rests in *how* it uses pragmatist thought to examine the following question: how can environmental writing help readers address complex and uncertain situations and face decisions that have social and environmental dimensions? Answering this question responds directly to the issues raised in Chapter 1, including the limitations of nature awareness and ecocentric values, the role of ecospeak and polarizing environmental rhetoric, and frameworks for addressing crisis. But answering this question is certainly not the only way to understand pragmatist contributions to ecocriticism. Pragmatic ecocriticisms, generally speaking, offer novel insight to literary texts, and their various meanings and roles in society. But the problem with this claim is the generality of "pragmatic": the pragmatist tradition is diverse, and even efforts to use Dewey's work to understand environmental writing could take a variety of approaches, some more or less based on Dewey's aesthetics, politics, ethics, philosophy of education, or psychology. Therefore, while the general category of pragmatic ecocriticism may simply be a welcome addition to ecocritical theory and

practice, the many meanings of pragmatism require a more specific examination of my approach to pragmatic ecocriticism, and that examination begins with Neil Browne.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Neil Browne's *The World In Which We Occur* (2007) offers the first in-depth use of pragmatism—in this case, John Dewey's aesthetics—to examine environmental writing.²³ Though Browne's overall project closely matches my own, he approaches environmental writing from a different direction. Browne develops a "pragmatist ecology" that considers "the relations among art, science, politics, intelligence, and the physical world, rendering the artificial boundaries separating them porous—ecotonal" (2-3). Browne examines a number of texts in environmental literature through the lens of Dewey's theories of democracy, inquiry, and most importantly aesthetics. In each case, Browne's method or approach to pragmatic ecocriticism breaks down dualisms and boundaries, exploring the middle ground between humans and the rest of the world, between politics and science, and between texts and the non-mediated world. In short, Browne argues that, "Deweyan participatory politics... can rejuvenate and sustain our already deeply diminished democracy and ecologies" (185). But while Browne offers an approach to pragmatic ecocriticism grounded in Dewey's aesthetics, and while Eric Katz and Andrew Light write in their collection *Environmental Pragmatism* (1996) that each approach to environmental pragmatism can "draw strength

²³ In the first chapter, I described the influence of William James' psychology on Scott Slovic's consideration of nature-awareness (1992), arriving early as it did on the ecocritical scene. Slovic's pragmatist approach to awareness represents a good beginning for pragmatic ecocriticism, but as described earlier, awareness itself offers a limited response to a world of environmental crisis. Neil Evernden's essay in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996, reprinted from the *North American Review* in 1978) used Dewey's aesthetics to examine literature and ecology and the topic of inter-relatedness (96-99).

from the positions of others” (5), I find a framework grounded in Deweyan ethics and Burkean rhetorical theory to provide more practical insight into the pragmatic potential of texts, particularly those in environmental nonfiction.

The remainder of this chapter develops three ways that contemporary scholars are attempting to bridge rhetoric, pragmatism, and environmental studies, in order to construct a more robust framework for pragmatic and rhetorical ecocriticism. These three approaches all begin with Kenneth Burke’s “literature as equipment for living” as a basic tenet for how to understand environmental writing’s practical effects on moral deliberation and dramatic rehearsal.

Pragmatism and Rhetoric: By Way of Rhetoric

Robert Danisch concludes *Pragmatism, Democracy, and the Necessity of Rhetoric* (2007) with the argument that “the spirit of pragmatism lives in work such as Burke’s because of his interest in discovering tools to use in coping with a plural and ultimately ambiguous world” (144). Similarly, Nathan Crick, in his dissertation *John Dewey and the Art of Communication* (2005), reads Dewey’s intellectual history and development through the lens of rhetoric. Finally, Paul Stob engages in detail the relationship between the politics and theories of communication of Dewey and Burke in “Kenneth Burke, John Dewey, and the Pursuit of the Public” (2005). These three pieces of contemporary scholarship present an increasingly well-established connection between the key figures,

traditions, and understandings of communication within pragmatism and rhetoric.²⁴

Pragmatic ecocriticism stands to gain much from this connection: Kenneth Burke's pragmatist criticism offers a lens with which to understand the role of texts in decision-making and deliberation, and generally speaking, the relationship between rhetoric and pragmatism offers an entry point for addressing the questions of value, polarization, alienation, and crisis described in Chapter 1.

Common understandings of the word "rhetoric" are often preceded by words like "just," "empty," or "mere" in order to conjure up the "bullshit" meaning of the term, a popular criticism of politicians, with connotations of meaninglessness, dishonesty, or manipulation.²⁵ Yet rhetoric has a history and tradition dating back to early Greek philosophers, rhetoricians, and sophists, and through its role in the original liberal arts. Rhetoric's meaning has traditionally meant "an ability in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion," an Aristotelian definition.²⁶ Most often the domain of rhetoric has been public speech and other oral arguments. As common discourse transferred into new domains—first writing, and now many communicative acts—scholars focused their attention on a wider variety of texts. Additionally, the focus of rhetoric has shifted: in *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950) Kenneth Burke encouraged rhetorical scholars to consider a larger meaning of rhetoric: how communication allows not just for persuasion, but also for identification between the writer or speaker and the

²⁴ Like Browne building on the work of Slovic and Evernden, these scholars build on the earlier work of Edward Schiappa and Steven Mailloux (1995, 1998).

²⁵ See Harry Frankfurt. *On Bullshit*. Princeton University Press. 2005.

²⁶ *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Aristotle, translated by George Kennedy. Oxford University Press. 2006. 1.2.1.1355b.

audience, both immediate and distant (46, 64). Simply put, Burke considered any use of language to “induce cooperation,” to be rhetorical, whether or not the use is explicitly persuasive (43).²⁷

Burke’s consideration of rhetoric, literature, and motives offers scholars methods with which to approach the question: how might someone use rhetoric to induce cooperation, or phrased slightly differently, how do texts work? The meaning of work here is two-fold. First, rhetorical scholars ask what a text does in the world: what are the effects? How does the text work in the world? This concern with practical consequences moves rhetorical studies closer to pragmatism than poetics. Second, rhetorical scholars ask how a text does what it does: how in the world does the text work? How do metaphors, narratives, arguments, or poetics create the persuasive effects or bonds of identification in order to induce cooperation, and how do authors craft texts along those lines? Burke’s methods offer numerous ways to answer these questions. He addresses metaphors as terministic screens that emphasize and hide particular meanings (1966) and that allow interesting insights to be made because of the transference of connotations through “perspective by incongruity” (1954). Additionally, Burke offers “dramatism” as a framework for critically examining narratives in *A Grammar of Motives* (1945). Most importantly, he offers scholars a way to understand language use from proverbs to literature as “equipment for living,” or tools which people might use to better deliberate or cooperate (1941).

²⁷ Inducing cooperation has obvious parallels to Dewey’s concept of “associated living.”

A more basic—yet still very useful—approach to rhetorical texts and contexts is Lloyd Bitzer’s essay “The Rhetorical Situation” (1968). Here, Bitzer offers an in-depth method of picking apart situations where communication occurs, or where texts are created. Bitzer states that the rhetorical situation goes beyond simple context or setting with an exigence that allows for a rhetorical response. For that reason, Bitzer sees the situation as “the source and ground of rhetorical activity” (6). Bitzer’s “rhetorical exigences” are those that require positive modification that can only be achieved through communication. The constraints on the rhetorical situation are those factors that limit the decisions and actions “needed to modify the exigence” (8). Importantly, Bitzer also connects rhetoric and pragmatism by stating that a rhetorical work “functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world” (3-4). As noted in the Introduction, Bitzer has been criticized for his “too-realistic” approach to rhetorical exigence, and a more sophisticated approach is both possible and welcome in a pragmatist theory of rhetoric. In other words, such a theory should allow for both “real” and “constructed” elements of rhetorical exigence.

Though Bitzer’s account is useful in its own right, I am more concerned with the “pragmatic situation” and the corresponding “pragmatic narratives” an author creates to respond to such situations. In these narratives, an author considers her or his decisions and actions and tells the story of how she or he navigated these situations. This dual project of telling one’s story about navigating a complex situation creates an inter-

mingling of the rhetorical situation with the pragmatic situation.²⁸ In a way, this blending matches Ian Marshall's account in *Story Line* (1998) of Burke's "equipment for living" when he states that "literature matters in our lives, maybe even gives our lives meaning or helps us understand the meaning of our lives. But so too are our lives equipment for understanding literature, helping us appreciate and understand what we read" (8). In summary, pragmatic narratives blend rhetorical and pragmatic situations, thereby offering an entry point into a pragmatic ecocriticism by way of rhetoric.

Pragmatism and Rhetoric: By Way of Pragmatism

The second entry point is by way of pragmatism itself and the role of language in individual, social, and political deliberation. Because it has a history of theorizing deliberation in the face of uncertainty and crisis, pragmatist philosophy has much to offer ecocriticism and environmental rhetoric.

As Louis Menand writes in *The Metaphysical Club* (2001), pragmatist thinkers are unified by the idea that, "ideas are not 'out there' waiting to be discovered, but are tools—like forks and knives and microchips—that people devise to cope with the world in which they find themselves" (xi). Though American pragmatist philosophy is often understood with regard to major figures in the second half of the 19th Century and first half of the 20th Century—Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, Jane Addams, and John Dewey—recent scholarship has uncovered roots stretching further back.²⁹ Menand's

²⁸ The topics of pragmatic narratives as situations, decisions, and actions is discussed in greater detail in the last section of this chapter.

²⁹ For example, Scott Pratt (2002), Bruce Wilshire (2000), Charlene Haddock Seigfried (1996), and Paul Thompson (2000) have worked to illuminate a richer pragmatist tradition by bringing examinations of race, ethnicity, gender, and class into the history of

Metaphysical Club offers an engaging history of the traditional pragmatist narrative, which he concludes with a discussion of tolerance, uncertainty, and democracy:

Though we may believe unreservedly in a certain set of truths, there is always the possibility that some other set of truths might be the case. In the end, we have to act on what we believe; we cannot wait for confirmation from the rest of the universe. But the moral justification for our actions comes from the tolerance we have shown to other ways of being in the world, other ways of considering the case. The alternative is force. Pragmatism was designed to make it harder for people to be driven to violence by their beliefs. (440)³⁰

This approach to “associated living”—acting in spite of uncertainty, tolerating others’ views—underlies a majority of pragmatist thought, but it is nowhere stronger than in Dewey’s philosophy.

In *John Dewey and American Democracy* (1991), pragmatist historian Robert Westbrook argues that Dewey understood democracy as both “a way of life” and “a system of government” (319). While Dewey addresses the system of government in *The Public and its Problems* (1927), Dewey’s basic assumption is that democracy is a way of life: “the idea of democracy is a wider and fuller idea than can be exemplified in the state even at its best. To be realized it must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion” (143).³¹

pragmatism. This assumption revises the notion that pragmatism is just European philosophy under the influence of the American wilderness (Pratt, xi).

³⁰ It should be noted that these ideas—tolerance, force, and violence—could be extended to the non-anthropocentric realm in order to construct another approach to environmental pragmatism.

³¹ Because the family as a social unit figures so prominently in the next three chapters, it is worth noting that Dewey develops the family-as-society analogy in greater detail with respect to communication, power structures, associated living (or its antonym, alienation), and democracy in his Lectures in China on “Communication and Associated Living” (especially page 91).

In order to capture all these modes of human association, Dewey's philosophical works are numerous and wide-ranging, and ecocritics could use any text or set of texts to frame a pragmatic approach to ecocriticism. Neil Browne's approach is influenced primarily by Dewey's aesthetics in *Art as Experience* (1934). But *Experience and Nature* (1925) may be the more useful text. Here, Dewey explains his approach to language, experience, and communication, offering an important piece to the puzzle of pragmatism and rhetoric, calling language the "tool of tools" (186) that "brings with it the sense of sharing and merging in a whole" that aims at "concerted action" (184). The relationship between rhetoric and pragmatism begins to emerge in this attention to discourse, specifically in the usefulness of communicative action and in the contingent, experiential approach to questions of politics and action.

In *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (1989), Cornel West also examines pragmatism and its relationship with philosophy. West argues that pragmatists have turned their backs on epistemologically centered philosophical traditions in favor of cultural criticism that responds to "social and cultural crises" and the accompanying "storms of class, racial, and gender conflicts" (5), a list to which environmental crises can easily be added. West explores how particular pragmatist thinkers have pushed philosophers toward the specific rather than the abstract and the engaged (or "applied" as philosophers often say) rather than apolitical endeavors of epistemology or theorizing knowledge. This turn toward both engaged philosophy and specific issues, even social-environmental crises, is a welcome one, though a requisite commitment to deep, critical, scholarly thinking is equally important. In other words, in examining the issues of the

day, and in adopting a willingness to weigh in on political matters, pragmatists should balance scholarly impartiality with active engagement in these issues.

One point that West makes from which environmental pragmatists might learn is Dewey's act of "demoting without devaluing" the value of knowledge in philosophy (89). Similarly, the response to the ecocentric versus anthropocentric debate over value theory in environmental ethics might best be demoted in importance, though the import of both ecocentric and anthropocentric values cannot be dismissed.

West goes beyond both Menand and Westbrook to consider the contemporary neopragmatism of Richard Rorty. If Menand is the most prominent pragmatist historian, then Rorty may be the most well known contemporary scholar. In fact, the relationship between philosophy and literature examined herein—pragmatist philosophy and environmental literature—holds some debt to Rorty's pioneering work at the intersection of the two, though the specific methods used by Rorty are less useful to this project, due to Rorty's overarching concern with poetics at the expense of rhetoric. According to West, Rorty's pragmatist period began in 1972 (197), using "Dewey's strategy of holding at arm's length the ahistorical philosophical notions of necessity, universality, rationality, objectivity, and transcendentalism" (200), but with shortcomings in "its distrust of theory and its preoccupation with transient vocabularies" (209). West argues:

We first must distinguish between the pragmatic accentuation of consequences and a historicist concern with specific practices. A common vulgar pragmatic fallacy is to elevate the former at the expense of understanding the latter... Yet a more refined pragmatism, one that preserves its historicist sense and genealogical aims, accents both consequences and specific practices in light of a set of provisional and revisable theoretical frameworks while it resists grand theories. (209)

The approach to pragmatism that West seems to advocate is closer to that offered by Nathan Crick, Robert Danisch, and Paul Stob, three scholars working to understand the relationship between rhetoric and pragmatism. It is the extension of this scholarship into the realm of environmental writing that best represents my particular approach to pragmatic and rhetorical ecocriticism.

The most detailed of these three projects is that of Nathan Crick (2005), who seeks to explicate Dewey's implicit theories of communication and rhetoric in his three intellectual periods. Because Crick examines a variety of Deweyan approaches to the subject of communication, the relevance to practical situations is sometimes lost, but the general scholarly value of the study is in Crick's genealogical approach to Dewey's intellectual development. Specific to the question of pragmatic ecocriticism, Crick offers an in-depth examination of Dewey's theory of situations and inquiry. In order to understand how people respond to complex and uncertain situations, Crick engages the indeterminate situation (196-203), the moral situation (204-209), and the rhetorical situation (210-219). In each of these cases, these situations are "characterized by tension, uncertainty, conflict, unease, or indecisiveness" which create "a sense of urgency" (217). Building Crick's work into a pragmatic ecocritical framework involves casting "situations" as the focal point for narrative criticism: such indeterminate situations require deliberation and decision-making (the pragmatic, or moral situation), and an engaged discussion of that process of deliberation (an rhetorical exigence). In the case of environmental nonfiction written in the first person, the crafting of such narratives

bridges rhetorical construction and extra-textual action, a central issue to pragmatic ecocriticism.

Though Crick offers a rich account of Dewey's implicit rhetorical theory, the larger questions of rhetoric and pragmatism are better understood through the scholarly work of Robert Danisch. Unlike Crick, Danisch (2007) moves beyond Dewey, examining the work of a variety of pragmatist thinkers, including William James, Jane Addams, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., and Alain Locke. Along with examining the relationships of pragmatism and rhetoric, Danisch argues for the importance of rhetoric to democracy. He traces this tradition from Aristotle and the sophists to contemporary theorists including Burke, Wayne Booth, and Stanley Fish. By comparing the central commitments of pragmatism (6) and rhetoric (12) side by side, Danisch is able to structure his argument around their shared commitments and how each mutually reinforces the other.³² The scholarly traditions of pragmatism and rhetoric are strong in themselves, but each is doubly strengthened by the other. Whether in the realm of democratic deliberation or individual decision-making, pragmatist approaches to democratic theory require the kind of rich communicative theory that rhetoric offers. This need for rhetoric stretches beyond Aristotle who "presents rhetoric as a practical and productive art with the capacity to guide decision making and public judgment given recurrent situations marked by uncertainty, particularity, and ambiguity" (11). Danisch cautions that "the development of pragmatism does not promise an increase in the store of knowledge or certitude about the natural world. Instead, it promises to develop the human capacity for making

³² This is not unlike Browne's approach to Dewey: side-by-side comparison with environmental writing texts.

intelligent decisions in difficult circumstances, the enhancement of individual experience, advancement of the public good, and participation in democratic decision making” (63). Rhetoric serves those functions, even if Dewey does not mention rhetoric by name (60). Danisch concludes the book with a discussion of Kenneth Burke and the recognition that while Burke was not an overt pragmatist (143), his approach to rhetoric had much in common with the pragmatism of Dewey and James (144-145).

What Danisch offers this framework of pragmatic ecocriticism is primarily the role that rhetoric can play in public and private decision-making—not only through the exchange of persuasive discourse, but also through the more subtle way texts influence audiences as they evaluate options imaginatively, as equipment for living. Additionally, the fact that Burkean rhetorical theory closely aligns with pragmatism is all the more reason to bring the two fields together in the pursuit of ecocritical inquiry.

A more engaged discussion of the relation between Burke and Dewey is seen in Paul Stob’s essay “Kenneth Burke, John Dewey, and the Pursuit of the Public” (2005). Stob argues that while Burke and Dewey had their political differences, and while Burke cannot easily be characterized as a pragmatist, their theories of communication and the public sphere both emphasize “pluralism and difference” in the pursuit of “problem-solving and community-building” (229). Burke and Dewey share a functional approach to language “though neither reduces language to instrumentality alone. Indeed, the aesthetic

dimension of language for Burke and Dewey is unmistakable” in Dewey’s *Experience and Nature* and Burke’s *Philosophy of Literary Form* (239).³³

Scholars have thus already established the compatibility of Deweyan pragmatism and Burkean rhetorical theory. Yet more work—theoretical and practical—is warranted at the intersection of these theories. For that reason, bringing Burke’s notion of the ethical instrumentality of literature into the domain of pragmatist ethics seems a worthy pursuit. Conversely, as an examination of rhetoric and pragmatic through a critical examination of environmental writing, this study both supports and extends the arguments being made by Crick, Danisch, and Stob.

In summary, the close relationship between pragmatism and rhetoric make the two comfortable partners for a pragmatic ecocriticism. These two traditions both seek to respond to crisis in an uncertain, complex, and pluralistic world. Both offer useful theories of communication, of the relationship between individuals and social groups, and of the situations that people encounter as moral agents and environmental writers. Finally, both recognize the functional nature of tools and equipment for living, which help people work through complex situations, deliberately and actively. Danisch places pragmatism and rhetoric together in the pursuit of enhanced individual experience and public goods, and Menand argues that pragmatic pluralism—democratic

³³ This point offers further support for the sun analogy offered in the Introduction. Language and literature can have an aesthetic dimension much like a sunset, but that doesn’t diminish the practical importance of each. Along these lines (though not a perfect extension), the focus of Browne’s pragmatic ecocriticism is Dewey’s aesthetics, whereas the focus here is ethics and the role of literature in ethical deliberation.

participation—“isn’t the means to an end, in this way of thinking; it is the end. The purpose of the experiment is to keep the experiment going” (442).

Environmental Pragmatism: Environmental Philosophy and Adaptive Management

Historians Nancy Langston in *Where Land and Water Meet* (2003) and Steven Pyne in *Tending Fire* (2004) have recently discussed the role of American pragmatist philosophy and adaptive management in environmental histories of land and forest management. However, a far larger number of environmental histories—Roderick Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967) for example—are wilderness-oriented, focusing on groups like the Sierra Club, places like Yosemite National Park, disagreements over conservation and preservation, and people like David Brower and Floyd Dominy.

In *The Landscape of Reform* (2006), Ben Minteer tells a far different story of America’s environmental history, one that focuses less on wilderness and more on the environmental planning of parks and trails, work that navigates the middle ground between preservation and conservation—Minteer’s “third way”—and brings less famous environmental figures into conversations of environmental history—Liberty Hyde Bailey, Benton MacKaye, and Lewis Mumford. Like Neil Browne’s ecocriticism, what Minteer’s history offers environmental pragmatism is a richer account of early 20th century attempts to avoid ecospeak.

This pragmatist approach to environmental issues echoes Bryan Norton’s search for unity among environmentalists and the convergence hypothesis he examined in 1991.

But it also offers an entry point into the ways that scholars can—to use Cornel West’s phrase—demote without devaluing the distinctions, dichotomies, and dualisms that frame conventional narratives of environmental issues. These efforts to creatively navigate the complex landscapes of social and environmental crises benefit greatly from the pragmatist tradition. Unfortunately, this tradition, while established in environmental philosophy and policy, is underrepresented in ecocritical scholarship. Yet like Minter’s historical account, the works of ecologists, philosophers, and political scientists provide useful models of the ways that pragmatism might be used to understand literary texts and individual processes of decision-making. By applying theories of adaptive management in public decision-making on an individual level, a model emerges for pragmatic ecocriticism. After a brief discussion of Aldo Leopold, this section highlights three key books in the environmental pragmatist tradition: Andrew Light and Eric Katz’s *Environmental Pragmatism* (1996), Kai Lee’s *Compass and Gyroscope* (1993), and Bryan Norton’s *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management* (2005). Through these texts, adaptive management emerges as a model for moral imagination and deliberation.

Aldo Leopold is often considered the father of—or perhaps godfather of—many areas of environmental studies, expanding and connecting ecology, forestry, wildlife biology, environmental ethics, and nature writing in his book *A Sand County Almanac* (1949). It is no wonder that environmental pragmatism can trace its roots to Leopold’s life and work. Both Minter and Norton do just that: Minter examines how Leopold’s concept of land health combines with the public interest to demote questions of intrinsic

and instrumental, nonanthropocentric and anthropocentric value in favor of a pragmatic and civic environmental ethics (129-130). Norton's scholarly exchanges with environmental philosopher and Leopold scholar J. Baird Callicott highlight these various readings, but as Minter notes, both "have conceded that Leopold employed a combination" of anthropocentric and ecocentric values, blending human duties to biotic communities with prudential ethics toward human welfare (129).

A number of other philosophers have participated in discussions of pragmatism's relevance to the field of environmental ethics, with scholarship taking off in the early 1990s—the same time as Slovic's consideration of William James—but philosophers examined pragmatism with greater intensity and sense of purpose than ecocritics. In addition to Bryan Norton's *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists*, scholarly essays by Weston (1992), Fuller (1992), Chaloupka (1987), and Taylor (1990) all brought pragmatist approaches to environmental ethics. But Andrew Light and Eric Katz's anthology *Environmental Pragmatism* (1996) greatly expanded and collected the breadth of perspectives on pragmatist approaches to environmental issues. *Environmental Pragmatism* did more than collect these perspectives: it provided a state-of-the-art entry point for further research, discussion, and argument. To begin, Light and Katz offered a pluralistic description of how philosophers might contribute to discussions of environmental pragmatism:

1. Examinations into the connection between classical American philosophical pragmatism and environmental issues;
2. The articulation of practical strategies for bridging gaps between environmental theorists, policy analysts, activists, and the public;
3. Theoretical investigations into the overlapping normative bases of specific environmental organizations and movements, for the

- purposes of providing grounds for the convergence of activists on policy choices; and among these theoretical debates,
4. General arguments for theoretical and meta-theoretical moral pluralism in environmental normative theory. (5)

These potential tasks for philosophers are a model for the various tasks with which ecocritics might be concerned: (1) examining the relationship between classical pragmatists and environmental writers; (2) bridging the gaps between environmental literature and science, policy, and activism or between other useful, but limited distinctions like those shown in Table 3 above; (3) investigation of narratives and metaphors that encourage pragmatic commitments in discussions and actions regarding complex social-environmental situations; and (4) attempts to understand a more diverse set of perspectives, viewpoints, and genres in literature and environmental writing. It is important to recognize that none of these formulations is necessarily better or worse than the others, at least at the outset, but Light (2002) pushes philosophers to engage more directly with problem solving and application rather than highly theoretical arguments. In the end, this book can function as a guide for the development of more pragmatic and rhetorical ecocriticisms, following the path of adaptive management in the fields of environmental science, management, and policy.

Kai Lee's *Compass and Gyroscope* (1993) examines the decision-making strategies known collectively as adaptive management, bringing pragmatist commitments to the sphere of public decision-making on environmental issues. Written in the early 1990s, around the same time as the philosophical essays in *Environmental Pragmatism*, Lee's book examines how human institutions can respond to environmental crises and changes that might eventually lead to crisis, even in the face of deep-set commitments to

the “activities that cause these problems” (5). In the face of “virtually intractable” problems “such as the greenhouse effect,” (5), “we hope that progress can continue. But a hope is a good deal less than a plan” (4). For that reason, Lee offers what journalist Philip Shabecoff calls a timely, clear, and eloquent roadmap “for solving the riddle of sustainable development” (viii), but as Lee cautions in the Preface, his goal is to offer an approach rather than *the* answer to how humans might adapt and cope with environmental change (xi-xii).

Adaptive management offers one answer to the question of sustainable development, and it also provides a general model for deliberation in the face of uncertainty and value pluralism. While Lee offers a general framework for adaptive management, he was hardly the first to do so. C.S. Holling first developed adaptive management in *Adaptive Environmental Assessment and Management* (1978).³⁴ He did so in response to the last paragraph of his report on *Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems* (1973), where he stated:

A management approach based on resilience [rather than stability] would emphasize the need to keep options open, the need to view events in a regional rather than a local context, and the need to emphasize heterogeneity. Flowing from this would be not the presumption of sufficient knowledge, but the recognition of our ignorance; not the assumption that future events are expected, but that they will be unexpected. The resilience framework can accommodate this shift of perspective, for it does not require a precise capacity to predict the future, but only a qualitative capacity to devise systems that can absorb and accommodate future events in whatever unexpected form they may take.
(21)

³⁴ One thing is clear from Lee’s bibliography and misleading from Shabecoff’s Foreword: adaptive management was not Lee’s invention, but rather traces back at least to C.S. Holling.

Sure signs of pragmatism visible throughout this paragraph, including contingency, uncertainty, and fallibility, demonstrate a clear intellectual lineage from pragmatism to adaptive management. In the decade that followed, Carl Walters took this scientific approach to uncertainty and developed the ecological theories and methods to make inferences and respond flexibly to contingency.³⁵

But it was Lee's *Compass and Gyroscope* that brought adaptive management together with participatory democratic processes of negotiation and bounded conflict. Lee also made explicit the connections of adaptive management and the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey.³⁶ The most important thing that Lee's *Compass and Gyroscope* offers to pragmatic ecocriticism, however, is a way to understand the deliberation process: decision-making and action in the face of uncertain, complex, and pluralistic perspectives requires flexibility, adaptation, social learning, democratic participation, and tolerance of other values and understandings. And Lee offers this approach in a readable and accessible text, engaging the Columbia River Basin as a

³⁵ See Walters' book, *Adaptive Management of Renewable Resources* (1986). For more on this history, see Gunderson, Holling, and Light's *Barriers and Bridges to the Renewal of Ecosystems and Institutions* (1995), which provides an excellent and brief early history of research on adaptive management in its Preface (ix-xii).

³⁶ Interestingly, Lee's title metaphors—compass (adaptive management) and gyroscope (bounded conflict)—mimic Dewey's metaphor concerning the importance of guiding principles and their application. In his *Lectures in China*, Dewey states, "A sailor, for example, must have at least a map and a compass, the former to help him set his destination, the latter to provide a sense of direction. By analogy the social philosopher must also have general guiding principles to serve him as map and compass as he observes and seeks the causes of conflicts and instabilities in the social scene, and then contrives approaches which promise to resolve or alleviate the difficulties which the concrete problems present" (64).

microcosm, and global sustainable development as the macrocosm for cooperative decisions on institutional scales.

Yet another text examines Lee's premise—how adaptive management can make for better environmental decision-making—in greater detail.³⁷ Bryan Norton's *Sustainability: A Philosophy of Adaptive Ecosystem Management* (2005) is a lengthy, in-depth account of the various ways in which pragmatist thought—from James and Dewey to Rorty and Habermas—has permeated or might soon influence environmental decision-making and public policy. Building on the work of classical and contemporary pragmatists, and their relevance to policy making at institutions such as the Environmental Protection Agency, Norton offers in-depth explanations of methods and tools for navigating complex and uncertain environmental issues with a plurality of perspectives and values. The length and inaccessibility of Norton's book precludes any traction with a wider audience, but environmental philosophers, political scientists, and hopefully policymakers at institutions like the EPA or U.S. Forest Service could develop, extend, and refine Norton's theories for years. Those willing to work through the book will find Norton has much to say about environmental decision-making in the public sphere, mixing small amounts of descriptive content with a larger dose of prescription. *Sustainability* clearly brings together the philosophical and political dimensions of

³⁷ Another important text on the topic of public participation is Renn, Webler, and Wiedermann's *Fairness and Competence in Citizen Participation* (1995), a book that considers various approaches to engaging citizens in democratic decision-making beyond voting and public opinion polling. What is most interesting about this development is its reliance on the theories of contemporary German pragmatic political theorist Jurgen Habermas.

adaptive management, but its place in the framework of pragmatic ecocriticism takes some additional work.

To a scholar of rhetoric, what is most striking about the book is Norton's newfound interest in language, discourse, rhetoric, and communication. In *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists* (1991), Norton framed pragmatism as a method rather than principles, but diverted his attention away from rhetoric in favor of results or action, failing to recognize the important linkage between the two within his "convergence hypothesis" framework. In 1991, Norton writes:

I see pragmatism not as a set of metaphysical principles, but as a method. That method starts with the idea that, in some important sense, actions are more basic than words, and that words get their meanings from the actions with which they are associated. Concepts are thus seen as tools of understanding, but tools that function best in the context of action. I hope, therefore, that this book displays a healthy skepticism for justifications based upon principles that are known intuitively, or a priori-true independent of empirical experience. (x)

However, he also said:

I have concluded that we have not seen the unity of environmentalism because we have been looking in the wrong place. I have, in my search, tried not to use environmentalists' rhetoric—the explanations they give for what they do—but their actions—the policies they actually pursue—as the fixed points on the map. (x)

This second statement represents a very different approach from the one he offered fourteen years later in *Sustainability*. In Chapter 2 of *Sustainability*, or "Language as Our Environment," for example, Norton states:

I intend to use environmental pragmatism quite specifically to refer to the habit of mind referred to by Hadley and also to the particular understanding the pragmatists share about the nature of language and logic in relation to the world of experience. The habit of mind, the theory of language, and the adaptive, experimental approach to environmental

action are to me three sides of the same coin. To articulate the argument for this intimate connection, I turn as promised to Dewey's particularly clear and compelling explanation of the not-yet-fully-understood consequences of Darwin's revolutionary idea. (77)

In other words, rather than dismissing language, Norton now engages how language shapes our thoughts and understandings of the world, and even influences our actions.

Norton's *Sustainability* also makes several contributions to the development of pragmatic ecocritical methods. On first glance, it may appear that Norton attends only to the discourse of highly technical institutions like the EPA, but on further examination, he appears to consider any kind of discourse or rhetoric that might bring cooperation—or at the least, avoid ecospeak—by improving “the ways we talk about shared experience and the ways we express our differences of opinion” (82). This is certainly not limited to technical discourse but includes any kind of literature and writing. Such writing might encourage a different public discourse, thereby transforming legal, political, and technical discourse, as Charles Wilkinson argued in *The Eagle Bird* (1992, 15-17). This approach to environmental literature has already been examined by Terre Satterfield and Scott Slovic in *What's Nature Worth?* (2004), but they are primarily concerned with environmental values. This approach is quite useful and interesting, but a pragmatist would be concerned instead with the decisions made and actions taken by writers of social-environmental narratives.

Norton's second contribution to a pragmatic ecocriticism is his discussion of how people do and should make decisions. After engaging with the same Deweyan understanding of situations (81) described earlier, Norton explains how a variety of research explains decision-making. But his “search for a decision model is constrained by

three factors,” including “the nature of (wicked) environmental problems,” his purpose, “which is to develop a cooperative, democratically functioning decision model,” and his constraints to keep the model “a general guide in an open, public, place-based process” (253). After outlining the various ways decisions might be made (270-272), Norton arrives at the following description of his decision-making model:

[It] must be embedded in a democratic process of adaptive management, it must be iterative, it must be open to all voices in the community, and it must be receptive to multiple values and varied formulations of these values. The adaptive approach is experimental, both with respect to areas of uncertainty about natural systems and with respect to the goals and values espoused. (273)

Though this description might be developed into a complete methodology for pragmatic ecocriticism sometime in the future, it remains a more general principle in this project: seeking out narratives that highlight such approaches to contingent situations and examining them in detail.

In addition to these commitments, Norton agrees with Dewey that while scientists and managers have tried to keep facts and values separate in questions of sustainability, “there is only one method of inquiry and one community of discourse, happily endorsing a normatively informed science and a search for scientifically informed norms. In the relevant discourse—public discourse—facts and values are inseparable” (380). In other words, demoting this dichotomy or dualism—while recognizing the important descriptive and normative aspects of environmental decisions—may lead to more productive discourse and less polarizing rhetoric.

Clearly, Norton offers a model for examining decisions in the face of complex, pluralistic, and uncertain situations with social and environmental factors. But it is less

clear how scholars of pragmatic ecocriticism can use such a model. The disconnect between institutional and individual decision-making means that scholarship addressing institutions will be of limited use to scholars engaging individual decisions, except in the ways outlined by Satterfield and Slovic or by Wilkinson. Yet the commitments and traits of individual decisions emerge in the explicit and implicit narratives of environmental writers, offering an entry point for a pragmatic ecocriticism. Efforts to understand individual decisions and actions (in literature) enrich and are enriched by discussions of adaptive management scholarship in philosophy, ecosystem management, and political science. These mutual benefits operate in two ways: first, each approach to decision-making—the individual and the political—has relevance to the other; second, understanding systems of decisions must incorporate both individual and collective decision-making. Thus understanding environmental behavior, values, and action requires attention to both levels. Therefore one final area of scholarship offers a pathway to a pragmatic ecocritical framework: pragmatist ethics and discussions of moral imagination.

Pragmatist Moral Imagination and Environmental Texts

This chapter described three paths to a pragmatic ecocriticism spanning Deweyan ethics and Burkean rhetoric. These paths address how pragmatic ecocriticism can help scholars refigure nature awareness and values, address ecospeak and polarization, and respond to crisis. One path bridges the pragmatist and rhetorical traditions. The second combines philosophical, political, and ecological approaches to public decision-making

in the context adaptive management. The final path brings together Kenneth Burke's essay "Literature as Equipment for Living" and pragmatist approaches to moral imagination, moral understanding, and moral intelligence in the tradition of John Dewey. By thinking of literary works as tools much like moral theories or proverbs, to be used by readers to help them to navigate complex and uncertain situations, the rhetorical insights of Burke can be combined with the ethical theories of Dewey. After examining this intersection of pragmatism and rhetorical criticism, I offer a summary of the implications of this chapter for the method of pragmatic and rhetorical ecocriticism offered in this dissertation.

In *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), Dewey framed ethical deliberation as a kind of "dramatic rehearsal (in imagination) of various competing lines of action" where "thought runs ahead and foresees outcomes" (190), much like the use of model simulation in ecological science or visualization techniques among athletes.³⁸ Dewey's form of imaginative reasoning relies on inferences of the future—consequences of actions and responses of others—and involves choosing a "unified preference out of competing preferences" (193). But as Gregory Fernando Pappas argues in *John Dewey's Ethics* (2008), this deliberate analysis of particular situations is done only with what Dewey called "moral intelligence," or "the best habits of reflection, imagination, and sensitivity available" (47). Pappas brings Dewey's ethics into the realm of mainstream moral philosophy with his analytic style and consideration of the relationship of Dewey's ethics to virtue, deontological, and consequentialist theories. But such a framework is less

³⁸ For example, see *The Mental Edge: Maximize Your Sports Potential with the Mind-Body Connection* by Kenneth Baum. 1999.

helpful to this project than that of two scholars—Steven Fesmire and Mark Johnson—who examine pragmatist ethics from the framework of moral imagination. In so doing, Fesmire and Johnson are able to place these other ethical theories within this pluralistic framework, while still leaving room for other instruments—including literature—in the process of ethical deliberation.

Steven Fesmire's *John Dewey and Moral Imagination* (2003) is an attempt to integrate ethical theories that offer sometimes competing and other times complementary views of ethical action. Expanding on Dewey's framework of dramatic rehearsal, Fesmire offers the metaphor of jazz improvisation to explain how people can use moral theories as tools—or in his metaphorical framework: instruments, scales, tradition, memory, and exercise (94)—to improvisationally act with others in a pluralistic world. The jazz improvisation metaphor is one that Fesmire must reconstitute from Dewey's own work (93-94), but the metaphor does generate the kind of framework Fesmire seeks, “with the aim of ameliorating the muddles of moral life” (56). Fesmire supports Dewey's claim that ethical theorists should cease to ask “which principle is the ultimate and unitary one” and instead attempt “to reconcile inherent conflicts between irreducible forces that characterize all situations of moral uncertainty” (56).

This uncertainty emerges in situations involving children caring for aging parents, couples choosing to have children, employees deciding whether to blow the whistle on their company, or soldiers acting on orders (57). Fesmire argues,

The pragmatic pluralist refuses to play the winner-take-all game. Take a taxonomy of current perspectives on hunting as an illustration. Because most ethical theories treat all but one of the following questions as secondary, they cannot on their own do justice to the ambiguity and

complexity of the situation. The ecocentrist helpfully asks: Is therapeutic culling of “management species” (especially ungulates such as deer or elk) ecologically obligatory, regardless of whether anyone would prefer to pull the trigger? The virtue theorist wonders: What traits of character are cultivated by sport and trophy hunting, and do these contribute to the good life? Do these traits carry over to treatment of humans? The deontological rights theorist inquires: Do other animals have rights; that is, might their interests as we perceive them override any direct benefit to humans? The feminist ethicist of care asks: Does hunting affect our ability to care for animals; indeed, are we genuinely capable of caring about beings with whom we have no sustained relationship? The utilitarian questions: Should all animals’ preferences or interests as we perceive them, including our own, have equal weight when evaluating consequences? To spotlight only one of these questions risks bringing inquiry to a premature close. Tunneled perception inhibits deliberation at least as much as it helpfully focuses it. (57)

These kinds of situations, and the various ways that ethical frameworks limit inquiry, illustrate important reasons why a pragmatic pluralist approach to ethics and decision-making may be preferable to frameworks that excessively limit the scope of perspectives on complex situations. But Fesmire does not just say, “things are complex and messy, and therefore nothing anyone does or could do is good, bad, right, wrong, virtuous, or vicious.” Instead, Fesmire offers moral imagination, dramatic rehearsal, and the metaphorical framework of jazz improvisation as ways to navigate these complex situations.

Fesmire’s Deweyan ethics make four contributions towards a pragmatic ecocriticism. First they illuminate how Deweyan theories operate on multiple scales. Both individuals and institutions deliberate, and both personal and political decision-makers face complexity, ambiguity, uncertainty, and a plurality of individual views and moral theories. But these decisions are negotiated through dramatic rehearsal and the kinds of activities encouraged in a participatory democracy, including discussion and

rhetorical argumentation. Second, Fesmire offers an alternate metaphor for moral imagination: improvisation. Improvisation is a rich metaphor because it combines tools or equipment with use and creativity, similar to Kai Lee's metaphors of navigation using the compass and gyroscope of adaptive management and participatory democracy. Third, Fesmire encourages philosophers to help people to respond to the difficult situations they face rather than developing arguments for the primacy of one ethical theory over another using simplistic exemplary cases. This translates into a worthy goal for pragmatic ecocriticism: ecocritics might better spend their time looking for the ambiguous and uncertain situations that require complex moral imagination rather than searching for ecocentricity or utilitarian ethics in literature. Fourth and finally, much like the moral theories discussed by Fesmire, texts of environmental writing can serve as part of the process of dramatic rehearsal and moral imagination. They can function as another tool for the improvisational toolbox (another scale for a jazz musician), as well as an entry point for dramatic rehearsal. Texts that describe the situations encountered and decisions made by authors do not necessarily encourage ecocentric values. Instead, **such texts may simply help readers imagine similar situations they might encounter in the future. This shifts the primary object of inquiry from values to situations. Readers who first encounter environmental values imaginatively are better equipped to then integrate these values into the situations they encounter in their own lives.**

Mark Johnson's *Moral Imagination* (1993) supports many of the claims made by Fesmire, but without an explicitly pragmatist or Deweyan framework. Instead, Johnson uses cognitive science to frame moral theory, examining the ways that psychology and

neurobiology can and should inform moral philosophy.³⁹ *Moral Imagination* brings the study of cognitive science and metaphor to the field of ethics, along with other cognitive structures like narrative of particular concern to myself and other ecocritics.

To introduce the topic of complexity and pluralism in moral deliberation, Johnson describes his decision regarding whether to go to war in Vietnam in 1970. Aware of the moral theories, social pressures and values, and literary descriptions of peace and war, Johnson “had all of the moral education [he] could handle,” yet he still “couldn’t decide what was ‘right’” (186). Facing incompatible “ideals, goods, commitments, laws, arguments, and motivations,” Johnson faced a situation where there was “no obviously ‘right thing to do,’ ... not one and only one right answer, and... no simple method for deciding how to act” (186). Using cognitive moral psychology as a guide, Johnson argues that a “theory of morality, then, should be a theory of moral understanding,” descriptive, or similar to scientific, psychological, and sociological theories that don’t “tell us how to behave toward other people,” but rather help people to “understand the subtleties of group dynamics and to be more socially astute” among other things (188). Because there is a “cognitive basis for the narrative construction of meaning” (164-184), Johnson understands why contemporary pragmatist Richard Rorty “has observed that people who care about their moral self-development turn, not to philosophical texts on moral theory, but rather to novels, short stories, and plays” (196). Johnson goes so far as to argue that moral laws might better be construed as “useful rules of thumb that summarize the

³⁹ The book is one of many volumes where Mark Johnson and his intermittent co-author, linguist George Lakoff, rethink areas of philosophy through cognitive science, beginning with *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) and expanding into politics, mathematics, and epistemology.

collective experience and wisdom of a moral tradition concerning prototypical situations” (187). Yet in the end, he cautions that moral principles, while not absolute, *are* important (256), again following Cornel West’s approach of demoting without devaluing the theories of morality. Simultaneously, Johnson offers a pragmatically inter-subjective approach to understanding “rational criticism” of moral theories, decisions, and actions (257).

Though Johnson places theories of morality, psychology, sociology, and science on the same level as rules of thumb and conventional wisdom when it comes to ethical deliberation and action, all theories and rules of thumb are not created equally. Nevertheless, all are tools in the same toolbox, available and useful for particular tasks in different situations, and together they function as part of a larger system of equipment for living. Like Rorty and Fesmire, Johnson rightfully recognizes the role of literary texts and other discourse in people’s moral development and decision-making, bringing this third path back again to Kenneth Burke’s notion of the ethical instrumentality of literature. Burke’s comparison of literature and proverbs, not unlike Johnson’s view of conventional wisdom and rules of thumb, offers scholars the final piece in the pragmatic ecocriticism puzzle.

Summary and the Methods of Pragmatic Ecocriticism

Wolfgang Mieder, the scholar most known for taking proverbs seriously, uses Burke’s essay “Literature as Equipment for Living” to introduce two of his books: *Proverbs Speak Louder Than Words* (2008, 13) and *Proverbs* (2004, 8). Yet from my

perspective, elevating proverbs to the level of literature or moral theory is far less interesting than using literature and environmental writing to understand the ways that writers navigate both rhetorical situations—deciding how to tell their stories—and pragmatic situations—deciding what to do when faced with complex, pluralistic, and uncertain situations. In other words, pragmatic ecocriticism should examine how writers “dwell in crisis”: how writers and characters navigate situations that transcend boundaries and that lack clear paths forward.⁴⁰ But pragmatic ecocriticism also concerns how writers craft texts in response to rhetorical situations.

This pragmatic examination of environmental texts is therefore concerned with how writers navigate or improvise in the face of complexity, pluralism, and uncertainty. In particular, I seek to explain how writers narrate their responses to crisis, how they “dwell” in crisis—the verb form—rather than making crisis their “dwelling”—the noun form. Such an examination offers not just a pragmatic ecocriticism, but a richer, fuller toolbox for living in times of social conflict and environmental degradation, where writers and readers have to work through situations based on what they understand, infer, and hold valuable to themselves, but with social, environmental, economic, political, and institutional constraints that limit their options and choices. In the face of a plurality of other viewpoints and a plurality of moral ideals, writers and their audiences are forced to make their way through the world with the tools at their disposal—compasses and

⁴⁰ As described earlier, such conditions are characterized by both ecocentric and anthropocentric values. They transcend the personal and political, or private and public spheres, and they bridge the gaps between global social-environmental crises and the regional, local, or personal situations encompassing a plurality of social and environmental considerations, constraints, values, understandings, and inferences.

gyroscopes, musical instruments and exercises, moral theories and political institutions, poems and essays. But they also have the support and faculties of moral, political, and environmental awareness, imagination, understanding, and community that allow them to creatively use the equipments for living at their disposal. Reading Thoreau's *Walden* pragmatically doesn't make everyone act like Thoreau, but it does involve thinking about the particular situations, decisions, and actions Thoreau faced (both in his context of 19th century Massachusetts and beyond); where to live, how to interact with his neighbors, what to eat, whether and how to participate in democratic decisions, and how to tell his story. Similarly, reading any contemporary work of environmental writing—poetry or prose, fiction or nonfiction—will in some way influence how readers respond to similar situations in their own lives, how they might dwell in crisis.⁴¹ It is therefore the role of scholars to critically examine the pragmatic narratives of environmental writers, asking how the authors navigated complexity, uncertainty, and plurality, in order to better understand the equipments for living described in the literature of environmental decision-making.

Framing this study as I do as an early work of pragmatic ecocriticism, I have chosen three texts, all within the genre of contemporary environmental writing and all following the tradition of Thoreau and Leopold's natural history essays. Each offers an

⁴¹ Such a perspective on literature may sound similar to traditional defenses of liberal education, but there are two points I emphasize beyond such arguments. The first is the focus on situations, actions, and reasoning/deliberation, which can get lost in some critical methods. The second is the relevance of cognitive science to moral imagination, via Mark Johnson cited in this chapter and the cognitive neuroscience research cited in the introduction. This research indicates that the brain responds to stimulation by books or moral imagination, even if it is unclear that the texts persuasive in the traditional Aristotelian sense.

approach to dwelling in crisis, an equipment for living in contemporary situations riddled with ecospeak and absolutist understandings of moral, political, and scientific theories. But each also offers the potential for pragmatism to move beyond ecospeak's polarizing rhetoric.

In choosing these three texts as exemplars of environmental pragmatism in literature, the scope of pragmatic ecocriticism may appear limited to prose, essays, memoir, and other nonfiction rather than poetry, pop culture texts, or fiction. The fact that the three authors of these books are white Americans with PhDs may appear at first meritocratic or racially suspect, echoing the claims made against classical American pragmatism. But following the example of pragmatism's role in grassroots justice movements such as Myles Horton, the Highlander Folk School, and Civil Rights, I suggest in the conclusion that this approach to pragmatic ecocriticism shares much with the field of environmental justice. Further, I suggest that an examination of narratives by non-white authors—for example, Eddy Harris's *Mississippi Solo* (1988) and Majora Carter's TED Talk on Greening the Ghetto of New York's South Bronx—are one of two next logical steps in the development of pragmatic ecocriticism, this one from the environmental side. The corresponding step from the perspective of literature and genre studies would involve a critical engagement with poetry by Mary Oliver or Stephen Dunn, and fiction by J.K. Rowling or Linda Hogan.

In summary, a pragmatic ecocriticism based in rhetoric and ethics offers an alternative to ecocritical investigations based in nature awareness, ecocentric values, or even pragmatist ethics. Such an ecocritical pursuit involves examining how authors and

characters respond to complex and uncertain situations: how they navigate problems in a time of social-environmental crisis, and how they construct narratives regarding their decisions and actions. Additionally, beyond investigating whether and how certain focal texts are, or are not, pragmatic in some sense—for some particular audiences, or by sharing commitments with pragmatism as it is understood by some particular theorists—this dissertation also applies the pragmatist framework developed in this chapter as an interpretive critical approach. By this method, *any* text can be critically examined through a pragmatic lens. Some may lend themselves better to such an interpretation, but any texts are fair game. Yet the focal texts examined in the following three chapters offer two qualities that not all texts have: first, they demonstrate pragmatic commitments (to the principles outlined in this chapter), and second, they have very explicit narratives of decisions and actions in response to complex situations. For that reason, I have chosen to develop this critical and interpretive method with regard to such low-hanging fruit. Further study and comparative analysis can certainly apply such a pragmatist reading to any text, but such texts may not demonstrate the same kinds of commitments or experiential narratives of decision-making and moral imagination.

Chapter 3: Beach Reading: Kathleen Dean Moore's *The Pine Island Paradox*

Even during the summer months, the island coasts of Alaska hardly offer the stereotypical beach experience: sand, surfing, and sun. Yet it is to these Alaskan beaches that Kathleen Dean Moore, her husband Frank, and her children Erin and Jonathan go to escape the “routines and pride and presuppositions” of the school year that too often separate their lives from the natural world (20). Like a “loud-mouthed, piano-legged aunt who arrives unbidden with all her baggage” (20), Moore descends on the Alaskan beaches of Pine Island, determined to get closer not just to the seals but to her family as well. Writing about her experiences on the beaches of this island and others closer to her Oregon home, Moore eagerly and equally delves into the sacred and mundane, the extraordinary and the ordinary. Though some might argue that her approach to nature writing is less appropriate for “literary criticism,” and more appropriate for “beach reading,” I question this easy dismissal and seek to push ecocritics and nature writers alike to both embrace the “easy listening” genre of environmental literature, and to seek out the beauty and complexity of Moore’s writing, offering as it does a pragmatic equipment for living. Such a search reveals the many ways in which Moore is rethinking environmental philosophy and nature writing.

A philosophy professor-turned-nature writer, Kathleen Dean Moore takes explicit inspiration from Henry David Thoreau and Aldo Leopold, responding to and building on the tradition of natural history essays. Moore could easily have internalized their approaches as many writers have, opting to describe her observations and lessons from the natural world while minimizing the role that people—friends, family, and

neighbors—play in her life. Her essays could just as easily address the nature—the behavior of crows and seals, the ecology of deer mice or the song of meadowlarks, the trophic levels of salmon, fungal genetics, and forest disturbance ecology—without the human. Yet she chooses instead to envelope the human and the nonhuman, her son and the fish he loves to catch, her husband and his wry commentary on bird behavior, her father and his fascination with refrigerator fungus, her daughter and a rescued deer mouse, her time searching for and finding these organisms, her grief viewing a forest clearcut.

Moore's choice is grounded in Leopold's land ethic, in Nel Noddings' feminist ethics of care, and Moore's own interest in "making connections in a disconnected world." But most importantly, her decision recasts nature writing as a story of human-nature, of ecosocial dilemmas and decisions, of social-environmental values, constraints, and considerations. Thus Moore addresses her experiences as a daughter, mother, neighbor, professor, singer of hymns, and explorer of places wild and domestic, sacred and mundane, near and far. *The Pine Island Paradox*'s narrative arc stems from Moore's concern with absolutes and dualisms, and as she weaves tales of a world filled with complex and uncertain situations and decisions, her background as a practical philosopher—a feminist or a pragmatist—offers a particular clarity to her reasoning. In these ways, Kathleen Dean Moore offers readers an equipment for living in the 21st century, a time and place filled with crises and complexity, human concerns and environmental considerations, nature and culture, love and grief.

As her third book of nature writing essays, *The Pine Island Paradox* represents both a continuation and a novel development in Moore's writing. Following *Riverwalking* (1995) and *Holdfast* (1999), Moore continues to hone her style: her writing is primarily personal accounts of experiencing nature. In these accounts, she connects family (her parents, sisters, husband, and children) with experiences of the world, and she sees her unique role as a nature writer as that of a philosopher. This means responding to the sometimes troubling intellectual baggage of western philosophy, but doing so in such a way that uses the strengths of philosophers to address this baggage: philosophers' attention to both epistemology/knowledge and ethics/values, and philosophers' clarity of reasoning, argument, and writing. The topical diversity of *Pine Island* equals that of *Holdfast* and surpasses that of *Riverwalking*, but *Pine Island* offers readers the level of coherence found in *Riverwalking*, which surpasses that of *Holdfast*. In that way, *Pine Island* can be seen as an exciting step in Moore's evolution as a nature writer.

However, Kathleen Dean Moore's evolution as a philosophy professor is much more a result of her earlier scholarship related to analytic philosophy. As a philosopher, Moore wrote her dissertation on *The Concept of Pardon in a Retributive Theory of Punishment* (1977), which later became the book *Pardons: Justice, Mercy, and the Public Interest* (1989). While understanding this intellectual history might seem superfluous to the topic of Moore's nature writing, the topics of mercy, retribution, and forgiveness enter her nature writing on occasion, including in one of the essays from *Pine Island* examined below. Just as importantly, *Pardons* demonstrates Moore's underlying concern with practical philosophy: *Pardons* addresses a topic from political philosophy,

but does so in a way that is concerned with real problems—executive pardons in America—and applications, not just theoretical questions of metaphysics and formal logic.

Additionally, Moore’s philosophical investigation of presidential clemency brings philosophy together with legal and historical texts, demonstrating a willingness to move beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries to address the complexity of executive decisions for clemency. The goal of this chapter is similar, to investigate the decisions and reasons Moore offers in the face of complex and uncertain social-environmental situations. And connecting her background in political philosophy and issues of justice is worthwhile if for no other reason than asking why issues of justice have not emerged in her nature writing to a greater degree. Yet I read her environmental essays as working to bridge the gulf between her primary academic field of philosophy and her long-held interest in nature writing. *Pine Island* moves far beyond *Riverwalking* and *Holdfast* to bridge this gap, but fully spanning this gulf may take more time.

Moore’s more recent philosophical text, *Reasoning and Writing* (1993), is a writing textbook for students of philosophy, but interestingly, Moore addresses as many topics from informal logic and rhetoric as she does formal logic and purely analytic philosophy. Combined with her experiences as a child and adult, described in her nature writing essays, Moore’s historic willingness to escape the traditional tenure line of a philosophy professor may explain her entrance into the realm of nature writing.

What emerges from Kathleen Dean Moore’s background is her interest in the relevance of philosophy, the practical philosophy that goes beyond asking what a good

life might be, and works to consider and explain the particulars of moral decision making and action. She frames *Pine Island* as a response to problems derived—at least in part—from the history of Western philosophy, from Democritus and Leucippus, Bacon and Descartes, Kant, Hobbes, and Locke, even Henry David Thoreau (5). But Moore avoids preoccupation with these philosophers and their ideas, choosing instead to tell a different story, one that may move both philosophy and environmental writing beyond disconnection and separation toward connection, responsibility, and care. In so doing, Moore offers a pragmatic narrative, telling readers stories that address not just *where* to live, *with whom*, and *for what*, but more importantly, *how* to live.

Beach Reading

If the “beach experience” is sand, surfing, and sun, then “beach reading” is a book that distracts from working life: it’s the easy read, the biography, mystery, or romance novel meant to remind readers why they enjoy flipping through pages filled with text. Unlike *Hunting for Hope* (the “self-help book”) and *Having Faith* (the “mommy book”), which have easier-to-place genres aside from environmental writing, Moore’s *Pine Island* primarily resembles traditional nature writing: she even refers to Thoreau and Leopold multiple times by name. Yet in addition to the setting on beaches of the Pacific Northwest, the style and voice allow *Pine Island* to be characterized by the popular genre of “beach reading.” To many literary scholars and environmental writers, this characterization may appear at first to be a pejorative label. After examining the “beach reading” genre, however, I argue that such a label is not only complimentary of Moore’s

writing, but also explains how such a book as *Pine Island* can be complementary to those of Sanders and Steingraber.

The characterization of “beach reading,” like those of “self-help” and “mommy book,” was lifted from a conversation I had while examining these books in detail. In a number of ways, the label—however constricting and limited—has stuck for me. Though the book hasn’t had the sales or readership to rival Daniel Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), or Nora Roberts’ *Blue Dahlia* (2004), or even James Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces* (2003), Moore’s *Pine Island* meets both the more quantitative and qualitative standards for what might be termed beach reading. Readability metrics found on Amazon.com place *Pine Island*’s Flesch Index of “reading ease” at 68 on a scale of 1-100 (0-30 requiring college degrees, 90-100 accessible to 5th or 6th graders). As shown in Table X, *Pine Island* is far closer to common examples of “beach reading” like *The Da Vinci Code* or *Blue Dahlia* than to common “nature writing” texts like Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854), and Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac* (1949). This appears to be an intentional decision, given that her scholarly book *Pardons* aligns closer to *Silent Spring*’s complexity than to the accessibility of *Pine Island*.

Book	Flesch Index	Complex Words (%)	Words per Sentence
Blue Dahlia	80	6	10
<i>Refuge</i>	69	10	12
Pine Island Paradox	68	7	18
<i>The Da Vinci Code</i>	65	11	11
Sand County Almanac	59	11	19
Walden	55	9	28
<i>Silent Spring</i>	41	18	23
<i>Pardons</i>	41	19	21

There are, of course, other texts of environmental writing that are as readable and accessible as Moore’s *Pine Island*, including Terry Tempest Williams’ *Refuge* (1991). But what matters more is that a quantitative view appears to support *Pine Island*’s label as beach reading.

Just as important, and what led to the claim in the first place, is the specific textual evidence of her style and voice, the qualities of Moore’s writing that make her readers feel comfortable and free of the pressures associated with jobs and school, or technical writing and textbooks. Examples of using more common language rather than formal prose abound: “okay, I’ll just say it” (134), “shit happens” (106), “a red-throated loon quacks like Daffy Duck” (60), “I’m sorry to be grumpy” (133), and “love ads are a data bank of human nature far more revealing than the Human Genome Project... So there it is. People like the outdoors best of all, they say, better even than sex” (38-39). These examples aside, Moore treads the ground between what’s common in nature essays—the mundane—and language that pushes the generic boundaries—the profane (of nature essays at least).

Writing a more approachable nature essay is a far different, and likely more difficult, task than incorporating this popular voice into environmental literature proper (fiction, poetry). Here a character like Edward Abbey's Hayduke can take on a particular persona with idiosyncrasies and eccentricities, common (often foul) language, and a worldview rarely associated with nature writers. Likely, it is for this reason that Kenneth Burke identifies *literature* as equipment for living, rather than nonfiction essays. When writing environmental essays, the author is forced to put herself—her views and interests—in the text and on the line, perhaps with the help of her scientist husband Frank. When Moore's thoughts approach simplistic or low-culture prose while aiming at common language and approachability, Frank is usually available to offer a counterpoint, pushing her back toward a more scientific understanding, telling her, "Kathy, this is *bad science*" (39), giving her insight into bird behavior (141), or offering her a scientific paper on the neurobiology of music appreciation (245).

This dynamic between the humanist (Kathleen) and scientist (Frank) is similar to the one Moore remembers from her childhood between her father offering a rationalist science and her mother offering common wonder (*Holdfast*, 39-47), and it offers a welcome narrative of navigating science, and ethics or aesthetics. More importantly, Moore's incorporation of these different "characters" pushes us to rethink Burke's emphasis on the literary quality of equipments for living. It transforms the standard into a more general "rhetoric as equipment for living," whereby particular texts might offer a particular kind of equipment depending not just on the literary qualities, but also the rhetorical qualities inherent in essays and nature writing.

One of Moore's underlying purposes in her "popularizing" of nature writing appears at least to be creating a book that college students might read outside of class, and maybe some non-students might read on the beach, even if that beach is in the Boundary Waters of Minnesota or on Chesapeake Bay and not in Cancun or the Florida Keys. Popularizing nature writing—combining science and ethics as Moore does—requires the author to walk a thin ridgeline between academic prose that reads like a textbook, and common language rivaling the lowest grade blog-talk (these are at least the potential charges of critics, and the worries of authors). It is the thin line between making a subject accessible and dumbing down that subject. Step too far in either direction, and the slope is steep enough to alienate audiences already skeptical of nature writing. Because a certain degree of taste is inherent in critical evaluation of popularization, I forego in-depth evaluation of Moore's overall approach, but I do caution against the "love ads" approach to nature writing, agreeing with Frank's skepticism of "Shy Affectionate SF" (38-41).

The attempt to make nature writing less formal and academic—and more readable, approachable, or popular—is certainly a welcome one if nature writers and ecocritics are to follow Killingsworth and Palmer's advice on avoiding "ecospeak" and alienation (279). Including "beach reading" in the environmental writing genre crosses boundaries, exposes new audiences to nature writing, and brings the matter of environmental crisis and ethics to a larger audience. But this is hardly the most significant of *Pine Island's* contributions to nature writing. A closer look at Moore's approach to human-nature and other dualisms, her refiguring of crisis, and her way of

navigating complex and uncertain social-environmental situations offers a far more expansive view of Kathleen Dean Moore's brand of nature writing.

Pragmatic Ecocriticisms and *The Pine Island Paradox*

The richness of *The Pine Island Paradox* allows for any number of topics to be addressed and ecocritical lenses to be employed. However, the pragmatic ecocriticism developed in this dissertation offers critical—meant both as interpretive and vital—insight into three of Moore's reconfigurations: first, Moore pragmatically refigures human-nature and other dualisms; second, Moore refigures ecological crisis as a human condition; and third, Moore refigures ethics as “careful” decisionmaking. I address each of these in detail before examining *Pine Island's* overarching narrative and “Blowing the Dam,” a specific story of restoring a river's flow on her family land. Kathleen Dean Moore's grand narrative offers readers “equipment for living” with her stories not just addressing *where* to live and where to visit (Frederick Buell's noun-form of dwelling), but *how* to live (the verb form of dwelling). Finally, I argue that the essay “Blowing the Dam” can be read as an allegory of humans and nature at work together, as a story of ecological restoration and biodiversity conservation, but most importantly, as a narrative of capacity building.

Moore begins her Prologue with a conundrum facing mapmakers charged with delineating an island in the ocean: where are the boundaries of land and sea, especially when wind, waves, or rain blur the shoreline, when “the distinction doesn't hold up at the edges” (3)? The paradox is this: “Not even an island is an island. Storm-washed and rain-sodden, so hard to get to, so hard to escape, Pine Island is the symbol of isolation

and exile. But any geographer will tell you that an island is in fact only a high point in the continuous skin of the planet,” a sign “of the wholeness of being, the intricate interdependencies that link people and places” (4). This paradox of islands generally, and her Pine Island in Alaska specifically, frames Moore’s attempts throughout the book to uncover the relationships between three “insulae” as she calls them: human/nature, near/far, and sacred/mundane. Each of the insulae shapes a third of the book, and in each, Moore works to explore not just the micro-scale ecotonal borderlands existing between the dichotomy’s parts, but macro-scale bird’s-eye-view of distinctions and dichotomies, dualisms and disconnects that trace back to the tradition of Western philosophy and plague contemporary worldviews and ethics.

Human-Nature: An Extended Family, Singing and Dancing

Though grounded in feminist care ethics, Moore pragmatically reworks human-nature and other dualisms using stories and experiential evidence that address why these disconnects break down, or pragmatically speaking, why these insulae just aren’t useful any longer, if ever they were. Two active metaphors and one relational metaphor provide *Pine Island* with its continuity of purpose: reconnecting humans and nature, especially in Part 1, but to a lesser extent throughout the book. The active metaphors of dancing and making music—or listening—show how humans and animals are connected in their behavior. Simultaneously, the metaphor of family, or just as often, kinship, offers a relational framework for understanding humans and the rest of nature as connected.

Moore offers both music and dancing as metaphorical associations between humans and nature in *The Pine Island Paradox*, the former as a theme interspersed throughout the text, and the latter as a more contained narrative in an essay. Inspired perhaps by her daughter's experiences learning to dance (117) in the essay preceding "Learning to Dance," or just using the story as an entry point, Moore begins with a story of a family trip (with Frank and Jonathan) to see sage grouse dance at a particular and exact place—a "lek"—that grouse have danced for generations (122). This dancing, if not her daughter's experiences in jail, provides the rhetorical exigence for recalling her own history of dancing, as a child with her sisters, junior high and high school dancing where the "guys never could remember the steps," and college dances in a temporary union building. But Moore's love of dancing really revolves around street dances and how they helped to create community enough to be "called the Neighborhood" (125). But as the community grew older, more successful, and moved away, so went the Neighborhood. Now, Moore finds herself taking ballroom dance classes with Frank and envying people who dance like her colleague who joins "the Karuk people for the world renewal dances" (126).

Moore uses this complex dancing metaphor—grouse dance, people dance, dancing serves social functions, and dancing connects people with special places—not just to make connections between human and nonhuman behavior (similar to connections drawn elsewhere), and between people and places (again, something she does elsewhere), but also to bring all of these together in a relatively brief essay. Moreover, she combines an experiential grouse-watching narrative with the personal history—or memoir—of her

dance experiences, and brings the two together with a reflective endnote: by learning how to celebrate people and places together, we can “dance the neighborhoods back into the towns, dance the sacred back into our dusty patches of ground” (129).

Moore’s dancing metaphor is largely contained in one essay, but the metaphor of music permeates all of *Pine Island*, from start—a wolf howling over the island cliffs (13)—to finish—singing Tennyson’s poem with her sister (247). Whether it is the wolf’s and loon’s augmented fourth intervals showing up in classical music and culture (13-17), discordant harmonies becoming a tuned chord by her students on a class camping trip (101-102), or the potential of melody and words of “Amazing Grace” bringing together strangers on a boat (75-78), music is a drawn out, deepened, and more complex counterpart to the dancing metaphor. “Songs in the Night” is a particularly wide-ranging essay: Moore touches on sounds, listening, mimicry, Biblical exegesis, word/meaning reclamation, birdsong, frogsong, bat sonar, and owl ears. Her anecdotes reflect a commitment not just to natural history, but also to science popularization and etymology in an effort to understand the aesthetics of loving wonder by listening to other animals, like these other animals do, often in the dark (186-198). Moore calls this kind of listening, loving the land “pragmatically” (196).

Though dancing and music provide metaphorical frameworks for connecting the activities of humans and the rest of nature, Moore uses family, or kinship, as a way to metaphorically capture the relatedness of people, other organisms, and places. Although Moore cites Aldo Leopold as an influence, this choice for a metaphorical relationship represents a departure from Leopold’s “biotic community” and community metaphor

generally. She is taken by “how complicated and layered and open-ended this kinship of humans with all of natural creation actually is, this beautiful, bewildering family” (55). In contemporary times of mobility and uprooted-ness, the metaphorical framework of kinship and family—seen broadly—can extend meaningfully beyond “community” because family members grow up together, “staying close, living together for a very long time” (88), offering “a way of knowing that is all mixed up with loving and getting along” (88). Following Winona LaDuke, and here acknowledging the familial extension beyond Leopold’s biotic community, Moore suggests that our ethics must extend to “all our relations” (65).

In addition to these metaphors for connection, *Pine Island* offers clearly articulated reasons to suspect the human-nature dualism. In “Late at Night, Listening,” Moore offers a numbered list of relationships—kinships—as a way to analytically support the stories she tells in this chapter and elsewhere. This list, similar in purpose to her list of ways that loving people and places are the same, serves as the framework to which the particular stories and experiences can attach, similar to the superstructure of a timber frame home or a human skeleton. The kinship list includes common substance, common origins, interdependence, and common fate (55-56). The list of similarities between loving people and places is much longer, but just as important to the relational metaphor of family and kinship. Asking herself what it means to love a person and a place allows Moore to discover that she had “two copies of the same list” (35). Her list includes the following:

One. To want to be near it, physically.

Number two. To want to know everything about it—its story, its moods, what it looks like by moonlight.

Number three. To rejoice in the fact of it.

Number four. To fear its loss, and grieve for its injuries.

Five. To protect it—fiercely, mindlessly, futilely, and maybe tragically, but to be helpless to do otherwise.

Six. To be transformed in its presence—lifted, lighter on your feet, transparent, open to everything beautiful and new.

Number seven. To want to be joined with it, taken in by it, lost in it.

Number eight. To want the best for it.

Number nine. Desperately. (35-36)

After feeling unsatisfied with this list, poetic and philosophical as it is, Moore examines her personal metaphors for love, including “a taut fly line, a spruce root, a route on a map, a father teaching his daughter to tie a bowline knot” (36), and she realizes that love is “not a choice, or a dream, or a romantic novel. It’s a fact: an empirical fact about our biological existence” (36). Moore remains unsatisfied with her list until she reflectively discovers what might be called the pragmatics of love: “Loving isn’t just a state of being, it’s a way of acting in the world. Love isn’t a sort of bliss, it’s a kind of work, sometimes hard, spirit-testing work” that involves taking responsibility for someone or something’s health and needs, leading her to number ten: “To love a person or a place is to accept moral responsibility for its well-being” (36).

What is initially striking about this passage is Moore’s deft ability to reconnect human and nature not just with commonalities as she does in the kinship list, but with love in its poetic forms. But her closer look at these love poetics (feelings and desires) leaves Moore unsatisfied until she identifies the ethical component, the pragmatics of loving a person or place, the responsibility and caring for others that is intertwined with the feelings and desires of love. Read one way, *Pine Island* is a collection of love

stories—perfect beach reading—between her and her family, her islands, her human and more-than-human communities, her boats, and the rest of the world: not quite a romance novel, but love stories nonetheless. But these love stories do not only concern feelings and desires, however large a role feelings play; these love stories tell of family vacations under comfortable and harsh conditions, of hard work together to restore rivers and reforest clearcut land, and of building community in classroom and neighborhood. By combining the experiential and reflective components of nature writing—her stories and reasoned arguments—Moore is able to reconnect not just human and nature, near and far, or the sacred and mundane, but also the poetics and pragmatics of love.

Similarly, what is notable to philosophers and beach readers alike about these lists of commonalities is how Moore traces the disconnects of humans and nature to Western worldviews shaped by Enlightenment philosophy. Moore wishes that Rene Descartes could experience the world with herself and her daughter so that she could understand why he found the world miserable and lonely (53-54) rather than a world filled astonishingly with life, where every breath shared with plankton, alders, hemlock, and shrimp “weaves you into the fabric of life” (54). Like the fabric of life, tracing the story lines of familial kinship and commonality through *Pine Island* is more akin to understanding knitting than carpentry and its explicit framework. Stories of common substance surface, then give way to stories of common origins. People are made of the same carbon atoms (55), born of the same cosmic dust (181-185), and breathe the same gases (54) as other organisms. We have similar evolutionary adaptations—tissues, senses, behaviors, and gooseflesh—as squids (56), barn owls (197), scrub jays (139-142),

and frightened bears. These stories of common substance and origins could instead be termed narratives of biochemistry and evolution: they address what humans and nature are made from, and the causal genesis of how humans and the rest of nature got to be this way. Just as importantly, they can be viewed in Moore's larger framework as family stories, the kinds of family history or genealogy that help people to understand their places in the world, not in a disempowering sense, but in a relational sense, like finding one's niche, hideout, or home.

If stories of substance address biochemistry, and stories of origins address evolution, then stories of interdependence could be called stories of ecology, and those addressing our common fate a cosmology of sorts, either on a longer term scale (everything decays and will eventually be cosmic dust again) or a smaller scale (however humans co-create or damage the earth will have similar effects on their own lives). People's interdependence with the rest of the world is described physically and emotionally when Moore describes the effects of clearcutting forests on streams: yes, it will destroy the homes and habitat of fish and other organisms, but it will also make stream water polluted and unsafe, while simultaneously diminishing the hopes and imaginations of people, especially the next generation (213).

Moore addresses the fate of people and the earth in a cyclical, ever-changing process, citing the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (153-162), but she also illustrates the point in the larger story of the essay "Fire and Water," where fires and floods represent both "natural change" and "unsupportable loss" (158). In "Blowing the Dam," natural processes are shown to act on both natural and artificial structures: forests and large,

main-stem dams (148-150). “Finis / Genesis” is a creative reinterpretation of the Judeo-Christian creation story as cyclical and more unifying of humans and nature, though aside from this topical relation, the essay is far removed in style from the rest of the book.

Finally, the topic of wildness connects people and the rest of nature with direct reference to pragmatism in Moore’s essay “The Moral Equivalent of Wildness.” The setting for the essay is a class trip to a forested sub-alpine lake where the class is free to camp and paddle while reading and discussing Thoreau. In addition to struggling to understand what and where “nature” is, the students try to understand not just “wildness,” but Thoreau’s more interesting concern with “what the muck of wildness nourishes in *people*” (93). This is a point in itself that brings humans and nature together through wildness instead of reinforcing the divide as discussions of the wild often do. More importantly to the larger topic of pragmatism, rather than focusing solely on what Thoreau meant in his essay, Moore pushes the students to search for a “moral equivalent of wildness,” with explicit reference to pragmatist thinker William James. This overt reference to pragmatism is small wonder given Moore’s life as a philosophy professor, but what a pragmatist approach offers to her students is the opportunity to concern themselves with contemporary personal and shared meanings of wildness in their lives, rather than trying as hard to understand solely what Thoreau meant by wildness. This pragmatic turn is similar to Schiappa’s approach to definitions and the politics of meaning (2003), allowing the question of wildness and human-nature to be interpreted through their relationships rather than separations.

Crisis as Human Condition

Refiguring the human-nature dichotomy has a central role for Moore in *The Pine Island Paradox*. By examining the history of Western philosophy and telling her stories, Moore is able to move not just beyond the human-nature dualism, but also those of near-far, and sacred-mundane. She does so by connecting the activities of humans and nonhumans, by extending the metaphorical framework of family, and by knitting together her experiences and reflections on what humans and the rest of nature have in common. Though Moore's responses to Western philosophy since the Enlightenment are explicitly feminist in motivation, *Pine Island's* experiential, particular, and evolutionary commitments, along with Moore's skepticism of strong dualisms, share much with the pragmatist tradition. This implicit pragmatism becomes ever clearer when Moore refigures environmental crisis as "part of the human condition" (88).

Kathleen Dean Moore's recognition of global problems with social and environmental factors is clear from the outset. She describes problems of "wars for oil" and "corporations stealing" (137), of marine by-catch (236), salmon run extinction (220-223), and deforestation (212-213), of "epidemics of asthma in smoky cities," lead-poisoned children, dysfunctional cities, and "landslides and vacant streams" (58). She understands not just Buell's laundry list of crisis, but the greenwashing and political efforts to ignore it, quoting her neighbor: "It's still a beautiful world. The environmental crisis is just a protest-industry fund-raising scam" (212).

These crises are cause for grief (209-214), and from a bird's-eye view, they may be paralyzing, but Moore works to connect the larger view of crisis with the responses

possible on the individual, familial, and community scales. She takes charge of her own back yard (142), does what she can to restore the river that flows through her land (143-146), gives her students opportunities to move beyond sorrowful or angry responses to crisis (99-100), tolerates her neighbors' qualities that bother her (130, 165) while looking for ways to create a better neighborhood community (124-129), and tries her best to care for her family while recognizing the longer term and larger consequences of her actions (117-119).

This last point is critical to the pragmatic task of refiguring crisis for two reasons. First, Moore offers a pragmatic narrative in which she navigates particular situations—family holidays, trips to Pine Island and Costa Rica, time spent with her ailing father—by caring for her family and all the people, places, and things that matter to them. This pragmatic narrative taps into Moore's metaphorical array, or framework: her larger notion of family and kin, the metaphors described above. By connecting *Pine Island's* main narrative—caring for family—with her metaphorical family-extending framework, Moore offers a narrative that on a conceptual level refigures crisis to a more personal and familial scale.

Second, and just as importantly, Moore juxtaposes care for family, particularly how parents care for their children, with this larger care for others—distant people and the rest of nature. Though she doesn't use this phrase, this juxtaposition could be called *Pine Island's* "parenting paradox." In "The World Depends on This," Moore is struggling with her daughter being jailed for protesting the war. Social and environmental crises are the setting: "Bombs are falling, newspapers aren't answering

their phones, injustice and environmental destruction tangle in nets of violence and profit around the world” (117), and all Moore can wish for is her daughter to be home in bed, safe. Moore reflects on this paradox and how the desire to care for one’s closest relations can unwittingly wreak havoc on the rest of the world and our children’s future:

Don't all parents want the world for their children? *Fellow parents, tell me, wouldn't we do anything for them?* To give them big houses, we will cut ancient forests. To give them perfect fruit, we will poison their food with pesticides. To give them the latest technologies, we will reduce entire valleys to toxic dumps. To give them the best education, we will invest in companies that profit from death. To keep them safe, we will deny them the right to privacy, to travel unimpeded, to peacefully assemble. And to give them peace, we will kill other people's children or send them to be killed, and amass enough weapons to kill the children again, kill them twenty times if necessary.

We would do anything for our children but the one big thing: Stop and ask ourselves, what are we doing and allowing to be done? (117)

After offering this rhetorical appeal to her fellow parents, Moore uses another rhetorical approach, writing from the perspective of those distant others for which most parents and people generally care most: grandchildren. This approach is interesting not just because Moore connects the interests of near and distant others, a goal of hers, but also uses readers’ grandchildren as the symbolic spokespeople for the interests of these distant others. As Moore struggles to connect the near and far, those close to her and those distant, and the crises facing the world and the particular situations she and others face, she tells her daughter that there are other ways to respond to crisis, to which Erin responded, “Then you need to show me those ways... Don’t tell me. Show me” (119), which is a fittingly pragmatic reminder when facing crisis.

Finally, in refiguring crisis, Moore also recognizes the noun-form of dwelling so important to Frederick Buell’s conceptual history of crisis, yet still gives primacy not to a

place, setting, or dwelling, but rather to the actions, approaches, and commitments inherent in the verb form of dwelling. Responding to climate variability and change, Moore acknowledges that “we must become caretakers of our places” (87), referring to Linda Hogan’s explanation of caretaking in *Dwellings* (1995). While this paragraph initially appears to support Buell’s noun-form of “dwelling,” the next shifts attention right back to a reconfigured crisis, with dwelling as a verb and crisis on a human scale rather than dwelling as noun and crisis on a global scale. Moore pushes this point, “Say you agree that humans have an obligation to care for the earth. What does that mean in particular, in this place and time? What are you going to do?” (87). Recognizing an obligation to a dwelling, whether one’s home or the earth generally is little help to people trying to figure out how to act as they encounter difficult situations with immediate and distant consequences, and it is only through giving deep consideration to the *verb form* of “dwelling” that our obligation to care for our *noun forms* of “dwelling” will be realized. It is in this way that Moore refigures crisis, attending to the particular situations that people encounter, the situations that may have far-reaching effects on larger social-environmental crises, but that can be best understood through people’s decision making and actions.

Refiguring Ethics: Care and Uncertainty, Pluralism and Improvisation

After asking “What are you going to do?” in the quote above, Moore continues, saying, “The point I want to make is that it isn’t easy to know. You can’t assume you know what to do. Everything changes around you, and you can’t do nothing, but something is often the wrong thing. And what you do in one place has unexpected

effects a hundred miles away or a hundred years in the future” (87). The message here, and of *Pine Island* generally, is a message of ethical contingency, that is, of an uncertain future where moral absolutes are unhelpful and moral obligations are just a starting point requiring application and extrapolation.

At the outset, Kathleen Dean Moore is attempting “to do the groundtruthing of environmental ethics” (8), which leads her not just to the experiences she describes, but to her approach, “poking around” as a trained philosopher⁴² and working to understand the meaning of these experiences to environmental ethics. This approach, groundtruthing, offers a level of awareness useful to others. Though Chapter 1 cautioned against putting too much stock in awareness as a final solution to social-environmental crises, awareness is certainly a necessary part of any equipment for living in times of crisis, helping people to navigate complex situations. Moore understands the preliminary role of awareness, writing that “When people learn to look, they begin to see, really see. When they begin to see, they begin to care. And caring is the portal into the moral world” (49). But awareness is not just about ethics, caring, and responses to crisis. Reflecting on her experiences gathering clams with her family, she offers a Mary Oliver-like consideration of gratitude and awareness:

Gratitude is a kind of seeing, an awareness of the magnitude of the gift of the earth. To see the world gratefully is to be endlessly surprised by the bare fact of it, its beauty and power and everlastingness. Gratitude is attentiveness. It’s easy to move through the world and never notice how a shifting wind changes the air from salt to cedar, easy to overlook the invisible moon that moves the tides. To be grateful is to stand with

⁴² “Poking around” is a topic Moore mentions on page 8 of *Pine Island*, but addresses in greater detail in *Riverwalking* (31-37), a great phrase and quite descriptive of her approach to nature writing.

stinging eyes and reddening nose in the northwest wind, taking it in—really this, taking it in—the expanse of dunes and dusk and each blade of beach grass drawing a circle on the sand. Gratitude peels the brown flakes from a clam shell and holds it into the sun—the violet glob—and wonders at the ridges on the shell, one for every year, so much like the ripple in creek beds on the beach (230-231).

Moore's discussion of gratitude addresses its relationship to terror, rejoicing, and moral obligation, but the key insight is that awareness contains both ethical and aesthetic components, that awareness is an important way of life not just because of increased enjoyment and appreciation of the world, but also because of increased concern and care for the world.

Increasing care through grateful awareness, parenting, or some other form of moral education alludes to Moore's preferred moral framework in *Pine Island* (114, 208). Developing an ecology of caring or "ecological ethics of care" (65) involves bringing Nel Noddings' feminist ethics of care with Aldo Leopold's ecological ethics, and Moore is most interested in how these two ethical theories "lean toward each other, both gleaning wisdom from the human experience of loving and being loved" (64). She examines other moral theories, finding unsatisfactory Utilitarian consequentialism (107-109), and Hume's Is-Ought problem (111-112), and their anthropocentric, or human-centered qualities (108), remarking that "ticks must think that hikers are their special gifts from God." Moore appears more amenable to virtue ethics, as shown in the previous paragraph by her attention to gratitude and awareness, and she ties many of her lessons in

philosophy to Viola Cordova, a Jicarilla Apache who lectured in her classes.⁴³ When Moore echoes Cordova's insight that "people and the world are co-creators of the future" (126), her ethics appear to share much with Alfred North Whitehead and process philosophy. But Moore's moral ecology of caring shares the most with pragmatist ethics like those of Johnson and Fesmire described in Chapter 2.

The ethics of *Pine Island* take place in a world that is "contingent, improbable, beyond our control" (231), where decisions and actions are complex: they have a multitude of consequences, some of them unknown or invisible (109). Unlike nature writers who live in less populated (by humans) places, Moore is forced to tolerate her neighbors, including those who don't share her worldview (212) and those whose actions frustrate her (130, 165), pushing her toward a practical pluralism common to many traditions of pragmatism. In addition to pluralism, complexity, and uncertainty, Moore's ecology of caring involves not just the words "moral imagination," but a rich understanding of the idea, from the cognitive and neurological side examined by Mark Johnson (114) to the metaphor of jazz and improvisation (87-89) used by Steven Fesmire, though this metaphor is directly in reference to Moore's heart trouble. But Moore does work up from ecological literacy and awareness to moral imagination and compassion as the ways of caring and love. She notes that in times of uncertainty, "the impulse is to improvise wildly, to do whatever we need to do to get by another day" (89), a stark contrast to the kind of learned and practiced improvisation of jazz musicians described by

⁴³ Moore has contributed to and edited a number of recent anthologies and books, one of which is *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V.F. Cordova* (2007): University of Arizona Press.

Fesmire. Though it's clear that Moore is refiguring ethics and crisis, the best illustrations of her reconfiguration are two particular pragmatic narratives that illustrate and offer equipments for living.

Equipment for Living: Where Should I Live, and What Should I Live For? And How?

The essay "Where Should I Live, and What Should I Live For?" (130-136) is a direct and explicit reference to Thoreau's second essay in *Walden*, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For." One of the most read and quoted of Thoreau's essays, the premise addresses not just where, why, and how Thoreau lived while at Walden Pond, but it also begins with an examination of the places—and one place in particular, Hollowell place, two miles from the village—that Thoreau only imagined living, plotting out what he would do were he to own a particular plot of land. Similarly, Kathleen Dean Moore's premise involves imagining just what she could do with a particular plot of land outside of town, this time closer to twenty miles rather than two, near a small river rather than a pond, and on the other side of the continent. But a more important difference is that unlike Thoreau, Moore need not be satisfied with imagined ownership, land management, and a dwelling outside of town because she owns this plot of land.

Moore contrasts her life in town—dealing with neighbors and other small annoyances—with the life of her fellow nature writers, many of whom have built their cabin or shack in a wilder, less populated place, many in Montana. Moore then picks apart the reasons she does and does not have for moving out of town beyond the neighbors and norms of nature writing. She has the money, the dream, and the floor plan,

and she understands the reasons people choose to live in “a beautiful, sparsely populated place” (they defend their homes,⁴⁴ they can better write about nature when close to the land, and some people are happier in unpeopled places). The question of neighbors is a wash: the sights, sounds, and smells she has to accept may annoy her, but she likes her neighbors too much anyway. And she might be too cheap to commute to work rather than enjoying her eight-minute walk to her university. In the end, Moore decides that town-life is something that could use more nature writers, saying “Sometimes I think I might call up my writer friends who have moved out of town. Come home, I would say, and write about the clear-cut hillsides and the halogen faded nights... Fight for the close-in places as you would fight for what is wild and good” (136).

Kathleen Dean Moore is not the only nature writer wishing for company in the more populated parts of the country. Jenny Price’s essay “Thirteen ways of seeing nature in L.A.” (2006) makes a similar argument, though one filled with far fewer qualifications and far less uncertainty. Price claims that L.A. is the best place to write about nature and wishes Thoreau (and his contemporary influences) would get on the bus and live up to her favorite ad campaign: “Experience the beauty... of another culture while learning more about wastewater treatment and reuse.” Whether readers prefer the stronger or more qualified argument, Moore and Price are pushing not just readers, but also other writers in the nature writing tradition, to examine the stories of cultures and natures, humans and the rest of the world, as they come together not just in beautiful and sparsely populated areas, but in the complex, commodified, transformed, and polluted landscapes

⁴⁴ This is related to Frederick Buell’s reason for supporting the noun form of “dwelling” as a metaphor for living with crisis. People know their homes and take control of them.

of towns and cities. The authors arrive at similar conclusions, but Moore's approach offers a more pragmatic approach: she's conflicted (133), uncertain (134), and recognizes the plurality of reasons and arguments for leaving town (134-135).

The essay in *Pine Island* examines a particular decision Kathleen Dean Moore faces—whether to move to build a house or cabin on her property out of town and live there, but the larger issue of where and how to live is something that can only be understood in the context of the full book. Moore offers her readers an equipment for living by constructing her life's actions as decisions responding to particular situations she encounters, more and less mundane, but complex and uncertain nonetheless. There are the straightforward decisions concerning which option to pick when facing extreme constraints, simplifying the matter. For instance, should she and her family wait for better weather, and which path to the mainland should they take when leaving Pine Island (68-71)? Though this is certainly a decision to make in the face of uncertainty (and can therefore be read as an allegory for her model of decision making in *Pine Island*), and though the decision has life and death consequences, the choices are limited, and the “how” is rather straightforward. They make a choice and act on it.

However, making the decision of where to live and where to visit is a far more complex process of decision-making and action. The uncertainty does not concern only unknown results (will we die passing through open waters, and will there be someone fishing in the bays and inlets that can drive us to port), but also what options are possible, how to negotiate the reasons when they conflict, and the related questions of how to live and act tied to where she lives: what does living in town mean for visiting other places,

getting her dose of beautiful and sparsely populated places. She addresses this (and offers a simple way to understand “wildness”) when she reasons, “To get my annual dose of wildlands, I commute each summer to Pine Island, a dreamy tide-washed island in a hidden inlet. It’s *very, very* wild, as ‘wild’ is measured by the odds of being drowned or eaten by bears” (133). This echoes her desire to get out of town expressed in an earlier essay (20), but more importantly, it ensures that the question of where to live is not entirely separated from the question of where she must then visit or to where she wishes to “commute.” Moore asks, “How would the world be different if Thoreau had lived with the Emersons and visited Walden Pond on Sundays, instead of the other way around? ... I’m not sure, but I’m fairly confident that fewer people would be moving to the mountains, or building their dream cabins by ponds, crowding out the coots in the land of ten thousand lakes and a hundred thousand lakeside cabins” (134).

In addition to drawing attention to the pragmatic effects and consequences of Thoreau’s writing—a narrative so many Americans now enact—Moore uses this analogy to bring the consequences of her actions into the decision-making analysis she offers as a narrative approach to moral imagination. She recognizes that “commuting to a treasured unpeopled place to write on summer vacations... takes the following: one Ford Expedition SUV trailering one 22-foot fiber-glass boat with a 200 horsepower outboard motor and an 8 horsepower Evinrude, and a skill with a 5 horsepower Mitsubishi outboard. Two motel nights each way. Twenty-six hundred miles, total; 212 gallons of gas—162 for the SUV, 50 for the boats. A gift of \$402.80 to the oil industry” (133-134). Moore understands that this decision harms the earth and “people who probably could put

this amount of money to better use.” In other words, Moore is forced to reconcile how various decisions she makes (where to live) have an impact on other decisions (where she now wishes to visit). She must account for the desires and values she has—to have neighbors and walk to school, but also to be in wild places—with the consequences her decisions can and do have, for herself, her family, for all the other people, animals, and places in the world affected to greater and lesser degrees by her actions. It is this kind of decision making process—of moral and environmental imagination—that Moore’s readers can use as equipment for living. Whether they value, desire, or understand the world in the same way—however they care for their families in the simple and larger metaphorical sense—the readers of *Pine Island* are forced to think about this decision-making process, this approach to living. And it is for this reason that a pragmatic ecocriticism focuses not just on where and for what Moore should live, but how: how should she understand the people and places with a stake in her decisions and actions, how should she therefore give consideration to these stakeholders, and how should she live in the world.

Equipment for Living: Blowing the Dam

In a more compressed narrative, Moore’s essay “Blowing the Dam” (143-151) addresses her and Frank’s decision to remove the dam on the river running through their property, the place she has (as yet) decided to visit rather than inhabit. Moore combines the “blowing the dam” story with two others, one describing a friend and his wife planting trees to create a grandfather forest, and the last her observations and

imaginings of a large dam on the Columbia River. Throughout, Moore reflects on philosophical topics on which she is an expert—retribution, forgiveness, and redemption—but metaphorically transfers the meanings of these terms into her second love of nature writing. The three stories and philosophical reflection combine to create a narrative easily understood as addressing ecological restoration and thereby biodiversity conservation. But by reading the essay as a pragmatic narrative that refigures human and nature, crisis, and ethics, “Blowing the Dam” has a larger meaning as a narrative of capacity building—human and natural—where people can choose to “wrong” others and the world, or where human and natural forces work together—co-creating—our future. When rivers are dammed and forests are clearcut, their natural capacities are weakened, as are the imaginations of people. But by working together over the long term, these capacities can return: capacities of rivers to flow and accommodate trout, of forests to make oxygen and wildlife habitat, and of people to make decisions that are contingent and pragmatic.

In six short sections, Moore weaves her narrative, beginning with the background on the dam and reasons for removing it. She then describes the aftermath of the blown dam, the hard work of removing the concrete, and the resulting river flow ten years later. The third section reflectively constructs the metaphor between the philosophical ideas of retribution, forgiveness, and redemption, and the natural and human systems that can butt heads or work together. The following story offers a parallel example of the same problems and restorative activities: planting trees to allow a forest to return, though it will likely take 500 years. The fifth section offers reflection on this activity, quoting a

philosophy professor, though Moore could just as easily have referenced Wendell Berry's poem "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front." The sixth and final section is a present-day story of following the flow of the Marys and Willamette Rivers to the Columbia, driving to see the large dam currently holding back water, a human system wronging a natural one. Like Edward Abbey⁴⁵ before her, and Derrick Jensen⁴⁶ in the present, Moore reflects on the future of the dam, the "rebirth of the river" that may come by some process, "natural or political." Speaking from her experiences with the Marys River dam removal, she imagines the larger scale breaching of the Dalles Dam a "time when the roots of willows will reach into clear water again."

For writing an essay titled "Blowing the Dam," Kathleen Dean Moore does little to actually describe the event because she and Frank are not even present for the breaching: she says that the guys who did blow the dam "must have drilled some holes, stuck in the dynamite, lit a fuse, and run like hell." As a critic interested in her process of decision-making, I would prefer an expansion of this section, but instead, Moore pushes the first section along as quickly as possible. She addresses the reasons she wants to breach the dam, and they include both human-centered (the desires of canoeists) and the non-human-centered (the needs of cutthroat trout). But the decision involves a simple change of presumption (that rivers normally don't have dams, so just because this one did have a dam did not mean it should): "Somebody put a dam in; somebody could take it out."

⁴⁵ See "Edward Abbey's Remarks at the Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. 11.2 (Summer 2004): 161-66.

⁴⁶ See "Actions Speak Louder than Words," *The Earth First! Journal*. September/October 1998.

The events take place ten years in the past, but foregrounding the decision would more closely parallel the approach Moore takes to the topic of where she should live. In the case of blowing the dam, she and Frank talk over the decision and don't think to worry about the political or legal issues surrounding dam removal. They just call the company that blows things up, and she fast-forwards to the work done jointly by river and person, removing silt and concrete rubble, channeling and sawing away. The act of working together is reminiscent of Richard White's analysis of rivers and dams in *The Organic Machine* (1995), but this narrative flips White's analysis on its head, telling of the joint human and natural work of breaching dams and restoring river flows rather than damming and controlling rivers.

The final section of the narrative reads like a more qualified and pragmatic approach to dam breaching than those offered by Abbey and Jensen. Moore expresses an uncertainty similar to Abbey's as to when and how the dam might be breached, but the same kind of certainty regarding the inevitability of the breaching. Yet Moore's tone and representation of the future offer a far more welcoming and pluralistically tolerant approach than Abbey's, most notably because her audience extends beyond the members of Earth First! Read simply, Moore's essay does everything that a narrative of ecological restoration is presumed to do. The ecosystem is damaged, and the biodiversity and human health and well-being are diminished, perhaps even in crisis. In this case, the rivers are dammed, the forests are clearcut, and the first response involves dam-breaching and tree-planting. But like all acts of restoration ecology, this is not just a one-time event: breaching dams and planting trees don't immediately restore some prior, historic,

or scientific baseline ecosystem state and the biodiversity that once existed, at least not most often. That kind of restoration takes time—and time on a more-than-human-lifetime scale—and often means additional, sometimes continual work. Restoring river flows and grandfather forests in the wet parts of the Pacific Northwest may be the exception rather than the rule when it comes to the need for long-term human intervention and action in the name of ecological restoration. It is no wonder, then, that there were no trumpets or trout leaping to herald Moore’s “Great Demolishment.” But after a while, the river at least flows and “some willows are beginning to take hold,” allowing cutthroat to breed upriver, even in spite of the remaining problems facing the Marys, including agricultural runoff and deforestation. Not only do human and natural systems move from efforts at odds with each other to working together; they also do so through closer interactions and feedbacks, through smaller instances of retribution and forgiveness.

Read as a narrative of ecological restoration, “Blowing the Dam” does just what it should, grappling with the troubles, experiences, and satisfaction of human efforts to redeem themselves for the “harms done to the world” and “for the sake of the world and the well-being of people they will never meet.” But “Blowing the Dam,” a later essay “The Road to Cape Perpetua,” and *Pine Island* as whole, can be read through an alternative narrative framework, that of “capacity building.” As a narrative of capacity building, *Pine Island* combines the human capacities to understand, imagine, and interact with natural ecosystems, with the natural capacities to regenerate, to flow and to grow, and to provide habitat to humans and other organisms. Without people’s efforts to breach

dams and plant trees, the next generation of children will “know mostly fish-poor, flood-stripped streams” where “estuaries are fouled, and no river water is safe to drink” (213). It won’t just be the ecosystems that are impoverished, but people’s lives, imaginations, and hope. Trapped in a “sliding baseline” where people accept that “a stripped down, dammed up, paved over, poisoned, bulldozed, radioactive, impoverished landscape is the norm” and cannot understand how to change this (213), “Blowing the Dam” offers not just a pragmatic approach to decision making, but also a pragmatic approach to acting.

Moore states,

Maybe the meaning of life will turn out to be a verb, something one does, some work, some endless process, rather than an end-state. Maybe its tools are hoe-dads and dynamite, and a person can find the meaning of life on the very day she’s wearing big black rubber boots and an embarrassing rain hat. Maybe human beings will find their purpose, their reason for being, in planting trees, releasing trees, breaching dams, releasing rivers—as the forests and rivers are reborn, finding their own rebirth and release in the good hard work of hope (149).

Among others, the difficult tasks facing environmental writers and pragmatic ecocritics include building the capacities in readers to refigure human-nature and other dualisms, to recast social-environmental crises as appropriately-scaled situations, and to participate in the hopeful work of ecological restoration. Viewed as equipment for living, nature writing has this potential, and *The Pine Island Paradox* can be understood not just as a narrative of ecological and cultural restoration, but as a narrative of human and natural capacity building.

Chapter 4: A Self-Help Book: Scott Russell Sanders' *Hunting For Hope: A Father's Journey*

In a chapter on family in a book about hope, Scott Russell Sanders develops what Kathleen Dean Moore might call the “hard work of hope”: in this case the cutting and splitting of a red oak driftwood log. Working with his own son, and with the future husband and father-in-law of his daughter, Sanders describes the social bonding of extended family members through the physical, sweaty labor required to prepare firewood for winter. Sanders’ use of metaphor—“force field of kinship and responsibility and affection”—explains how Sanders sees familial relationships—“we nourish and nag, without calculating who owes what to whom” (76). And Sanders crafts his stories and essays very intentionally, demonstrating self-awareness and careful wordplay, when he notes, “I use the physics metaphor deliberately, because life in family feels to me like a constant giving and receiving of energies” (76). But while Sanders’ commentary on family and kin echoes Moore’s attention these issues, he does so in a much more isolating and conservative way, noting the expansiveness of family, but focusing predominantly on what he knows: *Hunting for Hope* describes the life of a father who cares so much about his children and is so tied to the personal essay genre that sometimes the diverse experiences of others appear lost or forgotten. In fact, the scene could be said to highlight both Sanders’ strengths as an essayist and the frustrations many of his readers will find in his writing. His style is both polished and deliberate, but also self-centric and limited by the nature writing tradition.

In particular, the nature writing tradition's history of upper-middle class white men writing about what they know best, combined with Sanders' approach to personal essays, has the potential to frustrate, even alienate readers. This potential for alienation can be seen in the strong value placed on (traditional) family life; by the gendering of roles (even if by happenstance or preference) such as that found in the wood gathering scene; or merely by the white middle class lifestyles depicted in *Hunting for Hope*, and their accompanying bouts of negativity and anxiety, not to mention the potential for virtuous behavior to be interpreted as smugness. Yet even so, Sanders' efforts should be lauded: his own "hard work of hope" involves suspending some of that negativity and anxiety, and offering a more positive view on life from the perspective of a Thoreauvian nature writer. But however much *Hunting for Hope* (1998) reads like a self-help book, Sanders fails to move far beyond the nature writing genre, and fails to move beyond the smugness of virtuous behavior to more deeply engage with subcultures different than Sanders' own. While the book can be read as a pragmatic account of reconciling conflicting worldviews, it must also be seen as a half-attempt, as a struggle in progress, and as an unfinished hunt, not just for hope, but also for a pragmatic approach to navigating situations of ideological conflict and subcultural polarization.

In short, while Sanders' text may represent an important evolution in nature writing, the book's limitations suggest how pragmatism might further push nature writers. To develop that line of argumentation, this chapter focuses on two pairs of questions: first, what are the pragmatics of hope, and how does Sanders' book fit within such a rhetoric; and second, does, and if so how does, Scott Russell Sanders' *Hunting for*

Hope: A Father's Journeys exemplify pragmatic environmental writing and further the development of pragmatic ecocriticism?

Answering the first question—concerning the rhetoric of hope—requires interpreting Sanders' book in the context of self-help books, a form of writing rarely concerned with the environment but nonetheless an insightful critical lens with which to examine *Hunting for Hope*. After all, Sanders' text is reflective, existential, and altogether practical, like the majority of self-help texts. The rhetoric of hope—and hope here in the rich sense of the word I will describe below—is inherently pragmatic in that such rhetoric combines belief and action, connects an individual with a community and the world, and empowers rather than immobilizes or assuages commitment. A pragmatic rhetoric of hope in the face of social-environmental crisis helps readers get up in the morning, emotionally charged and ready for action, and get to sleep at night, knowing that they have done something to make the world a better place: pragmatic narratives of hope exist at the intersection of “Don't Worry, Be Happy” and “Be the Change You Wish To See In the World.” And unlike false hope, or naïve optimism, pragmatic hope encourages action in the face of social-environmental crisis, and encourages reconciliation in the face of conflicting worldviews.

Answering the second question—examining *Hunting* as a pragmatic text—requires asking how Sanders' essays function in the context of a pragmatically-grounded journey of reconciliation with himself and with his son Jesse. This journey is motivated by their conflicting worldviews: on the state of the world, or social-environmental crises, but also on popular culture, or more appropriately, other

subcultures. Sanders dislikes “commercial dreck,” and Jesse sees it as normal (8-10), an illustration of Moore’s “sliding baseline” (213), but Sanders goes beyond the identification of this phenomenon and tries to address it. Embracing the microcosmic community of family, Sanders moves beyond tolerance to a committed form of reconciliation, through work, play, and his personal essays. Unlike earlier environmental texts such as John McPhee’s *Encounters with the Archdruid* that emphasized conflicting worldviews, Sanders achieves more than polarization, more even than tolerance. He and his son find a kind of reconciliation through committed conversations and shared experiences: the experimental, improvisational, and adaptive navigation of personal interactions that take place in the context of social-environmental complexities, contingencies, and crises. But the extent to which this reconciliation is fair or complete is certainly up for grabs, no matter the pleasantness of Sanders’ conclusion. Some conflicts run deeper, and many require more willingness to acknowledge a plurality of goods rather than just communicating the fatherly pleasures and narrow vision of “the good life” from a particular worldview.⁴⁷ In effect, the extensibility of Sanders’ pragmatic narrative of reconciliation is limited, and may require both fine-tuning and careful responsiveness to the criticisms of identity, negativity, and “the good life” found in other

⁴⁷ Many of these limits are discussed in greater detail by nature writers—Reg Saner, David Gessner, Lauret Edith Savoy, and Alison Hawthorne Deming—in response to another essay by Scott Russell Sanders, “Simplicity and Sanity,” all published in *The Georgia Review* (Spring 2009). In particular, Gessner calls into question the lack of “complexity” in Sanders’ defenses of simplicity (a key issue for pragmatist environmental writing), Savoy questions the racial and socioeconomic inequities preventing Sanders-ian ideals, and Deming notes the futility of cultural isolation, or insulation from dominant culture, something that Thoreau, Sanders, and many others have tried and failed.

subcultures. While *Hunting for Hope* is a good first step in the search for environmental writing that engages pluralism and conflict, there is plenty of room for expansion into this pragmatic frontier.

These two answers brush up against the discursive equipment for living known as self-help books. Whether psychological, spiritual, motivational, or relational, self-help books are a widespread, though often disparaged, genre of writing, and Sanders' text could be considered just such a text. Yet like "nature writing" or "memoir," such a simple categorization prevents the book from being examined in depth. Therefore, an in-depth consideration of *Hunting for Hope* as a self-help book can shed light on its strengths and weaknesses within a collection of writings that serve as equipment for living in times of social-environmental crisis.

Self-Help Books and the Rhetoric of Hope

In August and November of 2007, *Time* Magazine released two news stories on the topic of eco-anxiety.⁴⁸ These articles brought the issue of anxiety in the face of the environment to the news magazine readership, though they were hardly the first accessible sources to discuss "the overwhelming and sometimes debilitating concern for the worsening of the environment" (Harbert). Anxiety, whether examined from a theological or psychological perspective, has become just one more level added to the growing phenomena known as social-environmental crisis, and for that reason, it is no

⁴⁸ "In Despair Over the Polar Bear" by Nancy Harbert (August 17, 2007) and "It's Not Easy Being Green" by Lisa Takeucci Cullen (November 21, 2007) take two journalistic approaches to the topic of eco-anxiety, the former a report and the latter a personal account.

wonder that psychologists and spiritual leaders would respond appropriately with the trick of the trade: the self-help book. But in the context of environmental issues, the normal label for books of this sort is “nature writing,” the authors “nature writers,” and the tradition “Thoreau’s.” For that reason, it makes perfect sense for an experienced nature writer such as Scott Russell Sanders—an essayist drawing inspiration and insight from Thoreau—to tackle the genre of self-help, or at least package his handiwork as a self-help book. Although written nine years too soon to capture *Time*’s free advertising, *Hunting for Hope* is situated in response to increasingly widespread awareness of social-environmental crisis, and within an era of increasingly pronounced and self-reflective environmental discourse: Bill McKibben’s *The End of Nature* (1989) and Nordhaus and Shellenberger’s “The Death of Environmentalism” (2004), to mention just two texts. While Sanders’ book is certainly environmental writing of a sort, only a small stretch of scholarly interpretation is required to see *Hunting for Hope* through the lens of self-help.

Compared to the pseudo-genre of “beach reading,” what qualifies as a “self-help book” is rather well-defined: by sections in most bookstores (including Amazon online), by scholarly articles and master’s theses on the topic, and by common knowledge among a variety of readers. It is no wonder, then, that a college student examining *Hunting for Hope* in an environmental history class immediately would remark, “This is just a self-help book for environmentalists.” However dismissive this uncaring categorization might be, ecocritics may miss some important aspects of Sanders’ book if they frame the text primarily as nature writing, and therefore seek out ecocentric values (Buell) or the awareness of nature (Slovic). Instead, pragmatic ecocriticism forces critics to think

seriously about what it means that there can be, there are, and perhaps there should be more, self-help books situated at the intersection of social-environmental crisis, and the personal or inter-personal soul-searching such crisis might inspire. And if environmental writers and ecocritics fail to explore such a sub-genre of nature writing, they will fail to diversify the genre in ways that reach readers dealing with particular situations and conditions, needing particular equipments for living.

Certainly the mass marketing and proliferation of self-help books has given rise to skepticism and even dismissive views of the genre, yet there remains something important about self-help, especially in an era of widespread social-environmental crisis. Just what self-help contributes, and why these books have become so popular, is not entirely clear. But whether as a form of social learning and guidance, or as a cure for modern maladies, the notion that environmentalists—or perhaps more accurately, Sanders, his children and students, the relationships between older and younger generations, and the earth itself—need help is a powerful one, requiring further examination.

Outside the realm of ecocriticism, yet still within the realm of literary and rhetorical criticism, scholarship on self-help abounds. Louise Woodstock examines how self-help authors “construct narrative authority” through “personal narratives of self-transformation” rather than through “professional expertise,” thereby abdicating “authority directly to the reader. After all, the ‘self’ that helps is the reader, not the

author.”⁴⁹ In *Ten Easy Steps to Everything: A Genre Analysis of Self-Help Books and Step-Books* (2005), Ronit Sarig traces the genre’s 200 year history (back to Ben Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanack* of 1738), and argues that the self-help genre responds to recurrent situations and involves a kind of social action.⁵⁰ While the history of self-help genre extends further back in history than Sarig argues (by way of wisdom literature, proverbs, and even oral traditions), what is important is Sarig’s focusing definition of self-help as: “books which intend to effect change in an individual’s life, attitude or perception of the self” and not “books that teach a skill” (8).⁵¹

Amazon’s sub-genres of self-help concur with such a parsing of topics, with self-help including the following sub-categories: personal transformation, motivational, spiritual, self-esteem, creativity, happiness, stress management, and a catch-all “general” category. The three most recognizable titles—and now series of titles—might be the following:

- Chicken Soup for the Soul
- Don't Sweat the Small Stuff--and It's All Small Stuff; and
- The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?

Yet some of Amazon’s top-selling self-help books in 2009 include:

- Get Out of Your Own Way: Overcoming Self-Defeating Behavior
- Five Simple Steps to Emotional Healing: The Last Self-Help Book You Will Ever Need
- Women Who Worry Too Much: How to Stop Worry & Anxiety from Ruining Relationships, Work, & Fun

⁴⁹ Louise Woodstock. All about me, I mean, you: The Trouble with Narrative Authority in Self-Help Literature. *The Communication Review*, 9: 2006. 321-346.

⁵⁰ Master’s Thesis. California State University, Northridge.

⁵¹ Pregnancy and parenting guidebooks like *Having Faith* could be considered self-help books, but they will be examined in the next chapter.

- Reinventing Your Life: The Breakthrough Program to End Negative Behavior...and Feel Great Again
- Self Matters: Creating Your Life from the Inside Out
- Dr. Laura Berman's Spicing Up Your Relationship

These books' titles certainly foreground the "self," but they also deal with the elimination of anxiety, the improvement of relationships, and the motivation to keep dealing with the rigors of life.

And they are not just gimmicks, but instead have the potential to be serious and important texts of guidance and insight. For example, Arthur Kleinman's *What Really Matters: Living a Moral Life Amidst Uncertainty and Danger* (2006) is a self-help book that challenges and extends a pragmatic ethical theory in the face of crisis. Kleinman argues that, "seeing the world as dangerous and uncertain may lead to a kind of quiet liberation, preparing us for new ways of being ourselves, living in the world, and making a difference in the lives of others" (10). If a book such as *What Really Matters* can help readers live in the face of uncertainty and contingency, then perhaps the most sophisticated of self-help books might help readers work through eco-anxiety and the psychological-existential dimensions of social-environmental crisis. In other words, if Scott Russell Sanders, his children, his students, and perhaps everyday American citizens (of a certain class) are facing feelings of despair and anxiety, then writers and critics must turn their attention to self-help books, and the role they play in social action. If nothing else, this call echoes Kenneth Burke's interest in the full pragmatic continuum between literary and proverbial equipments for living, and justifies such scholarly pursuits.

Yet given that self-help books often address readers' existential anxieties, hope may be the one-word parallel sought by those troubled by social-environmental crisis.⁵² Like self-help, people seek out stories of hope as a way of dealing with problems they face, through shared action, solidarity, and attitude: understanding that progress is being made by others, understanding that others are dealing with similar problems, and understanding that good things abound even now, and may be more abundant in the future if enough people stay focused and committed. Hope is a difficult word to define explicitly or simply, which is part of its power. Sanders spends all of *Hunting for Hope's* third chapter trying to examine the word's meaning using etymological, literary, psychological, religious, and experiential tools.⁵³ This search for a meaning of the word continues throughout the book, but at the outset, it is important to recognize that Sanders' search for hope is not just an internal and external search for what he calls "*thisworldly hope*" (27), but also a search for the most robust meaning of the word. Where others might dismiss hope, as a word or as a way of finding meaning, Sanders takes on what might be called the pragmatic task of reinvesting the word hope with rich meaning. If anything, what Sanders' account of hope is missing is the specificity of meaning sought by individuals, the particularity of hope within a community or subculture of people.⁵⁴ Just as Sanders takes hope seriously, so might critics take self-help books seriously

⁵² A much larger group of people than "environmentalists".

⁵³ Hope appears elsewhere in the book, but his focus is on the word in this chapter: its etymology (20), appearance in literature (18), psychology (18-19), religion (24-26), and experience (19-20).

⁵⁴ This is one way of pointing out that hope, like many other concepts and words, should also be interrogated: hope for whom, and in what contexts.

because both blend empowerment, motivation, and the management of despair and anxiety. Both can also be dismissed easily.

In a 2007 *Harpers* essay, writer Barbara Ehrenreich tied hope and self-help together in a way that is both interesting and unfortunate. The essay is inspired by Ehrenreich's experiences surviving breast cancer, and her main argument is that positive thinking in the face of hardship is unnecessary, that expecting optimism in such situations unfair, and rather that a constant state of rage, frustration, or pessimism may address such problems as well. For that reason, Ehrenreich says, she hates hope. But if hope is really exemplified by what she names the "Cult of Positivity" and the "Self-Improvement Industry"—if the word hope has become synonymous with "magical thinking" (10), then it is understandable that Ehrenreich would hate hope, and by association, the self-help books that have become industrial. But the unfortunate connotations of hope and magic, of self-help and industry are also dismissive of the richer meanings of hope, and the more practical utility of self-help available to writers and people everywhere. Hope need not be magical, and self-help need not be manipulative.

Ehrenreich is not, however, the only person who hates hope, and for environmentalists, Derrick Jensen's essay "Beyond Hope" in *Orion* (2006)⁵⁵ is likely to resonate with those uncomfortable with hope: those who agree with Jensen that, "Hope is what keeps us chained to the system, the conglomerate of people and ideas and ideals that is causing the destruction of the earth." Jensen thinks that the most popular view among environmentalists is that "We're fucked," and that hope is our "sole comfort in

⁵⁵ This essay is a compressed section of Jensen's book *Endgame: Volume I, The Problem of Civilization* (2006).

misfortune.” Jensen’s claim is that hope—and not just the “false hope” that technology, Jesus Christ, or Santa Claus will save us, but all hope—is a curse that encourages inaction, passivity, and disempowerment. Instead, and here’s where Jensen makes a stronger case than Ehrenreich, people who care about something—whether the protection of an ancient forest or the search for a cancer cure—should act, should pursue those goals: “When we realize the degree of agency we actually do have, we no longer have to “hope” at all. We simply do the work. We make sure salmon survive. We make sure prairie dogs survive. We make sure grizzlies survive. We do whatever it takes.”⁵⁶

What Jensen clearly articulates—and what Ehrenreich nearly echoes—is the importance of action, empowerment, and agency. Few would argue with Jensen on that level, though clearly there must be some recognition of limits—of agency, empowerment, and ability to effect change—and therefore some way of reconciling oneself with these limits. Secondly, Jensen rightly calls into question the choice to surrender that agency, power, and ability to effect prematurely, to sell oneself short. Finally, Jensen offers a voice of empowerment, however convoluted by his talk of living and dying in order to harden oneself against those in power. Clearly, rising up against those in power is superior to wishing crisis would go away, and taking action will be more effective than politely asking corporations to stop polluting, clearcutting, or overfishing. And both Jensen and Ehrenreich can legitimately claim that often the word hope is used to mean little more than a positive attitude or wishful thinking. After all, hope certainly gets used

⁵⁶ Interestingly, environmental philosopher Michael Nelson and animal ecologist John Vucetich take a similar approach to hope, arguing that other virtues, and not hope, may in fact encourage more action on behalf of environmental crisis and change (*The Ecologist*, March 2009).

in a number of ways, many of them simplistic or symbolic, by cancer foundations and magazine editors. Jensen and Ehrenreich are not mistaken in their frustrations with such uses.

Yet in their essays addressing the Cult of Positivity and wishful thinking, both authors miss an opportunity to enrich the word, concept, or framework of hope.⁵⁷ One such approach involves thinking about what follows an awareness of social-environmental crisis. One possibility is action inspired by and sanctioned with moral absolutism, including changes in personal behavior, along with advocacy on behalf of a cause. But other possibilities abound, including the following:

- naïve optimism, or false hope: things will improve, with or without me;
- simplistic nihilism: things won't improve, no matter what we do: we're fucked;
- willful ignorance: a crisis ignored cannot really do damage;
- anxiety or despair: crises are bothersome at best and overwhelming at worst;
- or, hopeful pragmatism: action combined with the recognition of agency, but also limits.

Those possibilities that inspire inaction and disempowerment—naïve optimism, nihilism, ignorance, anxiety, and despair—are surely problematic, for reasons described by Jensen and Ehrenreich. But so too is action, especially that inspired by moral absolutism, if it fails to recognize the complexity of situations, the uncertainty of results, and the personal

⁵⁷ The same could be said of Nelson and Vucetich, whose scholarly approach takes the dismissive rather than reconstructive approach to hope. In other words, they could have just as easily advocated for a more pragmatic and action-oriented hope, as I do, rather than identifying the worst case scenarios for hope that would encourage people to “Abandon Hope,” as their title states.

needs—whether psychological or spiritual—of those taking part in said actions. Simply put, not only can hope and self-help be reinvigorated with richer meanings, but the idea of hope and the work of self-help books can bring together agency and action, the existential and the practical. Those who haven't given up on salmon, forests, and prairie dogs need not give up on hope. Self-help books need not be denigrated. Hope need not be problematic.

Frustration and hatred are not the only responses to crisis, and Scott Russell Sanders is not the only writer who considers hope a useful tool in a time of crisis, though he could be interpreted as one of many writers to cave under the editorial pressure to give readers something hopeful. Journalists Bill McKibben's *Hope, Human and Wild* (1995) and Alan Weisman's *Gaviotas: A Village to Reinvent the World* (1998) take readers to three places around the world where, as McKibben's states, people are "living lightly on the earth." The stories of Curitiba in Brazil, Kerala in India, and Gaviotas in Colombia are hopeful, though the former more explicitly than the latter, but like *Hunting for Hope*, the narratives are action-oriented, practical, and nothing close to wishful thinking. Similarly, Rebecca Solnit's *Hope in the Dark* (2005) and Vaclav Havel's *The Art of the Impossible* (1997) offer more activist-oriented and political accounts of hope than Sanders'; yet all of these texts function within the same larger rhetorical system of hopeful pragmatism amidst social-environmental crisis.

Hunting for Hope: Self-Help for Whom, and for What Purpose?

Hunting for Hope is a fifteen-chapter book with three types of chapters: (1) four "Mountain Music" chapters describing hikes with Sanders' son Jesse in the Rockies and

the Smokey Mountains; (2) seven themed chapters based on words scrawled in Sanders' writers notebook on a hike with his son, including wildness, body bright, family, fidelity, skill, simplicity, and beauty;⁵⁸ and (3) four chapters operating on a meta-level, two setting up the book's premise, and two offering analysis and closure. Given Sanders' primary authorial role as an essayist, it is worth examining the extent to which the book hangs together, or whether it is just a new way for Sanders to organize a collection of essays. The coherence of the book seems to rest on the strength of the journey or quest metaphor, which is explicit in the title (hunting), subtitle (journeys), and as a framework for the book (2-3). This journey is both external—Sanders seeing a toddler (43-44) or hearing a screech owl (29-30) on his travels—and internal—reflecting as a writer on what he sees as good in the world, with the experiential and reflective segments alternating in equal parts. Sanders sifts through his “memories, images, hunches, and tales, all drawn from the muddle of ordinary life” (2) as a way of “writing from the center,” a phrase he develops in an earlier essay collection.

But these journeys through his experiences and memories are in many ways offered in the same voice as the essays in his earlier collections, though more thematic. They are essays, similar in form and substance to lectures on the topics of wildness and fidelity, not unlike Sanders' essayist predecessor Thoreau. The telltale signs include short quotes by other writers,⁵⁹ accounts of recent noteworthy experiences,⁶⁰ self-aware

⁵⁸ It is in these words that Sanders betrays his taste, his preferences, and his subcultural criteria for what is good in the world: what is “durable” or sustainable, and what is virtuous to him.

⁵⁹ In *Body Bright*, a chapter in which he references eleven writers (poets, psychologists, religious figures, and yes, Thoreau), and quotes all but a couple, it's interesting that

writing,⁶¹ and sections of memoir.⁶² These essays showcase Sanders doing what he does best—offering an integrative, personal account of a topic: a sermon from a wise guru, even as he lowers the stakes of his *ethos* in the first chapter, where Sanders states he “can offer no grand theory, no philosophy or theology, no checklist of ten quick ways to save the earth” (2). Without such a grand theory, he constructs the *ethos* of an essayist: wise, but not omniscient. Yet Sanders’ essays in their Thoreauvian tradition—first person narration by a white, middle-class man—may not sit well with all audiences, and even in reaching out to Jesse, Scott’s lecture-like narratives may fail in their search for the good things in subcultures beyond his own.

This is not to say that the essay genre diminishes *Hunting for Hope* as a book, or that the genre itself is pure. The first three Mountain Music chapters function together as a single narrative, recounting the outdoor adventures of a father-son bonding experience in all their joys and struggles. This narrative either frames, or breaks apart, the topical essays, and it represents the constructed backbone of the essay collection. The adventure travel narrative also functions both allegorically—as a way of tying together the essays into a journey or quest—and realistically—as what Sanders sees as the entry point for discussing hope in his other essays. And while he maintains that he cannot offer ten

Sanders’ quotes are too obscure to be found in books of quotations, but also too wide-ranging to be anything but an integrative essay.

⁶⁰ In this case, Sanders contrasts his observations in London (42-50) and in the Green Mountains (54-55).

⁶¹ Sanders discusses both his physical pain of writing (50-51) and his ever present guiding purpose of the chapter, essay, and book (56).

⁶² In this case, his reflections on his past and his sifting of memories involves constructing his high school health teacher as a foil—or perhaps a representative anecdote—for sex education and school teachings about the body.

simple steps to save the earth (or his relationship with his son), the journey narrative offers the first indication that Sanders is writing a self-help book of some kind.

Traditional journey narratives—like self-help books—deal with personal and spiritual growth, transformation, and sometimes reconciliation, in addition to physical travel and movement, whether by foot or by some other mode of transportation. It is small wonder, then, that self-help books are described as “step-books,” with their simplified, unitized, and compartmentalized steps on the longer journey toward some larger goal, or destination. But unlike step-books, not all self-help books, and certainly not all journey narratives have such units. *Hunting for Hope* exhibits both transformation—Sanders becoming more attuned to everyday symbols of hope—and reconciliation—a better, less volatile relationship with his son Jesse through both shared experiences and a more hopeful outward worldview. Yet Sanders offers no numbered, easy steps to hope, nor does he have any step-by-step instructions to an improved relationship with a teenage son. What his literary narrative offers—much in line with Burke’s rhetorical framework—is a journey, navigating through the complexity of social interactions with the backdrop of social-environmental crisis: what Jensen means when he says “We’re fucked,” and what Sanders describes on the second page, citing “nuclear weapons, population growth, pollution, extinction, [and] global warming.” Rather than describing in detail the causes of these crises, Sanders takes for granted in his readers what Aldo Leopold calls “an ecological education,” the awareness of “ruined landscapes and ravaged communities and broken people” (2). And this assumption begins to answer the question regarding for whom and for what this book is written, the rhetorical

questions of audience, purpose, and author. Who needs or wants the self-help and hope that Sanders offers?

The student mentioned above might quickly answer “well, environmentalists, of course,” but Sanders himself answers this question more carefully, opening the first chapter with,

Suppose your daughter is engaged to be married and she asks whether you think she ought to have children, given the sorry state of the world. Suppose your son is starting college and he asks what you think he should study, or why he should study at all, when the future looks so bleak. Or suppose you are a teacher and one student after another comes to ask you how to deal with despair. What would you tell them? (1)

Clearly Sanders’ grown children and his students are working to better dwell in, and to navigate, social-environmental crises: they are not necessarily depressed, but instead “bright, healthy, stable, and competent,” yet they still brood about the earth (1). They need help (if not in the traditional sense of that phrase).

And while Sanders’ immediate family and students might not need his self-help book—after all, they have the real thing—his immediate audience is not unique: they are younger people, older people, and students everywhere who may be feeling something in the neighborhood of anxiety and despair. While there are more than enough environmental studies classes on college campuses aimed at exposing students to social-environmental crises,⁶³ and while there are a smaller number aimed at helping students solve such problems, there are very few aimed at helping students reconcile these crises

⁶³ On this point, Sanders refers to Aldo Leopold’s notion that “one of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds.” If nothing else, Sanders offers his readers a sense of solidarity, or a chance to live together and work together in such a world, which is itself an important function of self-help books.

with their existential or psychological needs, whether spiritual, motivational, or attitudinal. For that reason, *Hunting for Hope* is a good fit as equipment for living among students who have had an ecological education, even if it is just one man's beliefs concerning whether "we have the resources for healing the wounds" (2).

But *Hunting for Hope*'s audience is also quite limited, and not just to people who have an ecological education, but also to those who would read nature writing by an older white man, either for entertainment or enlightenment. Personal essays in the nature writing genre already have severely limited audiences, based on their content and tradition. And while Sanders' message might be more appropriate than Thoreau's for contemporary students of social-environmental crisis, his style may be too similar to break the mold of nature writing and engage J.K. Rowling's or Sherman Alexie's readers. After all, Sanders expounds on the virtues of fixing ladder-back chairs and chopping firewood, but still doesn't appreciate Jesse's taste in music and interest in television or fast food. Sanders may be moving beyond Thoreau to come to terms with degraded landscapes, and to seek out good things in nature and culture alike, but Sanders is not Thoreau espousing the beauties of Sportscenter and Burger King, *Lost* and Twitter. *Hunting for Hope* is not even an experiment in trying to take seriously the tastes and preferences of others that ends in a return to welded railings and wood burning stoves as durable goods made by skilled labor. Instead, the book is just a self-examination of "the good things according to Scott," and not an attempt at "meeting Jesse halfway." But this characterization only applies to the "stuff" that symbolizes hope for Sanders; the acts of reconciliation and empathy that frame the story are a different story altogether, and one

that will be examined below. The book's genre, however, is firmly entrenched within the Thoreauvian nature writing style. One reason for this relates to how Sanders constructs his *ethos*: he is a storyteller, and a good one at that, but also a very personal one, rarely treading outside his own perspective, and as his perspectives mature and harden, it can become more difficult for him to understand the views of others.⁶⁴

Sanders is certainly an experienced storyteller—a Professor of English and author of more than twenty books, mostly collections of creative nonfiction essays,⁶⁵ but also novels,⁶⁶ books of literary criticism,⁶⁷ and children's stories.⁶⁸ As experienced as any so-called “nature writer” in terms of critical study and creative writing, Sanders the author is also Sanders the husband of Ruth, father of Eva and Jesse, professor to numerous students, community member of Bloomington, Indiana, and sage to a far greater number. And unfortunately, Sanders the sage may alienate or miss some readers.

The focal point of *Hunting for Hope* is clearly the father role, and especially his relationship with Jesse, which is traced through the four “Mountain Music” chapters, the

⁶⁴ In a way, this the premise of the book: Scott has a certain way of viewing the world—its pop cultures and industrialized mass markets—and he tries to reconcile those with the view of his son. The problem is that he seeks out hope and the good things of culture from his own perspective, not from the pop or subcultures of those around him. This keeps him writing in the same Thoreauvian mode, even while trying to extricate himself from such a pattern. Simply put, Sanders hunts for hope only in his own subculture, not in pop culture, or the various subcultures of his children, students, or the large majority of Americans.

⁶⁵ *The Paradise of Bombs* (1987), *In Limestone Country* (1991), *Staying Put* (1993), *Secrets of the Universe* (1993), *Writing from the Center* (1995), *The Country of Language* (1999), *The Force of Spirit* (2000), *A Private History of Awe* (2006), and *A Conservationist Manifesto* (2009).

⁶⁶ *Terrarium* (1985) and *The Engineer of Beasts* (1988).

⁶⁷ *D.H. Lawrence: The World of the Five Major Novels* (1973).

⁶⁸ *Meeting Trees* (1997), *The Floating House* (1999), and *Crawdad Creek* (2002).

first taking place on a hike in the Rockies, the last on a hike in the Smoky Mountains. In the first section of Mountain Music, Scott and Jesse are at odds, “deeper than the usual vexations” between fathers and sons, which is first announced in a disagreement over where to camp (5-6). Father tries to confront the rift head on, to externalize the conflict, and learns that the generation gap extends beyond age to a disagreement over the state of the world, and what can be done (8-9). Jesse first accuses Scott of hating everything that’s fun, that is indicative of the modern world: television, movies, video games, loud music, advertising, billboards, lotteries, developers, logging, corporations, snowmobiles, jet skis, malls, fashions, and cars. “You look at any car and all you think is pollution, traffic, roadside crap. You say fast-food’s poisoning our bodies and TV’s poisoning our minds. You think the Internet is just another scam for selling stuff. You think business is a conspiracy to rape the earth” (9). And rather than spitting on the world, Scott says that he grieves over it, prompting Jesse to ask: “What’s the good of grieving if you can’t change anything?” (9). Scott overcomes his retaliatory urge to continue the confrontation, and instead pairs their hike with an internal journey to overcome the dark, gloomy view of the world he—in an effort to push back at the forces of marketing and popular culture—had inadvertently let dominate his relationship with his son. Instead, over the following three Mountain Music chapters, Scott works to offer Jesse not just more power to determine their hiking experiences, but also the larger, more important equipment for living: hope in times of crisis, and reassurance that people can change the world, that they need not spit on or grieve over social-environmental crisis. In effect, the book serves as a

narrative of transformation, where a more rewarding equipment for living in times of social-environmental crisis is substituted for a darker, more polarizing perspective.

So while the primary audience and purpose might be a certain set of younger generation of college students wrestling with their ecological educations, an important secondary audience is an older generation of parents, many with more in common with Sanders, who are trying to improve their relationships with their children. And it is here also that the genre of self-help surfaces, with *Hunting for Hope* being not just a motivational book for young people, but also a perspective-changing, and relationship-healing book for the parents and teachers of such young people. In summary, the self-help of *Hunting for Hope* has three aspects: for Scott Sanders as author and father, to expel, or at least deal more responsibly with the darkness and despair he sees; for his son, daughter, students, and the group of people awkwardly labeled “environmentalists,” to offer them stories of hope, empowerment, and motivation; and for Scott’s relationship with Jesse, or more generally for parents, children, or anyone else engaging those with starkly different worldviews, to renew and grow a more peaceful relationship of understanding, pluralism, and care.

Pragmatism and *Hunting for Hope*

An ecocritical reading of *Hunting for Hope*, especially one concerned with ecocentric values and the primacy of nature awareness, would either be quite brief and somewhat boring, or quite elaborate and full of mental gymnastics. *Hunting for Hope* is just not an ecocentric book: hope, family, skill, fidelity, father-son relationships, and even hiking and rafting are primarily anthropocentric topics, and Sanders treats them as such.

No matter how much Sanders cares for the environment (which he clearly does), and no matter how much he blurs the social-environmental divide (which he also does), it would be difficult to classify the text as ecocentric. Yet it is not so difficult to see a good fit between Sanders' approach to social-environmental crisis and the approach that might be advocated by environmental pragmatists, whether philosophers or practitioners.

Unlike with Kathleen Dean Moore's writing, focusing a pragmatic ecocritical eye on Sanders' decisions and deliberative reasoning is not so simple. Sanders is forced to reckon with complexity and uncertainty, and he offers reasons for what he thinks, says, and does. But the deliberative process leading up to his decisions and actions is not quite so explicit as Moore's, and his writing is far more literary than philosophical when it comes to such decisions. In that way, *The Pine Island Paradox* offers an extraordinary pragmatic narrative of moral imagination. Yet pragmatic ecocriticism is not limited to such texts. The implicit decisions within *Hunting for Hope* can be teased out, and the pragmatic themes can be unpacked, but more importantly, the whole book can serve as a narrative of conflict resolution, or what Kai Lee calls "bounded conflict" within his political theory of adaptive management.⁶⁹ In the personal and interpersonal spheres of moral imagination and narrative ethics, Sanders gives readers a sense of what it means to delve deeply into his conflict with Jesse, along with what it takes to reach some resolution or reconciliation.

The following sections will investigate these pragmatic themes in *Hunting for Hope*, beginning with Sanders' understandings of family and community as microcosms

⁶⁹ *Compass and Gyroscope* (1993). 8-11 and 87-114.

of society and the world. Second, I examine how crisis and dwelling contextualize and shape *Hunting for Hope*, especially in comparison to Sanders' earlier book *Staying Put*. Third, I argue that *Hunting for Hope* can be read not just as a search for hope, and not just as a self-help book, but also as a pragmatic narrative of reconciliation in the face of pluralism, uncertainty, polarization, and conflict, though this reading is not without qualifications. After all, Sanders' practical advice to his children, students, and readers—the more step-by-step version of his equipment for living—is situated within a particular worldview, but more importantly, Sanders' reconciliation is limited both in terms of the scope of conflict and also in terms of pragmatic approach. Finally, I examine how reconciliation in the face of conflict might be more extensible to areas of ecospeak and polarized environmental worldviews.

Family, Community, and Crisis-Dwelling

Unlike Moore, whose metaphors of family and kin serve to break down the human-nature dualism, Scott Russell Sanders examines family in a more realist sense, but also as a scale model of community, what he calls “a training ground for life in community, in village or clan or tribe” rather than a sanctuary or preserve, “cut off from the rest of society” (69). In fact, for Sanders,

Family is the first community that most of us know. When families fall apart, as they are doing now at an unprecedented rate, those who suffer through the breakup often lose faith not only in marriage but in every human bond. If compassion won't reach across the dinner table, how can it reach across the globe? If two or four or seven people who share house and food and even kinship can't get along, what are the prospects for harmony in larger and looser groups, in neighborhoods, cities, or nations? Many of the young people who come to wondering how to find hope are

wary of committing themselves to anyone because they've already been wounded in battles at home. (65)

One such person, wounded by familial violence, might be hope-hating Derrick Jensen, who describes in *A Language Older Than Words* (2000), some of the worst experiences of family, of an abusive father, that are barely imaginable. Like Moore, Jensen connects family to the larger more-than-human world, but rather than using love and caring relationships to make such a connection, he does so through violence, arguing that the kind of unnecessary violence inherent in child abuse and rape is shared by factory farms and industrial forestry (35).

Where Jensen sees violence and abuse, Sanders sees the difficult state of the world: social-environmental crisis. But how Jensen understands family—as a potential source of unnecessary violence—only meshes with Sanders' understanding under a very pragmatic interpretation of family: families are the first communities, but like most other topics, family can be both good or bad, what Sanders calls “a mixed blessing” when he discusses “Skill” in Chapter Nine: “Everything depends on how we use our skills” (99), translated into the context of family, becomes “Everything depends on what we make of family,” whether love, compassion, harmony, or abuse. In Sanders' family,

We've had our share of turmoil, mainly across generations, including the occasional shouting match, like the one between Jesse and me as we drove through the Big Thompson Canyon in the Rockies. But on the whole we've gotten on well, looking after one another, trading stories and meals, braiding our lives together. Even the quarrels may strengthen our love, the way Jesse's angry words in the mountains set me to writing this book. So I remain hopeful about community, because my own experience of family, in spite of strains, has been filled with grace. (65)

But what of those families characterized by abuse rather than grace? Is Sanders blind to the plights of Jensen and others? This might be a legitimate criticism, but for the fact that Sanders has not just experienced shouting matches, but instead more serious issues with an alcoholic father, described in *The Force of Spirit* (74-81) and *The Country of Language* (77-82). While nothing close to the kind of abuse experienced by Jensen, Sanders understands the problems posed to families, and his firsthand experience with his own father shed light on how such addictions can hurt a family, and how people respond to emptiness with liquor, tobacco, or woodworking, how Sanders himself responds with writing and externalizing such intimate feelings and experiences.

As a metaphorical, yet quite real, training ground for the larger community, Sanders describes how family can be good, how people can work to pragmatically make life better with commitment, fidelity, and action. After all, when people struggle with addictions, become abusive or dangerous, or otherwise put strain on relationships, it is family that suffers first and foremost. Conversely, when people need help and support, family is the first place to turn. But just as importantly, when differing viewpoints arise, when there is conflict or division, families are best equipped to handle such conflict, compared to other social arrangements. This form of conflict resolution is one part of the “family as training ground” metaphor that extends to the larger community, and it is one part of Sanders’ equipment for crisis-dwelling.

The topic of crisis has been mentioned above, but the impact of social-environmental crisis is so central that it bears repeating and further development. Crisis—and prerequisite awareness of crisis—frames *Hunting for Hope* from start to

finish, with Sanders “enumerating crisis” to begin the first chapter and the last chapter, like laundry lists of problems that Sanders need not repeat: “Others have offered those warnings, fervently and cogently, in books and magazines and films, and anyone who is paying attention has already heard the bad news” (2), a statement he repeats later (185).⁷⁰ So while crisis—and a very mixed bag of crises, not just environmental, not just social, but ranging widely along that spectrum—frames the book and its purpose, it is, in fact, crisis-dwelling with which Sanders is concerned. It is the question of how his children, his students, his readers, and he himself might live in a time of crisis—how they can respond to these crises in their own lives.

And building on the distinction made in Chapter 2, the crisis-dwelling of *Hunting for Hope* is not a noun—a setting, a place, background, a context: where and when people live—but is a verb—a way of living, of getting along, of navigating such crises in their specific situational occurrences. *Staying Put*, Sanders’ most well-known book, is attentive to the noun-form of crisis-dwelling: how to make a home in both a restless world, and also a world where social-environmental crisis factors prominently. *Making a home* and *staying put* are both verb forms of crisis-dwelling, but they also feed directly into Frederick Buell’s noun form of dwelling. After all, getting to know a place and its inhabitants, and committing to those people and places, draws attention to the noun form of dwelling—a home or habitat—more than to the process of doing so, however closely linked the two are.

⁷⁰ See pages 1-3, 8-10, 77, 98, 132, and 185 for some examples of crisis-talk.

But *Hunting for Hope* is more about dwelling in the verb sense, the process and actions required to dwell in crisis. Dwelling in crisis—or “living in hope” as Sanders calls it in the last chapter—involves “staying put” and getting to know a place, but also much more. It involves making complex decisions in light of environmental crisis—like whether to have children (65) or whether to study or party (1, 9)—and then acting on those decisions with as much care, foresight, and compassion as possible (98). But it also involves getting along with others in families, communities, and nations with a diversity of worldviews, personal commitments, and political agendas.

Navigating complex and contingent social-environmental situations—making decisions and taking action—is difficult enough in the context of social-environmental crisis, and the accompanying feelings of anxiety and despair. But added to these difficult situations are other people, with whom dwellings—homes and communities—are shared. And while tolerance in the face of diversity or pluralism is a good start,⁷¹ the act of reconciliation moves beyond tolerance toward something more meaningful and durable. Even though the conflict is with his son, and even though the conflict may not appear all that serious at first glance, the narrative of conflict resolution offered by Sanders is an extraordinary one for the following two reasons.

First, Scott Russell Sanders’ journey narrative must be read at least three ways: (a) as a physical journey: hiking in the Rockies; (b) as an internal, psychological, and spiritual journey toward hope; and (c) as a metaphorical journey reconnecting father and son. But this third interpretation must also be considered a narrative of reconciliation,

⁷¹ Moore demonstrates this kind of tolerance in the face of diversity on pages 130 and 165, which is examined in Chapter 3.

thereby having larger implications for conflict resolution in other communities—those extending beyond familial relationships. The second reason: this third interpretation (that *Hunting for Hope* should be read as a narrative of reconciliation), combined with the earlier point about family being a training ground for larger communities, offers readers a narrative model—an equipment for living—in the face of “bounded conflict”: what occurs when a plurality of worldviews and political agendas bump up against each other in ways that strain and test a community’s strength.

In other words, Scott Sanders’ father-son reconciliation narrative is both (1) able to be extended to larger domains of conflict resolution in public life, and (2) pragmatic in both its approach and application. Indeed, while the analysis of decision-making and action is the primary approach to pragmatic ecocriticism offered herein, this particular decision and action—to reconcile with his son, no matter the difficulty—must be elevated above others, such as where to live or whether to breastfeed. This elevation is necessary in order to fully engage the pragmatics of pluralism, and the associated problems of alienation, polarization, and conflict. This story offers the ultimate equipment for living: a crisis-dwelling narrative that details how to reconcile difference, or resolve conflict with a family member, and by extension, with any community member or citizen stakeholder. Through reading such a narrative, Sanders’ audience might better think through—using moral imagination and dramatic rehearsal—just how they can respond to those with different worldviews, not just with tolerance and compassion, but also with a commitment to reconciliation. In a way, this makes *Hunting for Hope* not only a “self-help book for environmentalists,” but also a “self-help book for society as a whole.”

A Pragmatic Narrative: Bounded Conflict and Reconciliation

Sanders' narrative contrasts remarkably with many earlier environmental texts in terms of approach to conflicting worldviews and the potential for resolution. Unlike John McPhee's narrative of environmental conflict, Sanders' narrative moves beyond conflict to some level of resolution, or at the very least bounded conflict. However curmudgeonly Sanders might be, his narrative represents an honest effort to reconcile with his son. Sanders fails to go far enough in this act of reconciliation, but as an ongoing practice, and as a model or microcosm for larger environmental conflicts, *Hunting for Hope* has some promise.

Together with adaptive management, Kai Lee⁷² identifies bounded conflict as an important component of environmental politics. Such conflict, and the negotiation it inspires, persists when there "is a shared commitment to address important issues through continual debate" (10), which allows for social learning through "a pragmatic application of politics" in favor of a "durable social order" (11).⁷³ Conflict and reconciliation happen at the intersection of the political and personal spheres, where polarized worldviews and values can harden into uncompromising, absolutist political agendas.

Leading up to the publication of *Encounters with the Archdruid* in 1971, John McPhee took David Brower, a Sierra Club leader and well-known environmentalist, on three excursions. Each excursion involved a particular place inspiring environmental conflict, and a particular person representing a different social-environmental worldview

⁷² *Compass and Gyroscope* (1993).

⁷³ For more on bounded conflict, see Chapter 4. *Gyroscope: Negotiation and Conflict* (87-114).

and agenda from Brower. The three chapters document these conflicts, the biographies of the real-life characters, and the exchanges made over multiple days of shared experiences, between Brower (the Archdruid) and his unlikely companions. “A Mountain” addresses mining in Yellowstone National Park with geologist Charles Park. “An Island” examines development on Cumberland Island off the Georgia coast with Charles Fraser, a developer. And “A River” highlights hydroelectric dams on the Colorado River by pairing Brower with his arch-nemesis Floyd Dominy.

Each excursion begins with an expectation of conflict over land use decision-making, with Brower representing the environmentalist position—preservation, minimal development, and both scientific and aesthetic support for nature—and his companion representing the “opposing” view: support of resource development, efficient and maximal human use of nature, and possibly the principles of conservation. This polarization of ideologies creates tension between the characters, thereby heightening reader interest. McPhee then uses his journalistic genius to characterize Brower and his companions in ways that make them come to life, with quoted exchanges, comparisons, and descriptions of behavior. And when each excursion comes to a close, it is clear that the characters are more respectful of each other—ideological opposites become humanized persons, both for the characters and for the individuals. But the ideals and ideologies themselves change little, and therein lies the problem. While friendly tolerance is a good first step in the face of conflict—better than violence or other forms of unbounded conflict—a narrative of reconciliation goes beyond tolerance and aims for a deeper commitment to understanding and cooperation. In short, *Encounters with the*

Archdruid can be read as a narrative of tolerance in the face of conflict, but not as a narrative of reconciliation: good, but not great, as pragmatic equipments for living go.

The limitations of McPhee's narrative can be seen in contrast with Sanders' narrative in *Hunting for Hope*. In "A River," McPhee takes Dominy, the Commissioner for the dam-building Bureau of Reclamation, on a two-part excursion with Brower: first rafting down part of the flowing (though still regulated) Colorado River, and second on a speedboat around Lake Powell, stopping in between for a tour of Glen Canyon Dam. In the pages leading up to the excursion, McPhee sets up the conflict—water shortages in the American west (153-158), Brower's role in the history of water projects (158-167), and then Dominy's take on the conflict between the two (167-174). What follows is a weaving of the river-rafting narrative—similar to Sanders' Mountain Music chapters—together with accounts of Brower's loss of power in the Sierra Club, the time spent in the dam and on the reservoir (with fans of both Brower and Dominy making appearances), and descriptions of their arguments while on the rafts or at their campsites. McPhee contrasts the fearless, extroverted Dominy with the quieter, but still emphatic and outspoken Brower, who walks the shoreline during the first set of dangerous rapids because he's "chicken." McPhee then traces both the personal reconciliation of the two (238-239) and the continuing political divide over dam projects (240-241). McPhee ends the book with an account of Brower remaining on the raft for the last set of dangerous rapids, surviving them, then continuing his neverending campaign to stop the dam project while Dominy bites his tongue and chews a wet cigar (244-245).

While the conflict between Brower and Dominy is bounded—they agree to a shared experience and continuing discussions—and while there is some level of tolerance, even friendliness between the two late in their rafting trip, Dominy and Brower remain unwilling to reconcile their differences. Dominy invites Brower to visit his farm in the future (239), and both concede a small part of their ideology—Brower having testified once for a dam, and Dominy having the potential for fallibility (223), but when Dominy asks Brower to “be objective, Dave. Be reasonable” (241), Brower calls being reasonable “an error” and objectivity “the greatest threat to the United States today” (241).

Despite getting along fine on a personal level, and despite their efforts at “bounded conflict,” or continued debates, neither is willing to concede more than an inch on the topics of dams, water use, and the Colorado River. In other words, McPhee’s narrative may be one of tolerance—a good first step—but it is hardly a narrative of reconciliation. McPhee himself serves as a mediator in two ways—both linguistically as the author of the account, and politically as someone trying to understand the conflict and debate. The other rafters serve as a hung jury, “caught in the middle, and so they say they’ll have to think about it” (227), not unlike the classmates of McPhee’s children back home: the former with as much expert testimony as possible, and the latter with very little. McPhee builds this into a narrative of continuing conflict, with no emergent consensus, and activists campaigning on either side. *Encounters with the Archdruid* then reads as a narrative of bounded conflict and tolerance, but never as a narrative of reconciliation.

Alternately, *Hunting for Hope* can be seen as a narrative of conflict resolution. While the bounded conflict exists between father and son, not political opponents, and between what are primarily conflicting worldviews rather than primarily political agendas, the reconciliation is more complete, moving beyond tolerance—“getting along,” though this is certainly part of it—and toward better shared understandings and worldviews. Scott Sanders commits to searching for hope, to bridging the deep divide across a generation, and to both finding and externalizing his vision of hopeful pragmatism, rather than always denigrating and criticizing what Jesse sees as the world he must live in. While still preserving his skepticism for popular culture, consumerism, and other perceived causes of social-environmental, Sanders works hard to understand his son’s perspective, and to change his own, stating, “My search for hope has convinced me that we *can* change our ways of seeing and thinking and living. We can begin living responsibly and alertly right where we are, right now, no matter how troubled we may be about the human prospect” (186).

While there are stark differences between the narratives of McPhee and Sanders: the extent and type of conflict, the relationships—blood and power—between characters, the stakes or potential effects. But if Sanders is right—that familial interactions *can* serve as a training ground for other communities and other conflicts—then how Scott and Jesse Sanders respond to their conflict, how they reconcile with each other, should serve as a model interaction for the kinds of political conflicts examined by McPhee. As narratives of navigating pluralism—the diversity of views and values, the conflicts inspired by such diversity, and the responses through tolerance and reconciliation—both *Encounters* and

Hunting have strengths and limitations. The Brower-Dominy conflict encourages more humane disagreement and tolerance, though very little willingness to understand an alternative worldview and value set. The Sanders conflict is limited in scope—the familial relationship *is* a training ground, after all—but represents a stronger commitment not just to hope and action, but also to reconciliation with another’s perspective.

Equipment for Living and Practical Advice

What is most unique about both these books, at least in terms of improving relationships and resolving conflicts, is that they are narratives, or stories, rather than manifestos, arguments, how-to guides, or lectures.⁷⁴ Even so, Sanders ends his book with just such a collection of advice, manifesto-style, in the chapter “Living in Hope,” reference yet again to the importance of combining an outlook with action, of connecting hope and pragmatism. This collection of practical advice serves as a summary both of *Hunting for Hope* and Sanders’ other books, especially *Staying Put* (187). Most of the advice refers to the thematic chapters of the book: wildness, fidelity, skill, simplicity, and the rest. It includes simplifying the material parts of people’s lives, ignoring fashion, hype, and mass consumption, and instead seeking “true quality in products, services, art, and people” (186). He advocates more do-it-yourself activities (a boon to self-help and guidebooks), along with more localized economies generally, and when it is time to participate in governance and shape policy, individuals could take their turn and work toward common goods rather than private interests (187). If traveling, “we could think

⁷⁴ Sanders most recent book is, in fact, written and sold as a manifesto, an interesting rhetorical choice itself.

hard before we jump in a car or an airplane and zoom off, making sure each trip is worth what it costs the earth” (187). When faced with difficult situations, he reaffirms his commitment to sustaining family as a microcosm for society and the larger communities of which he is part.

And finally, when faced with not just the plurality of people and their commitments, but also the scale and complexity of social-environmental crises, Sanders reiterates his approach to navigating such contingent situations. “If we set out to solve the world’s problems, we are likely to feel overwhelmed. On the other hand, if we set out to act on our deepest concerns and convictions we may do some good” (186). This echoes Sanders’ earlier statements on acting in the face of crisis:

If you imagine trying to solve all the world’s problems at once, you’re likely to quit before you finish rolling up your sleeves. But if you stake out your own territory, if you settle on a manageable number of causes, then you might accomplish a great deal, all the while trusting that others elsewhere are working faithfully in their own places. (89)

This principle—of choosing something to work on, sticking with it, and trusting in others to do the same good work—echoes the microcosmic good that Kathleen Dean Moore expressed in her essay on dam breaching and river restoration. It also pragmatically connects individual action with collective and institutional action in important ways, even “without knowing whether they will have any large scale effect” (186), but the potential for the efforts together to “avert disaster and bring about a just and enduring way of life” even without everything turning out well (187). Sanders offers numerous examples of people doing such good, and using their unique skills or interests to make a difference (84-87), but what is important to Sanders is to commit to such actions deliberately and

intently (88-89), the way Derrick Jensen asks his readers to commit to saving grizzlies, salmon, and prairie dogs.

Though Jensen might see no reason to include trust and hope in an equipment for living in times of social-environmental crisis, Sanders sees the world differently. While acknowledging the role that anxiety and despair play in motivating action, and while looking to family as one place for both the inspiration and solidarity with which to dwell in crisis, Sanders' fidelity, commitment, and action closely match Jensen's overall outlook on environmental activism. Sanders chooses to trust in others, to reconcile his differences with his son, and to find hope for the world and society. All of these make *Hunting for Hope* a useful self-help book, for environmentalists, for Sanders, his children and students, and for society at large. As pragmatic ecocriticism searches for literature functioning as equipment for living, *Hunting for Hope* is one place to start.

Chapter 5: The Mommy Book: Sandra Steingraber's *Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood*

Though Kathleen Dean Moore and Scott Russell Sanders address many of the pleasures and challenges of family life, their books are situated within established, stabilized families with grown children. The same cannot be said of Sandra Steingraber's *Having Faith*, a book integrating the author's firsthand experience of pregnancy with the scientific and historical narratives of environmental health and fetal development. As ecologist Steingraber and her artist-painter husband Jeff "journey" into the unfamiliar "terrain" of motherhood, she works to find middle ground between the scientific textbooks and journal articles on pregnancy and the "mommy books" that serve as popular guides to the subject. This negotiation of experiences and discourses—personal and published accounts of pregnancy, popular and scholarly literatures, scientific and historical accounts from obstetrics, embryology, and midwifery—requires the inclusion of an almost-overwhelming amount of content, while working to walk the ridgeline (as Moore puts it) between too much and not enough. Too much science or gory detail alienates her readers who are unused to science writing, or creates anxiety among those who are currently pregnant themselves. Too much personal detail risks the same traps she seeks to avoid: a focus on the simple and apparent at the expense of the important developments behind the scenes, the science of embryology, fetal development, and environmental toxicology.

Read simply, *Having Faith* explores the metaphor, the reality, and the connections between the pregnant body as habitat and ecosystem, and the surrounding environment as

habitat and ecosystem, and this summary is made explicit in the Preface (ix-x). Yet compared to such a simple statement, these explorations are far more profound, far more complex, and far more meaningful. The implications of this metaphor and reality are that environmentalists should devote care and interest to the wellbeing of developing fetuses; similarly, anyone and everyone who cares about babies, progeny, and the next generation should care more about the wellbeing of the environment. As a reality, the science, policy, and practical decisions of parents (and everyone else) should be more attuned to the developing lives of those most vulnerable (and not concerned only with genetics). And by exploring the connections between the internal environment of a developing fetus and the external environment of a mother, readers—expectant mothers, interested uncles, and caring friends—ought to be better able to make more informed and responsible decisions in their own lives, but also advocate on behalf of babies, unborn fetuses, and not-yet-conceived potential inhabitants of the earth. Whether the cause is forest clearcutting, industrial pollution, or coal-burning powerplants, the environmental crises are evident and explicit throughout, but these causes of environmental problems are the background situation for the specific, real-life impacts on unborn fetuses and newborns, and the responses of scientists, corporations, regulators, and legislators may exacerbate the social dimensions of environmental crises.

Yet, the decisions made and actions taken by mothers, or parents generally, must be responsive in some way to these environmental problems, either through mitigation—eliminating or addressing the problems before they start: prevention—or adaptation—taking these problems as background, and either ignoring them or

circumventing them, by avoiding polluted water or mercury-laden tuna. In this way, this book can and should serve as a collection of pragmatic narratives: Steingraber highlights the decisions made and actions taken by someone working with the best available information and research, which is then evaluated and colored by her own worldview and values. Such worldviews and ideologies may alienate certain audiences who come to different conclusions,⁷⁵ but understanding *Having Faith* as equipment for living means using the text—using its information, working through the situations and decisions—but not necessarily following Steingraber’s lead and having an amniocentesis or trying to avoid painkillers. *Having Faith* might therefore serve as a guide—or Mommy Book—informing and offering situational insight that can then be used by readers in a process of dramatic rehearsal, involving moral and environmental imagination, insight that can then be used in readers’ own lives. In other words, the “journey to motherhood” found in *Having Faith* doesn’t follow the only path from conception to childbirth, but many of the steps along the way, and the difficult situations mothers face, are common and everyday. As a pragmatic refiguring of environmental crisis, the text changes the scale and perspective on the important questions and topics common to environmental philosophy, literature, and ethics. Yet it is not just the narratives themselves, but also the pragmatic approach to science, advocacy, environmental values, and uncertainty that

⁷⁵ This is one reason why a pragmatic interpretation of *Having Faith* allows for a fuller experience of the book. The author and the text cannot do this alone: readers must be willing to separate the scientific information—medical and environmental—from the final decisions made by Steingraber: her decisions are not the only reasonable responses to a complex situation. But part of this responsibility falls on the author’s shoulders by working to engage readers, acknowledge fallibility, and not alienate readers willing to give her text a chance.

move this text from Mommy Book to pragmatic social-environmental narrative, even without explicit reference to Deweyan pragmatism.

In other words, *Having Faith* pragmatically refigures social-environmental crisis, but saying the “book” does so obscures the fact that Sandra Steingraber herself is not just the narrator, the main character, and the focal point of the story, but also the writer who constructs this book around her body, her experiences, her pregnancy, and her daughter. Her first experience of pregnancy and motherhood is part of her identity and ethos, but Steingraber serves three more roles that figure dramatically in the narrative: an ecological scientist and writer, a woman, and a cancer survivor.

Steingraber as Author, and the Structure and Craft of *Having Faith*

Steingraber’s training as an ecologist is made explicit throughout the book, even making its way into the book’s subtitle: *An Ecologist’s Journey to Motherhood*. This is not a new role for Steingraber, having framed her previous book *Living Downstream* (1997) first with the subtitle “An Ecologist’s Look at Cancer and the Environment” (1997) and then “A Scientist’s Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment” (1998). *Having Faith*’s subtitle suggests from the beginning that her take on motherhood will be framed explicitly from a scientist’s perspective (readers beware), and her book can thereby be set apart from other pregnancy guides and memoirs. Where other pregnant mothers might journey into ecology, Steingraber is first an ecologist and then a mother, and the difference is important. She has been trained to see the world through a particular lens, to ask certain questions, and to seek out answers in particular ways: she does

thorough research, consulting scientific journals for answers just as much as she consults her obstetrician and the popular pregnancy guidebooks she collects.

Her training as a biologist involved studying the forest groves of Illinois (29-30), but it also meant learning comparative anatomy and embryology (6), topics of study requiring her return to her undergraduate studies, given that her graduate research focused on forest ecology.⁷⁶ Being a scientist, Steingraber must reconcile the dispassionate search for answers with the intimate experiences and perspectives that motherhood offers (261),⁷⁷ and that search can lead her to the ugly truths she might otherwise prefer to ignore, yet as “a pregnant biologist searching for the voices of mothers and scientists,” she wants “to know about the warnings both heeded and unheeded, . . . the lives blasted and the battles fought, . . . the treasures that prevail,” so she opens the biology textbooks and toxicology journals and dives in (39). In so doing, she brings her understanding of biology to bear not just on her own decisions and actions regarding pregnancy, but also on similar decisions her readers might face.

Steingraber is not just a scientist, but also a woman, and a woman scientist interested in environmental health: the dependence of human health on environmental factors, such as ecosystem health, the cleanliness (lack of pollution) of air, water, and soil, and the resilience of natural, or mixed human-natural, systems. In that way she shares one clear link to Rachel Carson, a link she makes explicitly and intensely in *Living*

⁷⁶ Steingraber’s dissertation—*Deer browsing, plant competition, and succession in a red pine forest, Itasca State Park, Minnesota* (1989)—is referenced a few times in *Having Faith*, with respect to herbicides (97, 99), and more tangentially to the contamination of Minnesota fish (131).

⁷⁷ This is a conflict that will be examined in greater detail below, as an aspect of pragmatism.

Downstream, but which has a far smaller role in *Having Faith*, where Carson and *Silent Spring* are used to introduce and frame the final chapter, but where they do not figure prominently. The link Carson and Steingraber share as women science writers straddling the scientific and activist spheres is compounded by their shared experiences—though at very different times in their lives, and with very different results—of having cancer.⁷⁸ In Steingraber’s case, however, she is a bladder cancer survivor (going on thirty years), and this colors and shapes both her experiences, and also encourages her to be thorough in her decisions rather than trusting conventional medical wisdom.⁷⁹

And while it is less apparent in *Having Faith*, Steingraber is cognizant of the important connection she has to Carson, who blazed a trail for women scientists and writers, and also scientists who suffer from cancer. As Steingraber writes in a recent *Orion* essay,

I look back on the life of Rachel Carson—my mentor in all this, who died when I was five years old—and find it unthinkable that she could not speak about her own cancer diagnosis, even while dying, as I have written about my diagnosis here. Thirty years of feminism lies between my life as an adult scientist and Rachel Carson’s. That human rights movement has ended the silence around the personal experience of cancer so that I have never had to fear, as did Carson, that my status as a cancer survivor will be used to impeach my science.⁸⁰

What Steingraber shares with Rachel Carson—female scientists who dealt with cancer—shapes this mentorship across time, while giving purpose to her work. But whereas *Living Downstream* is explicitly a kind of updating of Carson’s *Silent Spring*,

⁷⁸ See “Silent Spring: A Father-Daughter Dance” in *Courage for the Earth: Writers, Scientists, and Activists Celebrate the Life and Writing of Rachel Carson*. Ed. by Peter Matthiessen. 2007.

⁷⁹ *Having Faith*, pages x, 62, 151, 161, and 168.

⁸⁰ “3 Bets: On ecology, economy, and human health” in *Orion*, May/June 2009. 23.

Steingraber's *Having Faith* can only be called an extension, into new territories of environmental writing both in terms of lived experience and also the connections of environment and human health. Where *Silent Spring* was an introductory exposition to environmental health, and *Living Downstream* a more scientifically sophisticated examination of the connections between human health and the environment, *Having Faith* journeys into familiar places—pregnancy, childbirthing, and the maternity ward—while bringing new mysteries and understandings to these very same places—medically, environmentally, and rhetorically.

The rhetorical challenge Steingraber faces in *Having Faith* stems from her desire to write both a personal account of her pregnancy experience, and a book of science writing addressing embryology, obstetrics, environmental health, and history. Crafting such a book requires that Steingraber integrate two separate appeals to her *ethos*, or credibility. In other words, the two roles—ecologist and mother—require very different voices and can evoke very different responses from readers. The science writer explains what is happening as a fetus develops while the mother tries to deal with her own changing body and the bouts of sickness brought on by pregnancy.⁸¹ At times, the premise works: getting pregnant and having a child is the perfect exigence—real or constructed—to inspire a scientist such as Steingraber to write about environmental toxins and fetal development, not to mention the science of fetal development and the

⁸¹ As the book progresses, a third role—Steingraber as advocate—emerges to weigh in on the policy side of environmental health for mothers, fetuses, and newborns. This role is examined in greater detail below.

history of childbirth. But some of these exigencies are more deliberate than happenstance, and at those times, a writer's rhetorical approach warrants examination in greater detail.

Steingraber is certainly not the only nonfiction writer who sets up scenes, which can certainly heighten reader engagement, but can sometimes border on artificiality.⁸² The encounters McPhee sets up between David Brower and his political adversaries—described in the previous chapter—were not happenstance, but made the book: had McPhee written a journalistic account of Brower, Dominy, and their political disagreements, it may have been interesting, but would have lacked the excitement, detail, and narrative richness of a river rafting trip, which provides the action to accompany the background information in its newspaper-like prose. More recently, Michael Pollan has set the stage for discussing animal ethics and vegetarianism as he sits down with a steak and Peter Singer's book *Animal Liberation*,⁸³ a scene he tries unsuccessfully to expand into a McPhee-moment between Singer and the organic farmer Joel Salatin (327), and is forced to settle for the “cognitive dissonance” of reading and steak-eating (304).

⁸² The question of artificiality is related to an author's *ethos* or credibility, but there are more complex issues at stake here, including Dana Phillips' criticism of Lawrence Buell and other ecocritics in *The Truth of Ecology* (2003). Specifically, the relationship—between a textual account and a “real object” with which a text is concerned—points to the problem of responding to literary writing, its craft, and both its potential for constructed narratives that make claims to “realistic” and “honest” descriptions, topics which are interesting but beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, I take a rhetorical scholar's approach and examine these issues merely as questions of credibility and effectiveness.

⁸³ See “The Steakhouse Dialogues” in “Chapter Seventeen: The Ethics of Eating Animals” of *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. 2006. The book version is an update and revision of Pollan's *New York Times* column “An Animal's Place” from November 10, 2002. I'd like to further analyze the comparison between *Having Faith* and *Omnivore's Dilemma*, but that project is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Steingraber uses similar strategies in *Having Faith*, beginning with her first chapter where she is recounting the history of home and lab pregnancy tests, describing the menstrual cycle through an extended ecological metaphor, and remarking on her own “cognitive dissonance” of being a visiting professor at her alma mater, all juxtaposed with her own pregnancy test—“Pee on a stick, and three minutes later you have your question answered” (6)—and subsequent tense moments as she waits for the results. If describing the menstrual cycle seems a strange meditation for the time in between urination and results, Steingraber’s only defense is that she is a scientist, and more than that, a scientist-turned-writer whose livelihood depends on, or traditionally involves, the practice of juxtaposing insightful metaphors of biological phenomena with vivid descriptions of everyday experiences. Are these scenes too much of a stretch for a wide audience? Perhaps. Some readers might already dismiss her as a freak at worst, and a geek at best: her credibility is tied to the “mad-but-still-intelligent scientist” figure, but is softened by her recounted experiences as an anxious college student buying contraceptives transformed into an anxious college professor buying a home pregnancy test. These multiple roles approximate Steingraber’s complexity as an author and main character, roles that only expand as the book continues and her character develops. They also illustrate how critical it is to Steingraber’s success that she artfully weaves the scientific writing with the maternal memoir. Fail to portray the anxieties and difficulties of pregnancy, and the book is a dry account of environmental toxicology and fetal development written by nerdy science writer. Fail to communicate the science and history in resplendent detail, and *Having Faith* becomes the kind of mushy pregnancy account

Steingraber herself despises. Does the decision to recount menstrual cycles while peeing on a stick come across as forced or artificial, if not nutty? It likely does for some readers, but others will see such an approach as an honest integration of Steingraber's disparate interests, and a clear indication of what is to come.

Examples of these juxtapositions—between experience and science writing—show up elsewhere in *Having Faith*, like when she recounts the similarities between a placenta's nutrient hydraulics and those of a sugar maple while on a hike. Many juxtapositions emerge quite expectedly from Steingraber's background and what's on her mind: a forest ecologist understandably sees menstrual cycling and the physiology of a placenta in terms of forest ecosystems, and given that she's pregnant and writing a book about the experience, she will start making connections between pregnancy and just about anything that crosses her path. Other juxtapositions emerge by situational design, similar to a teacher putting students in a position to learn on their own without "instructing" in the traditional sense of the word: Steingraber purposefully takes a walk in the maple forest to both clear her mind, to get some fresh air, but also to give herself the chance to make meaningful connections between a maple pumping sap and a body pumping blood, each hydraulically moving fluid and thereby nutrients.

The difference between Steingraber's juxtaposition of experience and insight, and Michael Pollan's, is the notion that Steingraber is having her Eureka moment while on the hike, or is just crazy enough to be thinking about some scientific cycle taking a pregnancy test, rather than constructing that narrative *post facto* during the writing process. Steingraber's *ethos* raises some skepticism, whereas Pollan willingly admits that

he is just trying to create some cognitive dissonance for the purposes of telling the story. Both Scott Russell Sanders and Kathleen Dean Moore use another nonfiction writers' trick, which is to openly acknowledge the use of a writers' notebook, and to take notes while having an experience, and then to reflect on that experience, and describe its meta-level meanings later on, back home while writing. Though the research process—going to the library, consulting experts, experiencing pregnancy—is self-conscious or made explicit in *Having Faith*, Steingraber's painstaking time and effort spent writing the book is much less candidly portrayed. Openly or honestly offering a sense of the narrative's fictionalization or contrivance could very well be a strategy for Steingraber to employ in order to decrease her readers' potential for skepticism when it just seems too much to believe that someone would be thinking about hummingbird eggs when a big needle is passing through her uterus (64-65).

Structurally speaking, *Having Faith* is divided into two sections, with the first further divided into the nine months of Steingraber's pregnancy, followed by a three-chapter second section on life after Faith's birth.⁸⁴ While this organization might not set Steingraber's book apart, her connection of the months of her pregnancy with the full moons of the agricultural calendar (ix-x) is her first attempt to connect people and place: her own life and one way of interacting with the natural environment. A second human-nature connection of this type is built into the pairing of Steingraber's pregnancy with the cycle of growth and reproduction of silver maples outside her house in Illinois (13-14).

⁸⁴ Pregnancy guidebooks seem to have two common organizational structures: temporal—by month and/or by trimester of pregnancy, with sections for before conception and after birth—or topical: by the kinds of questions an expectant mother might ask (FAQ-style).

At first glance, it would be easy to conceive the book's structure as primarily within the pregnancy guidebook genre, but stopping there obscures two more important insights about the organization of *Having Faith*. The first of these is the book's similarity to Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), which itself had three sections, the first arranged by the monthly calendar the way that a naturalist or phenologist would record observations, with the second and third sections being more essay-driven and argumentative. Deliberate or not, Steingraber's structure follows Leopold's quite closely, and while the calendar-based first section and issue-based second section have their differences, the similarities serve to demonstrate a clear way to understand *Having Faith* as a book of nature/environmental writing, or at least offer a point of contact to the writings of an earlier nature writing ecologist not named Carson.

The second important insight about the calendar and organization of *Having Faith* is the primacy given to the moons—Old Moon, Hunger Moon, Sap Moon, Egg Moon, Mother's Moon, Rose Moon, Hay Moon, Green Corn Moon, and Harvest Moon—while demoting the traditional months to secondary status (unlike Leopold whose structure foregrounded January through December). Though the traditional agricultural moons differ from the place-situated and tribe-specific moon-calendar such as that often described by Winona LaDuke, this primacy has the potential to forge a powerful connection between the reader and the land, or at least to encourage readers to rethink the meaning they attach to the artificial western calendar. Just as likely, however, is the chance that readers will be frustrated with both the moons and months because the moon framework will seem at once novel and foreign. A more reader-centric strategy might

have included keywords or topics for each of the chapters somewhere, perhaps in the Table of Contents or at the beginning of each chapter. Using more abstract and less descriptive chapter titles is not new for Steingraber, whose chapters were labeled with the primal elements (earth, air, fire, water) in *Living Downstream*, yet this approach to the chapters not only makes *Having Faith* more like other nature writing books, but also less like pregnancy guidebooks. In fact, while the grim details concerning “what might go wrong in pregnancy, from both genetic and environmental sources” may keep some readers away, the long, detailed chapters lack clear signposting, which will amplify that effect, keeping readers from finishing or consulting the text and thereby problematizing *Having Faith*’s life as a guidebook. So while there is an impressive amount of information in *Having Faith*, readers will have reasons to pass on the book, but also reasons to continue reading.

One of the reasons to keep reading the book might be Steingraber’s character development and interaction, the memoir portion. Not unlike *Hunting for Hope* and *The Pine Island Paradox*, Steingraber herself is at the center of everything in *Having Faith*, and family members—her husband Jeff and (future-)daughter Faith—serve as the primary supporting cast, with a variety of extras making appearances occasionally. Jeff, a painter and artist, offers his intellectual, personal, and pragmatic perspectives on a variety of topics, in addition to serving as Sandra’s companion and support system,⁸⁵ while Faith is the fetus growing in Steingraber’s uterus and the baby breastfeeding and learning about the world in the second section of the book. Like the previous two texts, the central

⁸⁵ See pages 12-13, 27-28, 108, 120, and 156.

character/author and family allows for different levels of identification between characters and authors, as complex situations unfold, and the author is forced to navigate these situations with social and environmental constraints, all while trying to be good parents and world dwellers.

Having Faith can be considered a guidebook for expecting parents, but it expands the popular meaning of “Mommy Book” to the point of breaking. It does so because of its underlying, or implicit, pragmatist qualities: *Having Faith* is a book (a) that weaves experiential narrative, historical prose, and science writing; (b) that blurs distinctions between science and activism, humans and the rest of nature, and nature and environmental writing; (c) that refigures social-environmental crisis as unifying rather than alienating; and (d) that blends personal decisions in the face of uncertainty and complexity with advocacy for public and political action. In other words, Steingraber is navigating not just the personally novel experience of motherhood, but also a novel realm for nature-environmental writing by blending, expanding, and restructuring these common categories.

Mommy Books and Environmental Discourse

For lack of a better term, and in keeping with the sometimes dismissive labels of popular culture genres I have so far employed, Steingraber’s *Having Faith* can be categorized as a Mommy Book: a pregnancy guidebook (sometimes a pamphlet or blog), or as it might be described in a more scholarly fashion, a maternal memoir.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Diane Freedman examines Steingraber’s *Having Faith* and other maternal memoirs—Lauren Slater’s *Love Works Like This* (2002) and Louise Erdrich’s *The Blue*

Like other mothers who write pregnancy guides, Steingraber is able to speak from personal experience, and to integrate this personal experience into a linear text describing and documenting the time of motherhood through the key months of pregnancy: the changes in her own body and the developmental biology of her fetus/baby Faith, the excitements and troubles of pregnancy, the decisions made and actions taken, including first and foremost what she learns in the process, through the advice of friends, experts, and research in the library.

In this way, the personal, experiential narrative offers one element of her *ethos*, or appeal to credibility, based on living through pregnancy, and the associated experiences she has. In other words, for both the author and her audience, these experiences yield both understandings of pregnancy and values or responsibilities for the health and wellbeing of unborn fetuses and newborn babies, making a book such as *Having Faith* practical and meaningful, and for that reason, *Having Faith* is like other Mommy Books that mothers and others will read for practical purposes rather than for entertainment or enjoyment (though they must be engaging enough that with a semi-motivated reader, the books will be read): they explain pregnancy and childbirth while at the same time engaging readers with elements of personal narrative and scientific/historical explication. Yet in almost every case, these books fall more toward the “popular” and “simplicity” side of a continuum with “scholarly” and “complexity” on the other side. Steingraber

Jay's Dance (1995)—in an effort to connect the inward and outward search for ecology and nature. As a brief examination, Freedman's work is useful, yet there remain a number of rhetorical and pragmatic elements of *Having Faith* that remain to be examined. See Freedman, Diane. “Maternal Memoir as Eco-memoir.” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 15.2 (Summer 2008). 47-58.

seeks to reverse this general trend, and to do so, she actually plays the role of literary, rhetorical, and environmental critic. In this act, *Having Faith* is constructed both within this genre, and beyond.

Part of her library research includes reading embryology textbooks and popular guidebooks (11), but Steingraber soon becomes frustrated with the illustrations of both the scientific texts and popular books, and more importantly with the “gushy, overly reassuring tones” of the popular guidebooks (17). The scientific and popular texts focus too much on the microcosmic and macrocosmic developments of the fetus respectively, and on the corresponding trimesters—scientific texts focus on first trimester, and the popular on the second and third (104). The popular books rarely mention environmental issues (105), and when they do, they offer a “don’t-worry-be-happy approach” quite different from their absolutist positions on smoking and drinking (106). This construction of risk—or lack of risk—discourages public conversations about (107) and prenatal testing for (78) environmental threats to fetal development, extending into the popular portrayal of breastfeeding and contaminated breast milk (269). These limitations of popular Mommy Books frame Steingraber’s attempt to investigate the role of environmental pollution and its role in her own fetus/baby’s development, and in fetal development across the human population generally.

As a scientist, she is aware of the complexity of developmental biology, environmental toxicology, and experiment design. Steingraber examines the ecology (flows into a mother’s placenta and breastmilk), the toxicology (not just dosage, but also timing of doses), and the developmental biology of fetuses and newborn babies generally,

and uses her own experiences and Faith's development as a case study of this nexus. She therefore describes the various molecular biological processes of development, but she combines those technical descriptions, common to science writing, with both metaphorical and physiological comparisons.⁸⁷ And while some pregnancy guides bring a simplified science writing approach to the genre, few recognize the partner role that environmental factors play opposite genetics in the "dance of creation" (78) or "tango" (80). *Having Faith* foregrounds just such a partnership, though the dancing here is far different from that of *Pine Island*. That alone brings not just a science writing element to Mommy Books, but an environmentally focused science writing rarely seen.

Additionally, Steingraber offers an historical examination of certain key topics when necessary, whether it is a history of the incompatible pregnancy calendars used by embryologists and obstetricians (11-12), the placental barrier myth (35-36), the development, use, and regulation lead (115-118) and mercury (126-127), midwifery (162-165) and obstetrics (168-175), or the Precautionary Principle (284-286). These histories go beyond the histories told in popular guidebooks, and include more details of scientific insights, regulatory decisions, socio-cultural elements, and environmental factors. Each integrates particular people, ideologies, and political actions in novel ways.

Trying to integrate such a variety of perspectives on childbirth into a coherent and engaging book is certainly a challenge, especially when combined with the corresponding challenge of making the book readable. The three key elements that Steingraber uses to balance these are all commonly used in science writing: scientific description, scientific

⁸⁷ These metaphors and physiological comparisons are discussed in greater detail in the following section.

history, and investigatory journalist narratives. Yet the particulars of these writing strategies are what makes her writing most interesting. Steingraber's science exists not in a vacuum, but in a political and economic arena of competing interests and power structures. Alternate narratives enrich *Having Faith*'s scientific history, including that of midwifery. And the investigative journalism is both conventional (introducing key figures such as doctors, a filmmaker, and a midwife) and unconventional (discussing her morning sickness, her heightened senses, and her husband's lead exposure from painting). Similarly, *Having Faith* illustrates Steingraber's desire to expand the scope and audience of environmental writing—to include expectant mothers and others, and to show that nature writing is more than going off and living in the woods, even if Sandra, Jeff, and Faith end up doing just that.⁸⁸ In the end, Steingraber must capture her readers' attentions enough to effectively articulate her important message for mothers, researchers, politicians, and everyone else who cares about human wellbeing: environmental factors are either (a) critical to human health, or (b) gravely under-researched and could very well be more important than we realize. Yet only through telling this journey-narrative effectively, engagingly, and persuasively can Steingraber have the kind of impact she seeks, which brings us back to the idea of a Mommy Book.

Because *Having Faith* is not the normal, run-of-the-(paper-)mill Mommy Book, Steingraber has to convince her audience first that an ecologist has something interesting to say about motherhood (the memoir component), and second that environmental factors

⁸⁸ In the *Orion* essay quoted above, Steingraber works to further expand the scope of environmental discourse with an appeal to pro-life advocates, arguing that environmental pollutants present an important threat to healthy fetuses and babies.

are critical to the health and well-being of fetuses, babies, and future generations (the science writing). Steingraber engages her audience with her personal experiences, builds her credibility with equal parts investigative research and scientific/historical narrative, and then finally appeals to her readers to advocate on behalf of environmental factors in their individual decisions, but also (and more importantly) in political decisions and advocacy. *Having Faith* is no simple Mommy Book, nor is it just an “environmental” Mommy Book, but in the end turns into a justifiably *political* Mommy Book, one that might effect change and influence policy-making if read by enough readers and put in enough powerful hands.

But three limiting factors threaten this optimistic characterization. First, there is the question of readership, and second, of readership empowerment. While *Having Faith* has not had the kind of publicity or political power of *Silent Spring*, Steingraber’s previous success with *Living Downstream* ensures at least a modest amount of exposure for *Having Faith*. But there is a third limiting factor, and one that can be examined textually by critics: whether the political call to action—or precaution, as she frames it—is too little too late.

This call to precaution comes in the Afterword, which means after 283 pages of words, all of them blending personal narrative that borders on the romantic, and science writing that borders on the technical, even frightening. There are indications that Steingraber may be advocating for political action earlier in the book, such as when she discusses public and private abstinence (107-108), but the first real discussion comes on page 276 when she frames the options for purifying breast milk. If a larger part of

Steingraber's message is political, is the delayed thesis a rhetorical or organizational misstep? Certainly, political action in the face of environmental toxins is important and is effective (278), but at the end of a book so heavily invested in popular scientific awareness and personal memoir, the political message seems overwhelmed and lost. Conversely, the rest of the book may be building up to this pinnacle of awareness: Steingraber builds her credibility as a mother and a scientist, and then is forced to reconcile with her own frustration or apparent lack of power to effect change, and to keep her baby healthy. Only then does she turn her gaze outward, indicting industry for profiting through pollution, and indicting the government for not reigning in such polluting activities.

While the political call to action is without doubt "too late," Steingraber's construction of her credibility among an unsympathetic audience requires such a delayed thesis. The only remaining question is whether she mitigates her effectiveness for her sympathetic audience in order to better reach such an unsympathetic audience. Those who have read *Having Faith* or already appreciate the importance of environmental health could very well get bogged down in the first 275 pages and never make it to the last ten. And those who are skeptical of Steingraber's message may have already found reason to put the book down in favor of *Rattled!* (2009) as a substitute memoir, or *What to Expect When You're Expecting* (2005), a more mainstream parenting guidebook. Nonetheless, while Steingraber's execution could be improved through earlier and more consistent appeals to political action, even at the expense of unsympathetic readers,

Steingraber's message and approach to both individual and political action are both quite pragmatic, and importantly so.

Given the above discussion of audience—sympathetic and otherwise—it is worth mentioning the role of gender as it moves from author to text and audience. Unlike with Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma*, which aims to engage “anyone who eats,” *Having Faith's* potential audience is severely limited, first to the roughly 50% of the population physically equipped to be “mothers” at some point in their lives,⁸⁹ and further to those women desiring to reproduce or parent a child. A quick remedy for such a limitation on audience is to argue that anyone with any connection to a pregnant woman, fetus, or child ought to find *Having Faith* an engaging read. Such a remedy would nearly restore the potential audience to Pollan's levels, but such a remedy may be too optimistic. After all, the role that men play in *Having Faith* is severely limited, and unlike *What to Expect When Your Wife is Expanding* (2007), a guidebook for men, or *Expecting: One Man's Memoir of Pregnancy* (2000), Steingraber's experiential narratives may alienate male/masculine readers who cannot relate to a woman's experiences as fetal habitat or direct appeals to the pregnant mother's perspective with only cursory appearances by her husband Jeff. Yet, just like with Sanders, and to an extent any book of nonfiction memoir, Steingraber may just have to take this hit and hope that enough men will care about the health of their fetuses and newborns, even if their roles seem less important in an embryo's development. If anything, a fair interpretation (though a stretch) might be to

⁸⁹ A sophisticated discussion of gender and sexuality is beyond the scope of this dissertation, though such a discussion would certainly complicate any discussion of *Having Faith* with respect to motherhood, female-ness, femininity, masculinity, and other topics.

say that men should work even harder to lobby elected officials since they have just as clear of a stake in their progeny, and less power to make individual choices to benefit fetal health. In other words, when Steingraber imagines a throng of pregnant mothers marching on Washington (132), as powerful as such a scene might be, the power should be magnified if the gathering was all-inclusive: men and women, young and old, fetuses and former-fetuses, and not just pregnant mothers. The sad reality is that such a political event is more likely to feature pregnant women and a few sensitive, new-age guys, but without a more inclusive imagination, even her dream-come-true could be limited.⁹⁰

Despite these critical inquiries, a pragmatic interpretation of *Having Faith* yields numerous insights into both the book and its potential as equipment for living. By blending of individual/ethical decisions and actions with the institutional/political, by blurring social-environmental distinctions, by refiguring crisis, and by narrating her processes of decision-making and action, Steingraber enriches the notion of pragmatic environmental writing and ecocriticism itself.

Blurred Distinctions: Humans/Nonhumans/Nature, Time, and Uncertainty

In *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and Our Place in the World* (2001), Anna Peterson examines how human exceptionalism—the construction of humans as different from, and superior to, nonhumans and nature—is both a Western worldview, and is thereby unnecessary, and also creates problems for environmental ethics, and is thereby

⁹⁰ In truth, I think that thousands of pregnant women marching on Washington would motivate policymakers to toughen regulations on environmental toxins. But imagine such a march with not just expectant mothers, but everyone who cares about the fetuses inhabiting those mothers.

morally precarious. Looking at critiques and alternatives “both internal and external” to the “dominant Western view of human nature” Peterson offers insights into ways that humans are “related to, dependent upon, and similar to the rest of nature” (153). Peterson offers Asian and Indigenous North American worldviews, and evolutionary biology and ecology, as ways to rethink human separateness, much like Kathleen Dean Moore does in *The Pine Island Paradox*. But few books examine the question of human-nature separation and connection in as rich or interesting of ways as *Having Faith*, which blends three human-nature conceptual relationships: metaphorical comparisons, scientific comparisons, and experiential descriptions of nature as background and co-inhabitants of the world. At times focusing on one of these approaches, and at other times integrating all three in the space of a single chapter, Steingraber offers readers a complex understanding of the differences and similarities, connections and relationships, and the conceptual and physical role that nonhuman nature plays in the human world.

Steingraber understands quite clearly the complexity of the words “natural” and “artificial,” and uses the similar stories of lead and mercury to unpack that complexity, first examining heavy metal pollutants in relation to artificial chemicals such as POPs, PCBs, and DDT. To unpack the “naturalness” of lead and mercury, Steingraber first states that, “A commonly held belief is that natural substances are less toxic to the human body than synthetic ones. Like a lot of folk biology, this idea is both true and misleading at the same time. It all depends on what you mean by ‘natural’” (113). Lead is “indeed present in the earth’s crust. But lead is not really part of nature in the sense that it has no function in the world of living organisms” (113). Similarly, “mercury is interned deep in

the earth's crust, mostly bound up with other elements... Unlike lead, the elemental form of mercury exists 'naturally,' in that it can wend its way up to the surface world of living organisms without any assistance from mining and smelting operations" (120). But while "both blur the distinction between natural and human-made," they also "both vandalize fetal brains" (120). This analysis of the word or concept of "natural" is not made for its own sake, but rather as an examination of the conceptual history of "natural" in support of her larger project, in this case as examination of fetal brain development. In other words, while deconstructing the myth from folk biology is important, and while demonstrating the conceptual baggage and complexity of "natural" is equally useful, these two tasks only surface because they are useful and important to the task of understanding human and fetal health and development.

The same is true of the comparisons and references to animals, plants, and ecosystems: these are not idly speculative, or even motivated by the search for understanding the human-nature relationship/divide (which could be said of Moore as a philosopher). Instead, each metaphorical or physiological comparison is purposeful and directly relevant to understanding human's experience of pregnancy, human development, or the problems of toxic exposures in women's, fetuses', and babies' bodies.

In the Preface, Steingraber frames the book as an exploration of a metaphor—a generative conceptual metaphor that offers both insight and ethical motivation to readers, whether mothers, policymakers, or other decision-makers—calling herself a "habitat... an inland ocean with a population of one" (ix), an idea she echoes later in the book

(101).⁹¹ This metaphor frames her examination of the relationship between fetus and mother, and draws it parallel to the larger relationship between all humans and their environments, both local and global.

Yet the ocean/womb metaphor is not the only one offered early in the book that is ecological in design. Steingraber uses an extended explanatory metaphor of the human uterus (or female body generally) as a river and floodplain that cycles in a natural disturbance regime, with a “thin layer of silt left behind after floodwaters have receded” (7), meandering fallopian tubes with a gondola-egg floating, paddling, and ferrying itself downstream (8), while the cycles of “flooding and renewal” turn “the interior landscape of the uterus into a lush marshland” or delta (9), complete with bloody lagoons from which to nourish a developing placenta (10).

The placenta is then developed as a third conceptual metaphor, as a forest ecosystem that supports a growing fetus, a metaphor developed as a way to understand how a fetus is nourished (and poisoned) through a mother’s food, air, and water.

According to Steingraber,

[T]he internal anatomy of a human placenta closely resembles a maple grove: the long columns of cells sent out by the embryo into the uterine lining during the first few weeks of pregnancy quickly branch and branch again until, by the third month of pregnancy, the treetops of an entire forest press up against the deepest layers of the womb. Meanwhile, the open taps of the uterus’s spiral arteries send jets of blood spurting between these arboreal structures. As the mother’s blood trickles down through the canopy of placental branches all kinds of important transactions take place. Most notably, carbon dioxide and metabolic wastes are swapped for oxygen, water, minerals, antibodies, and nutrients. (30-31)

⁹¹ It seems quite likely that this second reference was actually the first in the writing process, while the earlier prose reference occurred as a crystallization of the book’s key insights.

While there are some key differences between the hydraulics of sap movement in a Sugar Maple and placental blood movement, the similarities frame the physiological connections between human biological structures, and the riparian forest ecosystems they resemble. And while the majority of *Having Faith* focuses on where the human-floodplain-forest metaphor can go wrong, Steingraber recognizes the wondrous mystery of the human body, and states that these connections “should not enter our awareness only when poisons flow” from the outside world, into the womb, and thereby into a developing fetus (55).

Ecofeminist scholars have focused on the implications of the metaphorical connections constructed between a woman’s body and ecosystems that are all too often degraded both physically and conceptually, even plundered for resources.⁹² Yet other rich insights can be gained from these three ecosystemic metaphors. First, the floodplain and forest metaphors bring not just structural elements, but also the relationships between habitat and inhabitant, and the processes of growth and succession, nutrient flows, and hydraulics. The poetic and scientific elements of these metaphors meld together complexly. These two metaphors are far different than the “pregnant woman as inland ocean” metaphor by virtue of the implicit depth of the analogy, but also in terms of motivational power (perhaps even ascribed intent). While the floodplain and forest metaphors are used to explain the structures, relationships, and processes, the ocean metaphor is a simple realization, meant less as a generative metaphor to help people

⁹² See Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature* (1980) and Louise Westling’s *The Green Breast of the New World* (1998).

understand either the human body or marine ecosystems, and more as a conceptual framework for thinking about pregnant women, their bodies, and the inhabitant so dependent on the safety, security, and nutrients offered by the uterus and placenta. In this way, the reason for taking care of the local and global environments as a way to care for women's bodies is made clear.

One reason for this difference can be seen through the metaphorical focus on the human body as ecosystem/ecology or as habitat/home. While the floodplain and forest metaphors are scientific in nature, and are used as explanatory tools, the body as ocean metaphor directs attention to the body as habitat, rather than to the marine ecology of the body, with its reefs and kelp bed, sharks and phytoplankton. Seeing the body as both ecosystem and habitat—as having complex anatomical and physical structures, relationships, and processes, and as being the home of a fetus and future-baby—allows readers to become more aware the ecology of childbirth, and motivated to act and advocate carefully.

The body-as-ecosystem-and-habitat metaphors are not the only human-nature connections made in *Having Faith*. As a science writer discussing pregnancy, fetal development, and environmental toxicology, Steingraber uses other animals as a reference point for humans. Were an ecocritic to look exclusively for signs of “human exceptionalism” or “human inclusion” in the natural world, both could be found, which is evidence that Steingraber fully recognizes the paradox of comparative biology: how humans are both separate from, and part of, the rest of nature, specifically mammals.

These comparisons are developed in greatest detail with respect to the placenta and mammary glands, but branch out to other areas of human physiology. Placental differences among closely related mammals are surprisingly different (32), and monkey species, horses, pigs, and sloths have diffuse placentae while cats, dogs, and elephants have seat belt-shaped, and sheep and cows have tufted placenta. “Humans have simple, round placentas whose point of attachment is restricted to one area of the uterine lining. So do apes, armadillos, hamsters, and vampire bats” (33). In other words, different species have different shaped placentas, humans share their shape with some animals, and our placental-cousins are quite unexpected. And while all placentas are “expelled with the fetus during birth,” humans are “the only mammal that does not eat it” (33). In other words, from evolutionary and comparative standpoints, humans are both like and unlike other mammals, both the exception and the rule.⁹³ The same is true for mammary glands and the milk they offer young mammals. Here, Steingraber constructs a “male mammary continuum” from humans with “well-formed nipples and ducts” on one end and rodents “whose males typically possess neither ducts nor nipples” on “the opposite pole” (216). When it comes to milk (this time back to the female), “human breast milk has nearly twice the sugar (lactose) of cow’s milk. It also has more vitamin A, C, E, and K. However, cow’s milk contains more than triple the protein of human milk and a lot more salt” (220). And while different mammal species’ milks may have different nutritious content, and even aesthetic color and texture (218), “it turns out that all mammals are

⁹³ Interestingly, humans are not the only species that vomits generally, but are the only species exhibiting pregnancy sickness (25). This is yet another example of our similarity and difference from a comparative biology perspective.

immunologically incompetent as neonates, which means... that we humans are in fine company” (231). Again, Steingraber highlights how humans are both like and unlike other mammals when it comes to the structures and processes of nourishing and growing fetuses and newborns.

But there’s more, and the “more” extends to the length and difficulty of labor (189), the relative size of a newborn’s head and a mother’s hip structure (189-190), and the sense of smell Sandra develops early in pregnancy: her sense of smell becomes more acute (23), prompting her to call herself a bloodhound (27), one place where humans might really have stronger senses and the neural capacities to smell and think like other species.⁹⁴ And while these normal comparisons are important, just as key to Steingraber’s argument are the comparisons regarding how both humans and other animals respond to chemicals in their environments: pollution (44-45, 52, etc.), birth defects (94, 96, 101), chemicals triggering pregnancy (179, 182), and the digestion of food and water (66, 75). In other words, Steingraber’s scientific analysis of fetal development and environmental toxicology are extensions of Kathleen Dean Moore’s philosophical framework, demonstrating that humans and the rest of nature share both common substance and a common future. Simply put, the ecology of pregnancy and childbirth connects humans back into the rest of the world, or as Steingraber puts it, “*Whatever is in hummingbird eggs is also inside my womb. Whatever is inside the world’s water is also here in my hands,*” when she holds her amniotic fluid (75).

⁹⁴ I include this commentary to reference Thomas Nagel’s essay, “What is it like to be a bat?” (1974). In particular, it could be that heightened senses—such as that of smell in pregnancy—could change the philosophy of mind with respect to what it’s like to be a human.

This realization is just one way of framing the intersection of people's everyday lives with contemporary environmental crisis. And while the phrase "environmental crisis" never appears in the book, and "environmental degradation" only once in the Afterword, the context of the book cannot be grasped without them, nor can Steingraber's personal and political response be fully understood.

Crisis and Dwelling, Private and Public, Individual and Political

Building on responses to crisis offered by Moore and Sanders, Steingraber offers two additional insights. The first is the most explicit, explained in the short Afterword addressing the Precautionary Principle (284-287), but with which Sandra and Jeff struggle in the Rose Moon chapter on nitrates, lead, and mercury (105-108, 118-121). The second way Steingraber responds to crisis is by seeing it as a unifying force rather than a cause of alienation. These two ways of refiguring crisis can be seen as pragmatic, but only through a kind of reconciliation between precaution and adaptive management, a resolution not yet articulated elsewhere.

It seems unnecessary to belabor the presence of crisis in *Having Faith*, since the book concerns the navigation of environmental crisis in such detail. It is primarily pollution—of food, air, water, and land—that makes writing this book so important to Steingraber. That pollution includes lead, mercury, nitrates, PCBs, DDT, dioxin, and other chemicals, some more or less natural and synthetic, and more or less active at different times during pregnancy. But the causes of these crises—the collective behaviors and political or economic institutions that allow for pollution—are not the primary focus of the book—they are subsidiary, relevant only to the point that Steingraber's audience

knows (a) where pollution comes from, and (b) how then readers and leaders might eliminate such pollution from the landscape of childbirth.

These pollutants enter a fetus or infant from a variety of sources. Agricultural pesticides are emphasized in *Mother's Moon* (77-102) with the words "pesticides" and "agricultural" being used in the same sentences four times (84, 89, 98, 99), though organic solvents proliferate near hazardous waste sites (92), and the risk of spina bifida increases "when fathers are exposed to welding fumes, cleaning agents, or pesticides" (95), and several birth defects "rise significantly if the mother lives within a few miles of a hazardous waste landfill" (91). The two primary sources of human lead exposure are paint and gasoline (115), while mercury comes from forest clear-cutting, gold extraction, and the "biggest single contributor" of "coal-burning power plants" (121). *Crisis* is not just about the on-the-ground pressures of pregnant mothers trying to keep their developing fetuses safe, but also about the larger-scale causes of pollution: crisis exists for both individuals and institutions. In other words, parents dwell in crisis because their fetuses and infants are threatened by pollution on many fronts, and from many sources, both in terms of the pathways of exposure, but also the social and industrial activities that create such exposure potential. And while people's habitats—their homes, communities, water sources, air and food supplies—ensure everyone's dwellings are in crisis (the noun form of dwelling), people also dwell in crisis (the verb form) as they try to navigate these complexities.

Steingraber's previous book—*Living Downstream*—addressed the question of place and its relationship to pollution in much the same way that Sanders' previous

book—*Staying Put*—offered his take on crisis-dwelling as a noun. However, *Having Faith* makes “dwelling” a very active process of living through crisis, whether through the complexities of drinking bottled-water while breathing the aerosols of tap water (100-101) or choosing whether or not to fish while visiting Alaska (146).

Steingraber dwells in this refigured crisis by examining fetal development and environmental toxicology in detail, but also by taking the Precautionary Principle to heart. Not until the Afterword does Steingraber examine precaution explicitly, but in the sixth chapter—Rose Moon—Sandra dwells on the phrase, “In ignorance, abstain,” and asks Jeff, “Why does abstinence in the face of uncertainty apply only to individual behavior? Why doesn’t it apply equally to industry or agriculture?” (107). Though Jeff’s answer centers on the difference between private and public spheres, Sandra remains unsatisfied, stating, “It’s pregnant women who have to live with the consequences of public decisions. We’re the ones who will be raising the damaged children. If we don’t talk about these things because it’s too upsetting, how will it ever change?” (108).

Steingraber’s analysis of this issue is important for three reasons, the first being a paradox regarding the specificity of the Precautionary Principle. Pregnant women, and people generally, are advised to use precaution—to avoid potentially damaging behavior in the face of uncertainty—when deciding how to behave: what to eat, drink, breathe, or do. But public institutions with direct access to power—they are the ones doing the polluting—do not operate under the same precautionary framework. For that reason, even a very cautious, hard-working, and responsible parent cannot prevent their child from being exposed to pollution. The second insight from this section is the importance of a

combined individual and political response, bridging the public and private distinction: parents should act cautiously in the face of uncertainty, but should advocate for corporations and government institutions to do likewise. This would give cautious women not just the chance to prevent exposures to their unborn children, but also the ability to drink tap water and eat fish without risking damage to their fetus.

The third idea that this exposes is the importance of precaution to pragmatic theories of adaptive management and decision-making. Adaptive management and the Precautionary Principle offer two ways to navigate social-environmental crisis in the face of uncertainty. Adaptive management functions by making decision-making and action into information-gathering activities, allowing for social learning through experimentation, iteration, and revision. In other words, “in ignorance, try something, learn from it, and try again.” By contrast, precaution advocates for abstinence in the face of ignorance or uncertainty. One interpretation of these two frameworks could put the two at odds: one requires action, and the other inaction, in the face of uncertainty. In other words, if people are unsure what to do in a given situation, they can try one approach and then reevaluate the situation, or they can sit on their hands and wait until they know more. Obviously, precaution allows for some kind of action, at some time, but it emphasizes the importance of information-gathering, or scientific study, in order to make the best decisions possible the “first-time around,” though “first-time” here implies some earlier research. Clearly, one limitation of adaptive management is that experimental action can have real, even irreversible effects in many cases (for example, chemical exposure during pregnancy), and may therefore be the wrong framework for the

job of decision-making during pregnancy. Similarly, the Precautionary Principle taken to an extreme—acknowledging a great deal of uncertainty still exists everywhere in both fetal development and ecology—might make for a very constrictive, even inactive approach to decisions and actions, whether for parents, for governments, or for industry.

Interpreting precautionary action and adaptive management as frameworks at odds with one another is hardly the only answer. Using the strengths of each in a more robust framework may sound something like the following. When faced with multi-dimensional decisions in the face of complexity and uncertainty, be cautious enough to avoid irreversible damage, work hard to minimize any and all problems as a general rule, but also proceed, which is to say, try something, monitor the results, learn from them, and revise the framework accordingly. In other words, take the best parts of both precaution and adaptive management, and use them wisely in the face of social-environmental crisis and everyday decision-making. This precautionary adaptive management can and should be extended both into private and public life, both individual and political decisions, though some situations—like fetal exposure to toxins—may require higher levels of precaution than others.

By connecting pragmatism and precaution, and by proceeding cautiously in the face of uncertainty rather than abstaining from action, Steingraber's paradox of individual and institutional precaution can be resolved. Both private and public behavior require certain levels of precautionary abstinence and cautious, experimental action, and for Steingraber to advocate on behalf of industrial and agricultural precaution in order to avoid similar precaution from parents seems somewhat inconsistent. But by advocating

for some combination of precaution and adaptive management for both public and private spheres, Steingraber may be able to navigate the conundrum she identifies in *Rose Moon*.

One last point regarding the refiguring of social-environmental crisis in *Having Faith* is the following: by examining how social-environmental crisis is not just a crisis of tree-cutting and fish-poisoning, but also a crisis for fetal development and the health of newborn babies, Steingraber uses crisis to unify rather than alienate readers. Given that there are many Americans who may not care much about PCB levels in orca whales or polar bears (139-140), but who care very much for the health of their children, Steingraber is able to connect those who care about the more-than-human-world with those who care primarily for humans, even closely-related humans. By avoiding a kind of environmental writing that is environmental crisis-driven, Steingraber navigates the pragmatic ridgeline between anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric values, recasting social-environmental crisis as a problem with farther-reaching consequences than just deforestation and extinction, though those are certainly some of the effects. In *Having Faith*, the fate of humans and the rest of the world are ecologically connected by the air, the water, the land, and the webs of food and consumption, and because fetuses and newborn babies are at the top of the so-called “food chain” (249-283), anthropocentric values extend far beyond humans to the rest of the biosphere. And while seeking out such value centers may be a useful ecocritical task, a far more useful one involves examining the decisions and actions themselves, the narratives that somehow integrate these values, constraints, and understandings into a useful framework and are employed as equipment for living.

Pragmatic Narratives: Decisions and Actions

Having a baby—pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing—is such a large and complex life experience that distilling, simplifying, and writing about it is no simple task. Yet with all her other rhetorical tasks, Steingraber is perhaps at her best when it comes to analyzing these complex situations, decisions, and actions, making *Having Faith* the perfect text in which to examine pragmatic narratives. Some of these decisions are more implicit—whether or not to have a baby in the first place—and others she addresses quite explicitly—whether to breastfeed, and where Sandra and Jeff might raise Faith. But throughout her narrated decisions, two pragmatic commitments remain paramount: first, personal and private decisions must be combined with public and institutional actions, and second, these kinds of decisions are riddled with uncertainties and complexities that cannot and should not be resolved with simple decision calculus. Rather, these contingencies should be accepted as such, and engaged nonetheless.

While others might also offer insights into Steingraber's approach to decision-making, three particular narratives demonstrate how *Having Faith* can serve as pragmatic equipment for living, helping readers engage in a process of dramatic rehearsal and moral imagination: first, amniocentesis as a missed connection; second, breastfeeding as an individual-private and political-public act; and third, where and how to live, as general advice and in comparison to Sanders and Moore.

Amniocentesis, a missed connection

Amniocentesis is an examination of a pregnant woman's extracted amniotic fluid, focusing on signs of chromosomal abnormalities. It is also an important decision facing future mothers and parents who risk triggering miscarriage in order to allow doctors to perform such an extraction. In *Egg Moon*, *Having Faith's* fifth chapter, Steingraber uses amniocentesis as an entry point for discussing birds (natural history); the fate of agricultural pesticides in drinking water (toxicology); and the limitations of current medical practices (environmental advocacy).

Steingraber's grappling with both her decision, and the all-too-simple decision calculus offered by genetic counselors, serves as a model for navigating the complexity of situations that future parents will face, and by extension, the kinds of situations people everywhere struggle to understand. After describing the science of genetic abnormalities and the practice of amniocentesis, Steingraber examines the recommendations of counselors using risk-benefit analysis:

After age thirty-five, the chance of carrying a child with Down syndrome equals or exceeds the chance of a procedure-induced miscarriage (0.5 percent); therefore amniocentesis is prudent and justifiable. Before age thirty-five, the risks are reversed, and therefore the test is not recommended. All things being equal. On average. (61)

Steingraber deconstructs this simple reasoning with three paradoxes, including the third:

“In the desire for an undamaged baby I am subjecting the baby to danger” (61).

Steingraber proceeds to question a medical encyclopedia's “weighing metaphor” while noting the social scientific studies describing how women end up actually making such a

decision. In the end, her own personal history of adoption and surviving cancer—her confounding factors—convince her to proceed with the amniocentesis procedure.

In a way, the decision to have an amniocentesis is really not a decision with clear environmental elements, and may therefore fall outside the context of a discussions of social-environmental discourse. But Steingraber’s approach to the decision—her pragmatic narrative—offers insight into how both she and her readers might navigate similarly complex, paradoxical, and contingent situations. Through some process of moral imagination and analogical extension, the Egg Moon chapter can prepare readers to navigate these sorts of situations. But just as importantly, Steingraber uses this chapter to demonstrate how the importance of genetics is matched by the importance of environmental factors, which we do not test.

What’s starting to bother me about amniocentesis is not the anxiety it creates (which is considerable) nor the coldheartedness of it (also considerable), but its narrowness of focus. The whole enterprise implies that the future life of a child can be read by counting its chromosomes and scrutinizing their architecture. But the children of Minamata had perfectly normal chromosomes. So presumably did the thousands blinded by rubella and the legless ones exposed to thalidomide. **Indeed, the majority of birth defects are not attributable to inborn genetic errors. And yet we put legions of geneticists to work looking for them, and we ritualize amniocentesis as a rite of passage for pregnant women, as though chunks of DNA were the prime movers of life itself.** As though pregnancy took place in a sealed chamber, apart from water cycles and food chains. **What if amniocentesis inquired about environmental problems as well as genetic ones? (74-75)**

It is in sections like the two block quotes above that Steingraber moves far beyond the normal genre of pregnancy guidebook, where her “mommy-ness” gives way to her life as an ecological scientist, and where her “journey to motherhood” becomes much more. As an ecologist, as a cancer survivor, and now as a mother, Steingraber leaves behind her

role as a science writer or historian, and instead becomes an advocate for change, trying to reshape the health care industry and Mommy Books that help expectant mothers navigate their nine months as fetal habitats, and far longer as primary caregivers. Steingraber is unsatisfied writing a slightly-more-savvy and scientifically literate Mommy Book, and instead moves *Having Faith* into the domain of political manifesto. Her case is simple: chromosomes and genetics are important, yes, but so too are the nutrients and the pollutants that find their way—by way of mothers, and fathers—into fetuses and babies. And for that reason, it is not enough for mothers to try hard to do what they can for their babies once they are pregnant, and to ignore the environmental connections at all other times. That kind of thinking is self-defeating, dangerous, and (dare I say) unethical.

In *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (2000), environmental historian Jenny Price traces the history of birds during key cultural moments as birds were transformed more and more into cultural objects from the natural animals they once were. But she begins her book with an examination of passenger pigeons—and their extinction—as a “missed connection” between humans and the environment in history. As important as passenger pigeons were—as a species, as biodiversity, and as a human-cultural phenomenon—and as unfortunate it is that Americans missed this “connection with nature,” it is far more startling and mysterious how people have missed the environmental connections between nature and human health, particularly the development and wellbeing of fetuses and babies. Building on this

principle, Steingraber's account of breastfeeding serves as a second pragmatic narrative, connecting humans and nature, not to mention the personal and political spheres.

Breastfeeding: connecting the personal and political spheres

The analysis of amniocentesis in *Having Faith* models a more complex decision analysis, and calls for the closer examination of the environmental effects on fetal development. Similarly, the last three chapters develop Steingraber's answers to the questions of breastfeeding: whether to do so, for how long, and how to incorporate the practice into a new mother's life. Unlike with amniocentesis, Steingraber's breastfeeding narrative is much less about uncertainty, and more about the plurality of viewpoints, as she tries to untangle the mess of conventional wisdom, scientific research, and practical constraints that make breastfeeding such an interesting issue in the first place. The emergent narrative emphasizes first the practical importance of breastfeeding for its health benefits, even in spite of breast milk's poisons. But the second emphasis is far more important because here Steingraber pushes mothers to be advocates on behalf of cleaning breast milk. The combination of personal and political actions—first, breastfeeding, and second, advocating on behalf of cleaner breastmilk—is the only path she finds to navigate the individual-scale dilemmas while also addressing the large-scale social-environmental crises that created the problems in the first place.

In *Mamma*, chapter 10, Steingraber examines (a) her personal experiences with breastfeeding, (b) the larger cultural history of breastfeeding, and (c) the evolutionary and molecular biology of breast milk, all while playing with a variety of metaphors for her

body, her milk, and her relationship with Faith.⁹⁵ Chapter 11—Loaves and Fishes—builds on the previous chapter, recounting the health benefits for mother and child of breastfeeding, along with the situated history detailing why breastfeeding went out of style, along with the social norms and mores of breastfeeding in public.⁹⁶ The twelfth and final chapter—The View from the Top—transitions away from the benefits of breast milk and into the poisons, while putting the food chain into perspective with human infants at the “top” (251).

Each of these three chapters combines science writing and history with personal experiences and insights, and while all of that information—science, history, personal experience—is relevant and insightful for mothers, the most important topics covered are the decisions made, the actions taken, the problems solved, and the reasoning offered for these situations: in short, the pragmatic narratives. And the most difficult part is trying to “solve complicated and alarming problems at 2 A.M.” (221). Some of the smaller problems with caring for a newborn include distinguishing between different cries and getting anything else done in between a baby’s naps, or dealing with the “helpless confusion” of not getting anything else done.⁹⁷ There are implicit decisions like using

⁹⁵ These include metaphors for the breast: faucet, garden hose, sprinkling can, tree, sweat gland, house, and fizzing Coca-Cola bottles—though the last was only in a dream; for her: “I am milk” and “I am eaten” (215); and for the mother-child relationship: “As with a lover, the world contracts when we are together” (212).

⁹⁶ In this chapter, breast milk is examined as both an assassin (killing bacteria on contact), and as medicine, or benevolent nurturer (231-232). After comparing formula and breast milk, and the mechanical bottles and breasts, Steingraber ends the chapter with a humorous account of six year old girl telling Sandra, “She thinks your boob is a bottle!” (248).

⁹⁷ If environmentalists need an extended metaphor for their activist efforts, the “string of defeats” paragraph may be a fruitful allegory for analysis (221).

cloth diapers (239) and explicit decisions like whether and how to sleep with Faith, whether to breastfeed in public (243), or when to wean a breastfeeding child (268).

But the primary decision with which Steingraber grapples is whether to breastfeed, given the health benefits (225-242)⁹⁸ and the potential for problems (251-272).⁹⁹ She herself concludes that “few mothers, if given accurate, complete information and a real choice in the matter, would opt to feed their babies an inferior food source that retards development, carries with it the risk of death and disease, and costs them an additionally \$1,000 a year” (245). Yet many do, whether because they are influenced by the popular media (247), they wish to avoid poisoning their child, or they are confused by the complexity of the reasons: if there are both health benefits and risks of breast milk, then some could see breast milk and formula as a toss-up.¹⁰⁰ Alternately, popular guidebooks on breastfeeding dismiss contamination’s potential for harm (269), and the more insightful approach is to weigh “the positive, health-promoting virtues of mother’s milk... against all the known and possible dangers created by its burden of toxic chemicals” (274). But the problem with risk-benefit approaches is that “they offer no solutions. The usual recommendation that follows from them—“Just keep nursing because the benefits outweigh the risks”—means that we nursing mothers should take no action until our milk becomes so contaminated as to pose as many risks as formula. In other words, until breast milk, like formula, kills 4,000 U.S. infants a year” (274).

⁹⁸ There are sections on these various benefits on just about every page of this chapter (225-229, 230-232, 233-234, 237-239, 240-242).

⁹⁹ Again, the poisons in breast milk are discussed throughout the first half of the chapter (251-253, 255-260, 262-264, 265-267, 268-272).

¹⁰⁰ This is similar to the principle: everything causes cancer, so why worry about cancer at all?

Additionally, while the simplicity of risk-benefit analyses make them useful tools, “the more variables scholars attempt to incorporate into their analyses, the more uncertain the outcome of the analysis becomes” (275). In situations like breastfeeding, merely knowing more, or being more aware of the environmental factors of breastfeeding, is not enough. Similarly, it would be both unhelpful and problematic to identify ecocentric values, interpret their meaning for such complex decisions, and act on those values: too many important constraints and values stand to fall by the wayside under such frameworks.

What pragmatic narratives like *Having Faith* do is help readers think through these situations. Steingraber explains her action—choosing to breastfeed—but also takes full account of the uncertainty and complexity of factors influencing her decision. It isn’t enough to say, “here are the connections between humans and the environment made clear by breastfeeding.” A memoir book alone could offer a personal account of making difficult decisions; a book of science writing could identify the complexities of breastfeeding, even identifying the most important factors in decision-making. Unsatisfied with either approach, Steingraber offers readers both, first taking the scientific approach, and then explaining her own response to the complexity of the situation. While Steingraber’s first person account of the decision-making process makes for an easy entry point for readers seeking a model for prudent behavior, the first person allows, even encourages, readers to take her actions for granted, as the “right” way to navigate complexity, when sometimes Steingraber’s decisions are influenced just as much by personal values and taste or preference. In other words, the strands of science writing, personal response to scientific information, and personal preferences are

sometimes woven so tightly that a reader could easily fail to separate them, thereby following her lead blindly, or responding adversely to her approach by feeling inferior to Steingraber's saintly behavior, or becoming offended by Steingraber's attempt at a moral high ground. Simply put, even though *Having Faith* might best be read as equipment for living, readers could unduly read the book as an argument for "green pregnancy and childbirth" by "an environmentalist."

Recognizing the legitimacy of such an interpretation, I would argue instead that Steingraber's approach to the uncertain and perilous terrain of breastfeeding (and childbirth) is more helpful than not, and more pragmatic than polarizing. Struggling with how to keep children the most healthy, Steingraber begins by reframing the situation:

The question is not whether we should feed our babies chemically contaminated, yet clearly superior, breast milk or chemically uncontaminated, yet clearly inferior, formula. The question is, what do we need to do to get chemical contaminants out of clearly superior breast milk? There are two basic approaches to answering it. One focuses on changes that individual mothers can make in their own lifestyles. The other focuses on political action. (276)

After identifying the practical and moral drawbacks arising from individual lifestyle changes (276-278), Steingraber analyzes the importance of political action and advocacy. Without the kinds of political actions—"DDT-style bans, tighter regulations, incinerator closings, emission reductions, permit denials, right-to-know laws, recycling initiatives, and tough environmental enforcement"—achieved by "public interest lawyers, public health workers, journalists, doctors, elected officials, scientists, environmental policy makers, environmental engineers, and organic farmers" (279), mother's milk today is purer. But more needs to be done to "continue the process of detoxification," and "avoid

stultifying breast-versus-bottle discussions that urge us to either shut up and nurse or switch to formula if we're so worried about toxic chemicals" (279).

Steingraber's avoids this false dualism by advocating on behalf of both breastfeeding and cleaning up breast milk. These paired actions offer not just a way of navigating individual decisions and actions in the context of social-environmental crisis, but also a way to respond to crisis on both personal and political scales. This approach is pragmatic on multiple levels: engaging problems crossing between human and nonhuman; combining personal and political action; and avoiding ecospeak and other polarizing dualisms. And while the act of breastfeeding is one only mothers can do, any others who care can advocate on behalf of cleaning up breast milk by cleaning up the environment. In that way, Steingraber's audience for her Mommy Book extends beyond mothers to others (who care about infant health), and her purpose extends beyond guiding pregnant mothers to guiding any citizens to act on behalf of fetuses, which also means advocating on behalf of polar bears and salmon.¹⁰¹

Where to live and what to do

The breast milk narrative draws out the inability of mothers to make a decision they can feel good about: neither breast milk nor formula are safe, and parents themselves don't have the power to minimize risks while maximizing the benefits by breastfeeding clean and healthy breast milk. The same is true of other decisions, such as where to live, and what line of work to choose: what might best meet the needs of one's family while

¹⁰¹ In a strange way, this framework casts infants as "keystone species," whose protection will secondarily protect other organisms.

minimizing the exposures of one's children to chemicals. Sandra and Jeff decide to move out to rural New York, leaving the city of Boston. The decision to leave Boston is a complex one for Steingraber, who has spent most of her adult life in cities. After remaining in the city, and in a building with lead paint for long enough to have increased lead levels in their daughter's blood (119),¹⁰² they decide to move to a more rural area. Like so many decisions people make, part of the decision is practical, related to job opportunities. But part is also the environmental benefits of country life (253) and the environmental health costs of living in the city and their apartment (119). These costs and benefits are mixed with the aesthetics of rural life, and the potential for Faith to grow up understanding the natural world in its behavior and ecology, both wild and domestic.

Here, Steingraber makes a very different decision from the one made by Moore, and even Sanders, who both decide to live in town. But it is important to recognize the different contexts differentiating the Steingraber family—having younger rather than grown children—and also how the social-environmental values and concerns of these writers do not necessarily lead to the same results. Instead, the processes of moral imagination, deliberation, and externalization (of the reasoning) can lead to different decisions: not everyone will end up living in town, even if Moore makes a good argument along those lines. Instead, individuals' particular contexts, particular values, constraints, and concerns will lead them to different places, and the pragmatic narratives that recount these decisions and actions will unfold in novel ways.

¹⁰² Interestingly, Steingraber makes a very pragmatic parenthetical statement here, acknowledging her and Jeff's fallibility when it comes to decision making on behalf of protecting Faith's health.

Yet the structure of pragmatic narratives remains quite consistent. A writer who has worked through an uncertain and multi-dimensional situation uses storytelling to recount the process of navigation in ways that reflect situational complexity rather than stripping away that complexity in favor of simple and straightforward—sometimes absolutist, and quite often polarizing—values, environmental or otherwise. After all, trying to decide whether to breastfeed, where to live, or what job makes the most sense for one’s family is no simple matter. At the same time, it is important to recognize how particular decisions and actions can have far-reaching effects on others, even into the future, and also how the decisions of others in the past have constrained or degraded people’s lives in the present. For example, Sandra’s husband Jeff comments, “Don’t grow our own root vegetables. Quit a job I like. How come we’re always the ones that have to do the abstaining?” (120). Because Jeff’s work as a painter has increased his blood-lead levels, and because their Boston apartment and Jeff’s painting together have thereby increased Faith’s own lead-burden, Jeff changes jobs when they move from Boston to New York in an effort to protect Faith’s healthy growth and development. Even this very personal decision is influenced by the actions of others, and while Jeff can do some small part to eliminate lead from his life, it is only through political action—government regulation and industrial restraint—that toxins like lead can be truly minimized in the environment. And even banning a substance in the present will not immediately remove the toxins, leaving people like Jeff and Faith to deal with them far into the future, as is the case with lead. Such is the complexity of social-environmental crisis, and the

corresponding social-environmental situations, decisions, and actions that people face in their everyday lives.

Steingraber's writing is not just aimed at bringing awareness of the human-nature connections, or the social-environmental crises of our times, and *Having Faith* is certainly not a book of nature-centered values in the traditional sense of that term. But this book, by bringing awareness to the complexity of these issues, and by offering ways to navigate that complexity, serves as an example of pragmatic environmental writing, and it offers ecocritics a clear chance to engage with the decisions and actions taken. Steingraber offers her readers not just new information regarding humans and the environment, but also some of the equipment for living in a time of large-scale social-environmental crises and individual-scale decisions and actions. Moreover, she connects these two spheres through the dual actions she advocates: working through complex situations in her own life, while also advocating for political and institutional changes on a larger scale. In so doing, she extends the popular genres of "Environmental Writing" and "Pregnancy Guidebooks" into a new realm, where Mommy Books can give readers both narratives of personal experience and explanations of developmental biology, both the history of obstetrics and the challenges of breastfeeding, and both the practical advice for small-scale decision making and the call to cleanup the environment on behalf of fetuses and infants. Steingraber constructs a well-developed argument for healthy breast milk—and thereby food, water, and air—being a human right, and she does so while discussing her own insights as an ecologist and now mother. Steingraber's narrative—while dense with information and loaded with insight—serves as another step

toward pragmatic and rhetorical equipments for living in a time of social-environmental crisis.

Conclusion: The Promise of Pragmatism, and the Challenge of Extension

The two primary goals of this dissertation were first, to construct an ecocritical framework informed by Deweyan pragmatism and Burkean rhetoric, and second, to use this framework to investigate three texts which seem at first glance to have pragmatic potential. Such a critical approach examines literary texts instrumentally, “as equipment for living” in people’s processes of deliberation and decision-making, and does so in the context of John Dewey’s ethical system of moral imagination. But beyond the approach, the critical inquiry into these three books of literary nonfiction illuminates, contextualizes, and emphasizes the rhetorical and pragmatic situations faced by the author-narrators. Whether the decision concerns where and how to live, how to respond to conflicting worldviews, or whether to breastfeed an infant, such situations and decisions are clearly relevant to a wide variety of readers.

While authors have minimal control—instead, only persuasive influence—over the decisions of their readers, as writers, they have much more control over their words: how they craft sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and books to reach an audience. It could be said that the rhetorical situation for an author runs both parallel to, and on top of the pragmatic situation, like a river flowing over saturated soil, supported by and supporting the groundwater below. The question of where to live is paired with the question of how to write about such a decision, and through the externalizing acts of reading and writing, the decision becomes more deliberate, more active. For that reason, the analysis of these pragmatic decisions—situations and decisions—must always be integrated with the

rhetorical decisions of the authors, as pragmatic narrative criticism blends into ethics and moral philosophy.

The texts examined here highlight the particular values, understandings, and motivations of the authors, but each—to a greater or lesser degree—is self-reflective about the presence of uncertainty, contingency, and the diversity of worldviews. In other words, readers should be able to have a different perspective and still not feel altogether alienated. Moore, Sanders, and Steingraber all represent a worldview clearly concerned both with humans and the rest of the world (and so might be labeled “environmentalists”). All three authors frame their perspectives within the larger context of social-environmental crisis, but act and write within the smaller context of situations and the smaller communities of their towns, their friends, and most especially their families, and in so doing, can appeal to wider audiences.

Along these same lines, the slow (and perhaps stunted) expansion of genre outside the realm of nature writing and Thoreauvian essay—expansion best seen in *Having Faith* and more limited in *Hunting for Hope*—promises a less alienating future for environmental writing. Such a future can be seen in the premises (reconnecting with a son on a hike, navigating the uncertain terrain of pregnancy), the more urban and inhabited settings (in town, with neighbors), and the minimization of ecocentric values and nature awareness in favor of a more widely encompassing set of constraints, understandings, and motivations (trying to connect humans and nature more thoroughly, struggling to make sense of conventional wisdom and scientific insight regarding pregnancy). The topical content, and the efforts made by these authors to engage a

grouped best termed the American middle class, extend these texts outside of the rhetorical tradition of nature writing, even if Sanders (Thoreau), Moore (Leopold), and Carson (Steingraber) are clear antecedents.

Connected to these more pragmatic approaches to environmental writing is the corresponding role of pragmatic interpretation: recognizing, and seeking out, the pragmatic elements of texts, a task best suited to critics, but an approach used by readers either implicitly (through neural restructuring), or explicitly (in a classroom discussion or throughout a liberal education). Read for their strengths, these narratives might give reference and insight into the kinds of decisions faced by readers, and might thereby help or assist those facing similar situations. Such a role for literature—Burke’s notion of equipment for living—gives ecocritics both a pragmatic orientation to environmental writing, and also a clear and useful framework for integrating such texts into moral imagination, deliberation, and ethical decision-making.

Simply put, this dissertation contributes to three scholarly conversations: ecocriticism and environmental writing; pragmatism and rhetoric; and moral imagination, decision-making and ethics. For ecocritics and environmental writers, there is a clear focus on contemporary and historical environmental writing, with the primary purpose of introducing both groups to Deweyan pragmatism, and the role that environmental writing can play in moral imagination. Such a framework continues the discussions of Slovic, Buell, Buell, Patrick, Philippon, Killingsworth and Palmer, and most relevantly, Neil Browne.

For scholars of rhetoric and pragmatism (or more broadly, Communication Studies, English Literature, and Philosophy), Burke's "literature as equipment for living" offers a clear way forward in the attempt to connect these two fields, a way more true to Dewey and Burke than to Rorty's earlier attempts to connect literature and pragmatism, and a way that builds on the scholarship of Crick, Danisch, and Stob.

For scholars of moral imagination and decision-making, this account builds on the work of Minter, Lee, Fesmire, and Norton, offering a more individual-centered account of decision-making, similar in structure to adaptive management, but operating on the scale of Fesmire's moral imagination. But as with Rorty's and Nussbaum's engagement with texts, Burke's keystone insight fills out the requisite framework for further use and extension.

The topic of extension is the primary area with which my future research must contend. The issue of extensibility is the mechanism by which certain texts and insights can be extended, or used, in novel circumstances: this involves "being handy" with the literary and ethical equipment critically examined in this project, but also what might be termed "product development," "discovery," or even "invention" in the context of pragmatic narratives. The three challenges of extensibility follow roughly the key areas with which this dissertation is concerned: genre and rhetorical construction (questions of discourse), environmental justice (questions of relevance, class, race, etc.), and relevance (questions of context and situation).

Because this dissertation focused solely on literary nonfiction (essays, nature writing, memoir, and science writing), questions of discourse and genre would factor

more widely in an investigation of other literary texts—fiction and poetry—but also other rhetorical genres including public speeches, web videos, or even actual guidebooks.

Burke's framework emerged from his interest in literature, but he was quick to draw pragmatic connections between literary texts and the conventional wisdom of proverbs.

Similar connections could be drawn, but a different voice, narration, and rhetorical situation can change the dynamics of the author-text-audience relationship, and thereby change how situations, decisions, action, and deliberation are presented in a text.

Because all three primary authors are white, middle-class (perhaps upwardly mobile as is the case with Sanders), college professors, there remain a wide range of voices not heard clearly in this discussion. Part of the reason for this may, in fact, be the genre and tradition of nature-environmental writing, and the prevalence of white, college professors in the ranks of contemporary environmental writers. This is not purely the case, but adding a level of richness to the discussions of genre and rhetorical tradition will be the question of race and class, a topic of particular interest to myself and other scholars of environmental justice.

Combining these two areas of future research will mean not just looking at poetry (like the works of eco-poet Mary Oliver) or documentary (*An Inconvenient Truth*, for example), but at discourse constructed by non-white authors and their relevance to moral imagination and decision-making. Examples of such texts include Majora Carter's TED Talk, Eddy Harris' first person modern adventure writing *Mississippi Solo*, and Linda Hogan's novel *Solar Storms*. Such texts will highlight the racial and socioeconomic aspects of decision-making and action in interesting ways, but do so in the context of

exposing the rhetorical strengths and limits of first person nonfiction in the context of environmental literature.

A third area of extension relates more to moral imagination, and the interpretive extension of situations found in texts to novel situations, those left uncovered by many books. Situations and decisions that future audiences face may be just as foreign to contemporary writers as contemporary situations are to historical figures (Thoreau, Leopold, etc.), and by looking diachronically at the past and future for insights into moral imagination in the present, critics may better estimate how texts succeed or fail in the face of novel situations and novel contexts. A compounding factor is the consideration of such futures in the rhetorical imagination regarding how to construct texts for those dealing less with the ambiguities of vacationing or living in town, and more with the uncertainty and complexity of human augmentation, biotechnology, climate change, or peak resources like oil. Such large-scale contextual shifts of what is now called Future Studies have been examined by some ecocritics in the context of science fiction, yet more can be done to bring the pragmatism of Burke and Dewey to the fantastic of Sci-Fi.

Though these three areas of theoretical and imaginative extension are presented as separate challenges to the pragmatic ecocriticism developed here, the relationships among them are becoming clearer and more pronounced with the convergence of issues like climate change, and the social pressures on authors (or media producers) to respond, and offer guidance, insight, or (sometimes just) reassurance. Without extreme oversimplification or self-importance, this dissertation and the pragmatic ecocriticism developed here has the potential not just to influence ecocritics and scholars of pragmatist

ethics, but also environmental (or otherwise) writers, and wider audiences of readers.

Limited as it currently is by these three challenges of extension, pragmatic ecocriticism in the vein of Dewey and Burke can refigure crisis-dwelling from the passive, noun form of context, to the active verb form of navigation. By focusing on the complexity and contingency of situations and the approaches to decision-making, action, and deliberation, pragmatism offers ecocritics and environmental writers the chance to refigure their texts and thereby the genre itself, thereby making the genre a better equipment for living in the present and future.

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