

# The Ecological Ethic: Sustainability, Ecophilosophy, and Literary Criticism

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The attitude of prairie farmers towards the landscape has changed considerably since early settlement. In Frederick Philip Grove's novel *Fruits of the Earth* (1933), set in 1900, the protagonist Abe Spalding describes southern Manitoba as a primitive wilderness fit to be conquered and tilled "from line to line"(21-22). In 1995, the province's agricultural producers published a strategy that encourages farmers to consider all components of the landscape, in addition to setting yield goals from livestock or crops. The strategy measures soil and water quality, wildlife needs and woodland protection. Tilling the land squarely from property line to property line is no longer an option. Yet it is clear from the historic, widespread cultivation of southern Manitoba that this approach did once dominate the agricultural mindset. In *Home Place: Essays on Ecology* (1990), Stan Rowe concurs with Grove that European settlers saw the prairie as "nothing but wilderness, waste, barren, desert and deserted until colonized and 'improved'" (16). Their objective, which Abe heroically achieves in Grove's novel, was to convert the prairie ecozone to fields producing wheat for commercial export. In the 1990s, farmers still see the land largely as a source of economic benefits, but they also acknowledge the interdependence of nature and account for conservation priorities in the course of economic planning. The producers' strategy, as outlined in the *Manitoba Farm Planner* (1996), recognizes that economic success depends on viewing the environment, the world economy and its human inhabitants as "inseparably linked"(4). The incorporation of ecological considerations into economic planning, under the rubric of sustainability, represents the ideological shift that is taking hold not only in agriculture but also in Canadian governments and industry at large. Increasingly, society is coming to see itself as a part of the environment, rather than as separate and distinct from it.

As the *Manitoba Farm Planner* attests, this trend is gaining credence on the basis of economic and other practical considerations. What is good for the land is good for agriculture. Yet the notion of humanity

existing as part of nature is also gaining attention on spiritual grounds, popularizing a longstanding environmental consciousness that many theorists and, more recently, scientists have come to recognize. In *The Diversity of Life* (1992), Edward O. Wilson observes a need so strong in people to interact with nature that the loss of life's diversity poses a threat to the very "spirit" of humanity (352). In a phenomenon that he calls "biophilia," Wilson notices a subconscious need in humans to seek out new life and "wonder" before returning to areas of the earth "that have been humanized and made physically secure" (350). Certainly, interaction with nature is critical to the public. Each year, millions take to the outdoors. A 1987 study by Statistics Canada shows that nearly 50% of Canadians participate annually in wilderness activities (Survey 3). The reason for such a need to get outdoors, argues Wilson, is basic: "[w]ilderness settles peace on the soul because it needs no help; it is beyond human contrivance" (350). While humanity may have reconstructed nature into dwellings and castles and then houses and cities to feel "physically secure," experiencing cities alone strips the soul of its need for diversity, both of life forms and landscapes. Wilson observes that humans are "part of nature, a species that evolved among other species" that cannot flourish while confined to the delusion that they are somehow separate from the rest of nature (348-349). The wonder humans experience in a natural setting, or what Wilson calls "biophilia," has long been acknowledged under the belief-system known as ecological philosophy or ecophilosophy. It will be argued here that the mainstream trend towards sustainability, and the more spiritual connection to nature long-advocated in environmental theory, justifies the application of an ecological perspective to literary studies under the methodology that was proposed by various writers in the past and is now becoming known as ecocriticism.

Though sustainability is a more recent and accepted concept, ecophilosophy has deep ideological roots and is far more revolutionary, constituting an alternative mindset to the very popular and ingrained methodology of Cartesian reductionism. Indeed, many theorists attribute the attitude that humans are somehow separate and aloof from nature to the rule of reason that arose in the seventeenth century, particularly in the thinking of René Descartes. In *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (1967), for example, Clarence J. Glacken notes that Descartes "exultantly described" a road for humanity to follow that "led to an ideal of a purposive control over nature through applied science, the kind of control which in our own day has been in such large and triumphant measure achieved" (427). In his overview of European history, René Albrecht-Carrié concurs that Descartes' "ideal of order based on reason" made a "deep imprint on the

age" (187). In *The Natural Alien: Humankind and Environment* (1985), Neil Evernden argues that the crux of this calling-to-order is Descartes' subject-object dualism, whereby material is broken into two distinct parts, that which can think and that which is thought of. Once the thinking individual can reduce what is seen no further, certain knowledge will be obtained (52). The result of this duality, which constitutes the framework by which most scientific investigation since Descartes has proceeded, was the complete commodification of nature. Rather than a vibrant living entity, nature became a "thing" suited for exploitation. Ecophilosophy redefines the environment as a vibrant ecosystem that contains many interconnected beings, including humans, a view that enhances the potential not only for a more fulfilling human experience, but also for a more intrinsic, less anthropocentric recognition of nature.

In 1972, at the Third World Future Research Conference in Bucharest, Arne Naess presented the notion of ecological philosophy as consisting of two components: "shallow" ecology, or frontline protests against resource depletion and pollution, and "deep" ecology, or the understanding of humans as existing as part of the greater natural community ("Ecology Movement" 95). In his explanation of deep ecology in "Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World" (1987), Naess argues that protection of the environment depends on people rejecting the "man-in-environment image" in favour of the "relational, total-field image," so as to see themselves less as isolated individuals and more as part of their surrounding space, because "[c]are flows naturally if the 'self' is widened and deepened so that protection of free Nature is felt and conceived as protection of ourselves" ("Self-Realization" 39-40). In "The Meanings of 'Deep Ecology'" (1990), Warwick Fox describes deep ecology as a "field-like sense of self," whereby care extends from oneself to family to friends to community to ethnic group to species and so on (49). But he cautions that since this personal basis for identification can also be the cause of "possessiveness, greed, exploitation, war, and ecological destruction" the care meant here must have a cosmological basis that attempts to "convey a lived sense that all entities [including ourselves] are relatively autonomous modes of a single, unfolding process; that all entities are leaves on a single tree of life" (50). The intended result of deep ecology is for the land and other life forms to become viewed less in the Cartesian mode of distinct, isolated entities and more as part of an integrated, ecological community.

The notion of humanity existing as part of a larger whole has been popularized in various modes in the twentieth century prior to its formalization under the title of ecophilosophy. While European phenomenologists, for example, were concerned chiefly with the

attainment of a broader human perspective, they fostered an understanding of life as a process of experiencing, of continual sensation and phenomena, that is more akin to nature's ever-evolving character than the desire for permanence and certitude that predominates in Europe and North America. In *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1913), Edmund Husserl writes about experiencing a greater sense of the world about oneself, of a "field of perception" that reaches "into the limitless beyond" (102). The experience begins, perhaps, with oneself, and extends infinitely beyond the self to encompass all that becomes within one's consciousness, which becomes what we consider part of our "world" (Husserl 103). For Husserl, phenomenology addresses the very meaning of "Being" and the establishment of knowledge of essences rather than facts, "dealing not with real, but with transcendently reduced phenomena" (Husserl 44). On moral grounds, some have argued that such a broadened human awareness of the surrounding environment should lead to a reduction of anthropocentric behaviour in favour of an intrinsic appreciation for nature (Rowe 34). In *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), Aldo Leopold describes the evolution of ethics in three stages: first, the relations between individuals; second, the relation between the individual and society; and, finally, what he felt had yet to develop, an "ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it" (238). Each ethic rests on the premise of the individual as a member of a community of interdependent parts. The land or ecological ethic is simply an enlargement of the boundaries of the community to include "soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land" (239). Fostering this ethic entails an "internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions" (246). Individuals, in other words, must develop a sense of obligation towards the environment through a fundamental reorientation of how they judge its value. Similarly, deep ecology dictates that if humans expand their scope of caring to view protection of nature as tantamount to protection of themselves, its preservation will become natural.

The principle of environmental interconnectness underlying deep ecology is a concept equally inherent to sustainability, albeit on an economic rather than a spiritual basis. However, proponents of sustainability are not quick to accept the term "deep ecology" since it continues to be associated with the so-called "tree huggers" and "eco-terrorists" who set up blockades to prevent tree harvesting, an activity that Naess defines as "shallow" ecology. Nor does sustainability advocate a rejection of Cartesianism, but rather a modification of the narrow, atomistic reductionism that renders its approach to nature insufficient. (In fact, the reductionist approach helped scientists to recognize the earth's interdependent nature. In *Lives of a Cell: Notes of*

*a Biology Watcher* [1975], Lewis Thomas asserts that biological science makes it clear that humans are "embedded in nature," and must learn to cope with this dawning realization [1-2]). In Canada, sustainability has become established only in the past decade, and in tandem with international milestones. One major step was the release by the World Commission on Environment and Development of *Our Common Future: the Brundtland Report* (1987), which proposes that environmental concerns be addressed through instituting sustainable development, defined as "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (ES-7). Situating the environmental cause in the context of sustainable development made the issue broadly palatable to European and North American societies. Previously, concern for the environment had remained a largely grassroots movement that started to gain exposure in the public and the media after the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), but had failed to become a significant element of government or corporate policy. The Brundtland report offered environmentalism in practical terms, calling for each nation to preserve at least twelve per cent of its natural territory. Another significant milestone was the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 in Brazil, commonly referred to either by its acronym (UNCED) or as the Earth Summit. At the UNCED conference, Canada and over 150 other countries signed the Convention on Biodiversity, a document that committed signatory countries to curbing the destruction of biological species, habitats and ecosystems. Over the past decade, the environmental movement has developed into a institutionalized mainstream effort in which on-the-ground conservation and a practical ecological ethic are becoming increasingly incorporated into economic decision-making, under the rubric of sustainability.

In Canada, this trend is perhaps best reflected in the *Canadian Biodiversity Strategy* (1995), the federal government's blueprint for ecological and economic integration. The strategy presents a vision for Canada of "a society that lives and develops as a part of nature, values the diversity of life, takes no more than can be replenished and leaves to future generations a nurturing and dynamic world" (3). Biological diversity, as defined by Environment Canada, refers to the diversity of all of life on earth, or the "variety among living organisms and the ecological communities which they inhabit" (*Backgrounder* 1). The Canadian strategy provides a framework to ensure the productivity, diversity and integrity of Canada's natural systems and urges the nation to develop "sustainably"(3). It sets out a mandate for ecological planning and management, including objectives for biodiversity conservation in areas affected by Canada's major natural resource

industries, such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry. Since biodiversity is the lifeblood of terrestrial and marine ecosystems, it is also directly responsible for sustaining the many resources that contribute to the economic output of these natural resource industries. Moreover, maintaining a broad array of biological resources safeguards potential future types of foods and medicine that as yet remain uncultivated. In view of these priorities, the strategy emphasizes the need for protection of wild flora and fauna, ecosystem restoration and rehabilitation, and species recovery.

The evolution of Canada's approach to the protection of endangered species is possibly the best illustration of the shift towards ecosystem-minded sustainability. Historically, wildlife conservation has been undertaken on a species-by-species basis, with biologists working to renew populations of certain high-profile birds and mammals like the whooping crane and the wood bison. Recently, the same broadening appreciation for nature's interdependency that stimulated the Convention on Biodiversity has altered this process. Wildlife biologists are now drafting recovery plans for entire ecosystems on the understanding that conserving populations of wildlife species is best achieved by maintaining a healthy environment. In "Noah's Ecosystem: We can't Save Endangered Species One at a Time," (1996), the Alberta biologist Cheryl E. Bradley describes the dependence of cottonwood forests on the province's Milk River, whose spring overflow onto shoreline floodplains leaves silty deposits where the cottonwood takes root (6-7).

In British Columbia, a recovery team was established in 1997 for the South Okanagan ecosystem, designed to protect several endangered species and many other large and small creatures that constitute the area's biodiversity. Similarly, a team was assembled in 1996 to preserve the abundance and variety of plant-life in southwestern Nova Scotia. Other areas targeted for ecosystem recovery include the Carolinian region of southwestern Ontario and the prairies. The federal government is also pursuing legislation that would prohibit anyone from hunting or in any way disturbing endangered species or their habitat.

Industries and associations of non-governmental groups are also undertaking major initiatives that fulfill the biodiversity strategy's vision. In the forestry sector, the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association recently launched a biodiversity program that hastens the transition to a more holistic view of the land. New practices to emerge from this approach include leaving watersheds undisturbed, leaving wildlife migratory corridors intact, and making smaller clearcuts. In addition, forestry companies are studying forest ecological functions and preparing management plans that preserve wild species and habitat. For

example, a study in Alberta found that the preferred nesting habitat of pileated woodpeckers is living aspen, since these trees become infected with a fungus that rots the centre of the tree. Previously, it had been thought that woodpeckers nest only in rotting, dead softwood trees (*Biodiversity 2*). The research indicates that aspen must be preserved for the woodpecker population. Several firms are developing forest ecosystem networks, and linking forest reserves with timber corridors that will preserve areas for several species including such large mammals as moose, grizzly and caribou. Other activities range from protecting specified habitats for certain species, such as areas inhabited by blue heron colonies, to full landscape-level planning that divides holdings by ecoregions and sets objectives for ensuring the protection of biodiversity throughout the range of age class within a forest. Forestry staff are also being trained in sustainable practices, such as converting to equipment that carries logs instead of dragging them, which, thereby, minimizes ground disturbance. Under a programme called "Loggers for Wildlife," the Canadian Forestry Association and several partner agencies are sponsoring a series of workshops to instruct foresters and private woodlot owners about the value of wildlife and the importance of protecting their habitat. These programmes constitute a component of the industry's response to a call at the 1992 UNCED conference for industry to make the transition to sustainable forest management.

In agriculture, the recommendations of the *Manitoba Farm Planner* are indicative of a broader movement to employ sustainability in the industry. For example, in recent years the Winnipeg-based International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) has undertaken several exhaustive studies analyzing ways to ensure the ecological health of the Great Plains, the vast region that extends from the Canadian prairies throughout the mid-western United States to the Gulf of Mexico. As well, throughout the 1990s, a federal-provincial government agreement called the Permanent Cover Programme has worked to reduce soil deterioration on farmland where annual cultivation is causing long-term soil damage. The programme provides financial assistance for converting the land to permanent cover by planting perennial forages for hay or pastures, or "trees for recreation or wildlife" (Barg 95). Since 1986, under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, hundreds of organizations across Canada, the United States, and Mexico have been cooperating to restore wetland habitat. While the plan is motivated largely as a means of increasing duck populations for harvesting, its benefits extend to ensuring the conservation of biodiversity by maintaining extensive habitat across North America for a great range of other wildlife species. Wetland basins collect runoff, and thus replenish the water supplies that are needed to sustain natural

vegetation, crops, fish, and other wildlife. They also purify surface and ground water, prevent soil erosion, and moderate the impacts of drought and flooding. In 1995, local businesses and IISD hosted a major international conference in Winnipeg on sustainable development on the Great Plains. Attended by representatives of major industries, governments, and farming organizations, the conference's workshops and speeches stressed the need to integrate economic, social, and environmental priorities (*Sustainable Development 2*). The farmer has come a long way since Abe Spalding's turn-of-the-century musings on crop development. In many areas, Canadian institutional bodies and groups are advancing the ecological ethic in an effort to guarantee a sustainable future.

The task is imperative. In Canada and abroad, economic experts, the popular media, and policy-makers are making forceful overtures lamenting environmental decay and advocating the adoption of an ecological approach. In *Green Budget Reform* (1995), a study that examines the efforts of several governments to incorporate conservation concerns into their budgets, Robert Gale and Stephan Barg assert that, historically, the failure of financial, political, and social institutions to integrate economic development and human welfare concerns with "ecological" systems has led to unsustainable development (2). The consequences of this single-vision economic strategy include species extinction and the depletion of renewable natural resources such as "fish stocks" (1). The collapse of the northern cod populations off the east coast, which are showing few signs of recovering, provides a well-known example of where an industry's refusal to accept such ecological principles as habitat requirements and carrying capacity has decimated an economy and communities depending on that economy. In 1993, the editors of *The Economist* likened the destruction of natural habitats and ecosystems to a form of "genocidal" thoughtlessness (17). Many scientists suggest that it is the variety and interconnectedness of all species that sustains life on earth. Wilson writes that ecosystems "enrich the soil and create the very air we breathe. Without these amenities, the remaining tenure of the human race would be nasty and brief. The life-sustaining matrix is built of green plants with legions of microorganisms and mostly small, obscure animals—in other words, weeds and bugs" (347). In 1994, a cover story of *The Atlantic Monthly* warned of such burgeoning environmental threats as deforestation, soil erosion, surging populations, spreading disease, water depletion, air pollution, and rising sea levels in critical, overcrowded regions (58). In 1997, the editor of *The Globe and Mail*, William Thorsell, wrote of the "deadly threats" imposed on biodiversity and many unique landscapes by overpopulation, and proposed that Canada's political boundaries be redrawn according to its ecosystems (D6). By such an ecology-



conscious scheme the Boreal Shield, for example, could become a province. Thorsell's suggestion might sound radical, yet an increasing number of respected environmental theorists are proposing a transition towards a likeminded sensibility. In 1996, the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas published a study that divides Canada's landforms and climate, plants, wildlife, and economic activities by its twenty ecozones rather than ten provinces and two territories, and the federal government published a mammoth state of the environment report that also divided many of its chapters by ecozone. In similar fashion, the North American Council for Environmental Cooperation, the administrative and research body implementing the environmental component of the North American Free Trade Agreement, addresses the continent often by ecological divisions. Such initiatives are firm indicators that the call for ecological awareness has become an immediate, institutionalized mandate.

In combination, the increasingly accepted ecological approach to economics understood as sustainability and the deeply-rooted spirituality of ecophilosophy provide strong justification for the application of ecological principles to literary studies. In recent decades, many writers have employed the methodology in Canada and abroad, making ecocriticism well situated to become a stronger component of literary studies. In these works, two approaches seem paramount to the application of ecocriticism: theorists have either illustrated how a literary work advocates greater ecological awareness, or they have shown how a work portrays the nonhuman realm as a sheer commodity subject to human exploitation. The roots of the first approach are deep. In "D.H. Lawrence and Deep Ecology" (1990) Dolores LaChapelle characterizes Lawrence as an early practitioner of this form of ecocriticism. In his collected letters Lawrence writes: "'What is the real hero of [Thomas] Hardy's book, 'Return of the Native.' It is Egdon Heath itself, the primitive, primal earth.... Here is the deep, black source from whence all these little contents of lives are drawn'" (27). In her own critique, LaChapelle asserts that nature also runs through the themes of all of Lawrence's own works, and that the author himself believed nature to be his primary theme: "[a]lways it is Nature. He said this over and over again in both his letters and his essays" (27). Quoting from many of Lawrence's non-fictional prose writings, LaChapelle describes his yearnings for a deeper connection between humanity and the natural environment. In an expression of ecophilosophy penned long before the phrase was coined, Lawrence wrote in 1925 that "'blossoming means the establishing of a pure, new relationship with all the cosmos...it is a state of a flower, a cobra, a jenny-wren in spring, a man when he knows himself royal and crowned with the sun, with his feet gripping the core of the earth'" (26). Deep ecology, writes

LaChapelle, is now the "commonly accepted name" for the theme Lawrence was trying to convey in almost every piece of writing he produced (26).

Similarly, in "Seeing Nature Whole" (1972), the British novelist John Fowles draws out the ecological themes of his own fictional works in order to encourage professional literary critics to do the same. Writes Fowles, "[a]gain and again in recent years I have told visiting literary academics that the key to my fiction, for what it is worth, lies in my relationship with nature" (52). Fowles uses his paper to establish the groundwork for ecological interpretations of his novels. In a scathing attack on the Cartesian dialectic, he accuses the individuating process that starts with naming flowers and trees of being a movement away from "total reality" towards the anthropocentric perspective (50). Rather, spiritual nourishment lies in grasping the sum of all the "phenomena" of a place, rather than viewing it as a collection of distinct component parts (50). By giving wildlife names, Fowles observes, we reshape reality into images that exist only in the human imagination. "It is a little as in atomic physics, where the very act of observation changes what is observed" (52). A tree does not know it is called a tree; it is rather an existing entity, alive, nourishing, and a home to many a creature, including humans. Fowles sees a particular freedom in the forest, and for this reason uses a secluded dell in the wood repeatedly in his 1969 tale of self-liberation, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (67). The trees, and the forest, are in fact the best analogue to the very act of prose fiction writing itself, which is a retreat into the mental wild of artistic creation (68). Like the living forest, a fictional work is a process, one which accepts life as an experience rather than a static, defined certainty. It is arguable whether Fowles offers a truly non-anthropocentric perspective, or indeed whether it is even possible for a human to do so; yet his critique certainly validates the pursuit of ecological themes in literary analysis.

Several critics have demonstrated how literary works advance ecological principles. In the United States, Lawrence Buell's 1995 work *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and Formation of American Culture* provides a thorough examination of ecological themes in the works of Henry David Thoreau and other American writers. In Canada, Northrop Frye's 1971 collection *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* and Margaret Atwood's 1972 critical study *Survival: a Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* each shows how Canadian works of art, both literary and visual, depict the importance of nature—as an economic resource and a spiritual force—to the Canadian identity. Though neither of these works refers to ecocriticism by name, they emphasize the presence of ecological themes in much of Canadian literature, as do many

subsequent critical pieces on Canadian nature and literature. With David Bentley's 1990 essay "'Along the Line of Smoky Hills': further Steps towards an Ecological Poetics," ecocriticism becomes a deliberate and primary methodological approach. Bentley describes how scientific rationalism, protestantism, and capitalism—the cornerstones of what became known as modernity—led to a perception of nature as "fodder for subjugation and commodification" (n.p.). Bentley then questions how critics of Canadian poetry might participate in undoing the human sense of "integrity and interconnectedness with nature" that they lost in the Renaissance, and briefly illustrates how several Canadian poems can be understood as "ecological" in theme and form (n.p.).

Contrasted with an approach that shows how writers advocate an ecological ethic, Canadian critics have also shown how literary works reflect a complete scorn for nature. In "Eruptions of Postmodernity: the Postcolonial and the Ecological" (1993), Linda Hutcheon, in a critique of Frye, describes the cold, empty, indifferent Canadian environment that Frye saw in nineteenth-century Canadian writing (155). It was a recognition of their vulnerability to nature's seemingly hostile whims, argues Hutcheon, that compelled Europeans to embrace the "Cartesian rationality" (146) that became, in part, the project of modernity (153). In her description of an early nineteenth-century American painting by Edward Hicks whose title became for Frye a simulacrum of Canada's vision of fostering a "'peaceable kingdom'" (153), Hutcheon questions whether such a dream ever became the reality. Rather, in dutiful homage to European norms and perspective, and in fear of the vast hostile countryside, Canada as a colony adapted to the Canadian context Descartes' split of consciousness and nature, as seen in the "imposition of the geographical patterns of human design—road and railways, streets and concession lines—on the land" (154). The objective was to aggressively dominate and pacify nature. Similarly, in *Savage Fields: an Essay in Literature and Cosmology* (1977) the poet Dennis Lee concentrates on writing in which the protagonists illustrate only contempt for the environment. Lee applies an ecological and quasi-phenomenological perspective to the writings of Michael Ondaatje and Leonard Cohen to depict a destructive struggle that humans have historically played out with the non-human realm. He describes how the planet has become partitioned into spheres which, borrowing his terms from Heidegger, he calls "world" and "earth" respectively. (According to Heidegger world is "that part of earth which is open to human understanding, that 'referential totality which constitutes significance'" [160]). For his part, Lee defines "world" as those who are "conscious, or are used to further the purposes of consciousness," and "earth" as "un-self-conscious material energy, powered by instinct" (113). "World" constitutes all places and things affected in any

way by humans, while "earth" is all that which is left to its own natural design. Lee's interest lies specifically in the sphere where "world" and "earth" overlap, in an opposition that Heidegger calls a "striving" (Lee 113) but which Lee calls a "global war" (8). Such a war is played out, for example, in the way humans are forever cultivating lawns and gardens from earth, and continually doing battle with lawnmowers and whipper-snippers to keep out the earth's natural flora, such as dandelions and other "weeds." Lee's critique of Ondaatje and Cohen reveals a fundamental hatred that humans have displayed for nature en route to reforming it in a supposedly safe and secure manner. Humanity's fear of nature is also a prime thematic force in the fiction of Robert Kroetsch, whose task has often been to "illustrate how sharply humanity's approach to life conflicts with the ways of nature" ("Pulling Strings" 43). On this level, ecocriticism reveals the psychological, social, and economic factors that result in environmental destruction.

By illustrating the kind of scorn for the nature exhibited in characters like Abe Spalding, ecocriticism has the capability of liberating both nature and humanity. In this way it achieves a validity that is absent from some, though not all, other literary-critical methodologies. If the post-colonial agenda enhances the relationship between society and individuals—which Leopold calls the second ethic—ecocriticism advances his third ethic, the broadening of the human sphere of concern to embrace the nonhuman realm. In terms of human relations, Grove's *Fruits of the Earth* is a story about a pioneer Manitoba farmer who sacrifices family relationships for the sake of amassing wealth, on the misguided premise that material goods are what the family most needs. By contrast, an ecological analysis might look at the underlying attitudes that empower Abe Spalding to cultivate so much of the Manitoba prairie. As Grove's novel thoroughly recounts, planting as much wheat as possible and getting as much money as possible for it becomes Abe's emotionally crippling, all-consuming objective. From a social viewpoint, Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959) is about a man whose obsession with wealth is so strong that he destroys any hope of having a healthy relationship with family or friends. Ecologically, Duddy, like Abe, possesses an ambition that will ultimately ruin a breathtaking environment and himself. Discovering a pristine lake, recreating it already in his mind's eye, Duddy beat his fist "into the palm of his open hand again and again," with delight at the prospect of building a town along its shores (97). The mission nearly destroys his physical and mental health. More broadly, an ecological approach to these and other Canadian novels might investigate how commodification and the Cartesian subject-object dualism manifest themselves in unsustainable economic development.

If the mission of post-modernism, meanwhile, has been to ridicule,

disrupt, and generally tear down the false societal hierarchies and systems reinforced in literary canons, ecocriticism becomes the next logical sequence in this analysis. Just as colonized cultures have been described in European literature as the inferior "other," so has the environment been subjugated as raw material ripe for exploitation. In a recent issue of *The Ecologist*, Larry Lohmann observes that if human beings must contend with being misrepresented by others, then what about "apes, trees, dogs, newts, crops, minerals, molecules, grizzly bears and all the other things and organisms which have been the subject of tales about 'nature' or 'the environment'?" (203). As Evernden points out, in the Age of Reason the "environment" became defined as a fixed, static entity, and was no longer a part of the "phenomena" of daily life (127). Ecocriticism illuminates society's burgeoning practical and spiritual trend away from this Cartesian approach, and might hasten the progression "back" towards an ecological sensitivity that all the earth's species, including humanity, require for survival. As if in homage to the Renaissance, many people still exhibit a fruitless quest for permanence, exemplified by such activities as imprisoning natural landscapes with fences and converting natural attributes within these confines. The alignment of trees, for example, into ordered, manicured rows represents a human fear of the change that occurs naturally in a true forest. In place of such fear, ecocriticism offers the alternative of approaching literature in such a way as to bring human understanding to the enjoyment of nature's evolving character and diversity, and to enhance the pleasure of those critical moments that include an awareness of the earth. Many writers and critics have already shown the way down this path. It remains for Canadian literary scholars to embrace and foster the methodology where artistic works show an appreciation, or scorn, for nature's attributes. To reveal how a work of literature renders the sound of the loon's haunting cry in spring, the taste of fresh wild fruits in summer, the sight of changing colours of fall, and, yes, even the feeling of winter's biting chill, is to assist not only in the protection of animals and plants, landscapes and sky, but also in the liberation of the human spirit itself. Stories of environmental decay continue to mount,—horror stories of closed beaches, undrinkable water, polluted air, and converted landscape. With each wound nature endures, the mission of ecocriticism becomes ever more critical. It is time to heed the call of the wild.

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