The Preservation of the World

by Gregory McNamee

"Accuse not nature, she hath done her part; Do thou but thine!"
—John Milton

Ecology in the Twentieth Century: A History
by Anna Bramwell
New Haven: Yale University Press; 292 pp., $16.95

This Incomperable Lande: A Book of American Nature Writing
Edited by Thomas J. Lyon
Boston: Houghton Mifflin; 495 pp., $29.95

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Slow learners that we humans are, only recently have great numbers of us become aware of the tremendous, seemingly insurmountable ecological crises facing us. Some environmentalists date the earliest stirrings of this now-widespread awareness of the natural world and of our increasingly disastrous effects upon it to 1962, when Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* drew international attention to the dangers of pesticide spraying, especially of the fearfully toxic DDT, on garden plots and fields throughout the world. Others date it to April 22, 1970, when the first Earth Day celebrations were held in the United States, Western Europe, and Japan. (In this country more than twenty million people observed the event.) By any reckoning, words like *ecology*, *greenhouse effect*, and *environment* are relative newcomers to the common tongue, as any lexicographer will attest.

Scientific specialists had such words much earlier. The term *ecology* was coined by a German biologist, Ernst Haeckel, in his monograph *Generelle Morphologie* (1866). From those arcane origins, the word spread into the scientific literature, and Haeckel's *Ökologie* became a naturalized citizen of the English language within a few years of its birth. Like his European contemporaries, the now all-but-forgotten Haeckel sought to discover general laws about the individual human's physical relationship with the natural world, about the place of humankind in a cosmos governed by unalterable forces, just as Karl Marx and before him Friedrich Hegel grappled to distill the universal laws of history.

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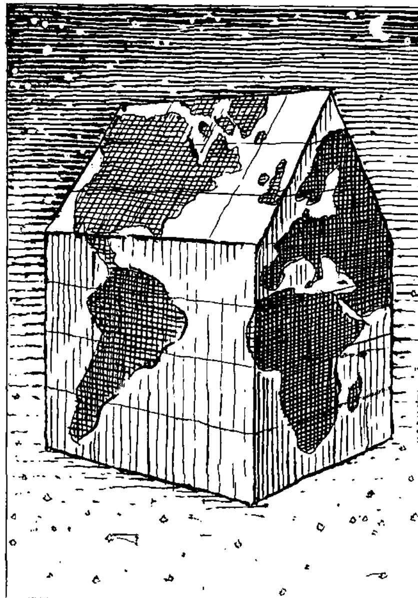

Janusz Kapusta

There is, of course, nothing new under the sun. A mere seven years before Haeckel, in England, Charles Darwin set forth his own laws of nature in a book that altered history, *The Origin of Species*. Indeed, Darwin might be used to explain the history of ecology. Just as species diverge in new environments to form new species—thus reindeer in the Eurasian Arctic, caribou in the American—so the scientific ecology of the European Enlightenment has split into many "ecologies." In modern Europe environmentalism has become a powerful political force, thanks in large measure to the parliamentary successes of the Green parties of Germany, England, and Scandinavia. For most Greens, Henry David Thoreau is an unknown quantity; their guiding icon looks suspiciously more like Karl Marx than Chief Seattle, with a good slug of the British biologist Sir James Lovelock, author of the "Gaia hypothesis," for good measure. The Green program in many European nations is a confused mix of laissez-faire economics, antinuclear agitprop, and a nostalgic hippie ethic that makes it a natural magnet for aging New Leftists—who have in fact made many gains in cleaning up the Thames and the Danube, in making the air over Rome and Athens more breathable than it has been in years.

Anna Bramwell charts the origins of the Greens in her inaptly titled *Ecology in the Twentieth Century*. Bramwell's greatest success—an accidental one—in her turgid study is to demonstrate how wildly different modern European environmentalism is from its American counterpart. But by playing the facts fast and loose the English historian has delivered an astonishingly bad book; where it is possible to get those facts wrong, she does. An example is her annoying insistence that somewhere in the world lies a country called "North America"; another is her use of the academic term "political ecology" for "ecological politics."

For all that, *Ecology in the Twentieth Century* has its uses. Noting that "the fusion of resource-scarcity economics with holistic biology . . . gave force

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and coherence to ecological ideas," Bramwell traces the rise of European ecologism in the work of such notables as Ernst Haeckel and other proponents of German *Naturphilosophie* — a movement, the great English biologist Sir Peter Medawar has noted, that promulgated "a form of scientific belles lettres with a truly dismal track record for making sense of the puzzles in which biology abounds." Medawar might have been thinking of the German scientist who mused, in the 1930's, over England's status as a world power. It must be due, the good ecologist noted, to the island's cats, which killed mice and rodents that in turn fed on bumblebee larvae; since bees are the most efficient pollinators of red clover, on which British cattle feed and thus provide sustenance for the soldiers and sailors of the Empire, well, then, of course England rests on the performance of its felines. Q.E.D.

Anna Bramwell's rendering of the intellectual history of this romantic school is evenhanded enough, if unoriginal; only when she gets on to later avatars of Haeckel does Bramwell begin to miss the point entirely, as when she says of Sir James Lovelock's "Gaia hypothesis" — a controversial, elegant, and now extremely popular thesis that Earth is a single self-regulating organism — that it supposes that nature thrives in a "serene ecological balance." Pacifists everywhere may hearten at such assurances, but in point of fact the history of the planet suggests that catastrophe of various sorts seems more useful to a healthy ecosystem than does stasis. Bramwell compounds this error by saying wistfully that "ecologists believe in the essential harmony of nature." *Balance*, yes, but the notion of harmony imposes on nature a sort of homey goodwill, by which the lion lies down with the lamb, that few scientific ecologists would recognize.

Her discussion of the political consequences of *Naturphilosophie*, when European environmentalism left the laboratories and entered the streets, is, however, quite good. Ask a modern Green for his or her description of paradise, and chances are that the image evoked will be one of the quiet thatch-roofed farmhouse in a sylvan glen, a curl of smoke arising from the chimney and lambs bleating in a clovery meadow full of swarming bees, fairhaired children dancing bucknaked around a maypole, and strong, handsome elders discussing Marcuse over their meerschaum pipes. There will be little or no evidence of unmanaged nature in such a vision, and for good reason; only in the wilds of highland Scotland and the shadowy Balkans, among a few other places, has Europe left much of the land alone, untroubled by human intervention.

It's a happy enough picture, a world in which J.R.R. Tolkien's hobbits and Hans Christian Andersen's fairies would feel at home. It is also just the picture that Nazism, Italian Fascism, and the Little Englandism of such lights as Edmund Blunden and D.H. Lawrence offered: a world free of factories and capitalism, landlords and — well, non-Europeans. (In 1942, Blunden remarked that he wished Hermann Goering named Lord Protector of England, "because he would restore blacksmiths to every village.") Anna Bramwell points out these connections, remarking on the origins of Western European totalitarianism in fringe country-life movements that glorified peasant virtues and reviled the nastiness and squalor of the metropolis. She also rightly notes that Nazi technocrats like Heydrich and Speer eventually convinced Adolf Hitler that the back-to-the-land ideals of the European ecologists threatened the interests of the New Order: the nostalgic search for harmonious environmental values were "part of the pre-Third Reich yearning for a pan-Aryan, non-national identity of a 'soft' kind."

The parallels with certain strains of modern Green thought are frankly eerie. So, too, are the recent manifestations of *Wandervogel* environmentalism in the Great Russian *Pamy'at* movement, which lately has been giving so much trouble to Mikhail Gorbachev in his attempts to cede at least some state power to the non-Russian republics of the Soviet Union. (One of the leading *Pamy'at* spokesmen is Valentin Rasputin, the author of *Siberia on Fire* and organizer of efforts to protect Lake Baikal from further industrial pollution.) Anna Bramwell does not make enough of those parallels, and she is content to remark merely that the technologically sophisticated, planned economies do the most harm to nature today. This seems a truism, and not a terribly interesting one at that; but one look at the Nile or the Brahmaputra, at the open sewers of Rio de Janeiro and Khartoum, would suggest that Bramwell's argument needs deepening. Given the richness of her topic, it is unfortunate indeed that she could not have done better, if only by giving her book a more accurate and modest title — *Ecology in Saxon Europe*, say.

Bramwell almost entirely disregards North American ecological thought, which makes her sweeping pronouncements on the nature of environmentalism all the more annoying. As a brief on European ideas of nature and humankind's place in it, *Ecology in the Twentieth Century* has many virtues and many vices, but readers in the New World will recognize little of their interests in her pages.

Thomas Lyon's splendid anthology, *This Incomperable Lande*, offers a powerful synthesis of American ideas on nature, ideas that now as two centuries ago are indebted to European science and literature. Our intellectual ancestry is indebted to men and women facing unknown wilderness and the vast space the new continent afforded; it is for good reason that one of our great national heroes is the solitary and far-ranging Johnny Appleseed, not the civic-minded homebody (but anti-bunny) Farmer Brown. Confronting the incomprehensibly huge space of America, our early naturalists abandoned notions of managed nature and the country life, and if most of them made their home in the crowded seaports of Boston and New York, they took to the woods for their solace.

Lyon, a professor of English at Utah State University and for many years editor of the scholarly journal *Western American Literature*, opens his collection with a magisterial series of his own essays on the history of American naturalism. These essays are alone worth the price of the book, as is Lyon's detailed chronology of events in the natural history of the continent; collectively they mark some of the most sensible literary history to have been published in years. The anthology proper begins with an excerpt from William Wood's *New England Prospect* (1634), a suitably awed account of "the kingly lion and the strong-armed

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bear," the "large-limbed mooses with the tripping deer," the "red-eyed ferret" and "ravenous howling wolf" that roamed the forests around the Pilgrim settlements of the Massachusetts Bay Colony; in recognizing the supremacy of these animals in the natural world Europe had invaded ("there is little hope of their utter destruction, the country being so spacious and they so numerous"), Wood becomes the first exemplar of a long North American tradition of ecological writing.

Lyon gives careful attention to these beginnings, noting the contributions of such great but little-known naturalist-explorers as William Bartram, John James Audubon, and Thomas Nuttall, each of whom brought largely self-taught scientific sensibilities into the task of describing the flora and fauna of the new continent. Their work led directly to the less rational celebrations of Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose first book, *Nature* (1836), introduced in its turn the deistic, perhaps even pantheistic spirit that marks so much of natural history writing today. "In the woods," Emerson wrote, "we return to reason and faith," setting Enlightenment dogma on its head. The last bison in the East had been killed in Emerson's boyhood, but that did not keep him from seeking a cathedral of sanity in the forests most of his less thoughtful countrymen were hell-bent on destroying.

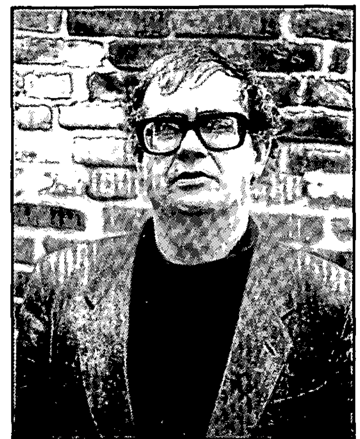
From Emerson, Lyon takes us to Henry David Thoreau, the spiritual forefather of modern American environmentalism in all its guises, who brought scientific vigor to his older friend's Transcendentalism. (Thoreau and Louis Agassiz, one of the first American systematic zoologists, once drove Emerson to tears of rage by discussing the sexual habits of tortoises over Sunday dinner.) Thoreau championed wilderness for its own sake and celebrated an antisocial self-sufficiency; that he took his wash home from Walden Pond every week for his mother to do, an oddity Lyon fails to note, does not diminish his contribution to a dawning preservationist ethic, by which at least something of the continent's original grandeur came to be protected from the rapaciousness of the Industrial Age.

Lyon's anthology offers a first-class selection of the work of our foremost naturalists, from the Scottish wanderer John Muir—who thundered, in response to an unfortunately successful plan to make a reservoir in the Yosemite Valley, "As well dam for water-tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has been consecrated by the heart of man!"—to Aldo Leopold, thanks to whose efforts the first federally protected wild lands were established, and on to such modern giants as John Haines and Edward Abbey.

In *This Incomperable Lande*, Lyon's enterprise and unfailing good taste have yielded not only a model of literary selection and commentary, but a book that is wonderfully patriotic: it celebrates the best of our continent and culture, and it reminds us once again of all that we have to protect. Lyon's book is timely, for wild America is hurting, along with the rest of the planet, thanks to the shortsightedness and greed of us humans, slow to learn. There is one nature, comprising many ecologies—and many environmentalisms. In all of them, to borrow from Thoreau, lies "the preservation of the World."

SOUTH AFRICA—WHOSE COUNTRY?

The "embarrassing disclosures" just reported by the New York Times (April 24, 1990) of "torture" in the ANC have been around since 1982, especially in Washington.



"...Here is reality at last."—**Brian Crozier** "...The Denton Hearings first showed the full extent of repression and liquidation of opposition in the ANC and in SWAPO."—***The Neue Zuercher Zeitung*** "...incredibly shocking..."—**Rear Admiral W.C. Mott, USN (ret.)** "...an honesty all too often missing..."—***Orbis*** "Raditsa is right that events in southern Africa are subject to widespread misconceptions which play into the hands of the declared enemies of democratic freedom."—***Commentary*** "...elucidates the political morality that designates the most radical opinion, however murderous, as the only true voice of any subjected people."—**Howard Brotz, author of *The Politics of South Africa*** "...divulges what the politico-cultural establishment censors out."—**Lev Navrozov** "...a remarkable achievement."—**Herbert London** "I cannot speak too highly about this book. There is no other like it."—**Arnold Beichman** "This is a powerful and well-documented look at what is really taking place in South Africa..."—**Allan Brownfield in *Chronicles***

PRISONERS OF A DREAM:
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A Historical Essay on the Denton Hearings

LEO RADITSA

Order direct from the publisher, the **Prince George Street Press**, P.O. Box 252, Annapolis, MD 21404. $25.95 includes shipping.

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'What Men? What Needs?'

by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

"Rational thought. Calm, reasonable, gentle persuasion. It was this quality of moderation in his writing that most impressed me, for my own inclinations always tended toward the opposite, toward the impatient, the radical, the violent."

—Edward Abbey on Joseph Wood Krutch

The Desert Year
by Joseph Wood Krutch
Tucson: University of Arizona Press; 270 pp., $10.95 (paper)

The Forgotten Peninsula: A Naturalist in Baja, California
by Joseph Wood Krutch, foreword by Ann Zwinger
Tucson: University of Arizona Press; 277 pp., $9.95 (paper)

Grand Canyon: Today and All Its Yesterdays
by Joseph Wood Krutch
Tucson: University of Arizona Press; 276 pp., $11.95 (paper)

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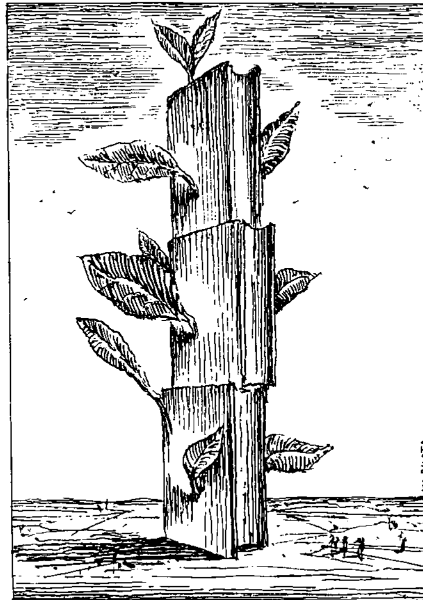
The name of Joseph Wood Krutch was well-known in its day, much less so now. Perhaps the timely reissue of these three titles will do something to remedy the situation; if not, it should. On the final page of *Grand Canyon*, the author writes: "The generation now living may very well be that which will make the irrevocable decision whether or not America will continue to be for centuries to come the one great nation which had the foresight to preserve an important part of its [natural] heritage." Since at any given moment not one but several generations may be counted as "the living," it is hard to say just how prescient Mr. Krutch was when he wrote that sentence. One can only say that, while those people for whom the natural world is an object of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic appreciation remain as ever a minority in the United States (as elsewhere), still, the 1990's show promise of being far more sensitive to the concerns of that minority than were the 1950's, when Mr. Krutch was writing. As late as the late 50's, "growth" was one of those incantational imperative buzzwords (like "globaldemocracy" today) upon utterance of which millions of men and women wearing I LIKE IKE buttons were expected to leap to their feet waving tiny American flags. The so-called Greenhouse Effect is perhaps no less an exaggeration than International Communism was, but at least it has had the effect of making people who have scarcely ever set foot off Madison Avenue (or the Madison, Wisconsin, campus) pay their overdue respects to the plight of the natural world some two hundred years after the onset of popular democracy and the Industrial Revolution.

Chilton Williamson, Jr. is senior editor at Chronicles *and the author of several books, the most recent of which is a novel,* The Homestead, *published last spring by Grove Weidenfeld.*



Janusz Kapusta

Joseph Wood Krutch, *aetat.* 59, moved from Connecticut to the American Southwest in 1952, when 18 years of life remained to him. In retrospect he may be seen as the venerable precursor of a generation or two of urban refugees—known more poetically as "earth muffins"—who in the 1960's, 70's, and 80's succeeded in transforming the individualistic legacy of Henry David Thoreau into something approaching a mass movement. Krutch, a native of Tennessee, had spent his adult life in and around New York City where, as drama critic for *The Nation* and professor of drama at Columbia University, he established impeccable credentials as a scion of Gotham. He wrote books on the theater and several more general ones, including that for which he is perhaps best known, *The Modern Temper*—a rather pessimistic meditation on that subject. While resident in Connecticut, this urban man of letters wrote a book about the natural world as it transpired under his nose in his postage stamp-sized piece of New England, and found it pleasing both to himself and to some readers. Waxing bolder, he ventured into southeastern Utah to behold the great canyons, buttes, and deserts that were shortly to entrance a young man named Edward Abbey. He speculated upon these phenomena for years, and then, having arrived at the discovery that he could not banish them from his imagination, made the leap of faith that has landed so many converts in the Great American Wilderness. Joseph Krutch, for his part, came to rest in the Lower Sonoran Desert near Tucson, Arizona, about which he had already written a book (*The Desert Year*) while on sabbatical leave from Columbia.

"With Mr. Krutch," Paul Horgan wrote, "we make a journey into two places. One is the desert itself. The other is his civilized and charming mind. Together they make a country

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