LITERARY RHETORIC IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT: TOWARD THE ADVOCACY OF THE 2009 PROPOSAL OF A PASSENGER RAILWAY IN COLORADO

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By

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This thesis is dedicated to Professor Norma Tilden who shares a mutual love for the outdoor world. Her buoyant energy and guidance helped focus this project and continually reminded me of why we write.
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Two years ago, I made the decision to leave my home state of Colorado to study English at Georgetown University. My experiences here in Washington and my displacement from Colorado, have greatly impacted the way I think, learn, and look at the natural world. More importantly, my experiences at Georgetown have affected my understanding of the ways in which the study of literature has shaped, and sometimes even created, current ideologies and attitudes about how today’s society thinks about the natural world. Faced with the new prospect of city-living, my love for environmental texts was reinvigorated and I took up ecocritical studies: a literary criticism that focuses on the influence of the natural world on cultural, social, and political assumptions in society. Not until I left Colorado did I realize the power the
place still holds over me. I’ve experienced a sense of claustrophobia here in D.C., hardly a city that should induce such feelings, but between the omnipresent air-traffic, no car with which to jump out of town, and a general, fast-paced attitude, I’ve felt restricted and longed for the open spaces of the west.

In direct response to my growing interest in the discourses of place and environment, I have shaped my literary studies to explore various texts representative of the environmental movement. The study of these texts and their criticisms has both informed my own thoughts on the efficacy of writing as a form of environmental advocacy, and turned my attention toward the environmental challenges currently facing Colorado. What follows is an exploration of the scope of the environmental movement as it has manifested in the literature of advocacy, and specifically, the rhetoric employed for said advocacy. The nature of studying the rhetoric of environmental advocacy has deepened my understanding that now, more than ever before, the environmental movement demands the attention and action of a world-wide audience to avoid imminent global catastrophe. I have learned that the global crisis is the sum of many different factors and must be addressed individually at regional levels. The literature of environmental advocacy must communicate global consequence, but drive local action. I have put this knowledge to practice by composing an environmental essay advocating for a proposed commuter railway in Colorado. I present my essay as a series of mini-chapters interspersed within the
greater framework of my ecocritical studies in order to highlight the operations of environmental rhetoric as it functions within my own environmental writing.

The modern-day environmental movement began in 1962 when Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* drew the world’s attention to a staggering and unprecedented problem: the possibility of our earth’s inability to safely absorb or even survive the damage which results from humans’ polluting actions. Now, as the end of the first decade of the twenty-first-century draws to a close, the realities of a planetary crisis have finally gripped the global community’s imagination. The rise in global temperatures has led to, among other problems, the melting of polar icecaps and an increase in the intensity and frequency of devastating storms. The recognition of these environmental issues, primarily by scientists, has ignited a reaction commensurate with the crisis at hand: the sustainable use of the word “green” has earned a place in our collective parlance; environmental issues are in the headlines of newspapers, blogs, and other forums every single day; and political candidates are running on conservational platforms as demanded by constituents. These reactions—in the social, political, and economic fields—were sparked by the scientific exposure of the harm our world is enduring, and contribute to our idea of the generalized and necessarily inclusive environmental movement. Alongside scientific study, a reaction in the field of literature can also be traced, which continues to result in an outpouring of environmental discourse which has evolved far beyond traditional notions of nature writing.
I want to discuss the role literature has played in developing and reacting to the environmental movement. The four primary sources I will use for this project are Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), Edward Abbey’s *Desert Solitaire* (1968), Rick Bass’s *The Brown Dog of the Yaak* (1999), and Al Gore’s *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (1992). These texts are representative of a range of environmental issues which emerged with the modern environmental movement. For the sake of this introduction, I deliberately leave “environmental issues” as a broad, inclusive phrase. More precise descriptions of these issues will emerge as I examine and compare the distinguishing rhetorical features of each book. By using texts which represent the chronological arc of the environmental movement,¹ I want to ask questions about the ways in which (if at all) these four texts relate to, build upon, and even revise one another. Ultimately, I hope to better understand these authors’ environmental goals by evaluating their various uses of environmental rhetoric.

I explore these texts in the practical context of a landmark environmental study currently underway in Colorado: the proposed construction of a high-speed, intercity passenger rail service connecting the most heavily trafficked corridors in the State. Currently, the Rocky Mountain Rail Authority, funded by the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and forty-five participating counties, is conducting a feasibility study of the technical and economic realities of building a commuter railroad to

¹ I place *Earth in the Balance* last in chronology despite it having been published before *Brown Dog of the Yaak*. *Earth in the Balance* was rereleased in 2006 and allies closely to the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, released the same year. For these reasons, I will speak of Al Gore last in order to provide a “bookend” to the Rachel Carson section.
alleviate traffic congestion along the I-25 and I-70 corridors. The study of these four writers, each of them environmental activists, has deepened my understanding of how best to approach and advocate for the necessity of a solution to the current traffic-congestion problems afflicting Colorado.

By examining these authors’ different rhetorical devices, I have attempted to locate each of their works historically, culturally, and socio-politically in order to inform my own writing. Only with the identification and understanding of historical contexts will the power and weaknesses of these authors’ literary rhetoric be revealed. Carson’s words about pesticides and pollution changed the world by introducing the reality and urgency of the intangible concept of a global crisis. But after a precedent has been set, what are the benefits and challenges to subsequent authors to sustain the movement? Is it possible to be as effective as Rachel Carson? Although Edward Abbey’s agnostic rhetoric diverges from Carson’s scientific and visionary language, he too is a well-known figure in the environmental world, and articulates profound and beautiful insights about the natural world. But what does he gain from focusing on small and definite places? His work vacillates between an angry, alienating voice and lyrical natural description which raises questions about the relation between the two: are his lyricism and rhetoric at odds; is the latter contingent upon the former? Abbey’s attention to specific place is echoed in the work of Rick Bass who possesses a unique style when expressing his passion about a slice of land in Montana. How does a narrow focus help change world-wide, ingrained ideologies destructive to the environment?
Bass proffers a unique, metaphorical brand of environmental rhetoric, but how does he negotiate the precarious position as resident environmentalist when living amongst those whose livelihoods depend on the exploitation of the Yaak Valley? And finally, Al Gore, like Carson, focuses on the global crisis facing our generation—is Gore’s comprehensive approach to global warming overwhelming to the general population? My study examines how these texts have built on each other (or diverged from one another) as these environmental authors face the challenges of a drastically changing world and audience.

These authors have taught me a great deal about the difficulty of effective writing in the name of environmental advocacy. Their various rhetorical techniques have influenced my own writing and action—more importantly, they have influenced my thoughts about the benefits and challenges of studying environmental rhetoric from a literary perspective. This project moves back and forth from theoretical analysis to a meta-discursive essay employing the literary activism I have studied. The essay details a drive home from the mountains in the summer of 2008. Three friends and I went backpacking for a few days near Aspen and got stuck in heavy traffic driving back home. The traffic congestion that I describe prompted the feasibility study by the Rocky Mountain Rail Authority. I see this essay as a contribution to the public dialogue surrounding Colorado’s environmental health. By writing self-reflexively, I put to practice the various forms of rhetoric exhibited by the primary authors studied, advocate for the construction of a commuter railroad in Colorado, and continue to
investigate and explore the pragmatic possibilities and efficacy of environmental writing.

The environmental movement began when *Silent Spring* introduced a message of warning about the degradation of our planet. Forty-years later, Al Gore has successfully revealed to the world how dire the need to combat global warming has become in the twenty-first-century. By comparison, the insular works of Edward Abbey and Rick Bass seem highly removed from such sweeping claims. Their precise focus on place represents a very different brand of activism which is no less integral to the shaping of the movement. I hope to add a voice, however small, to the advocacy of the environmental health of Colorado. I believe that a study of the history of environmental rhetoric will inform my own voice and a reflexive analysis of my writing will help me draw conclusions about the pragmatic position of literary advocacy in the future of the environmental movement.
Chapter 1: Rachel Carson

In 1962, Rachel Carson’s publication of *Silent Spring* alerted the world to a major environmental hazard and initiated the modern-day environmental movement. Her study of the proliferation of DDT and other chemicals and their harmful consequences found in and indeed permeating ecosystems led to a staunch warning to which the world listened. Her lyrical voice and accomplished literary ability effectively opened *Silent Spring* to a lay-readership. She combines the rhetoric of apocalypse, mythological allusion, and veiled complicity, all grounded in hard science, to expose a capitalistic and dubious chemical industry for the harm they were consciously afflicting upon the public to whom they espoused the progressive wonders of technology. Carson was a scientist invested in truth and the fate of this one planet she
lived on. Her personal experiences as naturalist, scientist, and conservationist invest an intimate and engaging personal voice into an otherwise scientific text. Despite having read *Silent Spring* for the first time more than thirty years after its publication, and well past the dangers presented by DDT, the book had a great impact on me. Carson’s gentle, but effective words have provided a precedent and path for all subsequent environmental and activist writers to adhere to. Her rogue attitude and pragmatic words have inspired me, and many others, to give voice to their own environmental stories, concerns, and passion for the protection of this one world we share together.

* * *

For all that Rachel Carson has done for the environment, I do not often think of her, as I do with other environmental authors, when I’m spending time in the natural world; generally, in the confines of the natural world, Carson’s apocalyptical visions are far from my mind. I certainly hadn’t thought about her during a three-day excursion with friends in the mountains south of Aspen, Colorado last summer. And I didn’t (initially) think about her while staring out the windshield as we drove home that July day. The same cloud structures that had only hours before swirled over our heads while hiking out of Conundrum Valley now obscured the mountains that lined I-70. My speedometer registered over eighty miles-per-hour as we barreled down Vail Pass toward Copper Mountain, and I eased off on the gas. As Matt, Crystal, Jon and I drove
east, moving down toward the plains and home, the large, rising bulbs of

cumulonimbus clouds created the opposite feeling: it seemed as though we were
gaining elevation again, driving higher into the beautiful backbone of the Rocky
Mountains and the skies beyond them.

I’ve been making the trek to and from the backbone of Colorado’s mountains
my entire life. My parents met at Vail where they would eventually teach me, at four
years of age, how to ski. When I was eleven, my older brother introduced me to
backpacking in the Gore Range, just west and north of Silverthorne. In high school, as
an overzealous adrenaline-chaser, I woke from a concussion on one of the many ski-
slopes strung along the I-70 corridor. I wasn’t able to answer the question, “do you
know where you are?” so the ski patrol had to remind me I was at Copper Mountain.
College brought a myriad of camping, backpacking, skiing, climbing, and biking trips
around the entire State. For about a year after school, some crazy people in
Washington actually paid me to travel around, hike with my dog and friends, and
eventually publish a trail-guide book.

Besides local hikes in my native Boulder, and areas in and around Ft. Collins
where I went to University, traveling by car was a necessity. And while not all of my
travels have involved the main interstates, I-25 (north-south) and I-70 (east-west),
these two arteries that split the state into four massive chunks were more often than not
relied on to provide access to the high country. And I am certainly not unique in my
outdoor enthusiasm. Colorado pays a price for its three-hundred days of sunshine a
year. The world-class skiing draws hoards of people to the State every winter, and once
the snow and ice thaws, the verdant and colorful spring, summer, and fall makes for
endless playgrounds commensurate to all tastes of outdoor fun. As a result, the lifelines
of access between the population centers of the Front Range like Ft. Collins, Boulder,
Denver, and Colorado Springs, are clogged nearly year round.

A sheet of rain pounded on the roof of my car, heavily and unexpectedly, and I
felt a moment of comfort to be out of the elements. The large drops of rain drowned
out the stereo and woke Matt and Crystal from their doze in the back seat. A short,
intense three-day hike through the Maroon Bells Wilderness Area had left us all feeling
battered and exhausted, but happy and serene. When Matt and I had talked months ago
about Crystal and his visit from Minnesota, I began planning a trip I’d hope would be
indelible and representative of Colorado for the two flat-land natives. I had met Matt
and Crystal while teaching English in Japan. The last time I had seen the two was a
classic culmination to a year of karaoke, festivals, and travel: a climb up the iconic
volcano, Mt. Fuji. That climb, while great fun with good friends, remains the most
dubious “hike” I’ve ever undertaken. The associations I generally hold with the
thought of hiking—those of solitude and isolation; a chance to connect with my
environment on my own terms—were abandoned on Fuji. The twelve-hour experience
that started at ten pm—the goal when climbing Fuji is to watch the sunrise from the
summit, a long-standing tradition on this most holy of mountains in the Land of the
Rising Sun—was interrupted every step of the way by hoards of people, multi-colored
blinking lights of scores of tours, and the shrill screams of *ohayou gozaimasu!* (good morning!), and *irashaimasu*! (welcome!) from the many food/trinket-vendors just below the summit. Two years after Matt, Crystal, about five-hundred strangers, and I had watched the sun rise above the Tori gate on the east-facing rim of Mt. Fuji, I wanted to show them a piece of untouched Colorado—I wanted to show them the kind of serenity twelve hours of hiking affords one in the heart of the Rocky Mountains.

The rain slowed east-bound traffic that late afternoon to an understandably slower speed. As we navigated past Dillon and down to Silverthorne, the highest windshield-wiper setting could barely keep up with onslaught of water that obscured our view. And in two minutes, just as quickly as it had started, the shower stopped entirely. The music replaced the loud echoing in our car, and the setting sun eclipsed the storm clouds as they moved east of us—deep, peach-colored puffs of swirling rain and lightning. We were past Silverthorne, driving up toward the west portal of the Eisenhower Tunnel. For a few moments, before the sun dipped behind Buffalo Mountain, rising from the flanks of Silverthorne like the back of a mighty bison, we marveled at the sudden appearance of a squat, but thick rainbow that slipped out of the sky.

* * *

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And then it was gone, all of it. The smell of rain was slowly replaced by the smell of thousands of cars worth of emissions. As we came to a complete halt, I yanked on the parking break and cut the engine. The sounds of music and rain were replaced by rushing west-bound traffic, and squeaking brake pads as the east-bound lanes locked into a complete standstill. In place of the rainbow’s gentle, iridescent curve was the long, snaking bend of brake-lights, curiously reminiscent of the Japanese tour lights blinking up the flanks of Mt. Fuji in the dark. My friends were silent, each brooding upon their own frustrations at our delay, and I looked out my window, down to the highway pavement. For the first time that trip, I began to recall the words of Rachel Carson. I watched as a few damp cigarette-butts tumbled into the weeds of the median which reminded me of the opening chapter of *Silent Spring*. Carson uses a shocking first chapter, “A Fable for Tomorrow,” to spark the same thoughts of environmental destruction I was having while stuck in traffic. While I stared at the rustling weeds lining the highway, I realized the importance of Carson’s creation of a plausible situation with which to begin a book. That first chapter develops first a level of empathy for anyone who has ever anxiously anticipated the thaw of winter, the appearance of foliage along the roadside, or the first bird-songs of spring, followed quickly by a high degree of unease and concern:

> Along the roads, laurel, viburnum and alder, great ferns and wildflowers delighted the traveler’s eye . . . Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the
community . . . The roadsides, once so attractive, were now lined with browned and withered vegetation as though swept by fire . . . No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves. (1-3)

These words were monumental in their simplicity and implication to a 1960s readership. Carson wrote in a time when society was still very much dominated by post-World War II sentiment. Anti-Communism extended from the prevention of Soviet expansion to a serious anti-subversive attitude. The government’s interests in new chemical weapons against both insects and enemies fostered close ties between government officials and chemical company executives. Political and social conformity, near-blind patriotism, and faith to both religion and materialism were all expected in this new paradigm of the American way of life. Despite these politically tenuous and socially conservative times, Carson, an unmarried career woman and mother to an adopted child, spoke out in direct opposition to the hegemonic chemical industries and government, and changed environmental attitudes forever by introducing notions of the end of nature—a nature to which we ourselves are inextricably linked.

Today, Rachel Carson’s warning messages about the devastating dangers of DDT and other pesticides seem prosaic or self-evident. This fact is testament to the long-reaching implications of Carson’s work. In 1962, however, the publication of Silent Spring rhetorically spoke to a public largely ignorant of their own participation
in what Carson called the potential for environmental apocalypse. The existing tension and uncertainty about military technology that permeated American society after World War II and at the open of the Cold War created a nervous and responsive audience to Carson’s work. The opening vignette allows readers to locate themselves psychologically within a fable about Anywhere, America before describing an unknown blight of death that touches the land, animals, and humans across the country. Carson then writes, “I know of no community that has experienced all the misfortunes I describe. Yet every one of these disasters has actually happened somewhere, and many real communities have already suffered a substantial number of them” (3). In their book on the rhetoric of environmental politics, *Ecospeak*, M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer recognize that this juxtaposition of potential tragedy in the future and the precedent of actual occurrences agitate public emotions and “invite a variety of responses, building from vaguely felt discomfort and partial recognition to a deep intellectual and ethical concern over an actual state of affairs. Bringing a possible future alive in the present is the aim of this apocalyptic rhetoric” (67). The simultaneous presentation of terrifying possibilities and real occurrences make Carson’s apocalyptic rhetoric far from fanatical. In fact, *Silent Spring* quickly became a national best-seller, was regarded by President Kennedy for its importance in relation to American policy, and was echoed in the lyrics of songs like “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall,” by then emerging star, Bob Dylan. The vignette that begins *Silent Spring* introduces readers to Carson’s brand of apocalyptic rhetoric which courses
through her book, and indeed, throughout all subsequent literature in the same genre. In *Voices in the Wilderness*, a book that explores the politics of American nature writing, Daniel Payne writes that Rachel Carson’s words were so effective in “alerting the public to the ecological dangers of chemical pesticides that it has become the rhetorical archetype of modern environmental literature, to which the numerous succession of books with titles alluding to environmental Armageddon bears witness” (137). By easing readers into a familiar and comfortable image of spring before exposing the scientific realities that threaten the image, Carson begins the environmental movement.

* * *

Jon sighed loudly and broke my train of thought. I looked over to see the side of his head cradled in his palm. He gazed intently at the immobile and seemingly infinite line of cars ahead and cursed under his breath. When I’d told Jon about my plans to take Crystal and Matt up a fourteener (the name dubbed to each of the fifty-four mountains in Colorado that rise above fourteen-thousand feet in elevation), and invited him along, I knew he’d readily acquiesce. Always up for an adventure, Jon has been a good companion on any number of adventures. We’ve hiked along the Great Glen Way in Scotland, watching storms rage and clear with machine-gun rapidity over Loch Ness. While backpacking in Iceland, we’d torn off our shirts in freezing
temperatures giddied and warmed by geothermal vents that create swaths of green amidst brown, volcanic landscapes. And the trips and stories we’ve shared in Colorado are endless. A love for the sense and wonderment of the primordial and sublime felt in the Rockies is a feeling Jon and I have always shared. To feel the rocks that are products of millions of years of erosion summons sentiment that transcends fact. It’s difficult enough to comprehend the definition of “millions of years,” much less listen to a rushing river or wake up in a tent being pounded by rain and try to understand these facets of creation. To reconcile eternity with the stringency of the modern age leads one toward mythological beliefs. Jon celebrated his love for the mountains, his connection to the primordial, his belief in science and myth with a tattoo of Thor’s hammer. We’ve spent many a cool, Colorado night in the mountains, drinking mead and smoking pipes, wondering about days of old and cherishing our ineffable love of landscape. To see a flash of lightning illuminate a dark hillside of gaunt lodgepoles, and feel the reverberations at the end of a clap of thunder is a spectacle unexplainable by any textbook. Jon and I believe we’ve witnessed and heard Thor’s wrath. Mjolnir’s impact is a reminder of eternal power, and a feeling of true connection to the mountains of Colorado.

* * *
Rachel Carson’s connection to the natural world manifests in a variety of ways. As a scientist, she was equipped with the tools to prophesy environmental apocalypse, but as a lover of the natural world, she takes great strides in warning others of her findings. Her apocalyptic claims are in large part a result of her scientific knowledge and concern about the influence of pesticides in a holistic ecosystem:

Where do pesticides fit into the picture of environmental disease? We have seen that they now contaminate soil, water, and food, that they have the power to make our streams fishless and our gardens and woodlands silent and birdless. Man, however much he may like to pretend the contrary, is part of nature. Can he escape a pollution that is now so thoroughly our world? (188)

These notions of environmental apocalypse or millennial ecology are now so ingrained, it may be difficult to imagine what they must have sounded like to a 1960’s readership. Today, ecocritics and environmentalists recognize the dangers inherent in the notions of progress that date back to the Enlightenment: namely, the coextensive ideologies of scientific advancement and social progress. Greg Garrard’s *Ecocriticism* guides readers through a brief history of significant environmental moments in order to contextualize various ideologies that have developed over time. He writes of a major paradigm shift that occurred in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries when the writings of innovators such as Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton offered empirical reasoning and answers to mysteries of the outdoor world:
Reason became the means to achieving total mastery over nature, now conceived as an enormous, soulless mechanism that worked according to knowable natural laws . . . [this reductionism] substitutes a fragmented, mechanical world view for a holistic, organic one . . . the human mind is seen as the sole source and locus of values besides God, nature ceases to have any worth or meaning beyond that assigned to it by reason. (62)

This “soulless mechanism” took on a very different meaning just a few centuries after the Scientific Revolution. Early in *Silent Spring*, Carson writes “Only within the moment of time represented by the present century has one species—man—acquired significant power to alter the nature of his world” (5). The danger of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ideologies may be slowly infiltrating the environmental imagination of twenty-first-century society, but Rachel Carson’s words were directed toward the homogenous imagination of Enlightenment-dated notions of progressivism.

Given mid-twentieth-century scientific paradigms, it is difficult to imagine how anyone would be capable of effectively and realistically conveying such new and outlandish claims as environmental apocalypse. No stranger to social subversion, Rachel Carson was a talented scientist and rhetorician, and knew well the difficulties her crusade would encounter. Perhaps the most difficult dilemma she faced was the need to cleave the seemingly inextricable notions of science and progress, while harnessing the positive results of scientific research to make her arguments more
effective. Carson faced the paradoxical fact that growth in civilization, and its residual
growth in scientific knowledge, had the ability both to destroy the environment and provide solutions for how this destruction could be stopped. *Silent Spring* sets out simultaneously to castigate scientific progress while relying on its pragmatic results in order to convey the dire situation surrounding an increase in the use of pesticides.

Carson solves her paradoxical dilemma by likening post-World War II science to the stuff of black magic—the ancient enemy of science that was supposedly eradicated with the end of the Dark Ages. In the same way conservation in the twenty-first century might look back to the environmental “dark age” before *Silent Spring*, Carson herself invokes the prescientific era of the days before the Enlightenment. By aligning the dangers of modern-day science with witchery and sorcery, *Silent Spring* warns against the dangers of the implementation of incipient and untested knowledge. Carson reduces the most modern of science to “chemical death rain” and claims it has the same kind of powers as “Medea’s robe” (12, 32). She ironically uses the language of children’s stories and fairy tales to critique the frightening realities born out of laboratories under the pretense of progress:

> The world of systemic insecticides is a weird world, surpassing the imaginings of the brothers Grimm . . . It is a world where the enchanted forest of the fairy tales has become the poisonous forest in which an insect that chews a leaf or sucks the sap of a plant is doomed. It is a world where a flea bites a dog, and dies because the dog’s blood has
been made poisonous, where an insect may die from vapors emanating
from a plant it has never touched, where a bee may carry poisonous
nectar back to its hive and presently produce poisonous honey. (32-33)

By relating the dangerous results of modern science to mythology, Carson undercuts
the notion that science frees the world of the dark arts and medieval magic.

Killingsworth and Palmer go so far as to compare “A Fable for Tomorrow” to Faustian
mythology arguing that it “sets the stage for a rendering of the human tragedy
connected traditionally with the desire to control nature through witchcraft . . . the
imagery of which Carson connects overtly with technological development” (66). That
is, not only is medieval science taking humans to the literal ends of the earth, it is
aligned with ideology of progress so that 1960s progressivism itself comes under
question. This inversion of the idea of progress leads the imagination to believe hope
for the future will depend upon the development of environmental consciousness and
action. This is a very important point because Carson never blames the scientific field
of study; she recognizes the benefits of science just as she recognizes that there is
indeed an insect problem that pesticides try to address. In this manner, Rachel Carson
effectively confronts an audience ingrained with the understanding that science means
progress, those who believe nature is at the whim of humanity. And at the same time,
she backs up her argument with the very same science:

The “control of nature” is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the

Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that
nature exists for the convenience of man. . . . It is our alarming
misfortune that so primitive a science has armed itself with the most
modern and terrible weapons, and that in turning them against the
insects it has also turned them against the earth. (297)

She uses technology to foster a degree of anxiety in society with the hope of a
paradigm shift, a revolution in science and consciousness, but not a return to the
prescientific era. Her rhetoric reaches hyperbole with its suggestion of impending and
certain doom. The dilemmas and paradoxes she faces, and handles well, are necessary
when considering the scale of the problem she addresses. That is, no matter how
extreme the devastation predicted, Carson calls for a commensurate change in
perception and political agenda.

The success of *Silent Spring* also relies on a balance between two different
types of arguments: ends-oriented arguments and means-oriented arguments.

Killingsworth and Palmer write that these different arguments are necessary for writers
to build constituencies. “Ends-oriented arguments deal with the moral issues involved
in public decisions” which, when focused on exclusively, “drift toward stridency” (76).
Throughout *Silent Spring*, there are number of moments when Carson chooses to
moralize the management of pesticides:

> Who has made the decision that sets in motion these chains of
> poisonings, this ever-widening wave of death that spreads out, like
> ripples when a pebble is dropped into a still pond? . . . Who has
decided—who has the right to decide—for the countless legions of people who were not consulted that the supreme value is a world without insects, even though it be also a sterile world ungraced by the curving wing of a bird in flight? (127)

These rhetorical questions are jabs at the heads of chemical corporations and governmental agencies responsible for the poisoning of the environment. The questions appeal to a lay-readership’s sense of right and wrong and evoke the sense that Carson is merely part of a morally-aware and critical community, along with many other citizens who value life and the environment and are disproving of those who attempt to destroy them. But if, as mentioned above, this moralizing rhetoric is in danger of sounding strident, Carson also fills her book with practical hopes and objectives. When discussing cancer toward the end of the book—a very poignant subject given Carson’s battle with terminal cancer toward the end of her work on *Silent Spring*—Carson writes: “For those in whom cancer is already a hidden or a visible presence, efforts to find cures must of course continue. But for those not yet touched by the disease and certainly for the generations as yet unborn, prevention is the imperative need” (243). If “ends-oriented” arguments risk stridency, “means-oriented” arguments like this are in danger of drifting toward a “kind of mechanistic reductiveness” that threatens alienation to those outside to the academies of science (*Ecospeak* 76). That is, environmental writers walk the line between coming across as either fanatical and harsh, or sounding esoteric and alienating. Despite Carson’s arsenal of facts, antidotes,
and expert-testimony, however, her call for social action is clear and inclusive.

Whether “ends-oriented” or “means-oriented,” Carson’s arguments are presented as if by an “attorney at trial” (Payne 144), or with what Lawrence Buell, in his landmark study *The Environmental Imagination*, calls a “novelistic momentum” (294). By balancing between these rhetorical pitfalls, Carson’s rhetoric clearly but accurately explains her warning.

The rhetorical achievements of effectively communicating the dangers of pesticides and DDTs arguably makes *Silent Spring* one of the most important environmental books to date. The sheer scale of the book, and its results, cause Payne to argue that it “marks a literary and political dividing line between the conservation era and modern environmentalism” (137). He recognizes the conservation era, or “first-generation” environmentalism, as dealing with issues like land use and wildlife protection, whereas “second-generation” addresses a post-World War II environment marked by the global concerns of chemical proliferation, toxins, and nuclear contamination (137). Carson paved the way for future environmentalists, “second-generation” environmentalists. Carson’s writing established a method of transparency when she recognized a problem, thoroughly researched it with all the resources at her scientific disposal, and translated it from scientific esotericisms for the world to see. This kind of transparency opened a new, inclusive genre of nature/scientific/environmental writing that was quickly utilized by a generation of subsequent environmental writers. It allowed for an interdisciplinary approach to
writing marking another reason for which *Silent Spring* began the environmental movement. This book is the product of one concerned citizen’s hard work, a scientist and steward of the environment, a woman who took action.

Lawrence Buell writes that Carson’s anger, while overtly aimed at the military and chemical corporations, also implicates, however slightly, the complicity of chemical consumers:

The invective gains force by not limiting itself to a single adversary. It carefully preserves an us-versus-them dichotomy without absolving us for our acquiescence and complicity as chemical consumers—even as *Silent Spring* makes clear that ordinary citizens are victims of military, corporate, and government arrogance. (*Writing* 41)

Buell’s point speaks to Carson’s veiled chastisement of society at large—society’s “acquiescence and complicity.” In her characteristic voice, Carson uses cautionary rhetoric of apocalypse as a warning directed to those who would remain complicit. By employing these elements, she utilizes the entrenched and effective literary tradition of the jeremiad. Michael Branch, in an article outlining the jeremiad and elegy used in environmental writing, (re)defines the *green* jeremiad as a chastisement of society for its environmental sins:

[writers] urge us to adjust our behavior; reaffirm the importance of health in the extended natural community of which we are a part; reinforce the value of an ethics of respect and affection; and, ultimately,
attempt to reinvigorate our hope that it is not too late to avoid the 
unhappy consequences of the bleak, ecologically impoverished world 
that they so powerfully envision. (235)
The sin of complicity in the destruction of our earth; victims and perpetrators at the 
same time—these are harsh words, but powerful and motivating. *Silent Spring* creates 
these paradoxical definitions of society, thus informing readers of a scary truth and 
course of action. The book begins the environmental movement by challenging its 
audience to make a change before it is too late.

* * *

Carson’s ambition to solve a major problem in the face of a number of odds 
amazes me. If one person can recognize and solve global change, why were my friends 
and I moaning about a problem we hadn’t even tried to address? We inched along up 
toward the Eisenhower Tunnel, still unable to see the entrance to the large hole that 
hastens drivers from one side of the continental divide to the other. Jon was the most 
 vociferous about his annoyance. Quickly excitable and contemptuous toward those he 
considers to be “outsiders.” Jon has never failed to vocalize his anger toward the 
rapidly increasing population numbers in Colorado. Emotionally, I had difficulty 
disagreeing with Jon’s opinions. Half a day earlier we had to ford Conundrum Creek 
which had blown out its bridges due to high run-offs from a heavy winter—our views
were dominated by pines and spruce, craggy ridges, and an azure sky. The sound of rushing water all but drown out our voices as we cautiously, but excitedly stumbled through thigh-deep water focused on nothing but the next step. The contrast was sharp. In the car, with the windows down, the noise and stink of brakes and west-bound traffic filled our vehicle. It’s easy to let emotions take over when sitting in any traffic jam, much less the gridlock we experienced after days of isolation, fresh air, and quiet—it’s easy to start looking for people to blame rather than take steps toward solving a problem.

I felt angry as I sat there in traffic. It was difficult to reconcile the presence of my own taillights along with the others in that seemingly endless stream of red light. I was angry at the cars around me, angry at my own presence in the middle. I had journeyed into the mountains to find beauty, serenity, escape; at that moment, all I felt was the bitter guilt of complicity. At least we were carpooling, but that hasn’t always been the case. A nasty little fact that I have to come to terms with is that I chose to live on the Front Range—I chose to live in a place which necessitates at least half a tank of gas to get deep into the mountains. Where do I draw the line between enjoying wilderness and destroying it? How can I reconcile my self-declared conservationism with weekly, gas-guzzling trips into the mountains? What, if any, are the options to reduce my environmental impact, mitigate my hypocrisy?
Edward Abbey’s *Desert Solitaire*, another influential contribution to the environmental movement, departs drastically from *Silent Spring* in place-specific purpose and angry tone. A prototype of the counter-cultural 1960s, Abbey’s fierce individualism, anarchical spirit, and passionate love for the deserts of southwest America manifests into a book focused on local causes with wildly (a)political purposes. Abbey’s venomous tone in the name of place and against the governmental organizations in charge of such places defines his spot in the environmental movement. *Desert Solitaire* had a great impact on me the first time I read it in college. I’ve often wondered since reading it, and rereading it, if environmental writers run the risk of alienating much-needed readerships with too much anger. More importantly, however,
Desert Solitaire taught me about the necessity of the source of Abbey’s anger: the near painful love for the natural world. Ultimately, any attempt at true advocacy for land is contingent upon a love for and immersion in place, and the subsequent ability to convey that love. Abbey’s book about areas in Utah managed to create a stronger bond between me and the places I love in Colorado.

* * *

I have a love for too many places in Colorado to list here, but I have especially fond memories of childhood trips I took to the mountains with my parents. As the youngest of three children, the natural pecking order generally precluded me from the much coveted front seat of the car. I always made sure, however, to sit on the right side of the backseat when we went skiing, camping, or hiking. At the age of five or six, I had no idea we were driving southbound on highway 93 when leaving Boulder, before linking up with Interstate 70 to head west into the mountains. I was more concerned about ogling the steep, craggy, erosion-prone cliffs lining the north side of I-70 near Georgetown; gazing at the herd of bison north of the Interstate near Genesee Park; and staring with awe and wonderment across the protected open space land west of highway 93. There, on a lucky day, I could see great locomotives steaming and pulling hundreds of colored cars between and over the great rolling plateaus that give way to the foothills. As a child, these grand cavalcades were the subject of intoxicating
curiosity; frankly, they still are. I sometimes wonder if my inability to tell anyone what these trains might be carrying or where they might be going is a bridge to my childhood imagination. Why discover that freight cars carry timber or liquid nitrogen rather than kings, queens, and exotic animals? Instead of making their way toward Los Angeles or Portland, might not they be headed through time toward a Jesse James ambush in Iowa, or to Tombstone in 1880? More importantly, I sometimes wonder if those tracks could be used to transport people today like they may have a century ago.

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As we came closer and closer to Eisenhower Tunnel, I ruminated about those beautiful plateaus just south of Boulder, desperately wishing we were there. As a child, I was usually asleep by the time we were returning back to Boulder after a trip, but as an adult, those hills meant I was home. Warm summer nights in those foothills were filled with ambrosial aromas of bitter-mint and vanilla from the sage and ponderosa pines. To this day, these aromas spark a sensual reminder of home, a palpable connection to place. The notion of place is a powerful sensation. Most people, despite their environmental affinities, or lack thereof, feel a connection to their origins. Evoking place can be a powerful tool of persuasion given its universal qualities. Given the scope of Rachel Carson’s project, sense of place was one area she could not encompass. Buell comments on her global vision: “Silent Spring . . . is localized in no
place; the problem is ubiquitous . . . a globalist commitment, which focuses on pervasive environmental systems or attitudes rather than regional variants” *(Environmental Imagination 294)*. In contrast to Carson’s writing, on the other hand, in the late 1960s appears the writing of Edward Abbey whose work focused very narrowly on specific place. Abbey was a man who, after serving in the military, became vehemently anti-establishment, anti-military, anti-bureaucracy of any kind. His writings came at a time when environmental controversies were heating up, but were still trumped by larger, social issues. *Desert Solitaire* was released in 1968 when the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, and the Chicago Democratic National Convention riots overshadowed events like the passage of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers act, the flooding of Glen Canyon in 1963, and the Wilderness Act of 1964. Amidst these major events and acts, *Desert Solitaire* appeared: a book focused very closely on one season in the deserts of the American southwest, specifically Arches National Park. The book was narrower in scope and its concerns were less immediate than issues like the Vietnam conflict, but it reflected well the spirit and desire for a radical revolution that permeated America at the time. *Desert Solitaire* is based on Abbey’s journals while living in Arches in 1956 and 1957 and, despite its impetuous, angry tone about one place in particular, the book was carefully planned and written many years later, many miles from Utah and draws from experiences Abbey had both inside and out of Arches.
A problem arises even before discussing Abbey’s departure from Carson’s “globalist commitment.” What is place, exactly? Do the plateaus between Boulder and Golden encompass one place, and, if so, where does that place stop? The same argument suggesting Boulder’s connection to Golden can be extended to Boulder’s connection to Vail, Grand Junction, Moab, Arches National Park. Rebecca Solnit writes that “Sense of place is the sixth sense, an internal compass and map made by memory and spatial perception together . . . this very abstract sense is composed of sensual detail” (203). This lovely definition is complicated, however, when place encompasses more than just geography. My wandering daydreams of trains destined for Jesse James’s gang or toward the showdown at the O.K. corral suggest a sense of place as extending across the planes of space and time. Wendell Berry’s notion of place pushes out into this more inclusive realm: “To preserve our places and be at home in them, it is necessary to fill them with imagination” (90). I like to imagine the geography of place as a sphere that I fill with memory, association, and imagination—as a dynamic concept never fixed in time or space. Lawrence Buell expounds on these thoughts with an entire chapter devoted to the elusiveness of place:

Much of this slipperiness derives from “place” having by definition both an objective and a subjective face, pointing outward toward the tangible world and inward to the perceptions one brings to it . . . ‘Place,’ then, is a configuration of highly flexible subjective, social, and material dimensions, not reducible to any of these. (Writing 59-60)
But for its “slipperiness,” and despite its “highly flexible” configuration, there is no denying the existence and power of place. It inspires love, nostalgia, and action as seen in any environmental text. Given its elevated position in the collective imagination, Buell’s most salient point about place concerns its loss: “The more a site feels like a place, the more fervently it is so cherished, the greater the potential concern at its violation or even the possibility of violation” (Writing 56). Effective rhetoric is built around the presentation of specific place and the warnings inspired by its loss.

With poetic grace and lyrical mastery, Edward Abbey captures the beautiful details of the sweeping landscapes in the deserts of the southwest. And by using landscape as a hook throughout Desert Solitaire, Abbey reaches beyond mere place into the personal philosophy and commentary unique to his book. The “Down the River” chapter encompasses these notions of specific place well. After rafting down Glen Canyon, before its infamous damming in 1963, Abbey describes a storm in the east with the grace of a poet, unhindered by any hint of anger:

boiling over the desert, a mass of lavender clouds bombarding the earth
with lighting and trailing curtains of rain . . . Between here and there
and me and the mountains is the canyon wilderness, the hoodoo land of
spire and pillar and pinnacle where no man lives, and where the river
flows, unseen, through the blue-black trenches in the rock. (193)

There are many beautiful descriptions such as these throughout the book, but, as Don Scheese points out in a critical essay about Desert Solitaire, “As in all compelling
nature writing, the account of the relationship between self and nature, nature and culture, evokes important truths about self and society” (309). The love of specific landscape inspires the rhetoric of place which is extended into Abbey’s comments on civilization. This turn encompasses the “dimensions” Buell speaks about above: Abbey defines place by stripping it of any subjectivities presupposed by the presence of civilization; and at the same time, as a member of civilization, he is forced to fill landscapes—at the very least, the landscape of the book—with his conclusions and musings in order to protect it. These complicated thoughts preoccupy Abbey throughout the book and make the rhetoric effective:

Men come and go, cities rise and fall, whole civilizations appear and disappear—the earth remains, slightly modified. The earth remains, and the heartbreaking beauty where there are no hearts to break . . . man is a dream, thought an illusion, and only rock is real. Rock and sun . . .

Under the desert sun, in that dogmatic clarity, the fables of theology and the myths of classical philosophy dissolve like mist . . . What does it mean? It means nothing. It is as it is and has no need for meaning. The desert lies beneath and soars beyond any possible human qualification.

Therefore, sublime. (194)

Abbey identifies and describes a beautiful landscape; this inspires musings about the transience of humankind amidst such landscapes; and he reaches his fever pitch when addressing, as he does often, the compulsory egocentric paradigm of human beings. It
is the “integrity, stability, and beauty of the desert [that] are the dominant concerns of Desert Solitaire. . . . The ultimate concern . . . is the preservation of the land, its harmony, and the equilibrium of natural relationships in a particular environment” (Scheese 308). This evolution toward the importance of a “particular environment” or specific place creates a sense of empathy in Abbey’s audience. The excitement and wonder for specific place makes the thought of its loss seem drastic and tragic.

* * *

The light at the mouth of the Eisenhower tunnel came into view; it looked like a star with a river of red tail lights pouring out as if the Pyrphlegethon River itself had burst up from Hades and out the side of the mountain. This river of fire and the light from whence it emanated were discordant with the surrounding landscape. Here, high in the Rocky Mountains on a beautiful summer night, hundreds of people sat trapped in their cars, about to enter a hole with the magical effect of transforming night into day. The star of artificial light ahead reminded me of the celestial stars we had gazed at the night before. I had planned the trip to Conundrum Valley for a few different reasons. Primarily, I wanted to show Matt and Crystal one of the most beautiful areas in Colorado. The Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Area is home to the iconic Maroon Bells—Maroon Peak and North Maroon peak are among the most photographed mountains in Colorado, and possibly the world— and trails climbing
over nine passes over twelve-thousand-feet high. There are succulent valleys resplendent with wildflowers and rushing creeks, aspen groves interspersed with stands of pine and vice versa, and of course, the soothing hot waters of Conundrum Hot Springs, our base-camp destination. I also hoped to venture to the top of Capitol Peak, one of the Elk Mountains’ six fourteneers, thus initiating Matt and Crystal into a long-standing tradition and inclusive club of all those who have ventured to any of the fifty-four highest points in Colorado.

I was also excited about treating them to one of Colorado’s many hot springs. There are all varieties of springs throughout the State: the developed tourist destinations like Strawberry Hot Springs in Steamboat, the locally-kept secrets like Penny Hot Springs near Carbondale, nothing more than a small pocket of boiling water in an otherwise cold mountain river, and a mixture of the two like Dunton Hot Springs south of Telluride, featuring enclosed springs and sporadic outdoor pools—nothing more than holes in the ground. Conundrum Hot Springs are special in that they require an eight-mile hike to reach them; you have to “earn” your peaceful soak, which is much deserved after carrying a pack up the long valley. Matt, Crystal, Jon, and I reached the springs about the time the compulsory afternoon thunderstorms were swirling through and over the valley. A light, cool rain began as we marched from where we’d pitched our tents to the warm, steaming waters of the springs. The better part of our afternoon was spent watching the wisps of virga drizzle out of small storm-cells to the north—huge jellyfish dragging their tentacles over fourteen-thousand-foot
mountains. We took a break from the soothing pool to hike back to camp and make
dinner while the last glimmer of daylight faded out behind the valley-wall to the west.
But once the stars made their quiet entrance, we hurried back down the trail to slip into
the water and soak in the unhindered views of the Milky Way. It saddens me to think
it’s generally a luxury in America to view a star-speckled sky without the disturbance
of light pollution. On that cool night, while sitting in the warm waters of natural hot
springs with friends, staring at the spine of our galaxy, I forced my imagination to bend
around an unthinkable concept: the possibility of losing places in the world like these.
Despite my own environmental consciousness and studies, I don’t know if I had ever
truly imagined the loss of places close to my heart as anything but theoretical. I tossed
and turned in my tent all night as I mulled over the horrific possibilities and a future
that suddenly seemed scary and soon.

* * *

Abbey’s concern over loss, and his rhetorical advocacy for landscapes, places
his work into the tradition of the green jeremiad. *Desert Solitaire* is in large part a
tribute to place, and more specifically, the vulnerability of place. Of course, Abbey’s
prose is not a gentle warning. His tone of voice is established in the introduction to the
book: “This is not a travel guide but an elegy. A memorial. You’re holding a
tombstone in your hands. A bloody rock. Don’t drop it on your foot—throw it at
something big and glassy. What do you have to lose?” (xiv). In this cantankerous voice—one found throughout *Desert Solitaire* and indeed, most of Abbey’s works—we find an even more conspicuous rhetorical device. Abbey’s tone of voice has been described as many different ways as there are critics: be it Bryan Moore’s label of “cranky,” Don Scheese’s phrase “rhetoric of rage,” or Buell’s more bombastic “raffish panache.” However the critics choose to characterize his voice, Abbey’s intense, harsh, extravagant, and iconoclastic writing departs from Carson’s different brand of warning. Importantly, however, this startling technique—that is, the crankiness that causes discomfort in readers—reaches far beyond a flashy bid for attention. Between these lines of anger, Abbey once again praises place by celebrating the perception, immersion, and experience of unmediated place. Bryan Moore’s article about Abbey’s use of traditional rhetoric says that his cranky posture, which is commensurate with his desire for subversion, results in a realness of voice, a noble rhetoric, that woos readers by showing them better versions of themselves and helping them realize their own means for accomplishing what, ultimately, Abbey sets out to do (274). In *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey writes of his wish “to confront, immediately and directly if it’s possible, the bare bones of existence, the elemental and fundamental, the bedrock which sustains us” (6). Abbey’s angry voice is a product of his love for the desert. Whereas Carson addressed a global position, Abbey’s rhetoric benefits from the possibility of empathy each reader has because of the love of their own particular places.
Of course, for those who have never traveled to Arches National Park, *Desert Solitaire* describes a wholly alien landscape. We are brought full circle, then, to the original question of place. How can the written description of place—one I may never have travelled to—capture the same sense of my nostalgia and sentiment as the foothills south of Boulder, the warm pools at Conundrum Hot Springs? Buell identifies five different dimensions of “place-connectedness,” the fifth being the most relevant to a discussion of Abbey’s advocacy for place: “The reinventionary aspect of place sense . . . [or the] connectedness with fictive or virtual places.” Buell asks, “Is it necessary for places actually to have been experienced for them to have influence? Must you have been there before to they can be said to matter to you?” (*Writing 71*). Buell goes on to describe the holiness of religious locations around the world and their importance and impact to those who have never traveled to them. The example is also relevant in the case of *Desert Solitaire* when Abbey writes:

*Wilderness*. The word itself is music . . . The word suggests the past and the unknown, the womb of earth from which we all emerged. It means something still present, something remote and at the same time intimate, something buried in our blood and nerves, something beyond us and without limit . . . Original sin, the true original sin, is the blind destruction for the sake of greed of this natural paradise which lies all around us—if only we were worthy of it. (166-167)
Abbey’s reader need not necessarily visit Arches National Park or hike the scree of Tukuhnikivats in order to grasp his anger in the destruction these wild places Abbey describes. But the knowledge of the existence of such places, the awareness that the body from “which we all emerged” is not dead, promotes, defends, and celebrates the deserts of the southwest. This kind of connection to any peculiar place is what lies at the root of laws enacted to protect such places. Abbey’s angry rhetoric is at its best in these moments—he evokes our sense of identity by tying it to the land, and then jolts us into action by questioning our very loyalty to, or appreciation of, that identity: “if only we were worthy of it.”

Abbey, however, (in)famously moves beyond a vociferous voice for the sake of place. In the chapter “Polemic: Industrial Tourism and the National Parks,” Abbey’s evening reveries are disrupted by a survey crew from the Bureau of Public Roads scouting out the construction of a new road in Arches National Park by hammering stakes into the ground. Abbey begins his “raffish” description of those (for example, the National Park Service) who would promote “progress” by sarcastically mocking them:

There are some who frankly and boldly advocate the eradication of the last remnants of wilderness and the complete subjugation of nature to the requirements of—not man—but industry. This is a courageous view, admirable in its simplicity and power, and with the weight of all modern
history behind it. It is also quite insane. I cannot attempt to deal with it here. (47)

As he does with landscape, Abbey clearly distinguishes those who, despite job or motive, would destroy the sanctity of place. These government men are merely metonyms for, and extensions of, the city. But at the end of the chapter, in a move which would come to completely redefine Abbey’s role in the environmental movement, he describes what happens once the survey crew left: “For about five miles I followed the course of their survey back toward headquarters, and as I went I pulled up each little wooden stake and threw it away, and cut all the bright ribbons from the bushes... A futile effort, in the long run, but it made me feel good” (59). This dabbling in ecoterrorism paves the way for Abbey’s later fiction. Don Schese writes that Abbey’s illegal acts mark a significant moment in the history of nature writing: “committing an illegal act against the government transforms the work that tells of it into a truly subversive, revolutionary genre” (316). Abbey is now not only an advocate of the wilderness, he is a militant guardian of the natural world against the onslaught of industrial civilization. This gesture is an eloquent example of the capabilities of individuals. Abbey’s desire for place is what leads to subversion and even illicit acts. The implied point, of course, is that one cannot commit illegal acts unless there is a bureaucratic structure in place which imposes such laws. Edward Abbey, lover of place, inflammatory rhetorician in defense of place, expresses his true sense of subversion with illegal, if “futile,” acts against the government.
It’s easy to understand why Abbey would lash out against those who would seek to impose more order in wild places. I too seek out wilderness as a place to escape the restrictions, in all senses of the word, of civilization. It’s been difficult for me to come to terms with the necessity of certain regulations that can arise in wilderness. Conundrum Hot Springs is a good example. The hike to reach the springs is a mild one through exquisite landscape; the springs provide a perfect base-camp and jump-off point to climb Castle and/or Conundrum peaks, or a layover before heading over Triangle Pass and down toward Crested Butte; and if long trips or peak-bagging is not in the plans, the springs make for a spectacular destination themselves. But beauty can prove a curse for wilderness areas. The popularity of Conundrum Hot Springs comes with the unfortunate and ironic, if expected, consequences of beauty: gashing mazes of eroded trails over-frequented by campers, a regular presence of mice taking advantage of poor eating/disposal habits, and of course, the lack of isolation one hopes to find miles away from any road or town. Most guide books describing the area take advantage of the pun, the conundrum of Conundrum—namely, how long can this fragile, high-altitude gem sustain the regular abuse of slob hikers? With the amount of traffic currently tearing up the site, I don’t think the Forest Service is too far away from setting restrictions or requiring permits to visit the area; and I will support the decision
when it’s made. What, however, is lost when rules are grafted onto wilderness? Abbey writes that “out there is a different world, older and greater and deeper by far than ours, a world which surrounds and sustains the little world of men as sea and sky surround and sustain a ship” (37). In writing this, however, I realize we may have the vanity, but not the ability to try and impose rules on that world “out there.” Sadly, we do have the ability and hubris to destroy that world and are forced to impose rules upon ourselves.

Generally, one expects to find one set of rules in the wilderness: natural law. For the sake of this argument, I do not necessarily mean the formal definitions of the phrase which are traced back to classical Stoicism—that is, the evolution of the philosophy of religion and jurisprudence—but a more literal sense of that which one must abide by when venturing out of the comforts of civilization: namely, a healthy respect for the sublime power of weather, erosion, flora, fauna—in short, wilderness. At the heart of this respect lies all the discomforts and mood swings found in hiking, camping, and backpacking, but more importantly, all the beauty, isolation or camaraderie, and solace. A different gamut of physical comfort and emotions exists outside. Wherever one may lie along this spectrum, a degree of freedom, the freedom afforded by wilderness, is presupposed when abiding the laws of nature. A two-fold problem arises, unfortunately, when laws of society begin to impinge upon natural laws: due the massive increase in population in states like Colorado, more and more people drive into the mountains everyday to enjoy the freedom of wilderness; given
this trend, certain rules and regulations, the products of bureaucratic civilization, must be put in place to avoid hiking wildernesses to death. Thus, a paradox: the act of seeking freedom in wilderness brings about more restrictions to such freedoms.

* * *

Edward Abbey, of course, as an incendiary product of the 1960s-countercultural movement, held unwavering beliefs about the right to unimpeded wilderness and its enduring gift of freedom. Ultimately, freedom is the endgame for Abbey. His wrathful language for the sake of place and wilderness grows out of a fear of the loss of freedom: “we need wilderness whether or not we ever set foot in it. We need a refuge even though we may never need to go there . . . We need the possibility of escape as surely as we need hope; without it the life of the cities would drive all men into crime or drugs or psychoanalysis” (129-130). He understands wilderness to be diametrically opposed to bureaucracy—freedom versus captivity. Abbey worries that society has lost the vital link with the natural world which is so important to basic freedoms. When discussing Abbey’s thoughts about the freedom of wilderness, Moore writes that “the industrialization of public wilderness areas and national parks [is] the final step in the governmental and commercial usurpation of individual freedom . . . Like Thoreau, Abbey believes that wilderness corresponds with the wild, anarchic base of human nature” (268-269). Abbey’s angry style continually comes into clearer focus
in this vein of argumentation. Certain degrees of freedom are considered inalienable in
our society; these rights of freedom have been, and continue to be, the subject of all
levels of society and its laws. When discussing natural law, however, freedom need not
even be discussed—freedom and wilderness are inextricably linked, freedom is
inherent in the natural world. That bureaucratic laws have the power to intrude upon
wilderness, thus inalienable freedom, is a fact that understandably riles Abbey. Desert
Solitaire functions as an exemplary model of what one can find in wilderness: self-
awareness and happiness, two feelings afforded by the basic rights of freedom.

Abbey’s staunch support of freedom allows him more license to strike out
against cultural trends than Rachel Carson. Nonetheless, very much in the same vein as
Carson, Abbey lashes out against the collective notion of progress which he allies with
consumerism, industry, bureaucracy, and the government’s industrialization of
wilderness areas and national parks. These notions of progress do more than just
impede Abbey’s sense of individual freedom, they prohibit it:

What reason have we Americans to think that our own society will
necessarily escape the world-wide drift toward the totalitarian
organization of men and institutions? . . . history demonstrates that
personal liberty is a rare and precious thing, that all societies tend
toward the absolute until attack from without or collapse from within
breaks up the social machine. (130)
A strong skepticism surfaces in *Desert Solitaire*, not unexpected by an author who studied philosophy and wrote a thesis on anarchy. Moore points out that Abbey’s concerns over threats to individual freedom stem from a belief that “as an out-of-control consumer society, we have become too dependent on a dubious technology and industry that foster[s] dullness, restrain[s] individuality . . . [Abbey’s] vision provides the attitudinal impetus to resist unquestioned compliance with consumerism” (268). Where Rachel Carson fights a war against a problematic notion of progress—that is, the very progress used to help solve the chemical problem—Abbey fights a war against the progress of capitalism. For Abbey, however, there are no ambiguities. If the language he employs and the actions he engages in seem drastic, it is only because his beliefs and conviction are firm. James Papa, Jr. writes that Abbey, in *Desert Solitaire* and subsequent work, is utterly invested in “the moral responsibility and integrity of the individual; the intrinsic value of nature and wilderness; and the environmental, social, and spiritual damage wrought by blind faith in technological advancement and capitalist consumption” (317). Abbey pulls up those stakes because he believes wilderness to be the last safe haven from tyrannical consumerism bent on dominating the soul.

* * *

46
As we finally made our way into the west portal of the tunnel, where three lanes converge into two (just one of the many traffic inhibitors that night), traffic began to break a little. It felt good to move again. I wondered if Abbey had ever driven through the Eisenhower Tunnel, or what he would say about this long tube of concrete whisking drivers from one side of the continental divide to the other. His feelings regarding its construction would no doubt be angry and uncompromising. But despite Abbey’s bellicose style, which I believe has the tendency to alienate readers who may find him offensive, he always keeps the integrity of wilderness and the human soul in mind. Looking at the lights in the tunnel, I recalled what he writes toward the beginning of Desert Solitaire: “[t]here’s another disadvantage to the use of the flashlight: like many other mechanical gadgets it tends to separate a man from the world around him. If I switch it on my eyes adapt to it and I can see only the small pool of light which it makes in front of me; I am isolated” (13). The flashlight is a metonym for the tyrannical progress Abbey so desperately warns us against; Abbey is not a fanatical hippie, he’s an advocate for freedom in the anarchical-sense of the word. The traffic began to slow again. I felt claustrophobic. I was shut in by the walls of technology, shut out from a world “out there” and surrounded by hundreds of strangers trapped in their metal boxes, but only able to see the truck in front of me, the headlights behind. I was isolated by this small pool of light and I wanted out.
Chapter 3: Rick Bass

Rick Bass has published a series of books in defense of the Yaak Valley in Montana, his home for a number of years.¹ Like Abbey, Bass focuses on a specific place in order to advocate for a wilderness designation in a small, bucolic community in northern Montana. *Brown Dog of the Yaak*, published in 1999, utilizes complicated rhetoric by eulogizing Bass’s hunting dog and companion, Colter, who disappeared unexpectedly and never returned. Colter is used as a metaphor for the Yaak Valley, underscoring the pain that would result from losing a precious piece of land like the dog was lost. At the same time, Bass suggests that the very essence of Colter is shaped or sculpted by the Valley. The figure of Colter, then, also functions as a metonym of

the Yaak. The book’s messages about the ability of landscapes to shape human subjectivity are powerful supplications to all who will listen to help protect the Yaak from more roads built in the Valley for logging purposes.

* * *

We had finally entered the eastbound portal of the Eisenhower Tunnel. I don’t think I’ve ever known a Coloradoan who doesn’t conflate both portals of the tunnel under Eisenhower’s name, but technically, only the westbound portal takes the name Eisenhower Memorial Bore or Tunnel (EMT), while the eastbound portal is called the Edwin C. Johnson Bore or Tunnel (EJMT). The Colorado Department of Transportation’s website includes a brief history of the tunnel. Its construction is traced back to 1956 when the Federal-Aid Highway Act was championed by President Eisenhower, the man behind America’s interstate system. In 1960, interest in the creation of a highway from Denver to Utah, one which would pass through the Continental Divide, prompted the study of eight possible locations to create a tunnel. Over the next few years, contractors and funds were allocated and in 1968, construction began. As soon as the tunnel opened for vehicles in 1973, the need for a second bore became obvious; severe traffic jams resulted from the bottlenecking of four-lane traffic into one lane in both directions through the tunnel. Construction of the EJMT—Johnson, a strong supporter for Colorado’s interstate system, had represented
Colorado as a Lieutenant Governor, Governor, and U.S. Senator from 1931 to 1957—
began in 1975 and was completed in 1979 (“Twin Bores”).

The tunnel itself is a modern-day marvel of engineering. At 11,112 feet, it
reigns as the highest vehicular tunnel in the world. One million cubic yards of earth
was removed and replaced by 190,000 cubic yards of concrete in order to create the
1.69-mile tube through the earth. The tunnel requires fifty-two full-time staff members
to monitor the bores every hour of every day of the year. Their duties include
everything from snow-removal to ventilation maintenance to round-the-clock video
surveillance. The creation of the first bore successfully linked Colorado and Utah, but
resulted in the overburden of traffic in 1973. The immediate response to traffic
congestion resulted in the costly and difficult process of building a second bore which
took only six years. Today, the same area is plagued with paralyzing traffic and the
people of Colorado anxiously await a solution.

* * *

In 1976, just a few years after the construction of the EMT, an ambitious
eighteen-year old, Rick Bass, read Edward Abbey’s The Monkey Wrench Gang.
Despite its inflammatory content—featuring environmental sabotage, or “ecotage” on a
much grander scale than Desert Solitaire—the book holds the root themes found in all
of Abbey’s works as identified by James Papa, Jr.: “moral responsibility and integrity
of the individual value; the intrinsic value of nature and wilderness; and the environmental, social, and spiritual damage wrought by blind faith in technological advancement and capitalist consumption” (317). Rick Bass would come to call the reading of this book the “‘crossing over’ into a life of passion and anger on behalf of the natural world” (Branch 229). A native of Fort Worth, Texas, Bass studied and worked as a petroleum geologist in Mississippi and Utah before heading north with his wife for wide-open landscapes. They landed in the Yaak Valley in northern Montana, quickly fell in love with the place, and Bass has been fiercely writing in defense of the Valley ever since.

Bass is a prolific writer in celebration and defense of his home in the Yaak Valley. Brown Dog of the Yaak is exemplary of his meta-critical thinking about the protection of place and where he falls, as an environmental writer, within the environmental movement. His narrative of advocacy is interspersed with reflections on the relevance of his own writing. He asks, “Can literature help protect a place? . . . We intend to find out” (85-86). The book, subtitled “Essays on Art and Activism,” is broken into four different sections, “Colter,” “The Yaak,” “Activism,” and “Art.” Predicated upon the loss of Colter, the book explores the mysteries of place, the Yaak’s ability to define people, and the arenas of activism and art in relation to dog, and to the Yaak. Despite the linear implications of its chapter headings, Brown Dog of the Yaak is more of a Venn diagram—four circles explained distinctly, but always overlapping.
Bass tirelessly advocates for the Yaak Valley, and he does so self-reflexively. His acute awareness of what he writes for, why he writes, and the possible outcomes of his writing, permeates *Brown Dog of the Yaak*. From the beginning of the book, he identifies the “shadows” or “lines of connection” between physical objects and what they evoke in the imagination, and says these emotions, ideas, or imaginings have a certain “magic” which acts as an important subject for artists (12-13). That is, he makes important distinctions between his writing and that which it owns as a subject:

Writing about the need to protect those last cores of wildness in the islands of remaining roadless areas is not anywhere near the same as those roadless areas themselves . . . There can be a power . . . generated by your passage back and forth, from subject to shadow-of-subject. (13)

A deep skepticism emerges in these words. Bass is not interested in the people who write about and for the sake of places. Rather, his concern lies in those areas he (and others) wants to defend. The essence of physical place, after all, provides the inspiration for the art created as a tribute to, and often times in defense of, such places: “it is not we who were brilliant but the places to which we traveled” (Bass 14). Bass feels the magic in wilderness and breaks down the sum of its elements to find what lies beyond it. His unique defense of the Yaak is predicated upon the magic it inspires.

Bass makes direct links between the magic of wilderness and his lost dog, Colter. In the most basic sense, Colter functions as a symbol for the wildness of the Yaak. Bass finds in his dog the same kind of ineffable magic he finds in wilderness:
I suppose the word for [Colter]—for what he had—was brilliance, which is a term I don’t think we use well. There was a brilliance in his eyes . . . a brilliance of irreducibility, of a thing not being puffed up or constructed to some value beyond itself, but being whittled and worn down to its essence, like the one crystal of a gem. Artists have long known and strived to capture this. (11)

Bass invokes Platonic notions of form throughout the book, searching for the indivisible core of existence in that which he loves. He recognizes the same kind of brilliance he feels in the Yaak in his missing dog; indeed, the brilliance in his dog is sculpted by the brilliance in the Yaak. The symbol of Colter works as a counterpoint to the destructive forces of humanity. Bass believes his dog represents a connection to generations past, a connection to a time when humans were in touch and aware of the land’s power:

We are so used to viewing the land and its resources as raw materials, and ourselves as the tools, the machines, the sculptors, that we have forgotten how it used to be the other way around. . . . The landscape carves at us with wild abandon, artistic glee, even if we do not notice.

(41)

For Bass, Colter is a constant reminder of the power of landscape. Twenty-first-century civilization is becoming increasingly removed from the natural world. The symbol of
Colter embodies the spirit of wilderness and exemplifies the power the world still holds over us all.

As a stand-in for, and product of, wilderness, Colter’s disappearance suggests a pointed warning about the loss of wilderness itself. As such, Bass too utilizes the green jeremiad. In an article about the efficacy of literary activism, “Can a Book Protect a Valley? Rick Bass and the Dilemmas of Literary Environmental Advocacy,” Karla Armbruster writes that “Although he never explicitly connects the loss of his dog with the potential loss of the valley’s wildness, his grief over losing Colter is woven throughout the book and functions almost as a foreshadowing of the grief that may still come” (203). In this manner, Bass writes from a triad of perspectives: he looks back nostalgically at the core value of his dog and what he represented; he analyzes the essence of the Yaak and wildernesses in general that exist in the present; and then he peers into the future of wilderness, passionately informed, but grieved by the possibility of losing the Yaak, and by extension, other wild places:

But what if the landscapes themselves vanish . . . how do we measure wildness, and decide what needs preserving, both in reality, as well, as in story, in shadow? . . . What happens if we lose our anchors and exist one day only in a world of shadows? As if even the familiarity of mountains in the distance were to become rubble, broken into disorder. . . . What happens when the durable things fall away, one by one, then two by two . . . what
kind of stories do we tell, as we are falling? And how do we live our lives?

(25)

The figure of Colter offers a fresh take on the magic of wilderness by standing in for it. But Bass’s literary use of Colter is much more complex than mere symbolism. O. Alan Weltzien, editor of a book of critical essays devoted entirely to Bass, writes in his conclusion to the book that Colter acts as the “optimal balance of nature and culture and distills the wildness that Bass thematizes and prescribes throughout his career. And as quintessence of the Yaak, Colter epitomizes Bass’s defense of place” (306). Just like Bass’s notions of brilliance, Colter is a product of the magic of wilderness and wildness. The Yaak valley moulds the essence of the dog, and thus channels it through him. For Bass, this realization is vital to understand the power wilderness has to sculpt humanity. Despite a modern indoctrination of dominating ideologies—that is, the false notion that humans sculpt landscape, and are not sculpted in return—Bass can look to Colter as a reminder that landscape shapes him. Weltzien says that this symbolic reversal locates Colter as a signifier for wildness, wilderness, and the Yaak. Colter then serves as both a symbol for the Yaak and Bass’s own “soulmate, alter ego, and mentor” (308). In Colter we see the embodiment of the Yaak, and in this representation we see Bass’s defense of place. This is not just immersion in the wilderness; Colter provides a living, breathing connection to the specific wild place where he was formed.

* * *
If the magic of a valley can shape a dog or person, how might the constant artificiality of modern civilization shape me? I wondered how the Eisenhower Tunnel had molded me. After all, despite the diversity of landscapes and experiences of my outdoor adventures in Colorado, the tunnel always remained constant. This was not a place I wanted to be connected to. This rip in the side a mountain is a tracheotomy to relieve the pressure of the nine-mile alternate route over Loveland Pass on U.S. 6—a seemingly short distance but for the steep grades, hairpin switchbacks, and near 1000-foot elevation gain. Only this tracheotomy ushers pollutants through the body of the earth, drains $70,000 worth of electricity every month, and serves as a frightening reminder of just how many cars drive through the heart of Colorado. According to the CDOT website, that night, our car was just one of 1,123,184 cars that passed through the tunnel in the month of July of 2008; the annual count for tunnel traffic reached a staggering 11,550,601 cars (“Twin Bores”)! The Eisenhower Tunnel marks a significant place in the consciousness and memory of millions of Coloradans. It represents a number of intersections: historically, the tunnel stands for perceived progressivism resulting from the end of a World War and remains a heroic achievement in the eyes of engineers world-wide; culturally, the twin-bores facilitate the tourism Colorado is known for; ideologically, the tunnel symbolizes traditional male-oriented human dominance over the feminized natural world—in this case, literally penetrating the earth in the name of capitalism. Rick Bass focuses on the
ability of a valley to sculpt his subjectivity; how had this tunnel affected me? How far removed from the power of landscape am I? More importantly, what steps can I take in fighting against the ingrained ideologies dominance? The first step in advocating on behalf of Colorado is to recognize the role it has played in sculpting my own identity.

* * *

Bass’s advocacy for the Yaak Valley places him in a tenuous position with the others who live in the same valley, and offers Bass an opportunity to make a rhetorical observation about the difficulties of addressing local environmental issues. Many of the Yaak’s few residents rely on the logging of the Yaak for subsistence. Armbruster’s comments on the conservational tone of Bass’s writing highlight the clash Bass encounters with his neighbors: “Bass is engaged in what I would describe as literary environmental advocacy: the practice of using literary writing to speak for nature in opposition to prevailing cultural ideologies that sanction the domination, manipulation, and destruction of the nonhuman world” (197). Bass’s rhetoric, in other words, gives voice to an otherwise silent and vulnerable subjectivity: the physical world. But it is easy to understand why those who rely on logging might misinterpret Bass’s attempt to combat the “prevailing ideologies” mentioned above. In contrast to those inhabitants who believe that trees in the Yaak are “no more than a crop of fiber to be harvested and controlled” like a “kind of gardening,” Bass believes that “the
protection of these last little islands of untouched wilderness . . . [is] a kind of gardening as well. It’s simply that what is produced from those untouched gardens is invisible, immaterial, immeasurable—though just as important, and just as nourishing” (43-44). The rhetoric here runs the risk of pigeon-holing Bass as another bleeding-heart liberal with a penchant for impractical conservationism by the subsistence-loggers in his community. But he refuses to concede to such a stereotype in different ways: first of all, he denies the absurdity of his being against logging: “I want logging to continue up here, to help this place keep its identity and rough character. But if the forests are lost, we’ll lose even logging” (49). Selective logging provides both sustained employment for Bass’s co-inhabitants, and acts similar to a fire’s function by cleansing forests of overgrowth. In the age of “Smoky the Bear,” and Americans’ desire to build homes in wilderness, the country has come to associate fire with nothing but danger and destruction. In reality, the over-suppression of natural wildfires has led to myriad problems: too much fuel results in the increase of destruction when inevitable fires do roar through forests, outbreaks of harmful insects like Pine Beetle currently ravishing Colorado’s forests, a decrease in the overall health of the forests, and more. Bass also makes sure not to perpetuate the dichotomy between environmentalists and loggers. In a move similar to Carson, he implicates industry, not individual loggers, as the source of the problems. Bass argues that the last roadless areas in the Yaak are roadless because they do not provide much timber anyway, that these cores are vestiges for the last of the Valley’s threatened and endangered animals, and that only the short-term
greed of the timber industry seeks to destroy this land which is ninety-seven percent public: “The timber industry’s been treating them as if they’re 97 percent private—
theirs” (49). Bass, like Carson, works to align environmentalists and loggers against a greater enemy: the corporations that would clear-cut all forests for economic gain. Bass creates a space for his neighboring loggers by lashing out at corporations for their unethical indifference to both the long-term future of loggers in the area—that is, the faster the forests are gone, the sooner loggers will be out of a job—and the greater value of untouched wilderness.

Bass’s support for deeper meanings in untouched wilderness, and value of the current roadless mysteries and magic of the Yaak, underscores the possible tragedy in losing such places. Bass invokes the green jeremiad in order to urge change from our current desire and process of exploitation of the earth for its resources before we wake up to mere shadows of what we once knew. Branch writes that “Bass wants not to depress spirits but to raise consciousness, to revitalize a community of environmental concern, and to envision a new hope that the burning world may be saved before we are left only with ashes” (235). There is a seamless movement in Branch’s sentence—from Bass’s hope “to revitalize a community of environmental concern” to the consequences of a “burning world” which “we” have the power to prevent. The importance of Branch’s comment gets lost without close examination. Bass speaks of the Yaak Valley: his world, his community. The extensions of land and people operate
in this kind of writing, from Bass’s neighbor’s to humanity at large, and from the Yaak Valley to wildernesses everywhere:

We all draw our sustenance directly from this land. We draw it spiritually, every time we step outside and look up at the mountains, or even—especially, perhaps—when we close our eyes and sleep at night, knowing the wildness is still out there; and we draw our sustenance from the valley directly, physically, as well. We cut our firewood from the forests; we gather berries, fish, grouse, mushrooms, venison from the forest. We garden, gathering its heavy rain and brief sunlight. The wildness sustains us. We are all here and not somewhere else, because we love the valley the way it is. (Bass 50)

Bass makes no attempt to hide the fact that he speaks of the Yaak specifically. But by focusing on such a particular place and its people, Bass’s jeremiad extends all the beauty, mystery, and magic of the Yaak, as well as the challenges facing the local community within the Valley, to all of America’s wild places and the country’s culture at large—a crucial, unique, and extraordinary move. After all, Brown Dog of the Yaak attempts to save just one valley. But even readers who may never travel to the Yaak identify with other places because of Bass’s transitive writing: Bass is part a of place and community; the Yaak Valley represents wilderness at large; and if the notions of environmental apocalypse brewing since Carson come to fruition, the Yaak, the wildernesses of the world, will no longer have the diversity, beauty, and mystery of the
particular places which inspire art, accommodate spirituality, and provoke imagination for all people.

* * *

A line of characteristic orange road-lights that cut through the dark after the exit of the EJMT guided drivers down the steep hill following the tunnel. I never really understood the effects of light pollution until I moved from Colorado to Washington DC. The millions of artificial lights in D.C. subsume stars with their constant, stale, milky-orange glow. I feel fortunate to hail from a place where light pollution is for the most part at a minimum, but when I looked at those orange lights lining the road, I thought about the satellite images that have been taken above the United States at night. East of the Mississippi, a grid-like mess of dots stretches across the dark landscape like a fish-net cover. The west offers more interspersion between lights, but it’s filling quickly. Denver, Boulder, Ft. Collins, and Colorado Springs create a bright constellation and then, like the tail of a tadpole, a thin line of light can be seen moving west from the city: I-70 and its proximal mountain towns. Fortunately, light pollution creates more a nuisance than a harmful threat. The real and immediate dangers to environmental and human health that range from local to global levels are associated with traffic congestion. Direct combustion emissions include, among other gases, carbon monoxide (CO) and particulate matter that is ten microns in diameter or smaller.
(PM10). According to the Colorado Air Quality Control Commission, CO is detrimental to weakened cardiovascular systems and deprives the body of oxygen. PM10, born of road dust and engine exhaust, affects lung and heart function, strains the respiratory system, and weakens the immune system (“Report”). On a greater scale, in the realm of global warming, the consequences of the American need for oil have come to the fore in our environmental consciousness. According to the Environmental Defense Fund, American autos emit more than 333 million tons of Carbon Dioxide (CO2) annually, more that one-fifth of this country’s total CO2 emissions (“Time”). That mythical river of red lights stretched out in front of our car ever since Silverthorne presented even direr consequences than the stories of old—this river exceeded its banks to create a fog of poisonous gas up and down the valley.

Furthermore, local communities along the I-70 corridor, those that rely on the economic boon of tourism, have been hit hard by the increasing congestion problems. Drivers afraid to lose their spot in the traffic line or too impatient to stop in for food and goods tend to stay in their cars and hope for the best. I had two tourists in my own car. I had hoped to show Matt and Crystal a representative taste of Colorado. Was a monster traffic jam to be the indelible moment of their trip? How was their experience being defined by inhaling the toxic fumes of cars on all sides? What happens when people begin to gauge the quality of their outdoor experience by the ease with which they were able to reach their destination? Are we to weigh the costs of congestion against the intangible mysteries and expanse of the outdoor world? And worse yet, if
the hindrances to the access of the outdoor world deter the attempt to access it, what is the fate of the desire to plunge into the outdoor world? A vicious cycle looms: we need the ability to access the beauties and magic of wilderness if we ever want to save it. Place-connectedness is essential for the fate of this world.

* * *

Rick Bass strongly emphasizes the importance of place-connectedness when advocating for the Yaak: “There is no choice. If you love a piece of country, or an issue, and see that subject being harmed, you have to act. Your unannounced love is almost surely one-sided, unrequited, otherwise—but pipe-dream thin, insubstantial” (71). Bass’s anger, although not as insidious as Abbey’s, is certainly palpable. And like a lot of environmental writers, this anger stems from love and grief—unquestionable, passionate love for wild places and the sorrow incurred at the thought of their loss. As such, Rick Bass’s writing is overtly and rhetorically political. Michael Branch rightly warns that “while “imaginative literature” retains the scent of immortality, writing with an explicit political agenda often strikes readers as circumscribed or ephemeral” (227). This of course is true despite the indelible environmental lyricism which permeates Bass’s work. Ultimately, just as Abbey asks his audience to throw his book as if it were a rock at something shiny, so too would Bass ask us to transform all the
celebration, rage, and loss conveyed in his books about the Yaak and turn them into
action. He would happily trade in all of his work if it guaranteed the prevention of
more roads being built in the Yaak Valley: “I would trade any book for one hundred
seventy-five acres of wilderness . . . Warblers, elk music, starlight on the fur of
sleeping wolves, wild trout—I would trade a book for that” (87). Activism may be
ephemeral, but “It adds up . . . Like ten thousand windy days sanding smooth some
ridge, so that one day, currents of scent travel down that ridge in a slightly different
direction: setting into motion a slightly different chain of events” (Bass 120).

The extremity of his voice, however, compared to Carson’s veiled implications
of the public’s complicity, Abbey’s alienating venom, and certainly the more rhapsodic
tune of other nature writers, creates different feelings of discomfort in readers. Bass’s
brand of rhetoric occurs on two levels: overt entreaties and one of the more
complicated metaphors in nature writing. First of all, Bass implicates his readers by
imploring them on behalf of the Yaak: “I don’t care if you read my books. I don’t care
if someone says nice things about them, or mean ones. I’ve heard plenty of both, and
it’s just words, wind-drifted and gone-past . . . But please, save the last roadless areas
in the Yaak” (121). Bass asks readers not just to think or feel for the Yaak, but to do
something about it. He challenges an ingrained passivity by offering specific
information about how readers can contribute to saving the Yaak. Branch accurately
sums Bass’s transition from green jeremiad to rhetorical entreaty to individual readers:
In forcing us to see what is being lost in the Yaak, he provokes us; in asking us to recognize the value of what we are losing everywhere in the West, he disconcerts us; by asking us to join a letter-writing campaign on behalf of an endangered place, he requests that we join him in an act of faith—faith in the value of community, democracy, and wilderness . . . At the heart of Bass’s elegiac art is advocacy; at the core of his advocacy, anger; at the source of his anger, grief; at the root of his grief, love. (242)

This nicely sums up Bass’s overt activism—a self-reflexive notion that preoccupies the author throughout the book.

A second and conceptually more difficult notion of activism, but no less reflexive in exercise, occurs when Bass plants a unique musing early in his book to create a complex metaphor:

What if you were to carve or sculpt some creature from the imagination, something that to your way of thinking might fit the surrounding landscape—a white mythic bird, say, in a landscape of gray stone and snow—and set that carved bird out in a field of marsh, and then had flocks of similar birds appear from out of the sky—birds that had never been seen before? . . . Do the hands prophesy the motion of the land—shapes to come? Do stories prophesy the movements of things to come, as a downcutting river prophesies the shape of the river to come, the river below? (57-58)
These thoughts question the constructive qualities the imagination can offer the natural world. If landscapes can sculpt subjectivity, how might creativity benefit the land? These questions are not as rhetorical—as in, not meant to be answered—as they may seem. Bass speaks of his own work when asking these questions. At the end of the book, he asks “Can hope and desire create physical shapes?” (119). In other words, can all of Bass’s hopes and desires, recognized in Colter and manifested throughout Brown Dog of the Yaak, translate into the kind of action that will shape the Yaak Valley by saving it? Bass offers a self-reflexive love story between a man and his dog which portrays the link Weltzien calls the “conjunction between the dire and the beautiful” (106). He simultaneously asks for readers’ help while questioning the very efficacy of such a request. From the love of his home, this landscape, the Yaak, springs forth the action of activism on many different levels. He hopes these notions will influence readers to consider both their own loved places and connections between wilderness and wildness, but more importantly to Bass, convince readers to enter a fight on behalf of the Yaak.

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I can’t in good conscious argue against the route chosen for the construction of Colorado’s section of I-70—I am as complicit as any, perhaps more, in my extensive use of the freeway. Nonetheless, a number of environmental impacts are attributed to
the massive scar of concrete that cuts through the heart of Colorado. Among the pollutants, both emitted and noise-related, water impacts—for example, the negative effects of roadway run-off into natural creeks—and erosion problems, are the effects on wildlife. According to CDOT, agencies have identified fourteen critical wildlife movement and migration routes which traditionally crossed over the route of I-70. These now barricaded wildlife linkage zones restrict wildlife movement and reduce access to important habitats (“I-70”). The best we can do now for wildlife is hope to mitigate the impact this corridor has caused. As we moseyed past Georgetown, I looked into the darkness of the hills opposite the town and wondered about the effects of this corridor on us humans. If I-70 created a lateral barrier for wildlife, these kinds of traffic jams create a linear barrier to humans also seeking critical habitats. When I think about how influential those trips to the mountains were when I was a child, it saddens me to think that a current generation of youngsters may be turned off by the congestion they experience on this road. Is the beauty and magic and mystery of particular places diminished by tedious journeys to reach them?

In the 1950’s, in the wake of a World War, when America looked to industry as a source of pride and protection, a national interstate system was planned and built. Today we exist in an increasingly globalized and fragmented society. But a new kind of war looms on the horizon; in fact, we’ve been swept up in it for decades, but without tangible consequences, notice has been a long-time coming. The potential for environmental disaster that we face at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first
centuries promises all the apocalyptic mayhem warned rhetorically by a number of different authors since Rachel Carson. Although discussing solutions to problems facing I-70 may seem minor when facing the umbrella of global warming, we must remember Rick Bass’s words: “It adds up. Like a thousand freezing nights, or ten thousand, cracking frost-wedges in a field of boulders” (120). In other words, if we are able to unify behind a central organizing principle—combating the imminent danger of global warming—it will need to begin on the level of isolated and individual problems. The attachment to place, all the love and passion and grief wrapped up in saving such places, represents the systemic needs of the planet. We can’t see the forest for the trees? The cliché has become obsolete. Today, we must see the forest for the trees.
Chapter 4: Al Gore

Al Gore has spent his life working hard as a governmental official and an environmentalist. As a high-level politician, his deeply-rooted desire to protect the natural world has gained the kind of attention necessary to enact true global change. *Earth in the Balance* benefits from Gore’s perspective as a political official. He extends the rhetorical devices relied upon since Rachel Carson beyond mere advocacy. His book details a comprehensive plan Gore finds necessary to avoiding the disastrous consequences waiting for a world that refuses to take urgent action.

I first learned of the book after the 2006 documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. Both the effects of reading *Earth in the Balance* and the fact that I read it after watching the documentary have had a large impact on my thinking about the efficacy
of environmental writing as a form of advocacy in the twenty-first-century. The book played a large part in my decision to gear my graduate work toward environmental advocacy, and has prompted my desire to explore the possibilities of adding my own voice to the environmental world in the realm of politics.

* * *

Whenever I drive around Colorado, a feeling of pride inspires a sense of duty to give back to my community. These feelings are greatest when I have the privilege hosting visitors. When I get to act tour guide, like with Matt and Crystal, I see my home state with fresh eyes. By the time we were passing Idaho Springs, it was getting late. Jon and I had planned on taking Matt and Crystal to Beau Jo’s Pizza, home of The Challenge—twelve to fourteen pounds of crust, green peppers, onions, mushrooms, pepperoni, sausage, and hamburger which, if successfully eaten by two people, earns those lucky gluttons t-shirts—and a staple to all outdoor enthusiasts returning from an adventure in the Colorado Rockies. But I had to get Matt and Crystal to an early flight the next morning, and our patience was taxed with close to two more hours of driving or worse to return to Boulder. We slowly passed the well-preserved Charlie Taylor Waterwheel across the highway from Idaho Springs—a symbol and reminder of the gold rushes in Colorado in the mid-nineteenth century. The Denver Conventions and Visitors Bureau-website mentions that the Pikes Peak gold rush in 1859 transformed
Idaho Springs and surrounding mountain towns into bustling communities of prospectors. Railroads were built to accommodate the transportation of gold down to Denver. Once the boom of the gold rush in Colorado died down in the first few decades of the twentieth-century, the railroads were stripped for scrap metal (“Denver”). I joked about how lucky Matt and Crystal were to get such a good, close-up view of the Waterwheel as we passed it at ten miles-per-hour, and thought about the link to the past the iconic Waterwheel created. What other kinds of links do the extant, mining-era structures offer? What has happened to the lengths of area where locomotives once delivered gold and silver to Denver? Today, historic train-rides are offered to tourists in areas like Georgetown, the Royal Gorge, Silverton, and Durango. Would it be possible to transform symbolic links to the past into practical commuter links in the future? I am not the first or only person to think about using some type of train transportation along the I-70 corridor where rails once existed. The Rocky Mountain Rail Authority (RMRA), in 2008, began to study the feasibility of creating a commuter railroad along both I-70 and I-25 to ease traffic. All Coloradoans know the risks of finding traffic jams during peak tourist seasons, including those serving in government. Governmental organizations like the RMRA and I-70 Coalition have been created in response to increasing congestion—they represent the arms that stretch from the greater federal government down to local jurisdictions throughout Colorado. In the last few years, these organizations have begun formulating plans to alleviate traffic throughout Colorado, and are vital in addressing individual communities’ needs.
I believe that local solutions to local problems are invaluable to the greater good of the environmental movement. The appeal to local place, and people’s attachment to such places, is critical when asking those people to stand up for conservation and preservation. The warnings we have received concerning world-wide, environmental apocalypse rooted in the dangers of global warming, call for a large-scale and unified solution to such problems. Former Vice-President Al Gore has stepped into a position of leadership, unification, and authority on the dangers of global warming in order to spark the world into the action of saving our environment, our planet. But even Gore’s global perspective can be traced to his local roots. Gore has led a life of environmentalism since childhood: he fought erosion on his Tennessee farm, learned about *Silent Spring* from discussions with his mother, learned about climate change at college, and eventually brought all this knowledge and experience to congress. But when his son suffered a near-fatal car accident in 1989, Gore’s life came into focus. It was then that he knew what was important to him and he committed to fight for what he loved: his love of place, his love of family, and his commitment to social responsibility lie at the foundation of his work.

The greatest strength of *Earth in the Balance* lies in Gore’s ability to speak from the perspective of a politician. The book utilizes a holistic approach to ecology
and history to create a comprehensive guide about the evolution of the crisis facing humanity, and methodically explains a plan—dubbed the Global Marshall Plan alluding to the plan General Marshall and President Truman enacted in order to rebuild Western Europe after World War II and prevent the spread of Communism—with which to confront global warming:

With the original Marshall Plan serving as both a model and an inspiration, we can now begin to chart a course of action. The world’s effort to save the environment must be organized around strategic goals that simultaneously represent the most important challenges and allow us to recognize, measure, and assess our progress toward making those changes. (305)

His plan calls for the implementation of five strategic goals, the importance of which is underscored by Gore’s use of bold print: “the stabilizing of world population,” “the rapid creation and development of environmentally appropriate technologies,” “a comprehensive and ubiquitous change in the economic ‘rules of the road’ by which we measure the impact of our decisions on the environment,” “the negotiation and approval of a new generation of international agreements,” and “the establishment of a cooperative plan for educating the world’s citizens about our global environment” (306-306). For fifty-three pages after mention of these goals, Gore specifically details the myriad steps needed to employ such a plan, and their benefits. Each goal addresses technical feasibility, and the role America needs to
play in the future. The perspective of the proffered solutions and policy suggests a scope of vision only available to those who have an intimate and thorough understanding of governmental process.

Gore’s most engaging rhetoric occurs when he calls upon individual Americans to rise up to face this global challenge. The persuasive rallying cry against the frightening prospect of the future gains force when he invokes the trials Americans have faced and worked through in the past—he plays on cultural moments of success that have come to define America’s place in civilization:

We declared our liberty and then won it, establishing a new country. We devised a new from of government. We freed slaves. We gave women the right to vote. We took on Jim Crow and segregation. We cured polio and helped eradicate smallpox. We landed on the moon. We brought down communism and helped end apartheid . . . We even solved a previous global environmental crisis—the hole in the stratospheric ozone layer—because Republicans and Democrats, rich nations and poor nations, businessmen and scientists, all came together to shape a solution. (xxiii)

Gore’s inspiration appeals to the belief that we are truly part of a generational mission. He believes we have something that few generations have the privilege of knowing: the exhilaration of a compelling moral purpose, a shared and unifying cause, a central organizing principle of world civilization. This rhetoric of community, inspiration,
challenge, and power to overcome—all prototypical characteristics of “America’s perseverance” throughout its history—fills readers with a sense of duty and excitement for a global cause.

* * *

My sense of commitment has been greatly informed by people like Al Gore. After reading *Earth in the Balance*, I began to investigate the myriad problems attributed to traffic congestion nation-wide and in Colorado. According to the World Population Balance website, America accounts for five-percent of the world’s population and is responsible for twenty-three-percent of the world’s energy consumption; the combined energy consumption of the five other countries leading in population—China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, and Pakistan—is less than America’s; and at the current rate of growth in this country, the U.S. census projects a double in our population over the next eighty years (“Population”). Of course, many factors contribute to the umbrella of total energy consumption, but the Local Governments For Sustainability-website reports that the transportation sector alone—transportation, industry, residence, and business sectors make up total emissions—accounts for thirty-three-percent of the total emissions. Of that percentage, sixty-percent is caused by gasoline for cars and light trucks (“Mayors”). These kinds of facts make the studies done for the RMRA exciting and necessary. A study conducted by Heart
Communications compared emission levels of Maglev trains—a magnetically-levitated train being considered in the RMRA feasibility study—and the average commuter car. The study reveals the need to build, as quickly as possible, a high-speed commuter railway in Colorado: a four-hundred-mile commute by one car takes over seven hours (assuming no accidents, traffic, or inhibiting weather), and emits .77 pounds of CO2 per passenger mile; a Maglev train, on the other hand, takes under three hours to travel the same distance, and emits .47 pounds of CO2 per passenger mile. That is, a four-hundred-mile trip on a Maglev, besides being a quieter, smoother, and far less dangerous ride, would save commuters three hours and produce nearly forty-percent less CO2 emission than traveling by car (“Quain”).

These staggering statistics make the prospect of a high-paced commuter railway throughout Colorado essential. If deemed feasible, the plans for the proposed commuter railroad call for a line running vertically from Wyoming to New Mexico along the I-25 corridor, and horizontally from Denver International Airport to Utah along the I-70 corridor with off-shoots to towns/resorts like Winter Park, Breckenridge, Aspen, and Steamboat—popular tourist destinations north or south of the highway. When weighing the pros and cons of replacing a significant chunk of traffic with railways along these corridors, one need not search much further than a number of points researched by the RMRA. The construction of the proposed railway would provide a number of benefits to Colorado, including: “the most energy efficient and environmentally friendly (green) transportation alternative . . . diversity in Colorado’s
transportation investment . . . Colorado’s residents and visitors [would have] an additional travel choice and alternative to driving” (“RMRA”). The construction of a high-speed commuter railway in Colorado would result in environmental benefits, noise-pollution reduction, and ease the impacts of congestion (time waste, the inability of emergency vehicles to respond to accidents, and the economic struggles of local communities contiguous to I-70).

* * *

Besides Gore’s major contributions to the environmental movement from the perspective of a politician, the majority of *Earth in the Balance* relies on many of the same rhetorical devices utilized by the above authors. Gore’s invocation of the green jeremiad is the most evident rhetoric in *Earth in the Balance*, the whole of which is an urgent jeremiad. Cason’s apocalyptic rhetoric functions as an archetype for subsequent writers, and the level of global impact conveyed in her work reaches a hyperbolic level in Gore’s writings: “Unless we act boldly and quickly, some of the leading scientific experts are now telling us that without dramatic changes to cut the pollution that causes global warming, we are in grave danger of crossing a point of no return within the next ten years!” (xviii). He uses the same language of Carson’s holistic ecology emphasizing that we are part of the whole and that the perspective of treating the earth as something separate from civilization will blind us from how close we are to pushing
our planet out of balance. Expert-backed timelines convey the urgency of his voice and the dire circumstances the planet, and its people, face. Unlike Carson, however, Gore takes no steps to veil implications. Carson had cause to point fingers at government and chemical corporations to assail the proliferation of DDT, but in the current global crisis, humanity itself is anathema to the health of the planet:

our bizarre focus on short-term thinking and instant gratification—not just as individuals, but more important in the behavior of markets, national economies, and political agendas—has led to a systematic exclusion on long-term consequences in our decisions and policies . . .

The results of this profoundly new relationship between humans and the earth are devastating. It is now not so much a relationship as a collision.

(Gore xvi)

Given its scope, Gore’s critique runs the risk of alienating readers by harshly criticizing humanity and its status-quo ideologies. Gore presents radical and scary findings difficult for ordinary citizens to comprehend. He tries to move around this difficulty by comparing the impending doom of the world to one of the worst social atrocities of the twentieth-century: the Holocaust. Despite the warning signs, and worse, the proof of photographed concentration- and death-camps, the world was slow to respond to Hitler:

But if it took a long time for the world to respond to Hitler, because of him it took only a short time for Roosevelt to respond to Einstein’s
letter about building an atomic bomb. A threshold of moral alertness had been crossed . . . Now warnings of a different sort signal an environmental holocaust without precedent. But where is the moral alertness that might make us more sensitive to the new pattern of environmental change? (Gore 177)

Gore amps up his rhetoric to give readers a frame of reference for the severity of the crisis at hand, and, at the same time, to open the door to prevention. If we could do it all over again, surely the world would respond faster to the horrific truths of the Holocaust. Gore says we face a crisis of a different kind, but with the potential for even more loss than Hitler was able to inflict. He challenges readers, and indeed, all of humanity to respond to climate change and respond now.

Like Carson, Gore departs from the iconoclastic, place-oriented voice of Abbey. Nonetheless, similar rhetorical elements do stand out between the anarchist of the 1960s and the elected official of the 1990s. Specifically, Gore picks up on the Abbey-esque notions of the importance of freedom. This idea extends the frightening analogy of global calamity and the Holocaust. Gore argues that humanity’s battle against its own environmentally destructive capabilities is a continuation of the struggles to fight against totalitarianism:

I believe that the emerging effort to save the environment is a continuation of these struggles, a crucial new phase of the long battle for true freedom and human dignity. My reasoning here is simple: free
men and women who feel individual responsibility a particular part of
the earth are, by and large, its most effective protectors, defenders, and
stewards. (275)

Where Abbey argues that wilderness provides the last vestiges of freedom from
establishments, Gore understands freedom to be a necessary presupposition to the
defense of the environment. Gore might not support Abbey’s illicit actions in the name
of freedom, and Abbey would certainly have a difficult time endorsing anyone
operating within the bureaucratic ranks of government, but on this point they agree: the
love of earth leads people to protect its places.

Of the other three authors mentioned, Gore’s writing most conspicuously
departs from the rhetoric of Rick Bass. Where Bass dedicates a book to a dog, a valley,
and the ideas of art and activism, in the hopes of earning thousands of acres of the
Yaak Valley a wilderness designation, Gore sets out to tackle the major problems of a
planetary crisis. Before offering a detailed and comprehensive plan to stabilize our
global climate, and take steps toward securing its safety in the future, Gore reflects on
the interdisciplinary approach he has taken in studying and understanding the health of
the planet:

Having attempted in earlier chapters to understand the crisis from the
perspectives offered by the earth sciences, economics, sociology,
history, information theory, psychology, philosophy, and religion, I now
want to examine, from my vantage point as a politician, what I think can be done about it. (269-270)

Readers are indeed bombarded by a barrage of overwhelming facts and frightening statistics. This kind of careful and thorough analysis does do a great deal to inform a lay-audience of the pressing problems at hand. But his departure from any notion of specific place, combined with the staggering amount of information he presents, risks alienating readers by overwhelming them. As seen above, the notion of place is crucial to any hope of changing paradigms at the individual level; both Bass and Abbey have exemplified this thought well, and where Carson lacks particular place in her writing, she makes up for it in her lyricism and “novel-like” momentum. At the end of the book Gore details the political response necessary to change the course of this crisis with his Global Marshall plan. But aside from voting for politicians who are capable and willing to employ such actions, how might the average person benefit from such a plan?

It may have been this kind of realization that led to the making of Gore’s film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, in 2006. The documentary conveys the same amount of information as *Earth in the Balance*, but transforms a four-hundred-page book into a one-hundred-minute movie. This may be a comment on the transformation of American/global society since the days of Rachel Carson. While both *Silent Spring* and *Earth in the Balance* were best-sellers in their own time, a massive change in the preferred medium for news media has occurred since the early 1960s. *Silent Spring*
appeared when TV media was still a burgeoning industry. Today, TV media is the status quo and reaches a much broader demographic than print. The visibility and accessibility of *An Inconvenient Truth* had the ability to reach millions of viewers and played a large role in helping Gore share the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize. These facts necessarily question the role literary activism will play in the future of the environmental movement.

* * *

I often wonder how my own voice will add to the environmental movement. This project was inspired by prominent voices in the movement, but outlines many of the difficulties facing each author. The difficulty I find in advocating for a Colorado commuter railway lies in the seemingly indeterminate amount of time it will take to begin construction on a much-need alternative to the current traffic crisis. The RMRA’s feasibility study is due sometime this year (2009). The best-case scenario, if the railway is deemed feasible, includes initial planning for the rail-system to begin in 2010. Then, if financing is secured, construction could begin between 2015 and 2020. This scenario assumes a lot. The project is bound to be plagued by a number of governmental processes. Michael Penny, chairman of the I-70 Coalition, details the difficulties of constructing a railway in a press release posted on the I-70 Coalition website. First of all, a complete Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement
(PEIS) is required before planning can begin. The PEIS evaluates all the alternatives involved in major transportation endeavors—it came into existence when the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was established in 1970 in order to address concerns about federal intrusion upon local communities. Upon completion of the PEIS, a Record of Decision (ROD) is made which outlines the decisions and plans for planning and construction to begin; that is, if the RMRA’s study is deemed feasible, it will likely be included in the ROD. In 2000, the Colorado Department of Transportation undertook the PEIS and the ROD is expected in 2010. In short, if all goes according to plan, construction of a railroad between the years of 2015 and 2020 would be the result of a study which began in 2000. In other words, without any set-backs, governmental studies and processes would take fifteen to twenty years to accomplish the beginnings of construction! A second problem revolves around the boundaries of the current PEIS—the 2000-study includes Golden to Glenwood Springs. According to Penny, “for rail to be feasible, a run from DIA to Eagle Airport would be required” (“Penny”). This means another PEIS needs to be drafted and analyzed in order to create another ROD, significantly pushing back construction dates. And given the expense of the project, there is no getting around time-draining federal laws given the need for federal money. Indeed, funding provides the last major hurdle to the construction of a railroad. A rough estimate of the project in 2006-dollars weighs in at eight-billion. This significant chunk of money will require the cooperation and support of local, state, federal, and private monies:
State dollars will mean a ballot measure to fund a statewide transportation solution . . . currently in process at the direction of Governor Ritter. Availability of Federal funding for transit projects across the country is very much tied to the 2009 Federal Transportation Reauthorization bill . . . This bill is not expected to be passed until 2010 or 2011. (“Penny”)

Thus, as citizens, we are at the whim of the slow-churning wheels of government, and must remain proactive by following updates on the RMRA, I-70 Coalition, and CDOT websites. A vocal constituency will help influence politicians to make the necessary decisions.

Waiting and researching and waiting some more—the unsettling realization for me is the knowledge that we likely face another decade of the same. There’s plenty of advice on the websites about how to avoid traffic, but it is framed in language geared toward avoiding the nuisance of congestion. The conspicuous absence of dialogue regarding the environmental effects of decades and more traffic congestion along the I-70 corridor frightens and angers me. Plans for the railway are in the works and that’s terrific, but until the environment itself becomes the impetus behind such major operations, the various and slow facets of government will have to be relied upon.

The discussion of environmental impacts on local places will be an important arena in the future in which environmental writers will need to express themselves. Even if practical goals (like the construction of a railway) remain the same, the
conversations about them need to change from economic and technical difficulties to environmental benefit. I hope I can insert my voice on behalf of the environment when advocating for the necessity of a commuter railway in Colorado. Matt, Crystal, Jon, and I spent the rest of the ride home that night in July talking about the state of our environment. I can’t speak for my friends, but between my experiences on I-70 and the environmental reading I’ve done, I’m ready to stand up for the sake of the environment; stand up for what Gore presents as the future organizing principle behind which civilization will either rally or disappear. As mentioned above, Gore’s best rhetoric stems from his presentation of the challenge we will face in the immediate future: the challenge to come together to fix the problems plaguing the earth. He says that “research in lieu of action is unconscionable . . . a choice to ‘do nothing’ in response to the mounting evidence is actually a choice to continue and even accelerate the reckless environmental destruction that is creating the catastrophe at hand” (37). Research and action will be necessary to successfully combat global warming, and environmental writers, as a voice for the natural world, must continue to guide conversations back to the earth. The earth, after all, has been warning us about future crisis for some time. If we fail to heed and respect these warnings, humanity will fall victim to its own obliviousness.
I have only lived outside of Colorado three times in my life. The first time I studied abroad in Switzerland for six months. The second time I taught English in southern Japan for a year. And my time spent here in Georgetown University’s two-year graduate program marks the third. Despite the alpine beauty of the Swiss Alps, the bucolic serenity of Japan, and the diversity and culture in D.C., I have always felt the pull to return to my native Colorado. No matter where I’ve ever lived, or traveled for that matter, I always begin longing for open spaces, dry air, and huge, exposed mountains skirted by dense forests.

Although Washington is among the smaller, and certainly squatter cities in America, my time here has produced within me nostalgia for Colorado like I’ve never
known. It was only natural that I would dive into the world of nature writing both to avoid watching the constant stream of planes fly into Regan National Airport from my apartment window, and to mitigate feelings of removal from the natural world. And given the critical atmosphere provided by a graduate English program, and frankly, some egregiously wasteful conduct by fellow classmates, I bent my environmental studies toward the activist realm and began reading and studying the literature of the environmental movement. The more I read, the more incensed I became about the torpid response to the clearly identified and urgent problem of global warming. The world’s reaction to this crisis seems to be rooted in a combination of apathy, inconvenience, indifference, and skepticism. These attitudes are what environmental advocates gear their writing toward. I have studied the rhetoric of the environmental movement to understand better these attitudes, and learn how to combat them with my own voice, my own writing.

I do believe more people around the world are beginning to take climate change more seriously, and steps toward global stability are being made. I also believe, however, given the history of civilization, that social and environmental responsibility for its own sake will play a small role in restoring the balance of the earth. Tangible consequences, unfortunately, seem necessary to affect large-scale change. Rachel Carson successfully began the environmental movement because *Silent Spring* exposed the direct and immediate consequences of DDT. Carson told parents that the products they were buying were poisoning their children, and people listened. Today, of course,
the adverse, but long-term effects of global warming do not provide the same sense of urgency to the average individual.

This concern is the reason why I have studied environmental rhetoric; it is the reason I have battled with a foundational question throughout this project: what role will writers of environmental advocacy play in the future of the environmental movement? When I consider the question, I look back at the work of the writers I studied for this project. I have experienced both optimistic hope and deep and unnerving skepticism when regarding their work. Rachel Carson sparked the environmental movement and her work began the eventual ban on DDT. She provides an amazing, but strangely ironic precedent: *Silent Spring* single-handedly changed world-wide attitudes, but it is dangerous to wait for or assume another silver-bullet will come along to change our current climate crisis. The environmental battles of the future will be greater in scope and will require new and complex solutions rendering precedent obsolete. I believe that the only way to achieve true global change will be to harness the accumulated energy of individuals world-wide, all gearing efforts toward the challenges of local environmental problems. Both Edward Abbey and Rick Bass are exemplars of how to engage readers with words about specific place. Their writing teaches people to focus on individual relationships with the land; when we love places, we protect them. But the roads in Arches National Park that Abbey spoke out against were eventually built; Glen Canyon eventually dammed. And to date, Bass has been unsuccessful in acquiring wilderness designation for the Yaak Valley. Future
environmental writers will need to possess the ability to convey place-connectedness and work with the greater bureaucracies that can help individuals enact change. Al Gore provides a connection between those who care about specific places and the processes of the federal government. His book has a lot to teach the public about the huge realities of global warming and offers equally huge plans to combat it. But I wonder how the individual absorbs comprehensive, intergovernmental solutions like those he offers. A balance lies between the combined efforts of these writers, and the future of the environmental movement depends on finding it.

For much of this project, I thought I might concede that literary operations of environmental advocacy would play ineffectual roles, if any at all, in the future of the environmental movement. But somewhere along the way, I realized I might be trying to base conclusions on the wrong kind of foundational question. I learned that trying to search for pragmatic and tangible results to environmental activism might only hinder the movement. I think a better question to ask is this: in what ways can environmental writing adapt to a twenty-first-century audience with new environmental challenges? And more importantly, how can I best insert my own voice within this movement?

I didn’t know it when I began this project, but the inclusion of my environmental essay has helped me discover these more productive foundational questions. I hope the RMRA finds a railway in Colorado feasible, and that sooner rather than later, we begin taking real steps toward its construction. But more important than the essay I’ve written are the tools I’ve acquired while writing it. The
environmental movement is built on both action and dialogue, and writers must be responsible for continuing to guide the conversations in the most productive ways possible. Originally, I thought the use of the essay would prove that certain modes of academic writing are ineffectual in the world of environmental advocacy. But while tangible results born out of this project may be unlikely, I’ve equipped myself with new ways to raise awareness, and spent time thinking critically about how I can best advocate for the health of this planet. The old adage, don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good, is vital to keep in mind as we take steps toward re-adjusting climate change. The sooner we accept that, the faster and more productively we will fight the right battles.

As Bass might say, the mountains of Colorado have molded me; I will be moving back home this summer as the pull to return is once again too great to avoid. I plan to continue writing and voicing concern and raising awareness on behalf of the environment, but I will no longer formally study literature. Al Gore’s words, “research in lieu of action is unconscionable” (37) have greatly affected me: I have decided to take up work in U.S. Senator, Mark Udall’s Colorado office. I hope to use what I have learned here at Georgetown University to create change in Colorado in whatever capacity I can. I’ll never be done researching the challenges of the environmental movement, but I’m ready to begin acting.
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