DMZ ECOTOPIA / Ecoambiguity at the Demilitarized Zone, the world’s most fortified border and an accidental, eccentric ecological preserve. Ersatz deer watching over shrapnel on a concrete dais against a backdrop of rusting metal bamboo and healthy vegetation.

Photo by David Damrosch.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

comments and to my editor Tom Dwyer, copyediting coordinator Marcia LaBrenz, and the Board and staff of the University of Michigan Press for their expert editorial and production care.

My familial debts go back many years. Thank you to my parents, Karvel and Nora Thornber, for emphasizing the importance of independent thinking in scholarship and in life, and for giving me the privilege of growing up in a home spilling over with both math and science, and music and song, one that taught me respect for the many paths to knowledge. To my grandparents, Lois and Chalmers Thornber, for opening to us your home in the Cascades, with its miles of enticing trails just outside the front door, and for teaching me about the rich human and natural history of the Pacific Northwest. To my father and sister Carol Thornber, for sharing inspiring tales of your climbs on five continents. And to my spouse Tom Havens, for more than a decade of memorable journeys together in Asia.

While researching and writing this book I benefited greatly from the enthusiasm, questions, and perspectives of my sister-in-law Anne Havens Fuller and my three stepchildren and their families, world travelers and adventurers all: Bill Havens and Julie Hunt; Carolyn Havens Niemann and Michael, Adam, Jacob, and Matthew; and Kathy Havens Whitten and Emily and Nathaniel. My grandmother, parents, sister, brother-in-law Evan Preisser, and nieces Juliette and Katherine Thornber were wonderfully supportive and full of bons mots throughout. As always, my greatest debts are to Tom, whose eager reading of chapters hot off the printer and zeal for discussing concepts large and small regardless of the hour or time difference made working on the book even more of a pleasure, and whose wit and boundless love bring ever more joy to my life.

This book honors the past, especially my grandfather, whose career engineering and managing dams in Oregon and Washington embodied the environmental ambiguities I examine, and the generations of biologists and botanists in our family who preceded him, who worked both to improve human lives and to protect environments in the American and Canadian West, but who likely never imagined ecological devastation that is now all too common.

Even as Ecoambiguity honors the past, it looks to the future. I have dedicated this book to Adam, Jacob, Matthew, Emily, Nathaniel, Juliette, and Katherine—the next generation of our family, now enjoying the pleasures and facing the pressures of college, daycare, and everything in-between—in the hopes that in the years ahead you will come to treasure all the planet has to offer, and that no matter the paths you choose your lives will continue to overflow with learning, laughter, and love.

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Conventions

Chinese words are transcribed in pinyin, Japanese words in the modified Hepburn system used by Kenkyusha’s New Japanese-English Dictionary, and Korean words in a modified McCune-Reischauer system. Transcriptions of Korean at times are based on how syllables are written, not on how they are pronounced.

In cases where persons with East Asian names writing in East Asian languages list alternative transcriptions of their names, I give both the standard and the alternative transcriptions. In cases where titles of East Asian language sources incorporate words from other East Asian languages, I give these words as they are pronounced in the other East Asian language, followed by their standard transcription in brackets.

East Asian names are given in the customary East Asian order, with family name preceding personal name, except for cases of Western-language publications in which the name order is usually reversed. Macrons are omitted over long vowels in the most familiar Japanese place-names; breves are omitted over vowels in the most familiar Korean place-names.

Dates for writers and other key figures, many of which are not readily available in English-language scholarship, can be found in the notes and index. I refer to writers by pen name if that name is used more commonly than the birth name.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations from French, German, Italian, and Spanish, as well as from modern and classical Chinese, Japanese, and Korean are my own.
ONE of the oddities of people's interactions with their surroundings is that individuals who love, respect, or show fascination with nature often contribute, deliberately or inadvertently, to damaging or destroying it. Navajo spiritual guides have claimed that “digging up the earth to retrieve resources like coal and uranium ... is tantamount to cutting skin and represents a betrayal of a duty to protect the land.” Anthony Lee Sc., president of the Diné Hataalii Association, a group of about one hundred Navajo healers, has put it more bluntly: “As medicine people, we don’t extract resources.” And yet coal and uranium mining, the latter banned on their lands only in 2005, have for decades sustained the Navajo economy. The consequences have long been apparent—mining and power plant emissions have dirtied the waters and dulled the skies of their reservations—but only recently has the Navajo Nation made sustained calls to heal environments. In “Letter to Send in a Space Capsule” (2010) the contemporary American poet Lucille Lang Day amplifies this paradox: “We built enough nuclear bombs to incinerate or irradiate all life and fill the atmosphere with ash / ... As we burned fossil fuels / to run our factories and cut down forests / to build our towering cities, the Earth / grew warmer, the air turned grayer, / and the polar ice caps crumbled into the sea. / One by one, flowers, frogs, worms, and birds / began to disappear. It may sound strange, but most people cared deeply about the planet / and each other.” It does sound strange, but as the speaker of “Letter to Send” suggests by talking about “people” and by introducing herself simply as someone who “lived on the third planet circling an ordinary star,” these ambiguities characterize the relationships of many human cultures with the nonhuman.

Environmental degradation would be difficult enough to contain if the attitudes propelling it were entirely and obviously ecophobic. But damage to landscapes is even harder to prevent and remediate because people’s basic sympathy toward the nonhuman regularly accompanies behaviors that unleash (un)expected harm. Whether propagated by governments or private organizations, popular environmental discourse often underscores the need to respect other species, develop closer ties to the nonhuman, even learn to “love nature,” on the assumption that such approaches will promote environmental health. Sometimes these attitudes translate directly into actions that benefit the planet’s ecosystems. Yet many literary works argue that little prevents well-meaning individuals and even proclaimed environmentalists from acting in ways that harm ecosystems.

The Chinese writer Jiang Rong’s *Wolf Totem* (2004) depicts this dynamic most clearly, featuring an animal that is denied freedom, even life, by the very individual who adores it; Chen Zhen imprisons and ultimately kills the wolf to which he has become deeply attached. Chapter 5 discussed how *Wolf Totem* shows human abuse of the environment accelerating even in the face of easily predicted and highly undesired consequences. The present chapter is concerned less with conflicts between conditions and behaviors than with gaps between attitudes and behaviors, especially the phenomenon of loving nature to death. Like most texts treating the relationships between indigenous peoples and their environments, *Wolf Totem* offers examples of people (Mongols) with great respect for animals who nevertheless occasionally kill them somewhat gratuitously. More significant in this novel is the ambiguous relationship of an outsider with one of the grassland’s animals.

Unlike most Han Chinese, who openly detest wolves, Chen Zhen is fascinated by them. Averting a wolf attack not long after his arrival on the Inner Mongolian grasslands, and fascinated by the orderly retreat of the animals, he “fell under their spell, experiencing a combination of fear, reverence, awe, infatuation, and obsession toward the wolves of [this region].” For him the Mongolian wolf was not at all a living thing that merely had touched his soul. Instead, it was a living thing that had already struck his soul.” His soul not just touched, but struck ( jue bu shi jinjin chui li ta de linghun, er shi cengjing jichu le ta de linghun de shengwu), Chen Zhen is completely mesmerized and wonders how the animal can exert such a powerful pull over him (ruci jude de xiyi). One night during his first winter on the grasslands, after watching a dramatic struggle between a wolf and domestic animals plus their human owners, he decides to learn as much as he can about these impressive creatures and imagines raising one himself. He finds the perfect opportunity during his second year in Inner Mongolia when he and his friends raid a wolf den and bring home seven pups. Finally holding a wolf, Chen Zhen declares the animal “the most noble, the most valuable, and the most beautiful small life on the Mongolian grassland.” He decides to keep the strongest pup for himself and raise it to adulthood.

Chen Zhen is aware of some of the many contradictions between his feelings toward the wolves and his treatment of them. He truly admires the animals and hopes that increased contact with wolves will lead to greater un-
derstanding of them. But the compromises begin with kidnapping the litter. As he walks home, Chen Zhen recognizes that he has irrevocably changed multiple nonhuman lives and fears that wolves, led by the mother of the captured pups, will haunt him forever. The imagined reaction of the wolves awakens him to the prospect that he has “committed a big mistake.” Chen Zhen first blames his friends for abducting with an entire litter, claiming there would have been nothing wrong with his simply taking the largest and the strongest of the seven. But he quickly admits that even if he had acted alone the outcome probably would have been the same: “Stealing a litter of wolf pups represented victory, courage, profit. It brought him honor and made others treat him with increased respect. Compared to this, the seven small lives were as lightweight as grains of sand [xiào shēngmìng jīn shí bā shí yì yáng jíng de fān mǎ le].” Chen Zhen’s attitudinal conflict is conspicuous: he believes wolves noble and beautiful while also deeming them insignificant, and as plentiful and interchangeable as particles of sand; the comparison with sand is ironic considering that the more damage Chinese inflict on the grasslands, the more this sere substance replaces wolves. But of even greater importance is the disjunction between Chen Zhen’s reverence for the animals and his mistreatment of them.

This conflict only intensifies after the young men return home. Chen Zhen and his friend Daoerqi each decide to adopt a pup, leaving the future of the remaining five uncertain. Chen Zhen briefly contemplates raising all seven to adulthood, the narrator noting that the young man’s feelings toward wolves have intensified from delight to obsession. Recognizing that he cannot possibly rear the entire litter, Chen Zhen considers returning the five the young men cannot keep but decides that this too would be unfeasible. The thought process is revealing:

An idea suddenly flashed in his mind. Why not get back on his horse and return the remaining five pups to their den? But with the exception of Yang Ke, there was no one to go with him, and he didn’t dare go alone. Neither he nor his horses had the strength to endure the round trip, which would total more than four hours. At that moment the mother wolf was certainly crying, utterly despondent, howling madly beside her damaged den. If he were to return now, wouldn’t that be tantamount to looking for death?

Chen Zhen is deeply attached to wolves. And he recognizes that his having kidnapped the pups has likely devastated their mother. But not only does he falsely claim himself and his horse too weak for the journey back to the den despite their having recently completed the trip. He also does not ask his friend Yang Ke, whom he asserts is the only one who might make the journey with him, whether Yang would be willing to help him return the wolves. To be sure, Chen Zhen declares that revisiting the den would be suicidal, but coming when it does, this statement appears to be almost an excuse to rationalize his cowardice. And so they decide that Daoerqi will kill the unclaimed pups, while Chen Zhen sighs deeply, “There’s no other way [zhī nèng zhuì yáng le].” Watching the murder of the first wolf is almost more than he can tolerate: “It was as though Chen Zhen’s heart had fallen from his throat back into his chest. The pain was devoid of consciousness.” But still he does nothing. The narrative makes it clear that despite his protests to the contrary, there of course are options—Chen Zhen could have left the pups in their den in the first place, or, recognizing his mistake in separating them from their mother, he could have at least tried to convince Yang Ke to help him return them to their den. Yet his attraction to wolves in the abstract, combined with little thought about the well-being of individual wolves and then with simple cowardice, leads directly to the demise of five pups.

The contradictions continue as Chen Zhen begins to raise his wolf. He knows from the outset that the Mongols will not approve of his keeping a wolf as a pet and understands the reasoning behind their censure, but he disregards their wisdom. He believes that raising the pup will help him and ultimately Han Chinese gain a deeper understanding of wolves; this will be no small accomplishment, since the Han Chinese allegedly have feared and tormented these animals for thousands of years. Yang Ke believes that there will be many benefits to raising this wolf: “It seems as though raising wolves will be good for more than just studying them. We also can study human nature [renxīng], wolf nature [lángxīng], animal nature [shòuxīng], and domestication [jiāchùxīng] . . . It seems as though our first day of doing this has yielded impressive results.” Chen Zhen’s and Yang Ke’s goals are noble. Yet their myopic hyperopia, their preoccupation with a distant future of understanding not only wolves, or even just wolves and people, but both animals and relationships between animals and people, blinds them to established knowledge and present conditions, knowledge and conditions that if not taken into consideration make the future they envision nearly impossible.

Enraptured by his quickly growing pup, Chen Zhen refuses to listen to his Mongol friends. Citing both local tradition and Chinese law, they implore him to liberate the animal while it is still young enough to reestablish ties with wild wolves. Although initially enthusiastic about helping Chen Zhen raise the wolf, Yang Ke soon recognizes that this is not a viable enterprise. Yang Ke warns his friend that the Mongols are not the only ones who want
him to relinquish the animal; in a rare moment of solidarity, the resident Han Chinese also want him to dispose of it. Yang Ke expresses dismay at the inhumanity of Chen Zhen’s treatment of the pup:

“I’m not afraid of the responsibility. It’s just that it’s too pitiful to see this little wolf tied up with shackles all day long like a little prisoner. The animal that most loves freedom is the wolf. But now not a moment goes by when this wolf is not in chains. Are you hardhearted enough to do this? ... I can understand why father opposes your raising it. This truly blasphemes the gods!”

Chen Zhen’s heart was completely conflicted, but his words remained unyielding... “How could I not think of freeing the wolf and letting it return to the mountains? But I can’t release it now. There are still too many things that haven’t been made clear. The freedom of one little wolf is the freedom of a single wolf, but if in the future the grasslands are home to not even a single wolf, of what sort of freedom could we then speak? If that were to happen, you also would regret it.”

Likening the chained wolf to a prisoner and disturbed by what he sees, Yang Ke declares pitiful (tai kelian le) the spectacle of this incarcerated animal. More significant, he observes that wolves love freedom (ai ziyou) more than any other animal, making Chen Zhen’s treatment of this creature especially blasphemous (zhei zhen shi xiedu shenling a).

Chen Zhen’s heart is completely torn (xinli sbifen maodun); although their circumstances differ, like the elephant keeper in Murakami’s “The Elephant’s Disappearance,” discussed below, he keeps shackled an animal he greatly admires and imagines would be more content if permitted to run free. His rhetoric is grand and his aspirations lofty, yet his behaviors are anything but. Facilitating this gap between attitudes and actions is a gulf between beliefs and evidence, in Chen Zhen’s case the delusion that imprisoning this single wolf will grant him sufficient insights into wolves to change people’s behaviors toward them and ensure wolf populations freedom for years to come. He is correct in asserting that if in the future the grasslands were wiped clean of wolves the “freedom” of a single animal, something with which Yang Ke is deeply concerned, no longer would be germane. But there is no evidence that keeping the captured pup in shackles will allow Chen Zhen to understand its true nature, much less the true nature of wolves. On the contrary, there is considerable likelihood of the opposite: keeping a wolf in captivity, particularly under the conditions favored by Chen Zhen, likely will teach him far less about wolves in their “natural” state than about how they react to internment. This, paradoxically, is the opposite of what Chen Zhen seeks to accomplish.

With time, keeping the wolf becomes downright dangerous for both the animal and the Mongols. But even when the cub learns to howl and its cries, heard by wolves in the surrounding hills, put the village in jeopardy, Chen Zhen does not relent. To be sure, the wolf comes to enjoy spending time with its Chinese captor: “Whenever the little wolf heard Chen Zhen calling ‘Little Wolf,’ it happily ran over to him, was very much attached to him [gen ta qin], licked his hand, rubbed up against his knees, pounced on his stomach, even lay on the ground, opened up its legs, exposed its belly, and let Chen Zhen scratch it.” And when Chen Zhen returns home in the evening the wolf, having missed him (xiang ta), welcomes him warmly, its howls of old “utterly distant” (shifen yao yuan). Affection here goes both ways.

But this harmony is short-lived. Just several lines after declaring the cries of the wolves nearly forgotten, the narrator abruptly declares, “Bears can be led [qian], tigers can be led, lions can be led, elephants too can be led. The Mongolian wolf cannot be led.” This is a lesson Chen Zhen learns firsthand. The wolf refuses to accompany him to his new camp; the more Chen Zhen pulls its chain, the more the animal grows and digs in its heels, not surrendering until it has lost half the fur on its bleeding neck, rubbed raw its paws, and blunted its claws. Chen Zhen’s tears at this sight are said to “drip [di] into the wolf’s blood,” a very different form of intimacy than the two have previously enjoyed. Despite everything, Chen Zhen still hopes for a bright future, confessing to Yang Ke that he had dreamed of having a “genuine wild wolf friend” (zhouzheng de yelang pengyou) that would frolic with him in the grasslands, but that now he hopes to give the cub new teeth and free him in the mountains of Outer Mongolia, Yang Ke chastises him for harboring such idle fantasies and urges him to face reality (miandui xiandi).

And soon it becomes impossible not to do so. The larger the wolf grows, the more frustrated it becomes with its chain, pulling and yanking it so desperately that it seems “the wolf wouldn’t stop until it attained his goal, and wouldn’t hesitate to strangle itself to death [jihu buxi ba ziji leisi].” Even though the wolf continues to fight its captivity and its injuries become increasingly severe, even though Chen Zhen admits he knows just how cruel it is to imprison this animal, he refuses to release it into the wild, claiming that to do so would be lethal. He believes death in captivity preferable to dying in the wild. Rather than give the animal even a moment of freedom, Chen Zhen keeps it imprisoned to the bitter end, until finally, after enjoying one last moment together, he has no choice but to kill the animal he had hoped to “raise to old age”:
Chen Zhen fell to the ground in total despair... Bloody saliva dripped from the wolf's mouth, and he looked at Chen Zhen like an older wolf, as though he wanted to say something to him... Tears rained down Chen Zhen's face. He embraced the pup's neck and one last time touched its forehead and nose closely against his own...

Chen Zhen suddenly stood up, ran to the side of the yurt, and quietly grasped a spade with a broken handle. He turned his body, holding the spade behind him, and ran back to the pup, which was still sitting there panting hard, its legs shaking even more terribly. Chen Zhen hurriedly stepped behind him, raised the spade, and, using all his strength, smashed the back of the wolf's skull, by his neck [bounao]. The wolf didn't make a sound, softly falling to the ground, like a true Mongolian grassland wolf [zhenzheng de menggu caoyuan lang], holding out until the very end...

At that moment Chen Zhen felt as though his soul had been knocked out of him. He seemed to hear again the clanking sound of his soul rushing out of the top of his head. This time it seemed as though the soul that flew out would never again return.

The narrator accentuates the increasingly close bond between man and wolf—the two first enjoy friendly physical contact (licking hands, rubbing knees, scratching and pouncing on stomachs), then they mix bodily fluids (blood and tears), and finally they entangle souls, as both are destroyed.

But even more important, Wolf Totem shows Chen Zhen's intoxication with wolves and insistence on understanding these animals coming at the expense of their well-being; the man who had described his soul as being struck (jichu) by this animal himself strikes it to death. His acts have consequences just as deadly, albeit on a much smaller scale, as the Han Chinese invasion of Inner Mongolia. As discussed in chapter 5, Jiang Rong's novel highlights the trauma that can result from behaviors that defy transmitted knowledge and indisputable evidence. Even more striking in the case of Chen Zhen is the disparity between attitudes and the impacts of behaviors: Chen Zhen literally loves an animal to death.

Chen Zhen and Yang Ke are not the only individuals in Wolf Totem whose attitudes and behaviors conflict. In the case of the Mongols, who both revere and kill wolves, these disjunctions stem largely from disparities in wolf behaviors. The Mongols revere wolves because the animals help maintain grassland ecosystems, but they kill them because the animals mercilessly slaughter the Mongols' animals. As one of the Mongol elders reminds Chen Zhen, wolves are not to be killed en masse, but they in turn cannot be allowed to kill indiscriminately: "The grassland is a battlefield... Doesn't it distress you that the wolves used deception to kill a large group of horses? If we don't use violent means, how will we ever match them?" 19

Similarly, when Chen Zhen refuses to help kill the wolf cubs they have decided not to raise, the Mongol Daoerji appears to misunderstand his motives and mocks what he perceives to be another example of Han Chinese contradiction: "You Han Chinese have no courage. You really hate wolves, but you don't dare kill even a cub." 20 Yet in this instance the real contradiction lies within Daoerji. Jiang Rong's novel depicts Han Chinese as having for centuries both hated wolves and killed them wholesale. Daoerji, on the other hand, is concerned with the health of the same wolf pups that moments later he delights in killing. When Chen Zhen asks him to postpone for several days the death of the five wolf pups they have decided to kill, Daoerji asks what he plans to feed them in the interim, noting that they all will quickly die if they do not receive proper nourishment. He has no qualms about ending the lives of wolves himself, but he does not want to see them starve to death, however quickly. Not surprisingly, concern with the well-being of the wolves evaporates when Daoerji is given the all clear to kill the pups. The exhilaration he experiences at slaughtering the young animals is noteworthy:

The more Daoerji killed, the more excited he became, repeating [as he threw the animals into the air], "Up to [the deity] Tenggel [Tengri] you go, up there you'll enjoy a life of ease and comfort"... Five pitiful little wolf pups flew through the air, and five blood-drenched bodies fell to the earth. Chen Zhen swept all five dead pups into a dustpan and then looked up into the clouds and the sky for a long time, hoping that Tenggel had accepted their souls. Daoerji seemed to be utterly enjoying himself... He said, "There aren't many opportunities to kill five wolves in a single day. People fall far short of wolves. If a fierce wolf has a chance, it will kill a hundred, or even two hundred sheep at a time. What does it matter that I killed five wolves. It's getting late; I have to go and get my cattle home." After he finished speaking, he went over to pick up his [living] wolf pup. 21

This scene incorporates all manner of contradictions, including those between actions (Daoerji simultaneously tosses animals to their deaths and tells them that he hopes they will enjoy a peaceful life post mortem; he kills some animals and spares others) and those between attitudes (Daoerji believes wolves in general are a vital presence on the grasslands but thinks there is nothing wrong with killing five pups). Aspects of these contradictions are
extraterrestrial environmentalists penalizing a nation for destroying forests around the world by stripping this nation of its trees, and the megalomaniacal leader of a green movement intent not on improving environments but instead on increasing his own personal glory, regardless of the ecological cost. Although fantastical, these writings powerfully attack the failings, hypocrisy, and malevolence of those who protest environmental damage. Together, the works examined in this chapter reveal some of the limits and perils of environmental attitudes and rhetoric, particularly their unexpected role in enabling damage to ecosystems. But far from suggesting that individuals and societies abandon environmentalism, these texts confirm its strengths and highlight its promise, if pursued more energetically and with greater awareness of potentially harmful effects on ecosystems.

Injurious Fascination

While Jiang Rong's novel Wolf Totem features a young man who kills the very animal he loves, the Taiwanese writer Huang Chunming's "Set Free" (1987) depicts an older man who harms an animal whose heart beats in tandem with his own. Both men imprison animals to fulfill emotional needs. Ironically, Chen Zhen is much more concerned with the well-being of his wolf than the aging Awei is with his egret, but the egret is liberated whereas the wolf endures a prolonged death. As discussed in chapter 2, "Set Free" centers around a couple—Jinzu and Awei—who live in a small town that has been subjected to years of paralyzing contamination; their son has been imprisoned for protesting the destruction of the region's soil, water, and skies. Even so, Jinzu and Awei resent new government policies that designate their land a conservation area in order to remediate pollution. The protected status virtually guarantees an influx of birds, and since the couple is prohibited from catching those that feast on their fields, they almost certainly will go bankrupt. "Set Free" highlights the conflicting attitudes of family farmers and fishers toward conservation laws; chapter 2 demonstrates how in this story even individuals with the deepest attachments to ecologically ravaged spaces paradoxically believe they should be allowed to use these spaces as best suits them personally, with little regard for environmental health. In this chapter I am more interested in the gap between individual attitudes and actual treatments of the nonhuman. Although believing corporations have no right to degrade environments, Awei himself purposely disrupts a bird's life; despite believing that the government has no right to imprison his son Wentong, Awei imprisons an animal. To be sure, Huang Chunming's
story nowhere suggests that the changes townspeople such as Awei inflict on their surroundings even remotely approach the effects of the upstream cement factories and chemical plants that have poisoned the land and water near their homes. Nor does it imply that Awei’s mistreatment of the bird is anything like the government’s mistreatment of his son. But Awei’s obsession with catching and holding an egret hostage, the text’s principal subplot, is an excellent example of the conflicts that frequently exist between attitudes and actions. With outlooks on the natural world so contradictory, it is almost inevitable that some will conflict with behaviors and that the nonhuman will remain in jeopardy.

The title “Set Free” refers to events narrated in the final pages of the story: the emancipation of people and the nonhuman from the ravages of pollution, of Awei’s son Wentong from prison, and of an egret Awei caught several days before his son’s release. Awei’s fixation on egrets dates back several decades. Thirty years earlier, he had captured one for his young son Wentong, who adored the bird and was crushed when it escaped. But preoccupied with a birthing sow, Awei had shown his son little sympathy. Instead, pulling the bawling Wentong away from the pig, he had ripped his son’s arm out of its socket, something for which he had never forgiven himself. To make amends, Awei has been trying for some time to catch another egret, but without success. Seeing the egret in a paddy many years later awakens old feelings, and he feels compelled to snare the animal and bring it home.

“Set Free” at first suggests that Awei is rescuing a poisoned bird that has become trapped in the mud. Early in the story the narrator comments:

As Awei was hurrying along the field ridge, he startled a bird that had ingested some recently sprayed snail pesticide. Flapping its wings, rocking from side to side, the bird fled from the ridge and headed toward the newly planted rice shoots. “An egret!” the old man shouted joyously. Forgetting about the rain, he set off in pursuit... The egret desperately flapped its wings but couldn’t fly away. In the end, its wings were stuck to the surface of the water, and it couldn’t even rise up, couldn’t even run.

Initially, both Awei’s legs and the egret’s wings move speedily, but while Awei sets off in hot pursuit (qizhuit), the bird is immobilized. And it quickly becomes clear that Awei’s priority is capturing, not freeing, the animal. Fearing that the egret will fly away just as he is about to grab it, Awei makes a final desperate dive for the animal, falling face first into the muddy water and making a spectacle of himself. Furthermore, rather than freeing the egret from the mud and determining whether it can manage on its own, Awei grasps it tightly.

The narrator notes that Awei does so even though he would have harshly scolded any child he saw attempting the same thing. Indeed, until this episode Awei gives every indication of believing that unless they are harming crops, birds, like people, should not be deprived of freedom. For instance, after visiting his son in prison Awei spotted an egret startled by an aging, backfiring bus. He watched the bird run along a nearby levee and then take flight, soaring into the distance over waves of rice plants until it was just a single black dot. There was no thought of chasing after the bird. Instead, Awei imagined himself becoming another black dot and disappearing into the wind, perhaps anticipating Chen Huang’s Pigeon Tuoli, discussed in chapter 4. Walking into town, Awei saw another egret, this time flying out of flowers bordering a ditch. Once again, he followed it with his eyes until it nearly disappeared. Yet his “primal impulse” (yuanshi chongdong), something he claims to have lost long ago, returns with a vengeance while hurrying along the dike, so he captures and needlessly imprisons an egret.

The complexities described here pose an ecological contradiction: Awei empathizes with birds when he sees them fly off into the distance but when one is closer at hand he captures it. Conflicts between attitudes and actions continue. Awei senses an immediate connection with the egret, noting that its nervous, thumping heartbeat is synchronized perfectly with his own (be cike laorenjia de xintiao, luxiang huying er pengpeng zhouxiang). His heart gushing with both guilt and joy, he feels great compassion for the bird; he talks to himself about its capture with such kindness that listening to his own voice makes him believe the trembling animal in his hands is a real treasure. But compassion and empathy here translate into imprisonment, not freedom. Rather than liberate the bird, Awei takes it home. His wife is clearly baffled by his behaviors, which contradict not only his own feelings toward the animal but also those of his community. Egrets, she reminds him, are not eaten even during famines, nor do people raise them as pets. “Set Free” highlights Awei’s selfishness, depicting him as assuaging his own guilt toward his son and fulfilling his own emotional desires, not assisting a poisoned bird.

Awei’s emotional attachment to the animal likewise does not prevent him from harming it. Still strong when it arrives at Awei’s home, the bird struggles mightily to spring free of its captor as he stands in the doorway being chastised by his wife Jinzu. Awei must grasp the bird tightly to prevent it from flying off. He recognizes that capturing and detaining the egret would be justified only if he were nursing it back to health, so he weakens the bird, keeping it in a chicken cage for three days and then claiming that the reason it
cannot stand up is that the effects of pesticides the bird ingested have not yet worn off. But Jinzu is not persuaded, believing that the bird's weakness stems not from ingesting pesticides but rather from going for days without eating fish; unsaid yet implied is that this lack of fish is as much Awei's responsibility (for not feeding the bird) as it is the fault of the factories and the farmers (for so polluting the waters that they no longer support fish). Pressured by his wife, Awei improves the egret's diet. The animal rapidly recovers and once again begins flapping its wings, "fancying itself circling in the air." Far from delighted at this turn of events, Awei states simply: "It's not going to die. Now I'm worried that it will fly away, not that it will die" (bu bù sì le, xianzai shì pà ta fēntāo, cài bù shì pà sì). So he keeps the bird in a cage, where it spends its time strutting around. The same individual angry with the authorities for holding his son for protesting environmental degradation consciously deprives an animal of its freedom and worries aloud that the bird might escape. Huang Chunming's story here points to the selfishness that often creates conflicts between attitudes and behaviors. Ideally, distress over his son's imprisonment would increase Awei's sensitivity toward the confinement of other human/nonhuman bodies, but instead he thinks only of himself, seizing and keeping captive a bird that reminds him of his son.

One evening, frustrated that his son has not yet been released from prison, Awei suddenly decides to set the bird free. By this time it has been imprisoned for so long that it does not quite know what to do when Awei opens its cage. Awei has to take the bird in his hands and launch it into the air; as with egrets in the past, Awei watches this bird fly off until it is nothing more than a black dot far in the distance. Attitudes and behaviors here coincide. Yet when Wentong finally returns home, Awei grows disappointed that he has freed the bird. Revealing his still powerful desire to restrain this animal, he declares, "[Wentong] if you'd come a bit earlier, I wouldn't have released the egret." The next, and final line of the story finds Jinzu watching Awei and Wentong while chanting silently "Praise be to Amitābha Buddha" (南無阿彌陀佛), a mantra from the Pure Land school that in Chinese Buddhism is used during meditation to help clear the mind. Her husband appears to have learned little from his son's imprisonment, so Jinzu needs as much fortitude as possible.

"Set Free" concludes with the concurrent freeing of a man from prison, of a bird from a cage, and, more generally, of both people and the environment from the ravages of pollution. These events suggest the beginnings of new human/nonhuman relationships. They also contrast with the relative stability of relations between people and their governments; the lives of the residents of Dakenggu will not become any less regulated by official decrees. Huang Chunming's story here comments on Taiwan's own shift—on July 14, 1987, just two months before the serialization of "Set Free" (September 12-15, 1987)—from a society under martial law to one regulated by a stringent national security law, a move that in some ways changed everything, and in some ways changed very little. On the other hand, the differences between the changes in human/nonhuman relationships and the changes in government/civilian relationships likely are not as great as they first appear. A conservation area is being established, and Tianying tells Awei and Jinzu that the factories "won't be allowed to dump poisoned water." But while the former waste site turned conservation area might be off-limits, nothing is said about prohibiting factories from releasing poisoned water elsewhere or emitting pollutants into the atmosphere. Nor is there any indication of how pesticide use will be affected, so possibly farmers will resort to killing birds clandestinely. Much thus remains unanswered. Are people and animals set free from one prison only to be herded into another, possibly more dangerous space? The initial prisons were readily identifiable—Wentong is in an actual jail, Awei keeps the egret in a chicken cage, and the villagers and their environs are enshrouded by unbreathable air. The shape of future prisons probably will not be so clearly apparent. Yet the story suggests that these spaces are potentially no less menacing.

Broadening the focus of a caged animal's relationship with an individual to that of a town, and leaving uncertain the fate of this animal, the Japanese writer Murakami Haruki's short story "Zō no shōmetsu" (The Elephant's Disappearance, 1985) depicts trying to safeguard an elephant as actually harming it and perhaps even bringing about its death. Contemporary Japan's best-known and most frequently translated creative writer, Murakami has consistently emphasized writers' social responsibility. In his Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech (2009) he declared, "I have only one reason to write novels, and that is to bring the dignity of the individual soul to the surface and to shine a light upon it. The purpose of a story is to sound an alarm, to keep a light trained on The System in order to prevent it from tangling our souls in its web and demeaning them." In "The Elephant's Disappearance" Murakami depicts a System that has literally entangled animals within its grip, a society where fascination with animals is at least partially responsible for their death. This story does not expose nearly the degree of elephant abuse found in other works of world literature, but the contrasts it posits between fascination with and treatment of this animal are significant in their reminder of the diverse sources of nonhuman suffering.

"The Elephant's Disappearance" opens with its first-person narrator reading a newspaper article on the disappearance of an elderly elephant from its pen near an elementary school in an unnamed affluent suburb of Tokyo.
The narrator, who long has been interested in the elephant and was one of the last people to see it before it disappeared, summarizes events leading up to this incident. Born in East Africa, the animal had lived most of its life in a small private suburban zoo in Japan. When the zoo closed, its land was sold to a real-estate developer and all the animals relocated except for the elephant, which no facility wanted because of its advanced age. Local bureaucrats agreed that they could not kill the animal since their constituents would be outraged and the fallout substantial. So the town took ownership of it, the developer provided land, and the zoo's former owners continued to pay the wages of its keeper. An elementary school gymnasium was relocated and turned into an elephant house, dedication ceremonies were held, and the elephant began its new life. It was cared for lovingly by its keeper and visited frequently by schoolchildren, who gave it scraps from their lunches. Murakami's story describes how after a year in its new home the elephant suddenly disappears, along with its keeper. The authorities assert that the elephant either "escaped or was snatched as the result of a clever and calculated plan." The newspaper likewise claims that the animal "ran away." But the narrator determines that, since people went to great lengths to make sure the animal could not escape, far more disturbing phenomena are at play: "A composite of complexities and labored rhetoric, the newspaper article left only one possible conclusion [essence; honsbutsu] concerning the incident: the elephant had not run away, it had "disappeared.""34

Later in "The Elephant's Disappearance," recounting his conversation with a young woman he recently had begun to date, the narrator justifies his conclusion. The night the elephant disappeared he had been perched on a cliff, looking into the animal's dwelling through a vent he had recently discovered, when he noticed that the size difference between the animal and its keeper was not as dramatic as before. He initially thought the town might have replaced the elderly elephant with a younger and smaller counterpart, but the animal's movements and interactions with its keeper remained as they had always been, so he quickly dismissed this idea. His companion asks him whether he believes that the elephant continued shrinking until it was small enough to escape from its prison or whether the animal simply evaporated into nothingness. The narrator has no answer but nevertheless wraps up the story with "The elephant and its keeper have disappeared [shōmen filters, and they will not be returning [modotte konai]."35

Murakami's story suggests that if even something so massive and so protected can vanish without a trace, then there is nothing preventing other human and nonhuman beings from a similar outcome; nothing is permanently safe, yet neither is anything permanently confined. But in discussing the extreme albeit futile measures taken to assure that what happened would never happen, "The Elephant's Disappearance" also underscores the fine line between protecting and imperiling the nonhuman. The animal's life is spared, it gets a new home, and its familiar caretaker is retained, but its movements are severely limited by physical restraints. Just as disturbing is the fact that no one, including those closest to the elephant, seems to protest its confinement. Fascination with the elephant is accompanied by silence over its shackles.

The narrator describes the ceremony dedicating the elephant house: the mayor gives a speech on the town's growth and the perfection of its cultural facilities, a student reads an essay beseeching the elephant to live a long and healthy life, contestants vie to see who can best draw the elephant, and young women feed the elephant bananas, which it munches as its eyes glaze over. When it finishes, everyone applauds. Perhaps too intent on enjoying the festivities, people seem oblivious to the chains that bind the aging animal, captured in the narrator's iron-clad account:

On its right rear leg the elephant was fitted with a massive, heavy-looking steel cuff. From this cuff there stretched a thick chain about thirty feet long. This in turn was fastened securely to a concrete foundation. Anyone could see what a solid steel cuff and chain these were. It appeared as though the elephant could struggle with all its might for a hundred years, and it still wouldn't be able to destroy them.

I couldn't tell whether the elephant was bothered by its shackles. However, at least on the surface, it seemed completely unconcerned that a steel lump was coiled around its leg. It kept its blank gaze fixed on an indeterminate point in space; its ears and white body hairs trembled softly in the wind.36

Discourse on confinement becomes progressively stronger: on one of the elephant's legs is a "massive, heavy-looking steel cuff" (gashiri to shita omoshi na tetsu no wa o hamararetaita). This cuff is connected to a "thick chain" (fitotai kusari), albeit one that is thirty feet long. But this glimmer of hope is quickly shattered, the chain attached "securely" (kotei) to a "concrete foundation" (konkurito no dodai). The narrator then reinforces the reinforcements, noting that everyone can see clearly that the cuff and chain are solid (ganjō), indestructible steel.

This passage contrasts sharply with the description of the elephant-house dedication festivities. While the ceremonies feature an animal chomping on bananas as schoolchildren and officials celebrate, this passage portrays an animal bound and tethered. Only its ears and white hairs move; even its gaze
is said to be steadfast. Interestingly, the narrator admits he cannot tell (boku ni wa yoku wakaranai) whether the elephant is bothered by its shackles, then comments that—the antithesis of Chen Zhen’s wolf—the animal seems completely unconcerned (kanshin o baratte inai yō ni nieta). At once pointedly denying any visible signs of nonhuman suffering, this admission and comment leave considerable room for speculation and reveal the narrator’s doubts that the elephant remains unaffected by its constraints.

Later in the story, in remarks on the newspaper article about the elephant’s disappearance, the narrator reveals that the massive leg iron was only the beginning. And he tries to explain how it would have been impossible for the elephant simply to “escape,” given the many barriers that were erected around the animal. The iron cuff was discovered still bolted; the newspaper says that the most logical explanation is that the caretaker unlocked it, freed the elephant’s leg, then relocked it. But the narrator notes that this would have been impossible. The caretaker did not have a key for the cuff; the keys had been housed in safes at the police station and the fire station, so there was no opportunity for the caretaker even to allow the elephant an occasional clandestine stroll. The narrator also notes the virtual lack of an escape path from the elephant’s pen. To be sure, the elephant arrived at this site via trailer and thus presumably could have been taken away in similar fashion by someone who had access to the key, an option the narrator does not consider. Instead, he comments on the extensive security surrounding the animal’s house and grounds:

The second problem was the escape route. The elephant house and elephant grounds were surrounded by a solid fence about ten feet tall. The question of security had been passionately debated in the town council, and the town had settled on a patrol system that might be considered rather excessive for a single old elephant. The fence was made of concrete and thick iron bars . . . there was only a single entrance, which was found locked from the inside. There was no way the elephant could have gotten over that fortress-like fence and escaped.  

Not only is the elephant excessively tethered to a building, the building itself is surrounded by a high fence that is “solid” (ganji) like the steel of the animal’s tethers, a fence worthy of a fortress (yōsai), not an animal pen. Moreover, as the narrator reveals, the elephant enclosure is located at the base of a steep hill that the animal could not possibly have climbed. And no footprints were ever found, confirming that the elephant did not walk outside its pen. Ironically, security around the elephant enclosure becomes even tighter after its disappearance. As the narrator comments, “A thick chain had been coiled around the bars of the entrance to the iron fence. This was to keep people out. Looking inside the fence, I could see that the door of the elephant house had been chained in similar fashion . . . The chain coiled around the door of the elephant house made me think of a large snake tightly guarding a rusted, ruined palace in a dense forest.”

The authorities had spared the elephant’s life, but not because they harbored any real concern for the animal. Instead, they focused solely on avoiding a public outcry. While initial public sentiment allowed the elephant to live, soon popular opinion ensured its imprisonment. Residents were well disposed to having an elephant in their midst. As the narrator wryly notes: “Adopting a homeless elephant was something about which people could feel good. People feel more affection for old elephants than for sewers or fire engines.” People also recognized that the elephant was feeble: “The elephant was so old that its every move was a huge effort. It was so old that people seeing it for the first time feared it might fall down flat on the ground and take its final breath . . . It looked as though it might drop dead of a heart attack at any minute.” But as reactions to the elephant’s disappearance reveal, some individuals still feared the animal. They thus did not object to the restraints and most likely were even in favor of them. At the same time that enthusiasm for the elephant preserved its life and immortalized it in image and verse, it also resulted in the animal’s imprisonment.

Even more significant than the contrast between the sentiments and behaviors of the townspeople is the paradox of the caretaker. The narrator describes the relationship between elephant and keeper as exceptionally close. They had an uncanny ability to communicate with each other: the caretaker needed only tap the elephant on the leg and whisper something in its ear for the animal to do exactly what he wanted. The narrator wonders whether the elephant has learned to understand snippets of human language, reckoning that it has lived long enough to do so. Elephant and caretaker appear so close that the narrator even wonders whether the animal can read the mind of its human counterpart. When he asks the caretaker how he communicates with the elephant, the man responds simply, “It’s been a long companionship.”

This is the public face of the two. Peering into the enclosure from his perch atop a neighboring cliff, the narrator is granted a privileged view of the elephant and its guardian:

What struck me right away when I saw the elephant and its keeper alone in the elephant house together was the real closeness of the two, a much stronger bond than they revealed in public. Their affection
for each other was clear in every move they made. It was almost as
though they saved up their deep feelings during the day, making sure
no one noticed their friendship, and let them out at night when it was
just the two of them... It was impossible to miss the special warmth
produced by the feeling of trust by which the two were bound. While
the keeper swept the floor, the elephant would wave its trunk and
lightly tap the keeper’s back.43

A profound connection clearly exists between elephant and keeper. But no-
where does Murakami’s text indicate that this man protested the town’s
treatment of the animal under his care; he does not seem to be troubled
even by the tight cuffing of the animal’s leg. Perhaps the caretaker is simply
relieved that the elephant’s life has been spared. Yet his utter silence con-
cerning the elephant’s confinement notably contradicts with his feelings for
the animal. The narrator’s silence is equally striking, considering his own
fondness for the elephant and his greater concern for the animal than its
caretaker after they disappear; elephant and caretaker vanish at the same
time, but as its title suggests the narrative focuses on the elephant, not its
human companion.

“The Elephant’s Disappearance” most obviously exposes corrupt and in-
efficient officiandom by highlighting the various deals made among zoo own-
ers, developers, the mayor, and politicians, as well as the town’s inability to
keep track of an animal so large and immobile as a feeble, heavily chained
elephant. Murakami’s story also underscores people’s ready disregard of in-
ept bureaucracy: the narrator states explicitly that even something as disturbing
as the elephant’s disappearance would not change society. He remarks,
“The earth continued its monotonous rotation, politicians continued issuing unreliable proclamations, people continued yawning on their way to the office, and children continued preparing for exams.”44 Human behaviors seem
impervious to empirical circumstances. “The Elephant’s Disappearance” is
also rife with informational ambiguity, particularly concerning the elephant’s
disappearance. Although the narrator, as the last person to see the animal,
appears to have more insight into its disappearance than any other resident;
his only conclusion is that it simply vanished. The failure of anyone in the
story, from the narrator to the townpeople, the officials investigating the
incident, even the newspaper reporters, to propose the most obvious sce-
nario—someone with access to one of the keys unlocked the animal and
removed it from the enclosure the same way it came in—further mocks hu-
man foolishness. Yet little heed is paid to the well-being of the animal. The
real mystery is not what happened to the elephant after its last sighting but
why such a creature was treated so inhumanely in full view of supposedly
well-intentioned people.45

Literature charges even indigenous peoples with mingling respect and
mistreatment of animals. Touched on in Nitta Jirō’s Tale of Alaska and Topas
Tamapima’s “The Last Hunter,” discussed in chapter 2, this paradox is cap-
tured particularly well in the Japanese writer and Hokkaido native Oguma
Hideo’s twenty-four-section narrative poem “Tobu sori” (Flying Sled, 1935).
Oguma was active in Japan’s prewar proletarian literary movement, and al-
though he was not an especially prolific writer, what he did produce attracted
the attention of both his contemporaries and postwar scholars; “Flying Sled”
has been called “the finest long poem ever written in Japanese” and “virtu-
ally unparalleled in Japanese literature.”46 In some ways the ecoambiguity
articulated in this poem is more understandable than the contradiction high-
lighted in Murakami’s story: while the latter focuses on the admiration and
confinement of a single animal, Oguma’s poem contrasts concurrent respect
for the nonhuman in toto with abuse of a particular species. In so doing, it
addresses a common dilemma in relationships among people and the nonhu-
man: appreciating environments often facilitates condoning or even glorify-
ing damage to one of their component parts.

“Flying Sled,” written explicitly for the Ainu people, draws attention to
the plight of Ainu driven from Hokkaido onto Sakhalin.47 As David Good-
man has argued, the text attempts to describe, and make credible, “an al-
ternative, outward-looking, culturally tolerant way to be Japanese.”48 But
although grounded in a specific place and time, the poem reaches out to ad-
dress conflicts between indigenous peoples and more recent arrivals. “Flying
Sled” critiques Japanese incursion onto Ainu lands and rampant destruction
of northern forests, contrasting Japanese profligacy with the Ainu’s prudent
use of resources.49 At the same time, it depicts the Ainu as far more methodi-
cal and effective hunters than Japanese. “Flying Sled” exposes a common di-
ichotomy between attitudes and behaviors toward the nonhuman: those more
respectful of the natural world (the Ainu) are in certain situations ironically
more responsible for its destruction (because they are such successful hunt-
ers, the Ainu kill more birds than the Japanese). Oguma’s poem by no means
depicts the Ainu as wasteful, and in fact it describes them innovatively utiliz-
ing as many body parts as they can from the other animals they kill: “The
Japanese were incompetent hunters. / Tearing off the pelts of the animals
they’d killed / they nonchalantly discard bones and carcasses. / But the Ainu
decorated the periphery of their homes / with countless animal bones.” The
narrator notes that the Ainu pray fervently over these bones day and night and “never forget to reminisce over the death of the animals.”\textsuperscript{50} Interestingly, here he gives one of the few examples of Ainu use of animal body parts that might seem frivolous: the Ainu respect the bones of deceased animals, but survival does not depend on homes decorated with skeleton fragments. By emphasizing how successful Ainu are at killing certain animals, even if only to survive, “Flying Sled” provides important perspectives on the delicate balance between harmony with and harm to environments.

“Flying Sled” opens tersely: “Winter attacked” (fuyu ga osotte kita).\textsuperscript{51} The narrator depicts humans and much of nature both standing in blank amazement, slapped by the suddenly brutal wind and snow. After describing a group of people preparing for winter, the narrator reveals their identity: early twentieth-century Ainu living in Sakhalin. He points out that the wind and snow are less of a threat to Ainu and the natural world than are the Japanese. The Japanese have driven Ainu and bears from their homes in Hokkaido, and the populations of both are dying off. In both Hokkaido and Sakhalin forests are just as endangered as their mammalian counterparts. Although the displaced Ainu in Sakhalin cut down trees the state has claimed as its own, they do so to survive. In addition, the damage they inflict on landscapes is mild compared to that wreaked by Japanese lumber mills and paper companies; the latter plunder forests purely for profit and then set fire to remaining foliage to obliterate evidence of their crimes. Oguma’s poem here establishes familiar contrasts between national governments and corporations on the one hand and indigenous peoples on the other.

Complicating matters is the description earlier in the text of the Ainu, who are desperate for jobs, as delighted to hear that the Oji paper company is opening another factory on the island. The narrator’s description of hunting birds introduces further paradoxes. Emphasizing the difference between Ainu and Japanese techniques, he reveals the Ainu as making a larger mark on some nonhuman species than do the Japanese. Halfway through “Flying Sled” the poem describes a Japanese forest ranger trying to shoot a flock of birds. The ranger came to Sakhalin partly to take refuge in nature. And his marksmanship leaves much to be desired. In fact, the narrator mocks his inability to kill more than a few of the dozens of birds that swarm overhead when he blows the birdcall:

His shooting position is good, and his rifle is of high quality, he can almost reach out and touch his prey
the ranger aims and fires with a bang, but what happens,

only one or two birds fall
and sometimes he can’t hit even a single bird . . .
[He wonders] to shoot one or two
do I have to blow on my flute
and draw as many as thirty?\textsuperscript{52}

The ranger’s Ainu friend Ikubashui (Jpn. Gontaró) then steps forward, calls the birds to the branches overhead, fires his gun, and the animals drop around his feet like ripe fruit. Gontaró explains that the hunter must proceed methodically, working from the bottom of the tree to the top, even if the most desired birds are perched the highest:

the Ainu begins with the bird closest to him,
the first target,
he shoots birds one after the other
beginning with those on the lowest branches
and gradually working his way up the tree,
and after he shoots the mountain birds
perched in the treetops, he has shot them all.\textsuperscript{53}

The Ainu’s instructions are cold and calculating; the hunter is simply to kill whatever stands between him and his prize. In contrast, the narrator decorates in rhetorical flourishes Gontaró’s relationship with his firearm: “When the rifle was gripped in the large hands of the Ainu [Ainu ni totte wa nikutai no ichibai no yó ni / ikite tsu-kawareteiru].”\textsuperscript{54} The rifle is virtually an appendage of the Ainu, much more a “natural” part of his existence than is true of the Japanese. It is not clear what Gontaró and the ranger do with the birds they have shot, but the text implies that they leave them where they fell. Gontaró apparently took the lives of these animals simply to show the ranger how best to kill large numbers of wildlife. This is only one of their many hunting expeditions together, the ranger always using the Ainu as his guide. The gulf between the Ainu people’s admiration for and killing of animals is readily bridged: they depend on these animals for survival, Oguma’s poem nonetheless depicts instances of wanton, meaningless slaughter.

The next sections of “Flying Sled” feature a devastating avalanche that severely injures the ranger; the poem ends with Gontaró and his loyal sled-dog team rushing their Japanese friend to safety. These lines, reminiscent of the poem’s opening comments about winter’s sudden and fierce arrival, also
Judging by your trunk, where even the resin has dried up
your roots too must be painful.
Having no idea of your exhaustion, association members
[boeuōndūl]
have enclosed your lower trunk in cement
and even while administering injections,
tell you just to keep standing there.57

“Old Pine Tree” not only records what has been done to the tree, noting
that its lower part has been encased in cement and that it has been subjected
to injections. Empathizing with the tree as most people cannot, the poem’s
speaker also speculates and then asserts how these acts have affected the
pine: its roots “must be painful” (ppu̍ga ap’il t‘eado toeōnnunde) and it
itself is “exhausted” (kodalp‘iūm). The tree has been altered chemically and
prosthetically to give the appearance of remaining unchanged, to its long-
term detriment.

In the second half of the text the tree is urged to defy these painful at-
ttempts to prolong its life; the poem claims that nothing is more natural than
old age and that the tree should surrender to its presumed longing to “take
some time off” and can feel free to rest for several centuries.58 This is because
people can do virtually nothing to stave off its demise; the tree’s only respite
will come from rest and eventual death. “Old Pine Tree” concludes with the
tree heeding the speaker’s advice and finally allowing itself to relax:

After keeping them open for more than a century
you shut your green eyes
and at last have fallen asleep standing up
old pine tree
with your drooping red branches59

While in the opening of the poem the phrase “for more than a century”
(paeqō nyōn) signaled continuity, here it marks the end of a life, or at least
of an era. In truth, the speaker has no more insight into how the tree is
actually feeling than the individuals who administer its injections and
apply its body cast. Both groups appear to have its best interests in mind. But
unlike the efforts of city employees to preserve the tree’s appearance, the
speaker attempts to ensure the tree’s comfort; granting the tree agency, he
gives it permission to act as it desires. That it decides literally to “fall asleep”
(chamdimiungu) highlights the ignorance of officials who “preserve” the
flora they deem important. Ironically, only when sleeping is the tree depicted
as having color. In the early lines of the poem the speaker talks about how it casts cool shade and moves with the breeze but does not mention its hues. Only as it relaxes are its "eyes" said to be green and its branches red.

There are times, Kim Kwanggyu's poem argues, where death is preferable; treating nonhuman bodies humanely does not necessarily mean prolonging their lives. This text focuses on a single pine that it claims has stood in the garden in front of Saemaul (New Community) Assembly Hall for more than a century. Although the damage explicitly described is temporal, not spatially pervasive, little separates this tree from any number of plants that have been "preserved" to their disadvantage. As the Australian aboriginal writer Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s poem “Municipal Gum” (1964) likewise laments: “Gumtree in the city street, / Hard bitumen around your feet, / Rather you should be / In the cool world of leafy forest halls / And wild bird calls / Here you seems to me / Like that poor cart-horse / Castrated, broken, a thing wronged, / Strapped and buckled, its hell prolonged, / Whose hung head and listless mien express / Its hopelessness. / Municipal gum, it is dolorous / To see you thus / Set in your black grass of bitumen— / O fellow citizen, / What have they done to us?”

Here too a tree has been preserved, only to be trapped in bitumen (asphalt, tar), its hell prolonged like that of the cart horse. As in many poems, including Kim Kwanggyu's, the fate of the nonhuman is aligned with that of human societies: trees, horses, and aboriginal peoples have been taken from their homelands and deposited in unfamiliar and often hostile ground. In “Municipal Gum” the analogy is explicit, the last line speaking of the tree as a "fellow citizen," and in Kim Kwanggyu's it is more implicit, the irony of the "old" tree suffering outside the New Community Assembly Hall striking. Death would appear a welcome release for a tree whose life has been forcibly extended by those who respect it not for its own sake but for their aesthetic benefit. On the other hand, as Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poem reminds us, the tree would be more content in a "cool world of leafy forest halls" than in the garden of an assembly hall, alive or dead. Threads of life, death, and disappearance weave themselves through these poems, complicating relationships between beliefs and behaviors and ultimately muddying environmental possibilities.

Admiring Ecosystems, Longing for Control

Even more convoluted conflicts between attitudes and behaviors vis-à-vis the natural world arise not out of concrete relationships with particular animals or plants but instead out of admiration for larger ecosystems. Narratives engaging with these dilemmas appear in many permutations, but most intriguing are those that feature appreciation as leading to behaviors that injure environments.

The Korean writer Ko Un's five-stanza poem "Kkot" (Flowers, 1986), for instance, shows desire for more greenery as resulting in behaviors that contradict both each other and this yearning itself. Written several years before the Seoul Olympics in response to government attempts to decorate the city for foreign visitors, this text depicts officials importing mature flora from the countryside, rather than planting seeds and bulbs. Rural residents, displeased with these developments and hoping to evoke sympathy, then claim that their landscape has been even more compromised than it actually is. Both groups feel strongly about greenery, but "Flowers" depicts even those most wishing to be surrounded by it as either displacing it or overstat- ing its removal.

Like many creative works addressing environments damaged by people, Ko Un's poem laments the absence of familiar vegetation (flowers) and the prolific sprouting of human artifacts (televisions). The text begins with the regretful comment:

Spring has come,
spring has come and gone,
but in the mountain valleys
there isn't a single flower
not even a common magnolia or cherry blossom.

The second stanza, relating the discovery that actually not all flowers have disappeared from the mountains, injects ambiguity about conditions; the poem casts doubt as to just how many spaces and species have been affected. Several kinds of flowers are blooming on bushes, on seed plants, and even on individual stalks in a nearby garden and in places that were not explored in the first stanza:

Luckily, in the vegetable garden yellow flowers are blooming on a plant gone to seed
How much joy! [ǒlmama nömch'ìnín kippūminya]
Go around the mountain
aha, here are heaps of blazing mountain bush clover
and look, at that field, lying idle,
tiny shepherd's purse thickly blazing [chauk'age p'iō inne]
of course, blazing, blazing [p'iō inne p'iō inne]
it with cement to adulterate poured concrete. In so doing the villagers most obviously jeopardize human safety. As Niki points out, anything built with substandard concrete made of cement blended with such salty sand is almost certain to collapse prematurely. When Niki asks the woman how the villagers can deliberately put people's lives in danger, she inquires simply, "Why should we worry what happens to others?" Niki for the first time recognizes that the people of the dunes, having been virtually abandoned by the outside world, see themselves as victims and thus that the line between "friend" and "enemy" is not as clear as he formerly believed. But the topic of disturbing the dunes by selling off the sand is quickly dropped.

Instead, Woman in the Dunes focuses almost entirely on the manipulation of sand when it is perceived to be at its most threatening. In other words, Abé's novel mutes the conflicts between perceptions and the known properties of the sand (believing the sand completely overpowering when actually it can sometimes support the weight of military vehicles) and between behaviors and conditions (selling sand to construction companies despite knowing that this puts human lives at risk). And it highlights the incongruity between attitudes and behaviors (believing the sand completely overpowering while at the same time attempting to overpower it). The decision of the village elders to remain in the dunes is the clearest example of the latter. Rather than relocate to a more hospitable ecosystem after the dunes rise well above their rooftops, the local leaders condemn much of their population to endless days and nights of shoveling. The villagers somehow create a dystopian life for themselves in their sand pits while manipulating slightly the movements of the dunes. The narrator emphasizes the precariousness of their situation; if only a single household fails to shovel out its hole, whole sections of the village risk collapse. Yet this hazard seems only to encourage them to continue to defy the movement of the sand. Having stumbled on a way to extract water from the dunes, Niki, who spends most of the novel plotting and unsuccessfully trying to escape, will contribute to and likely facilitate the villagers' endeavor.

In this light, Niki's earlier comments to one of the village elders about turning the dunes into a tourist attraction have to be taken seriously. Niki urges the elder to capitalize both on people's fascination with the sand and on the properties of the sand itself: "People today are drawn to the sand; it holds a strange fascination for them... There's a way of taking advantage of this [kono ten o riyō suru tte in te mo aru wake da]... You can develop a new tourist spot... You don't go against the sand, you follow it, you take advantage of it [suna ni shitagatte, sore o riyō suru]... In short, you have to try to completely change your thinking." Significantly, Niki conflates "following" (shitagau) the sand with "taking advantage" of it (riyō suru; lit. use). It rapidly becomes apparent just how much he and the villagers wish to exploit the sand. When the village elder protests that they are leading the only lives that can reasonably be led in the dunes, Niki responds that the town should try "erosion-control construction, full scale erosion-control construction." The elder objects to this idea because of the cost, not because he is opposed to building a barrier to restrain the sand; he reminds Niki that the government has not designated damage from wind-blown sand eligible for accident compensation. Abé's novel suggests that the dunes are only one political decision away from being radically reshaped.

Woman in the Dunes features an ecosystem within which people must devote considerable energy simply to staying alive. Reading the sand entirely metaphorically and focusing exclusively on the novel's depictions of people's relationships with other people diverts attention from its references to human manipulation and mistreatment, both actual and potential, of their nonhuman surroundings. By invoking human imprisonment and even destruction of the nonhuman, the same discourse that highlights human-on-human abuse (similes and metaphors comparing Niki to a trapped animal) also signals anthropogenic abuse of both people and animals. Niki treats insects much as he himself is treated, although he not surprisingly protests his treatment and has no reservations about mistreating insects. Even more significant is how the novel depicts fascination, indeed obsession, as facilitating manipulation, even destruction, of nonhuman bodies, no matter how resilient. With merciless dunes and hardy insects susceptible to human shaping, Woman in the Dunes suggests that it is only a matter of time before the effects of people's behavior on landscapes become greater than those of landscapes on people. Abé's novel in some ways has proved prescient. Unlike many of East Asia's deserts, which continue to expand and wreak havoc far beyond national borders, Tottori's dunes are shrinking; seawalls at a nearby port have disrupted waterfalls on which the dunes depend. For the last few years, volunteers have been regularly weeding the dunes, attempting to forestall the very infringement of greenery that was attempted after World War Two, when authorities planted trees there and tried to transform the area into farmland.

Green Hypocrisy

Literature frequently interrogates such ineffective, even detrimental "greening" of environments. Writings that exaggerate the failure, hypocrisy, and
even malevolence of environmental movements bring to light some of the most unsettling contradictions between attitudes and behaviors. They suggest that if even those individuals and organizations most explicitly trumpeting ecological health do nothing to attempt to repair environmental damage, or if they engage in behaviors harmful to both people and nature, then there is little hope for remediation, much less prevention, of devastated environments.

Some texts—including the Japanese writer Sakaki Nanao’s poems “Kono hanata no tane no” (This Flower Perennial Plant, 1995) and “Yuki no umikoide iku” (Snow Ocean Rowing, 1987)—focus on individuals who are deeply concerned about ecological damage, both local and global, who nevertheless choose not to try to repair it. These texts suggest that if even the persons most disturbed by human shaping of ecosystems withdraw without doing anything to remediate conditions, then finding people who actually will help is almost futile.

“This Flower” (1995) depicts an individual who says he wants to depart the world empty-handed and wonders how anyone can die “leaving behind the shame [haji] of twenty-century Japan,” a place he declares is on the verge of becoming “garbage empire number one” (gomi teikoku nanba wan). Yet rather than doing anything to help repair this damage, he sets off on a long hike with friends. The poem’s speaker is not the only one concerned with ecological degradation who behaves in this way; he receives a letter from the American poet and environmentalist Gary Snyder announcing the latter’s own imminent departure for the Himalaya. The contrasts between knowledge and behavior expressed in “This Flower” resemble those in several works examined in chapter 5: awareness of environmental degradation leads to avoidance, but not action. But what distinguishes “This Flower” is the gap between the attitudes of both the speaker and Snyder toward this knowledge and what behaviors ensue. By featuring friends from opposite sides of the globe whose outlooks and actions toward the nonhuman are remarkably similar, “This Flower” re-enforces the cosmopolitanism of many eco-ambiguities.

The poem’s speaker begins by celebrating the symbiosis among people, human cultural artifacts, and the natural world that he observes one October morning standing in a friend’s garden:

In the outskirts of Nagoya City welcoming this morning in the skies of a perfect autumn day cirrus clouds flowing in the garden of a friend dangling a 40-cm luffa one small rice field the size of about one tatami mat enclosed in cement today we’ll first harvest rice harvest happiness.

He then reveals that he plans to immerse himself further in nature by taking a two-week, 225-kilometer hike with friends along the Nagara River, which empties into Ise Bay southwest of Nagoya and is famous both in Japan and abroad for the Nagara River dam controversy. Pondering the lives of people he might meet outside the city, the speaker imagines a woman of nearly ninety saying that she would like to clean her house and garden before she dies. Thinking of all that she must have collected over the years—books, clothing, various plants, animals, and fungi—he claims her property is as dense as London’s Royal Botanical Garden. The woman’s possessions are concentrated in a single location, but his own are scattered around the world, something he would like to resolve before he dies:

Well this I
Books music tapes clothing ice axes skis
located not only here and there in Japan
but as far as North America

I too
want to move to heaven with just my body.

Significantly, like the elderly woman he imagines, the speaker does not indicate what he wants to happen to these belongings, perhaps because he cannot conceive of a viable solution. If he gives them away, they simply become someone else’s possessions; they perhaps decrease the overall human burden on the planet, but only indirectly, by causing the recipient to defer purchasing similar objects. There is no way to compensate entirely for the resources used to produce the objects he possessed.

After communicating frustration with the scope of his own tangible baggage, the poem’s speaker suddenly realizes that more dangerous to Japan’s environments than the belongings of a single person are the belongings of all individuals. And still more menacing are large-scale human cultural artifacts such as buildings, dams, nuclear power plants, and even athletic facilities, which all will remain standing, at least in the short term. Immediately after declaring that he wants to die without possessions, he implicates Japan, citing some of that nation’s recent environmental controversies:

Wait a minute!
The beginning of the twenty-first century the Japanese archipelago
waste empire number one what’s more
Tokyo Tower Nagara River dam fast breeder reactor Monju
continuing with the Nagano Winter Olympics
leaving behind the shame of twentieth-century Japan
can anyone really die?²¹¹

The contradictory answers to this question—the import of which are accentuated by references to the Nagara River dam, the Monju nuclear facility, and the Nagano Winter Olympics (1998), all of which exacted a significant environmental price—are that everyone dies leaving behind Japan’s shame, and that no one dies to the extent that people leave behind both objects and shame, they never completely leave the world.¹¹¹ The speaker not only believes that he must put his own affairs in order but also suggests that he and everyone else must tackle some of Japan’s large environmental burdens.

Despite such beliefs, he conveys no actual plans to address Japan’s ecological culpability. Instead, he moves from asking who can really die amid Japan’s shame to describing a letter from Snyder about his impending trip to the Himalaya. Snyder says nothing about alleviating the environmental problems plaguing that region, Mount Everest in particular. Instead, he cheerfully writes that he will “say hello to Chomolungma [Everest] for Nanao [Sakaki].”¹¹² Similarly, the poem’s speaker reveals that he thinks of Everest as pressed against by the Indian subcontinent and forced to stand on tiptoe (choppiri tsunasakidatsu yo); in contrast, no mention is made of the stress on this mountain propagated by tourists, including Snyder.¹¹³ And like Snyder, he is looking forward to his upcoming hike in Japan, concluding “This Flower”:

Wind north
I too stretch my back
Ah I will walk the Nagara River."¹¹⁴

This individual will be traveling along the same river whose dam he has explicitly identified as a key source of Japan’s disgrace. But as with Snyder, there is no mention of doing anything to alleviate the shameful degradation.

“This Flower” spotlights an individual deeply disturbed by Japan’s imminent transformation into the world’s largest junkyard as well as by his own contributions to this disgrace. Merely imagining an elderly woman trying to settle her affairs before she passes away makes him doubt his own ability to die in a manner he deems ideal, much less the ability of the Japanese as a whole to live in greater harmony with their environments. But the behaviors that follow on the heels of these attitudes suggest an individual who has lost hope, someone who believes he can do nothing more than escape to unavoidably compromised sites.

Sakaki’s earlier “Yuki no umi koide iku” (Snow Ocean Rowing, 1987) is narrated by an environmentally conscious individual plotting an even more drastic getaway. Here “shame” is not confined to any particular nationality; nations have melted into a distressed planet. Early in his text the poem’s speaker claims there are two planet earths: Earth A, in the solar system, and Earth B, which long ago flew to the other side of the Milky Way. Earth A is now a “megaslab of several billion robots / . . . blue and green faded.” Earth B, on the other hand, is allegedly a place where life and colors have returned: “Forests and waters are abundant / Flowers birds animals are luscious / People wear figured rainbow silk / and talk with dance and song.”¹¹⁵ Desperate to leave Earth A, the speaker finally receives an immigrant visa from Earth B; Earth B tells him he can “come back [to Earth B] anytime,” so he decides to travel there on Halley’s Comet. Noteworthy here is the speaker’s claim that he will be “returning” (kaeru) to Earth B; that he sees himself as returning not to Earth A, where he lives, but instead to a planet where he has not yet been, indicates his dissociation from his current home. “Snow Ocean” concludes as it began, with a brief stanza describing the speaker rowing in the “snow ocean” (yuki no umi), something he claims he will do until 2062, when the comet is next scheduled to appear.¹¹⁶

The individual featured in “Snow Ocean” is clearly ashamed by what people have done to the planet. He speaks of dropping his head in the presence of a rainbow, too embarrassed to confront it directly. But rather than advocate changes in behaviors, or even resolve to change his own, he instead says that he will spend the next seventy-five years with

Icicles on my beard
Snowshoes ski poles
snow ocean rowing
snow ocean rowing¹¹⁷

He will simply row along, waiting to return to a place he has been only in his imagination. Accentuating his passivity is the poem’s informational ambiguity about conditions on Earth A. Early in “Snow Ocean” the speaker declares the planet devastated, but he later indicates that he is waiting for his immigration visa not in a megaslab but in a national park that, although reshaped by people, is hardly beyond repair:

Today Earth A Japonesia. Daisetsuzan
Sakhalin fir larch shade of forested land
barely living oak Japanese poplar natural forest
long-tailed tit  Eurasian nuthatch  jay
flame of life  lingering in their cute pupils
northern red fox  Eurasian red squirrel  hare
footprints written in the snow  seen dimly
human world  tomorrow  how

“Natural” forests are simply scraping by, having been mostly replaced by forests planted by people, but the soil clearly is still capable of nourishing vegetation. Likewise, although birds of various species appear to be in some distress, life lingers in their eyes. So there is some hope of remediation. Even so, the speaker yells desperately to Earth B to sanction his travel. As in Sakaki’s poem “This Flower,” shame at what people have done to the nonhuman leads not to a resolve to rectify behaviors but to a powerful desire to abscond, whether to a nearby riverside or a faraway planet. Sakaki’s texts are oddly captivating emblems of a larger corpus of environmentally escapist literature in East Asia and the world.

Neither “This Flower” nor “Snow Ocean” discusses the consequences of such avoidance, although these can be readily imagined. In contrast, a number of creative works—including the Japanese writer Sakaki Nanao’s prose poem “Haru wa akebono” (Spring Dawn, 1994) and the Chinese writer Wang Lixiong’s novel Yellow Peril (1991)—take the opposite approach, portraying environmentalists not as fleeing ecodestruction but instead as among the world’s most destructive individuals. Although fantastical, these parodies warn not only against extreme environmentalism but also against placing too much confidence in environmental groups to repair ecosystems effectively.

“Spring Dawn” highlights the hypocrisy of a group of extraterrestrial environmentalists. Reminiscent of the classic science fiction film The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951, 2008), in this prose poem Black Angels (プラukkan ensemble: burakkku ensuru)—a superhuman people representing environmentalists from outside Japan angry at that nation’s exploitation of foreign resources—avenge Japan’s worldwide destruction of ecosystems. But whereas in The Day the Earth Stood Still the alien environmentalists target people, believing they must be exterminated so that the planet can be saved, in “Spring Dawn” they annihilate trees and threaten to attack nuclear power plants. In doing so they depict behaviors destructive to the natural world as universal. “Spring Dawn” also explicitly deciders these alien environmentalists. The first indication comes from a Beijing radio flash, midmorning on April 8: “Their size and physique, like Japanese. They have no facial expressions and no sign of gender [seibetsu wa shiriyō mo nai].” Similarly, the April 9 noon report from Japan’s Inquiry Commission declares that the angels “have no sexual characteristics or function” (seiketsu na tokuchō to kinō o motanai). And at 3:00 p.m. that afternoon the United Nations warns against negotiating with the Black Angels, emphasizing that “we cannot believe planet citizenship on a sexless and lifeless existence [seibetsu naka sei-mei no nai sonzai].” While exposing prejudices against individuals who do not map to one of the two recognized human genders, Sakaki’s “Spring Dawn” also undermines stereotypes of female “innocence” and male “guilt” in transforming human and nonhuman environments. This destabilizing is reinforced in the poem’s own description of “Japan,” rather than “Japanese men,” as responsible for destroying forests worldwide.

Sakaki’s text is dedicated to the early Japanese writer and court lady Sei Shōnagon, best known for her Makura no sōshi (Pillow Book, late tenth, early eleventh c.). Pillow Book begins with a paean to the spring dawn; the narrator declares daybreak the most beautiful attribute of the season and celebrates how it subtly colors distant hills. Echoing its predecessor, Sakaki’s “Spring Dawn” likewise opens with the phrase “In spring it is the dawn,” followed by a note that “cherry blossoms are in mid-bloom, today is the Flower Festival [Buddha’s Birthday], Friday, April 8.” But as with other literary works on ecodestruction that cite classical predecessors, “Spring Dawn” veers quickly from Sei Shōnagon’s verse. The following line describes a band of 1,200 chainsaw-winged angels descending on Japan, carrying a flag congratulating Japanese on the 1,200th anniversary of their former capital city Kyoto. The Japanese presume that the Black Angels have targeted them because they are world’s largest consumer of trees, relentlessly turning trees to woodchips, woodchips to toilet paper, and then toilet paper to comic books; the Black Angels are particularly concerned with the damage Japan’s demand for woodchips has done to Australia’s primeval forests. Nothing can stop this rogue environmental group: not the Japanese riot police, not Japan’s Ground Self-Defense Force, not even the United Nations Special Inquiry Commission Task Force.

Oddly for an organization avenging destruction of environments, the Black Angels kidnap 1,200 Japanese cartoonists, perhaps as a protest against the resources commandeered by this profession, or perhaps simply because they are addicted to their manga and want these individuals in their service. Even more significantly, the Black Angels use their chainsaw wings to fell every tree in Japan—in forests, parks, private gardens, and along city streets. Unlike many creative texts on ecodestruction, “Spring Dawn” refers to this destruction tersely: “[April 8] 7:00 a.m. Parks, shrines, the imperial palace... ancient forests, merciless... // 11:00 a.m. ... 1,200 angels with chainsaws...
for wings, dressed in black, invade Kyoto's forests...// 6:00 p.m. Spaceships\nland on stumps in bare [maruhada; lit. stark-naked] Maruyama Park, Shishimogamo Shrine, and the imperial palace in Kyoto... All the trees and forests have been razed // [April 9] 9:00 p.m. ... I walked around all day. All\nthe trees at shrines, temples, and schools felled, felled to go to factories."

Maruyama Park (丸山公園), one of Kyoto's most popular sites for cherry blossom viewing, is now maruhada (丸裸; lit. stark naked; i.e., completely razed), like everywhere else in Japan. The consequences are immediately recognized, as are additional culprits:

Bugs are chirping. Bats are flying. But how long will this continue? Our garden violets are in full bloom but without trees, what will become of them? Without trees, forests, and woodlands there'll be no dragonflies, beetles, deer, or bears, and so we perhaps won't know the seasons. A world without trees, can we call it planet earth [ki ga nakunatta sekai tte, chikyō tte yoberu n yaro ka]? We can only call it a mountain of concrete garbage [konkūrito no gomi no yama, tada sore dake ya wa].

Not only will plants and animals find it difficult to survive without trees, the world (sekai) itself risks losing its identity as planet earth (chikyō; lit. soil sphere); its soil spoiled and garbage exposed, round mountain (Maruyama) having become garbage mountain (gomi no yama), the planet now appears to consist more of human waste than of earth. Important as well is the broadening of focus from Japan to the world, suggesting that the Japanese are not the only people whose land will be flattened and not the only ones who have compromised their environments.

The Black Angels do to Japanese ecosystems precisely what the Japanese have done to ecosystems on other continents. Moreover, the damage Japanese inflict on their own country is perhaps less obvious but likely no less lethal than the devastation wreaked by the Black Angels. To be sure, while Japanese consumption of trees is depicted as unjustified, rooted partially in desire to read comics, the Black Angels—who eat comics—indirectly depend on processed trees to survive. But “Spring Dawn” does not argue that this difference justifies complete destruction of environments. Instead, it reveals the avenging angels, whom it leaves circling above Japanese nuclear power plants, as in many ways just as culpable as the people they attack.

Providing an even more brazen parody of environmentalists is the Chinese writer Wang Lixiong’s Yellow Peril, whose satires of deluded official-}

dom were examined in chapter 6. In contrast, the present chapter is concerned with how this novel—through its devastating indictments of Ouyang Zhonghua (歐陽中華; lit. Europe Sun China), his China Green Rescue Association (Zhongguo Liúse Zhengjiu Xiehui), and this group’s various “Green” (緑; lit) offshoots—portrays environmental consciousness justifying extreme attitudes and ruinous behaviors. Also illustrating the failure of even megalomaniacs to avert global social and ecological collapse, this novel underscores the near impossibility of reversing present human habits of harming the environment and even of preventing total apocalypse. At the same time that his rhetoric makes a powerful case for rejecting “material people” (wuzhoren) in favor of what he brands “spiritual people” (jingshenren)—a likely critique of the increasing materialism of Deng Xiaoping’s post-Cultural Revolution economic reforms—Ouyang also comes to believe that spiritual humanity will be possible only after the literal eradication, not just transformation, of material humanity. He is seemingly so committed to realizing a greener, more spiritual planet that he takes advantage of the collapse of China and other societies around the world to engage in exploits that cause needless human and nonhuman suffering.

Ouyang’s attitudinal conflicts are striking; he longs for a spiritual existence but also celebrates massive human casualties. His actions also are frequently contradictory. The China Green Rescue Association is responsible for developing shugua (薯瓜), a valuable substance that nourishes China’s displaced population. By participating in such activities as the Green Exhibition, this organization also works to increase public awareness of the dangers of current lifestyles to environments, as well as introduces people to the joys of the more spiritual life. But at the same time, the Green Rescue Association establishes supposed survival bases that in fact are death traps for many. Most striking in this novel is the chasm between Ouyang’s rhetorical advocacy of spiritual humanity on the one hand and his group’s merciless destruction of people on the other. Ouyang’s frequent justifications of death in the name of life, combined with the novel’s depicting a nation and planet that appear beyond repair, make resolving the disparity between rhetoric and behavior exceptionally challenging. Like the world from which they are attempting to protect themselves, Ouyang and his organization become more outrageous as the novel progresses.

Providing a foil in this novel for individuals advocating unchecked pro-
creation, industrialization, and consumerism are others committed to an explicitly “Green” approach, including those embracing the Green Party (lìdàng), Green Rescue Association, Green philosophy (liúse zhhexue), Green
religion (lijiiao), Green Exhibition, Green ideals (liuse lixiang), Green University (liuse daxue), even Greenpeace (LiUSE Heping). Yet rather than depict green groups and their individual proponents as offering viable solutions to China’s and the world’s environmental crises, Yellow Peril highlights their hypocrisy and malice, the gulls between their alleged beliefs and (the impacts of) their behaviors. The novel also ultimately underscores their faknesss. Wang Lixiong’s text depicts those committed to green lifestyles as professing concern for the welfare of people and the nonhuman yet consciously acting in ways detrimental to both. Green masks camouflage and justify injurious behaviors. The narrator remarks concerning the tyrannical Ouyang:

He recognized that he was full of wild ambition, boundless wild ambition, capable of embracing the entire world . . . His ambition was not ordinary wild ambition that could be satisfied with power and honor . . . To be able to function he had to merge with the limitlessly immense. Large, largest, as large as the universe, that was he! . . . He wanted only the ultimate extreme; missing it by a step just wouldn’t do. He had selected green [ta xuanze le liše]. This is because he knew that it was humanity’s only hope [nei shi renlei weilyi de xiawang]. Whoever grasped it first grasped the flagstick of the human future . . . He wanted only to change human history, to arrange the world anew [ta zhiyu gaibian renlei lishi, chongxin anpai shijie].

Ouyang believes that green is not one of many possibilities but instead the world’s only hope and that whoever controls it controls all humanity and has the potential literally to overturn human history. The world (Jpn. sekai; Chn. shijie) that Sakaki’s poem “Spring Dawn” depicts as about to lose its planetary status here is taunted with the hope of a new beginning. The perfect disguise, green rhetoric for Ouyang is largely a means to power, not something in which he truly believes. On the other hand, the future society he envisions is not anathema to the green philosophy and in fact could not exist without it. Wang Lixiong’s novel not only scathingly indicts individuals and organizations most obviously responsible for degrading environments but also modulates the many shades of green.

Yellow Peril initially portrays Ouyang and the Green Rescue Association as welcome presences in post–June Fourth (1989) Chinese society. Early in the novel the narrator notes that when political controls became severe after the Tiananmen demonstrations, the group assumed an especially important function even though just like the central government its real motives seemed suspect:

The “China Green Rescue Association,” an organization that had as its alleged aims [biomianshang] ecology and environmental protection [shengtai be huanbao], became the only domestic source capable of publicly announcing opinions that differed from those of the government. Its invariable concern was preventing the government from ripping off its mask [lianpi de bianyu; lit. the edges of its face]. It thus was able to maintain itself and gradually developed national influence and received international attention. The year before, Ouyang Zhonghua had won the world Greenpeace Prize [liuseheping jiang].

In the most recent political upsurge the “Green Rescue Association” played only a moderate role. With the exception of declaring its support for redressing the June Four Incident [Tiananmen Incident], it did nothing to attract public attention and did not worry about the momentum being seized by new arrivals. [For its work as peacemaker between the two factions] the “Green Rescue Association” was respected by all sides.132

The narrator’s comments that the Green Association has as it “alleged aims” ecology and environmental protection, that it works actively to prevent the government from ripping off its mask, and that it recently has permitted itself to be engulfed by new arrivals, about whose motives and aspirations the text remains notably silent, all suggest that this organization is not as “green” as it wants outsiders to believe. On the other hand, at this early juncture, Ouyang and the Green Rescue Association appear far more committed to environmental health than the Chinese government. Not only has Ouyang been accorded international recognition for his efforts to safeguard China’s environment, he also recently was imprisoned for leading a protest against the severe damage caused by an accident at a nuclear power station.133 In fact, the novel’s first reference to Ouyang is as a person jailed for environmental activism.

The narrator returns to Ouyang several chapters later, after describing devastating floods along the Yellow River. Again, Ouyang is portrayed as conscious of environmental hypocrisy, this time manifested by the nongovernmental environmental organization Greenpeace; Ouyang develops his own environmental theories in direct response to what he believes to be Greenpeace’s failed rhetoric. The novel notes that he became interested in the green movement during his earlier career as a writer. He admired the insights and objectives of Greenpeace, depicted in Yellow Peril as “coming from the West” (Greenpeace’s first China office did not open until 1997, six years after the publication of Yellow Peril) and warning about ecological catastrophe,
condemning the pursuit of limitless growth, industrialization, and consumerism, and urging self-control, respect for the fragile earth and other species (zhouhong zai ren de diqiu he qita wuzhong), and the creation of a new mode of production and way of life. Ouyang agreed with these tenets but was frustrated with what he perceived as this organization's “extremely feeble and vague solutions”—the chasm between Greenpeace's pronouncements and its ability to effect environmental change. He believed strongly that

To make people abandon in a single day the creation and consumption of material wealth, which had been the principal theme of human life for all of human history, would require more than empty words (kongdong cihui) such as “peace,” “intelligence,” and “return to nature” (zuidao ziran). Also worthless is making people feel satisfied with words urging restraint such as “morality,” “control,” and “self-control.”

Ouyang hopes to change human history and arrange the world anew; he longs for the opportunity to transform “material society” (wuzhong shehui) into “spiritual society” (jingshenren shehui). But he makes it clear that Greenpeace, with its “empty words,” will be of little help in this endeavor. His criticisms of Greenpeace are noteworthy considering this organization's history of radical environmentalism; Yellow Peril suggests that in a world on the brink of ecological collapse even rhetoric and behaviors that have been considered extreme are no longer sufficient. Greenpeace is not accused of actively harming environments, but Ouyang is convinced that nothing good can come from giving more attention to guidelines for behaviors than to behaviors themselves.

Ouyang responds to Greenpeace's lexicon with “spirituality,” a term that has catapulted him to best-seller lists and bookshelves around the globe; a true work of world literature, his foundational text jingshen ren (Spiritual People) has been translated into dozens of languages, and his theories allegedly have become a cornerstone of the international green movement (goujie liye yundong). According to Ouyang, the future depends on material consumerism being superseded by spiritual aesthetics, material humanity becoming spiritual humanity, and material forms of life becoming spiritual forms of life. This is because, he argues, the “beauty” (mei) pursued by those committed to the spiritual life is a source of energy just as forceful, just as incessantly stimulating to human life as the desire for material wealth.

At the same time, Ouyang's theories have some troubling loopholes and contradictions that make them even more suspect than the rhetoric of Greenpeace. First, Ouyang believes that “spirit” (jingshen) differentiates people and animals, that people have the ability to evolve into spiritual creatures whereas animals are forever grounded in the material world. Even today, we are only beginning to understand animal consciousness, and the narrator of Yellow Peril does not indicate whether Ouyang's comment actively rejects recent findings on this topic or stems from his ignorance. But Ouyang's perception that animals are less evolved than people indicates anthropocentrism that eventually is used to justify mistreatment of the nonhuman.

Second, and more disturbing, are the parallels between Ouyang's quest for a spiritual life and people's pursuit of material wealth, which he is attempting to reverse. He claims that because the search for a spiritual life is “not confined by resources” (shuoshu ziyuan xianzhi) there are literally “no limits to growth.” Ouyang also asserts that the principal objective of the new society will be the “constant heightening of people's spiritual life”; people will be most satisfied by “pursuing the demands of unceasing progress.” To be sure, Ouyang makes clear that in the society of the future, material life, while allowing people to be “warmly dressed and well fed,” also will be maintained at a level that conforms to available resources; spiritual growth will not come at the expense of environmental health. He likewise justifies his emphasis on the ceaseless development of spirituality by presenting it as redirecting into a less damaging course what has been deemed unalterable: the human need always to be pursuing something, whether tangible or intangible. Even so, it remains uncertain not only how definitively spiritual quests will be divided from their material counterparts but also what constitutes being “warmly fed and well dressed” and what it actually means to “conform to the environment.” Also unclear is what will happen when spiritual and material objectives collide, as seems inevitable.

Finally, the narrator notes that despite the worldwide influence of Ouyang's book, he refuses to take part in the many debates surrounding it, particularly those concerning the proposed transforming of material humanity into spiritual humanity. His silence stems not from the belief that he has nothing to learn from others' opinions. Instead, he feels that being a celebrity prevents him from talking freely, from saying anything unassailable. He believes in spiritual humanity strongly enough to write about it but not to debate it with others and develop more effective strategies. Yellow Peril reveals the ambiguities of Ouyang's green philosophy even before China's expected massive ecological and social collapse.

Implementing beliefs and rhetoric proves to be an even more convoluted process. Immediately after describing Ouyang's convictions, the narrator reveals that the recent massive human suffering caused by breached dikes and
floods, he changes rapidly from encouraging people to “be pure of heart
and have few desires,” “be content with your lot,” and “love nature”
instead to promoting annihilation. Incapable of reconciling his vision of the future
with the realities of the present, he believes total cataclysm a prerequisite for
reform. Once longing himself to “change history,” he now is devoted to helping
destiny take its course.

Even more striking than the speed and entirety of Ouyang’s conversion
is the contrast between his preoccupation with his personal security and his
complaint that people are too obsessed with their own comfort to sacrifice
anything for the future. His obsession leads him to initiate brutality that
rivals and at times exceeds the violence of the very entities whose obliteration
he believes necessary and inevitable. In his new book Nirvana Ouyang
repeats his assertion that destroying the present world is desirable because
it will hasten the arrival of its much improved counterpart; he envisions “a
completely new world being created on the ruins of the old world” (jiu sbijie
de feixushang yunyu yige quansxin sbijie). But he also recognizes that if this
new world of spiritual humanity is actually to materialize some people from
the current world must be saved. So Ouyang proposes that select individuals
be chosen to function as its progenitors, preferably “spiritual people with a
good education who have a high degree of intelligence and good measure of
self-control.” It is these people, fearful that the terrors of the old world
will be repeated, who will forever exercise self-restraint in everything they
do, from reproducing and learning to producing and living.

In other words, not only do Ouyang and the Green Association take no
steps to prevent the demolition of contemporary society, they actively en-
courage it, while sparing themselves and a chosen few. Replacing “material
humanity” with “spiritual humanity” thus has less to do with transforming
consciousness than with eliminating those who are not already “spiritual
people.” A complication is that “spiritual humanity” will quickly vanish
in a collapsing material world; those who allegedly live the life of the mind
and privilege the soul will be unable to endure what some call a deteriorating
animal existence in an animal world. In this sense, Ouyang and his col-
leagues in the Green Association practice what they preach. The govern-
ment allows them to establish six experimental bases to test their theories.
Although known to the public as Nature Protection Regions (ziran baobuqian),
these spaces in fact become sites of considerable violence; those in charge,
and Ouyang in particular, demonstrate little if any spirituality or self-control.

The greater the chaos in the world outside his nature reserves, the greater
Ouyang’s megalomania. He initially makes it clear to his followers that al-
though they should stop at nothing, including violence, to protect themselves

unprecedented flooding along the Yellow River “appears to be an opportu-
nity [sibij] for which Ouyang’s been waiting.” Rather than aspiring to
reform contemporary society, which has long adhered to behaviors harmful
to environments, Ouyang has yearned for a virtual tabula rasa. Understand-
ably, he believes that simply stepping back and allowing people to become
spiritual of their own accord will take millennia, by which time green poli-
cies will be meaningless because the planet already will have been destroyed
dozens of times over. Moreover, Ouyang is certain that even if he were to
work industriously under normal circumstances, he would not see results
within his lifetime and would have to entrust his life’s work to posterity,
something he is loath to do. Complete calamity, such as the floods China just
experienced, is by far the best scenario for allowing him to embark on his
project. So Ouyang parachutes into the flood zone, targeting an island where
people are temporarily isolated from outside political, economic, and social
forces and where he believes he can successfully propagate his green religion.
Asserting many parallels between the principles of the “green life” and conven-
tional Chinese values including “ardently loving nature” (rei zi ran), he
believes the stranded citizenry will be easy converts. Discovering to his
dismay that the people here have no interest in such matters, within hours
he loses all hope and begins longing for a more dramatic collapse of society.
Ouyang drifts off into reverie: “If material ‘people’ couldn’t become spiritual
‘people’ the world was condemned to destruction [huimie]. He had worked
hard, but from early on had thought destruction could not be avoided . . .
A new idea came to him. Destruction and the green future [huimie he li se
weilai] would go hand in hand, and death [siwong] would link in these two
hands.” Ironically it is a voice of life, not death, that brings his mind back
to the scene at hand, that of a young woman urging him to eat dinner. But
Ouyang remains obsessed with death and obliteration:

Things here would run their course. Since destruction [huimie] was
inevitable, since destruction was necessary for new life [xisheng], let
destruction come as soon as possible. Accelerating destruction was
spurring the advance of history. Since they were about to die, since it
was only after the complete annihilation of the material people [wu-
zhiren de damie] that the spiritual age [jingshen shidai] could begin,
the death of these people had a kind of ice-cold destiny. To save them
would be to go against history. As Ouyang’s repetition of “destruction” suggests, he has undergone a dra-

As Ouyang’s repetition of “destruction” suggests, he has undergone a dra-
matic conversion. Unable to sway the minds of populations devastated by

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from invaders, they are not to leave the compounds to attack others. But as he develops a political party, additional bases, an army, and even a university, his "violence principle" soon evolves into committing physical assaults; violence becomes common not only outside the walls surrounding the bases, as thousands of undesirables attempt to burst inside, but also within the compounds themselves.\textsuperscript{144} When Ouyang's girlfriend Chen Pan visits him at one of the nature reserves, she notes how forbidding they have become and realizes that her own future is in jeopardy: "The former 'Beauty Bases' [the nature reserves of the Green Association] had become [under the control of the Green Party] ice-cold subsistence bases... This was thanks to Ouyang's aspirations of becoming God [shangdi]. According to the standards he had instituted as God, she would be eliminated."\textsuperscript{145} Ouyang does not dispose of her immediately, but he does inform her that he is more qualified than God to choose survivors. And so when she demands—"Ouyang Zhonghua, let me see you shoot someone! Let me see how you are as a butcher! Let me see your pursuit of beauty and Green ideals!"—he willingly obliges until her universe turns dark.\textsuperscript{146} Chen Pan survives but leaves the base, heading to an almost certain death.

Since nature has already been virtually destroyed and the planet enveloped by nuclear winter, most of the green army's victims are people.\textsuperscript{147} But one of the novel's final sections, titled "Nature Reserve—Dog Pens," depicts violence to both humans and animals so atrocious that the dissonance between green ideals and green practices could hardly be more vivid. The narrator notes that the dog enclosure was wholly Ouyang's idea and that he knows well what happens there, but because he is too ashamed of the horrors he has unleashed, he has no desire to see the pen for himself. The base feeds human corpses to the dogs it is raising for food; many of these corpses are of people who have perished trying to enter the reserve. Ouyang has commissioned mentally and physically disabled individuals to staff the pen, since no one else is willing to perform such work. In "Nature Reserve—Dog Pens," Ouyang operates the pen himself. He corrals the despised Green Guards, who have raped women and beaten and needlessly executed people of both genders, and puts them in a pen with a young woman and a rabid dog. The Green Guards are excited, expecting they can watch the dog and woman copulate. But instead, Ouyang releases 150 dogs on the guards, resulting in the deaths of all of the men and most of the dogs. Ouyang is thrilled at this turn of events, believing himself master of the world. Yet still unsatisfied, he rapes the woman and unleases the remaining dogs on a worker who witnessed the attack. Suddenly terrified of what he has done and blurring boundaries between people and animals, Ouyang asks, "Had he truly become a wild animal?... Did the blood and flesh all around him indicate human defeat of wild animals or the defeat of wild animals by wild animals?"\textsuperscript{148} Whereas he earlier had declared that people's ability to evolve into spiritual creatures separated them from animals, he now recognizes that human and nonhuman might not be so different after all.

Even more alarming than Ouyang's transformation from an individual advocating "spiritual humanity" into a "wild animal" is his utter powerlessness to forestall complete social and ecological collapse. As megalomaniacal as he is, as carefully as he has designed his survival bases, he is unable to assemble an adequate force to protect his chosen spiritualists from the thousands of starving, desperate people storming the barriers. His actions make talk of "spiritual humanity" replacing "material humanity" appear ludicrous. Deceived by his own security forces, he seems to stand virtually alone. The final section of the novel portrays a single unidentified man walking across a desolate earth; it is possible but unlikely that this man is Ouyang. Instead, the novel suggests that he has simply disappeared, like so many others. He and his dystopia have evaporated into nothingness.

Ouyang and his green movement obviously caricature not only some of China's unavailing protest movements but also more generally the extremes to which individuals and organizations will go to further their own agendas. Unlike Sakaki's Black Angels, who destroy ecosystems on a vast scale, Ouyang is not ultimately responsible for the planetary apocalypse described in \textit{Yellow Peril}. And this ecological collapse appears more hyperbole than an accurate forecast of the chaos likely to descend on the globe if environmental concerns are not addressed more responsibly and effectively. But even so, the parodies of environmental activism in Wang Lixiong's novel significantly amplify many of the same concerns voiced in Sakaki's poem "Spring Dawn," highlighting the contradictions and inconsistencies inherent in any attempt to transform both mental and physical landscapes. Forming significant intercultural conceptual networks, much literature on environmental degradation reveals, in however exaggerated and parodic form, contradictions between professed attitudes and actual behaviors toward the environment. In doing so these writings expose the eternal gaps between human aspirations and concrete actions. They also suggest that to aspire to something better even as we undermine our own lives and that of the nonhuman is part of the essence of being human.

Far from resolving the ecological conundrums it describes, most literature on environmental distress further ambiguates these ambiguities, bringing to light deeper discrepancies. In fact, poetry and prose regularly counter the
unstable, inverted pyramids of environmental Ponzi schemes with their own mushrooming miasmas of environmental ambiguity. Creative writing often makes matters even more confusing by remaining silent about its uncertainties: many narrators and characters seem unaware of the discrepancies they depict or exhibit. Indeed, to the extent that they are aware of them, people often suppress the contradictions of their interactions with environments. Analyses of literature can provide sharp lenses for deeper insight into processes of environmental degradation by highlighting creative articulations of these disjunctions. Better appreciating the uncertainties and contingencies of ecodegradation in literature, and in life, should allow for more productive relationships among people and the natural world.

By teasing out intercultural conceptual networks of ecoambiguity, this book has brought to light the tremendous variety of writing that engages with ecological challenges in East Asia and beyond. Just as important, it has argued for more fluidity and flexibility in literature scholarship. Ecoambiguity proposes not only that we look more closely at how individual literatures address urgent matters of global concern but also that we consider literary negotiations with these issues regardless of the national corpus to which the texts belong. In other words, this book suggests that even as we probe deeper into cultural contexts we do more to use topics and concepts as the bases of analysis.

How we conceptualize global problems such as poverty, slavery, disease, and environmental degradation is enriched by examining the multiple literatures of world regions and, to the extent possible, multiple regions and ultimately the globe. Analyzing literary treatments of these phenomena as expressed in various languages and cultural settings leads to clearer understanding of shared problems and a better basis for resolving them. This is not to deny the importance of cultural specificity; it is crucial to be familiar with the local and national contexts in which literature is produced. And it is certainly true that even as literatures become more global they often become more national. But beyond focusing on what is written in particular languages or cultural spheres, we also should analyze how literatures from multiple sites treat shared phenomena found in one form or another across the world. The shift is in many cases subtle: for example, from studying how Japanese and Chinese literatures discuss pollution to examining literary engagement with pollution by incorporating examples from several cultures, including Chinese and Japanese. But when we change frames of reference the shift is nearly always significant: we start not with China, Japan, or any individual nation or people but instead with the global problem of pollution. The shift is even more significant when the focus is concepts (e.g., ecoambiguity) rather than topics (e.g., pollution). Moving the spotlight away from looking solely at what narratives tell us about specific peoples and cultures to what they also reveal about widespread human and nonhuman phenomena—in this case abuse to people and the natural world writ large—helps us break down barriers of isolation, insularity, and exceptionalism. Such an approach allows for new understandings, insights, and interpretations of cultural processes across time and space.

Creative negotiations with ecological destruction tend to open themselves or be more easily opened to the world than discourse on other global problems. Such texts speak bluntly about global apocalypse, or they liken conditions in one place to conditions half a world away, or they focus on the traumas inflicted on a particular space or nonhuman body that might infiltrate or be located or duplicated in any number of sites. In both their origins and their outlooks these and similar literary strategies can increase planetary consciousness. This is true even if texts have not traveled far themselves, neither translated, intertextualized, discussed, or even available in more than one literary space. It is true even if they are written in a language not frequently translated or even known by many outside a particular place. Literature on ecological devastation, no matter its cultural and environmental origins, regularly reaches out to the broader world. And so too should the literary critic.

Discourse on environmental and disciplinary crises abounds. Many contend that ecological calamities are likely to be the most pressing issues of the twenty-first century. Many also argue that literature scholarship and the humanities more generally are in flux. These dilemmas will not be easily resolved. But scholarship on individual cultures provides vital foundations for comprehending specific contexts of ecological abuse. The fields of comparative and particularly world literature help us appreciate more fully how creative writing and scholarship on creative writing can both reinforce and defy national, cultural, linguistic, geopolitical, and ecological divisions. Ecocriticism and other branches of environmental humanities demonstrate especially clearly the exciting possibilities for humanistic intervention in eco-degradation. Yet there is much work to be done. Without abandoning our time-honored approaches, humanists need to collaborate more with one another to expand our cultural and disciplinary scopes, incorporating more diverse materials and methodologies even while nurturing expertise in new and specific areas. Ideally, working with colleagues in the social, physical, and life sciences, we can develop deeper connections among disciplines with the ultimate aims of embracing more fully the wider world—culturally, geographically, biophysically—and of analyzing how the cultural products to whose study we devote our professional lives do the same.
105. Ibid., 1:70.
106. Ibid., 2:263.
107. Ibid., 2:264, 266.
108. Ibid., 1:71.
109. Wawa can mean either “baby” or “doll.”
110. Wang Lixiong, Huang buo, 3:275-76.
111. Sakaki Nanao, “Midori eien nari,” 60.
112. Franklin R. Rogers, Painting and Poetry, 66. Sen no Rikyū lived from 1522 to 1591.
114. Ibid., 61.
115. C. V. Kremenetski et al., “Late-Quaternary Dynamics of Pines,” 95-106.
116. The color white overtakes the color green in the fourth stanza, with its references to the Japanese white pine and White Mountain.
117. Nobiyagaru also means “stand on tiptoe.”

CHAPTER 7

2. Lucille Lang Day, “Letter to Send in a Space Capsule,” 606. The timber merchant Zhang likewise declares in Gao Xingjian’s environmental drama Yeren (Wild Man, 1985), “I love these trees dearly. My heart cries for them.” Zhang anthropomorphizes these plants, declaring that if his colleagues go into the woods, “You will hear, the trees all can speak.” Yet still he spends his days felling them. Gao Xingjian, Yeren, 150. For more on this drama see Monica Basting, Yeren.
5. Ibid., 160.
6. Ibid., 164.
7. Ibid., 167.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 168.
10. Ibid., 169.
11. Ibid., 174.
12. Ibid., 350.
13. Ibid., 463.
15. Ibid., 561.
16. Ibid., 506.
17. Ibid., 541.
18. Ibid., 548.
19. Ibid., 126.

20. Ibid., 169.
21. Ibid., 169-70.
22. The South African-born Australian writer J. M. Coetzee’s (1940-) novel Disgrace (1999), a haunting tale of postapartheid South Africa, features one of the logical extremes of this phenomenon. The protagonist David Lurie, a former professor, works at an animal welfare clinic that every week kills “superfluous” dogs; his job is to dispose of their remains. He takes this task seriously, out of respect for the dogs that have been killed. Unwilling to see their corpses mutilated, he carries them to the incinerator himself: “The dogs are brought to the clinic because they are unwanted . . . That is where he enters their lives. He may not be their savior, the one for whom they are not too many, but he is prepared to take care of them once they are unable, utterly unable, to take care of themselves . . . There must be other, more productive ways of giving oneself to the world . . . He saves the honor of corpses because there is no one else stupid enough to do it” (146). David himself does not directly hurt dogs, but the deep respect he has for the dogs’ corpses does not extend to their living bodies. Of course, even if it did, there is likely nothing he could do to offer the animals a better life.
23. In some creative texts, the only significant disjunction expressed is between attitudes and behaviors. In others the gap between attitudes and behaviors coexists with the attitudinal conflicts examined in chapter 2: individuals deeply respect the environment yet believe it is theirs for the taking. Many of the creative works examined in chapter 2 also include gaps between beliefs and behaviors, and many of the creative works discussed in this chapter also incorporate gaps between attitudes. But while chapter 2 focuses on these attitudinal conflicts, the present chapter centers on disjunctions between attitudes and actions.
24. It is unclear whether Awei is aware that the bird recently ingested pesticide.
26. Ibid., 79.
27. Keeping birds in cages to fulfill emotional desires is of course not unique to Aawi. For example, in the first half of 2010, nearly one hundred elderly Tokyo residents were charged with keeping birds illegally. One widower claimed that “having the bird there in a cage soothed his heart.” See “Committing Crime for Company.”
29. Ibid., 123.
30. Ibid., 115.
31. Murakami is known the world over for his powerful narratives on everything from young love to Japanese atrocities in World War Two, including in such works as the three-volume Nejunakidori kuronikau (The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, 1995). Murakami’s novels, short stories, and nonfiction have been translated into more than forty languages, and they are best-sellers in China, Korea, Taiwan, and numerous other countries. His fiction is translated into Chinese and Korean almost immediately after it appears in Japan. Scholarship on the Murakami boom in Asia and around the world is vast. For summaries of this phenomenon see Fujii Shôzô, “Higashi Aija to Murakami Haruki” and

Murakami did not begin writing until he was nearly thirty, and he was never awarded the Akutagawa Prize, the conventional entrée into the Japanese literary elite. But despite this initial lack of recognition and the literary establishment's often harsh dismissals of his work, such early texts as "Chūgoku yuki no surō bōto” (Slow Boat to China, 1980), Hitsuji o meguru bōken (A Wild Sheep Chase, 1982), Sekai no owari to bādōhirudo wandering (Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World, 1985), and Noruen no mori (Norwegian Wood, 1987) established him as a formidable talent, and his popularity quickly soared. His recent trilogy 1Q84 (2009-10), a publishing sensation and translated into Korean and Chinese just months after its release in Japanese, features agricultural communes that have attracted the attention of Japanese scholars of literature and the environment. "Environmental Literature." Murakami is a prolific translator of English-language literature, including the American writers F. Scott Fitzgerald, Raymond Carver (1938-1988), John Irving (1942-), Truman Capote (1924-1984), Ursula K. Le Guin, and Chris Van Allsburg (1949-). Murakami's nonfiction is also distinguished: he wrote about the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subways in Andaguraundo (Underground, 1997), a collection of interviews with victims of the incident supplemented by his own commentary, and Yakusoku sareta baso de: Andaguraundo 2 (The Place that Was Promised: Underground 2, 1998), a collection of interviews with members of the Aum Shinrikyō cult. Jay Rubin, "Murakami Haruki."

33. For examples see Jim Dwyer, Where the Wild Books Are, 99-100.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 426.
37. Ibid., 408-9.
38. Ibid., 411.
39. Ibid., 414.
40. Ibid., 414.
41. Ibid., 405. The mayor uses the elephant's age to justify its adoption by the town (407).
42. Ibid., 410.
43. Ibid., 421.
44. Ibid., 414.
45. Elephants are known for their great intelligence and uncommonly strong bonds with the land, one another, and at times the people who nurture them. See Charles Siebert, "An Elephant Crackup?"
46. David G. Goodman, "Introduction: Oguma Hideo." Oguma was born in Hokkaido and moved with his family to Japan's colony in Sakhalin in 1911; he relocated to Tokyo in 1928. During his life he published only two books of poetry but deeply impressed his contemporaries and later writers, including such leading poets as Nakano Shigeharu (1902-1979), Kijima Hajime (1928-), Ishida Hiroshi (1932-), and Oyaduki Hideo (1916-2000), who together published a six-volume collection of his work in 1980, four decades after his death. Oguma was active in Japanese proletarian literary circles in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In the mid- and late 1930s he founded and edited a number of literary journals and continued writing in earnest. His post-tenkō (renunciation of communism) writing emphasized the need to separate literature and politics but also promoted progressive ideals. Most impressive are his long narrative poems published in 1935, including "Flying Sled." Unlike most wartime Japanese writers, Oguma did not support Japan's conflict with China and instead attempted to understand the experiences of Japan's victims—Chinese, Koreans, and the Ainu.
47. Sakhalin Island, Russia's largest, is located just north of Hokkaido. The southern part of Sakhalin Island was administered by Japan as Karafuto between Russia's defeat by Japan in 1905 and Japan's own defeat in 1945.
51. Ibid., 99.
52. Ibid., 124.
53. Ibid., 127.
54. Ibid.
55. Gontarō depicts his techniques as perfectly ordinary, at least among the Ainu.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid., 97.
60. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1920-1993) was born Kathleen Jean Mary Ruska and also was known as Kath Walker. She was a member of the Noonuccal tribe (Australia) and was a leader of aboriginal activist movements beginning in the 1960s. Her popular anthology We are Going was the first volume of poetry published by an Australian aboriginal writer.
61. Other Korean creative writing on environmental ambiguities associated with the 1988 Seoul Olympics includes Han Sungwoon's (1939-) novel Abojjwa adul (Father and Son, 1989), which addresses the campaign against eating dog meat launched to appease the United States and other Western nations.
63. Ibid., 471.
64. Removing the foliage that heretofore camouflaged the countryside's many television (a much milder version of what Sakaki's Black Angels do to Japan, discussed later in this chapter) also makes the countryside look more like the city.
66. Ibid., 470-71.
67. The cult of Dazai is larger and more passionate than most. Like many
nese writers, Dazai used literature as a way of probing and exposing the self, their "authentic" or constructed. But what makes his work stand out is its ring honesty and intimacy. Also inviting is his inventive prose style and lively, luscious colorings. Much of Dazai's oeuvre concerns the shanm between the few who strive for integrity, and society at large; Dazai speaks frequently of as wallowing in deceit. His first volume, Bannen (Final Years, 1936), is a collection of diverse stories, covering everything from his childhood to the history of Edo period. Dazai is best known for the novels Shayô (The Setting Sun, 1947) and Ningen shikkaku (No Longer Human, 1948), both of which highlight the weakness of postwar Japan. Joel Cohn, "Dazai Osamu." Roy Stares discusses his lifelong ambivalence toward his childhood home and its impact on his life. In "Nation and Region in the Work of Dazai Osamu." For discussions of nonhuman in Dazai's oeuvre, see Omoi Ikunosuke, "Dazai Osamu to shi." Also see Shin Hyonson (Shin Hyun-seon), "Dajai Osamu [Dazai Osamu] hak." 58. Phyllis I. Lyons, The Saga of Dazai Osamu, 140-48. Tsugaru was composed by the publisher Koyama Shoten for its series of regional studies by ninent writers. For more on Tsugaru, see Nannyo Guo et al., eds., Tsugaru, particularly Hidenichi Kawanishi, "The Transformation of Modern Tsugaru tity." 59. Dazai Osamu, Tsugaru, 259-60. 60. Tokes frequently control the water in such places. 61. Dazai Osamu, Tsugaru, 286-87. 62. Ibid., 288. 63. Ibid., 302. Dazai uses the term fukei (landscape) differently from Shiga etaka, discussed in chapter 1, who employs fukei rather than the conventional, humanistic keikan so as to be more tangible/concrete regarding Japan's physical setting. Shiga was a geologist, but still romanticized Japan as not so different as to superior to other countries. 64. Goncharov (1812-1891) is best known for his novel Oblomov (1858). 65. Dazai Osamu, Tsugaru, 274. 66. Ibid., 274-75. 67. Ibid., 275. 68. Ibid. 69. Ibid. 70. Shôko Köbô played a principal role in Japan's postwar literary avant-garde remained a dominant figure in Japanese literature for the rest of his life; his work has been translated into many languages and been celebrated abroad. spent most of his youth in Manchuria, where his father was a physician. He was admitted to the University of Tokyo in 1943 and began publishing in 1948 while in school. His debut fiction, Ouwa michi no shibute ni (On the Sign at End of the Road, 1948) is set in Manchuria at the end of the war and discus questions of home and homeland. Although these issues remained focal points of his oeuvre, Abé quickly moved away from autobiographical writing. He lished volumes of avant-garde fiction that aptly blend the experimental and ec with science, math, and logic. His best-known works are Woman in th Map, 1967); Face of Another features a chemist with a severely scarred face who believes he can restore his identity via a mask, while Ruined Map depicts a detective searching for a missing man while identifying closely with his need to escape society. Christopher Bolton, "Abé Köbô." Abé's oeuvre is not obviously environmental, but its futuristic scenarios point to possible consequences of continued human manipulation of ecosystems. As noted in chapter 1, Abé's novel Inter-Ice Age Four features a world utterly transformed by rising sea levels. Also important from an ecological perspective is his short story "Dendrocacia;" which portrays a man transformed into a plant and highlights similarities between man and plant. 81. Susan Rubin Suleiman, Subversive Intent, 12. See also Karen L. Thom- ber, "Ecocriticism and Japanese Literature of the Avant Garde." 82. Abé Köbô, Sana no onna, 10. The narrator is purposely vague concerning the location of the village. He indicates that only the journey from Niki's home to the dunes takes barely half a day via rail (to "S Station"), bus, and foot. It is likely that Niki's travels took him to the Tottori sand dunes on Japan's western seashore, which Abé's literary predecessor Arishima Takeo (1878-1923) made famous and which Abé visited before writing Woman in the Dunes; "S station" could refer to Suetsune Station, located only one stop from Tottori University (where Abé did some of his research) and three stops from Tottori Station. But Tottori Station's greater proximity to the dunes than Suetsune Station complicates this interpretation. It is also possible that the narrator is evoking sand dunes in Manchuria (northeastern China), where Abé spent much of his childhood. Abé lived in the city of Shenyang, so the "S" could suggest Shenyang Station; in addition, Liaoning Province's long coastline, not far from Shenyang, includes numerous sand dunes. Or perhaps the novel is alluding to China's and Mongolia's Gobi Desert, whose windborne sands regularly invade Japan. At the same time, the narrator strongly implies that the story takes place in Japan. To give an example, the village elders provide Niki with a newspaper with headlines that, with one exception (the deaths of 280 people in Africa), either do not specify location or are explicitly about events in Japan; Niki not coincidentally is drawn to an article, cited in the narrative, on a fossil construction accident in Yokokawa (Gunma Prefecture) involving sand and the Tô-A Construction Company (Tô-A Kensei Kôyô, est. 1908). The bureaucracy and social structure depicted in the novel also mirror those of 1950s Japan. 83. Abé Köbô, Sana no onna, 144. 84. The avant-garde filmmaker Teshigahara Hiroshi (1927-2001) worked on several films with Abé. 85. David Pollack, Reading against Culture, 128. 86. Sasaki Kiichi, "Güwa teki ni shika kokkai dekinai," 3. 87. Susan J. Napier, Escape from the Wasteland, 13. 88. J. Thomas Rimer, A Reader's Guide to Japanese Literature, 179. 89. Abé Köbô, Sana no onna, 9-8. Much scholarship on Woman in the Dunes addresses Niki's interest in insects but for the most part reads this connection symbolically (as indicating, for instance, an obsession with detail), rather than as pointing to human/nonhuman interactions. 90. Abé Köbô, Sana no onna, 61-62.
91. Ibid., 9.
92. Roy Rosenstein discusses other meanings of Niki’s quest for insects in “The End of Insect Imagery.”
93. Abe Kobo, Sama no otama, 11.
94. Ibid., 72.
95. Ibid., 76.
96. Ibid., 65.
97. Ibid., 13.
98. Ibid., 15.
99. Ibid., 29.
100. Ibid., 13.
102. Ibid., 134.
103. Ibid., 92-93.
104. Ibid., 93.
105. Norimitsu Onishi, “In the Shrinking Dunes.”
107. Ibid., 50.
108. See chapter 13; Kada Yukiko et al., “From Kogai to Kankyo Mondai,” 159-70.
110. Ibid.
111. “This Flower” is date-stamped October 1995. As in “Someday,” discussed in chapter 3, Sakaki’s reference to Monju in “This Flower” might have been fortuitous, but he also could have changed the poem in light of the December 1995 sodium leak and fire at the plant. Likewise, although “This Flower” was written several years before the Nagano Olympics, the environmental consequences of this sporting event were already becoming apparent despite the latter’s billing as the “Environmental Olympics” and slogan “coexistence with beautiful and abundant nature.”
113. Pollution and other environmental problems have increased dramatically on Everest in recent decades, largely because of the greater numbers attempting to climb the mountain. For more on this phenomenon see “Environmental Problems and Efforts to Save Mount Everest.”
116. Halley’s Comet will next be visible from Earth in 2061.
118. Ibid., 10. Daisetsuzan is Japan’s largest national park.
119. Although not as fantastical, also complicating dichotomies are such texts as the German writer Gunter Seuren’s (1932-) novel Die Kratenkiser (The Toad Kisser, 2000), which depicts a group of environmental activists who aim to revitalize a 10,000-square-meter urban space. Led by a local biology student (Staudinger) and hoping to save the European green toad population, the environmentalists advocate returning this space to a “pristine” state off-limits to people. Not surprisingly, they are taunted by the city’s adults and children alike, who call them “toad kissers,” “green weirdos,” “eco-shits,” and “eco-arseholes.” Yet Staudinger himself is quickly revealed as a tyrant; obsessed with controlling every aspect of the reserve, he brings in an excavator to dig basins that will accelerate the lifecycle of the toads, he lines the basins with plastic, and he sterilizes the soil with a gas burner to prevent weeds from consuming the wildflower seeds he has planted; he also has the narrator cut off the limbs of hibernating toads. The narrator goes so far as to compare the toad-breeding project to the Nazis’ Lebensborn. Staudinger’s scheme ultimately fails: toads die by the thousands likely because of poisons that were injected into the soil years ago during construction of the subway. Axel Goodbody, Nature, Technology, and Cultural Change, 238-45. Seuren’s The Toad Kisser does not depict environmentalists as bearing principal responsibility for the devastation of ecosystems, but it does complicate dichotomies between people devoted to “preserving” and people seemingly intent on “destroying” the natural world.
120. Other creative works feature plants and animals, as opposed to semihuman creatures, striking back. See the German writer Frank Schätzings (1957-) best-selling novel Der Schwarm (The Swarm, 2004), where a new species of worms collapses the continental shelf, previously innocuous marine life attacks people en masse, and lobsters trigger an epidemic. Schätzings’ The Swarm is reminiscent of the American writer Arthur Herzog’s (1927-2010) The Swarm (1974), which features killer bees that migrate from Africa to South America and then to the United States. Related films include Godzilla (1954); The Day of the Triffids (1962); Frogs (1972), which has the tagline “It’s the day that Nature strikes back”! ; The Day After Tomorrow (2004); The Ruins (2008); and The Happening (2008). Also noteworthy is creative work where nature actively defends itself, preventing degradation, such as the tales “Curupira: Guardian Spirit of the Forest” and “Mapinguari: One-Eyed Ogre” on nonhuman protectors of the Amazon. See also Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow, “Sued by the Forest.”
122. Ibid., 41.
123. Ibid., 42.
124. For more on gender in Sakaki’s verse and his attacks on conventional ecofeminist thought see Karen L. Thornber, “Degendering Ecodgradation.”
125. Sei Shônagon lived from 966 to 1017.
127. The narrator of Ruth Ozeki’s My Year of Meats likewise credits Sei Shonagon for being her inspiration. She begins each chapter with a quotation from the Pillow Book. But far from setting the tone of the chapter, these quotations highlight the incommensurability of Sei Shonagon’s depictions of environments with current conditions.
128. Kyoto became Japan’s imperial capital in 794.
130. Ibid., 44.
132. Ibid., 124-25.
133. Ouyang and the Green Rescue Association also are said to have worked to negotiate peace between the People’s Front and the Democracy Front. Both
the People's Front and the Democracy Front want to reform China, but while the former is supported primarily by workers and the urban population, the latter is supported by intellectuals with strong international connections. Most of the leaders of the People's Front were imprisoned after Tiananmen, while the leaders of the Democracy Front found refuge in the United States and other nations.

134. Wang Lixiong, Huang huo, 1:79.
135. Ibid., 1:80.
136. Ibid.
137. Ibid., 1:81.
138. Ibid., 1:82-83.
139. Ibid., 1:86.
140. See ibid., 1:272. The complaint appears in his new book Nirvana.
141. Ibid., 1:273.
142. Ibid.
143. Ouyang envisions people who already are spiritual as developing a more fear-based consciousness, but this transformation is less significant than that from material to spiritual.
144. The bases admit only those who have mastered a particular specialty, and they reject the infirm, the disabled, children, and anyone over age fifty-five.
146. Ibid., 3:238.
147. The narrator vividly describes the planet as it becomes enveloped by nuclear winter: “It was the hottest season, yet the hills were covered in white snow. The sky was black, the ground was white, and the entire world appeared as though it were in reverse. Looking closely, the snow wasn’t pure white, it was dark blue or green, and if you looked at it a little longer, it even appeared black. Radioactive dust, melted rubber, smoke and dust from burnt cities, and no doubt also the scorched molecules of corpses were concealed together to form each snowflake. The temperature continued to fall” (3:213).
148. Ibid., 3:268.
149. For more on this phenomenon outside literature see Paul Wapner, Living through the End of Nature.
150. Significantly, writing on codegradation is often less place specific than writing on the allure of the natural world.
151. See, for instance, Paul De Man, Blindness and Insight, 3-19; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Death of a Discipline; René Wellek, “The Crisis of Comparative Literature.”

Works Cited