
University of Pennsylvania
Institute for Environmental Studies



presents

Dana Phillips

Towson University

Aesthetic and Environmental Values

In recent years, an increased awareness of the global environmental crisis has led some literary critics and philosophers to attempt to articulate the ways in which creative writers and other artists might help to improve the health of the planet. In literary studies, this attempt has taken the form of so-called “ecocriticism.” In philosophy, it has taken the form of a renewed interest in the aesthetics of the natural environment.

Both ecocriticism and environmental aesthetics sometimes present themselves as picking up where science leaves off, or reaches its “limits.” This assumption—that science actually has “limits,” which nonscientists can accurately describe—expresses a longstanding belief that values are the special province of the humanist. Values, or so the story goes, cannot be adequately addressed using the methodologies and theories available to scientists; since the environmental crisis is in part a moral crisis, scientists badly need the help of their humanist counterparts if we are to collectively fashion a sustainable and equitable way of life.

Using a description of a winter sunset from Henry David Thoreau’s *Journal* as a touchstone text, this presentation will address some of the problems faced by ecocriticism and environmental aesthetics in their sometimes uneasy relationship with science by considering the following issues:

- What counts as an aesthetic value? As an environmental value?
- Are aesthetic and environmental values as currently defined commensurable, or even compatible?
- Or is aesthetics, as it has been traditionally understood, a barrier to the development of coherent environmental values?
- If environmental values (whatever they might turn out to be) must trump traditional aesthetic values, what form might an environmentally well-adjusted culture take?

Date: March 22, 2006

Time: NOON - 1:30 pm

Place: Carolyn Hoff Lynch Auditorium

On the Penn campus: Chemistry Building: 34 & Spruce Sts. (enter on 34 St)

NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Direct questions to: 215-573-3164

ies_penn@sas.upenn.edu; <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/earth/ies>

NO FOOD OR DRINK PERMITTED IN THE AUDITORIUM
