15. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 10.
16. Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 683–84.

Environment

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THE story of the coinage and popularization of the word *environment* in its modern sense runs through some of the towering intellectual figures of the Victorian period—Thomas Carlyle, Harriet Martineau, G. H. Lewes, and Herbert Spencer—and their continental influences, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Auguste Comte. In some ways, it is a story that bears directly upon the wholesale rethinking of the conventional divide between nature and culture that went on in many disciplines over the course of the century, a conceptual shift that has roots in German and British Romantic thought, and finds scientific theorization in the work of Charles Darwin. But it's also a story about the complications and difficulties involved in reimagining the relationship between these two crucial categories, and the way racial, imperial, and economic ideologies blunted or even subverted the new conceptual possibilities for ecological thinking that the term *environment* both reflected and helped generate.

It seems fitting that the word "environment" would first appear in its modern guise in 1828, at the dawn of the period that would produce the factory town and the railroad, the Coal Question and the Great Guano Rush, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Wuthering Heights*, and, for many contemporary critics, the first observable signs of the Anthropocene. Carlyle first uses it in his essay *Goethe* to translate the master's original German *Umgebung* and to signify not merely surroundings or context (as it had been commonly used before) but rather the vital, ongoing influence of those surroundings upon a person or thing.[1] As Ralph Jessop argues, this coinage arises from the "counter-Enlightenment" stance Carlyle took against the forces of mechanization and mechanical thinking: *environment* is an attempt to convey something of the holistic, "dialogical

[and] open-textured" set of influences—physical, social, intellectual, spiritual—at work upon someone.[2] We can thus see in it the stirrings of an interdependent, "green" sensibility, though always filtered through Carlyle's peculiar metaphysical division of "substance" from "semblance" and his quasi-reactionary politics.

Despite the usefulness of the word—its flexibility, its capaciousness, its ability to suggest the porous and shifting boundaries of self—Carlyle employed it relatively sparingly in his writing, and the term did not catch on. For its popularization, we have Herbert Spencer to thank. As historian of science Trevor Pearce argues, Spencer was introduced to the term via Comte's *Cours de Philosophie Positive* as translated by Harriet Martineau, who herself may have been drawing on Carlyle.[3] Spencer's switch from the word *circumstances* to *environment*, and his reliance on the latter in his popular *Principles of Psychology*, Pearce argues, initiated a crucial shift: "The successive transitions from individuated particular factors (e.g., 'climate'), to a general plural term (e.g., 'circumstances'), to a general singular term (e.g., 'environment'), correspond to a progressive concealment of the different elements that make up the world outside the organism and the relations between these elements . . . [T]he singular term 'environment,' like 'organism,' is an important heuristic for biologists, insofar as it gives them a way to talk about general causes without exploring the details of micro-level complexity (the term 'natural selection' is a parallel case). Hence, the word 'environment' does metaphysical work."[4]

One of the ironies of the term, then, is that it was precisely in its abstraction from the material details of actually existing environments that it became most useful to thinking ecologically *about* those environments. Although binaries like organism/environment can themselves be problematic, as Timothy Morton has argued, they were conceptually productive for the nascent science of ecology, and Spencer's work had a tremendous influence upon many significant early twentieth-century thinkers in this field, including Frederic Clements and Victor Shelford.[5] From here we are but a short distance to the next, encompassing level of abstraction, "*the* environment," which the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates to 1948, and which signifies something like "the natural world" but always with the added implied possibility of human activity and disruption.

Spencer's "environment" included not only physical and biological factors, but social and political ones as well; as he makes clear in essays like "The Social Organism" and throughout *Principles of Psychology*, his aim was to break down the distinctions between the human and the "natural" world. As recent ecological criticism and philosophy has

shown, questioning the conceptual divide between nature and culture is necessary, because (among other things) it helps make clear the extent to which a civilization's cultural forms and practices depend entirely upon natural resources, processes, and conditions, and gives the lie to mystifying fantasies of human transcendence of the material world. But although Spencer is second perhaps only to Darwin among nineteenth-century thinkers who helped undermine this binary, it's also true that the encompassing abstraction "environment" allowed him to reinforce other kinds of problematic distinctions. The natural world and human civilization may both be considered "environments," but in Spencer's system the latter is at a further stage of evolutionary "complexity," and thus it functions as a stimulus to even more profound kinds of intellectual, moral, and social growth.[6] And *civilization*, as Raymond Williams has shown, had not yet been relativized by the widespread adoption of its plural form: for Spencer, it means Western civilization.[7] Thus, such developmentalist arguments reflect the way the concept "environment" was inflected by assumptions of racial and cultural superiority; indeed, as George Stocking notes, to be an "environmentalist" in Victorian anthropological circles was to believe in the profound shaping power of external forces upon human characteristics and capacities and, more often than not, to uphold the ascendancy of European culture on such grounds.[8]

Moreover, the complete continuity of nature and civilization also makes Spencer—at least in his early writings—famously wary of any "artificial" human intervention in economic and social processes. It is thus a rather bleak irony that this important "environmental" writer was also England's most well-known advocate for *laissez-faire* capitalism, an approach to markets, natural resources, and social relations that had, and continues to have, environmentally catastrophic consequences.

Notes

1. Leo Spitzer, "Milieu and Ambience: An Essay in Historical Semantics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 3, no. 2 (1942): 169–218, 204; Lowell Frye, "History as Biography, Biography as History," in *Thomas Carlyle Resartus: Reappraising Carlyle's Contribution to the Philosophy, History, Political Theory and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Paul Kerry and Marylu Hill (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010): 133–147, 144.

2. Ralph Jessop, "Coinage of the Term Environment: A Word Without Authority and Carlyle's Displacement of the Mechanical Metaphor," *Literature Compass* 9/11 (2012): 708–20, 713.
3. Trevor Pearce, "From 'Circumstances' to 'Environment': Herbert Spencer and the Origins of The Idea of Organism-environment Interaction," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 41 (2010): 241–52, 247–48.
4. Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 249.
5. Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 214–15.
6. Herbert Spencer, "Progress: Its Law and Cause," in *Essays, Scientific, Political, and Speculative* (New York: D. Appleton, 1916), 51.
7. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 58–59.
8. *George Stocking, Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 48, 64.

Ethics

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THE late 1980s witnessed the ethical turn in literature, with notable scholars being J. Hillis Miller, Wayne Booth, and Martha Nussbaum.[1] Recent studies of Victorian narrative have explored ethics as a relation between self and other through a lens of sociality and openness to otherness. In this essay, I would like to focus on studies on the ethics of care, sympathy, hospitality, and empathy before turning to underexplored areas of research.

In the past few years, scholars have turned their attention to the analysis of ethics and the marriage plot, with the coming together of wife and husband "marking a larger reconciliation between individual and society."[2] Talia Schaffer's study, *Romance's Rival: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction*, explores, among other things, the marriage of a physically disabled person through the theory of ethics of care, which asserts that human relations should be understood as interdependent exchanges of caregiving and care-receiving. By drawing attention to a