

## ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICE AND EARLY AMERICAN LITERATURE

This original and provocative study tells the story of American literary history from the perspective of its environmental context. Weaving together close readings of early American texts with ecological histories of tobacco, potatoes, apples, and honeybees, Michael Ziser presents a method for literary criticism that explodes the conceptual distinction between the civilized and natural worlds. Beginning with the English exploration of Virginia in the sixteenth century, Ziser argues that the settlement of the “New World” – and the cultivation and exploitation of its bounty – dramatically altered how writers used language to describe the phenomena they encountered on the frontier. Examining the work of Thomas Harriot, James Grainger, James Fenimore Cooper, Henry David Thoreau, and others, Ziser reveals how these authors, whether consciously or not, transcribed the vibrant ecology of North America, and the ways that the environment helped codify a uniquely American literary aesthetic of lasting importance.

MICHAEL ZISER is Associate Professor of English and Co-Director of the Environments and Societies Program at the University of California, Davis.

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN AMERICAN  
 LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Editor

Ross Posnock, *Columbia University*

Founding Editor

Albert Gelpi, *Stanford University*

Advisory Board

Alfred Bendixen, *Texas A&M University*

Sacvan Bercovitch, *Harvard University*

Ronald Bush, *St. John's College, University of Oxford*

Wai Chee Dimock, *Yale University*

Albert Gelpi, *Stanford University*

Gordon Hutner, *University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign*

Walter Benn Michaels, *University of Illinois, Chicago*

Kenneth Warren, *University of Chicago*

*Recent books in this series*

166. MICHAEL ZISER  
 Environmental Practice and Early American Literature
165. ANDREW HEBARD  
 The Poetics of Sovereignty in American Literature, 1885–1910
164. CHRISTOPHER FREEBURG  
 Melville and the Idea of Blackness: Race and Imperialism in  
 Nineteenth-Century America
163. TIM ARMSTRONG  
 The Logic of Slavery: Debt, Technology, and Pain in American Literature
162. JUSTINE MURISON  
 The Politics of Anxiety in Nineteenth-Century American Literature
161. HSUAN L. HSU  
 Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century  
 American Literature
160. DORRI BEAM  
 Style, Gender, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women's  
 Writing

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-00543-3 — Environmental Practice and Early American Literature  
Michael Ziser  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

ENVIRONMENTAL  
PRACTICE AND  
EARLY AMERICAN  
LITERATURE

MICHAEL ZISER  
*University of California, Davis*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-107-00543-3 — Environmental Practice and Early American Literature  
 Michael Ziser  
 Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

**CAMBRIDGE**  
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India  
 79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.  
 It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of  
 education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107005433](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107005433)

© Michael Ziser 2013

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
 no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
 permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2013

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data*

Ziser, Michael, 1973–

Environmental practice and early American literature / Michael Ziser.  
 pages cm. — (Cambridge studies in American literature and culture ; 166)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-00543-3

1. American literature—History and criticism.
  2. Nature in literature.
  3. Ecology in literature.
  4. Agriculture in literature.
  5. Agent (Philosophy) in literature.
  6. Natural history—United States—Historiography.
  7. Nature (Aesthetics)
  8. Ecocriticism—United States.
- I. Title.

PS163.Z57 2013

810.9'36—dc23 2012040131

ISBN 978-1-107-00543-3 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or  
 accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in  
 this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,  
 or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

## *Contents*

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> ix
Introduction: More-than-Human Literary History	i
PART I LEAVES AND ROOTS	23
1. Sovereign Remedies	26
2. Staple-Colony Circumspection	48
PART II FRUITS AND FLOWERS	83
3. The Pomology of Eden	85
4. Beeing in the World	119
PART III CONCLUSION	157
5. Walled In and Farmed Out: Pastoral Isolation and Georgic Collectivities	159
<i>Notes</i>	183
<i>Index</i>	221

## *Acknowledgments*

While this book exerts itself to uncover the broad and complex more-than-human processes that give rise to literary texts, its own conception and completion involved plenty of good old-fashioned individual human beings. From my extraordinarily generous graduate school mentors I absorbed three distinct but complementary models of what literary scholarship might be. Larry Buell reset my expectations regarding just how broadly and deeply one must read to develop a valuable perspective on American literature, as well as just how lightly all that learning might be carried. Lisa New was a constant reminder of the coruscations that draw us to literature – and of our obligations to honor them in our own work. And Elaine Scarry showed me what it means to give one’s whole mind and spirit to the elucidation of the deep mysteries of our situation amidst things and words. My still-unrealized – and perhaps impossible – dream is to write in a way that does full justice to the influence of all of these remarkable people.

My colleagues at Harvard and UC Davis have provoked, soothed, and sustained me in countless ways over the past decade. There are more here than can be listed by name – including the entire roster of wonderful faculty in the UC Davis English Department – but I would like to single out for their particular intellectual, material, and moral support Nathan Brown, Carolyn de la Peña, Greg Dobbins, Beth Freeman, Hsuan Hsu, Tim Morton, Jason Puskar, David Robertson, Matthew Stratton, Julie Sze, and Louis Warren. Although my graduate students did not contribute directly to this particular project, their influence is all over the work I have carried out in parallel with this book and they were never far from my mind as I drafted the final version.

Two grandparents who set the stage for this book did not live to see it published. My grandmother, Phyllis Ambrose, so prized and embodied education – especially literary education – that I sometimes feel my own career choice is the delayed expression of her academic potential. My

*Acknowledgments*

grandfather, George Ziser, was the first to open my eyes to the philosophical significance of agriculture. Put them together and you can easily see the sources of a book on environmental practice and American literature.

This book is finally dedicated to my own domestic crew: Carrie, my beloved partner in so many things, and our children, Anna and Eli, who are daily reminders that the future, however deeply bound it may be to the past, remains an open field.