

UNST 124g fall 2011
green consciousness, part 2

1 introduction

Swamp Thing issues 21 to 24 (collected as chapters 1 to 4 in *Saga of Swamp Thing*) redefined the character in a profound way. The he “monster” in Alan Moore’s narrative is not an element of nature run amok but is instead humanity itself. It is *the green* who must consider how to deal with his human foe. This rhetorical device allows Moore and the artists working with him to explore a range of issues, from the mundane—nuclear waste—to the sublime—the meaning of consciousness.

Issues 51 to 56 (collected in *Swamp Thing Earth to Earth*) see Swamp Thing return to Houma following a journey to meet others in his lineage—the “Parliament of Trees”—and a battle with evil—in which he met an interesting set of otherworldly DC characters and fought by not fighting—only to find Abby on trial for “crimes against nature” (p. 8). In the issues we missed, Abby’s husband made a relationship-ending deal with a demon and wound up in a coma, Abby and Swamp Thing fell in love, and Swamp Thing was warned by the Parliament of Trees that “power is not the way of the wood.” Power, the trees told him, “tempts anger, and anger is like a wildfire” (Moore, et. al.,2001, p. 113). Swamp Thing gained great insight into himself and his power during his travels and yet, he is not at peace.

In the issues you will read for this assignment, Moore explores community, alienation, and self-awareness. These are, of course, familiar literary themes but when viewed through the lens of green consciousness we may be able to make novel connections to the issues of our day—environmental degradation, urban decay, and more broadly, the human relationship with nature. Biologist Edward O. Wilson (1984) coined a term to describe the emotional part of that relationship—what he believes to be the innate human “tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes”—*biophilia*. As Wilson defines it, biophilia is part of our evolutionary inheritance. The human brain, he asserts, “evolved in a biocentric world, not a machine-regulated world” (Wilson, 1995). We learned to work with the environment in order to survive in the environment, and through that process came to have an intimate emotional (both positive and negative) relationship with it. Biophilia, so understood, implies that we humans have an innate environmental and conservation ethic¹. When Abigail Cable stands before the judge in a court of law, it is human *biophilia* that Moore puts on trial.

2 assignment

The following questions are intended to provide some context for thinking about the ideas presented in *Swamp Thing Earth to Earth*. We will discuss these in class the 9th of November. You may be asked to turn in your reading responses so please prepare them appropriately. In this case, the questions will be most useful if you read the comics first and then read the questions.

1. Why is it important to Moore’s narrative that Abby skips bail and leaves Houma to hide in Gotham?

¹Wilson’s essay *Biophilia and the Conservation Ethic* (1995) can be read online as a Google books preview.

2. How is environmental justice, a growing concern in the 1980s when these issues were written, addressed in these issues of *Swamp Thing*?
3. The people of Gotham (and elsewhere) do not all respond in the same way to the arrival of the green. Find examples—residents, pilgrims, city government, and so on—and describe the different responses. How are the different responses used in the narrative?
4. The images and dialog on page 69 (issue 53 page 21) are central to Moore’s examination of community, power, and self-awareness. What is Swamp Thing’s role in these panels? What is Chester’s role here?
5. *The Garden of Earthly Delights*—the title Moore uses for issue 53 (chapter 3 here)—is not the Garden of Eden. What is it? How are those images and themes expressed in these issues of *Swamp Thing*?
6. Compare the images in the upper and lower panels on pages 74 and 75 (issue 53 pages 26 and 27). Are Swamp Thing’s actions causing the city to die, as Batman suggests?
7. What is meant by “life explodes like battlefield poppies” (p. 75 here; p. 27 in issue 53)?
8. Attendance is sparse at Swamp Thing’s memorial in Gotham. Among those who do participate are some otherworldly characters Swamp Thing met in earlier issues (the Stranger, Boston Brand, and John Constantine) and Batman. What point is made by this arrangement?
9. Chapter 6 (issue 56) begins a six-issue story arc in which Moore explores the meaning of consciousness and life off Earth. The themes of community and alienation persist, now in a science fiction context. What concerns does this issue raise regarding terraforming other planets?

3 references

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