

## INTRODUCTION

### *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*

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Arthur Dent is having a bad day. A bad Thursday, to be exact, on which local authorities roll bulldozers up on his front lawn to tear down his house in preparation for the construction of a new highway bypass. His clumsy protests against the demolition remain ineffectual, but that hardly matters, since the day quickly gets worse: a spaceship announces via a global public-address system that Planet Earth itself is about to be demolished to make way for a hyperspatial express route. The demolition crew aboard the spaceship, observing the worldwide panic this announcement causes, point out that “all the planning charts and demolition orders have been on display in your local planning department in Alpha Centauri for fifty of your Earth years, so you’ve had plenty of time to lodge any formal complaint.” Apparently, they do receive an objection from someone on Earth, because a few minutes later they declare with irritation: “What do you mean, you’ve never been to Alpha Centauri? For heaven’s sake, mankind, it’s only four light-years away, you know. I’m sorry, but if you can’t be bothered to take an interest in local affairs that’s your own lookout. Energize the demolition beams.” Earth is destroyed—to be replaced later by an identical copy of itself, manufactured in the same galactic factory that the original turns out to have come from.

This scene, of course, marks the beginning of Douglas Adams’s science fiction comedy *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (26), which propels the lone surviving earthling Arthur Dent into a universe of multiple galactic civilizations whose existence he had never so much as suspected. A rather obvious satire on the brutal tactics of urban development and the genocidal consequences of colonial invasion, the language of the alien technocrats derives much of its humor for the reader from the way it redefines the meaning of the word “local,” which here encompasses not just all of Planet Earth but also distant solar systems where humankind has not even yet set foot. Whether Adams intended it that way or not, this sudden confronta-

“Erasmus Darwin’s Cosmopolitan Nature”; Alan Bewell

“I absolutely nauseate Darwin’s poem,” Samuel Taylor Coleridge declared in 1796 to John Thelwall.<sup>2</sup> Although nausea is clearly excessive, readers’ responses to Erasmus Darwin’s *The Botanic Garden* were rarely neutral. Horace Walpole could not get enough of it. Describing it as “the most delicious poem on earth,” he claimed that “Dr. Darwin has destroyed my admiration for any poetry but his own.”<sup>3</sup> Lord Byron, on the other hand, diagnosed the Lichfield doctor as suffering from a tin ear and complained of the monotonous, “pompous chime” of his overwrought pentameter couplets. Adopting Darwin’s own proclivity for hyperbole, overuse of adjectives, and alliteration, Byron parodied him as the “mighty master of unmeaning rhyme.”<sup>4</sup> Darwin was never a poet to use a common everyday word when a rare, erudite, technical, or luxurious one could be found or invented. The fame of *The Botanic Garden* may have been short-lived, but it was nevertheless the most popular and the most controversial nature poem of the 1790s. Between 1789 and 1796, part 2 of the poem, *The Loves of the Plants*, which was published first, went through four English editions and two Dublin printings. The complete poem, with part 1, *The Economy of Vegetation*, now added, appeared in 1791 and saw four English editions along with separate Irish and American printings by 1799. It also was translated into French, Portuguese, Italian, and German. William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Coleridge each fell for a time under the sway of what Wordsworth would call the “mischievous influence” of “Darwin’s dazzling manner,” even though they soon held quite different views on poetry and nature.

*Falling From Grace*; Student Work

“I want to be Superman”—said by the infamous Lex Luthor. Even if on a level of principles we can’t be like someone admired, we still harbor that exact desire. Hero worship is something that almost everyone grows up with. In her article, “Superhero Worship”, for *The Atlantic*, Virginia Postrel states that this happens because we have the need to project ourselves onto these ideals. That superheroes, especially in the cinema, have an aura of glamour to them because they give us a goal to aspire to. But in this present day, an issue is left almost ignored by those arguing for the virtue of these titans of fiction. If the superheroes have glamour for the sole purpose of a point to aspire to, then why is it that they have become darker and darker with every new reboot of their respective universe? Why is it that all of a sudden in his newest reincarnation Superman, the epitome of good, is capable of killing a man?

“Refiguring Rhetorica: Linking Feminist Rhetoric and Disability Studies”: Jay Dolmage and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson

Feminism and disability studies out to be powerful allies. Feminist rhetorical methods provided a foundation for the emerging field of disability studies in the humanities in the late 1980s. And in the 1990s, disability studies theories and methods developed synergistically with feminism and other theories in directions that challenge and transform methods and theories across fields.

*Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England (The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics)*; Stephan Greenblatt

I began with the desire to speak with the dead.

This desire is a familiar, if unvoiced, motive in literary studies, a motive organized, professionalized, buried beneath thick layers of bureaucratic decorum: literature professors are salaried, middle-class shamans. . .

*A Theory of Adaptation*; Linda Hutcheon

If you think adaptation can be understood by using novels and films alone, you’re wrong. The Victorians had a habit of adapting just about everything—and in just about every possible direction; the stories of poems, novels, plays, operas, painting, songs, dances, and *tableaux vivants* were constantly being adapted from one medium to another and then back again. We postmoderns have clearly inherited this same habit, but we have even more new materials at our disposal—not only film, television, radio, and the various electronic media, or course, but also theme parks, historical enactments, and virtual reality experiments. The result? Adaptation has run amok. That’s why we can’t understand its appeal and even its nature if we only consider novels and films.