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In my thesis I investigate a pervasive trend in political rhetoric, scientific polemic, fiction, and media that employs visions of a future, ruined, earth in an effort to motivate readers and viewers to act in the present to avoid environmental catastrophe. However, I argue that the effect of despairing environmentalist rhetoric—no matter what the genre—is to force the audience to encounter the devastating impact of human consumption and disposal without offering alternatives to human violence to planetary ecology upon which we all depend. Using three agricultural novels of the late 20th century as case studies, I explore the ways in which fiction engages with this despairing trend in contemporary environmentalist rhetoric both by repeating the catastrophic dystopian visions deployed by popular environmentalists like Al Gore and Bill McKibbin and by opposing these rhetorical strategies with literary renderings of alternative relationships between humanity and ecosystem. For example, in the first section of my thesis, I show how Jane Smiley's novel, *A Thousand Acres*, focuses on the impact of agribusiness on human bodies and landscape through a display of soil and water poisoned by pesticides that leads to the eruption of multiple cancers within a small Iowan community. While the novel importantly seeks to awaken readers to the connection between human health and the health of the full ecosystem, it also avoids presenting readers with alternatives to agribusiness as each character within the novel find themselves locked within a system that they cannot change. Despite its useful depiction of the impact of agribusiness on land and community, the text, like popular despairing environmentalist discourse, calls for a response to the environmental crises that we have created, but does not give readers a way to respond or to map that kinds of changes that would need to occur to promote the health of human populations and ecosystems. Turning in the second half of the thesis to two novels by Ruth Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* and *All Over Creation*, I argue that these novels move past environmentalist despair in order to highlight multiple ways that readers and larger communities might begin to address the environmental impact of agribusiness. While Ozeki's novels connect with the critiques provided in *A Thousand Acres*, they also present ways that communities might move past a focus on profit and agricultural productivity alone and toward a focus on the interdependence of humans and ecosystem.

Jeff Gilbert, "*Resistance is Fertile: Reimagining Community, Agriculture, and Environmental Discourse through Contemporary American Literature.*" Advisor: Prof. Mary Foltz