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Climate Scepticism in the UK

Greg Garrard

Before embarking on a detailed analysis of sceptical British texts, I will provide some historical and scholarly context. There have been many studies of anti-environmentalism in the United States (Helvarg; Brick; Ehrlich and Ehrlich; Switzer) and one on the global 'backlash' (Rowell), but none focuses exclusively on the UK. The sole treatment of anti-environmentalism within ecocriticism comes from the United States (Buell), just like the various exposés of climate scepticism discussed in the Introduction. As this chapter will show, British climate scepticism is possessed of a prehistory and some distinctive local features that reward closer inspection.

Nevertheless, the Anglo-American axis of organized anti-environmentalism is obvious: British climate sceptics such as Christopher Monckton, James Delingpole and Nigel Lawson are darlings of the American conservative think tanks (CTTs) that promulgate sceptical perspectives, while Martin Durkin's *The Great Global Warming Swindle* (2007), a British documentary shown on Channel 4, includes interviews with Richard Lindzen, Patrick Michaels and Fred Singer, all prominent American sceptics. *Energy and Climate Wars* (2010) (Glover and Economides) exemplifies this axis: it is a laboured, derivative defence of the fossil fuel industry co-authored by a British journalist and an American petroleum engineer. It wears its Heartland Institute affiliations on its sleeve, with three back cover blurbs from international oil men. Apart from a few embarrassing attempts at satire and some disconcerting evidence of radical Catholic conservatism, it conforms point for point to the environmentalist stereotype of the Anglo-American industry shill.

Glover and Economides are conservative white men, in keeping with the existing research on climate scepticism; if I qualify the stereotype further with 'anglophone', it will encompass almost all of the authors addressed in this chapter. Within that superficial homogeneity, though, we will encounter a globally popular motoring journalist who baits

environmentalist ‘carborexics’, a Kuhnian philosopher of science who laments the effect of climate activism on conservation, a leading comic playwright whose satire of climate orthodoxy brilliantly skewers British university culture and a theologian-biologist who claims God causes climate change (and evolution) by triggering supernovas. Climate scepticism in the UK might seem all too familiar to interested observers, but is, in reality, considerably richer and stranger than might be assumed.

The prehistory of anti-environmentalism in the UK

Noting that there is no extant history of opposition to environmentalism in the UK, the next thing to say is that it would, if it existed, be more than just the inverse of the history of environmentalist thought and activism; just as ‘environmentalism’ in the UK is a complex, shifting, internally conflicted phenomenon, so is resistance to it, with strands that have their own internal logics, rather than being exclusively reactive. Farming and industrial interests have always featured in debates about conservation and pollution control measures in Britain, but they have seldom spoken with one voice. The situation is akin to that in the United States, as described by Jacqueline Vaughn Switzer:

Despite the attempts by journalists and environmental group leaders to portray the environmental opposition [in the United States] in the most negative of possible lights, the ‘enemy’ is not nearly as powerful or monolithic a foe as they would like the public to believe. The environmental opposition suffers from a lack of cohesiveness among its myriad groups, a lack of resources with which to mobilize its members or influence policy, the absence of an articulated policy program, and the countervailing forces of public opinion.

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At the time of writing, with President Donald Trump in the White House and fossil fuel money (\$889 million in 2016 from the Koch brothers alone (Mayer)) continuing to cascade through the American political system, I would want to qualify or reject at least one of those conclusions. Even so, Switzer’s ethnographic approach, like that of Arlie Russell Hochschild’s *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2016), effectively demonstrates her contention that ‘the environmental opposition is made up of a much broader constituency than has generally been identified’ (14).

In British history, too, ‘businesses’ demands are highly individualized and fragmented. While some coalitions have been forged, disputes over clean air or

water legislation often pit one industry against another, with little agreement on the appropriate path of redress' (Switzer 284). The British experience is different from the American because the political system, lacking checks and balances on executive power, typically seeks compromise between competing interest groups, and because, until the advent of Tony Blair's 'New Labour' in the mid-1990s, environmentalism was attacked by both the pro-business right and the pro-union left. Environmental charities had many members but little sustained political clout through most of the twentieth century. It was the growing influence of the European Union that transformed environmental politics in the UK, greatly strengthening the green movement but also eliciting new forms of resistance.

This chapter surveys the development of anti-environmentalism at three key moments in British political history: the origins of the 'Back to Nature' movement in the 1880s; the Clean Air Act of 1956; and the apparent 'greening' of Margaret Thatcher's government between the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act and the First Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1990. The backstory contextualizes the most consistent feature of British climate sceptics' identities: as 'heretics' contesting an oppressive politico-scientific orthodoxy. First, though, it is worth asking how British climate scepticism came by its unmistakable tone of sneering ridicule, which, despite much variation in sophistication and effectiveness, is arguably its other characteristic feature. French, German and American sceptics employ comic modes too, of course, but for British writers, scorn and satire are the keynotes.

Love of nature has seemed widely admirable in Britain since the advent of Romanticism in the second half of the eighteenth century; it has seemed laughable for almost as long. Jonathan Bate argues that 'the origins of the conservation movement may be traced back to the principles of picturesque tourism' (*The Song of the Earth* 132). Thomas Gilpin's essays, in particular, provided an aesthetic framework that gave shape to Romantic-period poetry, painting and tourism guidebooks. William Wordsworth opposed mass tourism in the Lake District, but he also profited from it with healthy sales of his *Guide to the Lakes*, which was, according to Bate, 'without question the most widely read work of the most admired English poet of the first half of the nineteenth century' (*Romantic Ecology* 41). Much later, the picturesque informed the creation of the first national parks, with their physical infrastructure of paths leading to vistas, and even, in the United States, the construction of scenic highways, or 'Parkways' (Wilson 32–37). As soon as the picturesque was codified its strictures were mocked by satirical poets, novelists and illustrators.

Wordsworth was the perfect butt for such jokes, despite his attempts to complicate the picturesque and extend its moral range, because his poetry is short on humour and long on elevated reflections. George Gordon, Lord Byron, found fame with *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, which inspired its own bout of picturesque tourism. Nevertheless, Byron brilliantly satirizes Romantic 'self-communion' in stanzas 90–96 of the first canto of *Don Juan*, where Juan wanders 'by the glassy brooks/Thinking unutterable things' (Ferguson, Salter and Stallworthy 856) in a desperate – and ultimately futile – attempt to sublimate his desire for the married Donna Julia. For Byron's sardonic narrator, nature functions as a temporary distraction for a lovesick teenager, as well as a handy source of imagery for writers:

There poets find materials for their books,
And every now and then we read them through,
So that their plan and prosody are eligible,
Unless, like Wordsworth, they prove unintelligible.

Every time Juan's reflections threaten to soar away into 'Longings sublime, and aspirations high' in the sestet of Byron's *ottava rima*, they are brought crashing down to earth in the concluding couplet: 'If you think 'twas Philosophy that this did,/I can't help thinking puberty assisted.' Byron, having invented for his own use and benefit the Romantic persona of the brilliant, brooding, damaged hero, conjured another perennial figure in his caricature of Wordsworth as the idealistic, abstruse, humourless, self-denying nature lover who is, above all, in need of a good shag.

Wordsworthian Romanticism is targeted again in Oscar Wilde's 1891 diatribe against literary realism in 'The Decay of Lying'. Wilde's spokesman Vivian comments:

Wordsworth went to the lakes, but he was never a lake poet. He found in stones the sermons he had already hidden there. He went moralizing about the district, but his good work was produced when he returned, not to Nature but to poetry.

Wilde repeats Byron's claim of unacknowledged egotism and adds a further complaint against Wordsworth's habit of conjoining extensive 'moralizing' with tediously quotidian subject matter – such as 'the address to Mr Wilkinson's spade', says Vivian. Wilde's residual respect for Wordsworth as a poet is outweighed by his campy scorn for the bad Wordsworth, the green Wordsworth, who exemplifies foolish idealization of Nature and maintains a lamentable attachment to mere facts.

Vivian, by contrast, proclaims his emancipation from enjoyment of Nature, which he castigates for her 'lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition.' In this respect, if no other, Wilde's character was echoed by Ronald Reagan, who asked, in response to a proposal to create a Redwood National Park in California: 'A tree is a tree. How many more do you have to look at?' ('FACT CHECK: Ronald Reagan "If You've Seen One Tree ..."'). According to Vivian, only Art can redeem Nature by rounding off its rough edges and, more importantly, restoring our proper sense of egotism. While only a few climate sceptics would extol Art for its capacity to liberate us from Nature – their protestations about 'truth' and 'evidence' would only prove to Vivian their lack of style and imagination – James Delingpole and Christopher Booker deny that climate 'alarmism' is founded in science in the first place. In their view, examined in more detail below, prior commitment to a certain kind of *story* about Nature distorts environmentalists' sense of reality. Or as Vivian puts it,

Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas-lamps and changing the houses into monstrous shadows? ... Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us.

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'The Decay of Lying' was published not long after the first manifestations of what we now call 'green politics' in the UK. The most enduring legacy of the period, *News from Nowhere* (1890) by the writer, designer and socialist William Morris, epitomizes a moment in the history of the British left when the misery of the working class was clearly articulated in environmental, as well as economic, terms. Morris's pastoral utopia was written in the aftermath of the 1888 'matchgirls strike' at Bryant and May in the East End of London, which might reasonably be considered the first gesture of environmental justice activism in British political history. Morris was more directly provoked, however, by the publication of *Looking Backward* (1887) by the American socialist Edward Bellamy.

Bellamy's utopian novel had an enormous impact in socialist circles. Set in the year 2000, it depicts a technological New Jerusalem, an empire of machinery in the service of Reason, with a planned economy implemented by a united industrial army. Morris shared Bellamy's concern for working-class living conditions and admired his vision of communal ownership, but quailed before

its total rationalization of both humanity and nature: a 'machine-life ... on all sides' (Morris 357) in which neither the quality of labour nor its relation to the natural world would change, but only the quantity of work, which machines will reduce. Morris believed that 'the multiplication of machinery will just – multiply machinery', and that only an anarcho-communist society could liberate both humanity and nature from the tyranny of industrial capitalism. In *News from Nowhere*, he set out to depict such a society, using Bellamy's 'dreamer wakes' device to put his own protagonist, William Guest, in the pastoralized English 'Nowhere' of 2102.

Despite the general holiday atmosphere and unfeasibly good weather, Morris's utopia remains a trenchant critique of the oppression of both humans and nature under industrial capitalism. The utopian Ellen, for example, with whom Guest falls in love, is mystified by our masochism:

Don't you find it difficult to imagine the times when this little pretty country was treated by its folk as if it had been an ugly characterless waste, with no delicate beauty to be guarded, with no heed taken of the ever fresh pleasure of the recurring seasons, and changeful weather, and diverse quality of the soil, and so forth? How could people be so cruel *to themselves*?

(208, my italics)

The suppression of the instinct for natural beauty was linked in Morris's mind to the annihilation of healthy human instincts for pleasure in work, as the capitalist mode of production replaced useful work with useless toil, use value with exchange value. Over the century of labour activism that followed, though, Bellamy's vision largely won out over Morris's.

This schism notwithstanding, the most pronounced opposition to 'back to nature' socialism came from corporate interests and conservative politicians, as the Bryant and May strike of 1888 demonstrated. The plight of 'matchgirls', whose occupational exposure to white phosphorus could cause an excruciating, disgusting form of necrosis known as 'phossy jaw', had been a progressive cause for decades. There had been sporadic campaigns to reduce the risk, and yet Louise Raw recounts that 'the grandchildren of East Enders who lived near the factory recall tales of the glowing piles of fluorescent vomit which marked the Bryant and May workers' homeward routes at the end of each shift' (Raw 90). The matchgirls' strike, and the support it attracted from writers such as Annie Besant, drew an 'aggressively confident and choleric' (97) from the company. While the details were dictated by the local context, the outline of Bryant and May's argument remains familiar today: the workers' suffering was exaggerated;

they had been stirred up by socialist agitators; and in any case the continuing manufacture of white phosphorus ‘Lucifers’ was necessitated by the market. Successive Conservative governments backed the company, including Lord Salisbury’s administration which vetoed a European treaty to ban the production of Lucifers. The lord was not for turning.

The matchwomen’s strike sought environmental as well as social justice. It therefore attracted support from liberals, Romantic and industrial socialists, and sympathetic conservatives, albeit on somewhat different grounds. William Morris’s supportive article ‘The Commonweal’ attacks the cruelty of ‘the manufacturing capitalists’ and their supporters in the ‘capitalist press’, which ensures only that ‘certain persons are able to live a luxurious and useless life without working, and matches are made so cheap that the public buy twice as many as they want of them and waste half’ (“Sweaters and Sweaters”). While the first complaint is common-or-garden socialism, the second epitomizes Morris’s nascent environmentalism, which was not shared by most of his comrades. His opposition to the ‘manufacturers’ ideal, to wit, human machinery which will give not more, but less, trouble than the machinery of mere dead matter’ might also be levelled against *Looking Backward*, despite Bellamy’s good intentions.

The contest of Romantic and industrial visions of socialism was to have reverberations well beyond the febrile atmosphere of the resurgent socialist movement of the late 1880s. At that moment there was, as Peter C. Gould explains, ‘a relatively high level of tolerance offered to different progressive ideas’ (29) thanks to the small number of people involved and the ‘negligible’ socialist literature available. Quite soon, though, Morris and his fellow advocates of going ‘back to nature’ were sidelined by ‘scientific socialism’ and the ‘new unionism’ of the 1890s, which prevailed in the British left throughout most of the following century. Thereafter, overt environmental politics tended to be squeezed out by the contest of capital and labour, allowing organizations such as the National Trust and the RSPB to maintain broad-based support across the ideological spectrum. Contemporary British climate scepticism, I suggest, emerges out of the re-politicization of environmentalism in the late twentieth century, first in a 1970s groundswell, and then at the nexus of Margaret Thatcher’s ideological Conservatism and an increasingly influential European regulatory regime.

Smoke abatement had long been one of the most important causes for British environmentalism. Since the eighteenth century, rapid industrialization had been fuelled overwhelmingly by coal, primarily the bituminous kind that spewed sooty, sulphurous smoke. Despite the seemingly obvious effects on buildings, plants, air quality and human lungs, smoke came to be considered ‘pollution’

only in the 1870s and 1880s, having been previously labelled as 'benign or even beneficial' (Thorsheim 195). Doctors and scientists, as well as writers such as Charles Dickens, John Ruskin and William Morris, were instrumental in reconceptualizing nature as inherently 'pure and fragile' (195), and threatened by technology. Indeed, Peter Thorsheim records that painters celebrated or decried smoke and fog according to whether such phenomena aligned with their aesthetic theories: pre-Raphaelites such as William Holman Hunt supported smoke abatement, whereas J.M.W. Turner and Claude Monet enjoyed the visual effects of multi-coloured fogs (55). Vivian's argument in 'The Decay of Lying' that London fogs 'did not exist till Art had invented them' is merely a Wildean exaggeration of this difference of opinion.¹

If Wilde is to be believed, it was the waning of nebulophilic Impressionism, not the development of 'smokeless' fuels, the reports of Parliamentary committees or the activism of the National Smoke Abatement Society (NSAS), that made effective legislation against air pollution possible in 1956. In J.B. Sanderson's appraisal, the NSAS did struggle with the Byronic stereotype of the environmentalist: 'Above all, the Society had to avoid the crippling accusation of crankiness. In its early days it was often dismissed as an organisation of eccentrics' (239). The membership of the NSAS typified the British 'consensus' approach to policymaking, including local authorities, philanthropic organizations, proto-environmentalists and industry interest groups such as the Coal Utilization Council and the mighty National Coal Board. Sanderson commented in 1961 that 'the Society has the advantage that its cause is difficult to oppose openly, though indirect opposition is far from difficult because of the still strong romantic tradition surrounding the open fire' (242). Nevertheless, previous initiatives had been gutted at the Parliamentary committee stage by industry lobbying: a 1909 Bill to enable London County Council to regulate industrial pollution in the capital ended up 'in a deplorably emaciated condition' – a 'veritable mouse of legislation' – thanks to the concerted efforts of 'the London Underground Railways, the Central London Railway, the London Chamber of Commerce, the Electricity Supply Companies of London, the Gas Light and Coke Company, and the South Metropolitan Gas Company' (Ashby and Anderson 195). As a result, smoke abatement made modest progress at the municipal level before the 'great London fog' of December 1952 altered the political and discursive landscape.

Londoners were initially fatalistic about the 'pea-souper' that blanketed the city for four days. Newspapers focused on the increases in 'housebreaking and street crime'. In the aftermath, though, nearly 5,000 deaths were attributed to it

(including several prize animals at the Smithfield Agricultural Show), and the term 'smog' began to be used increasingly in the press. Sanderson comments, 'For smoke abaters, this word was a valuable addition to the political vocabulary; "fog" is almost a natural phenomenon, "smog" is an evil to be eliminated' (246). Under growing public and backbench pressure, the Conservative government set up the Beaver Committee to review pollution control measures. Its report in November 1954, which aligned with the views of the NSAS, ultimately led to the Clean Air Act (CAA) of 1956.

The political history of the CAA has been addressed in summary (Brimblecombe) and in detail (Kenny; Thorsheim) elsewhere. Here it is necessary only to stress how industrial and union opposition affected the passage and implementation of the CAA. Crucially, the Beaver Committee refocused attention from industrial pollution to domestic hearths from the outset, pointing out that 'although houses and commercial buildings together used less than 20 percent of the coal consumed each year in Britain, they produced 45 percent of the country's smoke' (Thorsheim 175). Still, overt opposition to the CAA was muted because in 1956 the alternatives were also derivatives of coal: domestic gas was extracted from it; electricity was generated by burning it; and smokeless cokes with cheerful names like Sunbrite, Cleanglow and Coalite were made by baking it in giant kilns, causing severe local pollution (Thorsheim 136). Moreover, the coal industry was protected with taxes and import bans on foreign competitors, including fines levied from the mid-1960s into the 1970s on the nationalized Central Electricity Generating Board for using coal from overseas (Chick 9–10). Nonetheless, Scarrow claims that resistance to environmental improvement ran deep: 'In coal mining areas the clean air movement was ... perceived, not incorrectly, as being a direct threat to the entire coal industry' (268). A 'Blue Card Information' leaflet on the CAA distributed by the National Union of Mineworkers in 1963 exemplifies this left-wing resistance: it seeks to shift the stigma of coal onto oil-fired boilers, claiming that 'oil firing gives rise to more frequent complaints and more serious pollution of the atmosphere by acidic oil smuts which attack and rapidly destroy cellulosic materials and fabrics on which they fall' (Hesler 5–6). The strongest message, conveyed in bold in an opening message, is more direct:

In the interests of the membership generally, it is of the utmost importance that members of Local Authorities, Welfare and Club Committees and similar bodies should at all times advocate and press for the use of coal or coal derivatives in any undertaking coming under their jurisdictions.

Alongside wider concerns about the future of the industry, most coal miners were paid partly with 'concessionary coal', which was often sold illegally on the side. They understandably resisted pressure to accept smaller (albeit legal) cash payments instead and sought to dissuade local councils from declaring smokeless zones. Only when Margaret Thatcher's government orchestrated widespread pit closures in the 1980s did the skies begin to clear over Britain's coal mining regions.

The unintended benefits of Thatcher's politically motivated destruction of the coal mining industry were not the only ironic outcome of her premiership from an environmental perspective. In the early 1980s, the Conservatives' pandering to the Countryside Landowner's Association (CLA) and the National Union of Farmers (NFU) in the Wildlife and Countryside Act prompted Britain's large, well-funded environmental organizations to get clever in (relative) defeat. Later, water privatization inadvertently undermined the Conservatives' allies in the nuclear industry and jolted the government into introducing effective regulation of aquatic pollution (McCormick 102–3). Finally, Margaret Thatcher herself dismissed the environment brief she held in opposition as 'humdrum' and led, according to John McCormick, the opposition to environmental regulation more openly and effectively than any previous prime minister (McCormick 58–59). Then suddenly, in a speech to the Royal Society on 27 September 1988, Thatcher announced that the Conservatives supported sustainable development, and suggested that 'with all these enormous changes (population, agricultural, use of fossil fuels) concentrated into such a short period of time, we have unwittingly begun a massive experiment with the system of the planet itself' ('Speech to the Royal Society'). Regardless of how credible it turned out to be, Thatcher's apparent conversion was a turning point in British environmental politics. Its impact demonstrated, Mike Robinson claims, 'that as Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher had been the most significant impediment to the "greening" of British politics until this time' (179).

At first, the 1980s seemed little different to previous decades: Britain still had 'no such thing as a coherent and recognizable environmental policy' (McCormick 10), in large part because none of the three main political parties accorded the issue any sustained attention. As with the great London fog, British governments reacted to events and to public pressure where necessary, but not otherwise. Just as before, trade unions energetically embraced some environmental issues, notably around workplace health and safety (Robinson 99–100), but considerable reciprocal suspicion and hostility remained between environmentalists and trade unionists (42). Moreover, as the drafting of the

Wildlife and Countryside Bill demonstrated, an influential 'policy community' of ministries and interest groups (the CLA, the NFU and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAFF) in this case) made government policy, in effect, well before it was subjected to Parliamentary scrutiny (76–87). With the exception of the RSPB, the conservation organizations, including organs of the state such as the Countryside Commission, were barely involved at all.

So far, so predictable. Two factors of long-term significance, though, distinguished the Wildlife and Countryside Act: first, it was made necessary by 'EEC [European Economic Community, predecessor to the European Union] Directive 79/429 on the Conservation of Wild Birds which the government was obliged to enact by April 1981' (Cox and Lowe 51), and second, the Bill was introduced into the Lords, not the Commons, due to a lack of Parliamentary time in the lower house. Ironically, this decision slowed the Bill's passage almost to a standstill by subjecting it to unprecedented scrutiny by well-informed peers, some of them board members of conservation organizations: 'In all, it took several hundred hours of debate carried out over eleven months and resulting in a record 2300 amendments before the Act was passed' (McCormick 78). Although it seemed the anti-environmentalist farming lobby eventually won its campaign against 'coercive restrictions' and 'official interference' in favour of 'sensible ground rules' (Cox and Lowe 64), the WCA catalysed new relationships between the European Commission, which was keen to extend its environmental mandate, and a range of newly energized, professionalized and (within the constraints of charitable status) politicized environmental organizations. As a result, Britons experienced a shift in what Sheila Jasanoff calls their 'civic epistemology':

Science ... achieves its standing by meeting entrenched expectations about what authoritative claims should look like and how they ought to be articulated, represented, and defended. ... I use the term civic epistemology to refer to these historically and politically situated, culturally specific, public knowledge-ways.

Thatcher's neoliberalism helped spawn a competing environmental knowledge-base, anchored in Brussels, which was later complemented by the global United Nations IPCC/COP process. The shift from a mainly national civic epistemology to a transnational one elicited the self-identified climate 'heretics' encountered in the third section of this chapter.

Margaret Thatcher may have spent most of her tenure ignoring or opposing environmentalism, but she was also uniquely qualified, by comparison with most politicians, to understand it scientifically. She graduated from Oxford with

a degree in Chemistry, where she worked under the supervision of future Nobel laureate Dorothy Hodgkin. On the other hand, she had done more than side with anti-environmentalist corporate interests in government; she had extended the deregulatory agenda further than most had ever imagined. Nicholas Ridley, her secretary of state for the environment, 1987–1989, ‘occasionally referred to environmental groups as “extremists” and “pseudo-Marxists”’ (McCormick 57). Thus, when she addressed global environmental issues such as ozone depletion and climate change in a series of speeches and interviews in the late 1980s, it puzzled both acolytes and critics: was this a sincere change of direction motivated by a strong grasp of the evidence, or was it political opportunism of some kind? The former interpretation came to seem implausible given the lack of concerted action over the next two years, whereas the latter ran counter to her fearsome reputation for ‘conviction politics’. In any case, environmentalism was hardly a live issue when she first addressed it; as Andrew Marr recalls, her speech to the Royal Society was expected to be such a non-event that ‘no television cameras were sent to record her speech and the prime minister had to read it by the light of wax candles held over her head in an ancient hall’ (Marr 480). She did go on to replace Ridley with Chris Patten, who was much more open to the environmental lobby. Nevertheless, Margaret Thatcher was evicted from Downing Street by her own party in November 1990, not long after the publication of a white paper on the environment that humiliated Patten and betrayed little evidence of her Damascene conversion.

Margaret Thatcher did much to unfetter and embolden corporate anti-environmentalism, as *The Times* editorial on the white paper frankly acknowledged: ‘[Conservatives] oppose green policies because, in the corridors of Whitehall, they are not free agents but regard themselves as delegates of interest groups: the oil and gas companies, the motoring lobby, road builders, and that sternest of all short-termers, the Treasury’ (McCormick 170). Nevertheless, Thatcher’s environmental legacy remains deeply ambiguous. Over three terms, her government eviscerated trade unions, forcing several into mergers that mitigated their narrow sectional interests. In principle, their declining influence ought to have allowed Tony Blair’s New Labour to espouse environmental causes less equivocally, although the reality was less encouraging. She took credit – in her Royal Society speech, for example – for environmental initiatives that actually started life as European Directives, while at the same time solidifying the association of ‘Brussels’ (site of the European Union’s parliament) and interfering environmentalists. Whatever her motivation, Thatcher’s surprise intervention in 1988 legitimized global environmental concern to a remarkable degree,

even if it did not displace the major preoccupations of politicians altogether. Robinson argues, moreover, that ‘the 1980s saw much of the environmental movement adapt to Mrs Thatcher’s version of popular capitalism. The rise of “green” consumerism ... has to some extent been a compromised response to Thatcherite policy and philosophy’ (191). Thatcher’s dominance interacted with exogenous factors like the growing power of the European Commission and the emerging scientific consensus about global warming to reshape both environmentalism and opposition to it.

The Wildlife and Countryside Bill was introduced in the Lords, not only because of Parliamentary timetabling but also because environmental issues were not seen as *political* in November 1980. Ten years later, when Thatcher left office, such a belief would have seemed ludicrous. Robinson’s conclusion, in *The Greening of British Party Politics*, is that, despite the disappointment of environmental idealists, ‘the framework of the existing party political system is appropriate, and broadly speaking, the diversity amongst environmental groups is well matched with the variety of political ideologies’ (228). Another way to put this is to say that, while the evidence of comprehensive ‘greening’ of party politics at the end of 1980s was patchy, to say the least, Thatcher’s revolution had clearly politicized the environment in ways that continue to reverberate through the climate debate today.

Climate scepticism in the UK: What we know

‘The Armstrong and Miller Show’, a popular British comedy show, included a sketch about climate change in the programme broadcast on 12 December 2010 (mbalax32). Torrential rain can be heard outside a suburban home where a couple is sitting reading on a sofa. The man gets up and walks over to the window, then turns to his wife and comments: ‘Well, whatever happened to global warming, eh?’ Suddenly a red X appears on screen, and a stentorian public service announcement begins:

Stop! From October 1st, if you say ‘Whatever happened to global warming, eh?’ whenever it’s a bit cold or wet, you could be cooling off in a prison cell. [Leaflet is seen coming through letterbox.] This leaflet is being sent to every household in Britain. You have until September 30th to learn the difference between climate, a long-term term trend averaged over many years, and weather, which is what’s going on outside the window right now. [Couple is seen earnestly reading leaflet.] Make sure you study it. Because if you don’t, the next shower you get

caught in could be in the prison washblock. [Menacing prison inmate is seen throwing a bar of soap to the floor.]

The man is now depicted turning from the window again, saying: 'Look at this weather, eh? Still, I'm sure it'll all average out statistically to indicate a long-term warming trend.' A big green tick appears on screen, and the man's wife smiles awkwardly towards the camera. The sketch concludes with the voiceover and onscreen slogan: 'Global warming quips – get acclimatised.'

The butt of the satire seems obvious: the habit, common to lay sceptics and warmists alike, of mistaking individual weather events for climate trends. Framing the satire in the style of a public service announcement, though, focuses attention on the intrusive, overweening moralization and bureaucratization of individual behaviour by a new regime of climate governance. Banning feeble sceptical jokes is just the kind of thing the nanny state *would* do.

Armstrong and Miller's sketch speaks to a dramatic shift in the cultural and party politics of climate change between 1990 and 2010, from a marginal concern of a few scientists and environmentalists to apparent hegemony. As we will see, there were actually two periods in which 'global warming', as it was initially known, had a high profile: 1989–1992, when the IPCC's First Assessment Report (FAR) was published and the Rio Earth summit took place, and 2006–2010, which saw the climate documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), the IPCC's AR4 (2007) and the Climate Change Act (2008). Climate scepticism lagged behind in both instances: Richard D. North and Wilfred Beckerman published sceptical books in 1995, and the great majority of the texts discussed in detail below date from 2008 to 2010. Scepticism in the 1990s portrayed global warming as a wacky, extremist belief, whereas second-wave scepticism, as we might call it, differed rhetorically by positioning itself predominantly as 'heresy,' reflecting the perceived dominance of a scientifico-political consensus about climate change in the UK. Nevertheless, the modest changes in British GHG emissions and the near-total disappearance of climate change from the political agenda at election time suggest that it is a rather thin hegemony by contrast with Germany, where climate change is less often challenged, and the United States, where there has never been a consensus and partisan conflict prevails. This section explains the emergence of a thin hegemony of climate governance in terms of party political competition, media attention and public opinion.

The first wave of global climate activism was stimulated by scientific concerns articulated in the IPCC's FAR, and channelled primarily through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which began holding annual Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings in 1995.² British political

parties had begun to take notice of environmentalism in 1989, when the Green Party won 14.5 per cent of the popular vote (but no seats), its best-ever result in percentage terms. A flurry of pro-environmental statements followed in 1990, including the Conservative's *This Common Inheritance*, and the party manifestos for the 1992 election gave significant additional space to environmental issues – especially the Liberal Democrat party, which is most directly threatened by the Green vote. Still, as Neil Carter observes:

The Labour and Conservative parties have made no concerted effort [up to 2006] to promote the environment during an election campaign. Even in 1992, when the environment figured strongly in all the main party manifestos, neither major party emphasized it in its press conferences.

(Carter 'Party Politicization' 748)

The Conservatives won the election, and Labour lost it, with barely a mention of climate change.

John Major's government (1992–97) was hampered by its small majority and the rise of Euro-scepticism in both the Conservative Party and the British media, although John Selwyn Gummer was a surprisingly effective secretary of state for the environment who unified a hodgepodge of regulatory acts and agencies in the environment agency. The UK signed the Kyoto Protocol in December 1997, but climate change was a low political priority throughout the decade because the decline of manufacturing and the shift from coal to natural gas led to falling GHG emissions even without concerted effort. Both Labour and the Conservatives pursued a policy known as 'preference accommodation': 'they moved their rhetoric and policies closer to the preferences of those voters wanting greater environmental protection' while avoiding competing with each other by proposing 'costly environmental protection policies which could alienate large numbers of voters' (Carter 'The Politics of Climate Change in the UK' 424). Whereas American sceptics began seriously to mobilize in the mid-1990s, neither advocacy nor opposition had particular salience in the UK until later.

Tony Blair's New Labour, elected in 1997, might have been expected to follow the path of environmental modernization touted by social democratic parties in Northern Europe. Blair had reduced the formal influence of trade unions on party policy and made enthusiastic, if infrequent, references to 'green issues'. The government committed to ambitious GHG emissions reduction targets: 20 per cent from 1990 levels by 2010, and 60 per cent by 2050. However, Michael Jacobs's Fabian Society pamphlet 'Environmental Modernization: the new

Labour agenda' noted in 1999 that 'New Labour is not comfortable with the environment as a political issue', and so 'there has been no "ideological narrative", no "story to tell", of the kind which New Labour has developed in other fields' (Jacobs 1, 6). As Carter points out, Blair's Chancellor Gordon Brown weakened a proposed climate change levy on polluting industries in the face of determined opposition, and then, in September 2000, protests by truckers and farmers derailed the 'Road Fuel Escalator', a policy introduced by the Conservatives to reduce transport emissions by increasing excise duties by 5 per cent on road fuel annually. The fuel protests began as a failed Conservative Party stunt, but later escalated into an extremely disruptive blockade of refineries by tractors and trucks. Thousands of petrol stations closed, hospitals cancelled non-essential operations and supermarkets began to run out of food. For the first time since the 1992 withdrawal of the pound sterling from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, the Conservatives were ahead of Labour in the polls ('Drivers Kept Waiting as Shortages Ease'). Moreover, environmentalist protestors who had opposed road-building during the 1990s did not turn out to oppose the farmers and truckers. Blair's New Labour, ever sensitive to the feelings and opinions of 'Mondeo Man',³ suspended the Road Fuel Escalator and backed off environmental issues for several years thereafter.

The next peak of interest in climate change provoked most of the hostile responses we analyse below. Between the 2005 G8 conference in Gleneagles, Scotland, when Blair sought to assume the mantle of global climate leader, and the COP 15 Copenhagen climate summit in December 2009, attended by Blair's successor Gordon Brown, a remarkable series of developments occurred that brought about major legislative change and elevated climate change to the thin hegemony satirized by Armstrong and Miller. First, the government's Chief Scientific Advisor Sir David King claimed that climate change was a threat greater than terrorism. Blair, who won the 2005 general election with the lowest popular vote in British history, hoped to recover from the severe damage to his popularity and global stature caused by his participation in the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. Then, in December 2005, David Cameron became leader of the opposition Conservative Party, and embarked on a major rebranding to 'detoxify' it by moving closer to the political centre. He replaced Thatcher's torch logo with an oak tree, travelled to Svalbard in Norway to witness the apparent effects of climate change (and get a photo-op with sled dogs) and proclaimed that Britons could 'Vote Blue, Go Green'. Cameron's overhaul effectively sidelined prominent Conservative climate sceptics, who came to be more closely associated with the anti-immigration, anti-European Union UK Independence Party. Crucially, the

re-alignment also forced Labour from its position of minimal accommodation into active competition with the opposition parties. The Conservatives, egged on by environmental NGOs, effectively set the pace for the government; as Carter explains: 'Several Labour Government climate initiatives were policies initially proposed by the Conservatives, including the Climate Change Bill, reforms of air passenger duty, feed-in tariffs and support for a new high-speed railway linking London to Birmingham and beyond' (Carter 'The Politics of Climate Change' 428).

Blair, keenly aware of the threat from a 'modernized' Conservative Party, helped to persuade the European Council in 2007 to adopt the '20-20-20 by 2020' targets, which mandated 'a unilateral 20% reduction target for CO₂ emissions, a 20% share of renewable sources in energy consumption and a 20% improvement in energy efficiency – all by 2020' (427). Under his successor, Prime Minister Gordon Brown, the 2008 Climate Change Act (CCA) was passed with cross-party support. It places a legal duty on the secretary of state for the environment to 'ensure that the net UK carbon account for the year 2050 is at least 80% lower than the 1990 baseline' ('Climate Change Act 2008'). The CCA was, and remains, a tremendous accomplishment of British environmentalism, even if the political consensus that delivered it has since disintegrated.

Just five Conservatives voted against the CCA. Nevertheless, they represented an increasingly vocal, even vituperative, opposition to the consensus, much of it funnelled through the notoriously outspoken British tabloid media. Like the right-wing press, the CCA rebels were, with one exception, also 'Euro-sceptics' who campaigned for Britain to leave the European Union. The outsized role of tabloids in the UK means that most research on climate scepticism has come from scholars of journalism and environmental communications, who have largely confirmed what we might suspect about the relationship between the ideological orientation of a newspaper and its reporting of climate change (Boykoff and Mansfield; Boykoff; Painter). Two newspapers in particular gave credence to scepticism and failed to preserve the distinction between reporting and opinion pieces: 'In two right-wing newspapers with a combined daily circulation of 2.7 million (the *Express* and the *Mail*), between 48% and 50% of *all* the articles ... included sceptical voices' (Painter 108). By contrast with observations of the broadsheet press in the UK and the United States, scholars found tabloid reporting did not become more accurate or less partisan over time thanks to the disproportionate contributions of specific individuals, including Michael Hanlon (*Telegraph*, *Express*, *Mail*), James Chapman (*Mail*) and Christopher Booker (*Telegraph*) (although Chapman later abandoned his scepticism)

(Boykoff and Mansfield). As Boykoff observes, British tabloids reported climate change with their trademark ‘ingenious and pithy’ (555) headlines and ‘deliberately contrarian positions taken with ironic tones’ (560), framing it through ‘weather events, charismatic megafauna and the movements of political actors and rhetoric’ (549). Over and over, global warming was dismissed as ‘hot air from politicians’: in a sardonic revision of Blair’s argument for the Iraq War, Hanlon wrote in 2004 that ‘for all their posturing over their green policies, Tony Blair and Michael Howard may find they have declared war on an enemy that doesn’t exist and instead of weapons of mass destruction, we now have weather of mass deception’ (quoted in Boykoff 564). Boykoff’s close examination of a sceptical column in the *Daily Mail* concludes that ‘through a combination of opinion-driven reporting with satirical tones, sensationalized villains (the Met Office as “so-called experts”), and sceptical claims and frames, the piece casts doubt on the legitimacy of scientific assertions, and specifically the veracity of claims regarding anthropogenic contributions’ (564). Even as the thin hegemony in support of the IPCC was forming, climate scepticism – along with Euro-scepticism, often in the same newspapers – was bubbling away discontentedly.

The significance of the scepticism expressed by the *Mail* and the *Express* should not be exaggerated, even if the 2016 British vote to leave the European Union casts right-wing populism in a different light in retrospect. As Painter shows, *The Sun*, the largest tabloid by far, employed Jeremy Clarkson (see below) as columnist, but was run by James Murdoch, ‘who is widely known to be concerned about global warming and has a background in environmental sciences’. Perhaps cognizant of its comparatively youthful readership, *The Sun* employs a dedicated environment editor and reports climate issues in a relatively unbiased way. *The Guardian*, a liberal newspaper, has put climate change at the centre of its reporting: ‘Since 2008, the paper and online site has had a team of six full-time environment correspondents, two editors, a dedicated picture editor, and two production journalists’ (95). Moreover, as Gavin Marshall’s analysis of the reporting of the Copenhagen conference reveals, the overall salience of climate change is never very great: his graph comparing Google Trends searches on ‘football’, ‘X factor’⁴ and ‘climate change’ shows the latter as a flat line running very close to the Y axis. Even Copenhagen and Climategate barely register.

A study of British media (including advertisements and websites) commissioned by the left-leaning Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) usefully maps three dominant British ‘discourses’ of climate change at the peak of the period of party competition in 2006–2007: alarmism, pragmatic optimism (‘technology will save us’) and non-pragmatic optimism. The authors subdivide

the latter into two categories, ‘settlerdom’ (an odd, unilluminating name) and ‘comic nihilism’:

[Settlerdom] rejects and mocks the alarmist discourse – and with it climate change – by invoking ‘common sense’ on behalf of ‘the sane majority’ in opposition to ‘the doom-mongers’. It dismisses climate change as a thing so fantastic that it cannot be true and reflects a refusal to engage in the debate. It is seen most clearly in the broadly rightwing popular press, but is also likely to be the stuff of pub conversations. It is significant because it is immune to scientific argument and its prevalence underlines that the task of climate change agencies is not to persuade by rational argument but to develop a new ‘common sense’.

‘British comic nihilism’ is another evasive rhetorical repertoire. Its rejection of climate change is whimsical, unserious, blithely irresponsible – a sunny refusal to engage in the debate, typified by comic musings on the positive possibilities of a future with climate change. It is currently marginal, seen in just a few places in the middle-class press and radio. But it is potentially important because it is a very British repertoire (self-mocking and contrary, dealing with adversity and threat by use of humour).

(Segnit and Ereaut 7–8)

In keeping with their remit – to ask ‘how are we telling the climate change story and can we tell it better?’ – Segnit and Ereaut recommend ‘treating climate-friendly activity as a brand that can be sold’ (9), which seems to be at odds with their assertion that scepticism is ‘likely to become increasingly marginal in the face of mounting evidence’ (24) and their doubt about the efficacy of ‘residual models of public service or campaigning communications’ (9). Most importantly, they recommend ‘treating climate change as beyond argument’: ‘The “facts” need to be treated as being so taken-for-granted that they need not be spoken’ (25). In a 2007 follow-up paper, they claim this objective has already been achieved: ‘There is now a broad consensus that climate change is happening and that man is at least partly responsible for it’ (94). Given that all the texts discussed below date from 2008 and after, it seems clear that scepticism was alive and kicking. In fact, in the years following passage of the CCA, British public opinion moved *away* from acceptance of anthropogenic climate change. What happened?

A 2014 longitudinal analysis of public opinion surveys proposes a four-way periodization:

- (1) 1980s and early 1990s, showing increases in knowledge and awareness; (2) mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, a period marked by growing public concern but also variability in opinion; (3) mid- to late-2000s, showing declining public

concern and increasing skepticism in some nations, with polarization of viewpoints within and between nations; and (4) 2010s, which so far suggest possible stabilization of public concern about climate change. (Capstick et al. 45)

Although the long period of growing public support for climate mitigation was manifested in the CCA, opposition grew too, especially in the late noughties⁵: scepticism about the warming trend rose from 4 per cent in 2005 to 15 per cent by 2010, and increasing numbers of Britons apparently came to suspect that the seriousness of climate change was exaggerated (Whitmarsh). Studies found that generalized scepticism was higher in the UK (44 per cent Eurobarometer) than the EU average (30 per cent), but also suggested a porous distinction between active scepticism and uncertainty (Poortinga et al.). Although political affiliation was a significant factor, as in the United States, British sceptical publics tended to be older, poorer, less educated and less certain than warmists – quite different to McCright and Dunlap's wealthy, college-educated 'cool dudes' (McCright and Dunlap). Poortinga and colleagues conclude:

The finding that climate scepticism is associated with attitudinal uncertainty, ambivalence, and conflicting cognitive-affective responses suggests that most climate sceptics may not hold their views very strongly. So, perhaps in contrast to the caricature of a dogmatic sceptic who is "waiting to pounce on any scientific uncertainty", climate sceptical publics seem to be less opinionated than non-sceptical publics.

(1021)

Scholars have attributed the growth of British scepticism to the 2008 financial crisis; the failure of the 2009 Copenhagen conference; the near-simultaneous release of the hacked 'Climategate' emails; a downturn in political and media 'attention cycle'; and a succession of cold, snowy winters. A German study of shifting attitudes in Hamburg suggests a mere reversion to the mean after a few years of elevated concern (Ratter, Philipp and von Storch 7). By contrast with these efforts to explain short-term fluctuations in poll numbers (Ereaut and Seignit discern an emerging consensus in the course of just a year!), Stuart Capstick and colleagues have ingeniously re-analysed six data sets from 1997 to 2010 in order to discriminate between temporal scales of public opinion change: 'relatively short-lived movements in attitudes as revealed by survey data and influenced by transitory phenomena; slower shifts in public discourses that track changing cultural contexts; and enduring ways of understanding climate change that are tied to longer-term ethical foundations' (Capstick, Pidgeon and Henwood 726). Looking beyond the fluctuations, they find that 'the

personally and socially relevant aspects of climate change have gradually found purchase in people's understanding of everyday life' (745). Far from appearing 'malleable and capricious' (746), respondents across the surveys increasingly accept responsibility for addressing climate change, even as they acknowledge 'pressures' from other areas of their lives. Moreover, the re-analysis found encouraging evidence in all six data sets of a durable ethic of intergenerational equity and 'stewardship' of the nonhuman world. A superficial reading of British opinion trends might conclude scepticism is on the rise, but in fact it seems to be fracturing into a constellation of more or less justified concerns about media representation, scientific process, the limits of human nature, the reliability of climate models and the economic, cultural and environmental cost of transitioning from fossil fuels to sustainable energy. Indeed, one might well argue that Britons are maturing into a properly critical, ambivalent relationship with their climatically altered future. The sceptical texts discussed in the next section have facilitated the shift, willy-nilly.

Climate scepticism in the UK: An ecocritical analysis

Several strands of British culture and politics have been traced that bring us to the brink of the late noughties and the era of thin hegemony. First, there is the satirical depiction of straitlaced, straight-faced Romantic environmentalists in Byron and Wilde. Second, there is the historical strength of apolitical conservationism in the UK from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries, which aligns with Capstick, Pidgeon and Henwood's finding of durable intergenerational concerns in British publics. Third, we have seen that, under the pressure of Thatcher's ideological Conservatism, environmentalism became politicized and Europeanized, thereby greatly increasing its influence, but also eliciting a counter-reaction, mainly from right-wing conservatives. This process clearly parallels the emergence of Republican anti-environmentalism in the United States during and immediately after Ronald Reagan's presidency, albeit that the British counterpart was coloured by Euro-scepticism. Finally, a growing consensus including all three national political parties, all but one broadsheet newspaper, many business leaders, and Sir David Attenborough, led – under the specific conditions of Cameron's attempt to outflank New Labour – to the 2008 Climate Change Act and the apparent hegemony of pro-IPCC politics.

The texts discussed in detail here, barring a couple from the 1990s, belong to the efflorescence of climate scepticism in the years from 2008 to

2015. Before examining them, it is worth rehearsing some of the evidence they adduce in support of their self-conception as ‘heretics’ confronting an oppressive orthodoxy. Al Gore’s documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) was immensely influential in the UK, prompting the Labour Department of Education to distribute copies of the DVD to all British schools. Stewart Dimmock, a school governor from Kent, took the DfE to court, claiming the film contained ‘scientific inaccuracies, political propaganda and sentimental mush’ (Peck). A High Court judge refused to ban the film, but required teachers using the film as a resource to draw attention to what *The Telegraph* called its ‘Nine Inconvenient Untruths’. Two years later, the newly created Department of Energy and Climate Change funded TV advertisements that narrated a climatically altered future, complete with weeping rabbits and drowning puppies, in the form of a bedtime story that would terrify children (JoetheElectrician). At the end, the little girl asks plaintively, ‘Is there a happy ending?’ In 2011, an independent report on science programming, commissioned for the BBC Trust, warned against the ‘false balance’ that could give ‘undue attention to marginal opinion’. The report was welcomed by climate scientists, but was read as ‘muzzling’ climate sceptics (Rao). Not only had all three national political parties committed to dramatic cuts in GHG emissions, but the nation’s broadcaster was keeping them off the air and children were being – as they saw it – indoctrinated with global warming alarmism.

A particularly striking example is provided by ‘No Pressure’, a four-minute film written by Richard Curtis and Franny Armstrong for the climate charity 10:10, which was withdrawn from YouTube on 1 October 2010, the day of its release. 10:10 invited people and businesses to pledge cuts of 10 per cent of their carbon emissions in the year 2010. In the withdrawn advert, schoolchildren, office workers and footballers are depicted being told about the 10:10 campaign, and largely agreeing to support it. The small number of holdouts in each group, including the football coach, are then graphically blown to bits, their bloody remains splattering everyone around. At the end of the film, its narrator Gillian Anderson is also blown up for refusing to take the pledge. Much like Armstrong and Miller, ‘No Pressure’ appears to take aim at climate sceptics who think there is ‘no pressure’ to act, while at the same time attempting self-deprecating satire of environmentalist intolerance. Only the first aspect was addressed by climate sceptics such as James Delingpole, who claimed, with characteristic hyperbole, that ‘the environmental movement has revealed the snarling, wicked, homicidal misanthropy beneath its cloak of gentle, bunny-hugging righteousness.’⁶ Having satirized environmentalists for being

humourless, climate sceptics were now chastising them for attempting humour – though to be fair, the film is simultaneously gross, politically incoherent and only mildly amusing. The more important point, for our purposes, is that ‘No Pressure’ sardonically acknowledges the hegemonic status of climate change in British culture at that moment, even as it stages, with cartoonish violence, the imagined punishment of those who fail to connect their knowledge to their behaviour.

The place of ‘global warming’ in sceptical texts was somewhat different during the ‘first wave’ in the 1990s. Already, there were the inevitable puns, as in the title of a booklet published by the ‘Institute of Economic Affairs’, a conservative think tank: *Global Warming: Apocalypse or Hot Air?*, by Roger Bate and Julian Morris.⁷ Also, the critique of ‘eco-doomsters’ is to the fore in Wilfred Beckerman’s Preface, which sardonically alludes to the puritanical message of environmental ‘preachers’ (Bate and Morris 5–6). The condescending tone of the Preface is not shared by the pamphlet, which is simply a brief, sceptical summary of climate science in the 1990s that focuses on the acknowledged crudity of climate models at that time, drawing reassurance from Richard Lindzen’s informed, but generally contested, assertion that ‘negative feedbacks’ in the climate system would outweigh ‘positive feedbacks’. Bate and Morris claim, on this basis, that ‘the overall effects of GHG [greenhouse gas] emissions are unknown but are unlikely to be seriously good or seriously bad, because the global ecosystem appears to be “engineered” for stability’ (27). Their confidence aligns with the ‘myth of nature’ defined as ‘individualist’ in John Adams’s influential *Risk*:

Nature benign: nature, according to this myth, is predictable, bountiful, robust, stable, and forgiving of any insults humankind might inflict upon it ... Nature is the benign context of human activity, not something that needs to be managed. The management style associated with this myth is therefore relaxed, non-interventionist, *laissez-faire*.

(Adams 34)

Adams’s other ‘myths of nature’ depict it as ‘perverse/tolerant’ (i.e. resilient, up to a point – the ‘hierarchist’ perspective); ‘capricious’, according to fatalists; and ‘ephemeral’ or fragile, which is the typical assumption of environmentalists.

For Bate and Morris, benign nature aligns with the virtue of unimpeded markets: they call for the elimination of distorting fossil fuel subsidies because ‘free markets in energy will not only be efficient, but will also alert us to changes in environmental conditions – via the price mechanism – far faster than any model might do’ (42). In fact, climate change is a perfect example of an economic

‘externality’ from the perspective of fossil fuel or nuclear power stations. Regardless, Bate and Morris insist that both the climatic and the economic future are unknowable, but thanks to the alleged stability of ‘the global ecosystem’ – a claim at odds with the expressed views of many paleoclimatologists (Pearce) – they are confident both will be fine.

The title of Wilfred Beckerman’s own book, *Small Is Stupid: Blowing the Whistle on the Greens*, suggests a rather more caustic tone than he actually adopts. Unlike much later British scepticism, Beckerman’s tone is witty, self-deprecating and rationalistic, as when he admits his limitations in relation to climate science:

Not being a scientist – or even a rock star, a politician, a diplomat or related to any Royal Family – it might be thought that I am not qualified to express any view about global warming. But I would hate word to get around among my colleagues at Oxford that I was reluctant to write about a subject simply because I did not know much about it. And, fortunately, one does not need to know much about it in order to learn that the really top scientists in the climatology field are acutely aware of the gaps in their understanding of the process of climate change.

(Beckerman 80)

Beckerman acknowledges that ‘the world is facing serious environmental problems’ (3) – indeed, he was appointed by the Labour politician Anthony Crosland to the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution in 1970 – but is perceptively critical of 1970s environmentalists’ failed prophecies and misunderstanding of the nature of ‘resources’: he prints a table of ‘known reserves’ of resources from the Club of Rome’s *The Limits to Growth* (1970) alongside the equivalent figures from 1989 under the sardonic heading ‘How we used up all the resources that we had and still finished up with more than we started with’ (53). His sharpest criticism – albeit still conveyed with the bemused restraint of an Oxford don – is reserved for Integrated Assessment Models (IAM), which yoke climatic and economic simulations:

There are several very complicated computerised models on the market for making the requisite predictions. But in fact none of them is necessary. It can all be done on the back of an envelope, or even in one’s head.

(90)

Given that humans occupy almost every climatic zone on Earth, and have frequently migrated voluntarily across far greater temperature gradients, he asserts that the economic impact of the 2.5°C of warming projected over the

twentieth century will, for most countries, be either favourable or negligible. At worst, the people of Bangladesh might have to be compensated for the loss of 20 per cent of their country (94). Beckerman's lack of confidence in IAMs is counterpointed by unerring faith in the wisdom of the free market. He advocates that we remove fossil fuel subsidies, keep researching the global climate system, resist 'pressures from semi-hysterical eco-doomsters' (103) and focus on 'more urgent environmental problems, particularly those in developing countries' (102) until sensible, gradual mitigation policies and effective zero carbon technologies emerge.

Richard D. North's *Life on a Modern Planet: A Manifesto for Progress* (1995) shares Beckerman's disdain for 'doomster' Greens, while approving of 'the generalised ecological and environmental concern almost everyone now feels', which he dubs "green" with a lower-case g' (North 8). Like Beckerman, North has impressive form as an environmentalist: he wrote a series of books in the 1980s on conservation and farming, and admits that he 'was probably thought of as a propagandist for the cause' (1). The strength of his sceptical book lies in how its detailed case studies of specific environmental incidents, such as the 1993 *Braer* oil spill and the 1976 Seveso dioxin release,⁸ draw attention to gaps between scientific knowledge and the publicity campaigns mounted by Greenpeace, which North describes as 'a campaigning organization with a long record of being cavalier with evidence' (103). His scepticism regarding global warming is sensitive to the risk of 'hype' (63), but open-minded towards the scientific consensus then emerging. North's own conclusion is shaped by paleoclimatic evidence of the volatility of the global climate system, which he calls a 'temperature rollercoaster': 'If this sense of a white-knuckle ride and its acceleration do not suggest the need for precautionary response, it is hard to see when such a response would be justified' (69).

The dominant sceptical positioning in the first wave in the UK, then, is a 'balanced' (North and Beckerman's favourite adjective) accommodation with moderate environmentalism, combined with a clear – albeit respectful – marginalization of 'eco-doomsters'. This generation allies itself with 'greens' against 'Greens', which threatens to upset the typology of Segnit and Ereault's discourse study above: the disparagement of doomsters places North and Beckerman in the 'settler' subsection of non-pragmatic optimism, but their overall orientation is clearly pragmatic optimism. We can see from the modesty of their scepticism that global warming was then nascent as a political issue, and far less polarized.

Whereas 'balance' was the watchword in the 1990s, 'reason' fulfilled that role for North and Beckerman's inheritors in the second wave: former Chancellor of the Exchequer Nigel Lawson and science writer Matt Ridley, whose book *The Rational Optimist* (2010) is not discussed here. Lawson's *An Appeal to Reason: A Cool Look at Global Warming* (2008) repeats 'rational' and its cognates so often it recalls the relentless tolling of a church bell on a Sunday morning. The IPCC is described as being 'biased', but at the same time 'authoritative and influential' (12), and so although Lawson repeatedly stresses the acknowledged uncertainties of climate science, he largely confines his critique to impact and policy scepticism. Based on the 'conventional wisdom', he sums up the threat of climate change in economic terms:

On the most pessimistic assumptions, and on the basis of the majority view of the science of global warming, the existential threat confronting the world today, from which the planet must be saved, is that, a hundred years from now, the people of the developing world may not be 9.5 times as well off as they are today, but only 8.5 times as well off. (Lawson 53)

Sir John Houghton published a scientific critique of *An Appeal to Reason* in *Nature*⁹; for our purposes, it is important to note, with Richard D. North, that Lawson's 'tone isn't quite right' because of 'the way his general bounciness alternates with occasional whining' ('The Social Affairs Unit – Web Review ...'). For example, Lawson notes the deaths of 15,000 'very elderly people', most of them in France, in the heatwave of August 2003, then goes on to counter that 'I spent the summer of 2003 in south-west France myself, and found it perfectly tolerable, but it was clearly a hardship for some' (34). He often trades on his experience in government, as when he admonishes:

As is frequently the case in government ... we are faced with the task of deciding, rationally, the most sensible policy course to take against a background of fundamental uncertainty. We need to avoid being paralysed into complete inactivity. But we also need to avoid being panicked into what could be disastrously damaging action. In many ways the decision to invade Iraq is an instructive parallel (with the government's alarmist Stern Review playing the role of Mr Blair's notorious 'dodgy dossier').

(21)

Political point-scoring aside, Lawson's arguments are at their strongest when he attacks the 'scam' (77) of cap-and-trade, and when he explains why climate change adaptation has good prospects, not the least of which is that it is 'essentially a matter of a large number of local and practical measures, which require no

international treaty or worldwide agreement for their implementation' (43). Curiously, though, he treats adaptation as if it is in direct competition with emissions reduction ('mitigation'), and writes about the latter in apocalyptic terms:

For a start it would mean unwinding the industrial revolution and returning to a pastoral society. But that would indeed be only a start. For man began messing about with the planet when he ceased being a hunter-gatherer and invented farming. So agriculture ... would have to go too.

(45)

Lawson's exaggeration is a useful reminder that environmentalists are not the only ones with a record of failed prophecies; conservative and corporate rhetorics, from Bryant and May's defence of white phosphorus to ICI's attempts to block regulation of CFCs, have often warned of economic collapse if specific activities are curtailed. When it turns out that 'environmental regulation [is] a little cheaper than they thought' (North 65), their dire prognostications tend to be forgotten, whereas those of environmentalists are endlessly recycled. Richard Lambert, chairman of the Confederation of British Industries, is hardly a hair-on-fire Green, but even he criticizes Lawson's 'airy generalisations' (Lambert) in his review of *An Appeal to Reason*. Lawson may be the inheritor of North and Beckerman's pragmatic optimism on a philosophical level, but his uneven style and exaggerated anxiety about emissions cuts are symptomatic of his relatively weak control of the non-economic material, as well as the wider polarization and politicization of climate change during the noughties.

As discussed in the Introduction, 'response scepticism' is a relatively recent addition to the typologies of environmental communications scholars (Capstick and Pidgeon 391). In the British sample, 'doubts commonly expressed by participants around the value of action taken to address climate change' and 'doubts around human nature and the human condition' were more strongly correlated with unconcern about climate change than were 'epistemic' doubts about the science itself (398), which suggests to the authors that response scepticism develops out of a 'wider sense of fatalism or resignation.' Though widely influential, such fatalism is seldom articulated by sceptical literature, which tends to be written – ironically enough – by those with a passionate interest in the subject. John Gray's *Straw Dogs* (2002), a bestselling work of popular philosophy, is unusual in this regard. Gray never questions the science of climate change, but he dismisses the possibility of concerted action to prevent it because it depends, he thinks, on moral capabilities that human primates –

technologically advanced but morally stunted – can never marshal. Citing James Lovelock's assessment of humans as a disease of the earth, which he calls '*disseminated primatemaia*', Gray asserts, in characteristically blunt, assertive terms, that humans are incapable of destroying their 'host', the earth, and will 'never initiate a symbiosis with' it (8). He reaches the bleak conclusion:

Humans are like any other plague animal. They cannot destroy the Earth, but they can easily wreck the environment that sustains them. The most likely [outcome is that] *disseminated primatemaia* is cured by a large-scale decline in human numbers.

(12)

Gray's perpetual overstatement of the evidence that Humanism is a delusion, pure and simple, is bolstered by his epigrammatic, aphoristic style, which conspicuously apes that of another great anti-humanist, Friedrich Nietzsche. Nevertheless, I myself have struggled over many years to answer Gray's basic case, which is that technological progress (including in our destructive capabilities) is cumulative, whereas moral progress is fragile and reversible. Scientists see further by 'standing on the shoulders of Giants', as Isaac Newton modestly admitted, whereas moral wisdom has to be learned afresh, all too unreliably, by every human being.

Gray pursues anti-humanism with unusual rigour, rejecting any and all routes to 'the salvation of mankind', and predicting – like Michael Crichton and Charlton Heston (see chapter 2) – that

Homo sapiens [sic] is only one of very many species, and not obviously worth preserving. Later or sooner, it will become extinct. When it is gone the Earth will recover. ... The Earth will forget mankind. The play of life will go on.

(151)

Wisdom consists in acknowledging the meaninglessness of action. Gray concludes:

Other animals do not need a purpose in life. A contradiction to itself, the human animal cannot do without one. Can we not think of the aim of life as being simply to see?

(199)

Environmentalists are well aware that fatalism stalks their ventures. Several commentators have acknowledged that climate change challenges 'the limits of our cognitive and affective capacities' (Jamieson 8; Hamilton; Clark *Ecocriticism on the Edge*); the activist George Marshall wrote a book called *Don't Even*

Think about It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change (2014). These authors, reasonably enough, treat fatalism as a psycho-social problem to be solved – with manageable actions, say, or positive news about climate activism. The deepest irony, though, is that taking Gray seriously opens up a yawning existential chasm beneath all our hopes, with long-term, large-scale endeavours the first to fall in. There can be a few environmentalists who have never peered into it; in this sense, we are all sceptics at times.

Capstick and Pidgeon found that 65.1 per cent of their sample agreed that ‘people are too selfish to do anything about climate change’, while 53.2 per cent agreed that ‘it is not in human nature to respond to problems that won’t happen for many years’ (396). I doubt very many of them had read *Straw Dogs*. A high proportion, though, would’ve seen Jeremy Clarkson on *Top Gear* or read his column in *The Sun* (later collected into books), making him arguably the most influential climate sceptic in the world. Clarkson epitomizes what Ereault and Segnit call ‘comic nihilism’, although the extraordinary popularity of his show (said to be the most-watched in the world) would seem to contradict their claim that it is a marginal repertoire. Clive Hamilton’s preferred term, ‘hairy-chested denialism’ (Hamilton 123), captures Clarkson’s overt (if often self-mocking) masculinity, though not the broad appeal of his hedonistic anti-environmentalism. Hamilton goes on to note:

[Clarkson] has become notorious for green-baiting, deriding public transport, promising to run down cyclists and declaring: ‘What’s wrong with global warming? We might lose Holland but there are other places to go on holiday.’ It’s an opinion, or rather a sentiment, that has instant appeal to the segment of the population that feels cheated of its enjoyment by climate doom-mongering, particularly when combined with state nannyism. In this way, Clarkson transforms climate transgressors into victims of political correctness. For some, it validates their resistance to behavioural change, justifying their reluctance to take the bus, buy a smaller car or recycle waste.

(124)

Clarkson’s comic nihilism would not go far if he were not in fact funny. But he is. He veers between bullish *braggadocio* and ironic acknowledgement of failure – a popular T-shirt for *Top Gear* simply reads ‘That’s not gone well ...’. He captures the virtues and limitations of the cars he drives with vivid, often sexual, similes, as in this description of the Audi R8 supercar:

It’s not the speed, though, that impresses you most of all – it’s the way this thing feels through the corners. Driving most supercars, it’s [*sic*] like trying to

manhandle a cow up a back staircase. This is like smearing honey into Keira Knightley.

(*Top Gear*, season 10, episode 2)

His stock in trade is comic hyperbole, which is perfectly suited to deflating what he sees as environmentalist (and other kinds of) alarmism. Here, for instance, he mourns the proliferation of ‘elf and safety’ rules,¹⁰ concluding with swipe at his nemesis, *The Guardian’s* environmental columnist:

Already, in the period of Great Boredom, they’ve stopped us smoking, killing foxes, reversing without a banksman, playing conkers, enjoying bonfire night and taking toothpaste on an aeroplane. And now they are thinking of banning patio heaters, doing 30, and wearing hooded tops. Soon, it will be illegal to not be George Monbiot.

(Clarkson *For Crying out Loud!* 309)

Clarkson here is Byron to Monbiot’s Wordsworth. ‘They’ are the killjoys – bureaucrats from local councils, labour unions, Whitehall and the European Union – who seek to protect us from both our own stupidity and the worst excesses of unregulated corporations. Clarkson occasionally questions the science of climate change (‘attribution scepticism’) – what he calls the ‘outdated and now completely discredited theory that man causes global warming’ (Clarkson *Is It Really Too Much to Ask?*) – but much more often asserts that the subject is simply ‘boring’. He has even proven willing to criticize Sir David Attenborough, Britain’s only secular saint:

My respect for The Attenborough as a broadcaster is boundless. He could tell me that I was a giant panda and I’d believe him. He could come on the television and say koala bears can fill in tax forms and I’d stroke my chin appreciatively. But when he comes on the television to say [actress] Sienna Miller’s Range Rover has broken the Gulf Stream and overheated a guillemot, well, I’m sorry, but I just nod off. Because finger-wagging environmentalism, even from the God of the electric fish tank, is catastrophically boring.

(79)

The escalating sequence of absurd claims attributed to ‘The Attenborough’ is worth pausing over. BBC Earth trades on the majesty and sublime improbability of nature, but Attenborough’s 2006 intervention, ‘The Truth about Climate Change’, is a step too far, claims Clarkson. The comical impossibility of the claim that ‘Sienna Miller’s Range Rover has broken the Gulf Stream’ (known in rhetoric as *adynaton*) draws attention to the supposed victimizing of ‘middle class’ indulgences, as opposed to ‘fat lazy northerners who won’t get off their arses and

fit loft insulation' (Clarkson *Driven to Distraction* loc. 2083). More plausibly it acknowledges that attributing vast, long-term change to infinitesimal individual contributions seems unfair, as well as daft. On the first point, Dale Jamieson's careful assessment of climate ethics accepts that 'it is ... not surprising that people do not see picking up their kids after soccer practice as reckless or negligent behavior' (152). The second is compellingly described by Timothy Clark – again, from a radically different perspective to Clarkson's – as a 'derangement of scale', in which the juxtaposition of a trivial daily action with the global, long-term impact to which it contributes disorients us in a way that could easily spin-off into absurdism. Clark notes that climatic scale effects disrupt a dizzying array of everyday assumptions: 'Even as the global stakes become higher, the term "decision" must become diluted almost out of all recognition in relation to the kinds of daily banality implicated in climate change' (Clark 'Some Climate Change Ironies' 137). Clarkson's adynaton satirically diagnoses derangement of scale, but in place of Clark's challenging aporia, he concludes, unhelpfully, that we ought to dismiss the whole issue as 'boring'.

Despite their global popularity, and the commensurate impact of Clarkson's performance of anti-environmentalism, he and his flagship show *Top Gear* have received very little scholarly attention, even within media studies. Frances Bonner suggests the neglect is due to 'generic hybridity; conservative masculinity; anti-environmentalism; and, on the scholarly side, a nervousness about confronting a text that so relishes its reactionary politics' (33). Studies focus on the show's gender politics, specifically the 'Janus-faced' oscillation between traditional heroic masculinity – embodied in the silent 'superhero' Stig (a pseudonym that recalls the caveman in a popular children's book) – and the 'ironic, humorous and self-deprecating' anti-heroes Clarkson and Hammond, an oscillation that Angela Smith says typifies the 'new lad' of the late 1990s and noughties. Bonner confirms that 'freedom from all restraints is obviously [*Top Gear's*] ideal' (38), but Kieran Tranter and Damien Martin develop the point that the presenters' seeming lawlessness *requires* the spectre of law for its risk-taking to seem appealing to other men. They note that Clarkson and Hammond's brand of 'combustion masculinity is about taking risks in cars and being seen in this risk-taking by other males' (Tranter and Martin 8). Where Clarkson's grumpy opinionated persona reigns supreme in his newspaper columns and books, his and Hammond's self-conscious 'boyishness' is counterbalanced on *Top Gear* by the presence of James May, or 'Captain Slow' as he is mockingly called by the other two. May's self-presentation is more 'hippy' than them; he betrays nerdy interests in technology and – crucially – he is the programme's resident environmentalist. Although his commitment is often set up to be teased and

undermined, May's 'controlled, constructive and caring' presentation of what Tranter and Martin call 'hydraulic masculinity' ('hydraulic' as in construction machinery) provides something of an alternative to Clarkson and Hammond's 'onanistic male climaxing through risk-taking in cars' (16). They conclude that, despite its overt sexism:

This is the purpose of *Top Gear*. It is men laughing with, and at, men role-playing a past masculinity. It shows the silliness, the out-of-time-ness, the past-ness of combustion masculinity.

(16)

It is perhaps for this reason that, as Bonner found, *Top Gear* is popular with many viewers (including women) who don't share Clarkson's politics. Clive Hamilton admits:

One does not need to be a petrolhead or into pimping one's motor vehicle to enjoy *Top Gear*'s fantasies. For some, it is not inconsistent to enjoy an evening watching Clarkson do donuts in a Mack truck and drive to work in a Prius the next day.

(125)

If Hamilton is somewhat coy about whether he includes himself in this group, the present author is not. In its heyday, *Top Gear* was TV gold, and not only because it sustained the BBC financially more than any other programme. There are (whisper it) bad environmentalists who enjoy fast motorbikes, perhaps even 'pimping one's motor vehicle'.

Max Boykoff considers that Clarkson's global warming jibes betray naked self-interest: 'Under the guise of irony and cynicism, such Clarkson comments ... effectively cohere with and sustain his political economic interests, be they narrowly perceived through the success of his BBC ode-to-automobiles program *Top Gear* or a penchant for market-led and anti-regulatory management of the environment' (Boykoff 561). If so, it is hard to account for the quite different perspective brought to the programme by Captain Slow. Boykoff underestimates Clarkson's broad appeal, which derives in part from his humorous, charismatic protest against the tendency to understand risk in purely negative terms. It is, as Adams points out, a widespread intuition outside academia:

The starting point of any theory of risk must be that everyone willingly takes risks. This is not the starting point of most of the literature on risk.

(15–16)

Clarkson's enthusiasm for risk-taking ought to both direct our attention to the pleasures that emissions mitigation really would endanger and alert us to the possibility that climate change itself might be neither 'boring' nor uniformly catastrophic, but rather an energizing challenge to human ethics and ingenuity.

Clarkson's comic nihilism is inimitable, fortunately, but that hasn't prevented less accomplished climate sceptics from trying to play the same tune. James Delingpole is obviously a Clarkson wannabe, as when he describes climate change as 'a threat so vanishingly small, it makes about as much sense as building garlic farms to ward off vampires, or blue whale shelters in case any stray cetaceans get sucked from the oceans by freak tornadoes and dumped over the British countryside during rain showers' (loc. 3794–96). His 2010 book *Watermelons* drags devil-may-care conservatism down to the level of largely witless sneering and relentless *ad hominem* attacks on climate scientists. Which is ironic considering Delingpole's seeming resentment at being treated as a fossil fuel company stooge. He denies being in the pay of the 'denial industry' in characteristically puerile terms:

Equally, the fact that I am heavily in the pay of Big Koch – I'm not really; this is just a fantasy of mine, and I like saying 'Big Koch' even though the joke isn't as funny as it could be because the Koch brothers' surname is in fact pronounced 'Coke' – does not necessarily mean my argument is corrupt.

(loc. 1110–13)

Delingpole's protestation that we should play the ball, not the man, would be more persuasive if he ever restrained himself in that regard.

He is more winning when he confesses to being shushed by his wife as he mutters sceptical observations about the Greenpeace videos at Glastonbury Festival (loc. 1241), and when he caricatures 'nice Al Gore with his frayed lovable air of some portly, slightly battered, once incredibly expensive teddy bear bought for one of the Rockefeller kids in the 1930s' (loc. 1722–23). George Marshall's generous assessment of *Watermelons* as 'the most entertaining attack on climate change as a belief system' is contestable – Richard Bean's *The Heretic* is much funnier and cleverer – but his conclusion is not: 'Delingpole has no interest in science or evidence, so this is just pure narrative-driven bile' (Marshall 245).

The book's argument, delivered with more verve than substance, is that the field of climatology, the whole IPCC and the UN COP process have been hijacked *in toto* by socialists whose sole interest is the destruction of capitalism,

not climate science (watermelons: green on the outside, red on the inside, geddit?). To make the case for this strikingly silly, shallow and polarizing view, he draws liberally, though without acknowledgement, on the press releases of industry groups such as the 1990s 'Global Climate Coalition'. It was the GCC that alleged the IPCC's Second Assessment Report (SAR) had been single-handedly 'doctored' by Dr Ben Santer, a statistician, to foreground the 'political claim' of 'discernible human influence on global climate'. Delingpole uncritically repeats this point (loc. 908–22), despite Santer's own detailed responses to the allegation ('Climate Science Glossary – "Close Encounters of the Absurd Kind"'). Actually, clear acknowledgement of uncertainty *does* appear in the SAR's Summary for Policymakers along with the 'fingerprint' claim:

Our ability to quantify the human influence on global climate is currently limited because the expected signal is still emerging from the noise of natural variability, and because there are uncertainties in key factors. These include the magnitude and patterns of long term natural variability and the time-evolving pattern of forcing by, and response to, changes in concentrations of greenhouse gases and aerosols, and land surface changes.

(Houghton 5)

Poke at any individual example adduced by Delingpole in *Watermelons*, and you find him being, in his own phrase, 'economical with the *actualité*' (loc. 1261). Moreover, he continually equivocates between broad, Trumpian resentment towards the whole 'liberal establishment' and the more localized – though still unsubstantiated – accusation that the IPCC is lousy with socialists. He directs this argument, rather surprisingly, at 'you', an implied reader who is supposedly one of the socialists' 'useful fools':

The last thing I want to do at this early stage is insult you by suggesting that you're gullible and thick. I think you've been brainwashed, that's all. (loc. 139)

The heretic pose is distinctively European for the simple reason that climate change is politically hegemonic in most European countries, albeit that Delingpole's idiom (choosing words like 'thick') gives it a self-consciously English spin. On the other hand, his paranoia about 'One-World Government' is uniquely American in origin (Marshall 18), as, arguably, is his absurd/terrifying moral dualism:

There are no-half measures in the modern green movement. To join it simply because you like trees, flowers and birdsong is the rough equivalent of joining the Nazi party in the mid-1930s just for the smart uniforms, restaurant discounts and more efficient train timetables. Which is to say that the eco-Fascistic elements

are not optional extras. The anti-capitalism, the hatred of economic growth, the curtailment of personal liberty, the disdain for the human race, the yearning for a One-World Government of rule by ‘experts’ – these are all as integral to watermelons as *Lebensraum* and extermination camps were to Nazism.

(loc. 2986–90)

Climate activism has perhaps been subject to some left entryism, and the history of environmentalism is marred by misanthropic statements – probably because real environmentalists sometimes suffer misanthropic moods – but the claim that ‘the eco-Fascistic elements are not optional extras’ is demonstrably false, as well as insulting. The politicization of the environment described above is taken here to an appalling extreme. Delingpole’s self-description as a ‘*South Park* Conservative’ seemed engagingly eccentric in 2010; it looks very different in 2018 now that Delingpole is a contributor to the ‘alt-right’ ‘Breitbart’ website. That joke isn’t funny any more.

So far, my analysis of British climate scepticism may have done little to dislodge the popular stereotype, not least because Clarkson in particular seems to revel in embodying it. The remaining texts, though, exemplify the diversity of British sceptical texts more effectively. The first, Philip Foster’s *While the Earth Endures* (2009) announces its oblique approach to climate change on the first page:

First and foremost I intend to preserve the integrity of the Word of God. But I am also going to depart from the current evangelical Christian consensus about the nature of the revelation given in the first chapters of Genesis.

(5)

Far more than the ranting of a Smart Alec alt-right conservative, Foster’s book came as a surprise. In keeping with its author’s Cambridge degrees in biochemistry and theology, it veers quite suddenly between the supposed ‘irreducible complexity’ of DNA and extensive Old Testament exegesis on the seeming imperfections in God’s creation. It devotes several chapters to confronting ‘Young Earth Theory’ with the ‘absolutely overwhelming’ (27) evidence that the universe is billions of years old, but then dismisses evolution as ‘a piece of negative theology surrounded by truisms’ (93). As well as being rambling, opinionated and very poorly copy-edited, Foster’s book adopts an amusingly old fogey-ish tone, as when the paucity of information in Genesis regarding the Creation is turned into a virtue:

It is the dull and lazy student who looks for easy ways out of doing his assigned work – it is the good student who works hard to learn for himself. At school,

some text books used to have the answers at the back of the book – but that only spoils it! These days, I suppose, this is one of the dangers of the internet.

(71)

Foster's usage of 'dull' in the sense of 'thick', not 'boring', is striking, as is the bespectacled vicar implied by the interpolation 'I suppose'. Elsewhere, he reminds readers interested in solar astronomy: '*Never look the sun directly*' (146).

Foster goes on to claim that, while God appears to concede physics and geology to the scientists (35–49), climate is in His domain:

The Lord is in charge of the weather, no question. Today, in a humanistic and atheistic world, such an idea is regarded as merely quaint and pre-scientific. Like the builders of Babel, humans now think they are causing the weather.

(122)

Foster's argument recycles all the sceptical talking points – Santer rewrote IPCC SAR, Rachel Carson is worse than Hitler, CO₂ is a fertilizer – up until the shocking *denouement*. Having proposed that the observed global warming trend is actually caused by the effects of cosmic rays on cloud cover – often known as the 'Svensmark effect' – Foster suggests that God controls the Earth's weather by causing supernovas:

Like the cosmic rays setting out on their amazing journey through the Galaxy in order to reach this tiny planet and start a particular cloud formation to produce a particular rain storm with unerring aim. *He makes the wind His messengers, Flaming fire His ministers*, so these fiery messengers [cosmic rays] may serve other purposes of God.

(213)

The changes in DNA required to bring about the irreducible complexity of the natural world, Foster asserts, are also brought about by means of the 'delicate molecular surgery of the cosmic ray' (216).

It is difficult to know how to respond to such an eccentric theory. Observing that multiple lines of scientific evidence cast doubt on the Svensmark effect seems beside the point ('Climate Science Glossary – Cosmic Rays'). Nor is it worthwhile to pour atheistic scorn on the notion that a divine being would need to interfere in Creation in such a roundabout way. Rather, one must skirt condescension and acknowledge the unique heterogeneity of *While the Earth Endures*: its earnest effort to integrate science and theology in an intellectually honest way. Foster may be right that we'd be 'freed from the *angst* of our age' (222) if we believed that the wonders of nature – which clearly captivate Foster

as much as the present author – were the outcome of such a ‘mind-boggling’ (215) intervention. His faithful scepticism would be more reassuring than, say, Gray’s enervating fatalism, but for this reader, sadly, it is simply incredible.

Martin Cohen’s *Paradigm Shift* (2015) is at the opposite extreme to Foster, both philosophically and stylistically. The author is a jobbing philosopher, writing popular texts such as *Critical Thinking Skills for Dummies* (2015) and *101 Ethical Dilemmas* (2007), but his sceptical text is published by Andrews UK, which offers four e-book publishing ‘packages’ ranging from £75 to £500. Cohen enfoldes climate scepticism within a broader questioning of scientific and other ‘experts’, but his careless treatment of complex issues undermines his attempt to bring acerbic epistemological scepticism to bear on climate science. Each chapter contrasts ‘what we’re supposed to think’ with ‘what you’re not to say’ on topics as wide-ranging as Darwinism, clinical psychiatry, evidence-based medicine, homeopathy, astrology and macro-economics. In every case, Cohen finds reason to doubt hegemonic views or boost those despised as ‘unscientific’ without avowing anything much himself.

Cohen’s broad knowledge of the history of science provides him with some arresting examples. For example, he highlights the irrationality, occultism and politicking of such illustrious thinkers as Galileo, Newton and Descartes, but then concludes with a trivializing false dichotomy: ‘So where’s all this history pointing? Just once again to the conclusion that science advances by irrational and political devices, not by weight of “objective evidence”’ (Cohen, loc. 1525–26). He broaches crucial issues, such as the creeping pathologization of mental distress (cf. Haslam), but then scuppers himself with flippant, implausible, trivializing analogies:

It is not so long ago that medical experts travelled in wooden wagons painted with outrageous claims, dispensing coloured water in fancy bottles to cure various ills. Evidently, these were not real doctors but crooks and charlatans! But brightly painted wagons impressed people back then. Nowadays, doctors must train for many years and have lots of books and ‘government advisories’ to achieve the same effect. And modern-day coloured water is made by huge transnational companies with gleaming steel and glass-fronted laboratories. Yet, too often, neither the diagnoses nor the remedies are any better.

(loc. 677–81)

‘Too often,’ Cohen’s favourite weasel phrase, spares him the effort of properly explaining, justifying or quantifying the effects he describes. Instances of expert failure are indeed legion, but his accounts reveal that they are almost

always noticed by other experts. So what are the proper limits and capacities of expertise? The more scientifically complex the field, the more brutally reductive is Cohen's treatment of it, as when he sums up chaos theory (now called complexity theory) as 'there are no rules' (loc. 2491). By the time we get to climatology, any lingering trust in the author's accuracy has evaporated, so his banal, straw-man conclusion fails entirely to shock:

The important thing, myth or science, call it what you will, is that you don't think that by calling it 'science' [climatology] becomes irrefutable. Because that it ain't. Even in the flexible world of climate science, there's no such thing as an 'average global temperature', nor even an average global CO2 level. The figures you arrive at depend on what you choose to measure, where you choose to measure it, and at what time. The selection of data is all.

(loc. 2766–70)

Well, yes, of course, that is precisely the challenge of earth systems science. Does Cohen have any suggestions about how it could be improved? He does not.

Cohen draws extensively on the work of Paul Feyerabend, whose *Against Method* (1975) epitomized the spirit of the moment with its sceptical demolition of scientific authority. However, he acknowledges none of the cogent objections to Feyerabend's relativism, and offers no advances on his analysis. Writing in the *Times Higher*, Cohen claims to be an environmentalist disillusioned by the shift from local conservation issues to 'propaganda' about climate change ('Beyond Debate?'). It is a defensible position, which is maintained with far greater authority by Peter Taylor's *Chill*, discussed below. Cohen, though, adds little in terms of either style or substance.

Having saved the best until last, we arrive at the most entertaining and illuminating examples of British climate scepticism. The first, *The Real Global Warming Disaster* (2009), is by the *Daily Telegraph* columnist and founder of the satirical magazine *Private Eye*, Christopher Booker. The book benefits from a journalist's economy of phrase and eye for political poppycock, notably the deal Tony Blair made with Vladimir Putin to support Russia's entry into the World Trade Organization in return for ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. Given that the Protocol's baseline year was 1991, when polluting Soviet industries were still in operation, 'Russia would start off way below its Kyoto allowance and would thus be able to make billions of dollars a year under the UN's Clean Development Mechanism from selling those "carbon credits" which were a key part of the Kyoto system' (loc. 2290–91). He is amusing, as well as persuasive, on politicians' (of all stripes) lack of comprehension of the huge technical and

economic challenges of decarbonizing the British energy supply, mostly with wind energy:

It was hard to recall any issue on which British politicians *en masse* had ever become so detached from reality. Yet, with one or two exceptions, these Quixotic proposals were solemnly reported by the unquestioning media, without any hint that they were pure wishful thinking.

(loc. 5912–14)

Booker recites the usual sceptical talking points about the corruption of the IPCC and the possible influence of the sun, but his underlying argument is quite fascinating and idiosyncratic. It extends the central claim of his ‘gargantuan, sometimes absorbing and often blockheaded ... book’ (Kakutani), *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*. As the title suggests, Booker argues – at numbing length – that all book and film plots can be reduced to just seven, including The Quest, Rags to Riches and so on. With the astonishing breadth of a book that took thirty-four years to write, Booker seeks to show that ‘all kinds of story, however profound or however trivial, ultimately spring from the same source, are shaped around the same basic patterns and are governed by the same hidden, universal rules’ (14). This plausible, if unoriginal, idea then forms the basis of a far more tendentious normative claim: that Western literature since Romanticism has gone wrong because it kept trying to depart from this archetypal pattern, in which the masculine and feminine principles are reconciled in the ideal balance symbolized in marriage. As a result, Booker suggests, we should see Steven Spielberg’s movie *E.T.* as providing

a more substantial ending than the plays of Chekhov, Proust, Beckett or any other story in this chapter. Because their pseudo-endings, going nowhere, are all that stories spun from the ego alone can ever hope to achieve.

(454)

Combining conservative Catholicism with Jungian cultural analysis and a *souçon* of evolutionary theory, Booker dismisses the entire Modernism tradition – and American culture, to boot – as essentially ‘immature’. He repeatedly relies, without evidence, on the supposed adverse reaction of abstracted ‘readers’, although my suspicion is that Booker himself is the jilted bridegroom deprived of a proper conclusion:

The archetype cannot be cheated. If it is defied, the story is doomed just to peter out, or to be forced into some implausible ‘pseudo-ending’ which leaves its audience curiously unsatisfied.

(494)

Despite the inherent flaws in its argument, anatomized elsewhere (Mars-Jones), *Seven Basic Plots* is the foundation of the sceptical position of *The Real Global Warming Disaster*:

We all of us, much more than we are consciously aware, see the world in terms of stories, 'narratives' which help shape the way in which we try to understand the world around us: explaining how it works, where we have come from and where we may be heading for. All ideologies in this way have their own narrative, and 'environmentalism' was no exception.

(loc. 6647–50)

We agree. Indeed, the subconscious power of narrative is a truism of modern literary culture. Regardless of whether they concur with Booker's Catholic-Jungian interpretation of narrative archetypes, literary scholars ought to take his argument seriously as a test of their own faith in the shaping power of narratives. George Marshall presents psychological evidence that people will hang on to a compelling story even in the face of directly contradictory factual evidence, and concludes mournfully:

This is why it is extremely hard for a deeply unengaging narrative based in fact to compete with a compelling narrative based in falsehood. 'The balance of evidence leads many climate scientists to suggest that our emissions may be damaging the climate' is, unfortunately, less inherently compelling than 'rogue scientists are conspiring to fake evidence in order to secure larger research grants'.

(106–07)

He cites Booker and Michael Crichton (discussed in Chapter 4) as supporting evidence, but this book is full of other examples.

Here is the problem for ecocritics: if, as the Canadian indigenous writer Thomas King's oft-quoted line has it, 'the truth about stories is that's all we are' (2), how can we claim that climate change is, uniquely, exempted from this condition? To put it in binary terms, does scientific evidence count, or do we select what counts on the basis of largely pre-scientific commitments, as Booker argues? At the same time, though, Booker shies away from the relativistic implications of this position, not because sceptics have stronger evidence – *ex hypothesis*: they must select it on the basis of *their* own narratives – but because conservatives are apparently more likely to accept the wisdom of the archetypes. Environmentalism, for Booker, is not marked by biocentric care for the non-human world, but the narcissistic belief that humans possess god-like powers: 'Those affected by this new concern for the "environment" were coming to see mankind as a greedy and reckless cuckoo in the nest of creation, capable not just

of wreaking immeasurable damage on all other forms of life but of destroying it altogether' (loc. 6130–32). On this view, which Booker shares with the Mormon radio host Glenn Beck, climate scepticism reflects an appropriate attitude of humility.

There is a puzzle, though, about the role of apocalyptic narrative in climate activism. Booker acknowledges that environmentalists'

vision of the coming apocalypse conjured up by their prophets, such as Al Gore and James Hansen, and confirmed by those 'sacred texts' handed down by the IPCC, had much in common with ancient myths and Biblical tales of the world being visited with 'extreme weather events', plagues, fires, mighty winds and above all floods so immense that whole cities would vanish below their waves. (loc. 6682–85)

Given such ancient provenance, Booker ought to endorse such a 'basic plot,' and yet he complains, in racially tinged terms, that environmentalists are idolators thanks to the 'computer model [that] stands at the heart of the story like some mysterious fetish at the centre of a jungle clearing, attended by those modern versions of witch doctors who are the consecrated interpreters of its oracular powers' (loc. 6693–94). But the subterranean appeal of basic plots reflects a psychology of archetypal form, not content; whether the idol is Jahweh or HadCRUT ('Temperature') ought not to matter. Even though climate apocalypticism seems to fulfil his closure criterion, Booker seems willing to bend his own theory to suit his ideological orientation.

The Heretic (2011) is by far the funniest and most technically accomplished sceptical text in the British canon. Playwright Richard Bean already courted controversy with his satirical treatment of East End immigrants through the ages, *England People Very Nice* (2009). His sceptical play features a paleogeophysicist, Dr Diane Cassell, who comes under pressure from her boss, Professor Kevin Maloney, to delay publication of evidence that sea level has not risen at all in the Maldives. She exercises her tart tongue in lively exchanges with her anorexic daughter Phoebe and a clever young student and environmentalist, Ben Shotter (whose name recalls Dr Ben Santer, a climatologist discussed above):

BEN: Look, if we double CO₂, we double temperatures, that's bare bait, man, and that is the end of the world. Common sense innit.

DIANE: If common sense trumped science my mother would be running a nuclear power station. The relationship between CO₂ and temperature is not linear, it's logarithmic. Think of an example, from your own life perhaps, where doubling a variable does not double the effect.

(Bean 39)

Diane receives death threats from the Sacred Earth Militia, whose undercover operative Mordoff, a Geordie ex-Marine from 'Site Services', is a working-class version of the Wordsworthian Romantic of Byronic satire. During the course of the play, Ben learns scientific scepticism, and Kevin threatens Diane with sacking if she upsets the 'consensus'. Above all, Earth Sciences must not sacrifice its prestigious position within the modern university:

KEVIN: It was the Arts forever, wasn't it, until in the sixties Sociology floated to the top like an aerated turd, hung around for a few years, before finally getting sucked down the tube of its own gaping fatuousness. Then in the seventies, the Psychologists took over the asylum. Boy did those tossers fancy themselves. But they could never nail anything properly down. One minute being mentally ill is a crushing personal tragedy, next minute it's a bit of a laugh and you should try to enjoy it. All that Psychology ever achieved was making bullshit respectable, which of course, paved the way for Media Studies and ten years of mind-numbing bollocks! So that day, last year, when Media Studies' top witch knocked on my door and begged me to let her first years onto your introductory Earth Sciences modular lecture, that was the moment I knew we'd finally arrived. It's official – we are the kings of the castle. Let's not fuck it up, eh?

(35)

Where other climate sceptics merely assert that science is distorted by groupthink and professional opportunity, Bean's delightfully comic depiction highlights institutional pressures that will resonate with any British academic. In the context of the relentless audit culture and artificially induced competition within and among British universities, Diane's 'heresy' is refreshing:

KEVIN: The 'Climate Change Research Unit' would service clients by –

DIANE: – I'm not a sex worker.

KEVIN: Listen! We are the Earth Sciences Faculty of YUIST for teaching, but *virtually* we are a separate budget centre, providing tools to the market.

DIANE: What tools would I be selling?

KEVIN: A computer model of sea level rise.

DIANE: I'd rather sell the fluff from my naval [*sic*]. It'd be more use. After a couple of years they could knit a jumper.(33)

Bean's satire on the instrumentalization of the 'neoliberal university' is comparable to Laurie Taylor's *The Poppletonian* from the *Times Higher* in its skewering of the vacuous language and, arguably, intellectual conformity fostered by corporatization. It is deeply ironic that Bean's targets – the monetization of

knowledge, the tyranny of Human Resources and the cant of 'student centred learning' – are themselves consequences of the neoliberalization of British universities initiated by the Conservatives and enthusiastically extended under New Labour.

The popular stereotype of climate sceptics depicts them as anti-scientific, but the truth is that British sceptics, like Michael Crichton (see Chapter 4), are more often disappointed scientific idealists. So it is with Diane Cassell, as she demonstrates in this exchange with the (real-life) BBC interviewer Jeremy Paxman:

PAXMAN: Doctor Cassell, are you a global warming *denier*?

DIANE: There is no evidence that CO₂ is responsible for twentieth century warming.

PAXMAN: You're pretty much alone in this belief aren't you.

DIANE: It's not a belief. I'm a scientist, I don't 'believe' in anything. (55)

With her sharp wit and fierce independence, Diane embodies a resilient modernist ideal of disinterested scientific authority – although she also loves her Jaguar XK8 and proclaims that 'cars are liberating, democratic and feminist' (97). By appealing to the evidence of a single salt-intolerant tree thriving on a beach in the Maldives in opposition to the IPCC's claims of sea level rise, moreover, Diane fulfils the empiricist orientation that Sheila Jasanoff includes in her characterization of the British 'civic epistemology' (Jasanoff 263). With superb if paradoxical intuition, Bean's play resurrects a myth of the scientist that, as we explain in Chapter 6, three decades of publicized climate science really ought to have vanquished.

The play's climax takes place at Diane's house as the Sacred Earth Militia closes in, intending to kidnap a climate sceptic. The usual sceptical talking points are gradually diluted by the accelerating action, although Diane squeezes in a comic tirade against environmental apocalypticism when Phoebe invites Ben for a romantic walk around a supposed medieval plague village:

DIANE: Can you explain something to me Kevin? Every year Phoebe and I walk around Wharram Percy. *Every year* I explain to her that the residents left the village in the sixteenth century because there was a change of land use. The landlord wanted to graze sheep, which meant an end to arable farming, so everyone packed their bags and left to look for work elsewhere.

KEVIN: How prosaic.

DIANE: Yes. But this generation –

PHOEBE: – it's not my generation that has fucked the planet.

DIANE: This generation, are disaster junkies. Armageddon in three acts.

PHOEBE: Fuck off.

DIANE: It's as if every last twitching synapse has been transplanted from the stolen corpse of a Hollywood screen writer. Why be content with 'a change of land use' when you can have the drama of 'wiped out by the Black Death'. Every day they wake up craving a narrative fix. When they see a photograph of a polar bear, hitching a ride on a passing ice flow [*sic*], they cannot see a wild animal at ease in its natural habitat. What they see is the last five minutes of Titanic! That one ton carnivore's contented yawn becomes Leonardo DiCaprio's hopeless scream as he drifts inexorably away from that posh girl who's normally in a corset.

BEN: Kate Winslet.

(91)

The conservative objection to 'eco-doomsters' is familiar enough, and the hyperbolic satire recalls Clarkson and Delingpole. Unlike other sceptical texts, though, *The Heretic* memorably dramatizes the contrast between the misanthropy of the Sacred Earth Militia and the defiant humanism of Diane and the other characters. When Phoebe suffers a starvation-induced heart attack, Geoff Mordoff (who has been hiding in the house) abandons his plan to kidnap Diane and saves a life instead. The comic resolution is thereby juxtaposed directly with the would-be cruelty of the environmentalist 'disaster junkies'.

We can be more specific: Act Five conforms neatly to Booker's outline of the seventh basic plot, 'Rebirth', which he illustrates with the plots of *A Christmas Carol*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *Silas Marner*. The hero, on this view, is Ben, because he is the one who falls 'into the grip of an egocentric obsession, which renders him both unable to feel for others outside himself and also blind to the reality of what is happening to him' (203). Diane's coaching in scientific scepticism aligns with Ben's acceptance of Phoebe as a 'redeeming figure', leading to his internalization of his mentor's language and empiricist idealism:

KEVIN (to BEN): ... Do you believe that we're warmer now than we've ever been?

BEN: Ever been, or in the Holocene?

KEVIN: Christ! You can tell he's one of yours [Diane's]. Of course, in the Holocene. Do you believe we're warmer now than we've ever been in the Holocene?

BEN: I'm a scientist, yeah. I can't allow myself to 'believe in' anything.

The last Act is redemptive on a number of levels: Phoebe is alive, not dead, and is about to marry Ben. Her pregnant body contrasts visibly with her anorexic

state in the first four acts; indeed, she embodies both the redemptive figures identified by Booker, 'a Young Woman' and 'a Child' (204). Diane and Kevin have buried their differences, and are now romantically united, but their modes of transport to the church imply that each has retained her or his own distinct identity:

KEVIN: Right! It's me and the bride in [Diane's] Jag, with the top down. You're driving the Prius, and Ben is on his bike.

(113)

There is no direct evidence that Booker has seen the play, but it ought to be a favourite, corresponding as it does to his views on both 'satisfying' plots (that conclude with heterosexual marriage) and climate change.

The last text to be considered here is, in a number of ways, the most heterodox. It is also a demanding test of our resolution to be agnostic on the scientific issues. Peter Taylor's *Chill: A Reassessment of Global Warming Theory* (2009) engages in considerable detail with both climate science and the social context in which it operates. The author is, as he frequently emphasizes, 'a committed environmentalist' (P. Taylor 3) and 'leading advocate of *rewilding* policies in nature conservation' (n.p.), with experience of the use and abuse of computer models in political campaigns. Stylistically, the book substitutes a 'more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger' idiom of disappointment for the kind of sneering satire that typifies British scepticism. While some of its claims are all too familiar, the basic orientation of *Chill* is utterly different from all the others: expressly and persuasively eco-feminist, green and empirical, albeit not uncritically so. The book has made next to no impact with either sceptics or warmists as a result.¹¹

Peter Taylor's experience has made him wary of the ways in which environmental issues – notably climate change – are 'scientificated', a problem we discuss in the penultimate chapter. Yet, unlike Cohen, he is no epistemological anarchist:

In addition to my training in natural sciences, I have an abiding interest in how different cultures, including my own, perceive their environment. In my experience, the world of environmental perception always interplays with theories of causation, divinity and notions of purpose and progress. In 'western culture' these elements are separated, as if inhabiting unrelated compartments of the mind. Thus, with regard to climate change, the issue is regarded as 'scientific' as if there were some pure and objective compartment of knowledge unaffected by any of the other boxes into which some very powerful and pervasive human propensities have been so solidly put. Social scientists would beg to question

such a reality, but I will address these issues only by way of a signpost to further enquiry. The main thrust of this book is to question the science on its own terms.

(3)

With that caveat, Taylor effectively adopts the mantle of a one-man IPCC, reviewing both the Assessment Reports and their evidence base with painstaking thoroughness. He proposes 'a predominantly natural explanation for global warming' that is 'entirely tenable within the accepted bounds of science, with every tenet supported by peer-reviewed work in the specialist literature' (47). This act of supreme presumption is conducted with – for the most part – appealing modesty. At the outset he asks: 'Who am I to disagree with [the] apparent consensus?' (3). Throughout the book, his own rhetoric is cautious. More substantively, he argues that the IPCC process prematurely identified anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions as the primary cause of warming in the 1990s, which imposed on the Earth systems science community a 'prior commitment' to climate model-based projections of further change. He observes that scientists seldom challenge findings of colleagues from other specialized fields, and, in the present political context, refrain particularly from drawing conclusions that might conflict with the IPCC consensus. For example, he analyses a series of papers that debate methods of measuring the Earth's total albedo, or reflectance, and its relationship to oceanic heat storage. It seems an arcane argument, but Taylor cites a claim that a 1 per cent change in albedo would be equivalent 'to the computed effect of a doubling of carbon dioxide levels' (62). He concludes:

[There are] a number of papers that refer to a period of changing short-wave (SW) flux throughout the 1990s affecting the oceans' heat storage. The authors comment that these changes are 'not reconciled' with climate models that assume changes in LW flux are responsible for global warming. This is yet another example of low-key statements that are not overt criticisms of the current global warming hypothesis when in fact they are of critical importance and give rise, once more, to the ability of partisan commentators to argue that no real scientific dissent has been published or, as with the IPCC, that a consensus exists on causation.

(66)

From a literary critical perspective, Taylor's habit of close reading 'against the grain' is both immediately recognizable and persuasive. Science and Technology Studies researchers would probably concur with Taylor's account of a politically enhanced version of 'black-boxing', in which knowledge artefacts imported from

cognate scientific domains are ‘taken for granted as completed projects, not as messy constellations’ (Sismondo 85). From a scientific perspective, though, *Chill* would presumably be infuriating, given that Taylor – an outsider with no record of work in climate science – appears to question *either* the integrity *or* the intellectual rigour of any scientist who does not support his own view. Moreover, Taylor ignores the ways in which the IPCC deliberately, as Paul Edwards puts it, ‘*brings controversy within consensus*’ (xvii) by inviting comments on draft reports from ‘national governments and by stakeholders, including environmental groups and corporate organizations’ (399). A 1999 change brought in review editors, who are not involved in the drafting, to ‘ensure responsiveness to the comments and criticisms collected during review’ (401).

Taylor’s solar flux hypothesis is endorsed by many other sceptics, but *Chill* presents it in impressive detail. He constantly reminds us that he is citing ‘new science’ (103) and claims there is ‘mounting evidence’ in favour of his view (89). Taylor explains in gendered terms the difference between his focus on natural cycles, notably oscillations in teleconnected ocean currents, from climate models’ attention to trends:

Science has become mired in a polarized, left-brain view of the world, which even within its own terms of reference has made it blind to the operation of cycles, irregular periodicity, the mathematics of spirals and elements of chaos. It would be trite to say that these are all elements of a feminine mode of thinking but nevertheless true.

(242)

Taylor’s most persuasive arguments against the primacy of climate models, though, derive from his own experience in environmental activism. Where right-wing sceptics portray climate change as the continuation of a tradition of environmentalist ‘doom-mongering’, Taylor explains the disreputable history of computer models that repeatedly *underestimated* environmental risks, as in the case of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB):

Neither its eventual toxicity nor its propensity to be transported as a volatile substance from landfill in warm regions and to be later distilled into cold environments had been predicted by the models that justified its initial release.

(252–53)

On Taylor’s account, it was the repeated *failure* of computer modelling to anticipate future hazards that eventually prompted the European Union to adopt the precautionary principle towards potentially toxic substances.

Despite his deep scepticism regarding the reliability of prediction, Taylor makes one falsifiable claim: that oceanic oscillations and a solar minimum should lead to global cooling after 2009. The fact that the global mean temperature has continued to rise supports a higher estimate for climate sensitivity than 'a likely range from 0.56–1.0°C for carbon dioxide doubling' (223). To the extent that most warmists *and* sceptics maintain, 'it's the science, dummy', Taylor has already been proven wrong.

However, Taylor's counter-review of the IPCC in Part 1 of his book is balanced by a compelling consideration of social pressures on science and environmental policy in Part 2. For one thing, his scepticism about attribution does not translate into impact scepticism:

The underlying message of the previous chapters is that dangerous climate change is an immediate problem that will inevitably get worse. It cannot be mitigated on any policy-relevant timescale.

(333)

He shares this conclusion, if not the reasoning that led to it, with authors such as Clive Hamilton, Dale Jamieson and Mike Hulme. We need to take time to get policies right, Taylor argues, and focus on ecological and social resilience, rather than emissions reduction, in the meantime. His most emotive appeal concerns the vast impact of dramatic emissions reduction on the British Isles, which has been continually understated by environmental organizations. As he points out:

That policy, enacted without stringent safeguards, would lay waste to the British landscape. That which I love, and which sustains me, would be turned into a technoscape of turbines, barrages, plantations and powerlines.

(302)

He is not exaggerating. David Mackay, chief scientific advisor to the Department of Energy and Climate Change, prints a map of a future Britain where 300 gigawatts of energy (i.e. present consumption) is produced with no fossil fuel emissions (MacKay 215). It includes 52 new onshore wind farms, 100 urban waste incinerators, 40 nuclear power stations and 2,700 square kilometres of solar power sited in North Africa. None of the other five 'plans that add up' (212) are any more attractive: Plan E, an economically optimal solution with no imported electricity, envisages Britain with *ten times* as much nuclear power capacity as in 2007.

Having previously campaigned to strengthen local communities, environmental organizations now collude with government and corporate

interests, claims Taylor, to override objections to ‘clean energy’ projects. Quite unlike Delingpole’s socialist conspiracy, this suggestion aligns with the evidence already presented here about the politicization of the environment in the 1990s. For Taylor, the final irony is that climate change has led his fellow environmentalists to abandon their hard-won criticisms of potential bias and groupthink within scientific communities:

These sorts of questions have become common ground when analysing the ‘defence’ industry, pharmaceuticals, pesticides, agrochemicals, nuclear and GMO industries, but the ‘global warming’ fraternity and its UN operation is placed beyond question. To even suggest that similar forces may be at work is to be denigrated and dismissed without argument.

(294)

Has climate science been spared the kinds of critique levelled at, say, the biotechnology industry, simply because it is seen as ideologically aligned with scholars in Science and Technology Studies? Are climate models false friends? We return to these crucial questions in Chapters 6 and 7. At this point, we need only observe that *Chill* contradicts the assumption that environmentalists cannot be climate sceptics. It shouldn’t be surprising: the impact of mitigation, on the British Isles at least, seems certain to be dire.

Conclusion

Throughout most of the twentieth century, environmentalism was culturally prevalent in Britain, but politically invisible. During the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher’s ideological Conservatism elicited a more politicized environmental movement, which found a sympathetic audience in Brussels. In the early years of climate activism, British sceptics were mild and reasonable in their criticisms, but as successive IPCC assessments reported increased confidence in anthropogenic warming, the sceptical response became more shrill and defensive. During the pivotal period 2005–2010, a fragile warmist hegemony prevailed in British politics and culture, further polarizing of public opinion and prompting sceptics to proclaim their own ‘heretical’ character. Their authors largely conformed to the conservative white male stereotype, while the texts themselves recycled a small number of specific allegations and counter-claims: the apocalypticism of environmental organizations, the corruption of climate science and the IPCC, the Svensmark solar hypothesis and so on.

Beneath this veneer of similarity, though, I found considerable stylistic, generic and philosophical variety. Fatalism, a little-studied aspect of response scepticism, vies with the more familiar economic optimism of Lord Lawson's *Appeal to Reason*. Peter Taylor and Philip Foster both endorse the role of cosmic rays, but from radically different perspectives and to diametrically opposed conclusions. Both Jeremy Clarkson and James Delingpole purvey hyperbolic satire with a recognizably British cultural pedigree, but the latter laces his bile with conspiracy theories from across the Atlantic. And in Bean's *The Heretic*, British climate scepticism enjoys a unique literary accomplishment, much funnier and more effective, in its way, than warmist dramas such as *The Contingency Plan* (2009) or *Greenland* (2011).

In the aftermath of the passage of the Climate Change Act, warmist activism and sceptical outrage have been in relative abeyance. British political and social life have been dominated by financial crisis and austerity (2009 on), a referendum on Scottish independence (September 2014), a general election (May 2015), a further referendum on European Union membership (June 2016) and another snap election (June 2017). It is now clear that Brexit will consume almost all the energies of the British polity for years to come. Still, in a context where the CCA and the Paris Agreement commit Britain to climate mitigation policies, it may be that reduced political salience and a lower-temperature debate will provide opportunities for collaboration and practical problem-solving. Understanding sceptical perspectives is only the first step.