Critics of An Inconvenient Truth (2006) base their negative reviews on what they see as Al Gore's inaccurate predictions. In an article distributed at Gore's film as a response to the film's science, “The Real ‘Inconvenient Truth,’” for example, JunkScience.com seeks to debunk predictions surrounding what has been called catastrophic planet warming, asserting instead that “activists and zealots constantly shrilling over atmospheric carbon dioxide are misdirecting attention and effort from real and potentially addressable local, regional and planetary problems” (13).

Steven Milloy, the publisher of JunkScience, is a Fox News columnist with links to Phillip Morris and ExxonMobil; he has a B.A. in Natural Science and a Master of Health Sciences in Biostatistics from Johns Hopkins and Law degrees from University of Baltimore and Georgetown. In addition, Ronald Bailey, science consultant for Reason Magazine, a libertarian magazine voted one of the “50 Best Magazines” three out of the past four years by the Chicago Tribune, asserts that Al Gore “exaggerate[s] the dangers by propounding implausible scenarios in which sea levels rise 20 feet by 2100” (6).

Instead of arguing from science, we argue that Al Gore’s An Inconvenient Truth mainly succeeds not because of its predictions but because of the eco-memories it evokes. Like eco-disaster films from the 1970s, Gore’s film argues most powerfully when it draws on environmental nostalgia, a nostalgia we share for a better, cleaner world. Although environmental nostalgia is by definition limited, since a pure, untouched, and unpolluted past projected onto a now lost wilderness cannot recuperate that wilderness’ history, Gore’s message gains rhetorical force in the ways that the film uses a comparison and contrast mode to evoke an environmental nostalgia with emotional appeal.

Gore’s framework of ecological memories

An Inconvenient Truth argues powerfully for sustainable environmental policies by invoking both personal and universal ecological memories, as do Silent Running (1971), Omega Man (1971) and, even more closely entwined with Gore’s narrative, Soylent Green (1973). Gore’s film opens with two scenes illustrating two historical memories of the world thirty years ago. One of those memories grows out of a meandering river that flowed near Al Gore’s family farm, a river we see flowing clean and clear through a pristine green landscape. The year is 1973, and Al and wife Tipper float along in a canoe over gentle ripples of the Caney Fork River. Living nature is highlighted here by the river, the foliage that lines it and the fact that Tipper is close to giving birth to the Gores’ first child. The footage also indicates the film stock’s age, showing us that this is a memory, not a view of the present, and that it rests on personal history.

The other more universal historical memory is highlighted by images of planet Earth shot from outer space, beginning with the 1968 shot from Apollo 8 and the 1972 shot from Apollo 17 (the last Apollo mission) and continuing through a series of satellite images that show all Earth’s continents and seas. In the 1968 and 1972 photographs, white clouds seem to swirl above clear blue oceans and, in the 1972 example, grasses and deserts on the African continent. The images serve as a starting point for a poignant slide presentation that shows us the impact humans have had on the earth, especially the last thirty years. In addition, beginning with thirty-year old shots of a river and photographs of Earth shot in outer space from the Apollo missions, the film narrative introduces the most powerful tool behind the documentary’s success — environmental nostalgia or what we see as “eco-memory.” The dates of both the river scene and the two Apollo photos become relevant here, since they coincide with the birth of the environmental movement and the EPA. Al Gore’s An Inconvenient Truth harks back to a past that personalizes Gore and his message and memorializes an Earth less tainted by human exploitation, the Earth that was present when the first Earth Day was established in 1970.

The rhetoric of environmental nostalgia

The powerful move back to eco-memory that Gore evokes to illuminate his points about global warming is a rhetorical strategy that seems to work both for advocates and skeptics of environmental politics. In an article celebrating the thirty year anniversary of Earth Day, for example, Ronald Bailey — the science correspondent for Reason Magazine — argues that “Earth Day 1970 provoked a torrent of apocalyptic predictions” (“Earth Day, Then and Now”). For him, Earth Day and the environmental policies it represented were necessary in 1970. Yet he insists that what he calls “prophets of doom” were “spectacularly wrong” (emphasis Bailey’s). In fact, he says,
The film adeptly points to these memories, highlighting what we have, what we have already lost, and what we can regain, if we take the

... with universal environmental nostalgia

Aligning personal eco-memories

... we all share.

Both Gore and his critics, then, draw on ecological nostalgia to reinforce their sometimes conflicting solutions to a phenomenon that all now agree was at least partially caused by humans: global warming. Both Bailey and the editors of “JunkScience.Com” now concede that humans have contributed to the rise in temperature on Earth. An April 21, 2006, “Junk Science” article argues against global warming claims for its first eleven or so pages, but on page twelve they admit that they didn’t say “humans aren’t affecting the planet or its temperature.” In fact, they claim that “human endeavors have significant local effects” (12). And Ronald Bailey, who includes himself as someone who “doubted predictions of catastrophic global warming” (Reason.org, April 11, 2005) admitted more than a year ago that “anyone still holding onto the idea that there is no global warming ought to hang it up.” And in a June review of An Inconvenient Truth, Bailey states,

“On balance Gore gets it more right than wrong on the science.”

The differences between Gore and his skeptics seem to respond to two issues: the amount humans contribute to global warming and answers to the question: “What, if anything, should we do about any future warming?” (Bailey 6). Responses from both camps rest on eco-memory, however, more than future predictions. We contend that the environmental nostalgia presented in An Inconvenient Truth carries more force because it draws on both pathos — in relation to the personal memories Gore discusses — and logos — in relation to the slide show that prompted the documentary in the first place.

Personal eco-memories

Gore’s personal memories not only add to his credibility by eliciting empathy from his audience; they also serve as powerful environmental messages that connect tightly with the science on display in his slide show. Caney Fork River footage frames the narrative, from the 1973 shots of Tipper and Al in their canoe to current scenes of the river that offer hope for a natural landscape. Both the 1970s and 2000s views of the river and its bank look lush and fertile, with the fecundity promised by Tipper’s pregnancy in the earlier shots followed by evidence of continuing life along the river shorelines. The river also serves as a symbol of Gore and his family’s journey as well as that which we are taking here on Earth, suggesting that both as individuals and as a people we have choices that we can make regarding the earth’s future.

In An Inconvenient Truth, Gore notes several experiences along his journey that remain poignant memories with lasting effects on his quest to share his views of global warming and ways to address its repercussions. The first of these personal experiences — his son’s near-fatal accident — serves as a catalyst for his work as an environmentalist. In fact, Gore lines up what he calls the story of his son’s accident with what he again calls a story — of global warming’s impact. According to Gore, while his son was recovering, Gore began writing Earth in the Balance. His son’s accident had prompted him to reflect on not only his life but his priorities, making time for his family but also rethinking what it meant to be a public servant.

Other personal experiences coincide with his life on the family farm. When not living in a cramped Washington D.C. apartment, Gore and his parents and sister lived on a farm. There Gore says he learned about nature and caring for the land from his father, as the father walked Al around the farm, and about the possible impact humans might have on nature from his mother, as she read Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring to her two children. These scenes from the family farm in Tennessee which connect Gore with the natural world gain force when he speaks emotionally about his sister Nancy’s battle with lung cancer, because the Gores’ chief cash crop until the 1980s was tobacco. For Gore, the battle against tobacco parallels that against global warming, since scientists recognized tobacco’s link to cancer and heart disease long before public opinion and public policy agreed. Gore sees the same disconnect between science and public policy in relation to global warming’s dire repercussions.

These personal reflections establish Gore and his family’s eco-memories, the memories that sparked Al Gore’s crusade and the memories of the Tennessee farm and river, which drive his nostalgia for what he sees as a better world environment. Such memories gain weight, however, because they are reinforced by science and by universal experiences that have become a part of our collective memory. Gore’s slide show, with the help of the film’s director, Davis Guggenheim, draws on emotions as well as reason because it draws on our memories of Earth as a living world of green and blue, the Earth of the Apollo space program photographs, eco-memories we all share.

Aligning personal eco-memories with universal environmental nostalgia

The film adeptly points to these memories, highlighting what we have, what we have already lost, and what we can regain, if we take the...
small, ecologically sound steps Gore outlines at the end of his film. In other words, the scientific slide show on display coordinates with the personal experiences Gore reveals, since they both hark back to a remembered Earth, drawing on the power of nostalgia — environmental nostalgia — to skillfully frame global warming as a problem we share but can solve together. And the solution takes us back to the environmentally sustainable world that, according to the film, may soon be lost.

Gore’s early shots of planet Earth shot from space provide not only a view of an eco-memory but of what some may see as the present state of our world — pristine and untouched. But the views also serve as a bridge to Gore’s discussion of our thin atmosphere and how our changing its composition has contributed to global warming and its repercussions. The juxtaposition of the shots of Earth from space with shots of a polluted Earth below draws further on our nostalgia for an environmentally sound world.

Gore reinforces this message by countering photographic evidence from thirty years ago with that from today, highlighting clear changes in the global environment. For example, a shot of Mt. Kilimanjaro from 1970 sharply contrasts with photographs taken thirty years later. The amount of snow capping the mountain has obviously receded, and in a shot from 2005, the mountain is nearly clear of ice and snow. Similar photographic evidence shows Glacier National Park losing more and more of its glaciers. And images around the world tell the same story of rapidly receding ice, snow, and glaciers. These images gain force in opposition to images from years before. The current views of parks and mountains, even those now without snow, mean nothing unless juxtaposed against earlier shots that show the devastating changes that have occurred there, at least partially because of our contribution to global warming.

Because of these earlier shots, we look back nostalgically on this world on which people's footprint might seem lighter. And then Gore shows us further evidence that we have created the negative conditions those shots of glaciers imply. Ice cylinders taken from Antarctica paint a picture of Earth’s temperature over the past 650,000 years, pointing to 2005 as the hottest year in the cycles revealed there. Gore shows us some of the repercussions of this overall warming trend, focusing on heat waves and strengthening storms across the world. He reinforces his more general claims with a series of images showing the devastation following Hurricane Katrina, images that not only remind us of the destruction there but also of our cry to save the city of New Orleans, our nostalgia for an untouched city prior to the hurricane and levee breaks.

The same pathos exerts an effect when Gore notes other consequences of global warming, including increase in pests like pine beetles that destroy trees we yearn to save. Trees serve as reminders of a natural world we seem ready to preserve, and images of a treeless Haiti beside a tree-covered Dominican Republic again broach our environmental nostalgia. The images of the impact development has taken on the world add weight to the wish on which the film seems to rest, a wish for a return to a world like that of 1970. In fact, a fiction film, the sci-fi Silent Running, from 1971, sends a similar message about saving trees, but that film ends tragically, with hope for life other than humans in the hands of a lone robot. An Inconvenient Truth, on the other hand, ends with some effortless (and painless) ways we can change our future, without sacrificing ourselves.

Strengths and limits of nostalgia

Critically, nostalgia has been critiqued, refuted, and recovered in the past few decades, with a resurgence of research in memory studies complicating negative views of nostalgia built on postmodern views. Postmodern responses to nostalgia critique its move toward essentialism. In her 1988 article, "Nostalgia: A Polemic," Kathleen Stewart engages postmodern cultural critics' views that see nostalgia as a social disease. According to Stewart,

"Nostalgia, like the economy it runs with, is everywhere. But it is a cultural practice, not a given content; its forms, meanings, and effects shift with the context — it depends on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present" (227).

Drawing on the work of Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Walter Benjamin, Pierre Bourdieu, Jonathan Culler, Donna Haraway, Fredric Jameson, and Raymond Williams, Stewart elucidates why nostalgia is also a powerful rhetorical tool: she argues,

"on one 'level' there is no longer any place for anyone to stand and nostalgia takes on the generalized function to provide some kind (any kind) of cultural form" (227).

According to Stewart, a negative aspect of nostalgia is that it serves as a powerful rhetorical tool that placates and paralyzes the disenfranchised:

"Nostalgia is an essential, narrative, function of language that orders events temporally and dramatizes them in the mode of 'that's what happened,' that 'could happen,' that 'threaten to erupt at any moment'" (227).

Stewart sees the seductive nature of nostalgia in a postmodern culture as not only culturally situated but reductively negative, resulting in what she calls mirages — either a "grand hotel" of affluence or a "country cottage" of romantic simplicity. For Stewart, then, nostalgia is a negative consequence of attempting to replace postmodern relativism (labeled good) with an essential past based in recovery of a "self" (labeled bad).

From the perspective of earlier cultural critics, their writings implied a vanishing point of striving and looking for the pure or untouched, unpolluted past, projected into the wilderness of the past of history. But that kind of striving really is an ideological project. Much of Earth's physical past, in terms of today's environmental issues, is substantially lost because of population explosion, irreversible global warming, loss of biodiversity, and unknown effects of pollution. Each year the people born will not remember the same past as previous generations. Our own literatures consider America's past through the lens of nostalgia and that is how our educational system often presents the past to us, with themes like the vanishing Indian, the disappearance of the buffalo, and the disappearing prairie. And all these themes were broadly interpreted in U.S. culture in relation to Frederick Jackson Turner's recuperative thesis of the frontier, a thesis that promotes progress at any cost, whether it be genocide or the expansion of industrialism in the United States.
More recent work, especially in anthropology and cultural studies, however, complicates visions of nostalgia as inherently and inseparably retrograde, as a perspective accompanying an imperial view. In contrasts, other anthropologists see nostalgia within local cultures not only a way to learn from the past but to recuperate real community. For example, in Ethel Pinheiro and Cristiane Rose Duarte’s 2004 article, “Leaves and Circuses at Largo da Carioca, Brazil: The Urban Diversity Focused on People-Environment Interactions,” nostalgia in the form of collective memory and appropriation is what led Largo da Carioca to survive in spite of all the political and urban changes.” Pinheiro and Duarte draw on both an historical-evolutive approach and participant-observation data. In this case, their historical-evolutive research demonstrated that the open plaza maintains functions from Ancient Greece, Egypt and Mesopotamia, especially those related to performance; and their participant-observation resulted in interview data that revealed how “people link social activity in the largo’s physical structure.”

Answers to the anthropologists’ question asking local participants to “choose a word that could explain the place” illustrated the pull of nostalgia — one of the terms given to explain Largo da Carioca. Others gave related answers, highlighting outdoor performances, culture, and tradition. The place is not based an a critical perspective that informs much of postmodern anthropology but it does reveal a positive impact nostalgia might have, actually impacting on the city’s shape, ensuring that a people will appropriate a public space for performance and art because their collective memory draws them to it. In this case, the power of collective memory — of nostalgia — seems to be manifested in the continuation of Largo da Carioca.

Recent cultural studies scholarship also seeks to complicate earlier reductive cultural critiques of nostalgia, noting that nostalgia need not always be constructed in negative terms. Situating nostalgia can minimize its essentialist draw, for example. According to Sean Scanlan’s introduction to a 2005 special issue of The Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies,

“In current work, nostalgia is no longer the programmatic equivalent of bad memory and the uses and limits of important theories from the 1990s are being reconsidered.”

Although cultural critics critiqued nostalgia because it “abused individual and collective memory and … problematized the relations between producers and consumers,” Scanlan suggests that nostalgia “can cross several registers simultaneously. It can be felt culturally or individually, directly or indirectly … postmodernism’s negative critique only partially illuminates its various links to memory, history, affect, media and the marketplace, only partially accounts for nostalgia’s continuing power.”

Scanlan ends his introduction to this special issue with more positive conclusions about nostalgia:

"Nostalgia is often secondary or epiphenomenal, yet it can also be Proustian and epiphanic, generative and creative. Walter Benjamin’s ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ contains his vision of the angel of history — based on Klee’s painting ‘Angelus Novus’ — in which the angel’s face is ‘turned toward the past,’ while a storm from Paradise ‘irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned’ (257-8). Benjamin is right to call this storm progress, but he does not describe what the angel might be feeling while looking toward the past. The angel of history … is nostalgic.”

In fact, in the context of Gore’s Inconvenient Truth, nostalgia’s rhetorical power gains force when contextualized both personally — through Gore’s own narrative — and historically — through our collective memory of Earth’s changes from the 1970s to the present. Gore’s message gains strength because it draws on both personal and collective eco-memories. It gains validity because it situates both science and personal history in particular cultural contexts. Current cultural critics have re-appropriated nostalgia as both a term and history. Gore re-appropriates and expands it to include ecology. For Gore, it’s not the cultural critics but the conservative scientists who most forcefully attack the rhetoric of An Inconvenient Truth. Yet, like Gore, these critics draw on nostalgia to make their claims.

**Critical environmental nostalgia according to science fiction
and Ronald Bailey**

Critics like Bailey and those writing for “JunkScience.com” suggest that Gore is a “global warming exaggerator” and that his message carries apocalyptic weight; it’s an argument Bailey made about doomsday prophets from the 1970s to whom films like Soylent Green responded. But Bailey and “JunkScience” also harbor a nostalgia for a more environmentally sound world. And they seem to respond to Gore as if he were writing science fiction and promoting a fictional eco-disaster film from the 1970s like Soylent Green, Silent Running, or Omega Man. As in Bailey’s articles, those films responding explicitly to Earth Day, the establishment of the EPA and other environmental programs of the 1970s did look back nostalgically on Earth in its more natural state.

In a direct reaction to the environmental movement, Omega Man (1971), Soylent Green (1973), and Silent Running (1971) all embrace the memory of an environment and ecology that no long exists on their Earth — an eco-memory. At the same time, though, these films reflect a nostalgia for a world that does still exist for its viewers, both in the 1970s and today. Unlike Gore’s films, these films represent the categories Bailey outlines in his article because they so clearly respond to the 1970s environmental movement (See articles by Gaylord Nelson and the EPA Website, for example). They also provide a way to exploit environmental ideas for commercial gain. But for both Gore and these 1970s eco-disaster films, nostalgia most directly connects the films to one another and to the ecology they all seem to have lost.

Few would dispute the idea that the U.S. movie industry responds to contemporary cultural trends, presumably for economic gain. And film responses to the environmental movement of the 1970s were no exception. For example, when the Soylent Green DVD was
“Hollywood, never slow to jump on a trend, began to invest in ecological themed films [after the first Earth Day]. Perhaps one of the most famous is Soyland Green, released in 1973.”

Soyland Green even serves as one of Bailey’s categories in his Reason article, since, according to Bailey,

“Imminent global famine caused by the explosion of the ‘population bomb’ was the big issue on Earth Day 1970.”

Soyland Green seems to align with the “Polluted Thinking” category, since the only remaining forests were protected in outer-space biospheres. Images of dying forests on Earth reinforce the sense of loss that destroying these domes will ensure. Omega Man, on the other hand, goes beyond Bailey’s categories, amplifying Bailey’s “Synthetic Arguments” with biological warfare.

Of these three films, Soyland Green falls most neatly into Bailey’s discussion of the “apocalyptic predictions” that he claims Earth Day 1970 provoked. Although Peter Biskind describes Charlton Heston as one of the “Old Hollywood Right” (130) and disregards Richard Fleischer altogether, Soyland Green is clearly a film of the 1970s. Unlike the anti-war movement, the Civil Rights Movement, the Women’s Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the environmental movement was supported by a cross-section of Americans, including those with right-leaning politics like those of Richard Nixon, under whose presidency the EPA was founded. So it comes as no surprise that a film like Soyland Green directed by an old-school director and starring an “Old Hollywood Right” actor embraces so strong an environmental message.

From Soyland Green to An Inconvenient Truth:
rhetoric of nostalgia made real

Soyland Green seems like a direct reaction to Earth Day and the establishment of the EPA. It also seems to follow the same rhetorical strategies as do the doomsday predictions of contemporary environmental activists like Paul Ehrlich, whom Life Magazine called “ecology’s angry lobbyist.” The film seems to agree with Ehrlich’s predictions in his 1968 book, The Population Bomb and illustrate them through its own prophets of doom. From the film’s opening montage shots of an increasingly over-populated and polluted Earth to the film’s 2022 urban New York City future setting, where every inch is packed with people, the “population bomb” idea seems to jump off the screen. The film seems to bring to life Gore’s current claims that the Earth’s population will increase from 6.5 to 9 billions in 20 more years.

In a world so overrun with humans, food sources for the masses come in the form of “soylents,” including the infamous soylent green — people. Soyland Green provides a picture of what would happen on Earth if Paul Ehrlich’s predictions came true: as he claimed in April 1970 (quoted in Bailey):

“Population will inevitably and completely outstrip whatever small increases in food supplies we make.”

Charlton Heston’s character, Thorn, serves as a prophet revealing the most horrifying result — “Soyland Green is made out of people.” Thorn, perhaps like Gore, reveals the truth in Soyland Green. Gore builds on a truth to predict a possible future we have the power to avert.

Constructing Charlton Heston’s character, Thorn, as a prophet also establishes him as a tragic hero like that described by Joseph W. Meeker. According to Meeker,

“Literary tragedy and environmental exploitation in Western culture share many of the same philosophical presuppositions … Three such ideas will illustrate the point: the assumption that nature exists for the benefit of humanity; the belief that human morality transcends natural limitations; and humanism’s insistence upon the supreme importance of the individual personality” (The Comedy of Survival 24).

Unlike Thorn, however, Gore gives us the possibility of a happy ending, with individual personality perhaps overpowered by communal need.

In his essay, “The Comic Mode,” Meeker defines the tragic hero in relation to biology: “Pioneer species are the loners of the natural world, the tragic heroes who sacrifice themselves in satisfaction of mysterious inner commands which they alone can hear” (161). Thorn of Soyland Green is a pioneer, a tragic hero willing to speak up and resist homogenizing forces as an individual whose morality transcends all those around him. Even his name suggests that he is a prickly plant, one of the pioneering “weeds” “whose life styles resemble behavior that men have admired most when they have seen it in other men. We celebrate the qualities in human pioneers that we despise in the pioneers of other plant and animal species” (“The Comic Mode” 161).

First as a rogue detective in a police state, and then as the sole voice of reason, proving the dreadful truth about Soyland Green for the intellectual’s Supreme Exchange, Thorn stands alone, morally superior to the corporate heads who control the food supply. For him, the crime is against humanity, not nature, since his biggest fear is that the company will raise humans “like cattle.” “It’s people,” he says. “Soyland Green is made out of people.” Thorn proclaims his message after fighting off bullets and punches from corporate thugs first to his police captain and then to the scores of others sleeping in what’s left of a church. A suffering tragic hero to the end, Thorn’s words seem to be his last, and he passes the task of taking evidence to the Exchange to his captain. Here the prophet, Thorn, becomes a pioneer, a tragic hero with a message that becomes his dying words. Gore, on the other hand, supports his claims with evidence and offers positive solutions to prevent our and our planet’s death.
Green is people. Nostalgia and memories of nature give him enough incentive to want more, to want what the corporations provide the

With the knowledge of not only Earth's losses but also its tragic future, Thorn readily sacrifices himself to provide evidence that Soylent

roles as consumers, not by giving up our lives.

— and it seems to be, for the most part — then we can go "home" to a world more like that of the 1970s by making a few changes to our

world has lost. Gore invokes similar techniques that draw on our eco-memories, but with less tragic consequences. If the science is right

In the end, Thorn shares Sol's nostalgic moment. "Can you see it?" and "Isn't it beautiful?" asks Sol. "Oh, yes," says Thorn, with tears in

streams, mountains, fish and coral, sheep and horses, and lots and lots of flowers — from daffodils to dogwoods.

So does as the reminder of better times and a figure with assertions similar to those of Gore — when "real" food was plentiful and the

natural environment thrived. When Thorn offers Sol some soylent crackers, Sol exclaims, "Now, when I was a kid, food was food." But

that was before people "poisoned the water, polluted the soil, [and destroyed] plant and animal life," according to Sol. Sol remembers

and looks back nostalgically on a world before the "green house effect," the global warming Gore proves we must reverse. When Thorn

leaves for work, the reason for such a dead world seems clear: people, so many that Thorn must climb over or through hundreds

sleeping on stairs and in the streets. What was once a world of plenty has turned into a corporate dictatorship where only the rich can

afford fruits, vegetables, and meat — food other than the soylents they produce. These scenes bring to mind Gore's scenes of

farmlands turned to deserts due to repercussions of global warming.

Food symbolizes the nostalgic world of plenty in Soylent Green. When William Simonson, a corporate executive, is murdered, it is the food he leaves behind that gain Thorn and Sol's respect and attention — lettuce, tomatoes, apples, celery, onions, and even beef. Thorn takes the food — and some bourbon — as his reward from Simonson's apartment. When Sol sees the beef, he weeps. "How did we come to this?" he exclaims. "Nobody cares. Nobody tries, including me. I should have gone home long ago."

Since Sol remembers a better world, he creates a real meal for himself and Thorn and serves it on linen, giving Thorn the one set of real silver with which to enjoy it. After feasting on beef stew and apple, Sol exclaims, "I haven't eaten like this in years." But Thorn doesn't remember more plentiful times: "I never ate like this." "Now you know what you've been missing," Sol tells him. "There was a world once, you punk." Sol provides the memories Thorn is missing — of beef stew and strawberries stolen on a spoon. But their real meal is juxtaposed with Sol's research on Simonson and Soylent Green.

Sol's research, too, brings up memories — of his previous life as a full professor, with as many books as he could read. Now the elite

have air conditioning, showers, and space. The masses sleep in piles and fight over genetically engineered food. With such a large

population, "farms are like fortresses. Good land has got to be guarded, just like the waste disposal plants," so there's no place for Thorn

and Shiril (Simonson's furniture girl) to go. Intellectual property, too, must be guarded at what they call the Supreme Exchange. At the Exchange "books," former intellectuals including judges, perform research using the last real books, helping Sol solve Thorn's murder mystery but also making a much more devastating discovery about Soylent Green. Their discovery prompts Sol to seek the ultimate nostalgia — home, the place he claims God might be found.

Going home brings up both corporate and individual nostalgia for Sol. Going home means going to a corporate hospital for termination, but it also means enjoying twenty minutes of the Earth's past glory. In a clean and spacious room where he is served by two attendants, Sol lies on a comfortable bed and enjoys his favorite color and music as they surround him. But the memories of Earth — his home — are what he seeks here, eco-memories of deer in woods, trees and leaves, sunsets beside the sea, birds flying overhead, rolling streams, mountains, fish and coral, sheep and horses, and lots and lots of flowers — from daffodils to dogwoods.

In the end, Thorn shares Sol's nostalgic moment. "Can you see it?" and "Isn't it beautiful?" asks Sol. "Oh, yes," says Thorn, with tears in his eyes. "How could I know? How could I, how could I even imagine?" he gasps — now understanding what he and the rest of the world has lost. Gore invokes similar techniques that draw on our eco-memories, but with less tragic consequences. If the science is right — and it seems to be, for the most part — then we can go "home" to a world more like that of the 1970s by making a few changes to our roles as consumers, not by giving up our lives.

With the knowledge of not only Earth's losses but also its tragic future, Thorn readily sacrifices himself to provide evidence that Soylent Green is people. Nostalgia and memories of nature give him enough incentive to want more, to want what the corporations provide the


Stewart, Kathleen. “Nostalgia — a Polemic.” Cultural Anthropology. 3.3 (August 1988): 227-241

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dependence on foreign oil. For example, the global warming skeptics cite one article more than any other in arguing that global warming is just a myth: a statement of concern during the 1970s that the world might be in danger of entering a new ice age.