

The Literature of Fire: An Analysis and Bibliography

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1. Executive Summary

We reviewed how literature reflects and has affected our cultural understanding of wildfire. Our task was to determine how fire has been framed by popular literature, to determine in what contexts and narratives the public receives information through this vital medium; and by doing so help to broaden and strengthen both agency and public understanding of cultural engagement with fire.

We focused on “fire-literature,” defining “literature” not as the entire body of writings dealing with a particular subject, but as the body of *artistic* writings characterized by some degree of beauty of expression and form and by universality of intellectual and emotional appeal. In short, literature not by scholars and researchers, but by novelists, literary essayists, and poets.

In the end, though we undoubtedly missed some worthy and relevant material, we compiled a comprehensive catalogue of 151 books, published between 1943 and 2011. (These books are organized in various bibliographic databases as addendums at the end of the document.)

We examined and filtered this literature in two ways. The first was in light of five critical aspects of literature:

- moral imagination
- vicarious engagement
- creative vision
- capacity for complexity
- effectiveness

We also analyzed the recurring themes and narrative devices that consistently surfaced; themes which we organized into “literary tropes” of our own devising. We use “trope” to refer specifically to commonly-used (occasionally overused) techniques, themes, or devices.

- Fire as Battlefield
- Fire as Incident: The Great/Terrible/Devastating Burn/Inferno/Firestorm of 18___/19__ !
- “All the World’s a Stage”: Fire as Plot Device or Setting/Background for Human Drama
- Fire as Dragon/ Fire as Elemental Evil/ Fire as Destroyer
- Fire as Renewal: Ecological Resilience Narratives
- Fire is Culture

All in all, our literature review revealed a respectable volume of books dedicated to the topic of wildfire. Within this fire-literature is an interesting diversity of perspectives and engagements. Fire is seen as a force that must be fought just as it is an ecological process that it is impossible and ultimately detrimental to control. It is seen as a single event and an overarching process. It is seen as a backdrop for human drama and it is seen as a central character in the narrative of the West. Fire appears in novels, memoirs, academic texts, poems, anthologies of essays, and general historic accounts. It is related in first, second, and third person.

Our analysis of this “fire-literature” finds the literature to be varyingly effective in terms of moral imagination, vicarious engagement, creative vision, capacity for complexity, and effectiveness. Compared to the richness of the subject of wildfire, compared to the way wildfire encapsulates all the complexities and controversies of culture, history, and ecology, wildfire’s potential as a literary subject remains largely unfulfilled.

2. Introduction

The impetus for this literature review arose out of a grant provided by The Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP). The JFSP’s goal is to “accelerate the awareness, understanding, and adoption of wildland fire science information by federal, tribal, state, local, and private stakeholders within ecologically similar regions.”

The majority of JFSP’s energy and resources are spent on “fostering a two way communication process between scientists and those who will ultimately benefit from knowledge gained: practitioners involved in applying fire science on the ground.”¹ In JFSP’s view, the “ultimate customers” of scientific knowledge are “the managers.” While both managers and “practioners” serve important roles, scientists and land managers are increasingly realizing that “learning to live with fire remains primarily a social issue that will require not just greater political leadership and agency innovation, but public involvement and community responsibility.”²

For example, according to Pamela Lichtman, “Land managers and ecologists generally agree that the 1988 fires in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem were an ecologically important part of a natural disturbance pattern and that little could have been done to stop them. For policymakers, however, the fires were a major public relations failure. Land managers and ecologists need to understand how citizens' and politicians' view of wildfire as a crisis can undermine the stability of natural resource agencies, then find ways to build support for natural fire.”³

¹ Fire Science Digest Issue 11 pg 2

² Dombeck et al 2004

³ Pamela Lichtman, “The Politics of Wildfire: Lessons from Yellowstone;” Journal of Forestry, Volume 96, Number 5, 1 May 1998 , pp. 4-9(6)

JFSP has frequently stressed the need to “transform knowledge into meaningful action.”⁴ Thus one of JSFP’s six “guiding principles” is to “be innovative, pursuing new and creative ways to disseminate knowledge.” But in the context of increasing public involvement and community responsibility for wildfire, “meaningful action” might best be achieved by partnering with or promoting the arts and humanities. As the author Leslie Marmon Silko put it, “The way you change a human being and human behavior is through a change in consciousness that can be effected only through literature, music, poetry—the arts.”⁵

Researchers from multiple literatures and disciplines have demonstrated that how and by whom topics are framed greatly influence how the public acts toward a particular issue⁶. Our task with this literature review was thus to determine how fire has been framed by popular literature. We wished to determine in what contexts and narratives the public receives information through this vital medium; and by doing so help to broaden and strengthen both agency and public understanding of cultural engagement with fire. This increased understanding could lead to increased awareness of immediate fire issues and encourage thoughtful public engagement with those issues.

3. About the Spring Creek Project for Ideas, Nature, and the Written Word

Based in the Philosophy Department at Oregon State University, The Spring Creek Project is a convening organization and think tank that works to connect science and the humanities in conversations regarding sustainability and our place on planet Earth. The challenge of the Spring Creek Project is to bring together the practical wisdom of the environmental sciences, the clarity of philosophical analysis, and the creative, expressive power of the written word, to find new ways to understand and re-imagine our relation to the natural world.⁷

4. Why Literature?

We choose to focus on what we are calling “fire-literature” for five reasons.

Moral imagination

As Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa has written, literature is “one of the common denominators of human experience through which human beings may recognize themselves and converse with each other.”⁸ Reading good literature is “an experience of learning what and how we are, in our human integrity and our human imperfection, with our actions, our dreams, and our ghosts, alone and in relationships that link us to others.”⁹ Through the specific and personal terms of a story or poem or essay, literature explores all the dimensions and possibilities of the human condition. Literature thus simultaneously helps us understand ourselves and helps us empathize, sympathize, and explore the world outside of our own moral and physical frames of reference. This is referred to as literature’s power of “moral imagination.” This is especially

⁴ Fire Science Digest Issue 11 pg 2

⁵ This is echoed by many others; for example: Bill McKibben, referring to climate change: “We need a big movement, and big movements come from beauty and meaning, not columns of statistics.”

⁶ Davis 2006; Entman 2004; Bell 1994

⁷ For more information, visit <http://springcreek.oregonstate.edu/index.html>

⁸ Mario Vargas Llosa, “Why Literature?” The New Republic, 5/14/01

⁹ *ibid*

important with regard to wildfire, for as author Mark Roche notes “the environment will not be protected if our only motive for action is calculable self-interest, for the consequences to the environment will be distant and will not affect us immediately.”¹⁰ As opposed to calculable self-interest, literature offers empathetic understanding.

Vicarious engagement

This creative and imaginative power of literature holds great promise for the human perception of wildfire because part of the reason that wildfire is generally regarded as a hostile force, is, as Stephen Pyne points out, “most urbanite citizens, especially the ruling and clerical classes, no longer have any personal connection with open fire, except what they can experience through TV and print.”¹¹ Roche echoes this, noting that “a significant factor in the ecological crisis is the distance between human beings and nature” but adding that “literature can contribute to bridging this difference. Art reinforces an emphasis on the natural, sensuous part of humans by forming itself partly out of the material world and appealing to our sensuousness; this effects balance in a culture that is no longer intuitive and in many respects too reflective.”¹² “Sensuousness,” as referred to above, is an integral component of literature’s “moral imagination,” and a critical way of overcoming what has become known as “nature deficit disorder.”¹³ Another way of thinking of this is “vicarious engagement”: wildfire is an inherently sensuous phenomenon—the face-tightening heat of a wall of flame, the cloying smell of woodsmoke, the way flames illuminate the smoke column at night—and by using correspondingly sensuous language, the author appeals to the senses of the reader, thus helping the reader become more fully engaged in a subject despite the physical distance.

Creative vision

Literature is powerful and affective not only in this sense of a “moral imagination,” but in the way its capacity for imagination leads to creative visions. Literature is idealistic, imaginative, creative, and expansive. At the root of many of the human-nature interface problems we now face is orientation—how we orient ourselves in and against the world, the past, the future. Because of its creative power, literature has proven to be a fine cultural compass, especially in envisioning opportunities and paths for the future. As Sue Spaid writes in *Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies*, “In one sense, all artists seek to change the world. To make things, even to propose ideas, is intrinsically a hopeful act. The most cynical artist, describing the least attractive alternative to the unmediated world, harbors at least a feeble hope that his dark view will prompt some transformation—whether of consciousness or of substance—that will save us all.” Art may thus provide a vision of a future of wildfire that science and policy cannot. Yet “creative vision” is not limited to envisioning our future: it casts the present world in a new light; presents objects and phenomena in hitherto unseen ways.

Capacity for complexity

Literature has a unique ability to not oversimplify moral, existential, and ecological dilemmas. This is important in terms of wildland fire, which is an incredibly complex welter of

¹⁰ Roche, Mark. *Why Literature Matters in the 21st Century*, Yale University Press, 2004; pg. 209

¹¹ Attention! All Keepers of the Flame" (Pyne, 1999)

<http://www.wholeearthmag.com/ArticleBin/290.html>:

¹² Roche, Mark. *Why Literature Matters in the 21st Century*, Yale University Press, 2004; pg 216.

¹³ The term ‘nature deficit disorder’ was first coined by Richard Louv in his 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods*.

science, management, politics, and social beliefs and values. Quality literature is characterized by “refusal to stereotype or generalize, fidelity to the whole complicated truth in all its breadth and subtlety...It helps us grasp the ways in which diverse parts form a comprehensive and complex whole.”¹⁴ The renowned novelist Italo Calvino puts it this way: “Since science has begun to distrust general explanations and solutions that are not sectorial and specialized, the grand challenge for literature is to be capable of weaving together the various branches of knowledge, the various ‘codes,’ into a manifold and multifaceted vision of the world.”¹⁵ Or, as the critic David Hickey put it, “Art is a safe place where we may non-violently come to terms with disorienting situations and adjudicate their public and private relevance.” Wildfire is undoubtedly one of these disorienting situations, just as its various aspects need to be blended into a more digestible whole.

Effectiveness

Finally, literature is effective at instigating social and cultural change. Great literature grapples with the ethical challenges of the day, concerns itself with “the fate and prospects of humankind.”¹⁶ By doing so, it has the ability to change individual and collective emotional, practical, and political perspectives. Consider the impacts on the public consciousness (and resulting outpouring of demand for action) of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*; and Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. Indeed, this last book, *Silent Spring*, deserves special note, as its author embodied in one world-changing voice the three necessary conditions for creating social change – powerful moral clarity, empirical expertise, and the ability to communicate effectively. One, or even two of these characteristics without the other may not have been enough: her work, and much of the work the world needs addressed, cannot be accomplished by one expertise talking to itself, but it can be achieved by the coming together of insights from many different perspectives and disciplines channeled into one medium of expression.

“Story is sometimes underestimated as something that is easy and instinctive. But story is actually a piece of disciplined magic, of highly refined science. It is the most powerful educational tool we possess; it is learning distilled in a common language. It is also a privileged carrier of truth, a way of allowing for multiplicity and complexity at the same time as guaranteeing memorability. Story creates an atmosphere in which truth becomes discernible as a pattern. And so I would argue that narrative is not just a means, it is a method, and a rigorous and demanding one. The conventional scientific method separates causes from one another, it isolates each one and tests them individually in turn. Narrative, by contrast, carries multiple causes along together, it enacts connectivity. We need both methods. Scholars in the humanities know that stories change the way

¹⁴Gillespie, Tim “Why literature matters,” Education Digest; Sep95, Vol. 61 Issue 1, p61, 4p

¹⁵ Italo Calvino *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Vintage 1996

¹⁶ Gillespie, Tim. *Why Literature Matters* Education Digest; Sep95, Vol. 61 Issue 1, p61, 4p

We believe, then, that literature and the power of the written word has much to lend to the study of wildfire. And yet, while literature and the arts have had much to say on human's role in and against *nature*, they have had very little to say about wildfire. Stephen Pyne—the most prolific chronicler of human engagement with fire—has already noted this: “In *Young Men and Fire* Norman Maclean alludes to ‘the literature of forest fire, if such a literature exists.’ It is remarkable that almost no such literature exists... Tens of thousands of firefighters pass alongside the flames every year, and have for most of the last century, yet almost nothing of literary merit has resulted.”¹⁷

people act, the way they use available knowledge. The stories we live by determine the future. So, in harnessing the power of narrative, in listening to, rediscovering and generating true stories, we change the world.”

Tom Griffiths, *The Humanities and an Environmentally Sustainable Australia*, “Eco-humanities Corner” Issue 43, December 2007

This may overstate the case somewhat—our bibliography of “fire-literature” proves that such literature does indeed exist. And yet as we detail below, compared to the richness of the subject, compared to the way wildfire encapsulates all the complexities and controversies of culture, history, and ecology, wildfire's potential as a literary subject remains largely unfulfilled.

5. Methods

Guiding Concept

Our guiding concept behind this literature review was to conduct a broad review of literary works to gauge the scope of literary (and thus, by association, cultural) engagements with fire. We wished to examine and filter this literature in light of the five aspects of literature we detailed earlier:

- moral imagination
- vicarious engagement
- creative vision,
- capacity for complexity
- effectiveness.

This literature review was neither written as nor intended to be read as an academic treatise. The review was not conducted under strict scientific standards of objectivity and methodology. And while we did not have a specific thesis, problem, or research question that this general “fire-literature” review helped define, we were interested in a number of specific questions: How does fire-literature—historically and contemporarily—reflect or support or refute “Smokey The Bear's” policy of strict fire-exclusion? How does it reflect or support or refute a more nuanced acceptance of the ecological role of fire? How does it offer and help shape perspectives on fire as controllable or uncontrollable? How does it reflect values—what we as a culture find acceptable regarding our public lands—and how these values change over time?

Selection Criteria:

We focused on “fire-literature,” defining “literature” not as the entire body of writings dealing with a particular subject, but as the body of *artistic* writings characterized by some degree of

¹⁷ Pyne, *Green Skies of Montana*

beauty of expression and form and by universality of intellectual and emotional appeal. In short, literature not by scholars and researchers, but by novelists, essayists, and poets. That said, reality is not so easily delineated, especially regarding contemporary nonfiction, in which, say, a book categorized as “literary nonfiction” features a large degree of overlap and cross-pollination between dry, science-heavy writing of the sort we may expect in academic writing, and rich, deep metaphoric prose we may expect in poetry.

Despite the frequent overlap of tone and style of many of these books—Stephen Pyne being the paragon example—we set out to determine, in a general and inclusive sense, works of literature published on the topic of wildfire

The scope of this literature review was limited to one type of publication: books. While this limited our approach and results, it was deemed necessary for practical reasons. We set no limits on cultural or temporal contexts; however, for practical reasons the vast majority of the books we reviewed were set in contemporary cultural contexts.

This same practical scope necessitated the elimination of certain genres or subsets of genres from consideration. We tended to avoid overly technical, prescriptive, or policy-heavy books (à la Harry P. Gaylor’s *Wildfires: Prevention and Control*); “academic” nonfiction verging on textbook (Donald A. Haines’ *Forest Fires in Missouri*). In line with the mission of the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP), we focused solely on wildfire, avoiding any literature dedicated to the myriad other manifestations of fire: structure fire, industrial fire, warfare fire (James Dickey’s poem “The Firebombers,” for example), ritual fire, etc. We generally selected books written by single authors and not by institutions like NPS, USFS, or National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Program

In the end, though we undoubtedly missed some worthy and relevant material, we compiled a comprehensive catalogue of 151 books, published between 1943 and 2011.

Search Methodology

We searched existing “fire-literature” bibliographies such as the Department of Interior’s Online Library Collections¹⁸ and wildlandfire.com’s “Books for Wildland Firefighters” page¹⁹. We also used online search tools such as Google Book and Amazon. We used library archives and databases.

6. Results and critical analysis

Fire-literature statistics

Total books: 151

Fiction: 13 titles (8% of total)

Non-Fiction: 138 titles (91% of total)

Specific Fire Events: 41 titles (27% of total) (Note, this does not include Fiction, 99% of which focus on a specific fire, though a few of these fires are fictional.)

Memoirs: 30 titles (19% of total)

Ecology and Natural History: 26 titles (16% of total)

World Fire: 10 titles

Anthology: 5 titles

¹⁸ <http://www.doi.gov/library/collections/wildfires.cfm0>

¹⁹ <http://www.wildlandfire.com/books/books.htm>

Oral History: 2 titles
General Non-fiction: 29 titles

6.1 “Five aspects of literature” analysis

In the following section we will examine and filter our collected fire-literature (available in the addendum) in light of the five aspects of literature we detailed earlier:

- moral imagination
- vicarious engagement
- creative vision,
- capacity for complexity
- effectiveness.

Moral imagination

As mentioned earlier, literature simultaneously helps us understand ourselves and helps us empathize, sympathize, and explore the world outside of our own moral and physical frames of reference. John N. Maclean, author of numerous “fire-books” views his job in terms of this “moral imagination,” to “make (firefighters) high-adrenalin, high-risk existence familiar to general readers, so they can better appreciate and understand the service these exceptional men and women provide.”²⁰

The “moral imagination” is perhaps inherent in the act of reading literature itself. Sitting down and opening a book to read is a ritual in which the reader willingly enters a different world. The task of the author, for the most part²¹, is to sustain this illusionary world. Literature’s powers of moral imagination work within this tacit agreement between author and reader.

Thus almost by default do the majority of the fire-books fulfill this role—they expand the range of the reader’s engagement with fire and allow him or her to empathetically or vicariously experience firefighters, homeowners in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI), animals²², and even the fire itself.²³

Fiction, as a genre, is traditionally associated with the term “moral imagination”—reading the fictitious story of, say, a firefighter having to make a choice in a dangerous situation, the reader almost unconsciously reflects on what his or her actions would be in the given situation. But it could be argued that nonfiction has just as great an ability to impart the experiences of the “other”—because nonfiction content is assumed to be true, the reader is not required to willingly suspend disbelief in order to empathize with the content, as is required in fiction. Thus the various first-hand accounts, be they oral histories—*The Hinckley Fire: Stories from the Hinckley Fire* (Anderson, 1993) and *I’ll Never Fight Fire With My Bare Hands Again’: Recollections of the First Forest Rangers of the Inland Northwest* (Rothman, 1994)—or memoirs (the single biggest genre of “fire-literature”) successfully place us within another’s frame of reference.

As to whether or not these books do anything to move or ethically and morally challenge the reader, this is subjective, contingent on both the individual book and the individual reader’s experience with wildfire. However, one intriguing source of this “moral imagination” found in

²⁰ <http://www.amazon.com/John-N.-Maclean/e/B001H6QEZQ>

²¹ Many post-modern authors use various means to intentionally disrupt this “contract” but that’s another story.

²² See: Zompolis, G. N. (1994). *Operation Pet Rescue: Animal Survivors of the Oakland, California, Firestorm*.

²³ George R. Stewart’s novel *Spitcat* is exemplary in this regard, giving careful attention to the fire as experienced by firefighters and lookouts, forest rangers and smokejumpers, animals, trees, bushes, and the fire itself.

fire-literature is the large number of “Fire Lookout” narratives—at least seven memoirs have been written about the life in a fire-lookout tower. It is not uncommon for Fire Lookout narratives to use fire as an excuse to explore other issues—hermitage, solitude, one’s place in the world, etc. Fire rarely actually appears; when it does it is from a distance. Undistracted by flames and smoke, the reader is thus drawn into the personal world of another human being; and, being that the author is usually alone, an even tighter bond is created between reader and author. What makes this a “moral imagination” depends on the author and the subjects explored, but these books explore the role of humans and nature, as Philip Connors (author of *Fire Season: Field Notes from a Wilderness Lookout*) describes in a recent interview in *Zyzyva*:

“Lookouts, by being stationed in a fixed location for long stretches of time, have the luxury of becoming intimate with wilderness in a way most people do not. We can’t help becoming amateur phenologists: noting when the aphids hatch, when the irises bloom, when the broad-tailed hummingbirds arrive. We detect patterns. We touch the ancient mysteries of life in the wild. We may even learn to see in new ways — more closely, perhaps, and deeper into geologic time. If we’re lucky we get close to learning how to “think like a mountain,” in Aldo Leopold’s great phrase. I think we’d do well to bring this knowledge back to the culture we come from, even or especially if that culture seems increasingly heedless of that type of knowledge.”

Vicarious engagement

This aspect of literature focuses on the author’s use of language to place the reader in scene, to feel the heat of the fire, hear the cackle of flame. The author, as novelist or memoirist or as “embedded journalist,” supplies the visuals and sensory details for the “armchair firefighter” reader. This is similar to “moral imagination” but is perhaps shallower—it places the reader-spectator in scene without necessarily doing anything to move or challenge the reader in an ethical or moral manner.

Because it doesn’t necessarily concern itself with this harder moral work, “vicarious engagement” is perhaps the most common characteristic of fire found throughout the literature. Seldom is the opportunity to describe a fire let go without lush prose, vivid metaphor (“It came so close it sounded as if it were cracking bones”²⁴) or dramatic, sensuous word use (“But to be burned while still breathing, every nerve ending screaming, the skin boiling, dragon breath inside the lungs, that was the worst.”²⁵) or simple, understated sentences (“It burns as if it were soaked with gasoline... In thick black smoke there is wild orange flame, rising through the canyons like explosion crowns. The canyons serve as chimneys, and in minutes whole mountains are aflame, resembling volcanoes, emitting high columns of fire and smoke. The smoke can rise twenty thousand feet.”²⁶) The use of language and metaphor in placing the reader in scene is almost certainly the root of the enduring success of Jack London’s story “To Build a Fire,” which hones the focus of the story—kindling a blaze—to a razor sharp edge by describing the bitter cold.

An interesting aspect of this vicarious engagement is that it does not need to fully rely on language itself, as Philp Levine acknowledged in his poem *Fire*²⁷. In the poem, Levine’s son, returning from a fire with “eyes glazed with seeing,/his time and place gone” would

“...raise his shaking right arm
above his head, and with his palm

²⁴ Norman Maclean: *Young Men and Fire*, page 6

²⁵ Timothy Egan: *The Big Burn*, page 13

²⁶ John McPhee: *Control of Nature*, page 210

²⁷ “Fire” appears in *What Work Is*, Knopf, 1995.

*open sweep it toward me again
and again and speak without grammar,
sometimes without words, of what
had taken place.”*

In terms of vicarious engagement, perhaps the most interesting question is how authors describe wildfire; what the words and metaphors they employ say, on a whole, about the perspective of wildfire they are transferring to the reading public. Are there more instances of words like “devastating” and “catastrophic” as opposed to “regeneration” and “nutrient cycling”? In short, do these “vicarious engagements” propagate the “Smokey the Bear” paradigms or do they also reflect the “Ecological Fire” paradigms? Unfortunately, lacking a software program that searches for individual words within every (digitized) fire-book, this is a question that exceeds our capacities in this literature review.

Still, it’s interesting to compare words used in titles. Despite the saying, we do judge books by their cover. Say you go into one of the increasingly vanishing bookstores in your home town to peruse the stacks. How do you choose a book? The title grabs you first, then you look at the cover, then you read the summary on the back and note any blurbs, and if you’re really interested you flip through it to get a sense of writing style and further content. But still, as any marketer or advertiser will tell you, those first few seconds are critical. So what are our collected books of fire telling us in those first critical seconds? What are the initial impressions?

On one hand we have fire-books whose titles bear the words: Enemy. Battle. Trials. Survivors. Firestorm. Scorched Earth. Ashes. Burned. Deadliest. Epitaph. Red Skies. Betrayal. Disaster. Flaming. Fight. Monster. Ugly. Fire in Paradise. Politics. *‘A Night of Terror, Devastation, Suffering and Awful Woe’*. Inferno. Devastating. Devil. Dragon. Control. Epic. Protection. Rescue. Economics. Force. Dying. Cost. Catastrophe. Empire. Management. Mismanagement. Warning. Tax dollars. Property. Hell roaring. Ghosts. Issues. Consequences. FrontLines. Hell. Pandemic. Nuclear winters. Haze. Blazing. Loss. Ignition. Danger Zone. Failed.

On the other hand we have: “The Fire that Saved America.” “Changed America.” Lessons. Bravery. Community. Zen. Tool. Rising. Rebirth. Renewal. Mimicking. Warrior. Restoring. Adventures. Insights. Dance. Living. Phoenix. Civilization. Ecology. Change. Experience. Interpretation. Spirit. Calling. “A great day.” Guardian. History. Culture. Encounter. Tending. Coping. Awful splendor. Context. Practice. Heritage. Reflections. Landscape. Natural.

Creative vision

One important and genre-spanning aspect of literature is that of envisioning opportunities and paths for the future. As the author Ian Watson said: "I see science fiction now as a survival strategy generally — a metaphorical tool for thinking about the future flexibly and boldly." As the critic and novelist John Gardner wrote, “True art clarifies life, establishing modes of human action, casts nets towards the future, carefully judges our right and wrong directions, celebrates and mourns...it invents prayers and weapons. It designs visions worthy of trying to make fact.”

There’s certainly plenty of evidence that connects our visualization of what we dream to be possible to what we eventually create as a new reality. Gene Rodenberry’s imagination in *Star Trek* and that of Arthur Clarke’s, Marvin Minsky’s and Stanley Kubrick’s in *2001: A Space Odyssey* had a direct impact on funding certain projects at NASA because scientists and researchers had “seen” this whole imaginary world, and they sought to make it real.²⁸

²⁸ <http://gizmodo.com/5404227/normal-was-never-cool-inception-of-perception>

How, then, does “fire-literature” think and cast nets towards the future?

From a historical perspective, fire-literature appears to mirror the cultural and political shifts in our regard for wildfire. The 1950s, ‘60s, and ‘70s were rife with titles such as *Burning an Empire: The Story of American Forest Fires* and *The Enemy is Fire: The History of Forest Protection in the Big Timber Country*. It’s not until the 1980s—beginning with Stephen Pyne’s work—that fire books begin to question fire as unmitigated evil, a trend that continues today.

But it seems important to note that on a whole it’s not literature that has pushed the vision of fire forward—it’s science. Fire literature follows and reflects the science. That’s not to say that it doesn’t have a valuable role in transferring (or translating) science from scientific circles to the greater public, but nonetheless, as far as creative vision, it’s the scientists and land managers and fire-scholars like Stephen Pyne—not the creative authors—that are doing much of the creative visioning.

This is not always the case; one book that creatively features a vision of future wildfire is Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*. McCarthy’s future world has been incinerated by wildfires (unleashed by an unspecified war) and is in the grips of nuclear winter. Fire in *The Road* has two roles: as the force that destroyed the world, and as the force that sustains life: “Where all was burnt to ash before them no fires were to be had and the nights were long and dark and cold beyond anything they’d yet encountered.” Yet fire offers the only color in the “cauterized terrain”—all else is grey with the “ashes of the late world.” Fire is also used metaphorically: as a religious-substitute, as an indication of humanity and hope: “nothing bad is going to happen to us” the father tells his son, “because we’re carrying the fire.” As bleak as a vision as McCarthy’s may be, it is a valuable reminder of the power of literature to foresee and present—and hopefully, in the case, *prevent*—a future.

But, as mentioned previously, “creative vision” is not limited to envisioning our future: it casts the present world in a new light; examines and presents objects and phenomena in hitherto unseen ways. One “fire-book” that exemplifies this (in fact, one of the only fire books that does this) is Gaston Bachelard’s *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*.²⁹ Bachelard’s lifelong (and groundbreaking) interest in epistemology—the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge, in particular its foundations, scope, and validity—led him to “studies of imagination,” in which he explored poetry, dreams, psychoanalysis, and the imagination.³⁰ In *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, the psychoanalytical subject is actually the human conceptualizations of fire and our subjective, ancient responses to it. In accordance with his epistemological outlook, Bachelard claims that we are simply too ruled by our passions and our loves to objectively look at something such as a flame or a fire—no matter how determined we are to remain detached, a reverie is induced that causes our emotional body to project itself onto the flame, which in turn alters our conclusions.³¹

Still, despite instances such as *The Road* and *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, the majority of fire-literature does not do enough to envision opportunities and paths for the future of humanity

²⁹ Bachelard was a French philosopher who rose to some of the most prestigious positions in the French academy, his work on poetics and the philosophy of science influencing all disciplines of the humanities (art, architecture, literature, poetics, psychology, philosophy and language.) In addition to *The psychoanalysis of fire* (written in 1938), he wrote *The poetics of fire (The poetics of the phoenix)* and *The flame of a candle*.

³⁰ The chapter titles of *Psychoanalysis of Fire* alone tell of the “creative vision” Bachelard brought to the subject of fire: Fire and Respect, Fire and Reverie, Sexualized Fire, Firewater (brandy) and Spontaneous Combustion, Idealized Fire, Fire and Purity, Original Fire, Fire and Respect.

³¹ “We have only to speak of an object to think that we are being objective. But, because we chose it in the first place, the object reveals more about us than we do about it.” Gaston Bachelard *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*

and wildfire. On a whole it is reactive to historic events or scientific and ecological advancements.

Capacity for complexity

Literature has a unique ability to not oversimplify moral, existential, and ecological dilemmas. In terms of wildfire, this is a valuable asset.

One interesting aspect our bibliography revealed was that, just as fire-literature paralleled our societal understanding of the role of fire, it has mirrored the way we approach the subject. Whereas early nonfiction fire accounts—whether memoir (*The SmokeEaters: The Story of a Firecrew*, 1923) or documentary (*The Firebirds: How Bush Flying Won Its Wings*, 1974)—had a narrow, siloed, or often strictly personal-account approach, nonfiction fire-literature of the past thirty years has expanded its range to draw upon natural history, philosophy, sociology, economics, and ecology, often all in one book.

In short, with the evolution of thought that fire is not simply “bad” but a complex political, tactical, ecological, and emotional phenomenon, authors are turning to as many disciplines as they can, including the Humanities. Much of this shift can be attributed to Stephen Pyne—whose dozen fire-as-cultural-history books represent a sea change in fire-literature. Following this vein have been David Strohmaier’s books, especially *Driftsmoke*, a contemplative look at wildfire that incorporates philosophy, religion, and history, and uses loss³² as a “unifying principle that might help explain our ambivalence toward fire on the landscape of North America.”³³ Another example is M. Desmond’s *On the Fireline: Living and Dying with Wildland Firefighters*³⁴, which explores the firecrew from a deeply sociological perspective.

Ever since the Yellowstone fires of 1988, when wildfire really burst onto the public’s consciousness, wildfire has been garnering more attention from journalists trained to shift through competing and conflicting claims and ideologies. For example, take John Maclean’s book *Fire on the Mountain: The True Story of the South Canyon Fire*. As the editor of “wildfirenews.com” wrote in a review,

“Because the truth about what happened on that awful day in 1994 is so convoluted, so complex and multi-layered, and so strewn with conflicting viewpoints and cumulative errors and circumstances, writing the true story would have been impossible for anyone intimately involved with the fire. Maclean, however, brings his formidable background as a 30-year journalist to the story, and he makes the setting, the background, and the tragedy come alive for his readers. With meticulous attention to detail and the unflagging search for facts that only a professional journalist can bring to bear, Maclean waded through stacks and years of documents, reports, interviews, and background material to produce a book that exceeded all expectations.”

Another book that reflects a remarkable understanding of wildfire’s complexity and presents a model example of dealing with that complexity—and does so in a far different way than John Maclean’s technique—is Norman Maclean’s³⁵ *Young Men and Fire*. *Young Men and Fire* recounts the story of the Mann Gulch forest fire, which torched some 4,500 acres of tinder-dry

³² More specifically: “loss of fire from the landscape, loss of life, loss of livelihood, and loss of place” (*Driftsmoke* p. xvi).

³³ Strohmaier, *Driftsmoke* (p. xi).

³⁴ University of Chicago Press, 2009.

³⁵ John Maclean’s father.

hills in western Montana on Aug. 5, 1949, killing 13 young smokejumpers, the worst tragedy ever to befall U.S. firefighters.

Almost immediately, Maclean informs us of what a complicated task he has set out for himself: "So this story is a test of its own belief—that in this cockeyed world there are shapes and designs, if only we have some curiosity, training, and compassion and take care not to lie or be sentimental." In search of these shapes and designs Maclean tests his own beliefs, and examines the Mann Gulch fire from various perspectives: metaphorical, philosophical, archetypal, literary, theological, journalistic. Even so he is unable to arrive at a satisfying conclusion: "There's a lot of tragedy in the universe that has missing parts and comes to no conclusion, including probably the tragedy that awaits you and me." This was, in part, why the book was not finished in his lifetime; as the editors of the posthumously published book describe, the book had "become a story in search of itself as a story, following where Maclean's compassion led."

That last line hits on something important as far as our discussion of complexity in fire-literature: Maclean never saw the story of Mann Gulch as set in stone, despite the fact that the fire seemed to offer so natural of one: fire starts, young men die, fire ends. But Maclean was a better author than that³⁶. Few other fire authors have been able to resist the often simplistic surface story—most settle for the story seemingly presented to them, without interrogating the complexity.

And fire is complex—as an ecological and anthropogenic process; as a phenomenon upon which we drape innumerable perspectives. Often a single fire stretches across all perspectives or swings on a long pendulum between two polarities, as represented by the title of S.F. Arno's book *Flames in Our Forest: Disaster or Renewal?*³⁷ or as described by Gaston Bachelard, in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*:

"Among all phenomena, (fire) is really the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil. It shines in Paradise. It burns in Hell. It is gentleness and torture. It is cookery and it is apocalypse. It is a pleasure for the good child sitting prudently by the hearth; yet it punishes any disobedience when the child wishes to play too close to its flames. It is well-being and it is respect. It is a tutelary and a terrible divinity, both good and bad. It can contradict itself; thus it is one of the principles of universal explanation."

Despite the polarities, wildfire has much capacity for complexity—whether it's analyzing a single fire from historical, political, economic, ecological, personal, and culturally nuanced perspectives or elevating it to the level of Tragedy as Norman Maclean did.

But on a whole there is startlingly little subtlety, creative perspective, and variation within the fire-literature, as we shall explain further in our analysis of literary tropes. The presence of tropes, in and of themselves, does not necessarily exclude complexity, but the weight of a single trope ("Fire as Battlefield") indicates that one story is being told over and over, to the detriment of what could be a truly diverse genre.

One could certainly argue that readers enjoy recognizing familiar stories, and easily settle into literary tropes and archetypes like "Fire as Battlefield" exactly because they're easily recognizable, as they've been around since the dawn of literature. But one could also argue that

³⁶ Though, it must be said, his book suffered because of his inability to latch onto the story—as one reviewer put it, the book has "too many of asides and tangents that don't yet fit the larger theme and don't come back. The not-yet-complete and not-quite-polished nature of this book is, I suppose, its own testament to mortality, but rather at odds with the view of death that Maclean wants to convey." ("With the Brave Young Dead," James R. Kincaid, *New York Times Book Review*, 8/16/1992

³⁷ Island Press, 2002.

readers also like to be surprised³⁸, and that, even if every story has already been told, the author's responsibility is to infuse new elements or twists or styles into this re-telling. Either way, it's hard not to regard the current fire literature as offering a limited range of perspectives. Few contemporary subjects would seem riper for Swift-ian satire or Ionesco-like absurdity than the conflicting narratives and human values on display in the event of a chaparral fire in Malibu, and yet fire-literature does not reflect these possibilities.

Effectiveness

The "effectiveness" of literature—or the arts in general—is extremely difficult to determine.³⁹ Certainly, when compared to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Jungle*, or *Silent Spring*, there hasn't been any work of fire-literature that has had even remotely the same cultural effect. Of course, very few books ever published in any genre or topic have had such effect—books that have directly influenced policy should be considered outliers, and probably not used as indicators of literature's ability to affect political and social change.

Taking our other characteristics of literature in hand, it could be argued that all fire-literature is, to a certain degree, effective. After all, if you agree with the "moral imagination" argument, that literature provides a way to stockpile experiences even if they are not our own, and that, in conjunction with our personal experiences, these imagined experiences create a more informed judgment—then all fire-literature has been effective.

Nonetheless, as far as effectively achieving cultural change regarding wildfire (or even land-use; like, say, Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*), fire-literature has fallen short. Norman Maclean's *Young Men and Fire* is likely the most popular or well-known book (it was a national best seller and won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1992), and has probably done more than any other book to not only raise wildfire into the realm of great literature, but bring it to the forefront of popular culture⁴⁰. That said, the book focused on a certain fire in Montana in 1949, telling the story in terms of tragedy of youth and death—it did not do much to explain wildfire in its greater ecological, cultural, political, or historic role.

John N. Maclean's *Fire on the Mountain: The True Story of the South Canyon Fire* was also a national bestseller, and received the Mountains and Plains Booksellers award as the best non-fiction of 1999. Underground Films, Inc. has developed a script from the book for a full-length feature movie, and the History Channel has released a two-hour docu-movie based on the book. So John Maclean's work is reaching a wide audience. The question, as with his father's book and all fire-literature, is how effective this outreach is: is it changing cultural values about public land management? Is it affecting zoning laws in the critical Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)? Is it moving the greater American culture away from Smokey the bear's blanket pyrophobia and towards a more nuanced and site-specific ecological understanding? Hard to say with any certainty, but indications point to no. (To be fair, it was not intended to do so.)

On the other hand, a number of fire-books seem to have been written explicitly to affect management and public consciousness. These seem effective in varying (and, again, subjective) degrees. For example, the book *Hell on Earth: The Wildfire Pandemic*,⁴¹ struck this reader as a

³⁸ If readers like to be *challenged* is up for debate.

³⁹ And endlessly debated, from Auden's line "poetry makes nothing happen" (from "In Memory of W. B. Yeats") to Frank Zappa: "There are more love songs than anything else. If songs could make you do something we'd all love one another."

⁴⁰ Pyne calls *Young Men and Fire* "the most dazzling achievement" of the fire community. (*Tending Fire*, p. 142)

⁴¹ Porter, D. L. a. R., Lee (2009). *Hell on Earth: The Wildfire Pandemic*, Forge Books.

somewhat hyperbolic account of the wildfire situation, whereas the majority of Stephen Pyne's work seemed a well-argued and logical denunciation of historic and contemporary fire practices.

There has been, certainly, a rash of fire-books denouncing historic fire policies. G. Wuerthner's 2006 book *Wildfire: A Century of Failed Forest Policy*⁴², being the paragon example. Again, it is difficult to determine how effective these polemical books have been.

Of course, this leads to the question of who leads change? Could it be that a change in the language employed by firefighters affects media accounts which affect the public? Or do firefighters have a limited role, and change needs to first come from science-based policy? Or can the science affect literature on its own accord, which affects the public, thus sidestepping policy altogether? Though this may be out of the scope and capabilities of this particular Literature Review, one important aspect concerning "effectiveness" is the question: who is the audience for the majority of these books? Most authors seek to reach a broad audience (if for the sake of sales if nothing else), but many writers write for perceived communities—the author chooses stories, focuses narrative, and employs language in a way that will engage the author's chosen community. There is certainly much evidence that one of the main audiences of fire-literature is the firefighter community itself.⁴³

This unverified assumption may help explain the prevalence of certain tropes, especially in memoirs: the fire community is repeating its myths and stories to itself. And again, this is not a bad thing. Tens of thousands of men and women fight fire every season, return home, and the stories they tell themselves, one another, and their extended circle of family and friends have an important cultural effect—they either reinforce or challenge dominant paradigms. As Patrick White wrote in *The Tree of Man*:

"The fact was, the fighters had become not only exhausted but fascinated by the fire. There were very few who did not succumb to the spell of fire. They were swayed by it, instead of it by them... Because they looked into the fire, and seen what you do see, they could rearrange their lives. So they felt."

By White's reckoning, firefighters—steeped in the literature and grounded in real experience—may be rearranging their lives and perspectives of fire. If we assume that media tend to adopt the lingo and metaphors of firefighters (as we discuss further below), and media transfers this culture to the public, a change in firefighter culture may very well affect a change in the greater popular culture⁴⁴.

As for the greater public, we should keep two things in mind: one is that a very small amount of the current United States population is directly affected by fire⁴⁵. Houses in the

⁴² Foundation for Deep Ecology, 2006.

⁴³ Certainly the majority of Amazon's "reader comments" reflect this trend. For a striking example, see the Amazon reviews of D. Gatenbein's *A Season of Fire: Four Months on the Firelines of America's Forests*, in which the author is eviscerated by an online army of firefighters. The majority of the Amazon reviewers in most of the books listed in our Literature Review are firefighters...

⁴⁴ Of course, this leads to the question of who leads change? Could it be that a change in the language employed by firefighters affects media accounts which affect the public? Or do firefighters have a limited role, and change needs to first come from science-based policy? Or can the science affect literature on its own accord, which affects the public, thus sidestepping policy altogether? An interesting topic, if it out of the scope and capabilities of this particular Literature Review.

⁴⁵ This argument is slightly skewed, as the vast majority of wildfires do occur on public land (and costs of fighting such fires are paid for by American taxpayers), which, technically, is owned by the American citizenry. Nonetheless, in most cases this is still an indirect affect.

WUI— ranch homes in the Bitterroot Valley and mansions in Malibu—do not represent the greater population.

Second, it should also be kept in mind that Americans are not the most literate culture. An Associated Press poll revealed that in 2007, 27% of Americans had not read a single book. Of the respondents who reported having read a book (73% of those polled), the mean was 6.5 books per year.⁴⁶ Additionally, in 2009, according to our bibliography, nine fire-books were published (only three other years produced as many). But in 2009, the United States published 288,355 "new titles and editions."⁴⁷ Thus one of the greatest years of publishing for fire-books still represented only 0.00003% of the total volume of published books.

This indicates that Americans receive far more information about wildfire from other sources of media than they do books.⁴⁸ According to one national study⁴⁹, the "Top-Rated Sources for Fire Information" ranked: 32% newspaper article, 16 % radio ad, 13% web site, 12% newsletter mailed to your home, 8% brochure or pamphlet, 8% booth at an event like a fair or farmers' market, and 5% newspaper advertisement. TV was not offered as a choice because the pollsters already knew TV ranks at 80% or higher as an information source. Notably, books do not appear as an information source.

6.2 Trope analysis

Our literature review revealed a number of recurring themes and narrative devices which we organized by "literary tropes."⁵⁰ We use "trope" to refer specifically to commonly-used (occasionally overused) techniques, themes, or devices. One way of thinking of a trope is that most fictional works have basically the same structural foundation. For example, Christopher Booker wrote a book: *The Seven Basic Plots*, which are:

- Overcoming the Monster
- Rags to Riches
- The Quest
- Voyage and Return
- Comedy
- Tragedy
- Rebirth

Manifestations of these few structural types can be sorted into startlingly similar story-telling devices and conventions we refer to as tropes. Another way of looking at tropes is to think of them as broad, stereotypical "terms of engagement." How are authors engaging with fire? How

⁴⁶ <http://surveys.ap.org/data/lpsos/national/2007-08-09%20AP%20Book%20Topline.pdf>

⁴⁷ <http://www.bowkerinfo.com/bowker/IndustryStats2010.pdf>

⁴⁸ Which may not be a good thing, as this other media (television, newspaper, movies) often broadcast a vision of fire in line with the aforementioned *Hell on Earth* book. As Stephen Pyne says: "Fire's image, particularly on television, animates a message: Fire is an environmental evil, the medium of virtually all the biosphere's larger ills...There is nothing even remotely equivalent in the media that argues that fire might have a legitimate role in global ecology; no friendly flame to answer the ugly charges, no image to plead that fire could be something more than the common catalyst in the Earth's environmental wreckage." ("Attention! All Keepers of the Flame," Pyne, 1999.) For more, see: "Fanning the Flames? Media Coverage during Wildfire Events and its Relation to Broader Societal Understandings of the Hazard" (Paveglio et al.) *Human Ecology Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2011

⁴⁹ IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR 10-YEAR COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY; GOAL 3 TASK 2; PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN ON THE ECOLOGICAL ROLE OF FIRE; PREPARED BY PARTNERS IN FIRE EDUCATION; JUNE 2008

⁵⁰ All tropes as elucidated below are of our own device.

does “fire-literature” reflexively cluster in to groups when viewed as a whole and from a distance?

One thing to note is that, though these tropes may seem formulaic, and thus worthy of criticism, that is not necessarily the case. Tropes are so common for a good reason: they are effective and popular. As Neal Gabler put it in *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality*: “One does not necessarily have to cluck in disapproval to admit that entertainment is all the things its detractors say it is: fun, effortless, sensational, mindless, formulaic, predictable and subversive. In fact, one might argue that those are the very reasons so many people love it.”

1. Fire as Battlefield

Subtropes: Man vs. Nature/ Firefighter as Dragon-slayer/ Fire as Extreme Sport/Fire as Proving-Ground

Much if not most of the existing “fire-literature” focuses on *fighting* wildfire—wildfire is a force of nature that must be brought under control. Whether fire is good or bad ecologically is beside the point—fire is the enemy to be defeated. The plot concerns man vs. nature, and only with determination, fortitude, sweat, blood, luck, organization, camaraderie, grace under pressure, and superior firepower can man overcome, in the words of a review of one fire-book “savage nature.”⁵¹

Much of this literature thus directly or indirectly treats firefighting as an extreme sport, an adrenaline-fueled test of the individual and the “band of brothers” fire-crew (many, if not most, of these narratives are written by men and reflect what seems to be a deeply entrenched macho attitude within the firefighting community). Fire is thus a setting synonymous with a “proving-ground.”

This literary trope stems directly out of the reality of the fire-fighting culture. With annual costs of fighting wildfire routinely topping one billion US dollars; with the complicated bureaucracies designed to fight such fires; with a vast workforce composed predominately of young men employing many of the elements of modern warfare, wildland fire-fighting has reached a level of that some critics have dubbed the “fire-military-industrial complex.”

Certainly the language employed by firefighters reflects the military-like mechanisms of fighting fire. To list but a sample from the “Glossary of Wildland Fire Terminology”:

- *Attack Line* (“A line of hose, preconnected to the pump of a fire apparatus and ready for immediate use in attacking a fire.”)
- *Attack Unit* (“Single vehicle or aircraft and its associated personnel and material provided for the purpose of responding to and abating a fire or other emergency.”)⁵²

But, from a literary and historical perspective, the situation of the contemporary fire-fighter as rendered by the author (often, it must be said, the fire-fighter himself) is simply a continuation of the ancient and archetypal heroic epics—Gilgamesh, the Iliad, Beowulf. These “hero narratives” traditionally focus on friendship, loss, adventure, manly questing, and a battle with great, elemental, and evil forces. Certainly the physical stage reinforces these perspectives of fire as

⁵¹ This came from a review of M. A. Taylor’s book *Jumping Fire: A Smokejumper’s Memoir of Fighting Wildfire*: “he deftly captures not only the savagery of nature, but also the strength of the human spirit and the joy in combating the wild.”

⁵² All definitions are from National Wildfire Coordinating Group’s (NWCG) Glossary of Wildland Fire Terminology; <http://www.nwcg.gov/pms/pubs/glossary/c.htm>

warfare: the firefighter's battle-camps, command centers, shifting deployments, overhead helicopters, smoke and confusion and threat of death.

This is reinforced with a look back to Christopher Booker's *The Seven Basic Plots*. Both "Overcoming the Monster" and "The Quest," are well represented in fire-literature, as are varying degrees of the other five. Which again raises the point about complexity—from a literary, creative point of view, these man vs. nature tropes are in danger of becoming clichés. But then again, as "tvtropes.com" is wise to point out, deeming something cliché is "very subjective and dependent on the consumer's culture and knowledge level,"⁵³ in other words, for the first-time reader, a fire-as-battlefield novel may be exciting and new; to the jaded bibliographer, it's just another tired, predictable, and overused narrative.

This sort of structural analysis—basic plots and hero archetypes—leads one to believe that readers expect these sort of tropes; after all, in an epic, the protagonist must go on a journey, in a romance, there must be some obstacles thrown between the lovers. If this is what readers want and expect, perhaps it is too much to expect of fire authors that they not play to the dominant cultural thought of them as modern day heroes. This becomes a chicken or the egg riddle: which came first: our cultural expectation of firefighters as dragonslayers, or firefighters stories from the lines that affected our cultural thought? An analysis of media coverage of two wildfires in 2006 struggled with the same question:

*"What remains unclear is whether the media is merely reflecting broader discourses about wildfire or influencing public opinions through their framing. By comparing the above results with existing social science research on fire, we will suggest that these elements are mutually reinforcing — that is, the media not only draw from existing public discourse in producing their news stories, but they also perpetuate outdated ideas of fire exclusion through the promotion of private property as the primary concern during fire events."*⁵⁴

In a recent essay about wildland firefighting, Jason Mark noted how the media culture adopts the language of the firefighting culture :

"As the reporters filed their stories, their descriptions took on the war-inflected language that is the default vocabulary among professional firefighters. Fire crews "dug in," and, as the conflagration spread, "bulked up their defenses" and "reinforced their lines." For a few days, a "stalemate" persisted. Then, when the weather shifted, the firefighters "surrounded" the fire in an "assault" as they "moved in heavy equipment and more personnel." The news from Big Sur that week could have been mistaken for a dispatch from Iraq."⁵⁵

And perhaps this is not necessarily a bad thing. For one, the "hero narrative," in all its forms, has provided some of the greatest works of literature and entertainment the world has ever seen. And, on a cultural whole, it could be argued that the "fire as battlefield" trope may not entirely be detrimental.

The major proponent of this view is William James, who in a famous 1906 essay "The Moral Equivalent to War" argued that "militarism is the great preserver of our ideals of hardihood, and human life with no use for hardihood would be contemptible." Thus, in times of peace, "we must make new energies and hardihoods continue the manliness to which the military

⁵³ <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/Cliche>

⁵⁴ "Fanning the Flames? Media Coverage during Wildfire Events and its Relation to Broader Societal Understandings of the Hazard," Pavegio *et al*; *Human Ecology Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2011

⁵⁵ Jason Mark, "Mission Impossible," EarthIsland
http://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/eij/article/mission_impossible/

mind so faithfully clings. Martial virtues must be the enduring cement; intrepidity, contempt of softness, surrender of private interest, obedience to command, must still remain the rock upon which states are built.” James’ idea was that there should be “a conscription of the whole youthful population to form for a certain number of years a part of the army enlisted against *Nature*.”⁵⁶ A war against Nature would help “get the childishness knocked out of them, and to come back into society with healthier sympathies and soberer ideas. They would have paid their blood-tax, done their own part in the immemorial human warfare against nature; they would tread the earth more proudly, the women would value them more highly, they would be better fathers and teachers of the following generation.”

Not only has this come to pass, but the same narratives of fire as an enemy force to be “fought,” of nature as a capricious and malevolent force needing to be brought under control, are as propagated in 2012 as they were in 1906. However, as we shall see below in the “Fire as Renewal” trope, more and more authors are questioning the idea of warfare against nature; arguing that perhaps it is less important that we “tread the earth more proudly” as it is that we treat it more humbly; that we should treat fire as a critical, foundational ecological process.

2. Fire as Incident: The Great/Terrible/Devastating Burn/Inferno/Firestorm of 18 /19 !

The vast majority of “fire books” relate the stories of extreme or exceptional fires, ignoring the reality that the majority of fires are mundane and unexceptional. There is good reason for this: such fires make poor stories, especially when contrasted to the slew of adjectives employed in describing some of the historical fires above. John Maclean, for example, focuses almost exclusively on large wildfires that resulted in firefighter fatalities.

One of the problems facing authors wanting to write about wildfire is that timeless, layered, and dynamic processes such as wildfires do not easily fit into narratives. But by focusing on an individual wildfire the author can deliver the narrative as a tidy arc from beginning to end.

One consequence of this may be that it reinforces one of our fundamental misconceptions of wildfire: we view it as separate, absolute, detached, as an event and not a process. We know that individual fires are an integral part of greater ecological, anthropogenic, and geological processes that have been at work for the past ten-thousand years, that fire is a process stretching across innumerable spatial and temporal scales. That, as William Faulkner put it: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”⁵⁷ And yet we can’t seem to help but see wildfire in terms of single events bound by ignition and extinguishment.

Not all authors are so limited, of course. G.R. Stewart, in *Fire*, claims that his fictional Spitcat Fire has a lifespan of merely eleven days, “yet its effects could be reckoned ahead in centuries.” Most of the “Fire as Incident” books give some account of the long-term effects of the fire, even if just in summary of epilogue form. But on a whole the literature gives the sense of an underlying acceptance that all that comes after extinguishment of the blaze—the ecological recovery, the healing—*is no longer fire*.⁵⁸ That is something else: “fire-effects.”

⁵⁶ Thus a sub-trope of the “Fire as battlefield” is not just “Fire as a Moral Equivalent to War,” but “Fire as Economic Activity,” which has been well-documented, including by Timothy Inglass here:

www.idahoforests.org/img/pdf/FUSEE.pdf

⁵⁷ *Requiem for a Nun* (1951)

⁵⁸ As is hinted at in the title “*After the Fires: The Ecology of Change in Yellowstone National Park*” (Wallace, 2004).

However, as related to the process of wildfire and the investigation of cultural responses to fire that is the heart of this report, credit should be given to the way many of these books unflinchingly lay the blame for many of these “Great/Terrible/Devastating” fires at the feet of social and cultural conditions.⁵⁹ For example, the Peshtigo Fire, the Hinckley Fire, and the Minong Fire were as catastrophic and took as many lives as they did (an estimated 1,500 in the case of Peshtigo) exactly because of conditions—mainly slash piles—that were results of the logging practices near the turn of the century. Thus, despite the fact that these “Fire as Incident” narrative lines focus on fires that wiped out towns and killed citizens and firefighters alike, and are thus inscribing the concept of Destructive Fire into the literary canon, they are also serving as lessons and warnings about future anthropogenic land-change.

3. “All the World’s a Stage⁶⁰”: Fire as Plot Device or Setting/Background for Human Drama

Fire, in this case, is simply a backdrop, intentionally written into the narrative as a way to move the plot forward or as a challenge or obstacle in the path of one if not all of the main characters. In short, the story of the fire, much less fire itself, is far less important (if important at all) than that of the human drama in the foreground. In some ways this trope reflects a cultural consensus on “Nature” itself as a setting for human drama. In other ways, this reflects less of a human-centric cultural belief system than it does on the mechanisms of literature, which commonly uses nature and natural disasters as emotionally-charged settings or even as minor characters within themselves. Thus a natural phenomenon (storm, fire, “gloomy sea”) is rendered as empathetic of the character’s mood, (i.e. rain on the windows as a woman is grieving.) A common device with Romance Novels in particular is to use wildfire as a way of throwing protagonists together; especially as the environment of fire and flame reflects, say, the lover’s unquenchable passion and consuming ardor.

Depending on how this device is employed, it is referred to as “pathetic fallacy,” “anthropomorphism,” or “personification”,⁶¹ and is certainly not limited to Romance novels. In *The Great Gatsby*, for instance, the climax between Tom, Daisy, and Gatsby occurs on a scorching hot day, but the chilly weather on the following day represents the end of Gatsby and Daisy's romance. One thing to note is that often the wildfire is in the forefront of the action; indeed, most authors will flesh out even a “plot-device fire” sufficiently that it becomes a minor character within itself.⁶²

⁵⁹ It could be argued that the author is forced to point this out, as it is a fundamental aspect of the story, but nonetheless, the stories themselves thus serve as warnings about the effects of human-caused land changes.

⁶⁰ This phrase is from Shakespeare’s play “As You Like It”: “All the world’s a stage/And all the men and women merely players:/They have their exits and their entrances;/And one man in his time plays many parts...” .

⁶¹ “The pathetic fallacy, anthropomorphic fallacy or sentimental fallacy is the treatment of inanimate objects as if they had human feelings, thought, or sensations. The pathetic fallacy is a special case of the fallacy of reification. The word 'pathetic' in this use is related to 'pathos' or 'empathy' (capability of feeling), and is not pejorative. In the discussion of literature, the pathetic fallacy is similar to personification. Personification is direct and explicit in the ascription of life and sentience to the thing in question, whereas the pathetic fallacy is much broader and more allusive. "Personification" is a more obtrusive and formal use of human traits attributed to natural objects, according to M. H. Abrams. For example, "the sea is angry at us" would be the pathetic fallacy, but when the sea assumes a human form such as a sea god, that is overt personification.” *From Wikipedia*

⁶² Perhaps the best example of this is G.R. Stewart’s *Spitcat* (1971, Houghton Mifflin.)

Often wildfire is used as a setting for “coming of age” narratives (also known as *bildungsroman*⁶³): the wildfire is used as a plot device against which the protagonist can pit his or herself and thus develop mentally, emotionally, spiritually, etc.⁶⁴ For example, J. V. Crues’ *Firestorm in Paradise* is “a story about challenges that transform a boy into a man and enlightenment that opens the mind of a girl into womanhood. This is a novel of broken dreams; of conflict between Indian, city, and small-town cultures; and of the ultimate triumph when men abandon their differences and stand as one against a firestorm.”⁶⁵ In this case the fire is simply a convenient way for the author to explore the characters’ evolution.

This trope is not unusual; in fact, one can hardly even call it a “trope,” as it has been argued that the whole task of literature itself has been one of concerning and investigating humanity. As Russell Kirk’s wrote in a well-known essay titled “The Moral Imagination,”

Every major form of literary art has taken for its deeper themes the norms of human nature. . . . Until very recent years, men took it for granted that literature exists to form the normative consciousness - that is, to teach human beings their true nature, their dignity, and their place in the scheme of things. Such was the endeavor of Sophocles and Aristophanes, of Thucydides and Tacitus, of Plato and Cicero, of Hesiod and Vergil, of Dante and Shakespeare, of Dryden and Pope.

Concerning fire-literature, the technique of grounding human drama against a backdrop of natural tempest produced its greatest book: Norman Maclean’s *Young Men and Fire*. Perhaps unsurprisingly for a teacher of Shakespearean literature, Maclean explores the fire’s dimensions of grace, tragedy, and internal struggle.⁶⁶ He thus created a classic literary Tragedy out of the loss of fourteen young smokejumpers that hot August day.

“For the sake of these dead men and for his own sake, (Maclean) cannot allow the deaths to be pointless, accidents that offer neither redemption nor purgation. Refusing to leave us in “moral bewilderment,” he conducts a search “for the carefully measured grains of consolation needed to transform catastrophe into tragedy.” This is a modern tragedy, he believes, not a classical drama of “a monumental individual crossing the sword of his will with the sword of destiny” but a collective tragedy, the “tragedy of a crew,” a tragedy of “little details rather than big flaws,” a tragedy, he concedes, of “screwups” rather than the errors of gods.”⁶⁷

It seems that the use of wildfire as a plot device goes both ways. On the one hand, if wildfire is used as a “Dangerous and Unpredictable Force,” the general Fire-as Battlefield tropes are subsequently reinforced and the complexity and nuance that is the reality of wildfire is lost or dismissed. This seems to be the more common case.

On the other hand, despite the diminished role of wildfire as a subject, this technique can still be used in a beneficial way. For example, it could be argued that a significant portion of fire-

⁶³ As previously mentioned, many of these tropes overlap and are employed in various combinations—obviously the “Fire as Proving Ground” sub-trope is closely related to these “Fire as Bildungsroman” plot devices.

⁶⁴ In this way the “trial by fire,” plot, so to speak, overlaps with the “proving-ground” subplot popular in the “Fire as Battlefield” trope.

⁶⁵ From the back cover blurb, Daniel and Daniel Publishing, 1998. Another example is C. Andreae’s *The Smoke Eaters*, in which a “hard-boiled female firefighter” is pitted not only against the wildfire, but, perhaps more importantly to the novel, “gender hostility, professional jealousy, political interference and a murderous, psychotic arsonist.”

⁶⁶ As Maclean put it, part of the reason he wrote about the Mann Gulch Fire was that “one of the chief privileges of man is to speak up for the universe.”

⁶⁷ From “With the Brave Young Dead” by James R. Kincaid; *New York Times Book Review* 8/16/1992

literature—Fire Lookout Narratives—fit within this trope. For the most part, Fire Lookout narratives use fire as an excuse to explore other issues—hermitage, solitude, one’s place in the world, etc. Within this monastic engagement, fire becomes a study in ecological awareness and knowledge. Thus fire, in the particular case of a fire lookout narrative, at once provides a diminished role *and* a critical function in our cultural pursuit of environmental knowledge.

4. Fire as Dragon/ Fire as Elemental Evil/ Fire as Destroyer

This trope is, of course, linked to and inextricably supports the aforementioned “fire-as-battlefield” trope. Fire in this trope is regarded, in Pyne’s words, as “an environmental evil.” In Pyne’s book *World Fire* he notes how “the bushfire became a set piece of Australian literature and art, an icon of all that was alien, unassimilable, and threatening about this ‘land of contrarities.’”⁶⁸ This perspective is certainly not limited to Australia, as is evident in many of the titles in our bibliography: “Hell on Earth,” “Firestorm in Paradise,” “Monster Fire,” “Devil,” “Devastating Firestorms,” etc. While many of these books are more nuanced within the pages, the titles and covers alone certainly portray fire as unmitigated destruction.

It should be noted that the perspective of “Fire as Evil” did not create the “Fire as Battlefield” trope. In the WUI, fire would be fought, and likely on the same industrial scale that it is today, regardless of whether it was considered good or bad. At that point, fighting fire is a battle, regardless. What the “Fire as Dragon” trope does is elevate those fighting the fire to dragonslayers; it underpins the archetypal valor often attributed to courageous firefighters.

A talk given by Tom Lyons, Professor of English at Colorado State University, titled “Representations of Fire in the Bible,”⁶⁹ lends credence to how archetypal this trope truly is. According to Lyons, the Bible is “one of the Western world’s seminal sources of ideas, shaping the way we think and feel about a topic,” and with the patterns of Scripture installed in our minds, we are “very likely to associate fire with some transgression or evil.” Fire in the Bible is a “vehicle for judgment and punishment”; as it responds to human sin and “tests and purifies,” it symbolizes God. Whereas sometimes God appears in fire, as a comforting and reassuring presence, as in Moses’s encounter with the burning bush, more often, fire embodies a consuming God, a jealous God. Malachi says that God is “like a refiner’s fire”; John the Baptist declares, “I baptize you with water; He shall baptize with you with fire.”

Fire, in this light, is something to be feared, the bearer of grief and tragedy.

5. Fire as Renewal: Ecological Resilience Narratives

Sub-tropes: Fire as Community Building Process (a local community coming together in efforts to reduce fuels), Healing from Fire (a community’s responses to victims of fire), Fire as World Ecology (the exploration of the innumerable side-effects: smog, haze, pets in danger).

For the last forty years (with a large spike in the wake of the 1988 Yellowstone Fires), more and more books are being written that engage wildfire in terms of “Fire as Renewal: Ecological

⁶⁸ (Pyne, *World Fire*, pg 36)

⁶⁹ The talk was given at the “Facing Fire: Lessons from the Ashes” conference convened by the Center of the American West in 2001. More about this talk and conference can be found at <http://centerwest.org/projects/more/facing-fire/>

Resilience.” These narratives offer an optimistic denouement to the “Fire as Tragedy” tropes, or try and flip the tragedy by revealing the resilience and rebirth of many fire-prone ecosystems.

Part of the reason that this is a relatively “new” trope is that the field of ecology itself—on which rests our understanding of fire’s critical natural role—is a relatively new arrival to the scientific field. Ecological tenets such as succession, feedback loops, and resilience have yet to fully cross into cultural consciousness. Furthermore, many of the finer-scale ecological mechanisms and effects of wildfire are still not fully understood by scientists and ecologists. As mentioned earlier, in the discussion of “creative vision,” literature tends to follow and reflect the science. Since our scientific understanding of wildfire is still young, incomplete, and hotly contested among scientists, it is little wonder that our literary understandings of fire-as-ecology are also tentative and incomplete.

This also applies for our cultural engagement with more contemporary fire-management policies. Some practices in some regions (e.g., fuel treatments after a period of suppression) may be so recent that there has not yet been time for cultural engagement. This is not the case for historic fire-management policies: numerous books (of which Wuerthner’s 2006 *Wildfire: A Century of Failed Forest Policy* is the paragon example) have taken to task the historic policies of strict fire-exclusion.

Despite the fact that this ecological trope is still emerging and evolving⁷⁰, it’s a considerably important one, in a number of ways. For one, it challenges the dominant Fire as Dragon/Fire as Battlefield tropes by portraying fire as a critical ecosystem process.⁷¹ Fire, in this case, is not a “natural disaster” but an “ecological stimulus.”⁷² It proves that the long-term devastation routinely predicted in the event of a wildfire does not generally come to pass.⁷³

“Fire as Renewal” also redeems, or simply continues, the oftentimes temporally limited “Fire as Incident” trope by focusing on the long-term events after the blaze was extinguished. One thing to be noted is that, in contrast to the way “Fire as Incident” naturally provides a narrative, “Fire as Renewal” does not. It is, in fact, very difficult to spin an engrossing narrative out of the myriad ecological processes that precede and follow a disturbance event like fire.⁷⁴

Perhaps most importantly, “Fire as Renewal” hints at a fundamental and often un-addressed issue concerning land-management and policy: that humans, to quote Aldo Leopold, are simply one “member of a community of interdependent parts.” Of course, as *Fire in California’s Ecosystem* notes, humans do have an inordinate effect of the world: “Humans have often disrupted these process, and the result can be that fire behavior and effects are outside their range of natural variation,” at which point fire is considered an “exogenous disturbance factor.”

Nonetheless, in terms of philosophical outlooks, the Fire-as-Ecology trope forces us to not only address the repercussions of our land-use (a century of fire-suppression, most obviously) managements, but also the various theological perspectives underpinning many of these management policies—perspectives that place humans as, say rulers “over the fish of the

⁷⁰ As far as we can tell, the first book to challenge the paradigm of fire-suppression was Ashley Schiff’s *Fire and Water: Scientific Heresy in the Forest Service*, published by Harvard University Press in 1962.

⁷¹ One of the latest textbooks on fire—“Fire in California’s Ecosystem” (2006, pg 62)—doesn’t even consider fire in anthropogenically untouched ecosystems to be a disturbance, but rather “an incorporated ecological process...as much a part of the environment as precipitation, wind, flooding, soil development, erosion, predation, herbivory, carbon and nutrient cycling, and energy flow.”

⁷² Timothy Ingalsbee, at “Words on Fire” Conference, OSU, 11/1/2012

⁷³ See *After the Fire: The Ecology of Change in Yellowstone National Park* (Wallace, 2004)

⁷⁴ Perhaps the best example of a social and ecological resilience narrative being spun out of fire is Gail Wells: *The Tillamook: A Created Forest Comes of Age*, (OSU Press, 1999).

sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."⁷⁵

6. Fire is Culture

Subtropes: Global Fire, Indigenous Fire, Traditional Ecologic Knowledge (TEK), Fire Management and Policy Debates, etc.

Much of the foundational work on this trope was done by Stephen Pyne, who, since *Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire* was published in 1982, has become one of the world's foremost experts on the history and management of fire. In over twenty books Pyne has explained and detailed how fire is a cultural matter. In a 1999 essay titled "Attention! All Keepers of the Flame," Pyne explains how fire is inherently human:

"It is the oldest of all human fire stories (the one found in every culture), in which we acquired, trapped, or stole fire as our own. The "story" is that fire is perhaps our defining ecological trait, it is what we do that no other creature does. It appears to be our job and destiny to see that it is used properly in the world. Not to extinguish it, not to burn everything in sight, but to somehow get the right mix of fire in the world for both our interests and those of others."⁷⁶

Most of these books are essentially discourses about humanity's past ecological impacts: fire suppression, fire starting, etc. One interesting aspect of this trope is how contradictory and competitive are the analysis. As detailed in an article in the *Journal of Biogeography*. Bowman relates that:

"Given high political voltage and the necessary overlap between disciplines from the sciences and humanities, it should be no surprise that the intellectual rules of engagement in discourses about humanity's past ecological impacts are uneven, and often ambiguous. In some situations the strictest evidence is required to demonstrate an effect, in other cases evidence that 'feels' right is used to develop master narratives that sweep readers along with bold big ideas. The net effect is the production of a literature that has become filled with jumbled and jagged contradictions, ambiguities and uncertainties."

As related earlier in our analysis of "Fire as Incident" many "fire-books" lay the blame for many of these "Great/Terrible/Devastating" fires at the feet of social and cultural conditions—logging camps, land use changes, urban encroachment in fire-prone ecosystems, arson—and how these can serve as lessons and warnings about future anthropogenic land-change.

Unfortunately, the "Fire is Culture" trope, more than any other trope, tends to fall into the more academic realm, and this literature review was designed to focus predominantly on works of popular literature, as these may represent a greater pulse of public engagement than the oftentimes rarified and jargon-strewn atmosphere of academia. Nonetheless, it is too important a topic to ignore completely, especially (as mentioned previously) there is a slippery and unsettled boundary between genres. Stephen Pyne's books, for example, which dominate the "Fire is Culture," straddle the line between academic tome (*Fire in America*) popular account (*Smokechasing*), though they explore and often repeat the same themes.

7. Conclusion: Strengths and Shortfalls

⁷⁵ Genesis 1:26, The Bible, New International Version, 1984.

⁷⁶ <http://wholeearth.com/issue/2099/article/12/attention!.all.keepers.of.the.flame>

Our literature review has revealed a respectable volume of books dedicated to the topic of wildfire. Within this fire-literature is an interesting diversity of perspectives and engagements. Fire is seen as a force that must be fought just as it is an ecological process that it is impossible and ultimately detrimental to control. It is seen as a single event and an overarching process. It is seen as a backdrop for human drama and it is seen as a central character in the narrative of the West. Fire appears in novels, memoirs, academic texts, poems, anthologies of essays, and general historic accounts. It is related in first, second, and third person.

Because wildfire is a multi-faceted phenomenon, stretching across disciplines and scales, avoiding summary or simplification, it is difficult to do it justice in words. As T.S. Eliot said regarding Hamlet, fire may well be “full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art.” Pyne essentially says the same thing in the quote: “tens of thousands of firefighters pass alongside the flames every year, and have for most of the last century (yet) almost nothing of literary merit has resulted.” But Hamlet is still one of the most well-known works of literature in history, and, whereas Pyne has a point, “literary merit” is subjective and not the best indicator of a culture’s engagement with a subject.

What is important is the telling—however it is told—and the receiving. As our bibliography documents, fire is a story that is being told. Perhaps a far better criterion is found in John Ruskin’s words: “the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see.” But an argument can be made that a major contribution is being made even if one does not tell what he or she saw in a “plain way.” As we mentioned earlier with regards to the Philip Levine poem “Fire,” one can describe wildfire through motions and silence—by not describing it at all.

Regardless, our bibliography of “fire-literature” proves that wildfire literature does indeed exist. It is varyingly effective in terms of moral imagination, vicarious engagement, creative vision, capacity for complexity, and effectiveness. And yet, compared to the richness of the subject, the way wildfire encapsulates all the complexities and controversies of culture, history, and ecology, wildfire’s potential as a literary subject remains largely unfulfilled.

8. Addendums

- 8.1 The Literature of Fire: Bibliography by Author Name
- 8.2 The Literature of Fire: Bibliography by Publishing Date
- 8.3 The Literature of Fire: Bibliography by Genre
- 8.4 The Literature of Fire: Bibliography by Trope

8.1 The Literature of Fire: Bibliography by Author Name

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Rothman, H. K., Ed. (1994). *'I'll Never Fight Fire With My Bare Hands Again': Recollections of the First Forest Rangers of the Inland Northwest*, University Press of Kansas.

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- Morrison, T. (2006). *Wildfire*, Houghton Mifflin Books for Children.
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- Zompolis, G. N. (1994). *Operation Pet Rescue: Animal Survivors of the Oakland, California, Firestorm*.

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8.4 The Literature of Fire: Bibliography by Trope

(Note: Many of the titles slot into multiple tropes)

1. Fire as Battlefield

- *The Enemy is Fire* (Cowan, 1961)
- *Fireline: The Summer Battles of the West* (Thoele, 1995)
- *The Smoke-eaters: The story of a fire-crew* (O'Higgins, 1923)
- *Trials by Wildfire: In Search of the New Warrior Spirit* (Leschak 1999)

2. Fire as Incident: The Great/Terrible/Devastating Burn/Inferno/Firestorm of 18___/19___

- Anderson, A. A. (1993). *The Hinckley Fire: Stories from the Hinckley Fire Survivors* Comet Press; Reprint edition.
- Ball, J. A. (2005). *Wildfire!: The 1871 Peshtigo Firestorm* Bearport Publishing
- Barker, R. (2007). *Scorched Earth: How the Fires of Yellowstone Changed America*, Island Press.
- Barbara, G. P. (1993). *Sifting through the Ashes: Lessons Learned from the Painted Cave Fire*, Univ. of California Press.
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- Junger, S. (2002). "Blowup: What Went Wrong at Storm King Mountain." (essay) in *Fire*, Harper Perennial: 43-56.

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- Maclean, J. M. (1999). *Fire on the Mountain: The True Story of the South Canyon Fire*, Harper Perennial.
- Maclean, J. M. (2007). *The ThirtyMile Fire: A Chronicle of Bravery and Betrayal*, Holt Co.
- Maclean, N. (1993). *Young Men and Fire*, University of Chicago Press.
- Matthew, M. (2009). *A Great Day to Fight Fire: Mann Gulch, 1949.*, University of Oklahoma Press.
- Matthias, B. (2010). *Monster Fire at Minong: Wisconsin's Five Mile Tower Fire of 1977*, Wisconsin Historical Society Press.
- Moore, M. (2000). *Montana on Fire! Summer of 2000*, Front Country Press.
- Morrison, M. (1993). *Fire in Paradise: The Yellowstone Fires and the Politics of Environmentalism*, HarperCollins.
- Morton, Colleen (2011) *Fire Monks: Zen Mind Meets Wildfire at the Gates of Tassajara*, Penguin Press HC
- Nolan, E. W. (1989). "A Night of Terror, Devastation, Suffering and Awful Woe": The Spokane Fire of 1889, Eastern Washington State Historical Society.
- Pascucci, Linda and Ron (1998). *On Storm King Mountain: The Legacy...the Lesson...* Authorhouse.
- Paxon, J. (2007). *The Monster Reared Its Ugly Head: The Story of the Rodeo-Chediski Fire and Fire as a Tool of Nature*, Cedar Hill Publishing, 2nd Edition
- Pernin, R. P. (1999). *The Great Peshtigo Fire: An Eyewitness Account*, Wisconsin Historical Society; 2nd edition
- Pyne, S. J. (2001). *Year of the Fires: The Story of the Great Fire of 1910*, Viking.
- Register, O. C. (1993). *Inferno! The Devastating Firestorms of October 1993*, Andrews Mcmeel Pub.
- Reinhart, K. W. (2008). *Yellowstone's Rebirth by Fire: Rising from the Ashes of the 1988 Wildfires*, Farcountry Press.
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- Wells, R. W. (1973). *Fire at Peshtigo, Wisconsin Tales and Trails*; re-issue edition.

3. “All the World’s a Stage⁷⁷”: Fire as Plot Device or Setting/Background for Human Drama
- Andreae, C. (2000). *The Smoke Eaters*, Minotaur Books.
 - Bill, J. (2002). *Climbing the Ladder Less Traveled: Adventures, Insights, and Life Journeys* Mountain Forest Publishing.
 - Boyle, D. (2007). *Between Land & Sky: A Fire Lookout Story*, Outskirts press.
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 - Scheese, D. (2001). *Mountains Of Memory: A Fire Lookout's Life*, University of Iowa Press.
 - Stratton, S. (2006). *Between Forest and Sky: A Fire Tower Journal*, Heritage House Publishing.
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- Bill, J. (2002). *Climbing the Ladder Less Traveled: Adventures, Insights, and Life Journeys* Mountain Forest Publishing.
- Boyle, D. (2007). *Between Land & Sky: A Fire Lookout Story*, Outskirts press.
- Connors, P. (2011). *Fire Season: Field Notes From a Wilderness Lookout*, Ecco Press.
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- Newman, D. (2007). *Finding Fire: A Personal History of Fire Lookouts in Lane County*, Oregon, Lane County Historical Society.
- Scheese, D. (2001). *Mountains Of Memory: A Fire Lookout's Life*, University of Iowa Press.

⁷⁷ This phrase is from Shakespeare’s play “As You Like It”: “All the world's a stage/And all the men and women merely players:/They have their exits and their entrances;/And one man in his time plays many parts...” .

- Stratton, S. (2006). *Between Forest and Sky: A Fire Tower Journal*, Heritage House Publishing.

4. Fire as Dragon/ Fire as Elemental Evil/ Fire as Destroyer

- Crues, J. V. (1998). *Firestorm in Paradise*, Daniel and Daniel Publishers.
- Matthias, B. (2010). *Monster Fire at Minong: Wisconsin's Five Mile Tower Fire of 1977*, Wisconsin Historical Society Press.
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5. Fire as Renewal: Ecological Resilience Narratives

- *After the Fires: The Ecology of Change in Yellowstone National Park* (Wallace, 2004)
- *Driftsmoke: Loss and Renewal in a Land of Fire* (Strohmaier, 2005)
- *Yellowstone's Rebirth By Fire: Rising From the Ashes of the 1988 Wildfires* (Reinhart 2008)
- *Flames in our Forest: Disaster or Renewal?* (Arno, 2002)
- *Sifting Through the Ashes: Lessons Learned from the Painted Cave Fire*, (Barbara, 1993)

6. Fire is Culture

- *Indians, Fire, and the Land in the Pacific Northwest*, (Boyd, R., Ed. 1999).
- *Mimicking Nature's Fire: Restoring Fire-Prone Forests in the West*; (Arno, S. F. 2005).
- *People, Fire, and Forests: A Synthesis of Wildfire Social Science*, (Daniel, T. C. 2007).
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