

# Heal the world: exploring palmer's "the case for human beings"

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Human beings. We are an exclusive species. Humans are able to achieve abstract thought, while most of the creatures in the animal kingdom have an attention span of only minutes. We are able to extract the purest elements from the most barren lands. We are also able to destroy the fragile biodiversity that has taken the earth millions of years to create. Should humankind, however, be punished for pushing so many different species into extinction by becoming extinct itself? In Thomas Palmer's essay, "The Case For Human Beings", Palmer explores the topics of human accomplishment, the diversity of humankind, and the havoc that said diversity has caused on the environment. Using irony and sarcasm, with the occasional clever analogy, he burdens the reader with his cynical outlook on humankind in regards to its brutish treatment of the earth's delicate ecosystem. In one paragraph, Palmer states, "The only way to... restore biodiversity to its greatest possible richness, would be to arrange for every human being on earth to drop dead tomorrow" (323-24). Palmer's combative literary form, however, is not entirely lacking its own beauty and grace. When he uses human achievements such as a Bach chorale, man's first journey to the moon, and three-masted schooners, he is bringing glory back to humankind. Although he explains the splendor of the Bach chorale, he still states, "Human consciousness... cannot, in this view, contribute to biodiversity, except by staying as far out of the picture as possible, so as to avoid tainting still-intact landscapes with unnatural influences" (324). No Bach chorale, no three-masted schooner, no Apollo landing, Palmer reveals, contributes to the ecosystem. Palmer isn't a misanthrope. He isn't out for the destruction of the human species. His writing strategies, such as comparisons, distortion of the

opposition, and smokescreening the obvious issue at hand, which is the destruction of the ecosystem, indeed tell the reader of his belief in his writing. Palmer writes this to Everyman--an average person of average intelligence with only an average curiosity about the destruction of the species. This essay could also be given to a staunch environmentalist, and the essay could make that " treehugger" so angry s/he would have to read on. Palmer knows what he is doing. His capability for writing for all audiences is impressive, if not admirable. Palmer makes us look at what we are doing to the environment, and shows us the truth: in a few hundred years, if we keep carelessly plundering this earth, we might not have a world to heal.