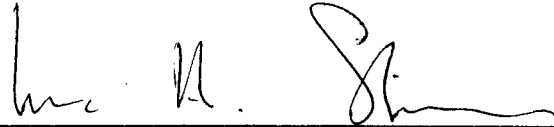


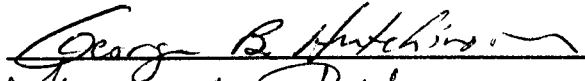
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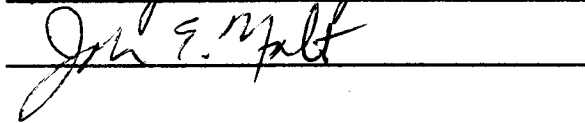
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by A. Brantley Harwell, Jr. entitled "Writing the Wilderness: A Study of Henry Thoreau, John Muir, and Mary Austin." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in-partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.



William H. Shurr, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:





Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate School

Writing the Wilderness:
A Study of Henry Thoreau, John Muir, and Mary
Austin

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Albert Brantley Harwell, Jr.

May 1992

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents

Dr. A. Brantley Harwell

and

Mrs. Joanne Brindley Harwell

who have supported me unreservedly during the
writing of this dissertation

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I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. William H. Shurr, for his undying optimism and encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr. George Hutchinson and Dr. John Nolt for their insightful commentary and challenging inquiry as they read the twists and tangles of my developing ideas and Dr. Mary Papke for her invaluable editorial and stylistic suggestions. I owe much to David Taylor for the use of his personal library, for his reading suggestions, and for being an honest critic and fellow traveller on the road towards a deepening ecology. I could not have written this dissertation without the spiritual, financial, and emotional support of my parents, Dr. A. Brantley and Mrs. Joanne Brindley Harwell. Finally, I would like to thank all the men who have shared experiences with me in wild places all over North America, especially my brothers Blake and Barry, my hunting, fishing, and hiking partners Ben, Tim, Mike, and a host of others. May the Earth Mother and the Sky Father bless you always.

ABSTRACT

This study of the writings of Henry Thoreau, John Muir, and Mary Austin focuses on the various paradigms they explored as they developed theories about humankind's relationship to wilderness. Thoreau evolved over the course of his three trips to Maine in 1846, 1853, and 1857 from a destructive pioneer understanding of wilderness towards a biocentric and Native American understanding of wilderness as home, though he never completely understood a Native American mindset and never found a paradigm that enabled him to understand his disturbing epiphany on Mount Katahdin during his first trip.

The esteemed preservationist John Muir moved beyond Thoreau in his wilderness philosophy as he studied a wide variety of paradigms from many disciplines. Over the course of forty years of reading and writing, he developed a philosophy that incorporated both creationism and evolution to explain the creative process but shunned the Calvinism of his father and purely mechanistic science, opting instead for a science that allowed for spiritual and intuitive insights. Though his vision of nature surpassed the most popular artistic, athletic, and scientific understandings of his time, he used tropes from these popular genres as he wrote to his Eastern audience. He rejected a Native

American understanding of nature but was able to understand and appreciate the extremes of nature better than anyone writing before him.

Mary Austin's wilderness writing diverged from that of Thoreau and Muir in her emphasis on human relationships to the desert. She studied a variety of people and their relationships to the land, including white men, who often lose their souls in the desert; white women, who usually bind themselves in society and never develop a relationship to the land; Native Americans, who live in harmony with the land but who also lead harsh lives; and Latin Americans, who, for Austin, combine the best of both white and Native American worlds so that they live in harmony with the land without facing the harsher exigencies. Her emphasis on the communal relationship to the land points the way towards "bioregional" ecophilosophies of our time.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

You tell me that I must be patient and reach out and grope in lexicon granaries for the words I want. But if some loquacious angel were to touch my lips with literary fire, bestowing every word of Webster, I would scarce thank him for the gift, because most of the words of the English language are made of mud, for muddy purposes, while those invented to contain spiritual matter are doubtful and unfixed in capacity and form, as wind-ridden mist-rags (John Muir, Christmas day 1872).¹

In studies of writing about wilderness, focus frequently centers on the paradigms writers have employed through history as they have struggled to understand and write about wilderness. Some of these studies, such as Max Oelschlaeger's The Idea of Wilderness From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology (1991), are extremely broad, spanning thousands of years, while others, such as Michael Cohen's The Pathless Way: John Muir and the American Wilderness (1984), are quite focused studies of the works of individual writers who have helped shape contemporary wilderness ethics and philosophy. This study of Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Mary Hunter Austin is a hybrid of both approaches. Ideally, it will contain some of the holistic perspective of

¹Letter to Jeanne Carr. In Badè, Life and Letters of John Muir, II, p. 6-7.

the wider scope, making connections between and beyond these writers, while also offering detailed analysis of each author's most important wilderness writing. Regrettably, it will surely at times be too broad, at other times overly restricted in scope. The primary purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the paradigms employed by three nature writers who are often mentioned together but who have heretofore not been studied together in any depth. For instance, both Oelschlaeger and Roderick Nash, whose Wilderness and the American Mind (1967) was the first lengthy study of wilderness writers, see Thoreau and Muir in a natural progression towards the next "great" wilderness thinker, Aldo Leopold. However, both ignore the writings of Mary Austin, who wrote before Leopold, as part of that continuum, perhaps because her writings are not part of that continuum given the criteria these scholars use, for her perspective diverges in important ways from those of Thoreau and Muir. This study places Austin in her rightful historical and thematic context, alongside Thoreau and Muir, and analyzes the similarities and differences between the visions each of these writers gained about wilderness. This study also will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each writer's vision and of the paradigms each employs in trying to express that vision. The last chapter will evaluate briefly how these writers helped shape contemporary wilderness philosophy.

Thoreau, Muir, and Austin experimented with paradigms both inherited and original that they hoped would enable them to understand the extremes of nature called wilderness by whites. All three writers reacted against the dominant, exploitative, utilitarian paradigm that was pervasive and that nearly destroyed all wilderness in late nineteenth-century industrial America. All three shared a belief that close, scientific observation of nature would teach the observer the wholeness in nature, the unity in diversity, the interdependence of all organic and inorganic systems. However, all three writers explicitly or implicitly acknowledged the limitations of science in getting at other truths in nature, truths beyond the scope of "angular factiness," as Muir expressed it. Each experimented with a variety of non-scientific paradigms to help develop a particularized, individual relationship to the land that, in turn, might guide others in developing their "land-ethics," to use Aldo Leopold's term out of context. In moving beyond the scientific paradigm, each writer moves in a different direction from the other two. A variety of factors might have caused this divergence. Since Muir read Thoreau and Emerson carefully and Austin read the earlier transcendentalists and Muir, anxiety of influence accounts in part for Muir's move away from Thoreau and Austin's from both Thoreau and Muir. Another factor that surely caused these writers to differ was the vastly different terrain

each writer chose as a base of operations. Though each explored a variety of terrains (Muir more than the others), each found a particular niche. Thoreau wrote primarily about the mountains, woodlands, and rivers of New England and Maine, Muir about the mountains and valleys of California, and Austin about the deserts of the Southwest. The most important factor, however, that influences the different non-scientific paradigms each writer appropriates are their varying backgrounds, accompanied by philosophical, religious, political, and even racial assumptions and stereotypes. Thoreau's obsession with Native Americans, for instance, leading him to fill over twelve notebooks with material on their history and culture, caused him to study the Penobscots of Maine in detail as living paradigms for an alternative relationship to the land after Western paradigms failed him on his first trip to Mount Katahdin. In his second and third Maine excursions, in 1846 and 1852, he found, much to his dismay, Penobscots mired in utilitarian understandings of nature, though he was able to reconcile himself somewhat to their brand of "commodity," as Emerson called utilitarian understandings of nature, after he met the amazing Joe Polis in his final Maine excursion in 1857. Polis introduced Thoreau to a wide variety of survival skills that enabled Thoreau to appreciate, with some reservations, the Penobscots' unique relationship to the land. However, the Penobscots' lingering superstitions,

which caused them to avoid certain places in the wild, the tops of mountains, for instance, left him still with no paradigm for understanding his now famous epiphany on Mount Katahdin. Moreover, his scientific skepticism and general distrust of religious systems distanced him even from Polis, who blended Protestantism with native religion and folklore. Thoreau never found a paradigm he could trust fully, though he developed much in his understanding of the wilderness and Native Americans over the course of his Maine excursions.

John Muir underwent a complex and lifelong process of compromise between the paradigms he brought to his studies of the wilderness. He first tested and then tried rejecting all inherited systems of thought, from his father's Calvinism to fact-bound or perspective-bound scientific, aesthetic, and artistic interpretations of the mountains, though he found himself forced to use old nature tropes when he wrote to his urban audience beginning in the mid-1870's. However, during his most radical years of the late 1860's and early 1870's, Muir attempted to abandon all anthropocentric understandings of wilderness. In his journals, he tried to write the human, white and Native American, out of his understanding of the cosmic wholeness of nature. He saw Lord Man and the animals he had domesticated as utterly degraded and separated from the purity of nature, though he maintained a faith that he could regain a proper place in nature if he immersed himself in it

fully, a project he undertook with more zeal than did Thoreau, Austin, and all but a few others before or since. Some critics have correctly stressed the feminine influences on Muir, particularly the unusual sway Jeanne Carr had in his affairs. However, like Thoreau's perspective, Muir's was, in many ways, largely masculine in that it was formed in solitude (or, in Thoreau's case, in the company of other men), in that it forsook the community, and in that it demanded great physical fitness and strength. In his most visionary writing, Muir believed that he attained unity with nature, an unparalleled understanding of it, by facing danger and possible death in nature, by surrendering himself to the spirit infusing nature that he called God, which, in turn, allowed him to overcome danger and death and to achieve a higher vision of the cosmos. He actively contrasted his methods with other paradigms. Ultimately, however, he had to compromise his extreme position in order to convince city-bound reformers of the need to save wilderness. In reaching this audience, he offered a gentler relationship to nature, one found in the middle ground rather than at the wild extremes. He underwent such compromise personally as well. By the 1880's, he had settled himself into an agrarian lifestyle, though the compromise may have weakened his health, which he regained again, he believed, only by partaking in wilderness excursions in Alaska. His rejection of Native American

paradigms seems, in retrospect, idiosyncratic and perhaps unfortunate inasmuch as he never learned to live off the land and, hence, always remained tied to civilization as a source of food. However, had he accomplished a permanent and total break with civilization, he might never have written the articles and books that launched the great preservation movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While his compromise was probably his loss, it is our gain.

In contrast, Austin never writes out human history in her interpretations of the desert Southwest. Instead, she makes the delicate relationship between humans and the land the focus of her most important work, stressing the relationship between communities of people and the larger biotic community. Hers is arguably a feminine perspective. Austin believed that the land will only be lived in on its own terms, an idea she claims to have borrowed from Native Americans. Humans who violate those terms or who oppose them are either destroyed or imprisoned in man-made environments. Every landscape has its own rhythm, and humans who adjust their rhythms to harmonize with that of the land survive without altering the land in destructive ways. Austin wrote about a variety of human relationships to the land, her most original contribution to wilderness literature; the people she observed were living paradigms of various understandings of the desert. For instance, the

Shoshones and Paiutes of California were, for Austin, flesh-and-blood paradigms of people living in harmony with the land. However, like Thoreau, Austin also ascribed to popular racial theories which made her skeptical of the ability of whites to live like the Native Americans. In an interview, Austin once said,

You can't get anything out of your racial experience that isn't there, you know. The experience itself which gives rise to a particular kind of genius must have registered, somewhere in the deep self, many times in ancestral history, before it can become part of the equipment of the individual.²

Unless, as in her case, whites had Native American blood coursing through their veins, they could not understand a Native American relationship to the land, and even those with small amounts of Native American blood could only understand such a relationship to a limited degree. Whites would have to adjust their rhythms to those of the land in other ways. Thus, Austin writes about a variety of whites and their relationships to the land, to themselves, and to each other and Native Americans. At the end of her most famous work, The Land of Little Rain, Austin portrays The Little Town of the Grape Vines as a paradigmatic community where Europeans of mixed but mostly Latin origins have learned to live in harmony with the land and with each other. The Latin culture of the Southwest became the paradigm Austin followed most closely when she established

²In Ruth Laughlin's "Mary Austin: An Interview" (51).

permanent residency in Santa Fe in 1925. In doing so, she implicitly rejected the extremely masculine wilderness vision Muir had found in the mountains of California and adopted a more feminine, communal, less extreme and dangerous relationship to the land and its people. Her racial and land theories, often seen as idiosyncratic if not flawed, allowed her to bridge the gap between Native American and white understandings of the land more thoroughly than either Muir or Thoreau while maintaining her ancestral and feminine heritage.

Of course, no study can cover adequately the entire corpus of any one of these three writers even for a limited topic such as their writing about nature. This study will focus on their writing about human relationships with wilderness and not on human relationships with less extreme forms of nature (the pastoral landscape, for instance), though even in their wilderness writing each writer discusses relationships to other more humanized forms of nature which cannot be ignored entirely. This focus on wilderness writing has also excluded some texts usually covered in studies of these writers' nature writing. The chapter on Thoreau, for instance, is almost exclusively a study of The Maine Woods, which is Thoreau's most complete statement on his thinking and writing about wilderness. This chapter does not cover his Walden experience, which was primarily a pastoral/agrarian experiment, or his journals,

though the latter do contain some of his important musings about his wilderness travels in embryonic form. The chapter on Austin's wilderness writing, likewise, focuses on a small part of her total corpus, though in her case the works under consideration, especially The Land of Little Rain, are usually considered her best and certainly her most popular writing. The chapter on John Muir, on the other hand, is more inclusive of the writer's total corpus, primarily because Muir wrote mostly about wilderness, unlike Thoreau or Austin. However, Muir's wilderness writing is so voluminous that complete coverage of it is impossible in a study of this size. Michael Cohen's extensive and seminal work on Muir is but a small sample of the rich ore yet to be mined in studies of Muir. My own readings and interpretations of Muir's wilderness writing, which have been greatly enriched and influenced by those of Cohen, focus on those elements in Muir's writing which connect him to Thoreau and Austin, to see him as the middle part of a continuum of three late Romantics who wrote about wilderness, while also analyzing those aspects of his writing that separate him from Thoreau and Austin.

Lifting these three writers out of the larger continuum of nature writers is, of course, problematic. These writers reacted to ideas about nature that preceded them and in turn greatly contributed to the evolution of twentieth-century thinking about wilderness that, as Oelschlaeger observes,

has become "a mélange of competing philosophies, ranging from resource conservation to so-called deep ecology" (3). This study separates these three writers from their fellow nature writers only because of their explicit historical, thematic, and philosophical connections to each other and refers the reader interested in the larger view to Nash's Wilderness and the American Mind, 3rd edition, and Oelschlaeger's The Idea of Wilderness. My readings of Thoreau and Muir forward no new claims as to their importance in the formation of ecological theory but differ significantly from those of their previous critics in terms of focus and, I hope, offer new insights into a few texts. I must acknowledge again a huge indebtedness to Michael Cohen's book on Muir's wilderness philosophy. His close look at Muir's writing and paradigms guided my own and helped bring into focus my ideas about Thoreau and Austin as well. His work as well as that of Nash, Oelschlaeger, and others is humbling to the scholar just beginning work in the field of environmental studies. However, like Muir and most environmental scholars, I hope that my focus will remain on the wilderness itself and not be shifted entirely to texts about it. Writing the wilderness is, as the epigraph above indicates, a futile but necessary task. Studying these writings may be even more futile. Still, those of us searching for effective environmental paradigms for ourselves and society at large have little choice but to

study the texts of those giants that have preceded us in the search, hoping, even while acknowledging their limited successes, to find some inspiration and direction in their work. If we remember the source - - the untamed cosmos itself - - of these writers' inspiration, perhaps over time a collective evolution, a grand paradigm shift, will occur in our collective environmental ethics. My search begins with these writings, a meagre personal launching into a sea of ideas already impacting the world we live in.

Chapter 2

THOREAU: FINDING A LANGUAGE FOR WILDERNESS

Henry David Thoreau had few encounters with primal wilderness in his lifetime. His trips up the Concord and Merrimack Rivers in 1839 and his Walden excursion were encounters with rural nature, not wilderness, since he never left the habitats of men. In 1838, he made a brief excursion to Maine, seeking a schoolmaster position, but again never left the villages. However, in 1846, during his second year at Walden, Thoreau made his second trip to Maine, an odyssey that changed his thinking about wilderness forever and forced him to rethink his notions about primeval forests, rivers, Native Americans, and man's place in inviolate nature. He would go to Maine two more times, in 1853 and 1857, and in each journey his thinking would change again. His account of these journeys, The Maine Woods, reflects a clear evolutionary change in his thinking; however, in this work he never finds a paradigm that helps him interpret his most disturbing experience in the wilderness, the one on Mount Katahdin, and often he

discovers that his paradigms conflict with each other, leaving him mired in paradox. Thoreau was an intellectual pioneer in the wilderness, a writer constructing and borrowing language paradigms whereby he might understand wilderness from many perspectives. He wrote about wilderness using scientific, mythical, mystical, descriptive, polemical, Native American, and poetic language, always shifting his allegiance from one language paradigm to another depending on his rhetorical purpose, sometimes contradicting himself in the process. The result is that The Maine Woods is like his other great works, Walden and A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, in that it is a palimpsest, writing on top of writing, language paradigm on language paradigm, which sometimes disfigures meaning as much as it clarifies it. However, the fruits of his experiments with language are plentiful. He was one of the first authors to recognize the need to preserve large areas of wilderness. He was also among the first to put realistic Native Americans (as opposed to romantic or savage stereotypes) on the printed page, with virtues and faults intact; and his composite view of Native Americans, which is closely tied to his view of the wilderness, is paradoxical partly because it is not one-sided.¹

¹See Robert F. Sayre and Richard F. Fleck for thorough discussions of Thoreau's evolving perspective on the Indian, his growth from accepting the "savagist" myths dominant in his day to a more mature and realistic understanding of the Indian as a human being rather than as a symbol. Others who

Several factors contribute to Thoreau's changing views about the wilderness. These include the radically different perspectives of the guides he chose for each trip, since their views of the wilderness affected Thoreau's in many ways;² Thoreau's increasing comfort in being in the wilderness, which grows with each trip; his increasing appreciation for a Native American perspective as it actually was rather than as he had read about it in books; and his increasing understanding of the effect of man's altering of the wilderness. Similarly, several factors contribute to the type of language Thoreau employs as he tries to define his wilderness experience, and often he is self-conscious about the suitability of language paradigms to define his changing experiences and perspectives.

Ktaadn

As a novice in the wilderness, Thoreau could only speculate about what he might find there. He discovered that no act of the imagination could prepare him for what he found. He also entered the wilderness with language paradigms he had to test. In his 1846 trip to Katahdin, the language paradigms with which he experimented fell primarily into two camps: European and Native American. Thoreau

have noted this shift include D. M. Murray (229) and Philip Gura (372).

²Sayre also notes that the guides Thoreau chose are the keys to understanding his changing perspective. See p. 158.

decidedly favored European language paradigms, particularly classical and Miltonic mythology, over other types, including those of Native Americans, in most situations which he encountered in this trip. The most important reasons for this favoritism were the influence of his guides and companions, all white men, which pushed him towards a perspective that was both Eurocentric and androcentric; his poor first impressions of the Native Americans of the Penobscot region, which he never entirely overcame; and his own fear of the wilderness. These would change greatly in later trips.

Thoreau made his first trip to the wilderness of Maine in the fall of 1846. In "Ktaadn," the account of his 1846 trip, Thoreau relates the story of "a fortnight in the woods of Maine," during which time he accompanied his cousin, George Thatcher, from Bangor, two other Bangor men with lumber interests, and, later, two guides, "Uncle George" McCauslin and Thomas Fowler, on a trip up the Penobscot River to Mount Katahdin, "the second highest mountain in New England" (3), about one hundred and fifteen miles from Bangor, by Thoreau's calculations (66-67).³ He chose to make the trip by boat rather than by the more accessible horseback route where "you see much less of the wilderness,

³Thoreau's calculations were often inaccurate, mostly because the maps he used (he had two maps of Maine on the trip) were misleading. See Howarth (15) for discussion of Thoreau's inaccurate measurements.

none of the glorious river and lake scenery, and have no experience of the batteau [sic] and the boatman's life" (3). In choosing to experience the boatman's life, Thoreau also chooses, however, to see the wilderness as white frontiersmen see it, not as Native Americans might see it, from a canoe. His company, in fact, includes white men only throughout the first Maine trip, and this greatly influences Thoreau's thinking about everything he sees and does.

Perhaps the most subtle but pervasive evidence of this white man's perspective is that Thoreau conceives of the entire trip in terms of an adventure, an odyssey, a series of challenges the white conquerers must face and defeat, a perspective on wilderness that is both Eurocentric and androcentric.⁴ This focus becomes most apparent when McCauslin and Fowler join the party, after two Penobscot guides fail to show. They join just as the river becomes its roughest, and their expertise and daring in first poling the bateau up the river and later maneuvering the bateau while shooting the rapids down the river become, in

⁴Tallmadge argues that "'Ktaadn' follows the conventions of popular travel writing. It is an adventure story set in a remote place with a colorful cast and a distant, challenging goal. Readers would have expected a long approach with a series of obstacles, a final dramatic push, a climax, and a denouement ending with a return to the familiar world" (138). Such a view of wilderness, with its phallic metaphor of conquest, has been called androcentric by "ecofeminists," who believe that such views cause many problems not only in environmental matters but also in human relations.

Thoreau's description of them, the stuff of legend.⁵

At first, however, Thoreau is ambivalent in his appreciation of white pioneers in Maine. Initially he is particularly disturbed by what he sees of one of their primary means of livelihood, the lumbering business. He announces a theme which will recur in all three trips, his disgust with the wastefulness and irreverence of the lumbering industry, as early as the first three pages of "Ktaadn":

Think how stood the white-pine tree on the shore of Chesuncook, its branches souging with the four winds, and every individual needle trembling in the sunlight - - think how it stands now - - sold, perchance to the New England Friction Match Company! The mission of men there [in Maine] seems to be, like so many demons, to drive the forest all out of the country, from every solitary beaver swamp, and mountain side, as soon as possible (5).

However, Thoreau's companions are, to the man, lumbermen, and their genius, their skill in harvesting and getting trees to market with primitive tools, is the object of Thoreau's admiration in spite of his nascent preservationist ethic.⁶

⁵Gura argues that the pioneers, like the Indians, are not the focus of this journey; Thoreau's inner response to the shock at Ktaadn becomes the focus (372-73).

⁶Stoller writes, "Despite his love of the forest and his desire to see it preserved, Thoreau was drawn extraordinarily to the woodcutter and the lumberer" (76). This was especially true during the Walden years, the same time he made his journey to Ktaadn, when "he was celebrating that 'true Homeric' man the woodchopper Therien, an element of the general tug of the primitive which the younger Thoreau had felt so intensely and which the older man never entirely lost" (76). Stoller argues that Thoreau resolved

As he moves further away from civilization, Thoreau's admiration for the pioneers increases. In "Ktaadn," Thoreau portrays the white pioneer in terms more positive than he would in accounts of later excursions, during which trips distance and perspective allowed him to see more clearly the self-destructiveness of the pioneer's life. In "Ktaadn," the pioneer becomes a model of individualism, the kind that Thoreau and others of the transcendental movement pointed to as the genius of America. Thoreau has great admiration even for the devastating cut-and-burn method used by pioneers to convert forests to fields (14). He sees in Maine a place for individuals to strike out, to start again, to find a new life. Such opportunity precludes any excuses for poverty:

Let those talk of poverty and hard times who will, in the towns and cities; cannot the emigrant, who can pay his fare to New-York or Boston, pay five dollars more to get here, - - I paid three, all told, for my passage from Boston to Bangor, 250 miles, - - and be as rich as he pleases, where land virtually costs nothing, and houses only the labor of building, and he may begin life as Adam did? If he will still remember the distinction of poor and rich, let him bespeak him a narrower house forthwith (14-15).

Maine was "bran [sic] new country; the only roads were of Nature's making, and the few houses were camps. Here, then, one could no longer accuse institutions and society, but must front the true source of evil" (16).⁷

this tension through his investigations in silviculture, the predecessor of modern forestry (76 ff.).

⁷Just what this "true source of evil" is is the subject of some debate. Like Ronald Hoag, I believe that the source of evil to which Thoreau alludes is man himself (25), though

Thoreau's appreciation for the pioneers gradually counterbalances his concerns about the havoc they wreak on the environment, though he never entirely forgets the latter. An intermediary step, one between his initial disgust with the lumbering business and his in toto celebration of the skill and daring of his guides' boating skills, can be seen in a revealing passage comparing the pioneer, the provincial, and the urban intellectual. The pioneer is more like the urban intellectual:

. . . for always the pioneer has been a traveller, and, to some extent, a man of the world; and, as the distances with which he is familiar are greater, so is his information more general and far reaching than the villager's (22).

He is unlike "the inhabitants of an old-settled country," whose minds are "narrow, uninformed, and countrified" (22-23). Thoreau admires the pioneers' log houses, even though he finds their surroundings "drear and savage enough" (19), and sees little wrong with men trapping or poisoning wolves that attack and kill their sheep (29-30). As he progresses into the wilderness, influenced by his pioneer companions and hosts, Thoreau begins to take on a pioneer mentality, seeing the wilderness in terms of obstacles to be overcome through ingenuity, skill, and strength. The wilderness becomes, then, for Thoreau, as it is for the pioneers, something to be feared as long as it is not

I essentially disagree with Hoag's premise that the Ktaadn experience affirmed Thoreau's "transcendental faith" (see f.n. 9).

overcome, something to view with contempt once it is overcome. By the time McCauslin and Fowler join Thoreau and his companions, this mentality is firmly entrenched, countered only by an occasional flashback to his new-born but ill-nourished preservationist ethic and finally, on Katahdin, by an awakening to the fact that his choice of approach has seriously limited his ability to understand the wilderness. Once the travelers leave the last vestiges of civilization, the trip becomes an odyssey, a paradigm befitting the intellect Thoreau ascribes to the pioneers. Thoreau and his guides play the role of modern-day Odysseuses; the wilderness plays alternate roles of dangerous obstacle or habitation of unfriendly gods. In viewing his journey as an odyssey, Thoreau appropriates one of the oldest Western narrative paradigms, grafting it onto the "intellectual" pioneer perspective, thereby deliberately seeing the wilderness almost exclusively from a white man's perspective.

A signifier of this quest motif is the language of mythology, which Thoreau begins to use shortly after McCauslin and Fowler join the party. On receiving beer to drink at Thomas Fowler's home, Thoreau says,

It was as if we sucked at the very teats of Nature's pine-clad bosom in these parts - - the sap of all Millinocket botany commingled - - the topmost most fantastic and spiciest of the primitive wood, and whatever invigorating and stringent gum or essence it afforded, steeped and dissolved in it - - a lumberer's drink, which would acclimate and naturalize a man at once - - which would make him see green, and, if he

slept, dream that he heard the wind sough among the pines. Here was a fife, praying to be played on, through which we breathed a few tuneful strains, - - brought hither to tame wild beasts (27-28).

The motif of Romulus and Remus sucking at the teat of Nature, combined with the motif of Orpheus soothing the wild beasts with the notes of his pipe, is indicative of the hearty endorsement Thoreau grants his pioneer comrades, tamers of the wilderness, potential founders of some new, vigorous Rome in the woods of Maine.

The goal of these Odysseuses is to reach and climb Mount Katahdin, and only after the white guides join the trip does Thoreau first see Katahdin from a distance. In keeping with the classical quest motif, Thoreau describes the sight using the language of mythology:

The summit . . . had a singularly flat tableland appearance, like a short highway, where a demi-god might be let down to take a turn or two in an afternoon, to settle his dinner (45).

The idea of Katahdin as habitation of the gods, white gods, for Thoreau, becomes a dominant theme once they begin their ascent, but first Thoreau and his companions have to reach the mountain by way of the river, poling upstream when they can, going overland carrying the bateau when they reach a falls too high to "warp" up. His guides, McCauslin and Fowler, show their skill and daring throughout the river passage, their strength and endurance in the portages, sometimes accomplishing feats they think have never been done. Thoreau admires their hardihood and skill in several

passages, this one, for example, on the strength required to accomplish a portage while carrying the bateau:

We were, on the whole, rather an invalid party, and could render our boatmen but little assistance. Our two men at length took the batteau upon their shoulders, and, while two of us steadied it, to prevent it from rocking and wearing into their shoulders, on which they placed their hats folded, walked bravely over the remaining distance, with two or three pauses . . . With this crushing weight [bateaux weighed from three to five or six hundred pounds] they must climb and stumble along over fallen trees and slippery rocks of all sizes (47-48).

Thoreau reserves his most heroic descriptions, however, for their boating skills. Interestingly, he drops the language of mythology in these passages. Simple description of their feats is evidence enough of their intrepidity, their kinship with the heroes of old. The following long passage, a description of their warping up Passamagamet Falls, is representative:

We were soon in the midst of the rapids, which were more swift and tumultuous than any we had poled up, and had turned to the side of the stream for the purpose of warping, when the boatmen, who felt some pride in their skill, and were ambitious to do something more than usual, for my benefit, as I surmised, took one more view of the rapids, or rather the falls; and in answer to one's question, whether we couldn't get up there, the other answered that he guessed he'd try it: so we pushed again into the midst of the stream, and began to struggle with the current . . . With an uncertain and wavering motion we wound and bolted our way up, until the bow was actually raised two feet above the stern at the steepest pitch; and then, when everything depended upon his exertions, the bowman's pole snapped in two; but before he had time to take the spare one . . . he had saved himself with the fragment upon a rock; and so we got up by a hair's breadth; and Uncle George exclaimed, that that was never done before; and he had not tried it, if he had not known whom he had got in the bow - - nor he in the bow, if he had not known him in the stern (48-49).

Thoreau acknowledges that he "could not sufficiently admire the skill and coolness with which they performed this feat" (49), but on trying his hand and failing at poling up a slight rapid further up the river, Thoreau is "obliged to resign the poles to more skilful hands" (50).

"Uncle George" McCauslin and Thomas Fowler are not the only adventure seekers in the group. While the above passage clearly indicates Thoreau was suspicious of their trying to impress him with their boating skill, it is evident that Thoreau is also engaged in his own role playing of frontiersman. He is not one of the weak of his "invalid party" but rather one of the strong. In the above passage, for instance, Thoreau is the third and only other passenger in the boat. The others go around the falls by land, carrying the baggage with them. Thoreau is hardly subtle in hinting at his superiority, particularly in comparison to the Bangor men, though his boating skills do not match those of his guides.

However, in his mountaineering skills Thoreau has no match among his companions. As they begin the ascent of Katahdin, which for Thoreau is, one recalls, the habitation of the gods, he outstrips his party in distance and in daring. Conflating the odyssean narrative with Milton's Paradise Lost, he compares the arduousness of his ascent to "Satan's anciently through chaos" (61), a clue that he sees himself as defier of the gods. The stage is set for the

most memorable passages in "Ktaadn," with Thoreau as Odysseus or Satan or some other defier of fate and the gods; Katahdin as the home of the gods, inscrutable, dangerous, alienating, regardless of man.

An important passage which describes events just before Thoreau begins his ascent shows just how far Thoreau's imagination has carried him into the world of Western myth. As the party catches fish for their supper one evening, Thoreau says,

I could understand better, for this, the truth of mythology, the fables of Proteus, and all those beautiful sea-monsters,--how all history, indeed, put to a terrestrial use, is mere history; but put to a celestial, is mythology always (53-54).

Perhaps this explicit reference to mythology is a clue that for Thoreau his journey is not mere history but, at least in his imagination, myth. Other passages bear this out. During his ascent up Katahdin, Thoreau comes "upon a side-hill, or rather side-mountain, where rocks, gray, silent rocks, were the flocks and herds that pastured, chewing a rocky cud at sunset. They looked at me with hard, gray eyes, without a bleat or low" (61). This passage is interesting in that it mixes the pastoral with wilderness, functioning both to lessen the wildness of the place by conceiving it in bucolic terms and at the same time to emphasize just how unpastoral, how wild, Katahdin itself is. This trip will not remain a pastoral romance, Thoreau

suggests, but will fast become a real epic.⁸

Darkness forces Thoreau to descend the mountain and to join his comrades for the night, but fearful portents greet him there. The camp is "savage and dreary enough; so wildly rough, that they looked long to find a level and open space for the tent" (62). They have trouble starting a fire, and then later during the night, one sleeper awakes screaming, startled from his sleep by fire caught in the top of a fir tree.

The next morning, however, Thoreau once again outdistances his comrades in his quest for the Katahdin summit. As he nears the cloud-covered summit, Thoreau says, in perhaps the passage most redolent of myth,

It reminded me of the creations of the old epic and dramatic poets, of Atlas, Vulcan, the Cyclops, and Prometheus. Such was Caucasus and the rock where Prometheus was bound. Æscylus had no doubt visited such scenery as this. It was vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits (64).

Thoreau counts himself among the "daring and insolent men" who go to the tops of mountains, unlike "Simple races, [such] as savages" who "do not climb mountains - - their tops are sacred and mysterious tracts never visited by them" (65).

However, the mountain-top experience, with Thoreau in the role of insolent defier, is soon overshadowed,

⁸Tallmadge also argues that Thoreau "turns to epic and tragedy" after disposing "of the lesser mode of pastoral" (142).

ironically, just as Thoreau joins his companions in their final descent. As they pass over burnt lands, the inadequacy of his Western perspective drowns him in the most rhapsodic passages in "Ktaadn." He writes, "Perhaps I most fully realized that this was primeval, untamed, and forever untameable Nature, or whatever else men call it" (69).

Earlier he regrets not bringing a brick they find in a logger's camp "to be left [on Katahdin] for our mark . . . [,] a simple evidence of civilized man" (45). Thoreau now realizes the futility of wanting to put the marks of civilization, of white men, on such a wild place ; he writes,

It is difficult to conceive of a region uninhabited by man. We habitually presume his presence and influence everywhere. And yet we have not seen pure Nature, unless we have seen her thus vast, and drear, and inhuman, though in the midst of cities. Nature was here something savage and awful, though beautiful. I looked with awe at the ground I trod on, to see what the Powers had made there, the form and fashion and material of their work. This was that Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night. Here was no man's garden, but the unhandselled globe. It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor waste-land . . . Man was not to be associated with it. It was Matter, vast, terrific, - - not his Mother Earth that we have heard of, not for him to tread on, or be buried in There was felt the presence of a force not bound to be kind to man (70).

As the inadequacy of his understanding of this wild place sweeps over him, Thoreau searches for other paradigms of experience. For instance, he says, "It was a place for heathenism and superstitious rites, - - to be inhabited by men nearer of kin to the rocks and to wild animals than we"

(70-71). In such passages, Thoreau still resorts to Western mythological paradigms to describe his thought, but he is increasingly aware that even these ancient paradigms cannot define his experience clearly. Finally, in a last and futile attempt to understand this new reality, Thoreau writes,

What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries! - - Think of our life in nature, - - daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it, - - rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the solid earth! the actual world! the common sense! Contact! Contact! Who are we? Where are we? (71).

Slowly, then, Thoreau evolves an awareness that he has approached the wilderness all wrong. His Odyssean perspective, with its inherent arrogance and self-centeredness, leaves him with only questions, the most fundamental questions of all, and no answers.⁹

⁹Debate over the impact and meaning of Thoreau's Katahdin experience continues. Most critics believe that Thoreau's transcendental views of nature and the doctrine of correspondences he inherited from the European Romantics were proven inadequate on Katahdin. Blair and Trowbridge say the experience drew him closer to Melville's pessimistic view of nature. Garber says that on Katahdin, for once, Thoreau's "redemptive imagination" failed him and that the experience continued to haunt him (84 ff.). Paul and McIntosh see the experience as a temporary setback to his basic transcendentalism, one which he quickly overcame. Tallmadge argues that the experience and the document proved that language is inadequate for describing nature and that this affected his writing from that point onward, even his writing of Walden. Only Hoag argues that the experience was positive, an overwhelming confrontation with the sublime, one that is written in the language of Burke. These approaches have focused on Thoreau's use of Romantic paradigms and not on his use of the more ancient paradigms (and Thoreau clearly relates age to authenticity) of Western mythology, though, in either case, these Western paradigms

The trip back down the river shows Thoreau still viewing the journey as an adventure but increasingly aware of the limitations of that perspective. He continues to admire the skill of his guides, who are now shooting the bateau down the rapids. He is fully cognizant of the danger involved in this undertaking, but as his guides accomplish the task rather easily, he writes,

One might have thought that these were falls, and that falls were not to be waded through with impunity like a mud-puddle. There was really danger of their losing their sublimity in losing their power to harm us. Familiarity breeds contempt (75).

Thus, Thoreau comes, slowly but steadily, to an understanding of the shortcomings of the pioneer perspective. Fear prompts the pioneer to fight the wilderness and to conquer it. As long as he fears the wilderness, its sublimity is intact. But once he masters it, he views it with contempt and can no longer recognize its sublimity.

At the end of his trip, Thoreau is left with the prospect that all his Western paradigms have failed him. He must quickly grope for other paradigms. But what other paradigm does Thoreau have at his disposal, the pioneer experience leaving him contemptuous of the wild and with questions he cannot answer? Though it would take him two more trips to appreciate its worth, Thoreau begins to consider, as an afterthought at the end of his trip, a

failed him.

Native American perspective. Though he had dismissed a Native American perspective earlier, he comes to a realization that perhaps he should reconsider this decision, and he then wrestles with this problem on all three trips.

Thoreau had a fascination with Native Americans all his life, yet, as Sayre has noted, he carried with him many of the nineteenth-century misconceptions about the Native Americans, his own predilection being the "noble savage" myth. Thus, when he encountered "real" Native Americans, who lived neither as noble nor yet quite devilish savages but as complex human beings with both virtues and vices, he was not ready for what he saw. "Real" Native Americans were not the unadulterated symbols of wildness and the disappearing frontier that Thoreau wanted to see. When he first encountered a significant group of Native Americans, the Penobscots of Maine, he was set up for a fall.

Almost from the outset of his trip, Thoreau comments on the degraded state of Native American life, a perception that would remain fast with him in the first two trips and to some degree in the third. His judgment is aimed only at contemporary Native Americans, however, not the primitive Native Americans of yore. Thoreau in fact longs for primitivism and sees in the contemporary Penobscot only a pathetic caricature of the white man. Further, he sees only the beginning of the extinction of modern Penobscots and compares their current condition to one imagined in a scene

from their past:

These were once a powerful tribe. Politics are all the rage with them now. I even thought that a row of wigwams, with a dance of pow-wows, and a prisoner tortured at the stake, would be more respectable than this (7).

But, while he finds contemporary Penobscots revolting, he still, at first, thinks he needs their services for guiding his trip. His party secures the services of Louis Neptune and another Native American, who are going up-river to hunt moose. Thoreau and his companions feel lucky in getting them, for Neptune had guided one of the earliest expeditions to Katahdin. However, at the appointed meeting place and time, the Native Americans fail to show, prompting Thoreau and his companions to ask the venerable "Uncle George" McCauslin and Thomas Fowler to join them as guides. A revealing comment about the Penobscot guides set in comparison to their new, white ones reveals much about Thoreau's inadequate knowledge of Native Americans and his misguided adulation of the pioneer:

We were lucky to have exchanged our Indians, whom we did not know, for these men, who, together with Tom's brother, were reputed the best boatmen on the river . . . The canoe is smaller, more easily upset, and sooner worn out; and the Indian is said not to be as skilful in the management of the batteau. He is, for the most part, less to be relied on, and more disposed to sulks and whims (32).

Offering an example of how the Native Americans complain about the pioneer and the arduousness of river travel, Thoreau relates a Native American story, which says

. . . that the river once ran both ways, one half up

and the other half down, but, that since the white man came, it all runs down, and now they must laboriously pole their canoes against the stream, and carry them over numerous portages (32-33).

Thoreau fails to understand this story from a Native American perspective, as an allegory of their position vis-a-vis white men's society. Thoreau grows even less tolerant of the Native Americans as the trip goes on, again revealing just how much he has been influenced by the pioneers. For instance, on the return trip, after the Katahdin experience, Thoreau's party happens into Louis Neptune and his companion, who had failed to meet them because they had been drinking. No longer does Thoreau respect Neptune, in spite of his reputation as a guide. He writes,

Met face to face, these Indians in their native woods looked like the sinister and slouching fellows whom you meet picking up strings and paper in the streets of a city. There is, in fact, a remarkable and unexpected resemblance between the degraded savage and the lowest classes in a great city. The one is no more a child of nature than the other. In the progress of degradation, the distinction of races is soon lost (77-78).

However, just when Thoreau's opinion of the Native American seems hopelessly and permanently negative, he reconsiders his stance while watching Neptune and his companion paddle their canoe out of sight:

. . . [T]here turns up but now into the mouth of Millinocket stream a still more ancient and primitive man [compared to whites who live primitively in Maine], whose history is not brought down even to the former [ages described by classical poets]. In a bark vessel sewn with the roots of the spruce, with horn-beam paddles he dips his way along. He is but dim and misty to me, obscured by the aeons that lie between the bark canoe and the batteau. He builds no house of logs, but a wigwam of skins. He eats not hot-bread and

sweetcake, but musquash and moose-meat and the fat of bears. He glides up the Millinocket and is lost to my sight, as a more distant and misty cloud is seen flitting behind a nearer, and is lost in space. So he goes about his destiny, the red face of man (79).

In this passage, Thoreau specifically compares the Native American perspective to the most ancient Western perspective he knows, that of the ancient poets (again in keeping with the pervasive mythological theme). While he cannot understand the Native American way of life, which is "lost in space" to him, he recognizes, here at the end of his trip, that the Native American's way of life is the most ancient he might know, that perhaps there is something he cannot yet understand that he must if he is to get to the heart of the wilderness. The pioneer perspective, primitive as it is, and as closely related as it is to that of the ancient poets, is not enough. But, it would take other trips and experiments with other paradigms before Thoreau could begin to understand the Native American perspective. He had many prejudices to overcome first.

"Ktaadn" ends with Thoreau summing up his experience in a manner which still reveals his early pioneer perspective. He comments,

[Maine] is even more grim and wild than you had anticipated, a damp and intricate wilderness, in the spring everywhere wet and miry . . . These are not the artificial forests of an English king - - a royal preserve merely. Here prevail no forest laws, but those of nature. The aborigines have never been dispossessed, nor nature deforested (80).

Among his closing comments is a revealing reference to the

"howling wilderness" (82), recalling earlier Puritan and Pilgrim pioneer perspectives in seventeenth-century New England. While "Ktaadn" contains the most memorable passages in all of The Maine Woods, those written about the mountaintop experience, it would take another trip before Thoreau would come to a perspective about the wilderness that would allow him to move beyond that of his ancestors.

Chesuncook

Thoreau began his second trip to the Maine wilderness on September 13, 1853, bound for Chesuncook Lake, to the west of Katahdin, and through Moosehead Lake on the return trip. From the outset of "Chesuncook," it is apparent that Thoreau's approach will be much different on this journey than on his earlier one. Botany and ecology become Thoreau's chief concerns in "Chesuncook," which contains the most detailed botanical descriptions and polemical environmental statements to be found in The Maine Woods. Equally important, though yet to come to full fruition, is Thoreau's attempt to understand the Native American perspective and his distancing himself, quite intentionally, from the pioneer perspective. The seriousness of the quest motif gives way to irony, particularly in his mocking use of mythology to describe the pioneer perspective. The rhapsodic passages from the mountain top give way to vehement passages on the sacredness of life in the bottom lands. Thoreau's rhetorical purposes, then, are quite

changed from his novitiate days of the Katahdin trip.

"Chesuncook" marks a clear evolution in Thoreau's thinking about the wilderness.

A note heading Thoreau's "List of Plants" in the "Appendix" reveals that serious botanical study became a part of Thoreau's agenda only during the 1853 trip (304). It was not an issue during the 1846 trip. Thoreau probably began serious botanical and forestry studies about 1850 (Stoller 72). The result of this new interest is the inclusion of detailed botanical descriptions that interrupt the narrative flow but that also give Thoreau a new purpose for coming into the wilderness. While the study of people and their daily functions in the wilderness remains a concern for Thoreau, his new botanical study serves as a means of distancing himself from that sociological perspective and even for criticizing it.

In truth, the botanical descriptions, in and of themselves, are not interesting to the reader hungry for narrative.¹⁰ However, this shift away from human narrative is precisely Thoreau's objective. The following is a paragraph early in "Chesuncook" that illustrates the style and substance of Thoreau's botanical study:

This was an interesting botanical locality for one coming from the south to commence with, for many plants which are rather rare, and one or two which are not

¹⁰At least one reader, however, disagrees. Howarth argues that "Plant names were a kind of sensuous Latin poetry, pure liquid on the tongue" (13).

found at all, in the eastern part of Massachusetts, grew abundantly between the rails; as Labrador tea, *Kalmia glauca*, Canada blueberry, which was still in fruit and a second time in bloom, *Clintonia* and *Linnaea borealis*, which last (?) a lumberer called moxon, creeping snowberry, painted trillium, large-flowered bellwort &c., &c. I fancie that the aster radula, diplopappus umbellatus, solidago lanceolata, red trumpet weed, and many others, which were conspicuously in bloom on the shore of the lake and on the carry, had a peculiarly wild and primitive look there. The spruce and fir trees crowded to the track on each side to welcome us, the arbor-vitae with its changing leaves prompted us to make haste, and the sight of the canoe birch gave us spirits to do so. Sometimes an evergreen just fallen lay across the track with its rich burden of cones, looking, still, fuller of life than our trees in the most favorable positions. You did not expect to find such spruce trees in the wild woods, but they evidently attend to their toilets each morning even there. Through such a front yard did we enter that wilderness (93-94).

The botanical descriptions, though not strictly scientific, inasmuch as they include many anthropomorphic references and other such poetic devices, nevertheless mark a shift away from the strictly anthropocentric position that characterized "Ktaadn." In doing so, they give Thoreau a platform upon which to elevate himself above mere human concerns in the wilderness. In turning to science in "Chesuncook," Thoreau virtually reverses an earlier position, evident in a senior college essay titled "The Mark or Standard by which a Nation is to be Judged Barbarous or Civilized," wherein he claims the holistic view of the Indian is superior to the atomistic view of science when studying nature. In "Chesuncook," as Tallmadge asserts, Thoreau turns to science because in "Ktaadn" other Western paradigms failed him and, perhaps, because he had become

disillusioned with Native Americans as he found them in Maine, though he would attempt to understand their perspective more in this trip only to be further disillusioned (147). Native American perspectives, he would discover, though different from those of whites, are still utilitarian. However, as Thoreau had postulated as a college senior, science can be a hindrance to one attempting to formulate a wilderness philosophy and to write the wilderness. It allows the observer to distance himself from both personal and human concerns, to imagine the systems of nature from non-human, ostensibly objective perspectives. It also, however, claims hegemony over other paradigms, negating particularly those paradigms which require intuitive leaps of logic or faith. In Thoreau's last trip to Maine in 1857, the conflict between science and other paradigms would mire him in paradox, as such conflicts have mired most natural philosophers, particularly in the post-Darwinian era. In "Chesuncook," however, Thoreau puts his suspicions about science aside. Building on the few preservationist passages in "Ktaadn," which in that text are overshadowed by human narrative, Thoreau here uses the botanical descriptions to distance himself rhetorically from that human narrative, particularly the Odyssean paradigm which served as the framework of "Ktaadn." As a distancing device, the botanical descriptions work in tandem with other distancing devices, including those of irony and polemic,

that allow Thoreau to shift from an anthropocentric to a more biocentric rhetorical position.

In general, irony is much more apparent in "Chesuncook" than in "Ktaadn." Perhaps one reason for the irony is Thoreau's disgust with the central event of the trip, the moose hunt and the subsequent "moose-murder." This event causes him to view the whole enterprise of hunting with bitter irony, which, in turn, leads him to an ironic portrayal of both pioneer life and of Native American motivations for being in the wilderness. The event also serves as a springboard for his polemic against hunting, logging, and other human enterprises in the wilderness.

In spite of his growing distrust of pioneer motives for being in the wilderness, some of Thoreau's former admiration for the pioneers remains intact, as it always would. Upon meeting a couple of timber scouts, for instance, Thoreau relates, with some sense of envy,

It was a solitary and adventurous life, and comes nearest to that of the trapper of the west, perhaps. Working ever with a gun as well as an axe, letting their beards grow, without neighbors, not on an open plain, but far within the wilderness (101).

The moose hunt, however, leaves such a bad taste in Thoreau's mouth that he spares none of his companions, white or Native American, or any of the pioneers he would meet after the event, his biting sarcasm. Thoreau's companion, the same George Thatcher from the first trip, is actually responsible for shooting the moose, though the others are

involved in the hunting and butchering of it. The killing is done strictly for sport, leading Thoreau to compare the motives of his "Nimrod" to those of the subsistence hunter:

It is true, I came as near to being a hunter and miss it, as possible myself, and as it is, I think that I could spend a year in the woods fishing and hunting just enough to sustain myself, with satisfaction . . . But this hunting of the moose merely for the satisfaction of killing him - - not even for the sake of his hide, without making any extraordinary exertion or running any risk yourself, is too much like going out by night and shooting your neighbor's horses (119).

Thoreau admits to being interested in learning "how the Indian manoeuvred" in the moose hunt, "but one moose killed was as good, if not as bad, as a dozen" (119). He then quickly loses interest in continuing the hunt, though his companions work most of the night trying to find and kill more. The bloodthirstiness of his companions and his disgust with the whole operation lead to the most polemical comments in The Maine Woods. These comments start with the killing of the moose but then expand to include the killing of trees, thus merging with his concern for the flora of the wilderness.

As stated before, white and Native American alike suffer the brunt of Thoreau's polemic. Following his own musings about Native Americans at the end of "Ktaadn," Thoreau hires a Native American guide and canoe for his second trip, thus deliberately attempting to distance himself from the white perspective. However, Thoreau does not drop his prejudices against the contemporary Native

American altogether. He hires Joe Aitteon, a son of the governor, who is joined by another Native American, Sabattis Solomon. Thoreau watches Joe "narrowly, and listened to his observations, for we had employed an Indian mainly that I might have an opportunity to study his ways" (95). His description of Joe as "a good looking Indian, twenty-four years old" (90) is followed by comments about Joe's speech and mannerisms, which reveal how suspicious Thoreau is of white influence:

I was surprised to hear him whistling, "O Susanna," and several other such airs, while his paddle urged us along. Once he said, "Yes, Siree." His common word was "Sartain." Talking with him about subsisting wholly on what the woods yielded, game, fish, berries, etc., I suggested that his ancestors did so; but he answered, that he had been brought up in such a way that he could not do it. "Yes," said he, "that's the way they got a living, like wild fellows, wild as bears. By George! I shan't go into the woods without provision, - - hard bread, pork, etc." He had brought a barrel of hard bread and stored it at the carry for his hunting. However, though he was a Governor's son, he had not learned to read (107).

In light of Thoreau's suspicion of Joe's imperfect "Indian" character, it is not surprising that during the moose hunt Thoreau is also suspicious of Joe's hunting abilities. When Joe loses the trail of the moose George has wounded, and they stumble on the carcass of the moose more than an hour later, Thoreau says, "No doubt a better hunter would have tracked it to this spot at once" (113). Thoreau is then thoroughly disgusted with Joe's skinning of the moose, for which he provides a graphic description (115), and comments, in one of his most livid passages, "What a coarse and

imperfect use Indians and hunters make of nature! No wonder that their race is so soon exterminated" (120).

As he shifts his focus from the moose murder to the destruction of trees, Thoreau launches his attack against other destroyers of nature, the lumbermen, in such pointed passages as the following:

There is a higher law affecting our relation to pines as well as to men. A pine cut down, a dead pine, is no more a pine than a dead human carcass is a man Every creature is better alive than dead, men and moose and pine-trees, and he who understands it aright will rather preserve life than destroy it (121).

Following the details of the moose murder and Thoreau's polemics, the account continues with the hunting party travelling to Chesuncook Lake, where Thoreau, interestingly enough, resorts once again to his use of mythological language in describing the pioneers and their surroundings. However, in keeping with his growing distrust of pioneer motives for being in the wilderness, the mythological scheme is eventually put to ironic use. Here the mythological language begins with a reference to the boat-landing on the shore of Chesuncook, which reminds Thoreau of a "harbor, where boats were drawn up amid the stumps,--such a one, methought, as the Argo might have been launched in" (124). In describing a log cabin, Thoreau again puts myth to use, saying the walls were "tuned to each other with the axe, like Pandean pipes" (124). The local blacksmith "remind[s Thoreau] how primitive and honorable a trade was Vulcan's," a statement which leads him to puns in reference to the

ubiquity of the name Smith (126). However, when he is reminded of why the settlement exists in the first place, his mythological schema turns ironic:

The white-pine was at the bottom or further end of this. It is a war against the pines, the only real Aroostook or Penobscot war. I have no doubt that they lived pretty much the same sort of life in the Homeric age, for men have always thought more of eating than of fighting . . . I doubt if men ever made a trade of heroism. In the days of Achilles, even, they delighted in big barns, and perchance in pressed hay, and he who possessed the most valuable team was the best fellow (128).

This is followed by another ironic use of myth in reference to moose hunting:

A man from Oldtown had killed ten or twelve moose, within a year, so near the house that they heard all his guns. His name may have been Hercules, for aught I know, though I should rather have expected to hear the rattling of his club; but, no doubt, he keeps pace with the improvements of the age, and uses a Sharps rifle now; probably gets all his armor made and repaired at Smith's shop (129).

Thus, Thoreau turns heroics, which he unabashedly incorporates in positive fashion in "Ktaadn," upside down in "Chesuncook." Here, there is no real heroism in a pioneer's life; as adventurous as it sometimes may seem, the pioneer's life is one for economic gain and little else.

Although he finds the motives of Native Americans for being in the wilderness as base as those of the pioneers, Thoreau is, nevertheless, quite fascinated with the race. He is particularly drawn to their language, as the following passage suggests:

There can be no more startling evidence of their being a distinct and comparatively aboriginal race, than to

hear this unaltered Indian language, which the white man cannot speak nor understand. We may suspect change and deterioration in almost every other particular, but the language which is so wholly unintelligible to us. It took me by surprise . . . and convinced me that the Indian was not the invention of historians and poets . . . These Abenakis gossiped, laughed, and jested, in the language in which Eliot's Bible is written, the language which has been spoken in New England who shall say how long? These were the sounds that issued from the wigwams of this country before Columbus was born; they have not yet died away; and, with remarkably few exceptions, the language of their forefathers is still copious enough for them. I felt that I stood, or rather lay, as near to the primitive man of America, that night, as any of its discoverers ever did (136).

This musing leads Thoreau to question the philology of certain Native American words, a practice that none of the Native Americans he is with has ever attempted. In their sometimes frustrating efforts to put into English the meaning of some of their words, the Native Americans show "an inability, often described, to convey an abstract idea. Having got the idea, though indistinctly, they groped about in vain for words with which to express it" (140).

Nevertheless, Thoreau hopes to find, in their primitive language, a paradigm which he can use in understanding the wilderness. On this trip, however, he is left here with the notion that their language is inadequate for his purposes because of its inadequacy in conveying subtle abstractions.¹¹

¹¹Also, the fact that Penobscots did not climb mountains - - indeed, they were afraid of them - - would render their language useless in understanding his Katahdin experience, the most disturbing one he had and the one wherein language failed him the most.

After both his Western mythology and his use of Native American paradigms fail him, Thoreau is left with little beyond his own poetic and botanical descriptions of the wilderness as evidence of the "higher" use of wilderness he argues for in his polemic. He asks who can understand and write this non-anthropocentric view of the wilderness.

Thoreau then argues that only the poet can do so:

. . . he it is who makes the truest use of the pine--who does not fondle it with an axe, nor tickle it with a saw, nor stroke it with a plane; who knows whether its heart is false without cutting into it; . . . it is the poet, who loves them as his own shadow in the air, and lets them stand. . . It is not their bones or hide or tallow that I love most. It is the living spirit of the tree, not its spirit of turpentine, with which I sympathize, and which heals my cuts. It is as immortal as I am, and perchance will go to as high a heaven, there to tower above me still (121-22).¹²

Here Thoreau puts himself in the position of poet, one of few with language (though he has yet to find a language that really works) and ideas expressive enough to put wilderness to its highest use. However, the dilemma of language still faces Thoreau the poet/botanist. As he returns to civilization, and feels relieved to be back, the inadequacy of even poetry as the language of the wilderness strikes him:

The wilderness is simple, almost to barrenness. The partially cultivated country it is which chiefly has inspired, and will continue to inspire the strains of

¹²Lowell cut these last words out of his 1858 edition, perhaps because he considered it too pantheistic, perhaps because he recognized Thoreau's account as far superior to his own narrative of a Maine excursion, where "one cannot see the forest for the words" (Paul 364).

poets, such as compose the mass of any literature. Our woods are sylvan, and their inhabitants woodmen and rustics A civilized man . . . with ideas and associations, must at length pine there, like a cultivated plant, which clasps its fibres about a crude and undissolved mass of peat The poet's, commonly, is not a logger's path, but a woodman's. The logger and pioneer have preceded him, . . . banished decaying wood and the spongy mosses which feed on it, and built hearths and humanized Nature for him (155).

Only the idea that "spirits of a yet more liberal culture, to whom no simplicity is barren," will go to the wilderness "to drink at some new and bracing fountain of the Muses" allows Thoreau a hope that he will become the voice of the wilderness, sounding its mysteries and beauties in yet undiscovered language. He would continue his search in his 1857 trip.

The Allegash and East Branch

In his final trip to Maine in 1857, just five years before his death, Thoreau begins to discover ways of understanding the wilderness that, though not without limitations, surpass his other attempts. Again, his experience is evolutionary, building on the Native American perspective he tried to understand, with mixed results, in his Chesuncook trip, and an increasing comfort in his being in the wilderness. Polemics play a much lesser role in "Allegash and the East Branch" than in "Chesuncook"; even Polis' killing a moose triggers implied but not explicit criticism. According to some editors, Thoreau's comments about conservation of trees in "Allegash" were probably

composed in 1858, about the time he composed "Chesuncook" (Moldenhauer Maine Woods 364), showing that though he continued to think conservation was important, his focus had shifted somewhat in the later trip. Thoreau retains the use of botanical description, and a large part of the trip is devoted to the collection of plants which he and his companion, Edward Hoar, dry and press in scrapbooks, Thoreau's substitute for trophy hunting. However, in one of the more interesting passages, on his first acquaintance with the phenomenon of phosphorescent wood, Thoreau deliberately disposes of his scientific mindset, choosing instead to be "a believer" in spirits and the supernatural, a throwback to his earlier belief in the limitation of science. Further, through the sometimes amazing woodcraft of his Native American guide, Joe Polis,¹³ Thoreau learns much about flora and fauna that goes beyond what is to be found in science books. Indeed, many of his most important musings in "The Allegash and East Branch" involve Joe Polis: Thoreau is nearly obsessed with deciding what parts of the Native American perspective are useful for his understanding of the wilderness; what parts are mere superstition and useless for him; what parts are overly influenced by whites and, hence, impure and untrustworthy; and what parts are so foreign to the white perspective that they are forever

¹³Sayre convincingly argues that Thoreau's Polis was a man also known as Joseph Porus. The article includes a print of a Charles Bird King portrait of Joseph Porus.

beyond him. Thoreau's rhetorical purpose, from start to finish, then, is to study and understand Joe Polis. He comes to the understanding that the Native American can indeed understand the wilderness as no white man can. Thoreau must, therefore, glean all the wisdom he can from Polis in the little time he has contact with him.

From the second paragraph of "The Allegash and East Branch," Joe Polis is centerstage. Thoreau and his companion find Joe dressing a deer skin in his yard, and the former describes him as "stoutly built, perhaps a little above middle height, with a broad face and as others said perfect Indian features" (157). Joe is an aristocrat - - that is, a landowner - - and Thoreau describes his house as "a 2-story white one with blinds, the best looking that I noticed there [in Oldtown], and as good as an average one on a New England village street. It was surrounded by a garden and fruit trees, single corn-stalks standing thinly amid the beans" (157-58). Though advised that Polis' services will cost them dearly, Thoreau and his companion hire him for one dollar and fifty cents a day plus fifty cents a week for his canoe. Thoreau says, "We thought ourselves lucky to secure the services of this man, who was known to be particularly steady and reliable" (159). These descriptions are important in that they distinguish Polis from the other Native Americans Thoreau had met on his journeys. Polis has adopted many of the white man's ways, but he mostly has

appropriated the white man's ideas and technology useful to his profession and has shunned the vices, unlike other Native Americans whom Thoreau characterizes as having cultivated the vices rather than the virtues of whites. Unlike Louis Neptune of the Katahdin trip, who proves himself unreliable because of his abuse of alcohol, or Joe Aitteon, who has adopted white methods of hunting and coping with the wilderness almost to the exclusion of native woodcraft, Joe Polis maintains a balance between worlds. As Thoreau learns more about him, evidence of this balance becomes more apparent.

It is coincidental that Thoreau and his party start their trip on the same stage with a man Polis calls "the great hunter." The great hunter, however, is not what he appears to be. Thoreau describes him as

a handsome man about thirty years old, of good height, but not apparently robust, of gentlemanly dress and faultless toilet; such a one as you might expect to meet on Broadway. In fact, in the popular sense of the word, he was the most "gentlemanly" appearing man in the stage, or that we saw on the road. He had a fair white complexion, as if he had always lived in the shade, and an intellectual face, and with his quiet manners might have passed for a divinity student who had seen something of the world (161).

Thoreau is surprised to learn that this gentleman is a hunter at all, much less the "chief white hunter of Maine" (161). Accounts of his manliness also include life-saving heroics, for which he has been rewarded with free stage transportation. He is the epitome of the virtues of both civilization and the frontier, at least from the white

perspective. Even in the limited space Thoreau devotes to his description, he appears to be the perfect balance of civilization and frontier, and in that role he serves as a perfect foil to Polis, who seems to have struck a similar balance. However, whereas the anonymous great hunter remains always a white man, bringing to the wilderness white methods of coping and hunting, Polis remains always a Native American, borrowing from the whites only what can be assimilated into his Native American mindset. It is significant that Thoreau never reveals the name of the white hunter, choosing instead to use him as a standard for evaluating Polis rather than developing him into a character with individual identity.

Polis' identity as a Native American, as someone quite different from the whites, is an issue from the beginning of the trip onward. One of the chief differences between Polis and the whites is his mode of communication. Idle banter and chitchat that are part of the white man's normal conversation have no part in that of Polis, as is revealed in this passage about their stage trip:

Again I was struck by the peculiar vagueness of his [Polis'] replies when addressed in the stage, or at the tavern. He really never said anything on such occasions. He was merely stirred up, like a wild beast, and passively muttered some insignificant response. His answer, in such cases, was never the consequence of a positive mental energy, but vague as a puff of smoke, suggesting no responsibility, and if you considered it, you would find that you had got nothing out of him" (162).

Earlier, Thoreau might have attributed this "peculiar

vagueness" to something like an "inability . . . to convey an abstract idea" or some other lack of language competence (140), but in "Allegash," Thoreau moves away from stereotyped misperceptions of Native American language and towards an understanding of the Penobscot Indian's penchant for communicating only what must be said. Later in the trip, for example, Thoreau relates an account of Polis shooting rapids in his canoe alone and waiting for Thoreau and his partner to walk downstream. Rather than calling them often to let them know of his presence, Polis calls infrequently, not enough for them to find him, "forgetting that we were not Indians" (272). He does this not to confuse his white friends but out of respect: "Indians like to get along with the least possible communication and ado. He was really paying us a compliment all the while, thinking that we preferred a hint to a kick" (272). Verbiage has no place in the Penobscot's communication, at least not in practical parlance.

At the same time, Polis is keenly aware of the differences between himself and whites. Perhaps the most telling linguistic evidence of this sense of otherness is that Polis never refers to himself, Thoreau, and Thoreau's partner as "we" but always says "you and I" instead, evidence that he never sees himself as part of the group (167). Polis' sense of otherness is illustrated amply. On Thoreau's asking him how he knows his whereabouts in the

woods even in the confusion of a moose chase, Polis responds, "O, I can't tell you. . . Great difference between me and white man" (185). Unlike whites, who carry detailed maps and other instruments to mark their locations in the wilderness, Polis "does not carry things in his head, nor remember the route exactly, like a white man, but relies on himself and the moment" (185). At the same time, while Polis has travelled to Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, he realizes how unfit he is for white civilization: "I suppose, I live in New York, I be poorest hunter, I expect" (197). Thoreau thus indicates that Polis "understood very well both his superiority and his inferiority to the whites" (197).

Despite Polis' inferiority in the context of the white man's world, Thoreau becomes convinced that Polis' otherness, his radically different vision of his surroundings, is precisely the key to understanding the wilderness in ways heretofore unknown to whites. His desire to learn all he can from Polis becomes apparent quite early on in the text. He writes:

I observed that I should like to go to school to him to learn his language, living on the Indian island the while; could not that be done? "O, yer," he replied, "good many do so." I asked how long he thought it would take. He said one week. I told him that in this voyage I would tell him all I knew, and he should tell me all he knew, to which he readily agreed (168).

While the notion of these men relating all they know in one week is quite humorous (as are many of Thoreau's and Polis'

comments, and Thoreau notes Polis' keen sense of humor more than once), the import still is quite serious. Later he writes,

One revelation has been made to the Indian, another to the white man. I have much to learn of the Indian, nothing of the missionary. I am not sure but all that would tempt me to teach the Indian my religion would be his promise to teach me his (181).

Such comments reveal Thoreau's agenda in his 1857 trip. He will glean as much information as possible from Polis and will in turn share with Polis whatever knowledge he has that the Native American wants. This exchange of information, clearly the focus of the trip, benefits both men, though at times both question the usefulness of the information they have received.

From Polis, Thoreau learns more about Native Americans than from any other single source. The variety of tasks that Polis performs primarily for Thoreau's observation is extensive. He demonstrates woodcraft in many ways: making thread from the roots of trees; making teas from various wild plants and relating the medicinal value or other uses of almost any plant Thoreau can name; finding and identifying snakes by the peculiar sound they make which only he can hear; preparing animal hides for use; repairing his canoe with materials found in the forest, including a type of pitch he makes from secret ingredients; tracking Thoreau and his companion when they get lost; relating how he can find his way in any woods by looking at rocks and

trees to see growth of mosses and limbs which indicate directions; guiding his canoe over very rough lake waters as well as river rapids by himself; carrying his canoe with a device made of bark that distributes the weight evenly over his shoulders, head, breast, forehead and hands; protecting himself from mosquitoes by smoking or building smoking fires around his bed at night; calling a musquash (muskrat) by imitating its sound. Thoreau is sometimes amazed at Polis' woodcraft and wildness and relishes each revelation Polis offers.

In addition to demonstrations of woodcraft, Polis relates much about Penobscot culture and language, which, for Thoreau's purposes, may be more important even than the woodcraft. As he did with Joe Aitteon, Thoreau asks Polis the Penobscot name and an English translation for practically everything they come across, and Polis proves more adept in doing this than the former guide. In addition, Polis relates much more than names in his revelations of Penobscot culture. He tells folk narratives, sings songs, and speaks proverbs. Interestingly, however, Thoreau accepts these offerings with reservations. For example, when Polis tells them a story about Mount Kineo having once been a cow moose that was killed by a mighty hunter, Thoreau is not impressed:

He told us at some length, though it did not amount to much, and with apparent good faith, and asked us how we supposed the hunter could have killed such a mighty moose as that, - - how we could do it. Whereupon a

man-of-war to fire broadsides into her was suggested, etc. An Indian tells such a story as if he thought it deserved to have a good deal said about it, only he has not got it to say, and so he makes up for the deficiency by a drawling tone, long-windedness and a dumb wonder which he hopes will be contagious (172).

Obviously, Thoreau shows little respect for Native American folk narrative techniques here. Similarly, when Polis sings a religious song, Thoreau remarks on its lack of meaning, though he finds the song more pleasing than the narrative:

[Polis sang] a slow, somewhat nasal, yet musical chant, in his own language, which probably was taught his tribe long ago by the Catholic missionaries. He translated it to us, sentence by sentence, afterward, wishing to see if we could remember it. It proved to be a very simple religious exercise or hymn, the burden of which was, that there was only one God who ruled all the world. This was hammered (or sung) out very thin, so that some stanzas wellnigh meant nothing at all, merely keeping up the idea . . . His singing carried me back to the period of the discovery of America, to San Salvador and the Incas, when Europeans first encountered the simple faith of the Indian. There was, indeed, a beautiful simplicity about it; nothing of the dark and savage, only the mild and infantile (178-79).

While the song is tainted with missionary influence, of which Thoreau is always suspicious, the element of both the native narrative and the song of which Thoreau is mostly suspicious is the degree of belief expected of the listener and deliverer.¹⁴ Both the narrative and the song are the artifacts of "the simple faith of the Indian." This matter of faith is Thoreau's stumbling block, though he struggles towards some sort of belief he can accept in all of his

¹⁴For contrary opinions on Thoreau's acceptance of the "simple faith" of Polis, see Lebeaux (287), Gura (378), and Fleck (1-21).

writings about the Maine wilderness. He finds that he cannot totally accept Polis' faith, a hybrid of native mythology and Protestant Christianity, and even searches for language more primitive, more at the heart of the wilderness, than that of the Native Americans. His encounter with phosphorescent wood and his attempts to describe and even to mimic the language of animals illustrate both his noble effort and his great failure to find a belief and a language suitable for his understanding of the wilderness. He simply cannot accept or even understand the Penobscot way because his mentor's superstitions about mountains cause him to avoid them, leaving Thoreau still with no paradigm for understanding his Ktaadn experience; because his mentor is tainted with a faith he does not trust and because he does not and perhaps cannot fully understand Polis' vision of the wilderness. His own otherness from Polis is not only the evidence of a radically different vision of the wilderness but also the barrier inhibiting Thoreau from ever understanding that vision.

Thoreau initially distrusts Polis' native beliefs because they conflict with his own scientific skepticism and because they cause Polis to be afraid of mountains. These native beliefs he labels superstitious, as this passage about meeting Polis while descending Mount Kineo suggests:

We met the Indian, puffing and panting, about one third of the way up, but thinking that he must be near the

top, and saying that it took his breath away. I thought that superstition had something to do with his fatigue. Perhaps he believed that he was climbing over the back of a tremendous moose. He said that he had never ascended Kineo (177).

Though he does not explicitly relate this climb of Kineo to his earlier climb of Katahdin, during which Thoreau had groped for a paradigm that might help him understand the "unfinished parts of the globe," Thoreau is sarcastic here primarily because Polis' superstition prevents any understanding of mountains, has, indeed, prevented him from ever climbing this mountain before. Such fear will not yield for Polis or Thoreau an understanding of mountains that Thoreau needs. However, shortly after this denigration of Polis' belief, Thoreau has his encounter with phosphorescent wood - - decaying wood that glows in the dark. This encounter is a revelation and inspires many statements of faith, a willingness to believe. Thoreau writes:

I little thought that there was such a light shining in the darkness of the wilderness for me A scientific explanation, as it is called, would have been altogether out of place there. That is for pale daylight. Science with its retorts would have put me to sleep; it was the opportunity to be ignorant that I improved. It suggested to me that there was something to be seen if one had eyes. It made a believer of me more than before. I believed that the woods were not tenantless, but choke full of honest spirits as good as myself any day, - - not an empty chamber, in which chemistry was left to work alone, but an inhabited house, - - and for a few moments I had fellowship with them (181).

These thoughts lead Thoreau to the statement, quoted above, that he had much to learn from Native American religion,

nothing to learn of the white man's. However, his mentor on this spiritual journey is, as was also noted above, not without missionary taint. Polis' Protestantism proves to be an even greater stumbling block for Thoreau than his superstition.

Polis' Christian beliefs, particularly his piety, are the subject of great parody. Polis comes to understand that Thoreau is not pious, though he never pegs him as an unbeliever. The clash between Polis the believer and Thoreau the doubter, especially on Sundays, becomes the subject of much humorous writing, mostly at Polis' expense. Polis thinks that they should rest on Sundays, Thoreau that they should travel, leading Polis to relate, as an example, the story of some ministers he had guided to Katahdin:

"They make a long prayer every morning and night and at every meal. Come Sunday," said he, "they stop 'em, no go at all that day, - - keep still, - - preach all day, - - first one then another, just like church . . ." I judged from this account that their every camp was a camp-meeting, and that they had mistaken their route, - - they should have gone to Eastham; that they wanted an opportunity to preach somewhere more than to see Ktaadn (193).

Thoreau is also quick to point out the discrepancies between Polis' pious talk and his behavior, relating that while Polis agreed to guide them on Sundays but without pay, he did "reckon in the Sundays" when pay day came (193). And, when they finally stop that first Sunday, Thoreau notes how Polis spends his time not praying but napping: "[H]e improved every opportunity to get a nap, whatever the day"

(202).

More importantly, Thoreau suspects that the Christian influence has even infected the Native American language. Upon hearing Polis refer to name of a stream as Socatarian, Thoreau writes, "The last name . . . had a bogus sound, too much like sectarian for me, as if a missionary had tampered with it" (183). Polis' Protestantism, then, serves as a major stumbling block for Thoreau. Thoreau's experience of belief never moves beyond the resolutions made during his encounter with the phosphorescent wood. In spite of his avowed willingness to believe, he remains a skeptic, still in search of some ancient paradigm of experience that he might accept just as the Native American accepts his "simple faith" but also one that might help him understand the mountains. Though he briefly resorts to mythology, at one point comparing Polis to Prometheus, his quest for faith seems in vain after his encounters with Polis' Christianity. Having lost faith in a Native American perspective, Thoreau turns to the language of the animals themselves in a desperate attempt to understand them and their home, his wilderness.

It is, not coincidentally, Polis who sparks this idea of speaking the language of animals. He attempts to call a muskrat (musquash) by imitating its sound, leaving Thoreau to comment:

I . . . thought I had at last got into the wilderness, and that he was a wild man indeed, to be talking to a

musquash! I did not know which of the two was the strangest to me. He seemed suddenly to have quite forsaken humanity, and gone over to the musquash side (206-07).

As they move further into the wilderness, Thoreau tries his own luck at conversing with animals. Some of these attempts seem rather silly, as is evident in this passage about his talking to a squirrel:

One of those sombre fir and spruce woods is not complete unless you hear from out its cavernous mossy and twiggy recesses his [the red squirrel's] fine alarm, - - his spruce voice, like the working of the sap through some crack in a tree, - - the working of the spruce-beer. Such an impertinent fellow would occasionally try to alarm the wood about me. "O," said I, "I am well acquainted with your family, I know your cousins in Concord very well. Guess the mail's irregular in these parts, and you'd like to hear from 'em." But my overtures were vain, for he would withdraw by his ariel turnpikes into a more distant cedar-top, and spring his rattle again (218-19).

He wishes to hear the howl of the wolf but does not: "We were not so lucky as to hear the wolves howl, though that is an occasional serenade" (224), but on hearing the call of the loon, Thoreau finds the voice of the wilderness that he can equate to his own:

This [voice] of the loon - - I do not mean its laugh, but its looning - - is a long-drawn call, as it were, sometimes singularly human to my ear, - - hoo-hoo-ooooo, like the hallooing of a man on a very high key, having thrown his voice into his head. I have heard a sound exactly like it when breathing heavily through my own nostrils, half awake at ten at night, suggesting my affinity to the loon; as if its language were but a dialect of my own, after all. Formerly, when lying awake at midnight in those woods, I had listened to hear some words or syllables of their language, but it chanced that I listened in vain until I heard the cry of the loon. I have heard it occasionally on the ponds of my native town, but there its wildness is not enhanced by the surrounding scenery

(224-25).

Thoreau grasps at straws in searching for a language of the wilderness, one that he, too, can speak.¹⁵ One can say that this desire to speak the language of animals shows how far Thoreau has come in his familiarity with the wilderness; his comments about the fearful "howling wilderness" in "Ktaadn" have given way to his wishing to hear the howl. Indeed, in another passage about voices of the wilderness, he writes,

[The mossy swamp] was ready to echo the growl of a bear, the howl of a wolf, or the scream of a panther; but when you get fairly into the middle of one of these grim forests, you are surprised to find that the larger inhabitants are not at home commonly Generally speaking, a howling wilderness does not howl: it is the imagination of the traveller that does the howling (219).

Certainly this understanding of the wilderness shows Thoreau's maturation, from adventure-seeking Odyssean to a man more willing to embrace the utmost wildness of nature. Still, however, civilization influences him, as seen in this

¹⁵As Fannie Eckstorm has noted, there might have been more to Polis' ability to converse with animals than Thoreau knew. Both Polis and Governor John Neptune (whom Thoreau met at the end of his 1853 excursion) claimed magical powers. Murray notes, "In previous times, they would have held the office of shaman or powwow, but in their day they concealed their gifts from white men. . . One of the powers of a shaman was the ability to talk to animals, and a story about John Neptune has him sequestered in a little hut with a company of salamanders, who stand on their hind legs and converse with him" (ftn. 13, p. 229). Given his rejection of Polis' supernatural beliefs in other instances, like the folktale about Kinneo, it is hard to project whether or not Thoreau would have accepted or rejected Polis' shamanistic gifts, in spite of his willingness to embrace the language of animals in the instances I have cited. Thoreau seems caught between his scientific skepticism and his transcendental faith.

passage contrasting the thick woods with the openness of river vistas:

To look down, in this case, over eighteen miles of water, was liberating and civilizing even. No doubt, the short distance to which you can see in the woods, and the general twilight, would at length react on the inhabitants, and make them salvages [sic] I perceive that in these woods the earliest settlements are, for various reasons, clustering about the lakes, but partly, I think, for the sake of the neighborhood as the oldest clearings. They are forest schools already established, - - great centres of light. Water is a pioneer which the settler follows, taking advantage of its improvements (197-98).

However, generally speaking, Thoreau's understanding of the wilderness is much matured over that of his Katahdin journey.¹⁶ His understanding of Native Americans, too, is greatly enhanced by his observations and interactions with Polis, though he cannot accept Polis' vision entirely because it, too, cannot interpret the mountains, because he cannot accept Polis' religion, and because he cannot fully understand Polis' perspective. Though Thoreau holds back no criticism in his evaluation of Polis, finding quite a few faults with him other than his religion (among them a propensity to make too much fuss over a stomach ache and to become overly excited when executing a shot while moose hunting), he retains a great deal of respect for his abilities to combine Native American woodcraft with white technology, using both to advantage in plying his trade as a hunter. Thoreau also admires Polis' initiative in wanting

¹⁶For a contrary opinion, see Paul (368).

to educate young Native Americans in schools: "if you had been to college and learnt to calculate, you could 'keep 'em property, - - no other way'" (293). At the end of their journey, Polis gives Thoreau what may be the greatest compliment he could give him, a Native American name, one that translates as "great paddler." The two part on amicable terms, each having learned from the other.

Less than five years separated the end of Thoreau's Allegash journey from his death. The events of the trip stayed on his mind as he continued to wrestle with ways he might understand the wilderness. Even his dying words, according to his friend William Ellery Channing, were "moose" and "Indians." Out of regard for his friend Joe Polis, Thoreau would not publish "The Allegash and East Branch" in his lifetime, though it was published with the previously published "Ktaadn" and "Chesuncook" in a shoddily edited edition called The Maine Woods in 1864 (Moldenhauer The Maine Woods 356).

Thus, The Maine Woods reflects Thoreau's thinking about the wilderness over a period of a dozen years. It reflects his use of multiple paradigms in his attempts to understand the wilderness and to preserve it. He was never entirely successful in finding a paradigm that would help him to understand the wilderness with the simple faith that he both envies and rejects in his friend Joe Polis. His turn to science in the 1850's made him something of a skeptic in

spite of his declarations to the contrary. But his revolutionary look at wilderness, his pleas for conservation, his attempts to understand a Native American perspective, and overall his overcoming traditional destructive ways of perceiving of the wilderness heralded the way for a new wilderness gospel, the preachers of which still look to Thoreau as their spiritual forefather.

Thoreau rejected the language of Christianity and other Western tropes for writing the wilderness, choosing instead to use the language of science and to look for more primitive paradigms that he found but never fully understood.¹⁷ It is no accident that the next great prophet of the wilderness, John Muir, who read Thoreau extensively, also tried rejecting these tropes as well as science but was compelled to use them in his public writings about the wilderness, though his private writings reveal a much more radical wilderness vision. His willingness to compromise his own radical vision in order to reach the public made his writing a much more effective political tool than Thoreau's Maine Woods, while his journals and essays reveal a mountaintop vision far more transcendent than

¹⁷One is tempted to speculate how much more Thoreau would have come to understand the wilderness through his science and his studies of Native Americans, both of which continued even after his final sickness overtook him, if he had lived. Howarth notes that through his scientific studies, Thoreau was headed towards an understanding of "ecosystems" long before the concept was named (14), and Sayre traces Thoreau's involvement with Indians well after his 1857 trip.

Thoreau's Katahdin epiphany.

Chapter 3

JOHN MUIR: WILDERNESS PROPHET

Of the nineteenth-century wilderness writers, surely John Muir was the most committed to living a life in the wilderness. A lover of wild things from early on in his childhood in Scotland, he became in his adulthood in the United States a champion of wilderness and the greatest prophet of the "gospel of wilderness" in history. Among his accomplishments are helping to found the Sierra Club, authoring in part the ideas on which the National Parks System would be founded and operated, influencing presidents personally on matters of wilderness preservation (even taking Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft on excursions into the Yosemite), writing over ten volumes (in the Sierra edition) that are still considered holy writ for wilderness enthusiasts, and converting many of the American public to the support of his preservationist causes if not all of them to his radical vision of man's relation to nature. He was aided in his efforts by a plethora of friends and supporters, many of them with powerful connections; but without Muir it is conceivable that wilderness according to any definition would not exist today

in the lower forty-eight states. His legacy is enduring, and in the late 1970's, the California Historical Society voted Muir the "greatest figure in California history."¹

However, Muir's amazing accomplishments and his ecology were tempered by compromises he made with the civilized world and compromises he made between the incredibly diverse and conflicting paradigms that informed his wilderness philosophy. Like Thoreau, who discarded paradigms that failed him (the Western paradigms that failed him on Katahdin, for example), Muir attempted to cast off all anthropocentric understandings of nature but found himself engaged in a life-long process of testing paradigms while seldom permanently discarding any of them outright. Rather than entrenching himself in a rigid commitment to a philosophical, scientific, artistic, or religious agenda in his writing on the wilderness, Muir practiced the art of compromise in testing the various paradigms he inherited. The result is that Muir's perspective is skewed by the paradigms that most affect him at the moment he is writing or the paradigms that, in much of his public writing, he chose probably for their rhetorical effect. Students of the environmental movement, while they often look to Muir as one of the fathers of modern environmentalism, are sometimes disturbed about the tensions and compromises evident within

¹See James Mitchell Clark's Life and Adventures of John Muir, p. ix.

Muir's life and works. This chapter is an attempt to make sense of those tensions and compromises. It will focus on Muir's writings; it is not meant to add to the growing biographical accounts of his life, as fascinating and necessary to an understanding of his ideas as they are, for Muir's life is a superb example of how modern man can attempt to live in harmony with nature.² His life, however, is not the only aspect of his career worthy of close study; Muir's experimentation with paradigms in writing the wilderness provides for a fascinating study, just as Thoreau's did in The Maine Woods. Muir's voluminous writings about the wilderness contain some of the most important contributions to our understanding of wilderness today and underline many of the fundamental paradoxes that still handicap our efforts to understand and protect or extend the few remaining pockets of wilderness on the planet. Close examination of a few of his works and letters over the course of his nearly fifty years of writing

²Several biographical accounts of Muir's life are in print. Woolfe's Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir (1945) is still the most thorough treatment of the life, though W. F. Badè's two-volume Life and Letters (1924) is the best treatment of Muir's life in the context of his own correspondence. More recent treatments of biographical materials include James Mitchell Clarke's The Life and Adventures of John Muir (1979), Herbert Smith's John Muir (1965), Stephen Fox's John Muir and His Legacy (1981) and Michael Cohen's The Pathless Way: John Muir and the American Wilderness (1984). Clarke's book is primarily for a juvenile audience, Smith's and Cohen's are as much studies of his writings as they are studies of his life, and Fox's places Muir in the larger context of the conservation movement.

provides a better understanding of his major paradigms and the compromises he made regarding them.

The Life and Early Influences

Late in life, John Muir was encouraged to write his autobiography but only completed a portion of it that covers his life through his college years, My Boyhood and Youth. When Muir was eleven years old, his father, searching for the one true religion and deciding to emigrate to America to try out Campbellite Disciples of Christ, moved the family from Scotland to the Wisconsin frontier, where they scratched out a farm in the tough prairie grasses and harsh northern winters. During his childhood, Muir suffered more than his siblings from the rigorous demands of his father's extreme commitment to hard work and total devotion to religious purity. However, he also found time to romp around in what remained of the Wisconsin wilderness. The contrasts between the purity and freedom of wildlife and the bondage, hardship, and corruption of civilization and his home life are the theme of Boyhood and Youth, a book intended for children that Muir wished to convert early to his later views of wilderness. Boyhood and Youth does not present Muir's most radical views of wilderness, those formed during the late 1860's and early 1870's, but rather those views he held after he had made his great compromises with civilization. The book shows, however, the process whereby Muir became disgruntled with his home life, used his

knowledge of scripture (he was forced to memorize all of the New Testament and most of the Old in the King James Version) to combat his father's religious intransigence, used his stock of inventions (for which he had become a local celebrity, in spite of his father's preachments about the dangers of vanity) to escape to the university, and, later, how he left the University of Wisconsin for the "University of the Wilderness." It was at the university, however, that Muir began wrestling with the sometimes conflicting ideas that would inform his wilderness philosophy.

Muir was pursuing studies at the University of Wisconsin the year Thoreau died, and while there, under the guidance of Professor Ezra Carr, his wife, Mrs. Jeanne C. Carr, and Dr. James Davie Butler, Muir read Thoreau and Emerson, the European Romantics, and many of the scientific texts that would influence his thinking about wilderness. These texts, and others he would encounter after his years at the university, became the paradigms he would test in wild places on four continents. They opened new vistas for him, helping him cast off his father's radical Calvinism and the dominant utilitarian philosophies that were advocating the conversion of wilderness to landscapes amenable to human needs. In following Emerson and Thoreau, Muir became one of the last important romantics of the nineteenth century, and in his time he was certainly the most influential spiritual descendant of the Transcendentalists.

Among the Concord Transcendentalists, Emerson seems to have been the larger influence on Muir in his early writings, though his appreciation of Thoreau increased as he grew older. He would, in his old age, hold Thoreau in greater esteem than Emerson, though he counted his meeting with the Concord sage among the most important moments in his life.

Muir's debts to his transcendental forebearers are numerous. Most importantly, he saw in nature a unity, a wholeness that men should embrace as Thoreau had learned to do at Walden and, to some extent, in the Maine woods. One critic notes that Muir's writing style is often heavily influenced by the writings of Emerson and Thoreau, though his own voice is, in many ways, original (Smith 27). However, Muir embraced the extremes of nature more thoroughly than either Emerson or Thoreau, spending literally years rambling in wilderness. Moreover, unlike Emerson and Thoreau, Muir was able to incorporate the Darwinian theories of nature into his basic transcendentalism, thus reaching a truce between science and religion that most participants on either side of the debate did not achieve; the result of this compromise is a philosophic and literary alternative not only to the naive views of nature offered by some Transcendentalists but also to the pessimistic, post-Darwinian views of nature espoused

by Crane, London, and others in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

In addition to participating in the philosophical debates raging over Darwinism during his time, Muir plunged headfirst into other scientific inquiries about the creation of the geological features of the earth. His geological and botanical explorations in Yosemite and later in Alaska confirmed his hybrid philosophical assumptions and pitted him against the foremost scientists of his day in debate over the origins of Yosemite, a dispute in which his glacial theories were mostly confirmed by subsequent geological discoveries. Later, as he saw his beloved Yosemite increasingly exploited by herding, logging, and other human enterprises, Muir used his debating talents to sway a larger audience, writing essays for the finest journals of his day and speaking across the country in defense of wilderness. His rhetoric helped accomplish many great strides towards wilderness preservation and towards modern man's attempts to see in wilderness a means of salvation from the corruptions of civilization.

Thus, while Muir certainly is the spiritual descendant of Thoreau and Emerson, his philosophy is complicated by a more thorough understanding of the scientific queries and debates of his time. Additionally, unlike Thoreau, who rejected Christianity as a paradigm for understanding wilderness, Muir's language is laden with allusions to and

phraseology of the Bible, most of which he was forced to memorize in the King James Version. In his mature philosophy, transcendental pantheism is harmonized with his deep-rooted Christian beliefs, for Muir believed that "although the page of Nature is so replete with divine truth, it is silent concerning the fall of man and the wonders of Redeeming Love." And while Muir confessed that he took "more intense delight from reading the power and goodness of God from 'the things which are made' than from the Bible," he also believed that both books were necessary: "The two books . . . harmonize beautifully, and contain enough of divine truth for the study of all eternity."³

Another major diversion from Thoreau is Muir's deliberate disregard for the language and lore of Native Americans, with whom he had much contact in California and Alaska but whose way of life he ultimately cast aside as an unsuitable paradigm for his wilderness agenda, which largely depended on sympathy from a white urban audience in the late

³Letter to Mrs. Jeanne Carr, dated January 21, 1866. In Letters to a Friend p. 1. In my evaluation of Muir's Christianity, I diverge from Fox, Cohen, and Oelschlaeger, all of whom believe he rejected Christianity and evolved a sort of pantheistic theology to replace it. Even though Muir did reject organized religion, he married a devout Christian, continued to use the language of Christianity throughout his life in much of his writing, and urged his daughters to memorize the sayings of Jesus even late in his life. My own ideology is, I confess, greatly influenced by Christianity, and I resist current tendencies in the environmental movement to reject Christianity outright because of its anthropocentric concept of the universe, a tendency reflected in the ideologies of the three men cited above.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ultimately, the role that fate played in forcing him into the role of publicist of the wilderness made him more of a polemecist than any of the Transcendentalists had ever been. This role also turned his writing away from philosophical or scientific debate and towards persuasive rhetoric. In his public writing Muir had to make the greatest compromises in his wilderness vision, but in every instance, from the earliest essays to the latest unfinished memoirs, Muir plays the role of compromiser, attempting to harmonize various philosophic stances that his romantic and scientific forebearers often saw as incompatible. These life-long compromises resulted in both the great triumphs and the great tragedies of his life.⁴

At the University of Wisconsin

Muir's tenure at the university brought him in contact with the people who had the most impact on his life. He signed up for courses in the classics, taught by James Davie Butler, and natural history, taught by Ezra Slocum Carr. These men introduced Muir to many of the philosophical and

⁴His biographer, Wolfe, says that the "duality of his nature," an extreme love for wandering in the wilderness and extreme devotion to his family, caused his "personal tragedy," though the compromises, as I will argue, extend far beyond these two extremes. Cohen sees the multiple compromises as neither tragic nor comedic but as inevitable considering the urban, Eastern audience whose attention he had to gain (see Cohen's introduction to Pathless Way and chapters 10, 11, and the epilogue, for discussions of Muir's compromises).

scientific texts and ideas that became part of the paradigms with which he wrestled throughout his life. Dr. Butler was the first to encourage Muir to keep a journal as Emerson had done, and he recognized in Muir's style the seeds of genius. Later, Muir would keep a commonplace book during all of his great wilderness excursions, and some of his most enduring ideas are found in those journals. Dr. Carr, on the other hand, introduced Muir to Louis Agassiz's theories of glaciation, first espoused in Études sur les glaciers (1840), theories which upset as many scientists as Darwin's theories of life origins did a few years later, because they failed to reconcile with the six-day creation story in Genesis. Dr. Carr, following the example of Agassiz, carried his students to the outdoors, where they could observe firsthand the evidence of the theories he taught. He used textbooks only sparingly, preferring first-hand experience in the laboratory of the outdoors. This preference for understanding nature through experience rather than through books became part of Muir's basic philosophy, in spite of the influence that some books, including Agassiz's, had on him. One of Agassiz's sayings was in essence adopted by both Carr and Muir: "A physical fact is as sacred as a moral principle."⁵

Muir also learned much from his fellow students, crediting one Milton S. Griswold for introducing him to

⁵See Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness, pp. 74-78.

scientific taxonomy and showing him the interrelatedness of species by making him aware of the essential similarities between a locust tree and a pea plant. Muir spent literally a lifetime, after this revelation, botanizing, discovering and documenting the incredible unity in nature that he himself had intuited, that Emerson and Thoreau had postulated, but that the sciences, he believed, best revealed.

These strong masculine influences notwithstanding, it was Professor Carr's wife, Jeanne, who exerted the most profound influence over Muir, either in or out of the classroom, first by introducing him (with Dr. Butler's assistance) to the works of Thoreau and Emerson. Later, she would arrange the meeting between Muir and Emerson, who was a personal friend of the Carrs, and other important scientific figures. It was she who fostered a Transcendental faith in Muir and the idea that he would do great things in his life. Furthermore, one critic convincingly argues that it was she who showed Muir how to regard nature as a woman would regard it, not as something to be used for the benefit of men but as something to be loved for itself.⁶ Muir went through a three-year period after he left the university in which he tried to convince himself that his invention of labor-saving devices was a

⁶Cohen, Pathless Way, 10-11.

"philanthropic" enterprise. He wrote to Mrs. Carr on
January 21, 1866,

I have been very busy of late making practical machinery. I like my work exceedingly well, but would prefer inventions which would require some artistic as well as mechanical skill. I invented and put in operation a few days ago an attachment for a self-acting lathe, which has increased its capacity at least one third. We are now using it to turn broom-handles, and as these useful articles may now be made cheaper, and as cleanliness is one of the cardinal virtues, I congratulate myself in having done something like a true philanthropist for the real good of mankind in general. What say you? (Letters to a Friend 3-4).

His question indicates he is not sure of his position, perhaps because he was probably aware, as Wolfe suggests, that labor-saving devices often put men out of work at the same time they saved time in the production process (Son of the Wilderness 103). Mrs. Carr, however, convinced him that his non-utilitarian interests in nature were also worthwhile. She wrote,

You do not know how we hold you in our memories as one apart from all the other students, in your power of insight into Nature, and the simplicity of your love for her. I think you would love her if she did not turn *mill wheels* or grind anybody's grist.⁷

It was this non-utilitarian view of nature, one held by few in the era of expansion and industry spawned by the Civil War, that set Muir apart from other nature writers, including Emerson and Thoreau, both of whom saw some commercial uses of nature as necessary. However, Muir did

⁷Quoted by Cohen, Pathless Way, p. 11; Source: The John Muir Papers, Stuart Library, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, Box 1, Oct. 12, 1867.

not reach this radical, perhaps feminine, view of nature without many years of incubation, nor once he had grown into it did he maintain it uncompromised, for in later years he became a successful farmer, putting the land to utilitarian use. Also, his most radical wilderness views, formed in solitude and in the face of danger, are arguably masculine; certainly his literary descendent, Mary Austin, found his perspective somewhat harsh and wrote of a communal and feminine experience in nature as an alternative, as will be seen in the next chapter.

In addition to the Transcendental and Romantic ideas of nature that Mrs. Carr and Dr. Butler opened for him, Muir also became imbued with ideas of conservation while at the university through his experience with a variety of people and books. For instance, in his early years at the university, Muir met Increase A. Lapham, known as a self-educated expert in geology, botany, meteorology, and scientific agriculture. He was also the strongest advocate of forest conservation in Wisconsin, writing a pamphlet in 1855 on the destruction of trees and travelling around, from that time forward, to warn Wisconsin citizens of the coming destruction of forests. The relatively strong environmental protection measures Wisconsin has today can be traced back to Lapham, as can many of Muir's early conservation pleas concerning the far West. Muir also read George Perkins Marsh's Man and Nature, first published in 1864. Marsh was

the first American to promote the watershed theory of forests, the idea that forests were the reservoirs of water systems as well as communities of trees, a fact proven by subsequent environmental studies. He used the examples of European and Asiatic deforestation to argue for the conservation of American forests. Muir read Marsh closely, for his copy of Man and Nature is thoroughly marked.⁸

Muir also read Alexander von Humboldt, whose vision of nature, expressed in thirty volumes on his travels in Latin America, is much like Muir's vision of nature having cosmic unity amid unfathomable diversity. How many of these volumes Muir read is unknown, but he carried one with him to Canada after he left the university in 1864 and was still reading them in 1869 in the Yosemite. Humboldt's influence may have been greater than even Agassiz's in shaping or confirming Muir's philosophy of nature.⁹

Muir left the university after the spring semester of 1863, fully intending to enroll in medical school at the University of Michigan the next fall. He was known as the best student in chemistry at Madison, and his encounters with suffering soldiers in the training camps near campus during the war made him think that he could best serve mankind in the medical profession. Others in his family wanted him to follow his other strengths or more traditional

⁸Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness, 83.

⁹Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness, 83.

paths to success: to invent, to go into business, to marry and settle down. Muir was twenty-five years old in the summer of 1863 and still had no clear direction for his life, for he was pulled by conflicting talents and interests which he had yet to reconcile. He had a strong desire to help his fellow man, but, encouraged by Jeanne Carr and his own strong instincts, he had an equally strong desire to pursue his wanderings in the wilderness, a quest few in the civilized world could understand. Through his studies and ramblings in the wild during the university years, he intuitively speculated that in nature there is "an essential Love, overlying, underlying, pervading all things." He wanted to find unspoiled wilderness, "not as a mere sport or plaything excursion, but to find the Law that governs the relations subsisting between human beings and Nature."

"Civilization," as his harsh upbringing and the calamity of the Civil War had taught him, "has not much to brag about. It drives its victims in flocks, repressing the growth of individuality." When autumn came, he did not enroll in medical school. Instead, in March of 1864, probably in order to evade being drafted into the Union Army, he began the first of many excursions in the wilderness, a journey into Canada. Stephen Fox argues convincingly that Muir had the first of many epiphanies while hiding in a Canadian swamp. He was alone and friendless for six months, but upon discovering one of his favorite flowers, Calypso borealis,

in June of 1864, he felt that he had found friends: "I felt as if I were in the presence of superior beings who loved me and beckoned me to come. I sat down beside them and wept for joy." Years later, he ranked this experience and his meeting with Emerson "as the two supreme moments of his life" (Fox 43). Eventually, Muir found work in a rake and broom factory, where he remodeled the machines for greater efficiency. When the factory burned down in 1866, however, Muir refused to help them rebuild a business that depended on the destruction of trees for its raw materials, saying, "I love nature too well to spend my life in a work that involves the destruction of God's forests!" He then left Canada for Indianapolis, where he worked for a hub manufacturer and, again, proved himself to be an invaluable employee through his invention of labor-saving devices. He was therefore assured of a great career in inventions and probably would have made a fortune in such pursuits, given his talents and the incredible burst of industrial growth after the war. However, in March, 1867, Muir slipped while working with a file and punctured his right eye on the edge of the cornea, causing the aqueous humor to fall out into his hand. He temporarily went blind when his left eye suffered sympathetic nerve shock. He spent weeks recovering in a darkened room, and he took the accident as a sign: "I bade adieu to mechanical inventions, determined to devote

the rest of my life to the study of the inventions of God."¹⁰ Though he regained use of his left eye and most of the use of his right, he turned his back forever on a career in invention, however lucrative it might have been, and, in September, took his first extended, uninterrupted trip to the wilderness of the American South, which had barely begun recovering from the devastations of the war. His journal of the trip, published posthumously in 1916 after some revisions he made later in life, is known as A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf, one of the most important contributions to wilderness literature written in the nineteenth century. The book documents the beginning of Muir's most radical years, during which time he nearly abandoned civilization entirely for a solitary life in the wilderness.

After his southern expedition, Muir travelled to California and his first "glorious" summer in the Sierras, recorded in My First Summer in the Sierra, a journalistic account of his first encounter with the mountains of California, edited and published in 1911. He lived in and studied these mountains for ten years, writing in his journal and finally beginning his public writing in the mid-seventies with articles on his glacial theories, now collected in Studies in the Sierra. He made his first trip to Alaska in 1879 and married Louie Strentzel in 1880. He

¹⁰Autobiographical fragment quoted in Badè's introduction to A Thousand Mile Walk, p. xvi.

devoted most of the 1880's to successful agricultural and child rearing enterprises but interspersed his work and family life with wilderness expeditions and extended trips to Alaska in 1880 and 1890. His journalistic accounts of these trips were published as Travels in Alaska in 1915. He launched his career as a book writer and polemicist in 1894 with the publication of The Mountains of California, arguably his best single book. Thereafter, he travelled extensively, wrote a number of books about his studies and wilderness advocacy, wrote children's stories about nature, published articles in leading magazines which helped shape legislation for the creation and operation of the national parks and forests, wrote the first part of his autobiography, and published his earliest journals. He suffered the worst defeat in 1913, when city planners in San Francisco and Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot defeated Muir and the "preservationists" in their bid to gain Hetch Hetchy Valley as a flood basin for urban water resources. Some say the heartbreak of this defeat caused his death on Christmas Eve in 1914.

A Lifetime of Writing the Wilderness

As Oelschlaeger states, there is no single source in which Muir writes categorically his wilderness philosophy (173). The reader must sort through volumes of Muir's writing in order to gain any holistic perspective on Muir's philosophy. A few commentators see a progression through

Muir's works which they define according to their own agendas, but clearly Muir went through a phase of radicalism in the late sixties and early seventies which he moderated by the mid-seventies, setting the stage for his becoming the chief wilderness spokesperson in the country. At least one document, "A Near View of the High Sierra," records Muir's most extreme vision of the wilderness, a mountaintop epiphany that contrasts markedly with Thoreau's disturbing Katahdin experience, a vision attainable only through an individual encounter with danger followed by a "surrender" to the elements not unlike that of Ike McCaslin in Faulkner's "The Bear." Later writings, however, show Muir compromising his own vision in order to convince his urban audience, which could not handle the extremes of wilderness, of the need to preserve wild places. In spite of the important feminine influences in his life, Muir's solitary and dangerous encounters yielded a wilderness vision which might be called masculine, though Muir tried not to portray himself as an archetypal male hero or conqueror of nature. Muir's anima, however, bolstered in the person of Jeanne Carr and later his wife Louie, and his need to get others into the wilderness in order that they might see a need for its preservation, swayed him to write articles such as "The Bee Pastures," in which he offers a gentler relationship to the land, though he clearly saw this relationship as inferior to his own. As he grew older, however, Muir became

more comfortable with the role of wilderness spokesperson and interpreter of wilderness for the novitiate. The compromise of his wilderness vision was certainly his loss and was, in some respects, regrettable though probably inevitable if any wilderness were to be preserved. It parallels the compromises he ultimately made between the various paradigms he studied, found lacking, tried to discard, but ultimately reincorporated as he shaped his own wilderness philosophy and decided to become a spokesman for preservation. This heated internal dialogue between paradigms which began at the university reached fever pitch during his walk to the Gulf of Mexico.

Muir's Thousand Mile Walk

Muir began his trip on September 1, 1867, travelling by rail from Indianapolis to the Ohio River, where he crossed over into Louisville, Kentucky, to begin his long journey on foot. He steered his way through Louisville by compass and soon entered "the green woods and spread out [his] pocket map to rough-hew a plan for [his] journey" (1). His plan was to push southward, avoiding large towns whenever possible. He travelled through Kentucky, down the Cumberland Mountains of Tennessee, across a small part of North Carolina, and through Georgia, where he sailed from Savannah to Fernandina in northeastern Florida. He then travelled to the west coast of Florida where he was stricken with malaria and nearly died. He convalesced in the Hodgson

home in Cedar Keys, Florida, for three months. He then sailed to Cuba, where he botanized for a few weeks, trying to regain his health. His ultimate plan would have taken him to South America, through the Andes and down the Amazon, to be "another Humboldt." But the southern climate kept him from recovering entirely from the malarial fevers, so he returned by ship to New York and eventually sailed from there to Panama and on to California, where he began his Yosemite odyssey.¹¹

The journal at several points also indicates that Muir avoided people whenever possible. In fact, during this trip Muir came as close as he ever would to misanthropy, though he never arrives permanently at such an extreme position even in this journal. One could say that, having turned his back on civilization and philanthropic vocations when he left Indiana, Muir sought the extremes of nature - - and extreme views of man's relationship to nature - - in order to strike the balance upset by twenty-two years of repressed home life, two and a half years of university studies upset by the Civil War, and three years of factory work. These extreme views are manifest in some of the unorthodox religious and social ideas he entertains in the journal. Later he claimed that he "never tried to abandon creeds or code of civilization; they went away of their own accord,

¹¹Badè's edition of A Thousand Mile Walk (1916) includes a map of Muir's route (page unnumbered; between the Introduction and chapter one).

melting and evaporating noiselessly without any effort and without leaving any consciousness of loss," though one critic seriously questions the validity of this comment, made when Muir was an older man.¹² Revising old creeds was, contrary to his claim, extremely painful for Muir, and the process took several years. In A Thousand Mile Walk, however, Muir assesses the old creeds and codes and imagines a new natural and religious order, in which plants, animals, and even inanimate objects possess sentience and souls; in which mankind is but one of billions of species, each as important as the other, not "Lord Man," ruler of the created order, center of the universe. Ironically, in searching for a language to express this new world order, Muir could not escape using anthropomorphisms; he did not, in other words, create a language to express an idea that was not anthropocentric, and, indeed, he would always use anthropomorphic descriptions of nature in both his public and private writing. He was plagued by perhaps the most fundamental problem facing nature writers of any age, an inability to think beyond the human, to think, as Tom Brown, Jr. says we must, as an animal or plant thinks if we want to understand it and the world from its perspective.¹³ It is

¹²See Cohen, Pathless Way, p. 26.

¹³Brown's The Tracker (1978) and The Search (1980) are among the most refreshing attempts to show how modern man can attain a world vision like that of Native Americans of old. Brown, who was trained by the legendary Apache, Stalking Wolf, writes from a Native American perspective,

also ironic that Muir often employs Biblical allusions and phraseology to relate a highly unorthodox view of the world. Both of these ironies are the results of the compromises Muir was making between the various paradigms of religion and nature he had inherited. A Thousand Mile Walk is thus a battleground of opposing paradigms: in one camp are anthropocentric/utilitarian understandings of nature; in the other camp are embryonic, non-anthropocentric, non-utilitarian understandings of nature best revealed, Muir believes at this stage, by science, a position he would revise in later texts. A Thousand Mile Walk is by no means a statement of Muir's final position but rather an exploration of new and old ideas of man's relationship to the world.

Deconstructing Anthropocentric/Utilitarian Concepts of Wilderness

Muir hoped he would find ideas about nature that were like his own among the inhabitants of the southern states.

though he is Caucasian. In The Search, Brown describes, through a multitude of examples, how he enters into a spiritual relationship with the earth and animals he wants to understand. This is an understanding beyond the scientific, which was Muir's primary paradigm for understanding nature, at least in his walk to the Gulf. Such an understanding comes first from close observation, then from playing the role of the animal or object to be understood. Muir would undertake such role playing later, when he sought to understand the slow-moving process of glaciation, and close observation was always one of his strong suits, though in practice he often looked for human characteristics in the objects or species he observed. Brown cites Muir as his favorite among all the nature writers, in spite of Muir's failure to grasp fully a Native American perspective on the world.

Not having found kindred spirits in his native Wisconsin or Canada except Mrs. Carr and a very few others, Muir continued his search in the South only to meet with attitudes toward nature similar to those he found in the North. The Southerners Muir met, all of whom were trying to regain some equilibrium in the aftermath of war, were concerned mainly with utilitarian uses for nature. Like Thoreau, who became disenchanted both with pioneers and Native Americans who entered the woods only for material gain, Muir found himself almost alone in defending non-utilitarian uses of nature, for the "useful, practical men . . . [were] too wise to waste precious time with weeds, caves, fossils, or anything else that [they] could not eat" (10-11). He found himself regarded suspiciously by those who recognized him as an outsider with no other business than botanizing. In one instance, Muir encountered a brawny, religious blacksmith who stated,

" . . . surely you are able to do something better than wander over the country and look at weeds and blossoms. These are hard times, and real work is required of every man that is able. Picking up blossoms doesn't seem to be a man's work at all in any kind of times."

Such an assault on his manhood hit to the core, but Muir defended his "feminine" vocation with one of his old weapons, the scriptures. He asked the man if he believed in the Bible. When the answer was affirmative, he said,

" . . . do you not remember that Christ told his disciples to 'consider the lilies how they grow,' and compared their beauty with Solomon in all his glory? Now whose advice am I to take, yours or Christ's?"

Christ says, 'Consider the lilies.' You say, 'Don't consider them. It isn't worth while for any strong-minded man.'" (22-24).

While the blacksmith was satisfied with this answer, Muir continued to encounter similar attitudes throughout this and many of the journeys he would take afterwards, sometimes even from people whom he expected would support him. Therefore, Muir continued to use the scriptures, as he had done at home, to defend own views.

However, such reliance on orthodox texts to defend his position did not negate the radicalness of some of his views. One of the most important deviations from popular belief and religious orthodoxy expressed in A Thousand Mile Walk is Muir's view of death. While waiting in Savannah, Georgia, for money his brother had sent by mail, Muir slept and spent most of his time in Bonaventure cemetery. The beauty and peace of this "town of the dead," in which he found "one of the most impressive assemblages of animal and plant creatures," caused Muir to reevaluate the traditional nineteenth-century views towards death and burial customs (69). He wrote,

On no subject are our ideas more warped and pitiable than on death. Instead of the sympathy, the friendly union, of life and death so apparent in Nature, we are taught that death is an accident, a deplorable punishment for the oldest sin, the arch-enemy of life, etc. Town children, especially, are steeped in this death orthodoxy, for the natural beauties of death are seldom seen or taught in towns (70).

Instead of the natural beauties of death, human deaths, even in the best of circumstances, "yield groans and tears,

mingled with morbid exultation; burial companies, black in cloth and countenance; and, last of all, a black box burial in an ill-omened place, haunted by imaginary glooms and ghosts of every degree." Such perversions surrounding the cult of death would be eliminated if "children walke[d] with Nature," seeing "the beautiful blendings and communions of death and life, their joyous inseparable unity, as taught in woods and meadows, plains and mountains and streams of our blessed star." Such children would "learn that death is stingless indeed, and as beautiful as life, and that the grave has no victory, for it never fights. All is divine harmony" (70-71). Here, Muir is quite aware of a cyclical view of life and death, that life is itself dependent on death, or, as Wallace Stevens would later write, that "Death is the mother of beauty."¹⁴ Cohen argues that the malarial fevers that would nearly kill him in Florida were already weakening him in Savannah, and that his musings at Bonaventure were his way of making peace with his own mortality.¹⁵ In later years, however, when he encountered mass carnage in the starving villages of Alaska and the coast of Siberia and when deaths multiplied among his own friends and loved ones, Muir would fall back on more traditional understandings of death. Here he writes as one largely unfamiliar with the "sting" of death and as one

¹⁴"Sunday Morning" stanza 5, line 3.

¹⁵Cohen, Pathless Way, pp. 16-19.

enraptured with the beauty around him. His romanticism, as one critic says, would be tempered through experience, and the orthodox teachings of his father on the subject of death were to be remembered in later years.¹⁶

The most important departure from the old paradigms in A Thousand Mile Walk is the idea that the universe is not anthropocentric. Muir's burgeoning understanding that the world is not anthropocentric was, ironically, concomitant with his growing discomfort in the wilderness. As did Thoreau in Maine, Muir experienced much discomfort in his southern wilderness trek. In his Canadian ramblings, he had hardened himself to the kinds of difficulties he would experience in northern climes, but the insalubrity and dangers of southern swamps combined with the extreme loneliness he felt so far from his own family and friends taxed his coping powers almost to the point of death. By the time he reached Cedar Keys, Florida, Muir had developed malarial fever that confined him for several months and eventually caused him to cancel his southern travels altogether. He also carried with him a fear of alligators that rendered him paranoid at times, though, as Thoreau had said about the Maine carnivores, it was mostly his

¹⁶Harold Simonson argues correctly that death was "the bell that tolled [Muir] back to his sole self" that was often lost in Romantic flights. Muir had strange premonitions of both his father's and his mother's deaths and wrote rather morbid reflections on the coming deaths of those close to him when he was an older man (238-39).

imagination that did the howling (he actually saw only one alligator during the trip). Further, his body was torn by a variety of briars and prickly plants he had never encountered in the North. The combination of these inhospitable elements, rather than eliciting from him bitter complaints, led him to a belief that certain parts of the world and certain species were not created for the benefit of man; that "Lord Man" was not the center of creation he claimed to be but only one of billions of species interdependent on each other for food and survival. He wrote:

The world, we are told, was made especially for man--a presumption not supported by all the facts. A numerous class of men are painfully astonished whenever they find anything, living or dead, in all God's universe, which they cannot eat or render in some way what they call useful to themselves. They have precise dogmatic insight of the intentions of the Creator, and it is hardly possible to be guilty of irreverence in speaking of their God any more than of heathen idols. He is regarded as a civilized, law-abiding gentleman in favor either of a republican form of government or of a limited monarchy; believes in the literature and language of England; is a warm supporter of the English constitution and Sunday schools and missionary societies; and is as purely a manufactured article as any puppet of a half-penny theater.

With such views of the Creator it is, of course, not surprising that erroneous views should be entertained of the creation. To such properly trimmed people, the sheep, for example, is an easy problem--food and clothing "for us," eating grass and daisies white by divine appointment for this predestined purpose, on perceiving the demand for wool that would be occasioned by the eating of the apple in the Garden of Eden. . .

But if we should ask these profound expositors of God's intentions, How about those man-eating animals--lions, tigers, alligators--which smack their lips over raw man? Or about those myriads of noxious insects that destroy labor and drink his blood? Doubtless man was

intended for food and drink for all these? Oh, no! Not at all! These are unresolvable difficulties connected with Eden's apple and the Devil. Why does water drown its lord? Why do so many minerals poison him? Why are so many plants and fishes deadly enemies? Why is the lord of creation subjected to the same laws of life as his subjects? Oh, all these things are satanic, or in some way connected with the first garden.

Now, it never seems to occur to these far-seeing teachers that Nature's object in making animals and plants might possibly be first of all the happiness of each one of them, not the creation of all for the happiness of one. Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation? And what creature of all that the Lord has taken the pains to make is not essential to the completeness of that unit--the cosmos? The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge (136-39).

In this non-anthropocentric posturing, Muir made a radical departure from even George Perkins Marsh, whose Man and Nature, though it was a seminal argument for conservation, nevertheless was premised on the notion that man was the center of creation and that conservation was ultimately for his benefit.¹⁷ Muir ridiculed men who saw God in anthropomorphic terms and man as the center of the cosmos. Still, nowhere in this passage does he question the existence of God or the idea that God desires happiness for man or any of his creatures. Unlike Stephen Crane and the naturalists, Muir did not abandon the old notion of a Creator with a divine plan; he sought, instead, to revise old notions of the Creator, the creation, and man's

¹⁷See Cohen, Pathless Way, pp. 20-22, for discussion of Muir's countering Marsh's argument.

relationship to both. Perhaps it was his faith in a beneficent God that prevented him from further analysis of the violence inherent in nature, to see that man was near the top of the food chain and that it was as natural for him to kill as it was for alligators and tigers to do so. Muir resisted such notions, clinging to a belief that man could transcend his carnal instincts. This issue would become more important in his Yosemite years. It is interesting, given his negative sentiments towards slaying animals, that he never became a vegetarian per se. He preached against those who killed for any reason, but he would rarely forswear the eating of meat and sometimes killed to feed himself. His ambivalence shows yet another issue on which he sought impossible compromise between the two extremes.¹⁸

¹⁸Of course, Muir's regular diet of bread, water, and tea, his usual fare during his wilderness ramblings, is sufficiently vegetarian, though, to a modern environmentalist, like Cohen, his eating of bread made from wheat carries its own environmental consequences, since growing wheat means subduing all other wildlife in the field in which it is grown (see Cohen, Pathless Way, p. 183). However, on his southern trek as well as on most of his later rambles, Muir ate meat when it was served in the homes of his hosts. Perhaps he resisted vegetarianism because it had been forced upon him early in life when his father adopted it during the "graham-bread-and-porridge fad." During this fad, Daniel Muir allowed only one meal a day, entirely vegetarian, and the hard-working children suffered miserably (Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness, 49-50). Muir talked his father out of this fad by quoting the scripture where Elijah was fed meat by the ravens, a sure sign, for fundamentalist Daniel, that the Lord did not mean for man to survive on graham alone.

Anthropomorphic Language

Muir's non-anthropocentric sentiments were radical ideas in the late 1860's, yet Muir went even further, arguing that if a war were to break out between man and the animals, he "would be tempted to sympathize with the bears" (121). In one passage, he even wishes that alligators "be blessed now and then with a mouthful of terror-stricken man by way of dainty!" (99). Clearly Muir had renounced, for the time being, his earlier sympathies with his fellow humans. However, in spite of the unorthodox posturing, Muir's radicalness is tempered by the language he appropriates to describe his non-anthropocentric, biocentric vision of the world. While he could scoff at commonly held anthropomorphic notions of God, he could not steer clear of anthropomorphic language in his descriptions of nature. Furthermore, he was conscious of his struggle to overcome anthropomorphic understandings of natural phenomena yet resorted to them anyway. For instance, he wrote,

How strangely we are blinded to beauty and color, form and motion, by comparative size! . . . But what is the size of the greatest man, or the tallest tree that overtopped a grass! Compared with other things in God's creation the difference is nothing. We all are only microscopic animacula (103).

Man, he argued, must think beyond comparisons of natural objects to himself. He should search for a perspective beyond his own limited understanding based on comparative size or, by extension, any other comparison. However, Muir

fell painfully short of this ideal when he actually wrote about plants and animals. He rarely escaped or even tried to escape anthropomorphic comparison. For instance, a mere three days after he wrote the passage above, he wrote,

The admirable Linnæus calls palms "the princes of the vegetable world." I know that there is grandeur and nobility in their character, and that there are palms nobler far than these [in Florida]. But in rank they appear to me to stand below both the oak and the pine. The motions of the palms, their gestures, are not very graceful. They appear to best advantage when perfectly motionless in the noontide calm and intensity of light. But they rustle and rock in the evening wind. I have seen grasses waving with far more dignity. And when our northern pines are waving and bowing in sign of worship with the winter storm-winds, where is the prince of palms that could have the conscience to demand their homage! (116).

In clear contradiction to his acknowledgement that men need to look beyond themselves when evaluating other species, Muir not only liberally uses anthropomorphic language but also ranks trees according to his own anthropomorphic schema, relying upon the metaphor of nobility (one he consistently used when comparing trees). He could debunk other men's notions of God being in favor of limited monarchy but could not help resorting to similar metaphors when describing nature. His tendency to anthropomorphize would increase in his Yosemite years. Finding the humanness of objects in nature served as the most important touchstone for Muir's earliest wilderness ramblings and later for his public wilderness voice.

Science: Muir's Early Faith

Of all the paradigms he carried with him to the South, Muir believed that science would best decipher the book of nature, which he described as "the one grand palimpsest of the world" (164). Though botanical studies were his primary interest in this trip, Muir was a generalist in his approach to science. At various times, he took up studies in botany, astronomy, geology, and paleontology, all with the view of helping him understand the underlying unity he believed existed between all natural phenomena. Of all the paradigms he inherited, science was the one he least questioned in his journey to the Gulf. Science would confirm his own developing religious understanding of nature, not work against his religion, as it did for those who clung to a literal interpretation of scripture. Only later, when he ran headfirst into scientists whose intransigence was nearly as entrenched as his father's, did Muir have reason to question the "truth" of science. His scientific method, however, often relied on intuition as much as experiment. In A Thousand Mile Walk, for instance, he writes about the lack of knowledge regarding the winds:

Two thousand years ago our Saviour told Nicodemus that he did not know where the winds came from, nor where they were going. And now, in this Golden Age, . . . we know as little about winds in general as those Palestinian Jews, and our ignorance, despite the powers of science, can never be much less profound than it is at present (172-73).

Muir believed that the wind, like every other natural phenomenon, left its mark on the great palimpsest of nature. Scientific experiment alone, however, would not decipher the language of the wind. A spiritual understanding had to accompany the scientific if one were to understand this language. In the Yosemite, Muir's transcendental approach to science was enacted in his studies of glaciers. During his walk, however, Muir remained content only to muse about the wind. His questions about science and the scientific method became more important only after his walk, as he read further into scientific texts current in his day. He would test the hypothesis of these texts just as he had tested the religious and utilitarian paradigms handed to him by his father and the orthodox world around him.

To California

Muir ended his southern trip in Cuba, hoping to pursue his travel further south. His illness, however, forced him to seek passage back to the states. He had a brief stay in New York City, where he "felt completely lost in the vast throngs of people, the noise of the streets, and the immense size of the buildings." In keeping with his misanthropic theme, he wrote, "Often I thought I would like to explore the city if, like a lot of wild hills and valleys, it was clear of inhabitants" (186). His passage to California only confirmed his growing pessimism towards his fellow man. He wrote very little in his journal about his passage over the

Isthmus of Panama and would never comment about it. A single comment in his journal reads, "Never had I seen such a barbarous mob, especially at meals."¹⁹

When Muir arrived in San Francisco, he reportedly stayed as short a time as possible. He found a passerby and asked for the quickest way out of town. When the man asked where he wanted to go, Muir responded, "Anywhere that is wild." Later Muir would write, "He seemed to fear that I might be crazy, and that . . . the sooner I got out of town the better, so he directed me to the Oakland ferry."²⁰ It would be years before Muir could make himself understood among his fellow humans, years in which he had to compromise his early radical views towards his fellow man and nature.

The Sierra: Muir Finds a Wilderness Home

The tone of Muir's writing changes dramatically between A Thousand Mile Walk and his next journal entries, which he edited for publishing by 1911, three years before his death. These journals, published in a single volume titled My First Summer in the Sierra, are probably the most widely read of all Muir's writings. Ostensibly, First Summer is a factual description of Muir's first summer in the mountains of California, but First Summer should not be taken literally or linearly as the thoughts of a young man encountering the

¹⁹Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness, 116.

²⁰Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness, 116.

Sierra wilderness for the first time. Rather, it should be read like Walden, as an artistically crafted work arranging the material of several journals written perhaps over several years. The older Muir, writing a book that would express his mature vision of his conflict with civilization as well as an honest book about his earliest Sierra wanderings, was in the process of analyzing himself as a young man. He was, by this time, in full control of his writing powers and knew full well the inevitability of the young man's compromises with civilization and his inability to throw off its shackles.²¹ Because both A Thousand Mile Walk and First Summer were edited late in life, when Muir was in the process of analyzing his life, the reader sees a clear pattern of thematic development between the two books as expressed through the thoughts of a young hero (who actually was not so young--at thirty--when he first entered the Sierras). But while the themes develop along the same lines, the tone changes dramatically, from gloom, fear, loneliness and a close encounter with death in A Thousand Mile Walk to sunny exuberance, a unity with nature that enables him to transcend loneliness, and an intentional encounter with danger above Yosemite Falls in First Summer.

²¹See Cohen (Pathless Way 350-361) for discussion of how First Summer fits into the older Muir's life and writings, how the book was heavily edited from the original journals, and how the young hero presented in its pages is decidedly different from the "thirty year old man" who was disliked by locals around the Yosemite for his eccentricities.

The joy and overwhelming experience of a sensitive young man's first encounter with the grand Sierras shines through an otherwise artfully crafted, mature work. First Summer became, as Cohen implies, Muir's Walden, the book for which he is most remembered, though it was revised very late in his lifetime (Pathless Way 350-51).

After arriving in California, Muir worked in the Central Valley on farms and ranches from March of 1868 to May of 1869. In June, he hired himself to a tall, gaunt shepherd, Patrick Delaney, to oversee a sheep drive into the Sierras for summer pasturage. Under Muir was the shepherd Billy, whose life among sheep had dulled his mind and senses miserably. Along the way, Muir encountered groups of Native Americans, whose striking difference enticed him to set up grand comparisons between himself and them. He also encountered tourists, who seemed oblivious to the august show of nature around them. Muir was able to contrast the love and wholesomeness he found in nature with the miserable degradation and blindness he found in the lives of these various people, even in those, like Delaney, whom he liked. These people, as Muir presents them, are a microcosm of the kinds of people Muir would encounter in wildernesses throughout his life and the kind of reactions they would have to him and he would have to them.²² His

²²Cohen compares the original journals to the published book and argues convincingly that the mature Muir toned down his most radical reactions to the people he encountered and

vision of nature as sacred, holy, the temple of God, would be shared by few people, for the eyes of most were clouded by commercial cares and greed, by personal vanity, or by the need for survival in the wild. Yet, the mature Muir also was honest about the paradoxes in his own youthful thinking, his own failures to disentangle himself from civilization and the "breadline" on which he was dependent for food. He, too, was the product of civilization. The result is, as Cohen says, an honest book, despite its artistry. Muir sees himself in paradox, as set apart from various people around him yet as part of them, too.

Testing Paradigms

Muir had multiple paradigms to test in his earliest California ramblings. In his southern trek he had attempted to cast off Calvinistic notions of creation and anthropocentric notions of nature. In California, he would test various scientific, philosophic, and artistic texts that he continued to read as Jeanne Carr and her friends sent them and their authors to him.

First Summer reflects, to a degree, the constant internal dialogue Muir carried on with these various paradigms. Like Thoreau, Muir never found a paradigm which he could trust entirely. Like Agassiz, he ultimately went

presented himself as a more likeable person than he actually was in his earliest California years, when he passed through a prolonged misanthropic phase.

to nature to find answers, putting aside or testing other men's notions of what nature is. He attempted, in the late sixties and seventies, to read the palimpsest of nature without guidebooks: scientific, artistic, philosophical, or religious. But at thirty, Muir was no tabula rasa; many paradigms had shaped his thinking, nearly all of them Western. He could not, as Cohen says he did, "go light in the mountains" by forgetting other texts or "the nightmare of modern history" (Pathless Way 30).²³ The many texts he had read and would continue to read were paradigms he had to test. The texts were indelibly part of his consciousness. They, too, became part of the compromising process he went through in the early years. The ways of understanding nature he investigates in First Summer include the pastoral ideal, Native American woodlore, the scientific and literary

²³Cohen has since reexamined his own thesis in a paper titled, "How Does One Defend A Brittle Thesis?" He writes:

The implied thesis of my own thinking about Muir may well be untenable, that the thirty year old Muir - - not very young, really - - was open to the influences of the wilderness he explored, and that wilderness transformed him into an exceptional human being. That thesis entered into my writing strategy when I attempted to judge the older Muir by the philosophical standards of the relatively young man. . . You know I would not want to have written about Muir if I didn't believe what he wrote about the transformational possibilities of the wild (5-6).

Cohen is correct in believing in the "transformational possibilities of wilderness," for clearly the Sierras transformed Muir in many ways. But another part of his old thesis, the emphasis on what Muir supposedly forgot as he entered the wilderness, seems more untenable. Muir could be and was transformed without forgetting.

renderings of nature he had read and continued to read, and the limited insight of the tourist.

Pastoral Quixotism

Muir rejected the pastoral ideal almost from the outset of his wilderness ramblings. He wanted the extremes of nature, not the middle ground that Thoreau had come to believe inspired the great number of poets from any era. In First Summer, Muir takes on pastoral employment but is quickly disillusioned with his life as a shepherd. He immediately saw that sheep, which he called "hoofed locusts," denuded large tracts of land, thus desecrating the meadows Muir loved for their abundant flowers.

Additionally, the American sheep business, in contrast to what he had read of the shepherding of old Attica or what he had seen of the Scottish shepherding, was a degrading business: ". . . whatever the blessings of sheep-culture in other times and countries," he wrote, "the California shepherd . . . is never quite sane for any considerable time. Of all Nature's voices baa is about all he hears" (24). Further, though he liked his employer, Delaney, Muir knew that his employer was blinded to the beauty of nature by his greed: "'Sheep-men' call azalea 'sheep-poison,' and wonder what the Creator was thinking about when he made it"(22). Because the California sheepman "is in haste to get rich, and often does," he is oblivious to nature: "Then indeed the wool is drawn close down over the poor fellow's

eyes, dimming or shutting out almost everything worth seeing." The lowly hired hand, Billy, is even worse off. Though he aspires to ownership, "he at the same time is likely to be degraded by the life he leads, and seldom reaches the dignity or advantage - - or disadvantage - - of ownership" (23). The shepherd, like Billy, falls into an existence of weary labor and filthy culinary and toiletry habits and "finds nothing to balance and level his life with the universe" (23). Muir describes Billy's pants, covered over many times with grease that drips from the meat he keeps in a bag at his side, as having "no small geological significance" (129). Even worse, Billy has no eye at all for beauty, seeing only "d---d big brakes" in a fern forest that Muir calls "sacred" (41).

One wonders to what degree Muir had in mind Thoreau's "Ktaadn" as he wrote First Summer.²⁴ Thoreau had employed the ancient Odyssean myth as a background for his first Maine adventure. It is interesting, given the kinship with Thoreau he had come to accept during his later years when he edited his journals, that Muir employs yet another Western archetype as the backdrop for his pastoral enterprises. He dubs Patrick Delaney "Don Quixote." The earthy, degraded

²⁴The earliest reference to The Maine Woods that I have found in Muir's writing is in a letter to Jeanne Carr, dated May 29, 1870. This dated reference does not, of course, preclude the possibility of his having read it earlier, but the First Summer is a reflection of the older Muir's ideas about his first summer anyway and includes many ideas he probably did not hold in 1869 (Badè, I, 223).

Billy is his Sancho Panza. Their quest is for money, and the windmills with which they tilt are obstacles such as shallow creeks which the incredibly dumb sheep refuse to cross or dangers like marauding bears which put Billy in flight. Unlike Thoreau, however, Muir resists becoming part of the archetypal story. In "Ktaadn," Thoreau adopts the pioneer/odyssean mindset of his fellow travellers, then rejects it. Muir resists the pastoral mindset from the start, though he is forced to admit his kinship to Billy regarding his reliance on civilized food. He wants to escape entirely such degrading sheep work, but his reliance on the bread such work affords negates such a possibility.

The irony of Muir's use of the Quixote archetype is that the only true quixote is his young hero. Muir has his fun with the humorous, sometimes pathetic, anecdotes of "Don" Delaney and "Sancho" Billy, but when he wrote his journal he was painfully aware that people around the Yosemite basin regarded him as queer, as capable of work but unwilling to take long-term employment. Like the Canadians and Southerners, the Californians regarded Muir, the wild looking, long-haired botanist, disdainfully. He was the quixotic dreamer, not Delaney or Billy, who were engaged in "useful" enterprise. His desire to read the entire book of nature and to interpret it was the most quixotic of enterprises. Muir was certainly aware of whom the real quixote was when he edited his journals for publication.

The Breadline: Muir's Rejection of Native American Woodcraft

Despite Muir's misanthropy and disillusionment with civilization in the sixties and seventies, he never rejected civilization outright. Muir makes his struggle with misanthropy and his desire to escape civilization the focus of First Summer, though he tones down his rhetoric in the edited, published version. In fact, one might seriously question Muir's desire to escape civilization based on the evidence he presents in First Summer. The opportunity to escape his dependence on "civilized bread," the consequences of being dependent on such bread, and his failure to learn self-sufficiency in the wilderness and thereby to escape his need for bread were the issues that settled his compromise with civilization permanently. It is clear that he did have opportunities to learn how to survive "on Nature's bounty" and chose not to do so. He chose, instead, to remain attached to the umbilical cord of civilization in spite of his grumblings to the contrary.

Ironically, Muir's failure to break off his connections with the bread line of civilization was closely related to his rejection of utilitarianism. Muir's botanizing, though not understood by the great mass of men, clearly expanded his vision of nature beyond the purely utilitarian. In these exercises Muir followed Thoreau's botanical explorations, one of the "higher uses" Thoreau had called

for in "Chesuncook." However, Muir's own rejection of utilitarian uses of nature in his early writings, a more profound rejection than even Thoreau's, forced him to disregard paradigms that might have proven congenial to his own developing views. For instance, during his walk to the Gulf, Muir scoffs at one of his hosts who offers "long lessons concerning roots and herbs for every mortal ill" (8). For Thoreau, such lore, especially when offered by Native Americans, was as important as scientific discovery. Not so for Muir in his earliest ramblings. For a variety of reasons, Muir rejected all utilitarian understandings of nature, including those of Native Americans, even while he acknowledged the latter's superiority to him in their abilities to survive in the wilderness.

Muir's desire to overcome his dependence on civilized food is apparent even before his Yosemite years. In A Thousand Mile Walk, for instance, Muir laments his inability to escape the confines of civilization permanently, saying, "Flowers and beauty I had in abundance, but no bread. A serious matter is this bread which perishes, and could it be dispensed with, I doubt if civilization would ever see me again" (95). The theme is expanded in First Summer as he contrasts his pathetic reliance on "civilized bread" to the Native Americans' ability to survive on nature's bounty. Early in First Summer, Muir writes that the Digger Indians use the seeds from the Sabine pine for food: "They (the

seeds) are about as large and hard-shelled as hazelnuts -- food . . . fit for the gods" (12). With such praise for this easily acquired fare, Muir seems ready to learn to eat such seeds himself. By the end of June, a grand opportunity to wean himself from bread presents itself. Muir and his party run out of bread and are living on mutton they slaughtered themselves. This sudden lack of bread causes Muir to compare his situation to those of other creatures in the "foodful" wilderness: "The Indians," he writes, "put us to shame, so do the squirrels, -- starchy roots and seeds and bark in abundance, yet the failure of the meal sack disturbs our bodily balance, and threatens our best enjoyments" (74). Later, he says he "should boil lupine leaves, clover, starchy petioles, and saxifrage rootstocks like the Indians" (74). "Like Indians," he writes, "we ought to know how to get the starch out of fern and saxifrage stalks, lily bulbs, pine bark, etc. Our education has been sadly neglected for many generations" (79).

Unfortunately, Muir would continue to neglect his education.

Muir never learned self-sufficiency in the woods, even though a thorough knowledge of woodlore would have allowed him to disconnect himself from the umbilical cord of civilization, enabling him to survive on the roots, berries, nuts, and meats that nature provided. Muir eschewed such practical knowledge of wilderness, preferring instead to focus on non-utilitarian understandings of nature. In the

Sierras, when the golden opportunity to learn such self-sufficiency presented itself, he turned it down, clinging to his diet of bread and suffering when he could not get it.

The reasons for Muir's rejection of Native American paradigms are manifold. First of all, Muir carried a prejudice against Native Americans that stemmed from early, unpleasant encounters with Winnebagos in Wisconsin. On one occasion, one of them stole his favorite horse and mistreated it before it was recovered by a suspicious farmer (Boyhood and Youth 84-85). He also regarded their killing of animals as the kind of savagery he wanted "humane" men to dispense with. One of his most idiosyncratic reasons for disliking Native Americans was his life-long obsession with personal cleanliness, part of his Scottish and Christian heritage though he defended his position by saying no creature in the wilderness is ever dirty. Passages in almost all of his writings testify to his belief in this principle. He sees in the wild things of nature a paradigm for godly cleanliness. Wild animals always keep themselves clean. Only man and the animals he domesticates become filthy. The Native Americans he encounters in First Summer are mostly filthy, defeated, and degraded people. Many of the Digger Indians he meets are dressed in calico rags, which leads him to say they would be more acceptable if "clad in fur, or cloth woven of grass or shreddy bark." Such Native Americans are not "a whit more natural than the

glaring tailored tourists we saw that frightened the birds and the squirrels" (59). Later, however, when he sees a group of Mono Indians clothed with the fur of rabbits, he is repulsed. They, too, are dirty, and, like the grease on Billy's pants, their layers of dirt seem to have "geological significance." Muir then examines his reactions towards these people, saying ". . . it seems sad to feel such desperate repulsion from one's fellow beings, however degraded. To prefer the society of squirrels and woodchucks to that of our own species must surely be unnatural" (219). His own misanthropy, Muir suggests here, is as unnatural in nature as the Native American's filth. He would have to find a way to associate with his fellow man. But, he would not pursue studies of Native Americans, as Thoreau had done, until much later. His early views of Native Americans as degraded savages were much like Thoreau's earliest views of the Penobscots, once he had met them face to face in his first Maine wilderness odyssey. Muir's prejudices would last at least until his Alaskan trips (beginning in 1879), where, for the first time, he encountered native peoples not entirely subjugated by whites. Thus, for the first dozen years of his wilderness ramblings, the most important years, Muir disregarded altogether Native American paradigms for understanding wilderness.

Muir may have had other reasons for rejecting a Native American way of life. Perhaps Muir recognized that his need

to remain attached to civilization went beyond questions of food. Though it would be nearly five years before Muir assumed the role of public prophet for the wilderness, surely he already had the gleamings of such a career in the back of his mind. Jeanne Carr, who had predicted his fame and fostered his growth, encouraged him to maintain contact with the civilized world, and from the time he was a teenager his relatives and friends had predicted that he would someday be famous. However, if he were to become famous among the elite circles with whom Jeanne Carr associated, he would have to remain rooted in white civilization. To adopt a Native American way of life would be too extreme. He might lose all contact with civilization, and he could not afford to do that. Though the pull away from civilization was strong, Muir would not cut his ties altogether.

At least one critic laments Muir's failure to incorporate Native American paradigms into his basic wilderness philosophy. Cohen discusses at length Muir's failure to arrive at self-sufficiency in the wilderness and his disgust with the savagery of killing. Unlike Thoreau, who reconciled to a degree his disgust with killing for sustenance and who recognized his own savage desires, and unlike Gary Snyder or Tom Brown, Jr., proponents of Native American woodcraft in this century, Muir did not turn to Native American paradigms and survival techniques in forming

his wilderness philosophy. Thus, unlike Native Americans, he never learned to regard the woods and mountains as home but, instead, always saw them as wilderness, as a place distinct from a home in civilization (Pathless Way 182-90).

From our late twentieth-century point of view, itself shaped by growing sympathies for Native American culture, Muir's failure to adopt Native American paradigms was, indeed, a regrettable loss. He wanted to align himself with the paradigm of nature, believing that nature had a natural order that he could discover, but found himself trapped in civilization when he refused to learn to survive in the woods. After his encounters with various Alaskan tribes, many of Muir's prejudices were dispelled, but by that time he had already made major compromises in order to reach a white, urban audience. He therefore never learned to think like Native Americans and developed his most mature views without aid of their perspective. Throughout his journeys, he would cling to Western paradigms, testing them against what he found in nature.

Contrasting Texts, Miracles, and Methods of Worship

Muir found much wrong with all the people he saw in nature, even himself, but the negatives he saw in people were more than offset by the transformation he underwent in his first years in California. Muir had not found a congenial environment in the overwhelming and insalubrious luxuriance of wilderness in the South. The austerity of the

mountains was better suited for his talents and mind.²⁵ In the Sierras, for the first time in his life, Muir felt he had found the nature he had been looking for, one in which he might find a new vision, a new relationship. In First Summer Muir is overwhelmed by the sublimity and diversity of what he sees in the Sierras, but he senses that this wilderness will not kill him as the southern swamps had nearly done. He can stay in this wilderness and learn to read its language, and he does. His first summer is an archetypal mountain top experience of the religious convert experiencing the intensity of his first love, his first enthusiasm of belief and baptism. Learning to read the holy texts of his religion would be a gradual and never ending process. In his glorious (a word he used extensively) first summer, the hells of civilization and inhospitable wildernesses are exchanged for the heavens of the Sierras, which he calls the "Range of Light."

²⁵Muir fell in love with the mountains of California almost immediately, perhaps because of his rearing in Scotland, where austere landscapes dominated. There is considerable debate about Muir's (and the environmental movement's) favoritism towards landscapes and individual species that are like or related to native European landscapes or species, and Muir's preference for alpine landscapes over swamps evinces such favoritism. See Cohen's "How Does One Defend a Brittle Thesis?" (pp. 4-8 and passim) for discussion of Muir's and others' Eurocentric attitudes towards nature. Cohen cites Alfred Crosby's Ecological Imperialism: the Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900 liberally in his argument.

Muir wanted to read this alpine book of nature without the influence of other interpretations, and he would always see nature as the standard for judging all other paradigms. Evidently, however, he could not escape the influence of the various texts he had read. In his earliest attempts to write about nature, including First Summer, Muir often expresses agony over his inability to put into words what he sees and experiences in nature. Perhaps because he was unable to forge a new language, a new paradigm, for writing wilderness, in his earliest writings, he tests the paradigms of the books he has read. In fact, certain passages are overlaid with the language of multiple paradigms, showing the compromising process Muir is undergoing in his search for language. The following passage, for instance, is quite multifaceted:

No Sierra landscape that I have seen holds anything truly dead or dull, or any trace of what in manufactories is called rubbish or waste; everything is perfectly clean and pure and full of divine lessons. This quick, inevitable interest attaching to everything seems marvelous until the hand of God becomes visible; then it seems reasonable that what interests Him may well interest us. When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe. One fancies a heart like our own must be beating in every crystal and cell, and we feel like stopping to speak to the plants and animals as friendly fellow mountaineers. Nature as a poet, an enthusiastic workingman, becomes more and more visible the farther and higher we go; for the mountains are fountains -- beginning places, however related to sources beyond mortal ken (157-58).

Here, Muir contrasts civilized manufacturing, which he had left behind three years previously, to nature, showing, as

always, the imperfection of all things human. The perfection of nature seems "marvelous" until one considers it the handiwork of God, a perfectly orthodox, theistic explanation of the creation. The stress on the interdependence of all things in nature echoes Humboldt's writing. When Muir describes nature in anthropomorphic terms, he uses the language of Transcendental pantheism: plants and animals, like men, are sentient, "friendly fellow mountaineers." But, he parts from his Transcendental mentor Thoreau in the next sentence. Muir views the tops of mountains quite unlike the way Thoreau viewed the summit of Katahdin. Where Thoreau saw mountain tops as "the unfinished parts of the globe," places unfit for man, Muir sees them as "fountains - - beginning places" and eagerly seeks them.

The passage thus shows the complexity of the paradigms Muir brought with him to the wilderness and his efforts to make sense of them. Such were the compromises Muir was making as he tested various paradigms against the paradigm of nature, as best he could interpret it with and sometimes without other paradigms. In his southern trek, Muir found a unity in all nature, an interconnectedness beyond human comprehension. Such unity was even more apparent in the alpine landscape. This unity was manifest in the most sublime mountain scenery and even in the playful antics of a jumping grasshopper, which creature expressed "the

mountain's wild health and strength" even more than the bears he saw. Muir here put into practice the close observation of nature practiced by Agassiz and Dr. Carr, climbing trees and spending hours in them to get their feel and to study their parts, observing his favorite animals, like the Douglas squirrel, with close attention to its habits but with the intent of showing its kinship to himself. The joy and overwhelming sensation of these experiences is evident throughout the book, building to a crescendo of religious ecstasy while Muir looks at Cathedral Peak, "a temple displaying nature's best masonry and sermons in stones." At this Cathedral Muir is led to worship: "This . . . is the first time I have been at church in California, led here at last, every door graciously opened for the poor lonely worshiper" (250).

Muir Versus Tourists: Contrasting Visions

Muir's growing reverence for nature is contrasted to a strange telepathic incident Muir has while atop the North Dome. Muir is suddenly "possessed with the notion that my friend, Professor J. D. Butler . . . was below me in the valley" (178). But, even after finding Dr. Butler like "the compass-needle finds the pole" the next day, Muir discounts the extraordinariness of the experience:

. . . it seems silly to make so much of it, while the natural and common is more truly marvelous and mysterious than the so-called supernatural. Indeed most of the miracles we hear of are infinitely less

wonderful than the commonest of natural phenomena, when fairly seen (191).

Compared with his experiences at Cathedral Peak, his telepathic incident does indeed seem less than wondrous. In fact, the incident only serves to bring him down off the mountain back into the valley-world of human affairs. In the valley, Muir finds not worshippers but tourists and sportsmen blind and deaf to Yosemite's "novel grandeur":

Most of those I saw . . . were looking down as if wholly unconscious of anything going on about them, while the sublime rocks were tembling with the tones of the mighty chanting congregation of waters gathered from all the mountains round about, making music that might draw angels out of heaven. Yet respectable-looking, even wise-looking people were fixing bits of worms on bent pieces of wire to catch trout. Sport they called it. Should church-goers try to pass the time fishing in baptismal fonts while dull sermons were being preached, the so-called sport might not be so bad; but to play in the Yosemite temple, seeking pleasure in the pain of fishes struggling for their lives, while God himself is preaching his sublimest water and stone sermons! (190).

Even Dr. Butler misses much of the grandeur of the valley, for he is "bound by clocks, almanacs, orders, duties, etc., and compelled to dwell with lowland care and dust and din, where Nature is covered and her voice smothered." Muir, on the other hand, is glad he is "not great enough to be missed in the busy world." He enjoys being "the poor, insignificant wanderer" who "enjoys the freedom and glory of God's wilderness" (186-87). Muir learns to be what Tom Brown calls "time rich," not dependent on other men's notions of time, notions he had worked through in his earliest wilderness ramblings. In the Sierras, for the

first time, Muir gains a sense of eternal time, or God's time, that allows him to transcend temporarily his own temporality. Through his studies and contemplations of geological features and plants that are thousands of years old, Muir is able to imagine time far beyond the three score and ten years allotted man. What he had read in Agassiz's Études sur les glaciers he sees confirmed in the glacially polished and grooved mountains of the Sierras, the moraine soils, the boulders placed in valleys where only rivers of ice could set them. He discovers junipers over a thousand years old which, "If protected from accidents, . . . would perhaps be immortal"(164). Muir wishes he "could live, like these junipers, on sunshine and snow, and stand beside them . . . for a thousand years." His reliance on bread, of course, disallows even a prolonged stay in the mountains. Yet, his imaginative participation in the lives of these plants and other features gives him a sense of timelessness, albeit a paradoxical temporary timelessness. Each day is an eternity, "measured without beginning or ending. A terrestrial eternity" (134). Such achievement of "practical immortality," as he called it, is so rarely experienced that it is worth celebrating whenever it occurs. Muir enjoyed a summer of many eternal days, perhaps a unique accomplishment even among the Transcendentalists and certainly rare in all

of our literature.²⁶ His wilderness vision here went far beyond those of the tourist or sportsman, surpassing even the understandings of men like Dr. Butler, who came to wilderness armed with paradigms of nature gleaned from the best literary renderings of the subject.

Interpreting Violence: Muir in Paradox

While this flesh-bound timelessness is a paradox worth celebrating, other paradoxes in First Summer are more troublesome. In addition to Muir's dependence on civilized food sources, another bothersome paradox is his explanation (or lack thereof) of violence in nature. Whereas in Thousand Mile Walk he had acknowledged the alligator's "right" to eat man (and feared he would become a victim), a recognition that man is not always at the top of the food chain, in First Summer, he vacillates between recognizing violence as a necessary part of the order of nature and explaining violence within more orthodox Christian structures. Killing would always disturb him. In Bonaventure cemetery, he had made his peace with death, accepting it as part of the cycle of ongoing creation. In

²⁶In Pathless Way, Cohen explores this idea in depth, arguing that in the early Yosemite years Muir searched for and found a union of body and spirit, particularly through his studies of glaciers. Cohen implies that such a union of body and spirit was virtually unparalleled among the nineteenth-century writers Muir had read, including Thoreau, whose Katahdin experience shattered his belief in such possibilities. See in particular chapter two (28-64), "The Glacial Eye."

his more misanthropic moods, as in A Thousand Mile Walk, he even accepted killing in reference to animals killing men in a sort of revenge for the killings men have perpetrated against them, and when animals other than man killed each other for food. In First Summer, however, Muir is bothered by the violence of a particular species of black ant whose savagery he cannot understand. This particular ant attacks seemingly without provocation, certainly not always for protection of the colony or for food. Muir falls back on orthodoxy in his failure to understand such violence: "much remains to be done ere the world is brought under the rule of universal peace and love" (43). Muir's explanation reveals a conflict of paradigms - - the paradigm of nature, with its inherent violence, and the paradigm of Christianity. He never could resolve the paradox. When he saw no explanation in the book of nature for seemingly unwarranted violence, he turned to other books for answers. The modern reader, of course, questions whether Muir looked closely enough for an explanation of the ants' behavior. Had he been a better scientist, he might have discovered a reasonable explanation, though most observers of nature encounter inexplicable acts of violence if they look long and closely enough.

Muir's abhorrence of violence, however, did not apply to all natural phenomena. He loved storms and catastrophes as part of the creative and awesome processes of nature.

For instance, he experienced a "noble earthquake" firsthand, and once climbed a tree in the middle of a mountain thunderstorm in order to understand what a tree endured during such a storm.²⁷ He would learn to celebrate storms and earthquakes as part of the creative process while at the same time resisting catastrophic explanations of the origins of the Yosemite on philosophical and religious as well as scientific grounds. A benevolent Creator, he would argue, had not resorted to cataclysm in order to create the Yosemite but instead patiently carved out its features over thousands of years with a glacial tool. Muir's view towards violence in nature seems, then, contradictory; sometimes he relishes violence, sometimes he abhors it. When Muir can find no reason for violence, no evidence that it was a vital part of the creative process or cycle of nature, he is loathe to accept it, even when not perpetrated by man, and he falls back on orthodox Christian explanations for the existence of such violence.

Foreshadowing Future Compromise: Muir and Agrarianism

Evidence of the literary craft within First Summer is most apparent in the foreshadowing Muir sometimes uses.²⁸

²⁷Muir wrote a much celebrated article about his storm experience in the top of a Douglas fir, included in his first book, The Mountains of California (1894), as "A Wind-storm in the Forests."

²⁸For instance, before his religious experience at Cathedral Peak, Muir mentions that he had searched in vain for one of his favorite plants, cassiope (244). Of course,

Writing as an old man, Muir could foreshadow not only events within the text but events beyond the text as well. Thus, one of the final events of First Summer foreshadows the compromises Muir would later make, when he would accept an agrarian life as a substitute "border life" for the pastoral he rejects in First Summer. Having left the mountains to avoid coming winter weather, Muir, Delaney, and two others stop at Smith's Mill, where they are served wine and apples. The others find the wine "divine" stuff, though Muir says he dislikes it. The apples, however, like the pine nuts he has not learned to eat, are "fit for gods or men" (262). Muir would become, in the 1880's a successful fruit grower, apples being one of his specialties. His return to agriculture had much symbolic value, as his foreshadowing of the event in First Summer indicates. If he could not learn to be self-sufficient in the wilderness like a Native American, he knew how to be self-sufficient in the borderlands as a farmer like a European. His understanding of nature, then, would remain European rather than Native American. His turn to agriculture also dramatized the compromises he would make with his extreme wilderness lifestyle and vision. Like the compromises he made between the paradigms that informed his philosophy, Muir compromised

he finds the beloved plant in front of the Cathedral (250), a fitting climax and juxtaposition of the sublime and the delicate.

his extreme wilderness lifestyle, settling for the more civilized agrarian life. The agrarian life had its advantages, including permanence and practical arrangements for family living. He would learn to appreciate these amenities as he left his youth behind and entered middle age.

After First Summer: The Early 1870's

Having the luxury of editorial hindsight in First Summer, Muir was able to forecast the compromises he would make with civilization after 1875. During the early seventies, however, Muir arrived at his most extreme wilderness vision. Perhaps only his ties to bread, family, and especially Jeanne Carr kept him from leaving civilization altogether. Nevertheless, he felt a need to communicate his most radical wilderness vision and his reasons for not pursuing traditional roles, as many of his letters indicate. Inevitably, his writing became public, partly because Jeanne Carr forwarded some of his letters to the press, partly because he felt compelled to justify his glacial theories. His craft matured as he wrote drafts of his ideas in letters to family and friends before shaping them into final form in published articles. Perhaps his most mature work, though not his most read today, was written during this period and later gathered into two collections, Studies in the Sierra, a collection of articles about glaciation and its effects, and The Mountains of

California, articles about Muir's observations of flora and fauna as well as geological features of the Sierras. In the former, he mastered scientific discourse and cleverly intermixed it with religious discourse for a lay audience which largely wanted a story of the Yosemite that reconciled with the Genesis account of creation. In the latter work, he offered artistic and philosophical descriptions of nature, hoping to give the audience (and perhaps to convert them to) his dynamic vision and relationship with nature. The Mountains of California became his first book, not published until 1894, when Muir was fifty-six years old and had already made many compromises with civilization after marrying and adopting an agrarian lifestyle. However, the philosophy of Mountains is that of the younger man, still struggling to find an equilibrium between wildness and civilization, still trying to redeem himself from the evils of modern industrial and utilitarian society. This emerging philosophy, however, is perhaps best seen in the letters and journals composed between 1870 and 1874.

Finding Self in Wilderness

The years between 1869 and 1874 were the most important in shaping Muir's wilderness philosophy. This was the period during which he met Emerson, botanist Asa Gray, artist William Keith, and geologist Joseph LeConte, mostly through the influence of Jeanne Carr. He began an in-depth study of Darwin, Gray, Tyndall, Agassiz, and Ruskin, and

read further into the writings of von Humboldt. He studied Emerson and Thoreau during long winter evenings in his cabin in Yosemite, which he built on top of a creek so that he could hear its music every night and allow the ferns and frogs to live and grow inside his dwelling. He became friends with Galen Clark, the famous Yosemite caretaker and guide (a model for park rangers who followed him), and made excursions in the mountains with Clark, LeConte, Gray, Keith and other artists, and even a short excursion with Emerson. Many of the men who had most influenced his life through letters became his acquaintances and friends, but he vigorously tested their theories of nature, their self-constructed paradigms, against his own observations in true Agassiz fashion. He struggled with their texts, keeping the gold and skimming off the dross according to his own careful studies. Probably more than any other man before or since, Muir studied the available texts on nature and wilderness and tested them against the real thing with the heat and intensity of a refiner's fire.

The most important struggle, however, was the struggle with self. Between 1870 and 1873, Muir was constantly faced with crossroads. Jeanne Carr (who had moved to California with her husband when the latter accepted a teaching position at the University of California), Emerson, Agassiz, and Gray, to name a few, strongly encouraged him to leave his wild mountain habitat and lifestyle and to return to

civilization, to teach, to write, to take up studies in South America - - anything but stay in the mountains. However, Muir stayed in the mountains for four years, his only link with civilization being his books, his correspondence, and the men and women Jeanne Carr sent to him. Eventually, however, Jeanne Carr had her way. Muir was too much a product of civilization - - maybe even too much a product of Jeanne Carr, if one judges from his letters - - to leave civilization forever. Some letters, fortunately, show the wildness of Muir, which might have dominated him had he broken ties with the men and the woman who influenced him so powerfully. What sort of man he might have become had he broken these ties is a matter of pure though intriguing speculation.

Mountain Joy

Between 1869 and 1873, Muir underwent what can be called a religious conversion, though it was one that involved no organized religion. His "church" experience on Cathedral Peak was but one of many moments of religious ecstasy he experienced. For four years, Muir communed with God as he had come to define Him, the Creator of Divine Nature or, alternately, Nature itself. Only in nature could man find God. Evil did not exist where man did not tread. Everything Lord Man had touched, however, was defiled, including religion. In the mountains, where man had no prominent presence, Muir could see God as He revealed

Himself. It was a religious fervor that kept him in the mountains in spite of the pleadings of the most influential people in his life. He tried to communicate this ecstasy in his letters, particularly those to Mrs. Carr but also in those to his more orthodox family members.²⁹ Ultimately, he would find a way to fuse his scientific studies with his religious faith, through the study of glaciers, though he evidently had much trouble convincing others that his study of glaciers was worth the time or effort.

The most radical expression of this religious ecstasy occurs in a letter to Mrs. Carr, undated but probably written in 1870. Muir wrote the letter with Sequoia sap. It reads:

To Mrs. Ezra S. Carr,
Squirrelville, Sequoia Co.
Nut Time

Dear Mrs. Carr:
Do behold the King in his glory, King Sequoia! Behold! Behold! seems all I can say. Some time ago I left all for Sequoia and have been and am at his feet, fasting and praying for light, for is he not the greatest light in the woods, in the world? Where are such columns of sunshine, tangible, accessible, terrestrialized? Well may I fast, not from bread, but from business, book-

²⁹In response to a letter from his brother about differing practices of baptism, Muir wrote,

I was baptized three times this morning. 1st. . . , in balmy sunshine that penetrated to my very soul, warming all the faculties of spirit, as well as the joints and marrow of the body; 2d, in the mysterious rays of beauty that emanate from plant corollas; and 3d, in the spray of the lower Yosemite Falls. My 1st baptism was by immersion, the 2d by pouring, and the 3d by sprinkling. Consequently all Baptists are my brethering, and all will allow that I've "got religion" (Badè, I, 218).

making, duty-going, and other trifles, and great is my reward already for the manly, treely sacrifice. What giant truths since coming to Gigantea, what magnificent clusters of Sequoic becauses. From here I cannot recite you one, for you are down a thousand fathoms deep in dark political quagg, not a burr-length less. But I am in the woods, woods, woods, and they are in me-ee-ee. The King tree and I have sworn eternal love - - sworn it without swearing, and I've taken the sacrament with Douglas squirrel, drunk Sequoia wine, Sequoia blood, and with its rosy purple drops I am writing this woody gospel letter.

I never before knew the virtue of Sequoia juice. Seen with sunbeams in it, its color is the most royal of all royal purples. No wonder the Indians instinctively drink it for they know not what. I wish I were so drunk and Sequoical that I could preach the green brown woods to all the juiceless world, descending from this divine wilderness like a John the Baptist, eating Douglas squirrels and wild honey or wild anything, crying, Repent, for the kingdom of Sequoia is at hand!

There is a balm in these leafy Gileads - - pungent burrs and living King-juice for all defrauded civilization; for sick grangers and politicians; no need of Salt rivers. Sick or successful, come suck Sequoia and be saved.

Douglas squirrel is so pervaded with rosin and burr juice his flesh can scarce be eaten even by mountaineers. No wonder he is so charged with magnetism! One of the little lions ran across my feet the other day as I lay resting under a fir, and the effect was a thrill like a battery shock. I would eat him no matter how rosiny for the lightning he holds. I wish I could eat wilder things. Think of the grouse with balsam-scented crop stored with spruce buds, the wild sheep full of glacier meadow grass and daisies azure, and the bear burly and brown as Sequoia, eating pine-burrs and wasps' stings and all; then think of the soft lightningless poultice-like pap reeking upon town tables. No wonder cheeks and legs become flabby and fungoid! I wish I were wilder, and so, bless Sequoia, I will be. There is at least a punky spark in my heart and it may blaze in this autumn gold, fanned by the King. Some of my grandfathers must have been born on a muirland³⁰ for there is heather in me, and tinctures of bog juices, that send me to Cassiope, and oozing through all my veins impel me unhaltingly through

³⁰Muir liked to pun his name with "moor."

endless glacier meadows, seemingly the deeper and danker the better.

See Sequoia aspiring in the upper skies, every summit modeled in fine cycloidal curves as if pressed into unseen moulds, every bole warm in the mellow amber sun. How truly godful in mien! I was talking the other day with a duchess³¹ and was struck with the grand bow with which she bade me good-bye and thanked me for the glaciers I gave her, but this forenoon King Sequoia bowed to me down in the grove as I stood gazing, and the highbred gestures of the lady seemed rude by contrast.

There goes Squirrel Douglas, the master-spirit of the tree-top. It has just occurred to me how his belly is buffy brown and his back silver gray. Ever since the first Adam of his race saw trees and burrs, his belly has been rubbing upon buff bark, and his back has been combed with silver needles. Would that some of you, wise - - terribly wise - - social scientists, might discover some method of living as true to nature as the buff people of the woods, running as free as the winds and waters among the burrs and filbert thickets of these leafy, mothery woods.

The sun is set and the star candles are being lighted to show me and Douglas squirrel to bed. Therefore, my Carr, good-night. You say, "When are you coming down?" Ask the Lord - - Lord Sequoia.³²

This letter is among the most remarkable of Muir's writings. In no other writing is Muir more pantheistic, more unorthodox. In no other writing is he more ecstatic, drunk, as he says, with nature. It was the happiest time of his life.

Muir's happiness was, however, tempered. Though he wanted to leave civilization entirely, he could not. The tone of his letters throughout 1870 reveals that he probably

³¹Probably an allusion to Thérèse Yelverton, whose former husband would have become the fourth Viscount of Avonmore in October, 1870. She still claimed her marriage rights, though she supported herself writing books.

³²Quoted in Badè, I, 270-273.

would have been reclusive could he have dispensed with bread and with longing for company. During that first year in Yosemite, Muir worked at Hutchings sawmill during the week but spent his Sundays in joyful worship rambling in the mountains. During the week, he rubbed shoulders with people, primarily tourists, whom he saw as "harmless" but offensive nonetheless. "All sorts of human stuff is being poured into our valley this year [1870]," he wrote, "and the blank, fleshly apathy with which most of it comes in contact with the rock and water spirits of the place is most amazing." In contrasting his own ecstasy to the apathy of typical tourists, Muir often became disgusted:

They climb sprawlingly to their saddles like overgrown frogs pulling themselves up a stream-bank through the bent sedges, ride up the valley with about as much emotion as the horses they ride upon, and comfortable when they have "done it all," and long for the safety and flatness of their proper homes.³³

In contrast, Muir

. . . spent every Sabbath . . . in the spirit world, screaming among the peaks and outside meadows like a negro Methodist in revival time, and every intervening clump of week-days in trying to fix down and assimilate my shapeless harvests of revealed glory into the spirit and into the common earth of my existence; and I am rich, rich beyond measure. . .³⁴

As happy as he was, nearly everyone tried to entice him out of the mountains. Mrs. Carr led the attack. Though few of

³³Letter to Jeanne Carr, dated May 29, 1870. In Letters to a Friend pp. 80-81.

³⁴Letter to Jeanne Carr, undated but probably written in 1870. From Letters to a Friend, pp. 85-86.

her letters to him have been recovered, her thoughts can be reconstructed through his responses to her. She tried to interest him in excursions to Hawaii and to South America. She incessantly encouraged him to return to the cities he had grown to hate. He wrote to her, in 1870,

You are a prophet in the concerns of my little outside life, and pray, what says the spirit about my final escape from Yosemite? You saw me at these rock altars years ago, and I think I shall remain among them until you take me away.³⁵

The travellers she sent to him came back with "uneasy" reports about Muir, but he felt sure that if she could see how happy he was she "would gladly let [him] go with only God and his written rocks to guide [him]."³⁶ Muir's obsession with glacial studies, beginning in force in 1871, made him even less willing to return to the cities: ". . . years and ages among snows and rocks have made me far more unfit for the usages of civilization than you appreciate."³⁷ Mrs. Carr, however, persisted, as did the men she sent to him, in encouraging him to leave his mountain studies. By 1873, she had her way. Beginning in 1871, Muir began to publish articles, mostly on his glacial studies. As others, including LeConte, began to report his findings in scientific conferences and, it seems, to take

³⁵Letters to a Friend, p. 94.

³⁶Letter dated September 8, 1871. From Letters to a Friend, p. 105.

³⁷Letter dated May 31, 1872. From Letters to a Friend, p. 118.

more credit than they deserved, Muir felt compelled to write his own articles and, in 1873, left the mountains for ten months to write a series of articles for the Overland. He was soon their leading contributor. He had returned to civilization and was soon cast in the role of prophet.

Testing Texts and Men

Muir had begun his reading of various texts - - scientific, artistic, and philosophical - - during his collegiate years. Immediately, one supposes, he began to question those texts. Among the scientific writings, he found Humboldt's philosophical vision of nature congenial to his own, but his body had failed him in the tropical United States and would probably not fare well in Humboldt's South America, though Jeanne Carr encouraged him to go there in 1870, when her son went to Brazil in an ill-fated South American colonization project.³⁸ Agassiz's method of study, as taught to Muir by Ezra Carr, became his own, and eventually he rivaled Agassiz as a glacial expert. In the sixties, Muir had accepted science as a paradigm which helped dispel Calvinistic and utilitarian understandings of nature. By the 1870's, however, Muir began to question all paradigms in earnest. Most of the scientific texts he encountered gave him trouble. Virtually all of the men whose texts he read wrote from within civilization. The

³⁸See Badè, I, 233-34.

scientific expedition, of the kind undertaken by Darwin, Agassiz, Humboldt, Gray, Tyndall, and LeConte, is a carrying of civilization to the wild, resulting in a mechanical, not a spiritual, understanding of nature at best. The scientist on expedition does not become one with the flow of the wilderness.³⁹ The nature philosophers, on the other hand, - - Emerson and Thoreau being the most important for Muir - - either could not or did not immerse themselves fully in wild nature. Though he continued to admire and even to emulate Emerson's and Thoreau's writing, he did not believe, as Emerson wrote, that "There is in woods and waters a certain enticement and flattery, together with a failure to yield a present satisfaction. This disappointment is felt in every landscape." Muir argued instead that "No -- always we find more than we expect."⁴⁰ Thoreau had found the tops of mountains unfit for man; Muir, on the other hand, would find renewal and rebirth on the summits of mountains, which he called fountains of life. Muir thus believed in total immersion in nature and used the baptism metaphor in multiple instances to illustrate this point. In addition to the problems Muir encountered in scientific or philosophical renderings of nature, he found artistic presentations lacking, too. Artists, particularly

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³⁹ See Cohen, Pathless Way, p.48

⁴⁰Quoted in Edwin Way Teale's introduction to The Wilderness World of John Muir, p. xi.

those of the Hudson River School or European Romantic tradition, painted and wrote a nature that was not true to the original in either realistic detail or spirit; Muir demurred especially with the writings of Ruskin, but also with the paintings of Keith and others, limited by perspective so that they could never capture the whole of any mountain scene. Muir needed a new paradigm, a new way to understand nature. Could he avoid following the footsteps and thinking of his mentors? Could he find a way to view nature, his own paradigm, which would bring him closer than any of his predecessors had come to being part of the unity of nature, at one with her?

Yes. And no. Muir did find a relationship with the extremes of nature unexcelled by his predecessors, equalled rarely since. Like them, however, he ultimately came down from the mountains, compelled to leave them not only by his need for bread but also by the dilemma of needing to communicate his mountain vision before it was too late, before the mountains were gone, put to utilitarian use like the rest of nature. Like them he fell into well-known literary tropes when trying to communicate his mountain vision to a largely ignorant and apathetic audience that expected and demanded a certain packaging of nature for their consumption. But, from 1869 through 1873, Muir relished his mountain freedom, forestalling all pleas to get him back into civilization in whatever capacity.

The Emerson Meeting⁴¹

Through the clever arrangements of Jeanne Carr, Muir met Emerson in the Yosemite Valley in May of 1871 and remembered the event as one of the most important that ever occurred in his life. Emerson was probably the most important of the Transcendental writers for Muir up to this point, for Emerson's writings on nature gave sanction to Muir's entire wilderness enterprise. It is probable that Muir already knew the discrepancies between Emerson's writing, wherein he claimed one must enter nature and absorb its influences as a "transparent eyeball," and his actual commitment to a life in nature, which did not even parallel Thoreau's, much less Muir's. Whether Muir knew this beforehand or not, the meeting and subsequent correspondence showed Muir that for all Emerson's avowed enthusiasm for nature, he was at heart a man of civilization, not cut out for extended exposure to wild places.

Emerson was also sixty-eight years old when he met Muir, himself thirty-three and in the prime of his life. Years later, Muir wrote,

. . . I saw him everyday while he remained in the [Yosemite] valley, and on leaving I was invited to accompany him as far as the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees. I said, "I'll go, Mr. Emerson, if you will

⁴¹See Arlen Hansen's "Right Men in the Right Places: The Meeting of Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Muir" for a complete account of their meeting and correspondence afterward. Also see Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness, 145-51 and Fox, 4-7.

promise to camp with me in the Grove. I'll build a glorious camp-fire, and the great brown boles of the giant Sequoias will be most impressively lighted up, and the night will be glorious." At this he became enthusiastic like a boy, his sweet perennial smile became still deeper and sweeter, and he said, "Yes, yes, we will camp out, camp out" (Badé, I, 254-55).

However, Emerson's party of Boston men and women would not let the elder sage camp out for fear of the damp night air. Muir responded that "only in homes and hotels were colds caught, that nobody ever was known to take cold camping in these woods, that there was not a single cough or sneeze in all Sierra" (Badé, I, 255). Though Emerson's keepers had their way, Muir and Emerson thereafter kept up a correspondence which lasted until the latter's death. Emerson included Muir's name in his list of "My Men," the only one on the list who was a veritable unknown at the time. Nonetheless, he also wrote encouraging Muir to leave the mountains and to come East:

. . . solitude [Emerson wrote] is a sublime mistress, but an intolerable wife. So I pray you to bring to an early close your absolute contracts with any yet unvisited glaciers or volcanoes, roll up your drawings, herbariums and poems, and come to the Atlantic Coast (Badé, I, 260).

Fortunately, Muir did not go to the Atlantic coast for many more years. He clung to his belief in the redemptive and instructive powers of nature and was rewarded for his faith, in spite of many other efforts to get him off the mountains. His studies only gained in intensity, his ramblings in distance. He would never again meet Emerson in the flesh, and he would never look back to his old mentor for guidance,

though he valued his support. He had to go where Emerson would or could not.

Scientists and Artists

In his earliest wilderness ramblings, Muir had trusted that science was the most important revealer of truth about nature. Science and philosophy, after all, had been the paradigms that freed him from the fundamentalist dogma of his father's home and strictly utilitarian understandings of nature. In his reading of Agassiz, he learned that science was often accompanied by intuitive leaps not necessarily directed by a chain of logic, a pattern many scientists have noted since. His own scientific studies would be largely intuitive, particularly his work on glaciers.

Muir knew, however, that scientists demanded facts supported by evidence gathered from careful experiment. His intuition would not convince skeptics committed to the scientific method. Such men, as Cohen argues, were Joseph LeConte, John Tyndall, and Asa Gray. LeConte, Tyndall, and Gray travelled in the high Sierra with Muir in the early 1870's, and he remained in contact with them for years. LeConte was a confirmed evolutionist who taught Frank Norris evolutionary theory and who wrote a book entitled Evolution and its Relation to Religious Thought (1888), in which he argued for the existence of God as "the soul or animating principle in Nature," which stance, though not pantheistic, was a position not unlike Muir's, who was not consistently

pantheistic in his theology either. Gray was another evolutionist who, like Muir, chose not to see natural process as "struggle," as Darwin asserted, but rather as benign, ongoing creation. Muir listed Gray among the "great, progressive, unlimited" men (along with Darwin, Huxley, and Tyndall) he had read. Tyndall had written Hours of Exercise in the Alps and The Glaciers of the Alps, both of which advocated a scientific inspection of alpine areas. After reading some of Tyndall's books, Muir wrote, "[he] is a true man, with eyes that can see far down into the fountain truths of nature."⁴² Muir would work with these men for years. LeConte was with him during his early glacial studies, though he was skeptical when Muir claimed to have found his first "live" glacier. Muir botanized with Gray during an expedition in 1872 and thereafter collected specimens for the botanist's Harvard collection.⁴³ Tyndall also travelled with Muir in 1872 and probably sent him a box of scientific instruments worth one hundred dollars for his glacial studies.

Muir never met Agassiz, though the latter was in San Francisco for a short time in 1872 but became ill and was

⁴²Letter to J. B. McChesney, dated December 10, 1872. In Badè, I, p. 367.

⁴³Wolfe argues that Gray and his former teacher, John Torrey, who also visited Muir in 1872, probably convinced Muir to resume botanical studies, which he had largely dropped during his obsession with glacial and geological studies beginning in 1870 (Son of the Wilderness 160).

unable to go to the mountains. Nor did he meet Ruskin, whose aesthetic studies of the Alps provided counterpoint to the variety of scientific and climbing books on alpine areas that became popular during the 1860's and 1870's. Muir had great regard for all of these men. However, as Cohen has shown, their perspectives were not his own. Muir took greatest issue with Ruskin, whose "Mountain Glory" and "Mountain Gloom" argued that a certain "foulness" accompanies "dead unorganized matter" in the mountains and that such matter "degrades" peasants who inhabit the Alps. Muir wrote,

How cordially I disbelieve him . . . , and were he to dwell a while among the powers of these mountains he would forget all dictionary differences betwixt the clean and the unclean, and he would lose all memory and meaning of the diabolical and sin-begotten term foulness.⁴⁴

The alpine scientists, Agassiz, Tyndall, and others, also took issue with Ruskin, arguing that one had to have close association with the mountains in order to gain scientific knowledge of them. However, Muir found these scientists too dry, too secular, as he also found Darwin and even Gray. After Gray's visit, Muir wrote to Jeanne Carr that "He is a most cordial lover of purity and truth, but the angular factiness [sic] of his pursuits has kept him at too cold a distance from the spirit world."⁴⁵ Similarly, he found

⁴⁴Letter to Jeanne Carr, dated April 3, 1871. In Badè, I, p. 249.

⁴⁵Letters to a Friend, p. 128.

Tyndall's mechanistic analysis of "intense mountain enjoyments" too far removed from the spiritual.⁴⁶ The joy he had felt in his earliest mountain experiences could not be accounted for in mechanistic science. Somehow, he had to reconcile the truths of science with the ecstasy he felt in nature. His own glacial studies became a test case for such a combination.

Muir's Glacial Studies

Concomitant with Muir's testing of paradigms was his study of glaciers, through which he gained some of his most original insights into nature by literally treading where none of the men whose works he had studied had gone before. His glacial studies allowed him to test his own views of nature and convinced him of their validity. In order to find what he really believed about nature, he had to find something untouched by books, unknown by those who preceded him. He needed, as Aldo Leopold later said all lovers of wilderness need, a "blank spot on the map."⁴⁷ The high Sierras were, in Muir's time, such a blank spot. Yosemite's glacial origins became his test case, where he could prove or disprove his emergent wilderness vision. In glaciers, he searched for and found the extremes in nature, and in them found his own rebirth, his own vision, and, paradoxically,

⁴⁶See Cohen, The Pathless Way, p. 39.

⁴⁷A Sand County Almanac 158.

his own reason for communicating with the civilization he had cast off in 1867.

Though Muir said that he saw clear evidence of glaciation in First Summer, which would indicate he was developing a glacial theory as early as 1869, there is little evidence that he had worked out a glacial theory before 1870.⁴⁸ However, the fact that he worked out a theory of glacial evolution at all is remarkable, his studies of Agassiz notwithstanding, given the opposition to such evolutionary theories from the foremost authority on Yosemite at the time, Josiah D. Whitney. Whitney and a team of geologists, including Clarence King, had begun a geological survey of the state of California in 1860 in order to determine its potential for valuable mineral resources. These men, however, had not limited themselves to "utilitarian" studies but had developed theories about the origins of various geological features and

⁴⁸Muir crafted his journals to show what he would become after 1869 as well as what happened to him during his first summer. Badè offers two convincing proofs that Muir had conceived of a theory of Yosemite's glacial origin by 1870, before anyone else but not during his 1869 trip (I, 283-286). The first is a novel, Zanita, A Tale of the Yosemite (1871) by Thérèse Yelverton, who spent several months in the Yosemite when Muir was there and conversed and corresponded with him. One of the main characters in her novel is Kenmuir, modeled, of course, after Muir himself. Kenmuir argues that Yosemite was "grooved and wrought out [by glaciers] for millions of years" (283). The second is the journal of Joseph LeConte, Professor of Geology at the University of California, who met Muir in the summer of 1870. In an entry dated August 8, 1870, LeConte wrote that Muir believed "that the Merced Glacier and the Merced River and its branches have done the whole work" (285).

paleontological phenomena in the state, the most famous being the Yosemite. Whitney, in spite of evidence found by King that glaciers had been in the valley, concocted a cataclysmic theory of the origin of Yosemite. He wrote in "The Yosemite Guide-Book" (1869), considered the authoritative commentary on all matters related to Yosemite, his view as follows:

We conceive that, during the process of upheaval of the Sierra, or possibly, at some time after that had taken place, there was at the Yosemite a subsidence of a limited area, marked by lines of "fault" or fissures crossing each other somewhat nearly at right angles. In other and more simple language, the bottom of the Valley sank down to an unknown depth, owing to its support being withdrawn from underneath during some of those convulsive movements which must have attended the upheaval for so extensive and elevated a chain.⁴⁹

Such a cataclysmic theory was widely accepted by an audience craving evidence to support the Genesis theory of creation, although, in truth, there was no evidence to support the theory. Muir quickly perceived that Whitney's theory was untenable. He saw no faults, and the hard granite in the floor of Yosemite Valley yielded no evidence of having sunk at all. Instead, he saw huge polished slabs, giant boulders in places where no avalanches could have put them (evidence of moraine drift), grooved and polished surfaces evincing an eroding force other than water or wind, and other signs that glaciers several thousands of feet thick and miles long had not only occupied the area but had carved virtually all the

⁴⁹Quoted in Badè, I, p. 276.

outstanding features. When he began to propound his theory in his capacity of Yosemite guide and later in print,⁵⁰ he had to refute Whitney, who retaliated in a bizarre manner for a man who was normally a careful and respected scientist. Though the evidence of glaciers found by Clarence King had already been published in the first volume of the findings of the California State Geological Survey, Whitney denied the evidence in his guidebook and later claimed,

there is no reason to suppose, or at least no proof, that glaciers have ever occupied the Valley or any portion of it . . . so that this theory [of glacial erosion], based on entire ignorance of the whole subject, may be dropped without wasting any more time upon it (Badé, I, 276-77).

Once he had propounded his theory in print, he would not revise it one whit. What proved to be his mistake gave Muir the first cause in which to exercise his scientific and rhetorical powers. It was his first collision with the dogmatism of science, but he proved as skillful in pleading his points among scientists as he had among fundamentalists.

Muir used a combination of scientific experiment and raw intuition as he developed his glacial theory. However,

⁵⁰Muir sometimes worked as a guide for tourists in the valley, though his main employment was under J. M. Hutchings, for whom he built and operated a sawmill to make planks out of fallen timber. He had a falling out with Hutchings in 1871, perhaps because the latter became uncomfortable with Muir's growing fame as a guide, and left his job during the summer. Years later, in the Hetch Hetchy dispute, Muir's detractors argued that his work as a sawyer proved him a hypocrite on environmental issues, ignoring the fact that he had never sawn cut trees.

the development of his "glacial eye," as Cohen argues, was far more important to Muir than just a quibble over scientific facts. The study of glaciers proved to Muir that the handwriting of nature could be read if one devoted time and unceasing energy to learning its alphabet. Muir approached his studies not just as a scientific experiment but as an exercise that would prove - - or disprove - - everything he had believed about nature. The palimpsest of nature in the South had been illegible, for one could not separate one "alphabet" from another. In the Yosemite, however, Muir discovered that in austere places, where nature's alphabetic characters were fewer and the writing more pronounced, he could read the letters. He devoted the better part of five years to his studies of Yosemite glaciers and later would study glaciers in Alaska and Europe. His findings convinced him not only of the validity of his scientific perspective but of his philosophical and religious perspectives as well.

Cohen discusses at length Muir's tactics in studying glaciers.⁵¹ Agassiz had studied glaciers by going to and living on glaciers in Switzerland. He knew them first-hand. But the Sierras contained no glaciers, as far as anyone knew. Muir had to start with geological evidence, such as grooved and polished granite surfaces and moraine boulders,

⁵¹See chapter two, "The Glacial Eye," in Pathless Way 28-64.

that glaciers had existed and then develop a theory. Without "living" glaciers, he had to resort to non-scientific experiments to support his theory, namely, playing the role of a glacier. He literally crawled over rocks, pretending to be a glacier, wetting his hands to stick to granite surfaces, probably wearing gray clothing in order to blend into the granite he crawled upon. He tried to fathom what it meant to travel for thousands of years at the rate of a foot or less a day, grinding and polishing and creating a landscape and soils for living things as the glaciers had done. He wrote,

I can do much of this ice work in the quiet, and the whole subject is purely physical, so that I can get but little from books. All depends upon the goodness of one's eyes. No scientific book in the world can tell me how this Yosemite granite is put together, or how it has been taken down. Patient observation and constant brooding above the rocks, lying upon them for years as the ice did, is the way to arrive at truths which are graven so lavishly upon them.⁵²

Muir made copious notes and drew thousands of sketches as he continued his studies. The few scientists he encountered, such as John Daniel Runkle, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, urged him to publish his findings forthwith. However, Muir needed to find a glacier, not only as absolute evidence that glaciers had occupied the valley but as confirmation that his intuitions were correct. His search for a glacier carried him far

⁵²Letter to Jeanne Carr, dated (by Badè) September or October of 1871 (I, 300).

beyond the usual tourist areas, into the inner recesses of mountains. When he finally found a living glacier, on Red Mountain in October of 1871, he wrote to virtually everyone he knew. The following portion of one of these letters, written to Jeanne Carr, became a draft copy for an article that appeared in the December 1872 edition of Overland:

One of the yellow days of last October, when I was among the mountains of the Merced group, following the footprints of the ancient glaciers that once flowed grandly from their ample fountains, reading what I could of their history as written in moraines and cañons and lakes and carved rocks, I came upon a small stream that was carrying mud of a kind I had not before seen. In a calm place where the stream widened I collected some of this mud and observed that it was entirely mineral in composition and fine as flour -- like mud from a fine grit grindstone. Before I had time to reason, I said, "Glacier mud! -- mountain meal!"

Then I observed that this muddy stream issued from a bank of fresh-quarried stones and dirt that was sixty or seventy feet in height. This I at once took to be a moraine. In climbing to the top of it I was struck with the steepness of its slope and with its raw, unsettled, plantless, new-born appearance. The slightest touch startled blocks of red and black slate, followed by a rattling train of smaller stones and sand and a cloud of the dry dust of mud, the whole moraine being as free from lichens and weather-stains as if dug from the mountain that very day.

When I had scrambled to the top of the moraine I saw what seemed to be a huge snowbank four or five hundred yards in length by half a mile in width. Embedded in its stained and furrowed surface were stones and dirt like that of which the moraine was built. Dirt-stained lines curved across the snow-bank from side to side, and when I observed that these curved lines coincided with the curved moraine, and that the stones and dirt were most abundant near the bottom of the bank, I shouted, "A living glacier!" These bent dirt lines show that the ice is flowing in its different parts with unequal velocity, and these embedded stones are journeying down to be built into the moraine, and they gradually become more abundant as they approach the moraine because there the motion is slower.

On traversing my new-found glacier I came to a crevasse down a wide and jagged portion of which I succeeded in making my way, and discovered that my so-called snow-bank was clear green ice, and comparing the form of the basin which it occupied with similar adjacent basins that were empty I was led to the opinion that this glacier was several hundred feet in depth.

Then I went to the "snow-banks" of Mounts Lyell and McClure and believed that they also were true glaciers and that a dozen other snowbanks seen from the summit of Mount Lyell, crouching in shadow, were glaciers living as any in the world and busily engaged in completing that vast work of mountain-making accomplished by their giant relatives now dead, which, united and continuous, covered all the range from summit to sea like a sky (Badé, I, 346-48).

In an article written years later, Muir discussed his entering this glacier for the closest of views, wearing only his short sleeves. Though he could not stay in the cold "glacial womb" for long, the experience marked the climax of his glacial studies. It convinced him that his intuitive, transcendental approach had been right all along, that he had, indeed, known the life of a glacier.⁵³ Few scientists, however, would accept Muir's discovery immediately. He sent LeConte blocks of ice chipped from the glacier, but the latter was skeptical, even though he had not ventured close enough to these snow-banks, in true Agassiz fashion, to develop a well-researched theory himself. Jeanne Carr continued to write letters chiding

⁵³Muir added the spiritual dimension to his experience when he wrote this article, "Living Glaciers of California," years after the original report. Cohen argues that entering the "glacial womb" and then leaving it was Muir's rebirth, a baptism or initiation into the wilderness. See Pathless Way, pp. 56-59.

Muir about his obsession with glacial studies, hoping to lure him out of the mountains and back into the civilized world. But Muir stayed in the mountains, conducting a variety of scientific experiments to prove that the blocks of ice he had found were indeed glaciers. Through a series of articles printed in the Overland and the New York Tribune, Muir slowly convinced the scientific world, as well as his friends and family, of the validity of his views. In 1874 and 1875, through the influence of Jeanne Carr (who was using any means to get Muir out of the mountains and into the cities, fearing that he would drift too far in his increasingly radical and anti-social views), and William Keith, who was a friend of the editors at Overland, Muir published a series of articles in Overland on glaciation that became his most enduring statement on the subject. Now known as Studies in the Sierra, these articles demonstrate a high degree of rhetorical effectiveness, showing that Muir could convincingly explain his scientific views to any audience.⁵⁴ They were accompanied by sketches of the phenomena he wrote about, a small part of the thousands of sketches he made in the early 1870's.

In Studies, the metaphor that Muir most often uses in describing glaciation is the alphabet, a variation of the

⁵⁴Studies in the Sierra was not released as a book until 1950, when the Sierra Club published all the articles on glaciation Muir had written for the Overland Monthly between May of 1874 and January of 1875.

palimpsest metaphor he had used since the 1860's. In his second Studies essay, titled "Origin of Yosemite," Muir writes,

The greatest obstacle in the way of reading the history of Yosemite valleys⁵⁵ is not its complexity or obscurity, but simply the magnitude of the characters in which it is written. It would require years of enthusiastic study to master the English alphabet if it were carved upon the flank of the Sierra in letters sixty or seventy miles long, their bases set in the foothills, their tops leaning back among the glaciers and shattered peaks of the summit, often veiled with forests and thickets, and their continuity often broken by cross-gorges and hills. So also the sculptured alphabet cañons are magnificently simple, yet demand years of laborious research for their apprehension (21).

Interestingly, Muir says that a view from the top of a "commanding outlook . . . offers, as a whole, a far more natural combination of features than is at all apparent in partial views obtained from the bottom" (21). Such objectivity, of course, is only useful when combined with the closest observation as well of the kind he had undertaken in his glacier role-playing. Distance is needed to free the mind "from the repressive and enslaving effects of [the] separate magnitudes [of natural features]" so that the mind could rise "to a comprehension of their unity and of the posed harmony of their general relations" (21). Though he writes essays in order to prove the validity of his scientific views, Muir also writes as a philosopher:

⁵⁵Muir was the first to use the word "yosemite" generically, designating any valley shaped by glacial forces exerted on granite.

unity and harmony is what he reads in the massive granite characters, the primary lesson that his studies teach him.

Muir's articles were, of course, a rebuttal of Whitney's guidebook, and in several passages he explicitly contrasts his theory to Whitney's. In doing so, he had to be careful lest he offend his audience, one largely sympathetic to Whitney's view. In one passage, Muir writes,

No student pretends to give an arithmetical expression to the glacial epoch, though it is universally admitted that it extended through thousands or millions of years.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, geologists are found who can neither give Nature time enough for her larger operations, or for the erosion of a mere cañon furrow, without resorting to sensational cataclysms for an explanation of the phenomena ("Glacial Denudation" 59).

This passage shows Muir's typical strategy in dealing with erroneous but popular ideas. Rather than side against the cataclysmic view on a strictly scientific basis, he also does so from a philosophical and religious basis, as one who understands the workings of nature and God better than those who work counter to both the facts and to his notions of a benevolent creator not restricted to human notions or comprehension of time. Buttressing this strategy, Muir adopts the language of scripture and Calvinism in his argument. For instance, after demonstrating that the Sierras are not one continuous, unbroken "wrinkle" on the

⁵⁶Here, Muir still supports Agassiz's view that a single glacial winter of unknown duration had occurred. The prevailing view today is that a succession of glacial winters, interspersed with milder periods, occurred over millions of years. Of course, Muir had no way of dating the phenomena he observed.

earth's surface but, rather, many stones placed one on the other, divided by planes of cleavage, he writes, "we may now understand the Scripture: 'He had builded the mountains,' as not merely a figurative but a literal expression." This appeal to literalism is, of course, the same ploy he had used in argumentation with his father and other fundamentalists. He goes even farther, adopting Calvinistic language when he says, "Mighty as [the glacier's] effects appear to us, it has only developed the predestined [my emphasis] forms of mountain beauty which were ready and waiting to receive the baptism of light" ("Mountain Sculpture" 16).

Slowly, Muir's articles won him broad support from the scientific community and the public. He had, by 1874, left the mountains as a permanent home. He had come down from Sinai, glacial tablets in hand, and had begun to see himself in the role of evangelist or prophet, preaching the gospel of wilderness. He wrote, "I care to live only to entice people to look at Nature's loveliness. My own special self is nothing."⁵⁷ The ice-cold glacial studies, though they were of paramount importance to Muir's own development, would not win souls to his vision of the wilderness. He needed to find a language and subject that would sway his civilized audience. Written with the hindsight not only of

⁵⁷Letter to Jeanne Carr, dated October 7, 1874. In Letters to a Friend p. 169.

his first Sierra years but also of his first Alaskan journeys, The Mountains of California is his first and best attempt to reach the public with his wilderness vision; its centerpiece, "A Near View of the High Sierra," offers a new way to view the wilderness, one not restricted by the narrowness of science, the gothic "foulness" of Ruskin, or the limitations of the painter's perspective. It is probably his best essay, or poem, as Cohen suggests, the apex of his most important wilderness living and writing. First Book⁵⁸

Mountains grew out of articles written in the 1870's. In writing these articles, Muir faced several fundamental problems. First, he did not believe that words could capture what he had experienced in the mountains or even come close: ". . . words make but a skeleton, fleshless, heartless, and when you read, the dead, bony words rattle in one's teeth."⁵⁹ Second, he did not believe that people living in everyday contact with corrupt civilization could ever understand him or nature, and his dealings with tourists had only confirmed his suspicions. Articles were, at best, nature understood secondhand, and Muir knew that

⁵⁸I largely follow Cohen in the analysis of Mountains. See Pathless Way, chapter 3, "The Pathless Way and the Range of Light," pp. 65-88.

⁵⁹Letter to Jeanne Carr, dated March 30, 1873. In Letters to a Friend, p. 146.

only the closest communing with the outdoors produced the kind of life he wanted others to lead.

Third, his audience was conditioned to certain literary forms in reading about mountains. Ruskin had led the aesthetic tradition, the texts of which described alpine scenes from an artist's distanced perspective. A sub-category of aesthetics was the "Picturesque," epitomized by the Hudson River School of artists but vulgarized by an outpouring of tourist pictorial books in the 1870's and 1880's. Others, like Agassiz and Muir himself, had written scientific works, and still others wrote in the aesthetic tradition about the popular sport of mountain climbing in the Alps, which sport reached its zenith in 1865 with Edward Whymper's ascent of the Matterhorn and his Scrambles Among the Alps.

Muir wanted to follow none of these traditions but had little choice. Long descriptions of nature, he felt, would only bore his readers, so he had to fall back on the popular conventions to some degree.

Thus, in Mountains, Muir would use the language of conventional alpine literature while also promoting his own views. He would include the scientific, the athletic, and the artistic. "A Near View of the High Sierra," however, stands out because it offers an alternative way to view the mountains. In this piece, Muir contrasts his holistic vision with the lesser understandings offered by art and

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shows the proper place of science and athleticism in understanding mountains. People wanted to see themselves in the mountains, either by conquering them, as Whympers had done the Matterhorn, by humanizing sublime mountain landscapes through art, as the Hudson River School did, or by mechanistic analysis of the components of mountains without understanding the relations of the parts to the whole, as science did. Thus, Muir's audience's understanding of mountains, circa 1875, was strictly anthropocentric, and Muir wanted his audience to see this new vision of the mountains but felt obligated to use the language of previous tropes. Though he had several experiences that might be called epiphanies, or wilderness visions, he wrote about his first ascent of Mount Ritter as an archetypal experience of a man who discovers himself by leaving himself, enduring suffering and an encounter with death, achieving the summit not as a conqueror but with a new sense of the cosmos, and then returning to a familiar place (his home in Yosemite) a changed man. This cosmic vision was deliberately contrasted with the limited vision of picturesque art, as represented by the artists Muir guides into the mountains.

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"A Near View of the High Sierra" begins with Muir leaving the mountains for the winter only to find two

artists waiting for him back in the valley.⁶⁰ They want him to guide them to a scenic view that they might paint, and Muir has just seen such a picturesque scene on his descent. As he leads them towards this place, they are enthralled with the variety of color they see but are disappointed with the landscape: "All this is huge and sublime," they say, "but we see nothing as yet at all available for effective pictures. Art is long, and art is limited, you know; and here are foregrounds, middlegrounds, backgrounds, all alike" (41). Muir promises them they will see what they are looking for, and when they arrive at the place he has in mind, they are ecstatic: "Here, at last, was a typical alpine landscape" (41).

Muir, however, presses on, deciding to climb Mount Ritter, at that time unclimbed by anyone else on record. As he climbs, the beauty he sees is obviously more comprehensive than the picturesque scene he has left with the artists. His first day is "pure pleasure; simply mountaineering indulgence. . . ." (43). "[E]very sight and sound [is] inspiring, leading one far out of himself, yet feeding and building up his individuality" (45). Mountaineering, he suggests here, need not be a egocentric activity, a man's will and strength pitted against the

⁶⁰The artists, unnamed in the article, were William Keith and Benono Irwin.

forces of nature. It is, when pursued as a spiritual as well as a physical activity, a surrender of self.

As he climbs higher into more austere regions the second day of his journey, he becomes shut in by the enclosing features of the landscape. His experience, however, does not lead him to the sort of displacement Thoreau had experienced on Katahdin. Rather,

Every feature became more rigidly alpine, without, however, producing any chilling effect; for going to the mountains is like going home. We always find that the strangest objects in these fountain wilds are in some degree familiar, and we look upon them with a vague sense of having seen them before (48).

The journey then becomes more perilous, and as he reaches the base of the summit of Ritter, he begins to question whether he should attempt to climb to the top. A sudden winter storm could kill him. However, his "uncontrollable" instincts take over, and he continues his ascent. The climax soon follows. Ascending a narrow avalanche gulch, which turns into a nearly sheer precipice of some fifty feet, Muir finds himself unable to climb up or to retrace his steps down. He continues moving up, but

After gaining a point about halfway to the top, I was suddenly brought to a dead stop, with arms outspread, clinging close to the face of the rock, unable to move hand or foot either up or down. My doom appeared fixed. I must fall. There would be a moment of bewilderment, and then a lifeless rumble down the one general precipice to the glacier below.

When this final danger flashed upon me, I became nerve-shaken for the first time since setting foot on the mountains, and my mind seemed to fill with a stifling smoke. But this terrible eclipse lasted only a moment, when life blazed forth again with preternatural clearness. I seemed suddenly to become

possessed of a new sense. The other self, bygone experiences, Instinct, or Guardian Angel, - - call it what you will, - - came forward and assumed control. Then my trembling muscles became firm again, every rift and flaw in the rock was seen as through a microscope, and my limbs moved with a positiveness and precision with which I seemed to have nothing at all to do. Had I been borne aloft upon wings, my deliverance could not have been more complete (51-52).

This passage depicts no man conquering a mountain, in the typical alpine tradition. It describes surrender, as the passive tone throughout this passage suggests. Muir does nothing of his own accord. The climb, as Cohen suggests, happens to him. Through his own surrender, he finds himself on the "topmost crag in the blessed light" (52). The view from the top, after this spiritual surrender, is "truly glorious" (52). He turns north, south, east, and west, gaining a holistic vision of incredible diversity. He recalls and then dismisses Ruskin's "sin-begotten" perspective, saying:

. . . when looking for the first time from an all-embracing standpoint like this, the inexperienced observer is oppressed by the incomprehensible grandeur, variety, and abundance of the mountains rising shoulder to shoulder beyond the reach of vision; and it is only after they have been studied one by one, long and lovingly, that their far-reaching harmonies become manifest. Then, penetrate the wilderness where you may, the main telling features, to which all the surrounding topography is subordinate, are quickly perceived, and the most complicated clusters of peaks stand revealed harmoniously correlated and fashioned like works of art . . . (55).

Only the initiate, the person who, through surrender, finds himself, can gain such a vision. Muir tries to imagine what these Sierra peaks would have looked like in the midst of a

glacial winter and reminds the reader that the process of creation is on-going, never-ending, thus creating a sense of timelessness and eternity, again part of his vision.

That night, as is usually the case after one of his intense spiritual experiences, Muir sleeps little. He returns after three days to his artist friends who seem "unreasonably glad" to see him. Thereafter, the artists "packed their precious sketches," and the group returns home to the valley. The reader is left to judge which vision of the wilderness, the artists' or Muir's, is clearest, which reveals the deepest insight.

Both Cohen and Smith mention the Zen-like quality of this vision and the language with which it is written. Having read Emerson and Thoreau carefully, Muir's use of such Oriental transcendentalism is not out of the question. Muir, however, in refusing to define exactly what guided him through the final ascent, allows the reader much leeway in interpreting the vision. "Call it what you will," the phrase Muir uses as he asks the reader to interpret the force that guided him, allows the scientist, the athlete, the Christian, the Taoist, almost anyone who might wish to understand his experience to use whatever paradigm suits. "Call it what you will" also expresses what Muir was through and through, a compromiser. "A Near View of the High Sierra" is a masterpiece not only because it describes a wilderness vision of a higher order than those of other

paradigms but because it absorbs those paradigms as it transcends them.

Middle Ground: Less Extreme Nature Visions

Although Muir offered the nineteenth-century reader a new way of seeing the wilderness in Mountains, he did not expect many readers to attain such a vision. He had lost that hope in his earliest wilderness ramblings. His wilderness ramblings were too dangerous and solitary, certainly for the women whose respect he wanted, like Jeanne Carr, but also for men he had begun to lead into wild places. Other articles in Mountains, ranging from general descriptions of wilderness to close descriptions of individual species, show that Muir had decided to adopt a new strategy in getting an increasingly urban population back into nature. If they could not understand the wild forests and sublime mountain summits, perhaps they could understand a more pastoral landscape, such as the Central Valley, with its myriad of flowers which Muir called "California gold." In "The Bee-Pastures," Muir not only paints a beautiful picture of California flora in spring but offers a model for people to follow as they settle the land, the way of the bee.

By 1875, Muir realized that even places he thought were inaccessible would be ravaged either by profit-seeking farmers or, worse, by sheepmen who not only allowed their sheep to overgraze the delicate grasses and flowers of the

region but who also burned huge areas in hopes of clearing them of fallen timber and underbrush, wreaking havoc on the land in the process. Realizing that settlers would come to California to establish homes, that wilderness would inevitably be altered if not destroyed, Muir tried to offer a gentler way of living in the land, a way that offered profit without the need for wholesale destruction of forests or prairies. Bee-keeping was his compromise solution. Settlers could make money keeping bees even in seemingly inhospitable places.

Moreover, the bees themselves were an example of a species that lived in the bosom of nature, living off its bounty, without destroying it. Like the settlers, the bees Muir focused on were emigrants, brought to California by early settlers.⁶¹ Clearly, Muir wanted immigrant settlers to see the bee as a model for living in California:

In this flowery wilderness the bees rove and revel, rejoicing in the bounty of the sun, clambering eagerly through bramble and bucklebloom, ringing the myriad bells of the manzanita, now humming aloft among polleny willows and firs, now down on the ashy ground among gillias and buttercups, and anon plunging deep into snowy banks of cherry and buckthorn. They consider the lilies and roll into them, and like lilies, they toil not, for they are impelled by sun-power . . . (277).

⁶¹What Muir did not realize was that most of the original flora of California had been destroyed by the earliest Spanish settlers. The flowers of California that he loved so much were themselves mostly immigrant species, as Cohen discusses in "How Does One Defend a Brittle Thesis?" (pp. 4-5). The flowers as well as the bees were symbols of the "Europeanization of the American continent" (4).

The bee lives fruitfully off the land:

Their field work is one perpetual feast; but, however exhilarating the sunshine or bountiful the supply of flowers, they are always dainty feeders. Humming-moths and humming-birds seldom set foot upon a flower, but poise on the wing in front of it, and reach forward as if they were sucking through straws. But bees, though as dainty as they, hug their favorite flowers with profound cordiality, and push their blunt, polleny faces against them, like babies on their mother's bosom. And fondly, too, with eternal love, does Mother Nature clasp her small bee-babies, and suckle them, multitudes at once, on her warm Shasta breast (277-78).

Only in the southern part of the state were bee farms established, and, as his description of the relative sparsity of flowers and the drought year of 1877 makes evident, southern California was perhaps the least suited part of the state for bee farms. Thus, he encourages new settlers to establish bee colonies in northern and central California. He hoped that such enterprise would limit the already widespread destruction perpetrated by sheep, lumber, and farming interests. If men could learn to live like bees, he hoped, they might gain some insight into living in nature. True, bee-keeping was a border-life, the kind Muir himself had adopted by 1880; but it was better than the wanton destruction that accompanied other enterprises in the wild. Muir had, by the mid to late seventies, decided to compromise, because, he believed, only in compromise could any part of wilderness be saved.

Mountains is the finest book Muir wrote. It blends his most mature vision of the wilderness with the compromises that were inevitable if he wanted to reach an increasingly

urban audience. Published in 1894, two years after Muir helped found the Sierra Club, it was a political tract for the new-born organization and set the stage for Muir's work to follow. As Muir moved into the national spotlight, with the help of Robert Underwood Johnson of Century Magazine, he was able to convince a national audience of the need to make Yosemite and Sequoia national parks in order to protect them from the ravages of sheep and timber industries. President Harrison set aside thirteen million acres in 1890 as public domain, but the area was continually pillaged by timber thieves and burned by sheepmen and prospectors. Mountains established Muir as an expert with no financial interests in the debate raging over these areas.⁶² It thus propelled him into the arena of politics for the rest of his life.

Alaskan Travels

Muir made numerous trips to Alaska and Siberia, four of which he wrote about in books. Travels in Alaska (1915) covers his trips in 1879, 1880, and part of his trip in 1890. The Cruise of the Corwin (1917) contains his journalistic writings about an Arctic journey in 1881 in search of the missing Jeannette and its commander, George W. De Long, and crew, during which Muir was able to observe native cultures of the far North and became one of the first men to set foot on Wrangle Land, then thought to be a

⁶²See Jack McCormick's foreword to Mountains, p. xiv-xv.

country stretching far to the north, though the expedition in which Muir participated proved it to be an island.⁶³ A third book, Stickeen (1909), was a dog story relating the events that occurred when Muir and his friend's (Hall Young's) dog, Stickeen, crossed a glacier on which they nearly were trapped. The dog's bravery and loyalty are the theme of the story, one of many children's stories about animals Muir composed though it is one of very few he ever wrote down.

Much of Muir's Alaskan writing repeats old themes. He saw for the first time land in the midst of a glacial age (rather than at the end of one) and became further convinced of the validity of his early glacial theories. He reiterated, as always, his belief in harmony amidst diversity. His compromise concerning the development of wilderness areas, which he had come to believe was inevitable, is evident in his optimistic writing about the progressive hopes of the region.⁶⁴ These would remain themes in all of his writing.

The Alaskan trips, however, did add some new dimensions to Muir's writing. As Richard Fleck argues, Muir became much more compassionate towards Native American peoples in these journeys, during which, for the first time, he

⁶³See Badè's introduction to Cruise, pp. xvi-xvii.

⁶⁴See, for instance, chapter 1, pp. 13-14, where he writes about mineral and timber resources, "railroad hopes," etc.

witnessed the evils of whiskey and other degradations brought by the white man into Native American culture, in contrast to the nurturing environment of the tribal community.⁶⁵ Muir also witnessed the horrors of mass starvation when he visited the "Villages of the Dead" in his Arctic cruise, finding the remains of nearly two hundred Eskimos who died in the winter of 1878-79. His ruminations about this experience led him to advocate national protection of Native American peoples.

Muir's encounter with Thlinkit tribes (the Chilcats, Hoonas, and Takus) and later the Eskimos and various Siberian peoples definitely changed his perspective towards these peoples and turned him into an advocate for their protection. He marvelled at their innate unselfishness, their Christlike self-sacrifices, their love for children, and even aspects of their religion. In turn, they found his inexplicable studies fascinating, and some tribes requested that he be sent to them as a teacher and minister by the white missionaries. At first, Muir carried his old prejudices with him and enjoyed scaring the Native Americans of Fort Wrangle with a huge bonfire which they took as an

⁶⁵See Fleck's Henry Thoreau and John Muir Among the Indians (1985). See also his articles, "John Muir's Evolving Attitudes Toward Native American Cultures" (1978) and "John Muir and Eskimoan Cultures" (1979). Fleck argues that Muir might have modelled his Travels, which is about three trips to Alaska, after Thoreau's Maine Woods, about three trips to Maine. Both books show an increasing understanding for Native Americans.

evil omen. But, such prejudice was soon overcome, as Muir spent weeks with his fun-loving Thlinket guides and saw a wealth of love and compassion in their communities. He might even, as Fleck suggests, have come to see their stories about animals not only as knowledgeable but also as insightful, learning through these stories that the Native Americans had the living relationship with the land that Muir wanted himself.⁶⁶ Eventually, like Thoreau, Muir tried to learn some Native American language, which he recorded in his journal. His attitude towards Native Americans was decidedly changed by his Alaskan trips.

However, he pursued studies of Native Americans no further than his journals, articles, and books. A Native American way of life never became his way of life. He would advocate Federal protection of Native Americans but saw their being civilized, like his own civilization process, as inevitable: "Unprincipled whisky-laden traders are their bane; common-sense Christian teachers their greatest blessing. A few good missionaries, a few good cannon with men behind them, and fair play, protection from whiskey, is all the Alaska Indians require."⁶⁷ By 1879, Muir had compromised with white civilization, which was finishing the process of exterminating or enclosing tribal cultures in the

⁶⁶"John Muir's Evolving Attitudes Toward Native American Cultures" p. 24.

⁶⁷John of the Mountains, p. 275.

lower states. Whites were not ready to adopt Native American paradigms in understanding the wilderness. If Muir wanted to save wilderness, he would have to argue within frameworks his audience would accept. He would only give his sympathy to native cultures and advocate as humane a civilization process as possible, even while recognizing the corrupting influences of any civilizing technology or vice. At best, his writing about Alaskan natives was recognition of a way of life that works in harmony with the land. He neither engaged in a serious, in-depth study of native culture, as Thoreau had done, nor advocated Native American culture as a substitute for the destructive Euro-culture into which he had reassimilated. In fact, some passages indicate that he probably favored natives who looked and acted more European than those who looked Asiatic and acted less like Europeans. In comparing the Chukchis to the Eskimos, for instance, Muir writes

The Chukchis seem to be a good-natured, lively, chatty, brave and polite people, fond of a joke, and, as far as I have seen, fair in their dealings as any people, savage or civilized. They are not savage by any means, however, but steady, industrious workers, looking ahead, providing for the future, and consequently seldom in want, save when at long intervals disease or other calamities overtake their [reindeer] herds, or exceptionally severe season prevent their obtaining the ordinary supplies of seals, fish, whales, walruses, bears, etc., on which the sedentary Chukchis chiefly depend. The sedentary and reindeer⁶⁸ Chukchis are the same people, and are said to differ in a marked degree, both in physical

⁶⁸Muir uses the term "reindeer" to designate the caribou.

characteristics and in language, from the neighboring tribes, as they certainly do from the Eskimos. Many of them have light complexions, hooked or aquiline noses, tall, sinewy, well-knit frames, small feet and hands, and are not, especially the men, so thick-set, short-necked or flat-faced as the Eskimos.⁶⁹

Muir could here be describing nineteenth-century European gentlemen. The contrast between the European-like Chukchis and Asiatic Eskimos is underscored by the terrible scene he witnesses in the "Villages of the Dead," in which his party discovers the skeletons of over two hundred mainly Eskimo victims of mass starvation. Muir attributes this starvation, in part, to the fact that "these people never lay up any considerable supply of food from one season to another" (Cruise 110). A more civilized, "sedentary" life, like that of the Chukchis, might have prevented such a calamity.

Interestingly, however, Muir blames the calamity on the "degrading influence" of civilization but sees as a solution only more civilization. Muir and Smithsonian collector Edward W. Nelson explored villages in which hundreds of natives had perished from starvation during the winter of 1878-79. Their skeletons remained unburied, and Nelson collected skulls freely for the Smithsonian collection. As Muir compared the terrible scene to the otherwise pristine environment around him, he wrote:

The scene was indescribably ghastly and desolate, though laid in a country purified by frost as by fire.

⁶⁹Cruise, p. 210.

Gulls, plovers, and ducks were swimming and flying about in happy life, the pure salt sea was dashing white against the shore, the blooming tundra swept back to the snow-clad volcanoes, and the wide azure sky bent kindly over all - - nature intensely fresh and sweet, the village lying in the foulest and most glaring death (Cruise 108-09).

The ghastly scene dramatized completely his view that wilderness was infinitely superior to town life, and he put a large portion of the blame on whites:

. . . unless some aid be extended by our government which claims these people, in a few years at most every soul of them will have vanished from the face of the earth; for, even where alcohol is left out of the count, the few articles of food, clothing, guns, etc., furnished by the trader, exert a degrading influence, making them less self-reliant, and less skillful as hunters. They seem easily susceptible of civilization, and well deserve the attention of our government.

The government attentions Muir advocated, however, would only further civilize these people, making them even more dependent on articles from the civilized world. The passage illustrates much of Muir's personal dilemma as well as that of the Eskimos. Since civilization corrupts, it should be avoided; but when one is dependent on civilization for one's food, escape is impossible. One has to become even more civilized. In 1881, when this passage was written, Muir had been married one year and had just begun his work in building a successful fruit farm, perhaps the ultimate symbol of his personal compromise with civilization. It is no wonder that he empathized with the more stable Chukchis, who tended herd as part of their livelihood. Like John

Muir, Native Americans would have to give up much of their wildness. Their plight was, in some ways, his own.

Reluctant Folk Hero

Another important issue in these Alaskan writings is Muir's increasing status as a folk hero and his reluctance to portray his ramblings as adventures. By 1879, Muir was widely recognized on the west coast, and his writings were much in demand. Letters he wrote from Alaska to newspapers, such as the San Francisco Evening Bulletin, were published forthwith and became the basis for his book. Muir became a folk hero, and his exploits, particularly those involving his saving of lives, built his reputation as a heroic adventurer as well as wilderness prophet. He tried to downplay these incidents in his own writing, but others willingly took up the pen and wrote hagiography. His rescue of Rev. S. Hall Young, for instance, who dislocated both shoulders in a fall from Glenora Peak and was carried down the mountain by Muir, is venerated in the latter's Alaska Days with John Muir but greatly understated in Muir's own account in Travels.⁷⁰ This story also illustrates another reality Muir had to face as he made his peace with civilization. Beginning in the 1870's but continuing throughout the 1890's, Muir evaluated the limitations of his fellow travelers in the wilderness and felt increasingly

⁷⁰See Travels, chapter 4, pp. 62-69.

guilty about leading people into dangerous situations, in spite of the role danger had played in his own "baptismal" and visionary experiences. Also, he did not want wilderness excursions to become adventures rather than spiritual experiences.⁷¹ Muir was always aware of his own superior talents for coping in the wilderness, and he was, like many mountaineers, a competitive spirit, as many of his writings suggest. Since childhood, he had disciplined his body to endure incredible rigors and punished himself on more than one occasion when his body failed him. In Boyhood and Youth, for instance, Muir relates an incident in which he nearly drowned in the pond on his father's farm because he panicked. At the next opportunity, Muir steered a boat to the deepest part of the lake and dove several times to the bottom, crying "Take that!" before each dive. Another instance occurred in 1873, after a prolonged stay in the city, when Muir lost his footing - - and some expensive equipment - - while walking across a glacially polished rock. He chided himself for staying in the city so long that his physical skills had become weakened and punished

⁷¹The title and theme of James M. Clarke's biography, The Life and Adventures of John Muir (1980), suggests the extent to which Americans wish to see wilderness excursions as adventures - - as Man against Nature - - rather than spiritual encounters with God, and the extent to which Muir's own life is read as such an adventure, in spite of his own modesty and attempts to direct his readers towards a spiritual vision. Cohen discusses Muir's increasing reluctance to lead persons or animals into dangerous situations (Pathless Way pp. 349-350).

himself that night by sleeping on the granite without anything between the rock and himself. Physical preparedness is, as Cohen points out, an integral part of the wilderness experience. The traveller or climber can gain only limited insight if his body fails him (Pathless Way 44-50). Muir's travels with Hall Young and later Robert Underwood Johnson, however, showed him the physical limitations of the average person, regardless of that person's willingness to endure hardships. In response to the average person's limitations, he offered less intense wilderness experiences as alternatives in articles such as "The Bee-Pastures" and, in Stickeen and in his account of his rescue of Young, showed the perils of leading the uninitiated into dangerous situations. He blamed himself for the plight of Young and the little dog, whose diminutive size made it nearly impossible for him to cross glacier crevasses so deep that Muir himself had difficulty negotiating them. He did not mind travelling into dangerous places with the likes of Galen Clark, but few people had his survival capabilities.⁷² In reaching for his public

⁷²That Muir liked to compare himself to other capable mountaineers, including Clark, is evident in his writings about an extended and difficult expedition they took to the Kings River region in 1874, in which Clark was portrayed at times as "not feeling able to bear the fatigue involved in such a trip" and who later quit the journey to return to his duties as caretaker of Yosemite (Badè, I, 388). Muir, on the other hand, endured many hardships, including a night on Mount Whitney "without fire or food in a very icy wind-storm" which "prove[d] that [he could not] be killed in any such manner," though more objective biographical accounts

audience, he had to compromise, to offer them a safer wilderness experience. This extreme compromise, most evident in Our National Parks (1901), became the basis for his advocating the building of access roads into the Yosemite and even a ladder up Half Dome, since he had already decided that part of his strategy for saving wilderness was getting people into the wilderness.

Muir's Alaska writings, then, are valuable in showing how Muir might have accommodated a Native American wilderness perspective had he not already made major and permanent compromises with civilization. They also show an early recognition of the physical limitations of civilized travellers whose support Muir would have to have if he wanted to protect wilderness areas. The latter would become crucial to his strategy of the late 1880's and 1890's, when he became politically active on a national scale.

Marriage and Politics

In 1880, Muir married Louie Wanda Strentzel, daughter of a prosperous fruit grower in the Alhambra Valley near Martinez, California. Two children were born to them, one of whom suffered physical ailments during most of her life. For the next ten years, Muir spent much of his time growing fruit and helping rear his family and was quite successful in doing so. His efforts took a toll on his own health,

tell that Muir during this night suffered frostbite from which he never fully recovered (Badè, I, 393).

though periodic excursions into the wilderness helped him regain it. He would never again rove as wild and free as he had in the early seventies. His fame, however, was already widespread, and for the rest of his life literary, scientific, and political men and women came to him or invited him on extended excursions into Alaska, the East Coast, Europe, Africa, and the Far East. Muir had settled down and accepted the role of friend of the wilderness and guide for the uninitiated. In this role, though it was a compromise with which he was never fully comfortable, he effected the greatest change in the public mind and policy toward wilderness. In order to save wilderness, Muir had not only to convince government to protect it but also to get people into wilderness, which meant wilderness had to be made accessible by roads and other transportation conveniences. The wilderness experience for the average citizen was primarily recreational, not spiritual, and Muir reluctantly approved. Any exposure to wilderness was better than no exposure at all. History has proven that Muir was naive in estimating the consequences of changes brought on by the automobile and twentieth century technology.⁷³ However, had he not agreed to such compromises, Yosemite might have been destroyed permanently.

⁷³See Bill McKibben's The End of Nature for discussion of early environmentalists, including Muir, who failed to see "that the atmosphere, the climate, could be dramatically altered" (62).

In his time the biggest threat to Muir's preservation plans was not gas guzzling tourists but inexhaustibly greedy mining, lumbering and livestock interests who had political connections both in the state of California and Washington, D. C. Muir battled these "merchants in the temple" until his death but lost a thirteen-year dispute with the city of San Francisco over the damming of the Hetch-Hetchy Valley, part of the original Yosemite reservation. Its loss would become the rallying cry for preservationists even into our time. Some speculate, however melodramatically, that its loss killed John Muir.

Muir as Guide

Two instances in the 1880's illustrate the role Muir decided to play as he tried to woo the public to the cause of preservation. The first was a trip proposed by Helen Hunt Jackson for which he would suggest an itinerary for the then deathly ill author and defender of Native American rights. The second was his trip in 1889 with Robert Underwood Johnson, a more typical, healthy wilderness visitor whose willingness to follow Muir was undermined by his own city-bred ineptness. These instances magnified what the Hall Young incident had first made apparent to him. He would have to make wilderness more accessible to the average person, even the unhealthy person, if he wanted public support. Nearly all of his public writing was tailored to this necessity.

In 1885, Helen Hunt Jackson, friend of Jeanne Carr, in whose home she had written part of her novel, Ramona, came to San Francisco after months of illness she blamed on poor sanitation in Los Angeles.⁷⁴ She had come to California on appointment as Special Commissioner to investigate conditions of the Mission Indians of California and was diligent in her efforts to address their problems. Wishing to rid herself of her illness, she contacted Muir, believing that a sojourn in the wilderness would do much to help her ailments, a remedy Muir often prescribed for himself. However, her health had deteriorated so much that she could not even walk. She could not endure heat, nor could she exceed an altitude of four thousand feet. Her retinue would consist of eight horses, an ambulance, two other wagons for supplies, and a phaeton buggy. Four servants, a maid, and a doctor would accompany her.

She wanted Muir to prescribe for her a trip. How would Muir have responded to such a request in, say, 1872? He could hardly tolerate tourists on horseback in those days. In 1885, however, Muir was a changed man. He was unwell throughout much of the 1880's himself and knew well the healing powers of the wilderness. He answered her letter, suggesting possible trips she could make with her entourage,

⁷⁴The details of Muir's correspondence with H. H. Jackson are in Life and Letters, II, 196-203. All information and quotes pertaining to this affair are taken from these pages.

which made a journey into the high Sierras impossible. He recommended a variety of possibilities within the altitudinal and climate range she had specified but could not help commenting on her unusual travelling mode as follows:

What an outfit you are to have - - terrible as an army with banners! I scarce dare think of it. What will my poor Douglas squirrels say at the sight? They used to frisk across my feet, but I had only two feet, which seemed too many for the topography in some places, while you have a hundred, besides wooden spokes and spooks. Under ordinary circumstances they would probably frighten the maid and stare the doctor out of countenance, but every tail will be turned in haste and hidden at the bottom of the deepest knot-holes. And what shuffling and haste there will be in the chaparral when the bears are getting away! Even the winds might hold their breath, I fancy, "pause and die," and the great pines groan aghast at the oncoming of so many shining cans and carriages and strange colors.

But go to the mountains where and how you will, you soon will be free from the effects of this confusion, and God's sky will bend down about you as if made for you alone, and the pines will spread their healing arms above you and bless you and make you well again, and so delight the heart of

JOHN MUIR

Such concessions are not far from those he would make to render Yosemite accessible to automobiles. Wilderness contained restorative powers no matter how the traveller moved, or so he believed. Helen Jackson, however, died before she could make her restorative journey.

From 1887-90, Muir worked hard as editor of Picturesque California, a project in which he literally gave the public what it wanted, a coffee-table book, an acceptable version of wilderness. He was then willing to play any role to save wilderness, realizing that only areas that the public would

consider picturesque would be those that could be saved. At the same time, he began a relationship with Robert Underwood Johnson that typified his relationships with other easterners whose support he had to win in order to save wilderness. In 1889, Muir guided Johnson into the Yosemite and the High Sierra. The two became close friends and around the campfire concocted a plan to make Yosemite into a national park. Muir would write two articles for Century, and Johnson would propose to the House Committee on Public Lands a proposal to establish Yosemite National Park along Muir's boundaries. The plan worked. Moreover, as Cohen suggests, this courting of influential persons around campfires would become one of Muir's most effective strategies.⁷⁵ He went on expedition with railroad magnate E. H. Harriman in 1899. He camped with Roosevelt in 1903 and Taft in 1909. These were but a few of the powerful political and business men whose respect he earned, whose ears he gained, while at the same time he kept the respect of scientists and humanists around the world. Muir became, in his own right, a master politician, though he seldom went to Washington, D. C. to promote his agenda. He had decided to live in civilization but, like Thoreau, "a majority of one," learned to play the game on his own field, in the mountains.

⁷⁵Pathless Way, pp. 317-323.

Muir's late years, his most politically active, are suitably covered in other studies. Much of his writing was for political causes and reveals little about his wilderness vision, though it sheds much light on environmental rhetoric that has followed. His writing for wilderness preservation in such books as The Mountains of California, Picturesque California, and Our National Parks shows the concessions he made to an audience that could never see wilderness as he had seen it in the 1870's. The best he could do was to save a few picturesque pockets of wilderness here and there. He was instrumental in saving not only Yosemite but also the Grand Canyon, the Petrified Forest in Arizona, and Sequoia National Forest in California, and he helped establish some of the guidelines for managing these parks as recreational areas. He knew the average tourist would never gain the sort of vision he had found again and again, as typified by his climb of Mount Ritter. He had grown out of his misanthropic stage of the late sixties and early seventies, and had made his peace with civilization, though that same civilization would "crucify" him on Hetch-Hetchy in 1913. He did what he had to do to save a little wilderness. Had he grafted a Native American way of life onto the other paradigms he studied, if that were possible, his wilderness ethic might have been even more complete, though one should suspect that this is a twentieth-century fantasy in the vein of Dances With Wolves. Ultimately, the paradoxes within

Muir's thinking and writing about wilderness gave his opponents in the Hetch-Hetchy dispute the ammunition they needed to undercut his credibility, as they searched his writings and history for inconsistencies between his theories and practice. We still have not resolved these paradoxes. We still do not understand the proper role of wilderness in an increasingly civilized world. Hetch-Hetchy controversies continue all over the world, as the current dispute between environmentalists and oil companies over the Arctic National Refuge attests. We must remember that Muir himself thought Hetch-Hetchy was safe as late as 1910; he believed San Francisco would find another water supply. It did not; with the support of Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot, who had never seen Hetch-Hetchy but who was dedicated to a policy of "wise use" of natural resources, San Francisco got its dam. Political maneuvering, not sound environmental policy, won the fight. Global politics circa 1991 threaten to extinguish wilderness altogether from the planet.

If Hetch-Hetchy most graphically demonstrates the tragedy stemming from the compromises of Muir's life, we must remember the many triumphs. Perhaps this is why My First Summer in the Sierra remains his most popular book. It shows not only the compromises he would make with civilization but also the glorious, triumphant, religious ecstasy he found during his earliest days in the mountains. This mountain vision, however, is best rendered in "A Near

View of the High Sierra." The mountaintop vision is what separates Muir from his predecessor Thoreau and Mary Austin, his literary descendant. It is what keeps us turning to Muir's writing for clues on how to gain our own wilderness visions. We can regret the compromises, though they were inevitable if any wilderness were to be preserved at all. We can also, however, celebrate the vision. After all, Muir said, even late in life, that he was probably the happiest man on earth. Who can ask for more?

Chapter 4

MARY AUSTIN: A FEMININE PERSPECTIVE ON WILDERNESS

Mary Austin is often ignored in scholarly studies of nature writers, though recently she is gaining some critical attention if not acclaim. The details of her life, as explained in her own autobiography and three ensuing biographies, have often blown up a storm of controversy around her work as blinding as the sandstorms she wrote about.¹ Mary (as she calls herself in her autobiography, Earth Horizon) was not a woman tolerated easily. As she admits in her autobiography, she had the annoying habit of speaking her mind even in situations wherein she probably should have remained silent. She agreed wholeheartedly with few people on any subject. Many people who knew her were put off by her "colossal egotism." Though she was a prototypical early twentieth-century feminist, she had serious disagreements with many of her activist colleagues, just as she did with many of her fellow artists. She was

¹The biographical monographs on Austin are T. M. Pearce's Mary Hunter Austin (1965), Augusta Fink's I-Mary (1983), and Esther Lanigan Stineman's Mary Austin: Song of a Maverick (1989).

known among men who were her literary companions as something of a leech, an annoyance, particularly when she attempted to ensnare them in romantic attachments.² She was the mother of a mentally impaired child whom she institutionalized. She participated in occult exercises like reading cards and crystal balls and evidently believed in her own clairvoyant powers. She was, as she and her latest biographer label her, a maverick.

None of the biographical facts, however, renders her accomplishments less than wonderful at their best, interesting in some respects even at their worst. Though not all of her work deals with man's and woman's relationship to wilderness, many commentators agree that her best writing does deal with this issue in some way or another. Her least effective writing, or at least her most imitative, is that set in cities, where she admitted she

²In his biography of Lincoln Steffens, Justin Kaplan writes about Austin's largely fanciful "affair" with Steffens, who probably did not encourage her as much as she claimed (207-08). Karen Langlois has covered the history of this "affair" at length in her article, "Mary Austin and Lincoln Steffens," lamenting the enormous energy Austin wasted in romantic pursuit and literary revenge afterwards. Other literary figures who rejected or ignored her were George Sterling and Jack London. Austin's friend Mabel Dodge Luhan related an interesting and perhaps apocryphal anecdote about Austin trying to seduce Jack London by letting her hair down while wearing "a delphic look on her face." London, misinterpreting the seductive import of her actions, said, "Well, if you're going to make yourself comfortable, I guess I can!" While Austin "always felt her hair was literally her crowning glory," she was acutely aware of her lack of "pulchritude" in general and blamed many of her failed romances on men's shallowness ("Mary Austin: A Woman" 20).

never could gain a sense of the web or fabric of life that she intuited in less complex and less anthropocentric environments, such as that she found in the desert. Her best writing offers original insight into the desert, Southwestern Native American and Latin culture and the artists therein, white men's and women's relationship to the desert and Native Americans, and male/female relationships in a variety of settings. In her best work, these subjects are entwined to show the colorful tapestry of Nature and Culture in the desert Southwest, to show the interrelationships between these various elements, the interdependence they often share.

Most commentators agree that Land of Little Rain (1903), a collection of sketches about a land and its people, is Austin's best work, the one in which she most carefully weaves the major themes of her life project. It is also the book in which she most clearly delineates her kinship to and differentiation from Muir and Thoreau. At the end of this work, Austin offers a paradigm for living near the desert which compromises between the extremes of white abuse as well as lack of understanding of the land and Native American primitivism, namely the Spanish culture of the old Southwest as it was preserved in the quasi-mythical town of El Pueblo de Las Uvas. Whether or not she really believed members of her own "race" could adopt the lifestyle

of Las Uvas, or whether she herself could entirely adopt it, is a complex question this chapter will address.

None of Austin's work after Land of Little Rain examines as thoroughly the issue of the interrelationship between humanity and the land. However, other works, such as Lost Borders (1909), The Trail Book (1918), and individual stories, sketches, or essays within many of her twenty-seven books, contain material which elucidates the land-ethic she formed early in life and maintained with some consistency, notwithstanding a long hiatus in urban California, Europe, and the east coast during which she maintained only imaginative contact with her adopted land and people in the Southwest. In addition to the books and sketches dedicated to the Southwest, Austin committed the last years of her life and considerable resources to preserving the dying Native American and Spanish culture around Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her best work, both in art and in life, involved the Southwest, its people, its past, present and future.

This chapter is based on the premise that Austin's feminist concerns were secondary to her concerns for the land and the artist's role in various societies. However, she writes best when she is able to weave all of these concerns into a larger tapestry. She criticized her city-bound feminist peers whose radicalism rendered them myopic, incapable of seeing the larger picture, which for her

included a reverence for wild places and folk often ignored by those in quest of equality for women. Still, Austin brings to the medium of wilderness literature a feminine and sometimes feminist perspective that clearly separates her from Thoreau's androcentric perspective and Muir's femininely influenced but still strongly masculine perspective. This vantage point allows her to see the white man's relationship to the wilderness in psycho-sexual terms not explored by Muir or Thoreau, who might have been lured in their own right by the seductive call of the wilderness to which, Austin argues, mainly white men are susceptible. Austin's perspective, however, is not always that of the white woman. Having the facility of artistic identification with either sex and multiple cultures, Austin's perspective constantly changes. In one sketch, for instance, she adopts the point of view of a white shepherd of French origins; in another that of a widowed Paiute woman who raises a child by herself; in another that of a white woman who also raises a family by herself after her husband, seduced by the desert, abandons the family; in yet another, that of the land itself. Her changing perspective thus allows her to express many differences in the way white men, white women, Native Americans, and Spanish Americans perceive the wilderness, differences not explored by Muir or Thoreau. This changing perspective is Austin's most original contribution to wilderness literature. Her ability to identify with an

enormous variety of peoples, sometimes competing against each other as well as against the wilderness, gives her work a complexity lacking in the work of either Thoreau or Muir. This shifting perspective might also account for some of the inconsistencies evident in her work and in her land ethic.

Life and Early Influences

Mary Austin was born in Carlinville, Illinois, on September 9, 1868, to Susanna Savilla Graham and George Hunter. Her father had come to America from England and had served the Union cause with distinction in the Civil War, during which he caught the fevers that caused him pain for the rest of his life and that probably killed him when Mary was ten. From her father she inherited a love for books and nature and her irreverence toward traditions and beliefs she saw as untenable. Susannah, on the other hand, was the descendent of a long line of pioneers, the last of her line to settle the wild frontier. She was descended from women who brought organized religion and civilization, in however crude a form, to the frontier; wilderness, for Susannah and other pioneer women, was a thing abhorred, a thing to be transformed as quickly as possible. Austin embodied elements of both her father's love for the outdoors and his "free-thinking" and her mother's disdain for unaltered wilderness and, to some degree, her traditionalism; this internalized conflict is never fully resolved within Austin's works.

Susannah's second child, Mary, was unwanted; and from birth until their final parting, Mary continually felt her mother's rejection, experiencing only rare instances of genuine affection and feminine solidarity. Mary's older brother, Jim, became the head of the house after his father's death, being compelled by his mother to take up that role. Mary resented his authority just as she had earlier resented his keeping up appearances as the dutiful and repentent child, which act she saw as a ruse. Mary's sister, Jennie, "the only one who ever unselflessly loved me," died the same year as her father, leaving Mary with no allies in her own household (Earth Horizon 87). A younger brother, George, completed the Hunter household, but Austin writes less about him than about the others.

The love Mary did not get from her mother was at least partially compensated by the experiences she had in the outdoors. The most important event of Austin's childhood was when "God happened to Mary under the walnut tree" (Earth Horizon 51). At the age of five and a half, under a walnut tree near her home, she felt the presence of something she later would call Ultimate Reality, which she almost always associated with experiences in the outdoors. However, she did not associate this presence with the organized religion taught by her mother and maternal grandfather, a fundamentalist, self-appointed Presbyterian minister who paid her for being his first grandchild to read the Bible

from cover to cover. She rejected the Heaven of Revelation as boring and "Above everything . . . wanted to avoid going to Heaven f'reveranever" (53). She also rejected the emotionalism inherent in Protestant fundamentalist religion, an emotionalism she believed was a poor substitute for the ultimate reality she had felt as a child, and because "she seemed to have been born with a bias against the emotional treatment of what might be called moral problems," she was punished often by her mother for acts of disobedience she could not feel were wrong. Her brother Jim accepted the emotional outpourings that were expected of him when he confessed disobedience and was exonerated according to his society's notions of grace; but for Mary, "'Grace' . . . was an inward condition, bestowed, not achieved" (Earth Horizon 56, 57).

After her father's death, however, Mary lost the feeling of the presence of God and substituted for it organized religion, until she regained a real sense of God many years later. In her twenties, she rejected organized religion altogether after seeing the religious community ignore incredible injustices inflicted on Native Americans and the land.

Austin began her schooling at age five, earlier than the law allowed, because her mother "did not know . . . what on earth to do with her" (Earth Horizon 58). Because of her reading ability, she advanced two years ahead of her peers,

which promotion only furthered her sense of loneliness. Her storytelling ability, though discouraged by her mother, who saw the creation of fiction as the telling of lies, won her respect from her schoolmates, who encouraged her to tell them tales.

Austin writes much about the educational expectations of a young woman in late nineteenth-century America, expectations she violated by exploring a variety of subjects, none of which would prepare her for her expected role as mother and wife or school teacher. From her earliest years, she had a love for the outdoors which she enhanced through reading scientific texts, such as Hugh Miller's Old Red Sandstone, the first book she bought for herself, a favorite of Muir and one of the earliest geological texts. Her mother, however, discouraged such reading, saying that gentlemen did not want to hear discourses about nature from their ladies. According to Austin, Susannah particularly discouraged her quoting Thoreau to boys who took her walking: "Burroughs was permissible, but not Thoreau" (Earth Horizon 112). Her mother believed a then popular idea promoted in Victorian books on behavior: "the gentleman will tell the lady what to think" (Earth Horizon 113). No one, however, could force Mary to accept such irrational credos. In addition to scientific texts, Mary read literary classics, including many of those by the Romantics and Transcendentalists, which

she found in her father's collection or borrowed from others. At Blackburn College, however, she studied the sciences instead of literature, saying she could learn literature on her own. But, in the process of earning her degree, Mary suffered illness, and, after a five-month period at the State Normal School, where she was sent to train as a school teacher after her first illness at Blackburn, she suffered a nervous collapse which she attributed to the grinding, "inch-by-inch" pedagogical method practiced there. She returned to Blackburn to finish her degree days before her brother unilaterally decided to move the family to California.

The deserts of California, on the borders of which her brother moved the family after buying into an ill-founded homesteading scheme, overwhelmed Mary before she met people who could help her interpret them. During her first six months there, she nearly starved herself, refusing to eat the rabbits and other game she sometimes shot herself. The experience was a spiritual crisis for her as well as a physical one. Like the men she would portray as spellbound by the desert, Mary was entranced by the harsh country that "failed to explain itself" (Earth Horizon 194). She began to eat only after finding wild grapes, a food she liked. Her questions about the desert began to be answered after she met General Edward Fitzgerald Beale, an early settler and soldier who knew the history of the area, the heroes and

villains, the whites, Spaniards, and Native Americans, who were part of its past. He introduced her to these people, beginning her lifelong career of interviewing and writing about people and their relationship to the land.

Perhaps more importantly, she found God again. While "leading her horse [through a hollow], . . . suddenly she was aware of poppies coming up singly through the tawny, crystal-sanded soil, thin, piercing orange-colored flames." It was the "warm pervasive sweetness of ultimate reality, the reality first encountered so long ago under the walnut tree. Never to go away again; never to be completely out of call . . ." This reality, she writes, "has nothing to do with time nor circumstance; no, nor morals nor behaviors. It is the only true and absolute" (Earth Horizon 198). Her search for spiritual truth continued throughout her life and took on many forms, from experiments with prayer in both Native American and Roman Catholic practice to the reading of palms, crystal balls, and cards to predict the futures of her friends. Her mysticism was one of the most controversial and fascinating aspects of her life.

In 1891 Mary married Wallace Austin, a man of genteel background wholly unsuited for sticking to any project or job in the California frontier that might earn enough income to support his family and without the inclination to keep accurate books and save money. He mired the family in pecuniary problems, having brought to the marriage a backlog

of debts he could not pay. In 1892 he moved with his wife to Owens Valley, "The Land of Little Rain," to launch a doomed irrigation project. Mary was pregnant with her daughter, Ruth, who, it was learned later, was mentally impaired. But before moving to Owens Valley, Mary met the poet Ina Coolbrith in San Francisco. From her she learned how to prepare manuscripts for the Overland, paving the way for her earliest publications. She published her first story shortly after her daughter was born, while she was in the process of a long recovery. Her husband, however, never joined her "in the most venerable of the fidelities of marriage, the common fronting of man and woman to the wilderness" (243). Once she was kicked out of her rented lodge because Wallace failed to pay the landlord; she then had to find a job that paid for room and board for both of them. After Ruth was born, Mary was nursed back to health not by her husband but by a tubercular doctor, helpful neighbors, and Paiute women from a nearby campody,³ one of whom nursed Ruth along with her own child. Two or three years later, when Ruth had not begun speaking as a normal child should, this same mahala⁴ brought her "dried meadowlark's tongues, which make the speech nimble and quick" (Earth Horizon 246). From these intimate encounters

³A Native American encampment, also spelled "campoodie."

⁴Austin defines mahala as "Indian Woman, corrupted from the Spanish mujere" (Earth Horizon, footnote 15, 371).

with Native American women, Austin developed a lasting concern for their plight and became one of the first writers to explore the hardships and joys of day-to-day living of Native American women. Even more importantly, she found in various Native American cultures artistic women and Chiseras, or medicine women, who assumed special roles in their tribes. Though she often followed the advice of Dr. Frederick Webb Hodge, an "Indian expert" who told her to write about the usual, the average in Native American life, some of her best writing, including her notable play The Arrow-Maker (1911), delves into the lives of these Native American women artists and Chiseras, depicted often as separated from the "average" of their societies just as the white artist is from that of hers.⁵

Eventually, Mary had Ruth committed to a private institution for the mentally impaired in Santa Clara, and she and Wallace drifted apart and divorced, though both of them took part in a failed campaign to save Owens Valley from destruction at the hands of Los Angeles developers who disguised themselves as federal agents and bought the valley to flood it for a water resource. Austin left southern California in 1903, intending never to return, disillusioned

⁵Elemire Zolla (The Writer and the Shaman, 1969) admires much of Austin's work on Native Americans, calling her the only writer "to comprehend the living theory of Indian rhythm" (195). However, Zolla finds The Arrow-Maker weighted down by "banal ideologies," for her chisera "speaks as if she had absorbed the slogans of the feminist press and the tense, breathless ideology of the 'common man'" (190).

with the worship of development at the expense of the land and folk.

The next twenty years of Austin's life read, in her account, like a who's who in letters, politics, and the suffragist movement. Her literary acquaintances included George Sterling, Jack London, Charles Lummis, Jimmy Hopper, Ambrose Bierce, Joaquin Miller, Edward Markham, Sinclair Lewis, George Bernard Shaw, Joseph Conrad, W. B. Yeats, H. G. Wells, Lincoln Steffens, and many others. Her feminist cohorts included Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Emma Goldman, Henrietta Rodman, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Margaret Sanger, and others. Her political acquaintances included presidents Roosevelt and Hoover. She travelled widely and developed many close friends in all these circles, though she had bitter disagreements with many of them, too. By 1925, however, she had settled more or less permanently in Santa Fe, where she spent the better part of the rest of her life preserving the native art and culture of the area and completing her own work. She died in 1934.

The connection between Thoreau, Muir, and Austin is quite explicit. She read both of them thoroughly and met Muir in Carmel, California, then not a town, in 1902 or 1903. Of him she writes,

I recall John Muir . . . most distinctly, a tall lean man with the habit of talking much, the habit of soliloquizing. He told stories of his life in the wild, and of angels; angels that saved him; that lifted and carried him; that showed him where to put his feet; he believed them. I told him of mine; except that I

didn't see mine. I had been lifted and carried; I had been carried out of the way of danger; and he believed me (Earth Horizon 298).

It is highly doubtful that Muir shared Austin's fascination with spiritualism, despite what this passage might suggest. He was in the main skeptical of mysticism and even discounted his own strange premonitions as nothing compared to the everyday miracles of nature.⁶ But, both writers shared a belief that God was revealed through nature, not through organized religion as it was practiced in nineteenth-century America. It is arguable that both writers grew to accept a pantheistic philosophy, a belief that God is Nature. Oelshlaeger insists that Muir evolved such a theology,⁷ but it is more probable that both writers vacillated between notions of God as Nature and God as transcendent to Nature without rigid commitment to either

⁶In contrast, Austin catalogues her premonitions, including foreknowledge of her mother's death, the San Francisco earthquake, and the beginning of World War I, as among the many important examples of her spiritual sensitivity. There is little doubt that she believed in her own powers to predict the future through mediums such as reading palms and crystal balls. One is tempted to dismiss these occult experiments as evidence of Austin's oft-mentioned quirkiness; however, they seem more important in relation to a basic tenet of her religious philosophy, that no situation, however seemingly hopeless, is irremediable; that one could interact with the cosmos in ways that would change her assumed destiny. Without question, she practiced her own mystical relation to the universe through exercises that Muir openly mocked when he was asked to participate in them, though both shared the belief that God existed and was best revealed in nature, a belief that set them apart from many of the prevailing writers of the day.

⁷See The Idea of Wilderness, chapter six, "John Muir: Wilderness Sage"; pp. 172-204.

view at any time. In her most radical departures from orthodox Christianity, Austin adopted Native American theological frameworks, a sort of return to a paleolithic world-view, wherein man saw himself as part of nature, not separate from it, which Oelshlaeger establishes as an alternative to the destructive Nature/Culture dichotomy that arose after man turned to agriculture. She writes about her adoption of Native American religious practice and theology in some detail in Earth Horizon and argues at length in an oft-neglected work, American Rhythm, that Native American culture and art should and would become a paradigm for American culture and art.

However, though she adopted some Native American religious practices, Austin never seriously considered any unaltered Native American culture (and she researched a variety of them) as a paradigm for living her own life. While working hard to preserve Native American art and people from destruction, Austin always considered herself as part of the European race and culture, even while claiming to have a small amount of Native American blood, and she believed she was genetically determined to understand only what was in her racial memory.⁸ Also, she recognized the

⁸Austin, as Lois Rudnick notes, "was subject to confused and often self-contradictory racial typecasting" ("Re-naming the Land," footnote 30, p. 243). Her theories gave her justification for arguing that whites would have to formulate different ways to relate to the land from those of the Native Americans, even while in American Rhythm she argued that Native Americans were a model that whites should

harshness of Native American life, particularly as it affected women, who often became blind and aged before they were really old. Austin, who was always afflicted with physical ailments but who was also convinced that she was born to be a writer, recognized the infeasibility of her ever living such a life and achieving any sense of happiness. While she celebrated Native American culture and saw their sacred treatment of the land as superior to the white man's view of land as a resource to be exploited, she also wrote detailed accounts of the harsh conditions in which these people survived. Native Americans might and did achieve happiness according to their own notions, but Austin's notions were quite different. Influenced by what she calls the "Polly McAdams" tradition of pioneer women,⁹ those who longed for stability and civilization and who brought them to the frontier, Austin, too, needed more

follow. Some critics see Austin's treatment of Native Americans as tainted with paternalism and argue that she and other Indian reformers could not come up with realistic measures to improve the Native Americans' worsening economic conditions (Stineman, Maverick, 179; Drinnon, Facing West, 210-11). Rudnick (f.n. 40, p. 243-44), Charles Briggs (The Woodcarvers Cordova 50) and J. J. Brody (Indian Painters and White Patrons 117) also argue that in general white patrons of Native American and Hispanic artists were self-serving and patronizing.

⁹Polly McAdams was Austin's great-grandmother and typical of the women who settled the Midwest and established civilization: "It depended upon their capacity for picking up their hearths and carrying them, along with all their cultural and spiritual implications, with no more labored equipment than a wooden pestle and a mortar of Indian make, a tin grater for corn meal, a deep pot and a frying-pan, and their own intention" (Earth Horizon 15).

stability and sophisticated culture than Native American life could offer her, though she sometimes seems unaware of that fact herself. She found a more stable, less harsh mode of life in the Latin culture of the Southwest, a culture that grafted together Native American and various forms of Latin cuisines, architecture, and art. This culture was, in Austin's view, well suited for the land in that its people lived off the land without changing it unduly and without succumbing to the pell-mell pursuit of material possessions and power that drove white settlers to exploit the land and native people. Moreover, women of the Latin Southwest culture developed a high sense of artistry in their day-to-day lives and maintained a level of comfort and ease much more appealing to Austin than the harsh, daily exigencies faced by women on the reservations. Though she sympathized with Native American women and culture as much as any white person of her day, she chose a lifestyle closer to that of the Spanish when she settled in Santa Fe.

Austin's sympathies and choices reveal much about her land ethic in its ideal and its real manifestations. Ideally, Austin believed that people should treat the earth as sacred and learn to live with it and off it while changing it as little as possible. She criticized development at the expense of wild Nature in sketches like "My Neighbor's Field" in Land of Little Rain. Native Americans, such as the Paiutes and Shoshones she writes

about in Land of Little Rain, who learned to endure hardships both natural and man-made without changing the land significantly, came closest to living such a life. However, Austin the sometime-invalid, Austin the author, and Austin of the Polly McAdams tradition of pioneer women demanded more than the Native Americans did from the earth and from life: she wanted stability in her own living conditions, more freedom from the basic demands of life in order to pursue "higher" aims and to nurse her feeble health, and a culture that provided facility for publishing the written word. These demands, of course, could only be met when she or others changed the environment. The kind of culture required by Austin in order that she make her living as a writer necessitated massive environmental change. Her audience, throughout her career, was situated in urban areas, as were the book-making industries that she depended upon; thus, cities had to exist in order for Austin's vocation to exist.¹⁰ And unlike Muir, who consistently doubted the value of books and his own writing in relating truth about the palimpsest of nature, Austin claims she always knew she would be a writer and always had sympathy

¹⁰The urban audience, however, was not the one she wanted to reach. Karen Langlois ("Mary Austin and the Houghton Mifflin Company") argues convincingly that Austin "perceived her fellow Californians as a 'natural' clientele for her work" and "that people in the West would buy her books, if they knew about them" (34). She was thoroughly disgruntled with her primary publisher, the Houghton Mifflin Company, for not marketing her books for this Western audience.

for her subject matter, even though, paradoxically, much of her subject matter is necessarily negated by the culture that makes her profession possible. Not one to endure hardship as a Native American might, Austin prided herself on not surrendering to the elements or to circumstance: "there was something you could do about unsatisfactory conditions," she wrote, "besides enduring or complaining, and that was getting out to hunt for the remedy" (Earth Horizon 195). Though Austin says most women had not made that discovery in the late nineteenth century, she refers to the circumstance that most women, like her mother, endured or complained about problems created by the male-dominated society in which they lived. Most white women had, however, learned not merely to endure but to change nature, to face and change the wilderness with their mates or even alone. Pioneer women did endure many hardships and inequalities, but they did not endure the unaltered wilderness for long. In spite of her reverence for the wild places she knew and her legacy of preserving, translating, and promoting Native American culture, Austin was a pioneer woman, one who came to the wilderness to build a life for herself much like the life she had left in the Midwest. The paradoxes between the ideal and the real of Austin's life and philosophy are, of course, concomitant to the paradoxes that faced Thoreau, Muir, and those which face the contemporary environmentalist; they therefore merit exploration. Land of Little Rain and

Lost Borders, supplemented with some elucidations offered on those works in Earth Horizon and The American Rhythm, are the best sources in Austin's work for studying these paradoxes.

The Land

The Land of Little Rain and Lost Borders share many similarities, though Austin's focus is obviously different in each book. The Land of Little Rain is primarily about the land itself. Among its essays are sketches on various landforms and features, done in detail, with little reference to people at all. People are, in fact, marginalized in most of Land of Little Rain. In this work, she presents some naturalist essays, following the tradition of Thoreau and, particularly, Muir, who wrote as little as possible about himself or human history and as much as possible about nature and geological, natural histories. For Muir, the study of Nature often meant ignoring Man, who had played only a small role in geological history. Moreover, Muir suffered, it will be remembered, phases of misanthropy, particularly in the late 1860's and early 1870's. Austin, however, did not share Muir's misanthropic tendencies or his disdain for human history. In her writing, she is always aware of the role humans play in the history of the land and is fascinated with this subject. For example, a few sketches in The Land of Little Rain, like "My Neighbor's Field," indicate her fascination with the

human role in the history of a piece of land, even while her focus remains on the land itself.¹¹ In Lost Borders, her focus shifts to the humans' relationship to the land. The land, however, remains at the center of both works. It literally shapes the way every living creature within its borders lives. As one critic writes, "[Austin] believed that America really had no choice about adaptation to the land, that in the long run through the process of mutual adaptation of the land and the people, the land always won. It always shaped the culture more than culture shaped it" (Ruppert 377). Even whites would eventually have to adapt their culture to fit the land.

"The Land of Little Rain," as Austin dubbed a real location, "lies between the high Sierras south from Yosemite - - east and south over a very great assemblage of broken ranges beyond Death Valley, and on illimitably into the Mojave Desert" (The Land of Little Rain 4).¹² Like Muir writing about the mountains, Austin wanted to capture the essence of the desert in her writing and had more faith in

¹¹Critic James C. Work ("The Moral in Austin's The Land of Little Rain") believes Land of Little Rain answers three questions: "What are the essential qualities of the land? What is the relation of life forms to the land and to each other? And what is the proper role of the human animal in relation to the land and the life in it?" (300). His questions underscore the basic relationship I see Austin working through in these texts, though I would add another: What are the relations of humans in the desert to each other?

¹²Hereafter, Land of Little Rain will be abbreviated LLR in all citations.

her ability to do so than Muir did in his. She believed that the desert or any other land produced its own natural rhythms that would be manifested in the acts and writing of any human who had learned to live there. For instance, the rhythm she adopted in writing The Land of Little Rain, she said eighteen years after she had written it, was that of the "irregular tug and release of the four horse Mojave stage and of the eighteen-mule borax team, from which the scenes described was almost never freed" (American Rhythm 14-15). Wagon and stage travel was her usual mode of transportation in the desert and, therefore, according to her own poetic theory, supplied a natural rhythm for her writing.

Yet, if the rhythm she used came from the mechanical contrivances of the white man's world, the names she used were often from that of the Native American. Native Americans named places and landmarks as they named themselves, for distinguishing features or history. Whites, on the other hand, named places or landmarks after their white "discoverers" or men of renown. Austin chose to use the Native American name over the white name because the former "is always beautifully fit and does not originate in the poor human desire for perpetuity" (LLR 3). In choosing the Native American name over the white name, Austin closely resembles Thoreau, who often followed the same practice or compared both names to derive the different meanings a place

had for the respective cultures. She shared Thoreau's faith that Native Americans held many clues to understanding the land whites had taken from them, a faith Muir held only tenuously in a few of his later writings. Muir, on the other hand, most often referred to places and features by the names given to them by their white discoverers and even named one Alaskan glacier after himself. Austin's use of Native American names in tandem with a rhythm derived from the white man's world is indicative, then, of the multicultural perspective Austin brings to her subject.

Austin's connection with Thoreau and Muir is most evident in The Land of Little Rain. She is particularly indebted to Muir in the style she appropriates for describing natural phenomena. Yet, even in the sketches in which she comes closest to emulating Muir, she clearly differentiates her perspective. Part of her agenda, in fact, was to create a style of writing, perhaps a new genre,¹³ that told the true story of the desert, a story that had been misrepresented in fiction, like Bret Harte's stories, as she says in the sketch entitled "Jimville--A

¹³T. M. Pearce credits Austin with creating a new genre in her sketches of the Southwest: "Read the story called 'The Last Antelope' in Mary Austin's Lost Borders and classify it, if you can, among the literary genres. Seek a parallel for it in American or English literature. There is none. Something of the quality of W. H. Hudson is here, and something of John Muir, but neither of these writers could make stark tragedy compounded from such simple elements as the comradeship between a sheepherder and a lone antelope in their battle against their mutual enemies, the coyotes" (Mary Austin: A Memorial 36).

Bret Harte Town," but also in writings by naturalists like Muir. The Transcendentalists and even Muir, she implies, had misrepresented nature as it existed in the wild, primarily by ignoring the violence and cruelty therein. Perhaps she had read only Muir's essay on mountain storms, one of his most famous, for she shows little awareness of his paradoxical writing on violence perpetrated by wild animals in such works as My First Summer in the Sierra (see chapter 4). However, she was correct in her belief that he had ignored suffering caused by storms and other natural phenomena. Austin would not ignore the cruelty of nature, as she believed Muir had done, nor would she glorify violence among men, as she believed Harte had done: "You see in me a mere recorder, for I know what is best for you" (LLR 68).

Austin focuses on the cruelty of nature in sketches like "The Scavengers," wherein she describes various carrion birds and coyotes, from the most despicable (from a human perspective) buzzard to the less objectionable coyotes and Clark's crow. The focus of the essay is on "the economy of nature," the way nothing in nature is wasted. While Austin admires this lack of waste, and so critiques the wastefulness of man's economy, she is nevertheless disturbed by the inherent cruelty of the desert's economy. Having seen thousands of cattle dying slow deaths during three

consecutive drought years (1888-90), Austin was indelibly marked by their suffering:

Cattle once down may be days in dying. They stretch out their necks along the ground, and roll up their slow eyes at longer intervals. The buzzards have all the time, and no beak is dropped or talon struck until the breath is wholly passed. It is doubtless the economy of nature to have the scavengers by to clean up the carrion, but a wolf at the throat would be a shorter agony than the long stalking and sometime perchings of these loathsome watchers (LLR 35).

A wolf at the throat, however, was not the desert's way. Cruelty and suffering and slow death were, instead, central to the desert's economy.

In "Nurslings of the Sky," Austin mentions Muir specifically in an essay obviously patterned after his own famous essays on mountain storms. Muir saw the significance of storms and earthquakes in their power to convince us that the earth is not anthropocentric, that nature is not in our control.¹⁴ Muir reveled in the one earthquake he experienced first-hand and intentionally climbed a tree during a violent mountain summer storm in order to gain its full effect. He wanted men to see the beauty of storms, their creative as well as their destructive capacity. In order to do so, he had to redefine the inherent destruction and cruelty of the elements. In writing about a flood that hit the San Francisco Bay area in 1875, for example, Muir was outraged at the way men had reacted, concerned only

¹⁴See Cohen, "Stormy Sermons," in Pathless Way, 124-150.

about their personal losses and not with the creations molded by the storm. In an early draft of the essay entitled "Flood-Storm in the Sierra," he "attacked his audience fiercely, saying that the impressions that storms excite in individuals depended 'almost exclusively upon the way in which their own small, material immediate interests are affected.'"¹⁵ In a later draft, he wrote, "True, some goods were destroyed, and a few rats and people were drowned, and some took cold on the house-tops and died, but the total loss was less than the gain."¹⁶ Nature had its own creative agenda which men could not see while pursuing their own inferior agendas.

Austin begins her storm essay on a similar note, claiming that "Weather does not happen. It is the visible manifestation of the Spirit moving itself in the void" (LLR 134), a creative, godlike force. Like Muir, she claims one must "be inside" a storm in order to get the "real effect" (LLR 134). Mountain storms are less dangerous than those on the plains, she argues, and, "if you keep reasonably out of the track of their affairs, do you no harm" (LLR 133). The most violent storms, however, "alter the face of things," "strike out the unfit" trees, and "raise up sudden floods like battle fronts in the cañons against towns . . ." (135). Here she appropriates Darwinistic, deterministic language,

¹⁵Cohen, Pathless Way, p. 138.

¹⁶Quoted in Cohen, Pathless Way, p. 139.

and in the following paragraph presents a perspective largely ignored by Muir and others more interested in the geological significance of storms:

All that storms do to the face of the earth you may read in the geographies, but not what they do to our contemporaries. I remember one night of thunderous rain made unendurably mournful by the houseless cry of a cougar whose lair, and perhaps his family, had been buried under a slide of broken boulders on the slope of Kearsage. We had heard the heavy detonation of the slide . . . and judged he must have come from hunting to the ruined cliff and paced the night out before it, crying a very human woe. I remember, too, in that same season of storms, a lake made milky white for days, and crowded out of its bed by clay washed into it by a fury of rain, with the trout floating in it belly up, stunned by the shock of the sudden flood. But there were trout enough for what was left of the lake next year and the beginning of a meadow about its upper rim. What taxed me most in the wreck of one of my favorite cañons by cloud-burst was to see a bobcat mother mouthing her drowned kittens in the ruined lair built in the wash, far above the limit of accustomed waters, but not far enough for the unexpected. After a time you get the point of view of gods about these things to save you from being too pitiful (LLR 136).

Muir had often assumed this godlike perspective in his writings about the mountain storms, ignoring the sufferings of his "contemporaries" in order to cast light on geological history and to remove himself from the anthropocentric perspective. Austin, as this passage suggests, would ignore neither geological history nor the suffering it sometimes caused. Though she is at pains not to write about humans in this essay, her perspective is nevertheless human in that she attributes human suffering to these animals. Only when she adopts the "point of view of the gods" can she ignore

suffering, but it was not a perspective she would adopt indefinitely.

Muir ultimately compromised his extreme views of nature and learned to live in a sort of middle, pastoral ground as a fruit grower during the 1880's, a compromise reflected in his writings. While his most extreme early writings, such as The Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf, are attempts to undermine all notions of anthropocentrism, his later and arguably more mature writings, such as "The Bee Pastures," attempt to show how urban man can regain some sense of harmony with the natural world through a middle pastoral ground. Austin's nature essays assume this compromise from the beginning. While she would ignore human history in a few essays such as "Nurslings of the Sky," she remained acutely aware of the role human beings played in the history of the land in most of her works. In "My Neighbor's Field," for instance, Austin gives a naturalist's perspective intermingled with the human history of life on a specific plot of ground. While she shared some of Muir's distrust of the role humans had played in their relationship with nature, she nevertheless was a careful observer and recorder of this dance between man and the land he uses, a dance in which partners were often exchanged, and she wrote of the graceful as well as the tragic turns in this continuing cotillion.

In "My Neighbor's Field," for instance, Austin initially points out that this field was not one created by man: "It is one of those places God must have meant for a field from all time" (LLR 75). From her description of it as "fenced by low old glacial ridges, boulder strewn and untenable," it is likely that the field was cleared by the glacial agents themselves. However, even though man did not create it, he has put it to use. Austin reveals the human history of the field, her own covetousness of the field which belongs to her neighbor she calls Naboth, being part of that history:

Edswick, Roeder, Connor, and Ruffin owned the field before it fell to my neighbor. But before that the Paiutes, mesne lords of the soil, made a campoodie by the rill of Pine Creek; and after, contesting the soil with them, cattle-men, who found its foodful pastures greatly to their advantage; and bands of blethering flocks shepherded by wild, hairy men of little speech, who attested their rights to the feeding ground with their long staves upon each other's skulls (LLR 75).

These occupants had battled with each other in combat and in the courts for possession of the field. Ironically, however, the field has been altered little by "this human occupancy of greed and mischief" (LLR 76). Only the Native Americans and sheep had left noticeable traces of their presence. Native Americans had left arrowheads and other stone tools and had probably brought in plants such as "hoopee" and hackberry, relished for their berries and not found anywhere else in the area. Sheep must have brought seeds on their coats which fell to the ground and grew into

a single clump of mesquite of a variety not normally found near the field.

The current owner has put a fence around the field, an act of claiming ownership which has kept out animals that would normally eat and destroy the original wild vegetation. The result is an ironic reversal of the expected fortune of a field, normally thought of as reclaimed for the purposes of man:

Since Naboth drew his fence about the field . . . many old habitués of the field have come back to their haunts. The willow and brown birch, long ago cut off by the Indians for wattles, have come back to the streamside, slender and virginal in their spring greenness, and leaving long stretches of the brown water open to the sky. In stony places where no grass grows, wild olives sprawl; close-twigged, blue-gray patches in winter, more translucent greenish gold in spring than any aureole. Along with willow and birch and brier, the clematis, that shyest plant of water borders, slips down season by season to within a hundred yards of the village street (77).

Austin intimates that this reclamation of the land by the forces of nature is what attracts her to the field, a field no longer "greatly esteemed of the town, not being put to the plow or affording firewood, but breeding all manner of wild seeds that go down in the irrigating ditches to come up as weeds in the garden and grass plots" (75). She relishes the wildness of this piece of ground so close to human habitation. Some plants, such as the clematis and wild almond, "will not come inside" the closely kept habitations of man and die when Austin tries to transplant them in her own gardens. Yet, in her description of them, they are

beautiful beyond compare when in blossom, yet another natural occurrence beyond the predictability of man: "The time to plant cucumbers and set out cabbages may be set down in the almanac, but never seed-time nor blossom in Naboth's field" (LLR 79).

Many insects and small animals also inhabit the field, feeding off the rich plant life and in turn feeding predators like the red-tailed hawk occasionally seen there. The field is, for Austin, a microcosm of nature, powerful in its ability to renew itself even after the use and abuse of man and his animals. She covets the field, but her neighbor has other uses for it in mind - - to turn it into town lots. Austin's comments about the intended future of the field are ambiguous: ". . . it occurs to me that though the field may serve a good turn in those days it will hardly be happier. No, certainly not happier" (LLR 80). Land, she suggests, must be used by man. But when used, as her neighbor will use it, to gain fortune at the expense of the life it sustains, the goodness of its use is suspect. Herding and farming, she implies, while they alter temporarily, change the land less than urban development. When man must be involved in the affairs of the land, he does best who alters it least. Unfortunately, Austin witnessed the wholesale urbanization of southern California and much of the land she had grown to love in her earliest years there. Though she fought against such development as the diverting of water

from the Owens Valley to Los Angeles, she was powerless to stop the tide of urbanization. The Owens Valley fight was to her what Hetch-Hetchy was to Muir and the Sierra Club, a symbol of man's destructive use of the land and the constant vigil environmental groups would have to keep. Yet, she never went through a true misanthropic phase, nor did she ever disregard the role humans played in the history of a piece of land, as long as they used moderation.

There is, however, little in her writing that indicates awareness of the contradiction inherent in her love for the gifts of the city, particularly the literary arts, and her love for the land. Ultimately, she resolved this contradiction to some extent by becoming an advocate and practitioner of primitive and household art, as this art was practiced by Native American, Latin American, and pioneer women in the West. Like Thoreau, Austin focused on the interrelationship between a land and the people who lived on it. Even when her setting was the most uninhabitable place, such as the Lost Borders, where man's laws and customs and life meant nothing, she wrote the humans' as well as the land's story, combining, paradoxically, the anthropocentric with the biocentric. This interrelationship became the driving force of her most memorable art and art theory. Culture in Nature, or Nature as it shaped Culture, is important in both The Land of Little Rain and Lost Borders, particularly in the latter, wherein she writes about people

living on the most desolate land in the United States.

Humans in the Desert

When writing about humans in the desert Southwest, Austin divides them into categories recognizable by their different relationship to the desert. These categories represent various paradigms for understanding and surviving in the desert. Some are obviously superior to others. White men, like her husband Wallace, who usually saw the desert as a place in which to make their fortunes, were often seduced by the large openness and myths of the desert and wasted away their lives within its borders. White women, however, usually saw the desert as the "other woman" which seduced their men and threatened their entire value structure. At the other extreme, the Shoshones and Paiutes lived on the borders of the desert and considered it their home; they could not understand the strange effect it had on white men, and, consequently, Native American women who cohabited with white men became, like white women, victims of the "other woman." In general, Native Americans understood the land better than did whites and learned to live in it, but the harsh land and lifestyle took its toll on them, too. Austin searched for a middle ground, a way of life that mediated between the extremes of white and Native American paradigms for living in and with the desert. For Austin, Latin Americans had learned best how to keep civilization alive in the desert. They did not lose their

souls to the desert, as did white men, and they lived more comfortable, stable lives than did the Native Americans. Theirs was the middle ground which Austin advocated as a sane way to live in harmony with the land.

White Men and the Desert Mistress

Almost immediately in The Land of Little Rain, Austin addresses the inevitable question of why any writer should concern herself with a place so desolate, so seemingly void of anything human or living. The desert, she concedes, is a place where species that often thrive in "mean temperatures" are stunted and "seldom . . . attain the full stature of the type" (LLR 11). It is a place of death, where man and beast die quickly when the few known water sources cannot be located or are found polluted or dry: "A land of lost rivers, with little in it to love; yet a land that once visited must be come back to inevitably. If it were not so there would be little told of it" (LLR 10).

Also from the outset, Austin establishes herself as a realist, as one fully aware of the fact that nature, in its desert form, has no sympathy with mankind: "Of all its inhabitants it has the least concern for man" (LLR 45). Whatever mystical notions she brings to her understanding of the desert, she does not promote the romantic fallacies about nature held by some early Transcendentalists. Just as Thoreau's Katahdin experience forced him to reevaluate Emersonian and other Western notions of nature he had

inherited, so Austin's desert experience challenged her own early experiences with the gentler nature she had turned to for succor in Illinois as well as the writings of Romantics and early Transcendentalists she had read. However, like Thoreau, who returned to the wilderness that had shaken his faith, Austin and the people in The Land of Little Rain return to the wilderness, drawn there for many reasons:

If one is inclined to wonder at first how so many dwellers came to be in the loneliest land that ever came out of God's hands, what they do there and why stay, one does not wonder so much after having lived there. None other than this long brown land lays such a hold on the affections. The rainbow hills, the tender bluish mists, the luminous radiance of the spring, have the lotus charm. They trick the sense of time, so that once inhabiting there you always mean to go away without quite realizing that you have not done it. Men who have lived there, miners and cattle-men, will tell you this, not so fluently, but emphatically, cursing the land and going back to it. For one thing there is the divinest, cleanest air to be breathed anywhere in God's world There is promise there of great wealth in ores and earths, which is no wealth by reason of being so far removed from water and workable conditions, but men are bewitched by it and tempted to try the impossible (LLR 15).

Austin herself had been bewitched by the desert from her earliest encounters with it, though not for the same reasons as the men she portrays. In Lost Borders, Austin presents a variety of men - - prospectors, miners, cattlemen, shepherds, teamsters - - who are spellbound by the desert. Interestingly, she describes the desert in feminine terms: —

If the desert were a woman, I know well what like she would be: deep-breasted, broad in the hips, tawny, with tawny hair, great masses of it lying smooth along her perfect curves, full lipped like a sphinx, but not heavy-lidded like one, eyes sane and steady as the polished jewel of her skies, such a countenance as

should make men serve without desiring her, such a largeness to her mind as should make their sins of no account, passionate, but not necessitous, patient - - and you could not move her, no, not if you had all the earth to give, so much as one tawny hair's-breadth beyond her own desires.

The desert is, then, a cross between femme fatale and goddess that seduces men and possesses their souls without them realizing the danger it poses. Its beauty seduces them, blinding them to the dangers therein:

. . . there is something incomprehensible to the man-mind in the concurrence of death and beauty [in the desert]. Shall the tender opal mist betray you? the airy depth of mountain blueness, the blazonry of painted wind-scoured buttes, the far peaks molten with the alpen glow, cooled by the rising of the velvet violet twilight tide, and the leagues and leagues of stars? As easy for a man to believe that a beautiful woman can be cruel (Lost Borders 159).¹⁷

Once under the spell of the desert-mistress, white men are fated to live out their existence in its borders, even though it often kills them. No matter how far they travel away from the desert, they always come back to it, like the Pocket Hunter, in the story by the same name, who goes to London to become part of the "wealthy English middle class" only to return to the desert to live out his true destiny as a pocket hunter, a prospector who searches for "a small body of rich ore occurring by itself, or in a vein of poorer stuff," called a pocket (LLR 49-50, 44). Austin has a curious interest in, even sympathy with, the dried up, homeless sojourners of the desert. She admires the Pocket

¹⁷Hereafter, Lost Borders will be abbreviated LB in all citations.

Hunter's ability to live off the land and the "weather shell" he has developed in lieu of adequate shelter. She misses him when he goes to London. She is, however, fully cognizant of the fact that these white men never understand the hold the desert has on them, nor do they understand the true significance of some of their own experiences. The Pocket Hunter once spent the night huddled amidst a herd of bighorn sheep when an early winter storm caught him in the mountains unprepared. Although he has virtually unparalleled good fortune in getting so close to the incredibly shy bighorn sheep, he misses entirely the significance of the event, for "he was curiously inapt at getting the truth about beasts in general" (LLR 48). Instead, he shares prejudices towards many animals common among miners and prospectors. In spite of his prejudices, though, he finds a "necessary sense of home and companionship among the beasts and trees" (LLR 47), though he is probably unaware of this, too. Austin admires him in spite of his shortcomings, his ignorance and prejudice. She mostly envies the closeness he shares with nature, in spite of his limited understanding of it. The Pocket Hunter and other wanderers in the desert, hapless and ignorant though they may be, experience more of nature than does the town dweller or the women they leave at home by the hearthside. Moreover, the men Austin met in the desert often told better stories than the women she met:

A man's story . . . is always so much more satisfactory because he tells you all the story there is, what happened to him, and how he felt about it, supposing his feelings are any part of the facts of the case; but with a woman it is not so. She never knows much about her feelings, unless they are pertinent to the story, and then she leaves them out (LB 202).

Austin envies the opportunity men of the desert have even while she decries their evasion of responsibility and exposes their inability to see the significance of the desert and its creatures.

Austin's husband was a model of the man seduced by the desert. Wallace Austin became entranced by the desert and avoided his responsibilities as a husband and father, as Austin relates in Earth Horizon. Even Mary went through a spellbound six-month period when she first encountered the desert. However, unlike the hapless miners, shepherds, and cattlemen of her stories, she looked for answers to the "meaning" of the desert and ultimately freed herself from its spell. Yet, in recalling how she was entranced by the desert, Austin separates herself from most of the white women she presents in Lost Borders, women who have only disdain for the desert that seduces their men and renders meaningless the social conventions that give them identity.

White Women in Town and in the Desert: Two Contrasting Paradigms

Though she admires white women who, like herself, learn to survive without their mates, she is largely critical of those who depend on the strictures of civilization to define themselves. Most white men, too, are dependent on

conventions such as the law: "They pinch themselves with regulations to make sure of being sentient" (LB 156). Men, however, go to the desert, even if they lose their souls and identities in doing so, as do most of the white men she presents in Lost Borders: "Out there . . . where the law and the landmarks fail together, the souls of little men fade out at the edges, leak from them as water from wooden pails warped asunder" (LB 156). A few men, however, find true meaning and their souls in the desert. They learn that nature cares nothing for the laws and customs of man:

Great souls that go into the desert come out mystics - - saints and prophets - - declaring unutterable things: Buddha, Mahomet, and the Galilean, convincing of the casual nature of human relations, because the desert itself has no use for the formal side of man's affairs (LB 180).

In contrast to the white men Austin presents in Lost Borders, men who lose everything as they succumb to the desert-mistress, most of the white women cling to social conventions, mores, and institutions. Women of the Polly McAdams tradition perceived the desert as a threat to the way of life they advanced across the frontier. Austin presents a variety of these women sympathetically in Lost Borders even while maintaining a critical distance regarding their reliance on man-made institutions for defining their personhood. Mrs. Wills, for example, in "The Return of Mr. Wills," learns to survive and raise a family without her husband's help, after he is lured into the clutches of the desert-mistress by legends of lost mines. She proves quite

competent as a provider but cannot extricate herself from the clutches of society, from which she draws her identity. A life without these social conventions, "a life laid bare to its thews and sinews," is for her unthinkable (LB 159).

Mr. Wills, however, is also dependent on society for his identity. He "is [the] sort of man bred up in close communities, like a cask, to whom the church, public opinion, the social note, are a sort of hoop to hold him in servicable shape" (LB 181-2). When he is lured into the desert by the legends of lost mines, which "of all ways in the West for a man to go to pieces . . . is the most insidious" (LB 182), he falls apart: "All hoops were off the cask. The mind of Mr. Wills faded out at the edges like the desert horizon that melts in mists and mirages, and finally he went on an expedition from which he did not come back" (LB 184). Mrs. Wills is then left to her own resources to fend for herself and her four children. Had Mrs. Wills been observant, she would not have failed to notice "coyote mothers, and wild folk of every sort [that] could have taught her that nature never makes the mistake of neglecting to make the child-bearer competent to provide" (LB 184). Her notions of providership, however, come from the church and society. Regardless, she learns to cope without Mr. Wills and soon is better off without him. She soon casts off the slatternly habits of desperation, begins

to carry herself with dignity and prettiness, and sets her house in the best order it has ever seen.

However, Mrs. Wills, Austin suggests, would have been even better off if she had also learned to do without the church just as she had learned to do without her husband. She does not divorce her husband because her church only endorses divorce in the case of adultery, and her minister, fresh from the East, has not learned to see the desert "as a woman and a wanton." When her husband returns unexpectedly, he settles "on his family like a blight." Mrs. Wills and the family soon fall back into the old despondency, and "the power of the wilderness [lies] like a wasting sickness on the home." Unfortunately, she will not divorce, though Austin hints that if Mr. Wills saunters into the desert again, she will see that he stays there (LB 186, 187).

If most white women are like Mrs. Wills, capable of but unwilling to let go of conventions that simultaneously enslave them and give them identity, Austin did discover a few women who, like Buddha, Mohammed, and Christ, found life laid bare and most meaningful in desert existence. In Lost Borders, it is two women, not two men, whose souls find their full measure of expansion in the desert. The Woman in "The Woman at the Eighteen-Mile" and the Walking Woman in the story of the same name discover what women bound by convention cannot understand.

In "The Woman at the Eighteen-Mile," Austin attempts "to write a story of Death Valley that should be its final word" (LB 203). It takes her several months to find someone who can tell her a complete version of a story involving a dead man named Lang. Most know only bits and pieces. The story has all the elements of a great desert story:

There was a mine in it, a murder and a mystery, great sacrifice, Shoshones, dark and incredibly discreet, and the magnetic will of a man making manifest through all these; there were lonely water-holes, deserted camps where coyotes hunted in the streets, fatigues and dreams and voices of the night. And at last it appeared there was a woman in it (LB 204-05).

It is this woman, the Woman of the Eighteen-Mile House, who knows most about the story Austin wants to hear. But, the story Austin plans on writing and the one that she is told are quite different. For the Woman, the focus of the story is not the murder-mystery but the relationship she shared with a man named Whitmark, a main player in the story.

The Woman is "one of the very few people [Austin] had known able to keep a soul alive and glowing in the wilderness" (LB 205). At the time she had come to the country of Lost Borders, seventeen years before she tells her story, she "had been . . . that which the world knows so little what to do with that it mostly throws away - - a good woman with great power and possibilities of passion" (LB 206). She is married to one of the "feckless men whom the desert sucks dry and keeps dangling like gourds on a string" (LB 205). And though she, too, has the "lean figure, wasted

bosom, the sharp, upright furrow between the eyes, the burned, tawny skin, with the pallid streak of dropped eyelids," her "soul was palpitant and enkindled" (LB 205).

Whitmark is not an extraordinary man, but he is the best man the Woman has ever met, "just a clean-minded, acute, tolerably cultivated American business man with an obsession for accomplishing results" (LB 206). He is "sent out to look after a mine to which the title was not clear, and there were counter-machinations to take it away from him" (206). The Woman, who likes Whitmark for a "certain stamp of competency and power," helps him secure the mine by giving him "warnings, intimations of character and local prejudice, [and] information which got him the reputation of almost supernatural penetration" (206). He trusts her, and their effort "was the one occasion when her soul had stretched itself, observed, judged, wrought, and felt to the full of its power" (207).

The villain in this story, as it is in so many of the works in Lost Borders, is the cultural baggage that prevents the Woman and Whitmark from becoming more intimate, namely his marriage to a "wife whom he had married for all the traditions of niceness and denial and abnegation which men demand of the women they expect to marry, and find savorless so often when they are married to it" (207). In his relationship with the Woman, Whitmark knows for the first time what it is "to have a woman concerned in his work,

running neck and neck with it, divining his need, supplementing it not with the merely feminine trick of making him more complacent with himself, but with vital remedies and aids" (207). He accepts her help, the manifestation of her love, but when their business is concluded, he elicits an involuntary promise from her that she will never let his wife and children know what has transpired between them. Both the Woman and Whitmark realize that they are bound by a love more intimate than sex, the bond that Austin consistently argues is the ultimate manifestation of love, that which allows them to live and work together towards a common end (210). For his cowardice, Austin says Whitmark should have been hung, though had he had a chance to redeem himself he would have. Unfortunately, on the journey back east, Whitmark contracts a cold and dies of pneumonia within a week. The promise he gains from the Woman carries with it the premonition of his death, though she does not understand this until afterward. For seventeen years, the Woman keeps the promise cleverly elicited from her, even though hiding her love, the only love she has known, is extraordinarily painful: "The mark of the desert was on her. Heart of desolation! But I knew what pinchings of the spirit went to make that mark!" (210).

"Love," Austin writes, "is Life's own way of reducing the clash of human contacts in order that the pair may turn a more opposing front to the adversary, the Wilderness"

(210). In numerous works, Austin argues that facing "the adversary, the Wilderness" is the highest love known between people reared in civilization. She is never clear on whether this peculiar maxim applies to Native Americans or people who do not see the land as wilderness but as home, people who, as Oelschlaeger argues, often have no word for or concept of wilderness. Perhaps civilization is the agent which keeps the civilized from knowing any higher kind of love, for surely it affects everything it touches.

Civilization prevents The Woman and Whitmark from knowing love in all its manifestations. They face the wilderness together but without the more intimate pleasures that should come with it, for they are frustrated by society: "Life did not invent Society, seems somehow never to be properly aware of it; though it justifies itself of Love, cannot yet square with Respectability, with the Church and Property" (210).

Love as Society understands it "weaves the fascinating intricacy of story, but here in the Borders, where the warp runs loose and wide, the pattern has not that richness it should show in the close fabric of civilization. If it lived next door to you, you probably wouldn't have anything to do with it" (210).

Though the Woman's love is frustrated, Austin presents another character who finds love, with all of its manifestations, and the fullness of her soul, though no one,

perhaps not even Austin, can fully understand her or respect her. She is the Walking Woman.

"The Walking Woman" is the last story in Lost Borders, an important position in any collection of stories. It is perhaps meant to be Austin's final word on the interrelationship of white people with the desert and each other in the desert setting. Like the Woman of the Eighteen-Mile, Mrs. Walker, as people call this woman who answers to the name they give her and tells them no other, has kept alive her soul in the vast desert reaches. From some reports, she has been inalterably marked by the desert, yet people cannot agree even about her appearance. Austin wants to meet her, to decide whether she is "comely" or "plain to the point of deformity"; whether she "has a twist to her face . . . a hitch to one shoulder"; whether she "limped as she walked"; whether she is "cracked" mentally even though "in her talk . . . [is] both wisdom and information" (LB 257).

The Walking Woman has walked for years unarmed and alone in the desert yet unmolested and respected by the men who occasionally encounter her. No one knows where she lives, if anywhere. She wears her hair short and dresses like a man. Whether she is "cracked" or not, she is not what whites consider respectable. Even Austin, after finally meeting her by a water-hole in the desert, decides that there is something warped about the Walking Woman - -

at least, that is her initial perception. Austin here uses the "I" narrator and presents herself as somewhat bound by society and its perceptions. The Walking Woman, on the other hand, is the one person Austin has met who has learned to live almost entirely without societal constrictions and approvals, even though she is aware of them. The Walking Woman is thus a living paradigm of humanity stripped to its core. She has lived the full life without the tricks and decorations of society, has known love, personal fulfillment, and motherhood without the trappings society deems necessary. Austin is left at the end of the story with a decision to make: which is warped, the Walking Woman or herself and society?¹⁸

The Walking Woman had begun her desert journeys "by walking off an illness," but she is never clear in her description of that illness: " . . . it might very well have been an unsoundness of mind which drove her to the open, sobered and healed at last by the large soundness of nature" (LB 257). In the course of their conversation, Austin learns that the Walking Woman has had a child and is

¹⁸My reading differs sharply from those of Stineman ("Mary Austin Rediscovered") and Marjorie Pryse (Introduction to Stories from the Country of Lost Borders xxxiv), who see the Walking Woman as Austin herself, "a woman who has come up against societal barriers, who recognizes the authentic value of her desire, and who has discovered her deepest self" (Stineman, "Austin Rediscovered," 549). I believe Austin recognized that she could never entirely extricate herself from society as had the Walking Woman.

at first surprised, though on second consideration she wonders "why I should have been surprised, for it is the most natural of all experiences to have children . . . one of the perquisites of living I should be least willing to do without" (LB 258). The Walking Woman then delivers forth her philosophy of life, "that there were three things which if you had known you could cut out all the rest, and they were good any way you got them, but best if, as in her case, they were related to and grew each one out of the others" (258). The three things are to work beside the man you love, to get his love without "the looking and the seeming," and to experience childbirth and motherhood, to know "the mouth at the breast . . . the lips and the hands . . . The little pushing hands and the small cry" (LB 260, 261).

Years before, the Walking Woman had helped a shepherd, Filon Geraud, save his flock during a sandstorm. Her help had been indispensable, and he had said "[o]bvious, kindly things, such as any man in sheer decency would have said" in gratitude for her assistance. Unlike Whitmark, however, he had also given her his love. He had told her, through his eyes, "'We are of one sort and one mind'" and had then slept with her. They parted only when the Walking Woman, heavy with their child, "was no longer able to keep the trail" (LB 260, 261). The child died before the Walking Woman had to decide whether or not to give up her nomadic lifestyle. But she had known the fullness of life in her own terms.

Without even saying goodbye, the Walking Woman leaves Austin to ponder the story she has told her. Still, Austin has doubts about the Walking Woman's philosophy, which she restates as follows:

She had walked off all sense of society-made values, and knowing the best when the best came to her, was able to take it. Work - as I believed; love - as the Walking Woman had proved it; a child - as you subscribe to it. But look you: it was the naked thing the Walking Woman grasped, not dressed and tricked out, for instance, by prejudices in favor of certain occupations; and love, man love, taken as it came, not picked over and rejected if it carried no obligation of permanency; and a child; any way you get it, a child is good to have, say nature and the Walking Woman; to have it and not to wait upon a proper concurrence of so many decorations that the event may not come at all (LB 261-62).

The Walking Woman, Austin says, follows nature's paradigm. Austin, however, is still wary, perhaps still clinging to her Polly McAdams values: "At least one of us is wrong. To work and to love and to bear children. That sounds easy enough. But the way we live establishes so many things of much more importance" (262). She still sees the Walking Woman's life as twisted, warped. For instance, as she watches her walk away, she is convinced that she sees "a queer, sidelong gait, as if in fact she had a twist all through her." On examining her footprints, however, Austin finds "in the bare, hot sand the track of her two feet bore evenly and white" (262). Austin clearly implies, then, that it may be her perception of the Walking Woman that is twisted, not the Walking Woman herself. Her perception of the Walking Woman's values, too, is suspect. She leaves the

reader to decide whether this woman is indeed mentally disturbed or whether, like the prophets of old, she has found life at its most meaningful core in the desert.

Only in "The Walking Woman" does Austin present a white woman who learns to live and attain full happiness in the desert, to abandon social constructs that fetter other women — and make them despise the desert. Austin, however, did not herself live this paradigm. As she saw her own husband while away his time and fortune on useless enterprises in the desert, Austin regained her Polly McAdams sensibility ^{— 1800} and turned her efforts toward civilizing the wilderness in order that she might live in it. Her experiences with Paiutes and Shoshones, however, revealed another paradigm for living in the desert, though again she could never live it herself. To these people, the desert was home. It held no power to entrance them and was no more hostile to them than a white woman's house and furnishings were to her. Like the plants and animals that had learned to live in the desert by adapting to it, the Shoshone and Paiutes developed lifestyles streamlined for the harshness of desert living. In her presentation of these people, however, she carefully avoids both of the popular nineteenth-century Indian stereotypes, the noble and the degraded savage. Instead, she portrays them as complex people with failings and with flaws in their religion and customs, much like she presents the whites. While she admires their ability to live off the

land and the artistry they bring to the creation of household articles, she is implicitly critical of superstitions and tribal customs that sometimes mandate their harsh treatment of each other. Also, through spending much time with women in campodies near her home, Austin learned firsthand the toll that day-to-day living took on them. In "Shoshone Land" and "The Basket Maker," Austin presents vignettes of Native American life that outline its complexities and exigencies, the first from a male Shoshone/Paiute perspective, the last from that of a female Paiute.

Native American Life and Art: Part and Parcel of the Land

"Shoshone Land" is the area traditionally thought to belong to the southern branch of the Shoshone tribe which had been split, according to their tradition, by an influx of Paiutes, their mortal enemies. This land is seen "through the eyes of Winnenap in a rosy mist of reminiscence" (LLR 55). Winnenap is a Shoshone who lives among the Paiutes, having become their hostage for the duration of a peace which whites forced between the warring tribes, a peace which never ends. Even though tribal order has disintegrated to the point that he can return to his beloved land and tribe, he remains with the Paiutes to preserve the good word of his people.

Winnenap, however, has become a medicine man among the Paiutes and every year is able to return to Shoshone Land during the season of herb gathering. Shoshone Land

. . . is the country of the bighorn, the wapiti, and the wolf, nesting place of buzzards, land of cloud-nourished trees and wild things that live without drink. Above all, it is the land of the creosote and the mesquite. The mesquite is God's best thought in all this desertness. It grows in the open, is thorny, stocky, close grown, and iron-rooted (LLR 56).

Like the mesquite, the Shoshones have learned to live in the desert, finding "a use for everything that grows in these borders" (LLR 57). Austin believed that the land dictated the way a people lived, "and the land will not be lived in except in its own fashion." Thus, the "Shoshones live like their trees, with great spaces between, and in pairs and in family groups they set up wattled huts by the infrequent springs" (LLR 57). Though seemingly isolated from the larger body of their own kind, the Shoshones "are not more lonely than other creatures that inhabit there." In fact, "the solitariness of the life breeds in the men, as in the plants, a certain well-roundedness and sufficiency to its own ends" (LLR 57). Shoshones, like all "Desert Indians [,] . . . eat chuck-wallas, big black and white lizzards that have delicate white flesh savored like chicken" (LLR 59). They also eat a species of burrowing turtle, called Gopherus agassizii, and many beans and berries grown on the desert plants. The desert is foodful for the "willing." Winnenap's description of Shoshone Land, particularly of its

indescribably beautiful springs, is one of a kind: ". . . there was never any but Winnenap who could tell and make it worth telling about Shoshone Land" (LLR 59).

After Austin finishes her description of Shoshone Land, the vignette abruptly changes character. The poetic descriptions, ostensibly given her by Winnenap, yield to the account of his death. Here, Austin is ambiguous in her writing about the superstitions that underlie his death:

Where the lot falls when the campoodie chooses a medicine-man there it rests. It is an honor a man seldom seeks but must wear, an honor with a condition. When three patients die under his ministration, the medicine-man must yield his life and his office. Wounds do not count; broken bones and bullet holes the Indian can understand, but measles, pneumonia, and smallpox are witchcraft (LLR 59).

Winnenap, through his skill with medicine and his cunning ability to hide himself during epidemics, survives as a Paiute medicine man for fifteen years. But, when a pneumonia epidemic destroys one third of his village, he submits to the wisdom of the tribe, even though in his heart he still hates the Paiutes. He is killed by three men who "sat at his fire without greeting." He looks towards Shoshone Land as a hatchet-stroke fulfills the will of the campoodie. Shortly thereafter, warm winds from the south break the force of the disease, and even Winnenap's women "acquiesce . . . in the wisdom of the tribe" (61). Austin, knowing that other Paiute villages had been convinced by educated tribal members and whites not to kill their

medicine-men, seems to doubt the wisdom of such superstitions and regrets the loss of her friend.¹⁹

In "The Basket Maker," Austin presents Paiute life from a woman's point of view. Seyavi, the basket maker, loses her mate in the last battles between the Paiutes and the whites. She has a child by him which she raises alone, choosing not to take another mate. Before the rumor of war dies, however, while she and her boy "lay up in the caverns of the Black Rock and ate tule roots and fresh-water clams that they dug out of the slough bottoms with their toes," she learns to survive in the meanest of ways. She learns "how much more easily one can do without a man than might at

¹⁹Austin is frequently ambivalent in her writings about the erosion of Native American religion and customs. A self-trained anthropologist, Austin lamented the disappearance of original Native American customs and religious practices. In works like The Trail Book, she wrote stories about Native American mythology and legend, intending to introduce children to "a mythology that grows organically from the 'mothering earth'" (Graulich 145). In this and other works, like "White Wisdom," [One-Smoke Stories (1934)], Austin is critical of the role whites play, through their religion and education, in the erosion of Native American culture. However, she is not entirely critical of the outcome of history as it affected Native Americans. In "How the Corn Came," Austin is implicitly critical of the Aztec practice of human sacrifice and has a potential victim escape from them to another tribe. In "The Basket Woman: Second Story" [The Basket Woman (1910)], Austin details intertribal warfare among the Paiutes that led to their demise and ends the story in a surprising statement, spoken by a white, "I think Indians are a great deal better off as they are now"; she does not undercut this statement. In her refusal to romanticize Native American life, Austin clouded the expression of her own point of view towards their cultures, probably because her own feelings towards their cultures were ambivalent. She seems much more comfortable with the Latin culture of the Southwest.

first be supposed" (LLR 93). Like Mrs. Wills and Austin herself, Seyavi learns to survive and raise a child on her own. However, during the months after the war, when whites fill the valley and make game more scarce and living more dangerous, Seyavi and her boy barely survive: "Paiutes have the art of reducing life to its lowest ebb and yet saving it alive on grasshoppers, lizards, and strange herbs; and that time must have left no shrift untried" (94-95). Yet, through her ordeal, Seyavi develops a philosophy which parallels that of the Walking Woman: "A man . . . must have a woman, but a woman who has a child will do very well" (93). Providing for her child becomes more than a necessity; it becomes a thing "worth while" (LLR 95).

As Graulich suggests, Austin wrote about many artistic Native American women whose roles parallel her own in their respective societies (25). Seyavi parallels Austin closer than any other Native American she writes about. Seyavi is the woman Austin might have been had she been born a Paiute. Not only does she raise a child alone in the wilderness, as did Austin, but she also is an artist of rare abilities in her medium, baskets. Austin has great admiration for Native American art in general: "Every Indian woman is an artist, - sees, feels, creates, but does not philosophize about her processes" (LLR 95). Seyavi's basketry, however, surpasses even the most clever work she had seen: "Seyavi's baskets had a touch beyond cleverness. The weaver and the warp

lived next to the earth and were saturated with the same elements" (LLR 95). Such an art, one that emerged from the land itself, is what Austin tried to achieve in her best writing.

Unfortunately, Austin did not know Seyavi before her tribe had been penned up on a reservation. In fact, Austin had little if any contact with Native Americans not already subjugated by whites. When she knew Seyavi, the Paiutes were already affected by the debunking of their myths. Austin had a hard time getting Native Americans to talk about their old customs, for already they were convinced that it was "fool talk" (LLR 96). Seyavi, however, "had come through the period of unfaith in the lore of the clan with a fine appreciation of its beauty and significance" (LLR 97). Though faith in the scientific or literal truth of their lore is gone, this lore can still be appreciated for its beauty and and truth at other levels. Seyavi is a model for this new understanding of Native American art. She has to redefine her role as an artist, the utilitarian reason for her art no longer applying: "Seyavi made baskets for love and sold them for money, in a generation that preferred iron pots for utility" (LLR 95). It was this new understanding of Native American art that Austin would promote in numerous books and in practice in the last fifteen years of her life, helping to save these arts from certain extinction.

Austin obviously has great appreciation for Seyavi and shares with her many beliefs and experiences. When Austin knew Seyavi, however, she was already old, probably sixty, living a lifestyle that led to the "quick maturity" of her kind:

Indian women do not often live to great age, though they look incredibly steeped in years. They have the wit to win sustenance from the raw material of life without intervention, but they have not the sleek look of the women whom the social organization conspires to nourish (LLR 98).

Seyavi spends her final years keeping fires around the wickiup, "with little strength left for anything but looking" (LLR 98). Soon even the looking is ended, as smoke in her hut causes her blindness. Blindness "is so long expected by the Paiutes that when it comes they find it neither bitter nor sweet, but tolerable because common" (LLR 98). It is from these old, blind women, with nothing to do but keep the fires and swap stories, that Austin "learned of life not set down in any books, folk tales, famine tales, love and long-suffering and desire. . ." (LLR 99). On days when she does not want to talk, however, Seyavi wraps herself in her blanket, the only privacy available in a campody, and contemplates her life and future, "nourishing her spirit against the time of the spirit's need." As for belief in an afterlife, "she knows in fact quite as much as you who have a larger hope, though she has none but the certainty that having borne herself courageously to this end she will not be reborn a coyote" (LLR 99).

While Austin writes admiringly of this stoical acceptance of hardship, she was never one to endure hardships of any kind with the same fortitude; the wisdom of her own "tribe" or any other was never good enough. One's condition could always be improved if found unacceptable, as it was for Austin more often than not. In spite of her appreciation for Native American culture, the hardships endured by Paiutes like Seyavi were unthinkable for a woman so imbued with Austin's sensibility. For Austin, there had to be a middle ground between the white way and the Native American way or between the way of the Walking Woman and the way of Mrs. Wills. She claims to have found it in El Pueblo de Las Uvas, The Little Town of the Grape Vines.²⁰

Las Uvas: Communal Life in the Wilderness

From the beginning of "The Little Town of the Grape Vines" Austin paints a dreamlike picture:

There are still some places in the west where the quails cry "cuidado"; where all the speech is soft, all the manners gentle; where all the dishes have chile in them, and they make more of the Sixteenth of September than they do of the Fourth of July (LLR 143).

The inhabitants of Las Uvas are mostly descended from the family of Antonio Sevadra, who discovers a vein of silver

²⁰Fink argues that Las Uvas is modeled after Lone Pine, a village in the Owens Valley where Mary and Wallace Austin lived just before the birth of Ruth. Rudnick writes that in the 1920's Austin used Las Uvas as a model of "an Hispanic community that displayed most of the qualities she drew upon in the development of a theory of native village socialism which she offered as an alternative to European Communism" (21).

and invites his extended family in from Old Mexico to work the lode. After the vein is worked out and the price of silver goes down, many move out, "but there were always those too idle, too poor to move, or too easily content with El Pueblo de Las Uvas" (LLR 144). The inhabitants now are like the mythical lotus eaters:

At Las Uvas they keep up all the good customs brought out of Old Mexico or bred in a lotus-eating land; drink, and are merry and look out for something to eat afterward; have children, nine or ten to a family, have cock-fights, keep the siesta, smoke cigarettes and wait for the sun to go down. And always they dance; at dusk on the smooth adobe floors, afternoons under the trellises where the earth is damp and has a fruity smell. A betrothal, a wedding, or a christening, or the mere proximity of a guitar is sufficient occasion; and if the occasion lacks, send for the guitar and dance anyway.

Family is more important than money, more important even than eating three square meals a day. It is a matter of pride for a woman to have her baby every year, "to keep a full breast" (LLR 144). One man tells Austin that he ate well when he worked for a mining company, while he gambled away his money on the weekends and had no money for his family. His solution: "I no work no more that Marionette, I stay with my fam'ly." The family, amazingly, has the "same point of view" (145).

Yet, food seems plentiful enough in Las Uvas, and when one has no food, his neighbors will provide: "Of what account is it to lack meal or meat when you may have it of any neighbor?" Every family grows its own garden, and the borders of the irrigating ditches provide an abundance of

"yerba santa, horehound, catnip, and spikenard, wholesome herbs and curative, but if no peppers then nothing at all" (LLR 145). For holidays, Mexican food, homemade wine "of good body and inimitable bouquet" and "sweets that are not nearly so nice as they look" are served in abundance.

The Catholic religion is effective in Las Uvas. The priest who serves Las Uvas, ironically, is Irish, but the people love him, and he participates heartily in the feasts they have for his biannual visits. He is known as a "shrewd searcher of hearts" and the people derive "comfort from his confessional" (LLR 146). More importantly, unlike the Protestantism Austin had foresworn, Catholicism in Las Uvas offers its worshippers tangible, earthy religion:

I am persuaded only a complex soul can get any good of a plain religion. Your earthborn is a poet and a symbolist. We breed in an environment of asphalt pavements a body of people whose creeds are chiefly restrictions against other people's way of life, and have kitchens and latrines under the same roof that houses their God. Such as these go to church to be edified, but at Las Uvas they go for pure worship and to entreat their God. The logical conclusion of the faith that every good gift cometh from God is the open hand and the finer courtesy. The meal done without buys a candle for the neighbor's dead child. You do foolishly to suppose that the candle does no good (LLR 148).

In much of her writing, Austin makes connections between Roman Catholicism and Native American religion, both of which she preferred over Protestant religion. In Earth Horizon, for instance, Austin draws many parallels between Catholic and Native American prayer. A Paiute medicine man

taught her that prayer was not an emotional outpouring or meaningless petition, as practiced among Protestants, but

an act; an outgoing act of the inner self toward something, not a god, toward a responsive activity in the world about you, designated as The-Friend-of-the-Soul-of-Man; Wakonda, to use a term adopted by ethnologists - - the effective principle of the created universe (Earth Horizon 276).

The person praying expressed this outward act through some medium - - words, music, rhythm, color, dance, or various combinations. She claimed to have spoken with William James about the Paiute prayer method, and she thought she heard him affirm her belief (Earth Horizon 283). Later, while Austin investigated Roman Catholic prayer practices in Italy, she overcame breast cancer through prayer, not "the practice of petition, but the studied attitude of the spirit in transaction with the creative attitude working from within" (Earth Horizon 310). In Las Uvas, Catholicism is effective religion, as it became for her.

The biggest celebration of the year in Las Uvas is held in honor of Mexican independence, the Sixteenth of September. Schools do not open until after that day because the children have only the celebration on their minds. The holiday begins at midnight with shouts of "Vive la Libertad!" and "Vive la Mexico!" At sunrise, shots commemorate "the tragedy of unhappy Maximilian, and then music, the noblest of the national hymns, as the flag of Old Mexico floats up the flag-pole in the bare little plaza of shabby Las Uvas" (LLR 147). They read the Declaration of

Independence, wear their best dress, participate in cockfights and exhibitions of horsemanship and feasts.

In the spirit of pure patriotism, the people shed tears when the flag of Old Mexico is finally lowered at the end of the celebration. The celebration ends as the flag of the United States is once again raised to the playing of the Star Spangled Banner. Then they sing national anthems, "America, the Marsellaise, for the sake of the French shepherds hereabout, the hymn of Cuba, and the Chilian national air to comfort two families of that land" (LLR 148). No one is left out of the communal celebrations.

In her final comments, Austin portrays Las Uvas as a place bound to the earth, as is evinced even by its architecture: "At Las Uvas every house is a piece of the earth - - thick walled, white washed adobe that keeps the even temperature of a cave" (LLR 148-49). The people, too, are part and parcel of their land, "and the way they count relationship everybody is more or less kin." They are not saints, for "they love too hotly," but "there is not much villainy among them. What incentive to thieving or killing can there be when there is little wealth and that to be had for the borrowing!" Austin's advice to the reader is unambiguous:

Come away, you who are obsessed with your own importance in the scheme of things, and have got nothing you did not sweat for, come away by the brown valleys and full-bosomed hills to the even-breathing days, to the kindliness, earthiness, ease of El Pueblo de Las Uvas (LLR 149).

The reader remembers, however, that Austin, at the beginning, refuses to tell the location of Las Uvas: "rather would I show you a heron's nest in the tulares" (LLR 143). The city-bound reader will have to find Las Uvas for herself.

In 1925 Austin settled in a place not unlike Las Uvas, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Though she maintained her cosmopolitan connections and travels and dedicated many years to the writing of books, she also practiced the culinary and garden arts and contributed greatly to the preservation of Native American and Spanish customs and art. In spite of her advocacy of the lotus-eater lifestyle, Austin, always cognizant of the Polly McAdams blood in her veins, was too restless to stay permanently rooted in one place. Yet, her adoption of Santa Fe and the land and culture of the Southwest was a prototype of the "bioregional" approach to environmentalism, the practice of sound ecology on and reverence for one's own land. Her station in Santa Fe allowed her some "certification of ladyhood" which, in spite of her forward thinking about marriage and women's roles, remained an important and largely unfulfilled desire, a holdover from her mother's Victorian values. In Santa Fe, Austin was able to achieve some synthesis of the cultures and paradigms she knew, cultures which were part and parcel of the arid deserts of the Southwest. If this synthesis was not perfect - - could

not be perfect - - because of the incompatibilities between values and understandings of the land itself, then at least she is to be commended for her attempt to live the paradigms she endorsed. Polly McAdams might never understand the Walking Woman or Seyavi, but in the person of Mary Austin, a dialogue was begun, a compromise reached. Perhaps the land is happier for Mary Austin's having lived on it.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Summary and Connections to Contemporary Wilderness Philosophy

Before connecting the philosophies of Thoreau, Muir, and Austin to contemporary wilderness philosophies, it is useful to summarize the progression in and connections between the philosophies of these writers themselves, as discussed in the previous four chapters. Thoreau, who pioneered nature writing in the nineteenth century, began his wilderness investigations in his first trip to Maine in 1846. During his first trip, he travelled with white pioneer men up the Penobscot River to Mount Katahdin, which he ascended and on which he had the most disturbing encounter with nature he would ever have. On Katahdin, the Western paradigms for understanding nature with which he had armed himself, particularly the Eurocentric and androcentric Odyssean perspective, failed him, leaving him at the end of that trip reflecting on the possibility that a Native American perspective, which he had rejected earlier, might answer some of the questions that confounded his Western paradigms, though he knew even in "Ktaadn" that the Penobscots avoided the tops of mountains. However,

following the logic that a Native American perspective might give him an understanding of wilderness that is more holistic and less egocentric than that of whites, Thoreau intentionally chose Penobscot guides for his trip in 1853, hoping to gain some insight. During this trip, however, he discovered that the perspective of these guides was not purely Native American, since they had largely assimilated into white culture, and that it was, like that of the white pioneer, primarily utilitarian. The moose hunt and subsequent "moose murder," perpetrated by both whites and Native Americans in Thoreau's party, led him to write the most polemical remarks he would make regarding man and his relationship to nature. He was left at the end of this trip only with botany and poetry as paradigms which allowed him to understand the "higher laws" of nature without destroying it, but he believed, even then, that pastoral landscapes and not wilderness were better suited for inspiring the great number of poets from any age. He maintained faith, however, that "spirits of a yet more liberal culture, to whom no simplicity is barren" would be inspired by wilderness and would discover some way to understand and express it. In his last trip to Maine in 1857, Thoreau again hired a Native American guide, Joe Polis. In his close observation of Polis, Thoreau learned more about Native Americans than he would from any other source. He became convinced that Native Americans understood the wilderness in ways that

whites did not and probably could not, an essentialist perspective that both Muir and Austin would also promote. However, Polis' hybrid religion, a combination of native superstition and Protestantism, left Thoreau skeptical, particularly since Polis and the Penobscots avoided the tops of mountains, which left Thoreau still with no paradigm for understanding his Katahdin experience. Although he gained a great appreciation of and respect for Polis, Thoreau remained distrustful of Polis' perspective as an adequate paradigm for understanding wilderness, turning at the end of his trip to the language of the animals themselves in a last attempt to find a language which might help him interpret the wild. He never found a paradigm that allowed him to gain the kind of vision Muir would attain in his mountain ramblings, nor did he reach the level of understanding of native myth and religion that Austin would achieve in her more intensive study of Native American culture. Though Thoreau reached the most revolutionary insights on nature of his time, his philosophy had to be expanded by those who followed him.

John Muir, who explored a variety of wilderness areas from the mid-1860's until his death in 1914, followed in Thoreau's footsteps, but, as Cohen's title, The Pathless Way, suggests, he diverged from that path and all others in significant ways. He was able to harmonize evolutionary theory with his own religious beliefs, thus reaching a truce

between science and religion that largely eluded Thoreau. Unlike Thoreau he rejected Native American understandings of nature early on and never turned to them during the most formative years of his wilderness ramblings, a regrettable decision in some respects because he was then forced to maintain contacts with civilization in order to survive. However, Muir's extreme commitment to a life in the wilderness yielded a personal vision of nature, one of an unparalleled unity with the cosmos, that Thoreau never quite found in his wilderness journeys. His archetypal experience of facing danger, surrendering to the force of nature, and finding rebirth and selfhood while climbing Mount Ritter, as he wrote in "A Near View of the High Sierra," gave him an understanding of the most remote places in nature that dramatized the inadequacy not only of Thoreau's disillusioning Katahdin epiphany but also of all other perspectives he had encountered, including the scientific, artistic, and athletic renderings of mountains most popular in late nineteenth-century America, while highlighting the superiority of his own vision. However, Muir was forced to offer his Eastern audience other views of nature that were less extreme in order to win their support for preservationist causes. He also compromised his lifestyle, leaving the wilderness as a near-permanent abode when he married and became a successful fruit farmer in the 1880's. Ultimately, Muir's life and philosophy must be judged in

terms of the compromises he made with civilization in order that wilderness might be saved. His most extreme wilderness vision, however, that typified by his climb of Mount Ritter, continues to inspire wilderness enthusiasts seeking their own mountaintop visions.

Mary Austin brought a feminine and sometimes feminist perspective to her studies of wilderness that was largely lacking in those of both Thoreau and Muir. She wrote a number of sketches of various people and their relationships to nature, making distinctions between the perspectives of whites and Native Americans and between men and women in both of those groups. Ultimately, she argued that in general white men lost their souls in the desert, white women were bound by a value structure that imprisoned them in towns, and that Native Americans, though they lived in harmony with the land, lived extremely harsh lives that she was unwilling and unable to emulate. She offered instead Latin culture as a suitable blending of white and Native American paradigms, one that her audience might grow to understand, as she did, to a large degree, and one that enabled the Latin inhabitants of the Southwest to live in harmony with the land while not subjecting themselves to the harsher exigencies faced by Native American tribes living in the desert. Her stress on communal relationships with the land differed sharply from the individualized relationships with the land sought by Thoreau and Muir. Her communal

perspective is arguably feminine, as opposed to their solitary or male-group perspectives, which are arguably masculine.

All three of these writers influenced the enormous variety of wilderness philosophies that currently compete with each other for public support, though some critics disagree over the importance of each and the role each played in forming late twentieth-century wilderness theory and practice. In evaluating the role each writer played in shaping contemporary wilderness philosophy, it is necessary to establish a spectrum of wilderness philosophies in order to evaluate each writer's contributions, recognizing obvious overlapping between the categories set up on that spectrum. These categories, as designated by Oelschlaeger in a debatable but workable breakdown of contemporary wilderness philosophy, can be described as (1) resource management or resourcism; (2) preservationism; (3) biocentrism and ecocentrism; (4) deep or foundational ecology; and (5) ecofeminism.¹ The history of the evolution of each of these philosophies is far too broad to cover here, but a brief description of each is useful and necessary in order to evaluate the contributions of the three writers in this study. Following a description and evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of these categories, the three

¹See Idea of Wilderness, ch. 9, "Contemporary Wilderness Philosophy," pp. 281-319.

writers will be evaluated for their contributions to these philosophies, such an assessment recognizing discrepancies between their theory and practice.

Overview of Contemporary Wilderness Philosophy

As the nineteenth century closed, Americans began to heed the warnings of people like Thoreau, Muir, and Austin and began to understand that their continent did not contain an inexhaustible supply of resources ready for exploitation. They were, however, more persuaded by arguments for conservation of natural resources for human consumption of the sort seen in embryonic form in Thoreau's "Chesuncook" and more developed in the writings of George Perkins Marsh as early as 1864 than by arguments for preservation of entire ecosystems on non-utilitarian grounds. This split in philosophy was personified at the end of the century by the two most recognizable figures in each movement, Gifford Pinchot, Roosevelt's chief forester and the leading proponent of European-styled forest conservation, and John Muir, first president of the Sierra Club, one of many preservationist societies active though its philosophy is increasingly criticized as "shallow ecology" by more radical environmentalists. In many ways these two camps define and contain all contemporary wilderness philosophy, though, as will be seen, there are varying degrees of preservationism that sometimes cause dissension in their ranks. As Americans at the turn of the century began to recognize the

need to conserve resources, conservationist ideas met with approval even in the highest offices. The Governors' Conference of 1907, led by Roosevelt and Pinchot (Muir was conspicuously absent - - perceived as a threat by Pinchot, he was not invited), marked the beginning of a nationwide emphasis on conservation of natural resources that led to the establishment of a huge bureaucracy of federal agencies (e. g., the National Forest Service, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Energy, Environmental Protection Agency, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service) and an enormous network of university departments, institutes, and schools to train an elite, professional corps of technicians. Thus, the professional resource manager was created. His job was to conserve resources for the use of future generations, a strictly utilitarian, anthropocentric philosophical standard tailored to fit the broader humanistic, consumer-based society that had arisen in the modernist era. Although this philosophy, sometimes called resourcism, "enjoys cognitive hegemony" and legal authority, and though it has been effective insofar as it has protected wildlife to some degree, it has many critics (Oelschlaeger 284). They range from preservationists to the so-called "deep ecologists," a collection of deeply committed citizens who are striving at the least for a change in policy, at the most for an entire change of values, a grand paradigm shift away from Modernism towards

what Oelschlaeger calls a postmodern paradigm that is yet to be. At best, we are in the midst of this paradigm shift, with competing groups struggling to define this paradigm in virtually all disciplines (science, religion, philosophy, economics, etc.). At worst, modernist philosophy will continue to dominate until all wilderness - - and perhaps humankind - - is eradicated in the name of democratic progress. Resourcism might be a step towards this grand paradigm shift, but it is a far cry from what is necessary to solve the global ecological crisis.

Resourcism

The underlying assumption behind resource conservation is that man can and should control nature to better his own life or, in democratic society, use nature to produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Resourcism is the child of scientific, consumer society, which perceives nature as a machine that can be manipulated rather than as a synergetic, holistic system. Its defining characteristics include the belief that (a) "natural systems are no more than collections of parts" (nature is perceived as machine rather than as a synergetic whole); (b) man "is related externally to the ecomachine" (or man is separated from a nature that he perceives as a machine); (c) "the ecomachine can be engineered to produce desired outcomes and prevent undesired consequences" (leading researchers, for instance, to produce hybrid species and poisons that kill

"pests" and "weeds"); (d) "the market objectively determines the worth and value of all things, cultural and natural; (e) the national and per capita income accounts are the ideal measure of societal well-being"; and (f) "progress can be determined according to the utilitarian formula of the greatest good for the greatest number" (Oelschlaeger, Table 4, 287).

While resourcism is probably the inevitable outcome of modern history and has been effective in protecting at least some wild nature, it has not prevented the exploitation of wilderness and has, in fact, been used as the ethical justification even for the eradication of species. The snail darter, for example, which disappeared from the Tellico Reservoir in order that waterskiers and anglers might enjoy the waterway, is but one of literally millions of species that have suffered or soon will the outcome of utilitarian-based formulas for conservation. Yet, resourcism is the only wilderness philosophy completely in sync with the prevailing and increasingly hegemonic democratic, consumer society, which perceives its ideology and logic as sacrosanct and evaluates and rejects all other paradigms according to its "rational" Benthamite formula. More radical philosophies must, therefore, attempt to subvert this monolithic ideology that has achieved the level of a religion, perhaps become the religion of the twentieth century.

Preservationism

Of the minority groups that criticize resourcism, preservationists are the least radical (though they, too, are perceived as radical by modernists) and the most open to criticism from those who espouse deep ecology. In contrast to resource conservationists, preservationists see nature not as a machine but as an "ecosystem, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, rather than as a stockpile of essentially interchangeable parts" (Oelschlaeger 289). They "believe that natural systems are (a) self-creating, evolutionary wholes with synergetic characteristics that preclude complete reduction and analysis;" (b) that natural systems contain hierarchal structures (e. g., the food chain) "where all the elements are internally related"; (c) that man "is related internally to the environment"; (d) that "human actions can impair the ability of natural systems to maintain themselves or to evolve further"; and (e) that "human values go beyond those measured by the national income accounts to include the preservation of wild lands and life" (Oelschlaeger, Table 5, 289).

Although preservationism is quite different from resource conservationism, it has also been criticized as shallow ecology by deep ecologists, who argue that preservationists still try to evaluate and dominate nature through "an ostensibly 'value-free' science and technology,

that they still see wild nature as man's playground, an anthropocentric view of wilderness. Furthermore, they are often criticized as being "green bigots," privileged members of the upper class who have made their fortunes in consumer society and who now put their own leisurely outdoor interests over the interests of impoverished masses. Finally, their efforts are seen as "too little, too late by biocentric thinkers, and thus an inherently flawed idea of wilderness" (Oelschlaeger 292).

Biocentrism and Ecocentrism

Although preservationists do see nature from a holistic perspective and reject a strictly economic criterion for evaluating it, they still see man as the ultimate product of evolution and the arbiter of value. Biocentrism and ecocentrism go beyond this perspective by "questioning specieism: the idea that humankind is somehow superior to and therefore entitled to impose its values on nature" (Oelschlaeger 292). While absolute differentiation between anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism is impossible, for their standards of value overlap in significant ways, some distinctions are clear:

Anthropocentrists [such as conservationists and preservationists] see the human species as the most significant fact of existence, and accordingly evaluate all else from a human standpoint. Biocentrists take life rather than the human species as the central verity and thus assign value to all other things relative to life; protection of a single organism (as distinct from a species) is therefore important to a biocentrist. Ecocentrists take natural systems as the

dominant reality, such that even life itself must be set in a larger evolutionary frame of reference that contains inorganic components; protection of a species (rather than an individual) and its supporting context is therefore critical to an ecocentrist (Oelschlaeger 293).

Although biocentrists and ecocentrists differ in their evaluation of the worth of individuals as opposed to species, both agree that life cannot exist without its supporting context. So both biocentrists and ecocentrists share the following characteristics: (a) they "believe that natural systems are the basis of all organic existence, and therefore possess intrinsic value"; (b) that "humankind is an element within rather than the reason to be of natural systems, and is hence dependent on intrinsic value"; and (c) "ethical human actions (actions which promote the good life for humankind) necessarily promote all life on earth (preserves such intrinsic values as diversity, stability, and beauty)" (Oelschlaeger, Table 6, 294).

Although the ecocentric perspective is appealing to defenders of wilderness, it is not without difficulties. For one, its presupposition that humans can view wilderness from a perspective other than human bothers some critics, while others see a paradox in the idea that humans "are obligated to promote intrinsic natural values . . . since nature 'runs automatically and, within her more active creatures, instinctively; but persons do things by design,

which is different'² And since humans have evolved into creatures that act by design, no action they take, even if it destroys the environment, can be unnatural. Oelschlaeger counters, however, by saying that such arguments equate human perspectives to anthropocentrism, that these detractors assume that all logic is bound within the matrix and logic of modernism, and that they fail to recognize that ecocentric perspectives can be both human (that is, linguistically and culturally enframed) and non-anthropocentric (297). A "naive ecocentrist," however, might counter such an argument by appealing to values in nature that are supposedly independent of human subjectivism, for instance, the beauty in nature that some believe is independent of the beholder's eye. The naive ecocentrist contends that the beauty of, say, a mountain meadow should be protected and that it does not need any humanizing touch, such as a ski resort, to accentuate its beauty. However, such appeal to intrinsic value in nature "rapidly leads to mysticism" and also, ironically, still is modernist because it sees duality between man and nature. The ecocentrist, then, must be careful of the philosophical ground upon which he walks. Still another criticism of ecocentricism is that it commits the is-ought fallacy. Analytic philosophers "argue that no ethical prescription

²Oelschlaeger (296) quoting Holmes Rolston, Philosophy Gone Wild, 33.

(an ought statement) can be validly deduced from any scientific description (an is statement), be it physics, chemistry, or ecology" (Oelschlaeger 298). Such philosophers, however, argue within "a paradigmatic framework assumed as an absolute" (Oelschlaeger 299), the modernist world view. Science, in the modernist's view, is divorced from ethics, a presupposition that ecocentrists reject. However, once the ecocentrist counters these arguments, he still faces a gamut of other protests:

Do the needs of burgeoning masses of Third World peasants and the privileged elites of the developed world take precedence over the values of natural systems? And how can Western society argue to the Third World that the global ecosystem no longer permits "underdeveloped" nations to exploit their natural resources? Further, by what methods and strategies might reconciliation between culture and nature be achieved? And what is the value of the anopheles mosquito? poison ivy? and the smallpox virus? since these natural kinds seem to lack intrinsic value? And who represents nature's interests, for the plants and beasts are mute? (Oelschlaeger 300).

Though the ecocentrist still cannot answer "the formidable philosophical problems raised by its prescriptive claims . . . [it] directly confronts resourcism and goes beyond the cognitive bounds of preservationism" (301).

Deep or Foundational Ecology

Deep or foundational ecology is consistent with the theoretical frameworks of ecocentricism but "goes beyond it by developing a pervasive critique of advanced industrial culture" (Oelschlaeger 301). Moreover, deep ecologists envision a postmodern, post-industrial world where the

boundaries between man and nature are no longer part of the human consciousness. Deep ecologists often stress the importance of the individual gaining his own relationship to nature before he moves to a critique of society. They "believe that (a) all life on earth has intrinsic value"; that (b) "the richness and diversity of life itself has value"; that (c) "human life is privileged only to the extent of satisfying vital needs"; that (d) "maintenance of the richness and diversity of life mandates a decrease in human population"; that (e) "humankind's relations to the natural world presently endanger the richness and diversity of life"; that (f) "changes (consistent with cultural diversity) affecting basic economic, technologic, and ideological cultural components are therefore necessary"; that (g) "'Green societies' value the quality of life (e. g., beauty) more than the quantity of life (e. g., GNP)"; and that (h) "individuals subscribing to these fundamentals of deep ecology are obligated to promote sociocultural change" (Oelschlaeger, Table 7, 303).

However, currently "deep ecology is . . . in a preparadigmatic period" (Oelschlaeger 302). The movement, which presently has input from incredibly diverse disciplines and enjoys enormous "theoretical freedom," is moving towards becoming a consistent paradigm, but it has not arrived there yet. There is "no theory which ensures that the perspectives converge on a common center"

(Oelschlaeger 303). Not yet able to define itself in any absolute positive terms, it at least in part defines itself by what it is not, shallow ecology, the ecology of resource conservation. Deep ecologists, for instance, reject the modernist notion that science should remain divorced from ethics - - they are, in fact, "part of a postmodern reformation of science" (Oelschlaeger 302). They are, more broadly, engaged in reforming the entire structure of Western ethics, which are "based on the assumption that the human species stands apart from and is superior to the rest of creation" (Oelschlaeger 302).

However, because the movement has no theoretical center, it "invites criticism that it is (1) more a secular religion than a legitimate philosophy, and (2) more a mystical than a scientific discipline" (Oelschlaeger 304), even though such objections carry no weight with many deep ecologists because they reject the science/religion dichotomy as part of the modernist paradigm. However, "because of their ecocentric commitments deep ecologists invite the charges that (3) they are green bigots who ignore the legitimate needs of underprivileged human beings and that (4) their program for social reform borders on hopeless utopianism" (Oelschlaeger 304). While deep ecologists stand "guilty as charged" on at least these last two counts, they at least recognize the need to reform society, to move beyond the bankrupt logic and ethics of Modernism. Some have offered suggestions for

an umbrella philosophy that would give deep ecology methodological underpinning, though not all deep ecologists agree on any one method. The dialogue continues, but the movement has far to go before it attains the level of the consistent philosophy that Modernism currently offers.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is, in many ways, related to deep ecology, though its focus is somewhat different. It is a relatively new way of thinking about the environment that, ironically, resurrects perhaps the oldest way of thinking about the cosmos, to see nature as "intrinsically feminine" (Oelschlaeger 309). Although ecofeminism is not a consistent program and is informed by various schools of feminist thought, it has some defining characteristics: "Ecofeminists believe that (a) Mother Earth is a nurturing home for all life and should be revered and loved as in premodern (Paleolithic and archaic) societies"; that (b) "ecosystematic malaise and abuse is rooted in androcentric concepts, values, and institutions"; that (c) "relations of complementarity rather than superiority between culture and nature, the human and nonhuman, and male and female are desirable"; and that (d) "the many problems of human relations, and relations between the human and nonhuman worlds, will not be resolved until androcentric institutions, values, and ideology are eradicated" (Oelschlaeger 310).

Modernism, according to ecofeminists, is not only anthropocentric but, more accurately, androcentric. Ecofeminists therefore look to premodern society for paradigms of nonandrocentric understandings of nature. Some try to reawaken these ancient understandings through earth rituals and ceremonies, a way to "escape the imprisoning effect of the linear-logical side of our brain and thousands of years of cultural conditioning" (Oelschlaeger 312); while to the modernist, such ritual is nonsense. Clearly, ecofeminists stand with deep ecologists in offering a pervasive critique of modern society, though they sometimes accuse deep ecologists of not recognizing androcentrism as the root of the problem. Ecofeminism, however, is itself subject to criticism from deep ecology and other quarters, for some of its proponents assume that there is an essentialist split between male and female, a belief that "denigrate[s] the full potential of our human beingness" (Oelschlaeger 315). Others promote "feminarchy," a female version of power drawn along the lines of patriarchy itself. Some ecofeminists, however, argue for a more inclusive world view, the need to move beyond sexism of any kind. Only when humankind begins to see itself without categorical sex distinctions will it be able to see itself as part of the larger whole that is nature.

Evaluating the Contributions of Thoreau, Muir, and Austin to Contemporary Wilderness Philosophy

Judging the past by the standards of the present is a deeply problematical practice. The historical context that enframes the movements discussed above is quite different from although contingent to that in which Thoreau, Muir, and Austin lived. These contemporary philosophies, for instance, have been greatly affected by the automobile and the cultural and environmental problems engendered by it and the industries that produce it and keep it running. None of the writers in this study, however, envisioned the problems the automobile would cause, much less the widespread destruction of the atmosphere and oceans caused by other developments subsequent to their historical periods. Nevertheless, it is useful and necessary to evaluate the extent to which these writers influenced later thinking about wilderness in order to understand the continuum that is environmental philosophy. In making such evaluations, it is sometimes necessary to distinguish between the theory of each writer and the practices he or she followed. Each writer - - like virtually all environmental philosophers who have followed them - - is more advanced towards a deep ecology in theory than each is in practice.

All three writers espoused but also moved beyond resourcism. Thoreau, whose desire to protect forests and

animals conflicted with his own admiration of timber cutters and hunters, ultimately in "Chesuncook" argued for the establishment of forest reserves not for the sake of the preservation of any ecological whole but for the benefit of future timber cutters and hunters. Muir, who became the leading proponent of preservationism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, rejected the most extreme forms of resourcism because of his distrust of timber, herding, and mining interests but ultimately argued for the establishment of national parks with the logic of resourcism, accepting and promoting the "playground" theory of national parks, that is, that they are isolated pockets of wilderness made accessible to and safe for virtually all people. He had to compromise his personal and extreme vision of wilderness, one that is arguably deep ecology, in order to save a few pockets of wild land, though his own writing indicates that he became quite comfortable with the compromise. Austin, in her work to save the Owens Valley from destruction, argued from a resourcist perspective, saying that the valley supported people who had as much right to the land as the Los Angeles citizens had to the water that flooding the valley would ostensibly give them. All three writers, then, used the rhetoric of resourcism in their attempts to conserve if not to preserve whole biosystems.

In moving beyond resourcism, these writers achieved varying degrees of ecological consciousness, and a clear progression is evident. Thoreau, for instance, arguably envisions at least a biocentric world in his most pantheistic passages, those about the sacredness of pine trees in "Chesuncook," for example. By placing the life of a pine tree at at least as high a level as his own, he is biocentric in that he emphasizes the sanctity of the life of an individual organism. He might even approach an ecocentric perspective in Walden, as Oelschlaeger contends, when he sees himself as part of an evolutionary process that begins in the "bowels" of the earth, thus acknowledging the importance of inorganic matter in the biosphere (294). However, Thoreau's disturbing Katahdin experience, the one incident in which all his paradigms failed him, the one in which he could not see himself as intrinsically connected to the environment around him, indicates that Thoreau's ecocentrism, too, failed him in the face of the wildest extremes of nature. Muir, on the other hand, developed early on and maintained consistently a biocentric perspective even during experiences in nature that nearly killed him, as is evident in his defense of mosquitoes and carnivores at the very moment he is suffering from malaria and fear of alligators in the swamps of Florida in A Thousand Mile Walk. Through his glacial studies, he was able to move beyond Thoreau's failure on Katahdin when he

envisioned mountains as fountains, the beginning places of all the life that dwelt in lower elevations, clearly an ecocentric perspective unparalleled in his time. Austin, too, believed in the sanctity of life but differentiated her biocentric perspective from that of Muir when she pointed out in "Nurslings of the Sky" the suffering that geological phenomena sometimes brought to animals. In fact, her sympathy with living things nearly undermines an ecocentric perspective in that it causes her to stress the importance of the life of the individual at the expense of the ongoing processes of the ecosystem, a fallacy she narrowly avoids by assuming the "point of view of the gods," though clearly she insinuates that such a point of view is taken too readily by geologists like Muir. Austin is much more sensitive than Muir to the criticisms that such ecocentric perspectives invite, particularly the criticism that they are anti-human (which Muir certainly was for a prolonged period in the late sixties and early seventies), and her stress on the importance of human history as a part of the land belies her intention to offset the lack of human history evident in much of Muir's work. Each writer, then, evolved at least a biocentric perspective but encountered difficulties and criticisms when developing and maintaining an ecocentric perspective.

Since deep ecology is, even now, in a preparadigmatic state, it is not quite fair to evaluate any of these writers

according to its radical agenda. It is, nevertheless, intriguing to do so. Thoreau and Muir, like deep ecologists, were among the first and most persistent critics of Modernism, and both rejected its paradigms for evaluating nature and, to a large extent, for living their lives, as evinced by Thoreau's Walden experiment and Muir's eschewing a variety of professions through which he would have made his mark in modern society. Neither, however, developed a pervasive criticism of Modernism or any coherent plan to move beyond it, though Thoreau's investigations into Native American culture were among the first attempts to recover a prehistorical mindset that might have given him an alternative to Modernism had he lived long enough to resolve the internal conflicts between his scientific skepticism and Native American primitivism. He intuited during his college years that science, as modern industrial man had defined it, would not reveal any holistic vision of nature but turned to it anyway as a method of moving beyond anthropocentrism. He needed, as deep ecologists now contend, a new science that incorporates ethics and does not eschew non-linear ways of viewing the universe.

Muir moved closer to finding such a science, one that allowed him to see the unified whole of nature, though, in doing so, he had to reject the fact-bound, non-intuitive scientific approaches of his fellow scientists. He also used his scientific conclusions to justify ethical action,

committing the so-called is-ought fallacy exposed by modernist philosophy, but Muir thereby also moved beyond the problematic assumptions about logic propounded by these same philosophers. Unfortunately, Muir never seriously investigated alternative relationships to the land such as those of Native Americans he encountered in California. Though he developed a sympathy for their plight, he did not investigate their cultures thoroughly until his wilderness philosophy was already mature and his rhetoric had been tailored to fit the expectations of modern, urban America. Thoreau and Muir, like contemporary deep ecologists, struggled with widely divergent paradigms towards a deep ecology they could envision but not put into practice. As a result, both compromised their lifestyles and philosophies to fit the expectations of modern industrial society.

Austin's ecology is complemented by her feminism but complicated by her emphasis on the human animal and her desire to establish a stable and comfortable life in accordance with her Polly McAdams sensibility. In her most extreme portraits of humankind's relationships with nature, she portrays a variety of characters who live alone in the desert. Of these characters, Austin clearly favors women who reject the confinements of society and then thrive in nature over those women who depend on society to define their self-hood or those men who go to the wilderness only to lose their souls. The Woman at Eighteen Mile and the

Walking Woman typify Austin's belief that women might learn to live in nature according to its rhythms better than men. Austin, however, rejected such a lifestyle for herself. Her desire to publish and her poor health caused her to seek ties to society even while she criticized it. She therefore turned to an investigation of culture in her search for a harmonious relationship with the land. In searching for a culture that would allow people to live more harmoniously with the land than that offered by white, industrial America, Austin investigated a number of possibilities. Though she acknowledged that Native Americans lived more in harmony with the rhythms of the land than did whites, she retained the essentialist perspective that such an understanding was racially predetermined and that whites would not be able to gain it entirely even if they wanted to. Austin therefore offered a compromise between the extremes of Anglo and Native American societies, one seen in the Latin culture of the Southwest, and offered the quasi-mythical town of Las Uvas as an paradigm, while refusing, however, to reveal the location of this ostensibly real place because of her fear that whites might exploit it. Although Austin's life is a model of inconsistency in almost all respects, she took up not only the defense of Latin culture but also the lifestyle to some extent when she moved to Santa Fe in 1925.

Because of Austin's emphasis on the importance of a feminine relationship to the land, she is sometimes considered a prototypical ecofeminist, though she does not exactly meet all the qualifications of Oeshlaeger's description, one more fitting post-World War II ecofeminists. Her feminine and feminist perspective on wilderness, however, is clearly evident, particularly when her work is compared to that of Thoreau and Muir. Even though some critics point to passages indicating a feminist perspective towards nature in the writings of Thoreau and Muir, their perspectives, when juxtaposed to Austin's, are essentially masculine. Austin's emphasis on the woman's perspective is decidedly different from that of Thoreau, who consistently travelled in all male groups and ignored entirely female perspectives in his writing about wilderness. Muir's solitary wanderings in the wilderness, as he came to see, were dangerous and demanded a level of fortitude that not even Galen Clark could maintain. He would compromise this extremism, particularly after he encountered persons willing but physically unable to follow his own pathless way, but his most profound visionary experiences occurred while he faced danger and even death alone. Austin, however, implicitly critiqued male individualism in her portrayals of men who go into the desert alone only to lose their souls, even though she recognized Muir as a visionary in his relationship to

nature. She admired women, like the Walking Woman, who trod like Muir, alone in the wilderness, but she could not reconcile herself to such a lifestyle. She would not live without culture, without, particularly, the community of other women. Her feminist perspective, as well as her ecology, recognizes that humankind is a cultural animal, that any vision of nature must be made amenable to the needs of the community and vice versa. Her emphasis on culture in nature or nature as it shapes culture marks her divergence from Muir and is an early attempt to find a workable paradigm whereby humans might live in harmony with nature, a "bioregional" approach to that is still an emphasis of deep ecology. Although her health and predispositions prevented her from finding a vision of nature in the wild extremes, her epiphany under the walnut tree and later experiences during which she encountered "God" in nature gave her a vision of nature commensurate with her physical abilities, a vision Muir doubted was possible in the lowlands. Though Austin's ecology, her land-ethic, is complicated by contradictions in her lifestyle, she points the way to contemporary deep ecology and ecofeminism more clearly than her male predecessors. She should be seen, then, as a link between the nineteenth-century romantics and Aldo Leopold, whose writing about the relationship between nature and culture advances from personal revelation to a call for action. She should also be seen as a prototypical ecofeminist

in her emphasis on the importance and superiority of the woman's experience in nature, particularly when her experience and those of a few women she met, like the Woman at Eighteen Mile and the Walking Woman, are contrasted to those of most white men.

Thus, Thoreau, Muir, and Austin have contributed enduringly to the changes in our thinking about wilderness that, deep ecologists hope, will eventually become a consistent paradigm for a postmodern society. Reading their works, while no substitute for personal encounters with wilderness, helps direct the contemporary ecologist still in search of paradigms. In order to achieve a postmodern relationship to nature, the contemporary ecologist must, of course, move beyond their perspectives, but he must also acknowledge his debt and gratitude to their pioneering work in this unfinished project and continue, as best he can, to walk, write, and define the unchartered wildernesses of a postmodern world.

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