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**Wilderness and interference: Images of the trail in American literature**

**McQuillan, Gene Peter, Ph.D.**

**City University of New York, 1991**

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WILDERNESS AND INTERFERENCE:  
IMAGES OF THE TRAIL IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

GENE McQUILLAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of New York.

1991

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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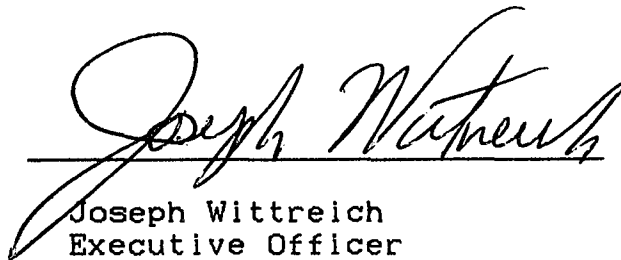


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## Introduction

Nature/Wilderness:  
Pretty Scenery or the Whole Goddamn Machinery?

You might think, after many years of teaching a class called "Nature Writers," that I would know what nature meant, but I do not.

John Hay, from "The Nature Writer's Dilemma"

With a slow pace we moved forward on the trail of the Indians. It led us up a hill and over a dreary plain; and here, to our great mortification the traces almost disappeared, for the ground was hard as adamant; and if its flinty surface had ever retained the dent of a hoof, the marks had been washed away by the deluge of yesterday.... Often we lost the trail altogether, and then found it again; but late in the afternoon we were totally at fault. We stood alone, without a clew to guide us.

Francis Parkman, from The Oregon Trail

Half the time they don't know the difference between a trail and a path, though one is a matter for the eye while the other is little more than a scent.

Natty Bumppo, from Cooper's The Pathfinder

This study assumes a scholarly form, but its origins are personal. Over the last twelve years, I have spent much of my spare time hiking, climbing, and rambling. Most of these activities took place in what are usually called wilderness areas, including nature preserves, wildlife refuges, and national parks. My journals of these excursions note

familiar topics: animal sightings, comments on landscape and weather, comparisons with similar areas, personal responses, thoughts of the moment. Yet I am not an explorer, and while I have at times considered myself an "adventurer," I have come to feel that my yearnings for summits or distant destinations often led me to hurry past more subtle rewards. I do not often try to put myself in Parkman's position, "without a clue" to guide me. Most of my wanderings are done on trails, sometimes for hours, sometimes for weeks.

I hold vivid memories of my trips, and often associate these moments with trails, which take many forms besides that of a worn, narrow footpath. My personal responses to wilderness are too varied to summarize here, but these images of trails might serve as a prelude: a series of six-inch white blazes painted on granite boulders -- the last steps of the 2,015-mile Appalachian Trail, which ends at Mount Katahdin's summit in northern Maine; a few well-placed chalkmarks in a limestone cave in West Virginia, reading "<--OUT"; the odd sight of bicycle reflectors attached to dwarf spruce trees on Mount Washington's Lion Head's Trail, which ice-climbers often descend after dark; the eerie sight of rock cairns in dense fog on the John Muir Trail in the High Sierras; a series of bamboo wands topped with bright red flags poked into Mount McKinley's Kahlitna Glacier; a nature trail behind Alley Pond Environmental

Center, running less than 200 feet from a major highway, its marshes packed with a menagerie of birds: ring-necked pheasants, snowy egrets, wood ducks and mallards, bobolinks, red-winged blackbirds, and an occasional great blue heron.

Trails imply a sense of community. Even while hiking alone for a few days, one senses that history lies thick on a trail. This dissertation is not about the ways in which trails were blazed, or about the ways in which they encouraged exploration or settlement. It is about the ways in which trails gather and distribute certain cultural ideas, especially literary ones. Ktaadn, the White Mountains, Slide Mountain, the Escarpment Trail, Mount Whitney, Mount Ranier, the Bright Angel Trail: from these places and trails arise a history of literary and artistic responses from Thoreau, Hawthorne, Burroughs, Cole, King, Muir, Powell. Trails also present the contradictions and failures of American relations with wilderness. The history of trails is also that of "pioneer armies" and tourist hordes, of personal misuse and bureaucratic mismanagement.

This study will place frequent emphasis on the implications of wilderness trails. I ask the reader to allow a certain latitude here. One could easily make a list of references to trails in major nineteenth-century American texts; the journals of Lewis and Clark, Cooper's The Pathfinder, Melville's Typee, Twain's Roughing It, Irving's A Tour on the Prairies, Parkman's The Oregon

Trail, and Thoreau's The Maine Woods all hold rich ideas about them. However, I have tried to avoid a formulaic study of the trail image, and this project is meant to be suggestive rather than exhaustive. I use direct images of the trail when they are suitable, but in a more general sense I am interested in the idea of wilderness as a construct, and in the ways in which these constructs have influenced American writers' experiences of wilderness. Besides discussing actual trails, I have referred to other related constructs, including park systems, maps, guidebooks, and "viewpoints."

While the idea of the wilderness trail remains the central focus of this study, I have found it necessary to discuss two other related issues. The first is the the drastic difference between nineteenth- and twentieth-century wilderness. One need not be a cynic to note that wilderness areas such as the Adirondacks, the Tetons, or the Sierras are closely mapped and closely regulated by government agencies -- they are no longer "white spots on the map." Melville wrote of the West as "the vast reserves -- the untried fields," but clearly one cannot hold such expectations of twentieth-century wilderness. Melville's "vast reserves" are now protected in national parks, while the "untried fields" are now threatened by what Edward Abbey calls "Industrial Tourism." America's most intelligent wilderness writers make no attempt to match the exploits of

their nineteenth-century predecessors, but choose to explore the ways in which twentieth-century ideas about language, ecology, politics, and culture can still invigorate the tradition of wilderness writing.

The second related issue concerns the evaluation of twentieth-century wilderness writing in traditional literary histories. The fifth chapter does not discuss wilderness trails, but literary canons. As I continued my work on this project, it was often difficult to find fellow teachers who had read many of the less familiar authors whom I praised: John Wesley Powell, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Barry Lopez, Leslie Marmon Silko. When I did find critical commentaries on contemporary wilderness writing, they usually relied on common accusations: its irrelevance to an industrial society, its lack of human drama, its semi-scientific style of description, its limiting regional characteristics, its lack of modernist or post-modernist techniques. These accusations must be given fair consideration; yet most critics have not read widely in recent wilderness texts, nor have they been sufficiently aware of the reasons why such texts would actively avoid or challenge prevailing "standards."

In this dissertation I often use the word wilderness; more specifically, I use the word in situations where readers might expect to see the word "Nature." For example, I prefer the term "wilderness writer" to "nature writer."

"Nature," when used by poets and philosophers, is an all-inclusive word. The following quotations suggest the vague and almost limitless boundaries of "Nature writing":

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,  
Whose body Nature is and God the soul.

(Pope, "Essay on Man")

The universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE.

(Emerson, "Nature")

A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still  
A lover of the meadows and the woods,  
And mountains; and of all that we behold  
On this green earth; of all the mighty world  
Of eye, and ear, -- both what they half create,  
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize  
In nature and the language of sense  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being.

(Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey")

For I thought Epicurus and Lucretius  
By Nature meant the Whole Goddamn Machinery  
But you say that in college nomenclature  
The only meaning possible for Nature  
In Landor's quatrain would be Pretty Scenery.

(Frost, "Lucretius Versus  
the Lake Poets")

While I greatly prefer the term "wilderness," it also involves this shifting focus between "the Whole Goddamn Machinery" and "Pretty Scenery," between the American West and Yellowstone Falls. I cannot hope to define and categorize wilderness in this preface. However, one might start with Perry Miller's claim from Errand into the Wilderness: "Nature in America means the wilderness" (204). While Mary Rowlandson, Cotton Mather, Crèvecoeur, Thoreau, Norris, Cather, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and Frost all try to establish some sense of personal and communal order within American landscape, they rarely maintain the relative calm of the European pastoral tradition. America was the landscape which Thoreau called "this vast, savage, howling mother of ours, Nature;" Fitzgerald wrote that on this continent man came "...face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder" ("Walking" 403; The Great Gatsby 182) Neither "Nature" nor "wilderness" is wholly sufficient to define such landscapes. I choose the term "wilderness" because it suggests a closer attachment to actual landscapes, and a more forceful sense of opposition to the City, or as Frederick Jackson Turner called it, the "Metropolis."

## Chapter One

### Wilderness and Trails: Contradictions and Possibilities In Post-Frontier American Writing

You will lead me out of my own quiet path. You  
will make me strive to follow you where it is  
pathless. I cannot do so. It is not my nature.

-- from Hawthorne's The House of  
the Seven Gables

A trail, other than an animal trail, is an insult  
to the perceptions.

-- from Jim Harrison's  
"Passacaglia on Getting Lost"

O public road, I say back I am not afraid to leave  
you, yet I love you.

-- from Whitman's "Song of the Open Road"

Wilderness, both as an actuality and an idea, has been one of the determining forces in defining American culture. According to Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," the presence of huge wilderness areas required and refined a set of political assumptions which distinguished the American political system from that of Europe (199-201). Although Turner claimed that the Frontier had closed in 1890, the mythology of the Frontier appears in many aspects of contemporary American culture, ranging from advertising to campaign slogans to fashion trends. American writers have continued a

resonant exploration of wilderness as an essential American myth; as Leo Marx claims in The Machine in the Garden, "Again and again, the imagination of our most respected writers -- one thinks of Cooper, Thoreau, Melville, Faulkner, Frost, Hemingway -- has been set in motion by this impulse" (10). Moreover, wilderness is a central idea for our future: Thoreau's claim that "in wilderness is the preservation of the world" serves as both a condemnation of our current priorities and a hope for a better balance of resources in the future. Indeed, the power of wilderness often affirms and generates the American promise of unending renewal, of yet another "New Frontier." In such promises we have been offered a vision. As Lee Clark Mitchell defines it:

In each instance, the pose proclaims: we have abandoned tradition-clogged societies to embrace a new, a free, a far richer life. America's wilderness seemed to provide a physically limitless and ahistorical setting in which men and women could imagine their finest self-conceptions fulfilled. The powerful fascination of that hope entwines more than three centuries of colonial and national experience. (3)

Nineteenth-century American writing abounds with such images or narratives of our "finest self-conception." One of the more concise renderings of the attractiveness -- and the futility -- of "that hope" is found in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, as Dimmesdale seeks for some future redemption, some release from the "judgement of God" and

the haunting presence of Chillingworth:

"Be thou strong for me!" answered he. "Advise me what to do."

"Is the world, then, so narrow?" exclaimed Hester Prynne, fixing her deep eyes on the minister's and instinctively exercising a magnetic power over a spirit so shattered and subdued that it could hardly hold itself erect. "Doth the universe lie within the compass of yonder town, which only a little time ago was but a leaf-strewn desert, as lonely as this around us? Whither leads yonder forest track? Backwards to the settlement, thou sayest! Yes; but onward, too! Deeper it goes, and deeper, into the wilderness, less plainly to be seen at every step! until, some miles hence, the yellow leaves will show no vestige of the white man's tread. There thou art free! So brief a journey would bring thee from a world where thou hast been most wretched, to one where thou mayest still be happy!" (187)

While few will deny the importance of wilderness in American thought, many will claim that prevalent ideas concerning wilderness were best defined by nineteenth-century writers such as Thoreau, Cooper, and Melville, and that writers after 1900 have offered few original contributions to a further understanding of why and how wilderness is important to our nation: notice that even Mitchell claims that wilderness "seemed" to offer such promises. Such a view contends that the accelerations and alterations of the modern industrial world have reduced wilderness values to a marginal nostalgia. Of course, such fears were present long before our time: Thoreau felt that he had arrived just in the nick of time, and wondered "what would become of us, if we walked only in a garden or a

mall?" ("Walking" 377) Those who search for American wilderness today must confront the obvious losses of the twentieth century: the Frontier has been closed, the animals killed or chased into hiding, the forests paved so that tourists can get a closer look at a "scenic attraction," the "pine of Semal, cedar of Haida.../Cut down to make room for the suburbs" (Snyder Myths and Texts). This sense of loss is sharpened by the knowledge that our lost heritage is not one of the distant past, but a product of decisions which we have participated in and sanctioned. Twentieth-century American literature tends to confirm or intensify our suspicions that the wilderness which was such an essential force in defining certain American characteristics has "vanished," that it has "made way for Gatsby's house":

And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailor's eyes -- a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in dreams to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder. (Fitzgerald 182)

There are several shortcomings in the arguments which I have just summarized. The first problem is the assumption that American wilderness, as either a physical space or a spiritual resource, has been exhausted or "closed." Many

make this assumption because of the overwhelming presence of industrialized civilization, and the dwindling wilderness areas that remain; the acreage of officially designated "wilderness areas" in America is now less than the acreage of pavement. However, to assume that the integrity of wilderness writing depends on an "advancing frontier" of unexplored territory is to deny the validity of many notable American works on this theme. James Fenimore Cooper's Introduction to The Pioneers makes it quite clear that the land he writes about is no longer uncompromised wilderness; the popular myth of Thoreau as wildman continues to obscure the fact that his "wilderness" was a mile from Concord; the same Emerson who claimed that Nature made him "glad to the brink of fear" refused John Muir's offer to sleep out in Yosemite Valley, preferring the warmth of a hotel. Yet such writers and works retain their value because of the complexity of the wilderness they confront; this process becomes as much an internal as an external exploration. Meanwhile, many of the works which confronted larger and "purer" wilderness areas -- the works of trappers, surveyors, and adventurers such as Clarence King and John Wesley Powell -- present us with an equally complex assessment of wilderness. These explorers of our Western lands found a space which was so large and unknown that it often left them searching for a new, yet manageable, frame for understanding their discoveries.

This range of alternatives continues today. If readers search for writing that defines wilderness as an author's metaphor for a personal or political spirit, then the texts of Barry Lopez, Anne LaBastille, Leslie Marmon Silko, or Aldo Leopold will offer a complex assessment of these ideas. If readers are looking for a careful consideration of adventure or exploration, then the texts of Arlene Blum, John Muir, David Roberts, or Edward Abbey would be a fine place to start. Furthermore, one should also consider how drastically the idea of wilderness has changed in the last forty years. Ideas such as "access," "ecotage," "'deep' ecology," "black space," "the aesthetics of interference," or "vertical wilderness" may seem like an environmentalist's jargon until one is shown that these terms lead to a challenging reading of works such as Thoreau's "Walking" or more contemporary accounts of adventure and preservation.

The writers whom I have mentioned must confront not only the disappearance of wilderness areas, but the relative neglect of serious wilderness writing by academic scholars. Scholars have not yet adequately defined the canon of American literature as it relates to the idea of wilderness. The writings of Cooper, Thoreau, and Melville are often seen as the finest expressions of American wilderness ideas; wilderness writing after them is seen as a last grasp at an opportunity which was already gone. Modern literary histories of wilderness writing often rely upon the canon as

if it could magically provide an infinite range of wisdom from a relatively narrow group of writings. It may be true that Robert Frost was "versed in country things," that Ernest Hemingway wanted to "do the landscape like Cezanne," that William Faulkner's The Bear offers a complex understanding of confronting the Wild. These writers have produced some of America's finest literature; yet they do not offer the most incisive, complex, or controversial perceptions of twentieth-century wilderness.

As Roderick Nash points out in Wilderness and the American Mind, the finest depictions of wilderness after 1860 have generally been denied a place in the literary canon. We should do more than simply admit that works such as John Muir's My First Summer in the High Sierra, Aldo Leopold's A Sand County Almanac, Edward Abbey's Desert Solitaire, or Barry Lopez's Arctic Dreams establish a "context" for understanding the theme of wilderness in American Literature; this simply upgrades their status from "ignored works" to "background material." These works lodge their own valid claims to be treated as Literature. They deserve critical attention because they represent a valid continuation and questioning of the many issues which were raised by nineteenth-century writers such as Irving, Parkman, and Twain.

One of the factors hindering the academic recognition of wilderness writers is a series of distinctions --

fiction/non-fiction, literature/history, imagination/actual experience, visionary/political -- which relegate wilderness writing to a secondary status. Thus the Journals of Lewis and Clark, John Wesley Powell, or Lucy Crawford are generally considered fascinating historical documents, but they are less likely to receive the attention of literary scholars than Melville's Mardi or Edgar Allan Poe's Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym. Such distinctions appear in bold relief when scholars discuss the writings of John Muir, who is generally considered to be a mountaineer, a naturalist, an activist, a fascinating character, and a writer -- in that order. No American writer better defines the status of late nineteenth-century wilderness; none can match his range of experience in the wilderness. An essay such as Emerson's "Nature" is a standard nineteenth-century text, and should continue to be. Yet we often expect the voice of writers such as Emerson to speak of the whole range of nineteenth-century experience. To read Muir is to realize how influential -- and how limiting -- were the ideas of Emerson. Emerson's airy raptures about nature lack a grounding in the actual facts of natural history, the actual lives of people in harsh conditions, the actual efforts to save the land for future generations. Muir cherished his copy of Emerson's Essays, yet by climbing, studying, and defending the wilderness of Yosemite, he tested the premises of Transcendentalism with a determination and intensity that

rival Melville's.

The conflicting roles of artist/adventurer become apparent in one of Muir's finest essays, "A Near View of the High Sierra." The narrative is based on a ten-day trip Muir took during October of 1872. During one of his walks, he noted Mount Lyell and Mount McClure in the distance, and these two peaks and their surrounding scenery presented a challenge:

It seemed now to be ready and waiting for the elected artist; and I could not help wishing that I might carry colors and brushes with me on my travels, and learn to paint. In the mean time I had to be content with photographs in my mind and sketches in my notebook. (106)

Soon after returning to his cabin, he was greeted by three artists who had arranged to visit him; one of them, William Keith, was to become one of Muir's closest friends. These men asked Muir to guide them to a suitable area for painting, but Muir had difficulty finding an area where the vastness of the Sierras could be divided into the artists' categories for composition. One of the artists commented,

"All this is huge and sublime, but we see nothing as yet all available for effective pictures. Art is long, and art is limited, you know; and here are foregrounds, middle-grounds, backgrounds, all alike; bare rock waves, woods, groves, diminutive flecks of meadow, and strips of glittering water." (108)

Muir finally led them to the view of Lyell that he had seen earlier, and "their enthusiasm was excited beyond bounds,

and the more impulsive of the two, a young Scotchman, dashed ahead, shouting and gesticulating and tossing his arms in the air like a madman" (108). The next morning, "the artists went heartily to their work and I to mine": the artists remained to paint this landscape, while Muir left for an excursion to "the untouched summit of Ritter." While some of Muir's essays are, in his own words, "simply mountaineering indulgence," the descriptions of climbing in "A Near View of the High Sierras" are closely linked to the possibilities for an aesthetic which supplements the shared limitations of the climber and the artist: "Climbing higher, higher, new beauty came streaming on the sight." This "new beauty" did not come without extreme danger:

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 mountain, 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 be possessed of a new sense. The other self, bygone experiences, instinct, or the 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 a precision with which I seemed to have nothing at all to do. Had I been borne aloft on wings, my delivery could not have been more complete. (123)

For many modern readers, the act of mountaineering is almost always associated with the dangers of climbing and the joyous release of attaining the summit: in this context, Muir's comments about the ascent of Mount Ritter might seem quite conventional. Yet despite the attention paid to mountain by nineteenth-century artists, both American and European, the summit had remained a rarely-used vantage point. Perhaps the most famous example of a "view" from the summit is Thoreau's commentary from the shoulder of Ktaadn in Maine. (He never did reach the actual summit.) For Thoreau, this area was, like the Sierras, not "available for effective pictures." It was beyond the familiar categories, "It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor waste land" ("Ktaadn" 568). For the three artists who remained in the valley while Muir climbed; for Percy Bysshe Shelley writing about the "Power" of Mont Blanc from a bridge in the valley of Chamonix; for John Ruskin, who believed that "the Alps were on the whole, best seen from below," there remained a whole range of aesthetic experience which had rarely been considered or attempted. For such artists, the imagination was sufficient, a higher means of perception than actual physical experience. Muir claimed he would "touch naked God," and his extended comments from the summit of Mount Ritter are attempts to define the possibilities and requirements of an aesthetic which integrated climbing, natural history, and imagination:

But, generally, 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. (127)

Muir did indeed study the Sierras, the "Range of Light," both "long and lovingly," yet his aesthetics are only one of numerous ways in which he re-defined American wilderness. Muir and other wilderness writers of his time attempted to answer a wide range of questions which previous artists had not even discussed. Later wilderness writers have continued this questioning, but for the most part, literary scholars have only recently begun to participate in this process. Reassessing John Muir and other "wilderness writers" is increasingly relevant to critical concerns as varied as semiotics, gender marking, or the New Historicism. For example, a recent collection of critical essays about Aldo Leopold's A Sand County Almanac has confirmed what numerous scholars of the wilderness have known for years: that Leopold's work is as sensitive, complex, and disruptive as any in modern American writing. The work that remains to be done in this field offers some of the most fascinating challenges to the concept of "canonizing," to the ordering of Literature's wildness.

These reassessments of literature, the canon, and marginalized writers present a both a respectful

confirmation and a disturbing challenge to the liberal understanding of wilderness in American culture. There has been relatively little work directed toward the re-definition of wilderness by contemporary critical thought. The historical understanding of American wilderness had been best defined by Roderick Nash in his Wilderness and the American Mind. Yet Nash was not intent on defining such a word in terms of recent critical theories which question the various claims of representation made on behalf of language. The liberal understanding of wilderness -- which I will discuss in the latter half of this dissertation -- has defined changing attitudes about wilderness by referring to particular contexts or writers who signaled a shift in values. Yet these critics often assumed that wilderness experience was a release from ideology, rather than an intense concentration of it. For example, Henry Nash Smith has admitted that his Virgin Land involved "pervasive ideological distortion" by not fully confronting the inherent contradictions and manipulations of such terms as "free land," "virgin land," or "Manifest Destiny": "free" for whom? why refer to land as "virgin?" what was the source of "our" "manifest" destiny? (Smith "Symbol and Idea" 28-9) Other liberal critics did not fully understand or explain how our ideas of exploring the Frontier not only came from a certain ideological standpoint, but also reinforced that position.

The way in which pioneers treated the Frontier as something unknown, unfriendly, and unmanageable was not simply a story of adventure beyond the boundaries of civilization; indeed, as Richard Slotkin has shown in both Regeneration Through Violence and The Fatal Environment, the "conquest" of the Frontier anticipated and justified many American assumptions and actions about Indians, the working class, immigrants, and minorities.

Roland Barthes has claimed that Ideology transforms History into Nature; yet there should also be a critical understanding of the ways in which "Nature" has also been transformed into Nature. Recent theorists, using perspectives as varied as feminism, deconstruction, Marxism, and semiotics, can contribute to an understanding of the ways in which social groups produce various versions of wilderness according to particular ideological needs. The application of critical theories to the standard presentation of wilderness reveals the "unnatural" basis of our ideas regarding adventure, aesthetics, access, perception, natural history, and the ability to define these processes through language. Contemporary wilderness writers realize that they rarely "see things as they really are," but rather "as they have been made to be" by various historical and linguistic interventions. While these same writers have generally been reluctant to pursue the drastic changes in form which have been one of the major trademarks

of modernism and post-modernism, the major revisions in critical theory and epistemology over the last three decades are having an effect on the supposedly "simple" act of "seeing Nature as it really is."

The formal and theoretical aspects of wilderness writing have yet to be addressed in a coherent manner, but one of the more suggestive attempts is Walker Percy's essay, "The Loss of the Creature." The essay is not specifically about wilderness or wilderness writing, but about the problematic ways in which culture interferes with the perception of reality. Percy begins his examination of these broad issues by referring to the status of modern American wilderness: now that large areas of wilderness have been "saved" and "preserved," and now that millions of Americans visit such areas, why is it that we might expect to be disappointed by contemporary wilderness writing or photography, and why might someone feel that something is seriously and inherently wrong with the ways in which we now confront wilderness?

Every explorer names his Island Formosa, beautiful. To him it is beautiful because, being first, he has access to it and can see it for what it is. But to no one else is it ever as beautiful -- except the rare man who manages to recover it, who knows that it has to be recovered.

Garcia Lopez de Cardenas discovered the Grand Canyon and was amazed at the sight. It can be imagined: One crosses miles of desert, breaks through the mesquite and there it is at one's feet. Later the government set the place aside as a national park, hoping to pass along to millions

the experience of Cardenas. Does not one see the same sight from the Bright Angel Lodge that Cardenas saw? (394)

The key term for Percy is not "discovery," but "recovery." His admonitions are not the usual well-rehearsed slanders of tourists and their "crimes of Kodachrome and ethnocentrism" (Schullery 155). For Percy, the role of the tourist is not easily transcended by the standard stategems of physical adventure, photographic skill, or more involved research about an area. He claims that we tend to choose such alternatives, such "ways of seeing," without realizing that they too have "already been formulated," and that even in one's very attempt at escape or non-conformity, such roles have already been prefigured:

Why is it almost impossible to gaze directly at the Grand Canyon under these circumstances and see it for what it is -- as one picks up a strange object from one's back yard and gazes directly at it? It is almost impossible because the Grand Canyon, the thing as it is, has been appropriated by the symbolic complex which has already been formed in the sightseer's mind. Seeing the canyon under approved circumstances is seeing the symbolic complex head on. The thing is no longer the thing as it confronted the Spaniard; it is rather that which has already been formulated -- by picture postcard, geography book, tourist folders, and the words "Grand Canyon." (395)

Percy warns us that the most attractive ways of avoiding or transcending acts of tourism are but different dialects of the same larger language. If, for example, one is tired of the formulaic reactions to a place such as Mount

McKinley, could an ascent of the peak be considered a means of revitalization? One who made such an attempt might soon "see the symbolic complex head on." He would find that Mount McKinley is now named Denali, Inuit for "the Great One"; he would find Denali "protected" by a six-million acre National Park roughly as large as Massachusetts; before climbing, he would be forced to watch the Park Service's version of "Clockwork Orange," a graphic half-hour presentation on the effects of frostbite, hypothermia, snowblindness, avalanches, and cerebral edema, and warned about the expenses of helicopter rescue; his images of the mountain might be gleaned from the photos of Ansel Adams, Galen Rowell, or Bradford Washburn; his daydreams of ecstasy of the summit might be blurred by the famous image of Tenzing Norkay raising his flag-wrapped ice-axe on the summit of Everest. Gradually, in Percy's terms, "the sightseer may be aware that something is wrong":

How can the sightseer recover the Grand Canyon? He can recover it in any number of ways, all sharing in common the strategem of avoiding the approved confrontation of the tour and the Park Service.  
(396)

In avoiding the various arrangements of the "Park Service," and all they represent, both the tourist and the modern wilderness writer face the dilemma of cursing the very system whose creation they may have supported and whose presence ensures the continued existence of wilderness.

The attempt to reconcile this problem -- namely, the recognition that many people both need and resent the contrivance of such Parks -- is the central theme of most wilderness writing after 1870. For example, writers such as John Muir, Clarence King, Bob Marshall, and Aldo Leopold are almost synonymous with the establishment of wilderness areas, and their writing generally displays the sense that such parks would indeed preserve not only wilderness but the possibilities of writing about such places. For contemporary writers such as Edward Hoagland, Edward Abbey, Gary Snyder, Anne LaBastille, or Galen Rowell, the parks are not only means of preserving wilderness -- they also act as monuments to their "creators," and to experience such areas is also to experience a certain heritage of writing and activism. For both the tourist and the wilderness writer, the problem becomes one of "sovereignty":

In the New Mexican desert, natives have occasionally come across strange-looking artifacts which have fallen from the skies and which are stenciled: "Return to U.S. Experimental Project, Alamogordo. Reward." The finder returns the object and is rewarded. He knows nothing of the nature of the object he has found and does not care to know. The sole role of the native, the highest role he can play, is that of finder and returner of the mysterious equipment.

The same is true of the layman's relation to "natural" objects in a modern technological society. No matter what the object or event is, whether it is a star, a swallow, a Kwakiutl, a "psychological phenomenon," the layman who confronts it does not confront it as a sovereign

person, as Crusoe confronts a seashell he finds on the beach. The highest role he can conceive himself as playing is to be able to recognize the title of the object, to return it to the appropriate expert and have it certified as a genuine find. He does not permit himself to see the thing -- as Gerald Manley Hopkins could see a rock or a cloud or a field. If anyone asks him why he doesn't look, he may reply that he didn't take that subject in college (or he hasn't read enough Faulkner). (401-2)

Recent American wilderness writing can be seen as an effort to have wilderness "certified as a genuine find." It is not, in Percy's terms, an act of discovery, but one of recovery, in which we reclaim the object as our own, rather than as the gift or province of some previously appointed "expert," be it a Park Service naturalist, a museum catalog, or a literary anthology. Yet even a brief history of attempts at such "recoveries" leads one to a bewildering array of possibilities.

There are many fascinating insights and misunderstandings regarding the status of American wilderness, the validity of American "wilderness" writing, and the relationship of such ideas and texts to American literature and recent critical theory. The difficulty of discussing the idea of wilderness in American literature becomes apparent when we consider the various and often contradictory ways in which American wilderness has been defined. Wilderness was a threatening wasteland to the early Puritans, a spiritual sanctuary to the Transcendentalists, an economic resource to the lumber and

railroad barons, a brutal, impersonal force to the Naturalists, and a metaphor of progress to generations of politicians. A controlling image is required, one that will both gather and distribute the values, ideas, associations, and controversies of the modern wilderness experience. Such images have already proved useful to scholarship about the American West and the pastoral ideal in America. For example, Henry Nash Smith used the symbols of Garden and Desert to clarify the various ways in which the West had been represented in nineteenth-century writing. Likewise, Leo Marx used the image of the Machine in the Garden to explain the theme of wilderness experience in Thoreau, Melville, Twain, and Fitzgerald. According to Marx, this image served both these writers and their readers as "a cardinal metaphor of contradiction, exfoliating, through associated images and ideas, into a design governing the meaning of entire works" (229). More recently, Richard Slotkin has studied how the images and rhetoric of the Indian wars have been readily adapted to seemingly distant concerns such as strike-breaking and foreign policy. To varying degrees, all these scholars have also shown how these "controlling" images are challenged and undermined by writers such as George Catlin, Melville, and Willa Cather.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "wilderness trails," such as the Cumberland, Oregon, Santa Fe or California Trail, allowed and defined certain aspects

of Western expansion. Besides improving the possibilities for transportation and settlement, these trails also served to organize the ways in which wilderness might be "promoted" or involved in America's attempts at self-definition. Trails provided a means for simplifying and distributing the incredibly varied perceptions of the "West." In the twentieth century, "wilderness trails" are still blazed, but in drastically different forms and circumstances: extensive public hiking trails such as the Appalachian Trail, the numerous trail systems in our National Parks, or even more esoteric trails such as those used by cavers or mountaineers. These various forms of trails are the major way in which Americans participate in an understanding of wilderness. Yet trails are more than simple guides for hikers: they are a concrete definition of many abstract ecological, historical, and cultural attitudes. Trails are also commonly used as metaphors for the creative process, for "exploring" new ideas, or "blazing the trail" into a "New Frontier" of "uncharted territory."

The "wilderness trail" provides a clear and simple image which nevertheless contains the central ambiguities and contradictions of wilderness experience and the ways in which it is presented in popular and literary cultures. The broad availability and use of wilderness trails presents confusing alternatives for people who try to experience wilderness by more intimate means than a ranger-guided slide

show. They have provided both opportunities and limits which many of us do not consider. The conditions of trail-building and the corresponding changes in wilderness attitudes are not easily understood in terms of intention and effect; whether the trails have been built to alter or enhance the essential perceptions of American hikers and writers is generally an unanswerable and perhaps even useless question. Instead one should consider the ways in which trails "commodify" past ideals of wilderness adventure. In this sense one must consider the replication of literary and artistic moments and locations, and how these are sustained, often by administrative action, in the form of a John Muir trail, a Thoreau Falls trail, a Bob Marshall wilderness area, or one of countless "Artist's Ledges." It is not only a matter of naming a mountain or lake after a person of merit: we are implicitly offered an authorization of certain aesthetic responses, of particular viewpoints, of various ecological hierarchies, of distinct literary methods, of approved methods of access.

These "authorizations" not only attempt to show how wilderness has been explored and defined in the past; they also confirm and generate present and future responses, and become structures for experience and memory. At times, these past ideals of wilderness experience are presented in ways which are all the more noticeable because of contemporary contexts which seemingly deny the sanctity of

the methods being praised. For example, at the top of Slide Mountain one will find a metal plaque imbedded in the last rock step. It reads:

In Memoriam

JOHN BURROUGHS

Who in his early writings introduced Slide Mountain to the world. He made many visits to this peak and slept several nights beneath this rock. This region is the scene of many of his essays. Here the works of man dwindle in the heart of the Southern Catskills.

The trail to Slide Mountain's summit allows hundreds of people to see these words and views each year, and to gain whatever inspiration they can. Yet the trail has long ago become an eroded rut, littered with beer cans and plastic wrappings. The fragile ecology of the summit area has been badly damaged by those who feel that no wilderness experience is complete without a bonfire.

One might argue that such local disturbances are almost inevitable in popular "wilderness areas," particularly those which lie within one hundred miles of several major cities. Yet such small-scale situations are symptomatic of more vast and complex problems which plague more extensive wilderness areas, most of which have trail systems. Despite obvious problems, modern trails and guidebooks often rely upon a vocabulary of optimism and renewal. While the general purposes of recent wilderness trails are quite unlike that

of pre-1890 trails, such differences and changes are often blurred by claims that trails provide a sort of mythic, transhistorical contact with nature. Such responses, however, are not only present in tourism brochures, but in the writings of serious wilderness advocates. One of the more concise and problematic examples of such claims comes from Sigurd Olson, one-time leader of the National Parks Association:

On the North American continent the frontiers seem very close, and we can almost hear the songs of the voyageurs and the rumble of caravans heading west. When I look back I am glad the old trails have branded me too, as the maverick we all are. It is good to know there is an escape if we choose to take it, for there are many wild and beautiful places as primitive as ever. (from Of Time and Place)

The mythologies of the Frontier, the voyageurs, the mavericks, or the mountain men continue to sustain us and confuse us. "Wilderness trails" provide a significant means for perpetuating such images, even during eras when wilderness rapidly disappears. As I have argued, the role of trails cannot be easily assessed in terms of intention and effect. Yet the establishment of lengthy wilderness trails provides a concise historical context for changing attitudes concerning wilderness and wilderness writing in the "post-Frontier" age; in particular, such trails attempt to re-create, on a minor scale, the epic journeys of the early Western settlers. Vermont's 265-mile Long Trail was

established during the 1930s, the 2,015 Appalachian Trail was completed in August of 1937, and the 212-mile John Muir Trail was finished in 1938. Such efforts are far from over; the 2,500-mile Pacific Coast Crest Trail, which runs down the spine of the Sierra Nevada from Canada to Mexico, was only recently finalized. One need not be a cynic to note that that modern trails hardly demand the rigours of the Oregon or Santa Fe Trails; they are for recreation rather than settlement, for recovery rather than discovery. Hikers on such trails will rely on up-to-date guidebooks, not the oral lore and almost fantastic maps of the early West. Yet such trails remain valuable because they attempt to sustain the possibility of an extended wilderness journey: it generally requires more time to hike the Pacific Crest Coast Trail than it required to travel the Oregon Trail. Such trails offer and rely upon a hope which is often naive, but whose attractiveness is undeniable. One hiker of the Appalachian Trail put it this way:

I remembered the story of a backpacker who emerged from the trail into the parking lot at Newfound Gap in the Tennessee-North Carolina Smokies. A pudgy, sandaled tourist hailed him: "Hey, buddy, where's that path lead to?"

The hiker silenced him with one word: "Maine."  
(Fisher 12).

Such comments attempt not only to imagine a unified path from Georgia to Maine, but to deny or ignore those forces which have led to division. Within such pleasant assertions

remain the unstated disappointments of such experiences. John Muir advised us, "Go into the mountains and get their glad tidings," while also warning us that "only by going alone in silence, without baggage, can one truly get into the heart of the wilderness."

Trails often attempt to establish some sense of continuity between past and present experiences of wilderness. The current situation in John Muir's beloved Sierras is indicative of the bizarre problems and compromises which have arisen from America's interest in the outdoors. The John Muir Trail from Mount Whitney to Yosemite Valley was to be a monument to Muir's achievements, but as Galen Rowell explains in his recent article, "The John Muir Trail: Along the High, Wild Sierra," the southern terminus of the trail exemplifies how public enthusiasm for wilderness actually threatens wilderness experience:

"Solitude," DeGraff proclaimed, letting the word hang for a long moment, "is a legal requirement of designated wilderness. Congress directs us to provide 'outstanding opportunities for solitude.' The creation of the John Muir Wilderness forced us to make a tough decision on public access. During holiday weekends we had over a thousand people on the 11-mile Mount Whitney trail, which connects with the Muir trail two miles below the summit of the mountain. That's hardly what you'd call solitude. We saw just two alternatives: Either remove Whitney from the wilderness or limit access to the mountain. We chose the latter and set a trail quota in 1974. The lure of the summit is so great that we have a lottery for summer permits. If you don't apply early, you might be out of luck." (480)

The northern end of the trail leads to Muir's "temple," to Yosemite Valley. Yet in many ways Yosemite is suffering even worse problems. The valley itself not only has a network of roads, but also offers bus service and bicycle rentals; it has slide shows of Yosemite Falls for those people who don't desire to walk another half-mile to see the actual falls; several years ago it had its first "gridlock episode" during a holiday weekend; although it does not have its own graveyard, it has taken a step towards civilization by installing a small prison for drunks and thieves. Two of Muir's most cherished places have come to represent what Edward Abbey calls "industrial tourism" (Desert Solitaire 45-67). Rather than appearing to be a place where we "choose" to "escape," the John Muir Trail itself seemed tainted. As Galen Rowell says, it was enough to scare off would-be visitors: "I had spent many years trekking and climbing in the High Sierra of California without following the whole John Muir Trail, assuming it was too crowded for real pleasure" (475).

When one visits Yosemite or Whitney, one "sees the symbolic complex head-on": the photographs, the tour brochures, the permits, the rangers, the tourists. Yet as Rowell explains, after hiking a few miles from the crowded trail-head, "we had the Muir Trail virtually to ourselves"; when he and two friends travelled the trail in winter, they saw no one for the first 160 miles. While the "symbolic

complex" might be less prevalent and obvious among the isolated peaks of the Sierra Range, the trail still acts as a source of "authority," or in Percy's terms, "sovereignty." Some of Percy's comments on "sovereignty" may seem rather over-stated, until one notices how the trail may "authorize" the ways in which we experience wilderness. Percy claims that our desire is to have our experiences certified as "genuine," and that we seek such certification from various "experts." Along the John Muir Trail, the presence of "experts" is implicit in the naming of the mountains: those who complete the trail will pass areas named after Wheeler, Ansel Adams, McLure, Dana, Lyell, Darwin, Mather, Pinchot, Tyndall, Whitney, Clarence King, and LeConte -- an encyclopedia of activists, surveyors, climbers, authors, scientists, and geologists who have, in effect, created the ways in which visitors may see such peaks.

Considering this array of obstacles, what can we expect from contemporary wilderness writers? Rowell's disappointments are over-matched by his steady enthusiasm; he claims that the trail "can be crowded near trailheads, but its heart is wilder than much of the Himalaya." One central question of his essay is whether one can still share the enthusiasm which John Muir felt for the area which now bears his name. Rowell's actions and responses are implicitly compared to those of Muir, who had claimed,

The last days of this glacial winter are not yet past, so young is our world. I used to envy the father of our race, dwelling as he did...with the new-made fields and plants of Eden; but I do so no more, because I have discovered that I also live in 'creation's dawn.' The morning stars still sing together, and the world, not yet half-made, becomes more beautiful everyday (Muir, quoted in Rowell 485).

Rowell is one of America's finest wilderness photographers, and has written eloquently of the wilderness areas of Alaska, the Himalaya, and his own native California. Yet in this article his song seems to stick in his throat. Rowell's article ends with a scene of climbing reminiscent of Muir's ascent of Mount Ritter, but here life does not "blaze forth with preternatural clearness":

On an August day in 1988 three friends joined me to climb the steepest side of Pliscator Peak using ropes and hardware for safety. Although I had expected the peak to have had countless ascents from other directions, I found no indication of human presence at the summit. As I gathered a simple pile of stones and placed them on top, I thought about my mother's party doing the same thing on the summit of the Hermit six decades earlier.

That a distinctive, 11,343-foot mountain in California remained unclimbed until 1988 is a testimonial to the continuing wildness of the John Muir Trail. (492)

Part of Rowell's shortcomings can be attributed to National Geographic's preference for clear information over visionary ecstasy, for in other essays he has written of such ascents with vigor and insight. But in a general sense it is one's expectation, one's hope that Rowell would actually

share Muir's sense of communion, which might prevent a reader from seeing the value of modern wilderness writing. Two of the texts which I will discuss at length in later chapters, Aldo Leopold's A Sand County Almanac and Barry Lopez's Arctic Dreams, make no attempt to match Muir, Parkman, or Melville on their own terms of adventure. Instead, Leopold, Lopez, and others try to break away from certain nineteenth-century expectations and possibilities which can only lead to disappointment in twentieth-century writing. For them, the "wildness of the John Muir Trail" cannot be sustained by looking for a few remaining unclimbed peaks, but by modernizing personal and cultural ideas about ecology, natural history, and the spiritual aspects of wilderness.

Such issues as adventure, access, tourism, ecology and wilderness writing can easily become bewildering, but placing them within the context of trails makes any attempt to discuss wilderness and American culture more manageable. For trails have become one of the major ways in which Americans participate in our wilderness heritage. Clearly such participation is not without its contradictions. Terms such as "trail blazer" and "wilderness trail" force us to consider the awkward balance of tradition and experimentation which has defined much of American politics and literature. As I have suggested, we need to reassess the status of American wilderness and the validity of

"wilderness" writing. It is also important that we relate the idea of wilderness to various recent developments in critical theory, or what Geoffrey Hartman has called "criticism in the wilderness."

The sheer amount and range of current critical debates can be intimidating and confusing. Yet as Louis Althusser has said, such controversies are a labor towards "the simplest acts of our existence: seeing, listening, speaking, reading" (see Roudiez 2). Nature writing has often made claims to see things as they really are: Edward Abbey, like many others, claims that he wants "to confront, immediately and directly if it's possible, the bare bones of existence, the elemental and fundamental, the bedrock which sustains us" (Desert Solitaire 6). Of course many current critical stances would question whether we ever free ourselves from the influence of structural, ideological, intertextual, and linguistic assumptions. Trails, either as actual paths or as metaphors, can clarify the relationship between critical theory and wilderness ideas. Are the ways in which we "see" wilderness determined by aesthetic or political assumptions? Is John Muir's claim that he "listened" to the language of rocks a foolish conceit or a fascinating challenge to our range of hearing? It is often said that language "speaks" us; does the trail also "speak" a passive participant? Does a trail enhance or interfere with our process of "reading" wilderness? In what ways do these various effects reinforce,

contradict, or undermine our experience? New trails, sub-trails, historic trails, government-owned trails: in various ways, trails mediate in the reading/writing of wilderness.

The trail represents two important and at times contradictory impulses in American culture. On one hand we have wilderness, the Frontier, Nature, or as Frederick Jackson Turner said, "a gate of escape from the bondage of the past" (227); on the other hand we have civilization, traditional places, the home, the Metropolis. "Wilderness trails" encapsulate both experimentation and certainty, both the independence of a solitary hiker and the implicit sharing of paths and ideas that hundreds of people have already experienced. The use of the trail as a controlling image will gently force me to focus my considerations of basic questions. I hope to begin a process of both unifying and challenging the assumptions of earlier critics and historians of wilderness ideas. While there is obviously a wide range of questions regarding wilderness, many are related to the concrete circumstances of actual trails. In this way, abstract questions can perhaps be clarified. For example, critics such as Marjorie Hope Nicholson, Paul Shepard, and J. Baird Callicott have researched and categorized various aesthetic models or priorities which are implicit in our views of Nature. In numerous ways, trails enact these priorities by "leading" groups of people to "classic" viewpoints, while ignoring certain "non-scenic"

areas. Likewise, critics such as Frederick Jackson Turner, Henry Nash Smith, Leo Marx, Lee Clark Mitchell, and Roderick Nash have discussed the relationship of wilderness to the various ideals of a distinctly "American" culture. Trails often include or feature references to both the popular and complex versions of America's wilderness heritage, to its pioneering spirit, its voices for preservation, its history of blind damage.

Jane Tompkins, Sacvan Bercovitch and numerous others have questioned whether the study of Literature also requires a study of texts which are considered non-literary or sub-literary. Earlier critics such as Norman Foerster have asked this question of wilderness writing in particular; to imagine a culture without canons or a wilderness without trails seems naive, disturbing, and simply impractical -- yet the possibility is still suggested in new Alaskan parks and new literary histories. Also, our "discoveries" and "conquests" of wilderness have often served as metaphors for seemingly distant social concerns. Critics such as Richard Slotkin, Annette Kolodny, Martin Green, and Melvin Dixon have studied the ways in which our history of wilderness adventure has neglected or silenced those who could not share in this process: the poor, slaves, blacks, women. The history of American expansion is filled with examples of this silencing; certain existing trails serve to remind us that this process of exclusion still

continues. To rephrase Frederick Jackson Turner, we should confront rather than escape the bondage of the past, and despite the confusion and possible pain that this confrontation brings, understanding our place and role within American culture and history is eventually more important and satisfying than naively "getting back to Nature." Indeed it is this conflict which is a major theme of so many of the most intriguing texts about wilderness.

## Chapter Two

Trails and Museums:  
Models for a Wilderness Aesthetic

A nobler want of man is served by nature, namely,  
the love of beauty.

-- from Emerson's "Nature"

This is the most beautiful place on earth. There are  
many such places.

-- from Edward Abbey's  
Desert Solitaire

We have...a continent to subdue with the plough and  
the railroad, before we are at leisure for aesthetics  
....Our spirit of adventure will first take a  
material and practical direction.

-- from James Russell Lowell's  
"Nationality in Literature"

In his essay "Nature," Emerson enumerates the most  
important of our relations to nature, beginning with the  
relatively "low" status of "Commodity," moving through  
"Beauty," "Language," and "Discipline" toward the higher  
goals of "Idealism" and "Spirit." Among these, natural  
beauty does not receive the highest praise. As Emerson  
explains,

Truth and goodness and beauty are but different  
faces of the same All. But beauty in nature is not  
ultimate. It is the herald of inward and internal  
beauty, and is not alone a solid and satisfactory  
good. It must stand as a part, and not as yet the

last or highest expression of the final causes of Nature. (196)

While beauty may not be the "highest expression" of Nature's importance for Emerson, beauty does have very immediate importance in the American understanding of wilderness. The beauty of American landscape has consistently provided a basis for claims that America is uniquely blessed; the appreciation of natural beauty continues to be a major political justification for the preservation of large wilderness areas. At all levels of American culture, from Thoreau and Thomas Cole to popular magazines and cigarette advertising, one sees the close and almost automatic associations between nature and beauty. Thus J. Baird Callicot's assertion that "natural aesthetics is a pitifully underworked topic in Western philosophical and critical literature" seems rather surprising (159). Contemporary wilderness writers have jettisoned many of the dominant aesthetic ideas of the nineteenth century, and have yet to establish a coherent aesthetic for twentieth-century nature.

Authors and tourists do not lack the enthusiasm to appreciate "America the Beautiful," yet they frequently lack a means of explaining why one should value a view of the Tetons more than one of a salt marsh, or why White, Flint's, or Goose Pond are less memorable than their neighbor Walden. In general, natural aesthetics have often relied upon

contemporary attitudes concerning science, politics, technology, and art: the whale that is understood by means of sonar-tracking, whaling treaties, scuba-divers, and audio-visual taping is not the same type of whale that Melville saw. There are three distinct aesthetic paradigms which are prevalent in twentieth-century texts about wilderness. The first, which is predominant in outdoor magazines, trail guides, and the general tourist culture, is a popular aesthetic based on the standard categories of "the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime." The second, appearing in a variety of works by authors such as Hemingway, Dos Passos, Faulkner, or Eliot, is a literary aesthetic closely related to the aesthetics of Impressionist or Modernist painting. The most important and controversial theory, based mostly on the writings of Aldo Leopold, is a relatively unknown "ecological" aesthetic which opposes many of the concepts of both popular tourism and literary modernism. It is this last aesthetic which marks off one major division between nineteenth and twentieth-century writing about wilderness. "Ecological" aesthetics provide the underpinning for the more revisionist and subversive aspects of modern wilderness writing. Thus far, most literary scholars have not appreciated the role of "ecological" aesthetics in contemporary wilderness writing, and for that reason, many of these texts have been ignored or misrepresented.

Twentieth-century natural aesthetics are directly related to the emergence of what Roderick Nash calls the "Wilderness Cult." As he explains, "By the early twentieth century appreciation of wilderness had spread from a relatively small group of Romantic and patriotic literati to become a national cult" (143). While recent enthusiasm for wild places has obvious precedents in Romantic writing, such attitudes appear in bolder relief when contrasted to the aesthetic norms of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One should not exaggerate the so-called "revolutions" associated with both British and American Romanticism, yet certain ideas of natural beauty drastically altered between 1680 and 1880. One may easily forget how an appreciation of wild rivers, panoramic vistas, open prairies, and rugged sea-shores is not only a matter of geography and landscape, but of a shift in aesthetics, one which has placed less emphasis on theological considerations, one which has made different assumptions about the "order" that Nature should reveal and justify, one inspired by new means of exploration and adventure. An indication of this shift is the changing depictions of mountain scenery. Most modern readers are not surprised that artists such as Wordsworth, Thoreau, Byron, or Thomas Cole portrayed Mount Snowdon, Mount Ktaadn, the Jungfrau, or Kaaterskill Falls as fascinating sources of beauty, power, fear, and insight. However, as Marjorie Hope Nicolson

explains in her book Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory, both the tourists and artists of the earlier seventeenth century often judged mountains as deformations of the earth's surface, as if someone had taken a valuable manuscript and crumpled it to form peaks, ridges, and valleys. Until the late seventeenth century, mountains were often described in terms which would seem quite odd to a modern reader. These lines by Andrew Marvell refer to several prevailing notions about mountain scenery:

Here learn, ye mountains more unjust,  
Which to abrupter greatness thrust,  
That do with your hook-shouldered height  
The earth deform and heaven fright,  
For whose excrescence, ill-designed,  
Nature must a new centre find,  
Learn here those humble steps to tread,  
Which to securer glory lead.

See what a soft access and wide  
Lies open to its grassy side;  
Nor with the rugged path deters  
The feet of breathless travellers.  
See how courteous it ascends,  
And all the way it rises bends;  
Nor for itself the height does gain,  
But only strives to rise the plain.

("Upon the Hill and Grove," lines 9-24)

Roughly 150 years later, Shelley would judge mountains in different terms:

Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal  
Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood  
By all, but which the wise, and great, and good  
Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel.

("Mont Blanc," lines 80-83)

The differences in the two poems represent certain general shifts toward a nineteenth-century Romantic appreciation of landscape: mountains were no longer seen as "unjust," as an affront to "heaven," but as a source of moral opposition to "fraud and woe"; mountains were at times considered dangerous or hostile areas, yet rarely would they be described as "ill-designed" or "hook-shouldered"; while poets continued to praise areas with "a soft access and wide," writers such as Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley struggled to understand the Power which "dwells apart in its tranquility, / Remote, serene, and inaccessible" ("Mont Blanc," lines 96-7).

Nicolson and other scholars have isolated several factors which led to a renewed aesthetic, one which replaced "gloom" with "glory." From roughly 1680 until 1780, writers established the theoretical basis for a renewed aesthetic of nature, especially of those aspects of nature which had previously seemed either too large or too forbidding to contemplate or portray. Thomas Burnet's Sacred Theory of the Earth (1684), Addison's "The Pleasures of the Imagination" (1712), and Edmund Burke's Essay on the Sublime and the Beautiful (1757), as well as numerous other works of the period, firmly established the idea of the Sublime. While there was a wide range of theoretical writing about the Sublime during this time, it was not until the late eighteenth century that painters and poets fully realized

the possibilities of this evolving aesthetic.

From 1780 to 1880, British writers based many of their landscape descriptions upon this aesthetic. Poems such as Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage feature descriptions of mountainous areas which would have been quite unusual a century before:

Above me are the Alps,  
The palaces of nature whose vast walls  
Have pinnacled in clouds their snowy scalps  
And throned eternity in icy halls  
Of cold sublimity where forms and falls  
The avalanche -- the thunderbolt of snow!  
All that expands the spirit, yet appalls,  
Gathers around these summits, as to show  
How earth may pierce to heaven, yet leave vain  
man below.

(Canto III, stanza 62)

The enthusiastic reception of this poem is indicative of the ways in which changes in aesthetics were not only of interest to artists and philosophers, but to a large popular audience as well. A heightened popular interest in Alpine scenery was fueled by authors such as John Ruskin and John David Forbes, and further promoted by men such as Albert Smith, whose lecture and slide show about his climb of Mont Blanc ran for six years (Newby 25-31).

The concepts of the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime gradually had a similar influence on American writers and their audience. In a sense, this aesthetic was ready-made for American landscape. While America lacked the ruins, the churches, or the antiquity of Europe, its

landscape was well-suited for an "aesthetics of the Infinite." The Catskills and Adirondacks, the Hudson River, the Great Plains, and the Rockies offered distinctly "American" landscapes; artists and photographers such as Thomas Cole, Albert Bierstadt, Frederic Church, George Catlin, W.H. Jackson, and Thomas Moran all considered the American landscape ideal for large, panoramic works. American writers also shared this enthusiasm for the picturesque. Washington Irving's descriptions from his popular A Tour of the Prairies (1832) clearly rely upon such concepts. It is not only that Irving refers to a "picturesque" encampment (451) or to "the landscape deriving sublimity from its vastness and simplicity" (493). The earlier sections of this text are adorned with numerous references which align the landscape of the American frontier with the traditions of European art. For example, we read that "the foliage had a yellow autumnal tint which gave to the sunny landscape the golden tone of one of the landscape of Claude Lorraine" (462) or that "the attitudes of the wild horse and the almost naked savage, would have formed studies for a painter or a statuary" (434).

This tendency to categorize landscape as "beautiful, picturesque, or sublime" was quite evident throughout the century, and at times led to an ineffective cluttering of superlatives. For example, in Clarence Dutton's "Canyon Country" (1882), the author claims that "the Grand Canyon of

the Colorado is a great innovation in modern ideas of scenery, and in our conceptions of the grandeur, beauty, and power of nature" (173). He begs the reader "to dismiss from his mind, so far as practicable, any preconceived notion" of how the Canyon "should" be described. Yet the very next paragraph is a discussion of the Canyon's "sublimity." It is "by far the most sublime of all earthly spectacles," and "the sublimest thing on earth." Indeed the vantage point for most of Dutton's views was named Point Sublime. Numerous wilderness writers, particularly John Muir, John Wesley Powell, and Clarence King, often used the descriptive vocabulary of "the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime" without calling critical attention to its European sources, without questioning its accuracy in portraying a changing national attitude towards the "American" landscape, and without fully realizing how such an aesthetic could be misappropriated to justify the abusive land policies of the late nineteenth century.

During the latter half of the nineteenth-century, several major American writers dismissed these categories as forms of interference with the processes of perception and writing. For example, Thoreau had read Burke's Of the Sublime and the Beautiful, as well as William Gilpin's travelogues and comments on the picturesque (Cameron 114). Yet Thoreau was far from comfortable with either of these authors. As Sharon Cameron comments,

He rejects Burke because he wants to redefine what it means to see without primary reference to human affect, even as he acknowledges the interference of that affect. He rejects Gilpin because he wants to write about landscapes without aestheticizing what he is seeing, even as he acknowledges that to consider nature's composition is to make a composition of it oneself. (114)

Mark Twain also fought to expand and "Americanize" the available aesthetic vocabulary. In his numerous travel books, especially The Innocents Abroad, he was, as Leo Marx argues, "obviously working within the convention of the picturesque. Yet it should be added at once that he was not comfortable in that mode" (21). In works such as Huckleberry Finn, Twain tries to break away from "high-brow" versions of natural scenery. This shift required an aesthetic which was based more on personal emotion and physical experience, rather than abstract categories and analytical distinctions. In Life on the Mississippi and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Twain demanded that American landscape be described in "American" language. He relied upon the vernacular, upon regional language, to establish the peculiar regional characteristics of landscape, of that "monstrous big river down there":

The first thing to see, looking away over the water, was a kind of dull line -- that was the woods on t'other side; you couldn't make nothing else out; then a pale place in the sky; then more paleness spreading around; then the river softened 'up away off; and warn't black anymore, but gray. (Huckleberry Finn, Ch. XIX)

In summary, Thomas Burnet's Sacred Theory of the Earth (1684) and Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn (1884) mark off a distinct period in the development of an aesthetics of landscape. The period was marked by an increasing reliance upon the aesthetic vocabulary of "the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime." These concepts encouraged a keener interest in the scenery of mountains, deserts, oceans, and panoramic views; in Marjorie Nicholson's terms, the idea of the "sublime" provided an "Aesthetics of the Infinite." Yet it gradually became apparent that the possibilities for this aesthetic model were far from infinite. As the terms became better known, they were used in a clichéd and automatic fashion. Eventually, writers began to question whether this aesthetic model was well-suited to the description of the American landscape. In turn, they sought to establish a new aesthetic model which would allow them to describe landscape in modern terms.

If any generalization can be made about contemporary wilderness aesthetics, it would be that the terminology of "the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime" has all but disappeared from serious works of art or literature. Most twentieth-century writers, painters or writers hesitate to depict the "sublime aspects" of a landscape; if used at all, references to the "sublime" would probably be presented ironically. However, the concepts of "the beautiful, the picturesque, and sublime" have not lost their power and

Influence in popular representations of American landscape. Photographs of Nova Scotian fishing villages, Adirondack mountain lakes, or the face of Yosemite Valley's El Capitan fill popular bookstores and adorn office walls; New Age videos, nature shows, John Denver songs, and calendars both create and fulfill an appetite for "good views." Yet this abundance of images generates confusion as well, for it is increasingly difficult to clearly delineate which particular images or views are "popular" and which are "complex." One can say, however, that the distinction between a "popular" and "complex" aesthetic is generally not a matter of which objects are chosen for contemplation: in other words, both a Banana Republic brochure and an Ernest Hemingway story might describe Kilimanjaro, the north Michigan woods, the Florida coastline, or a great fish leaping out of the water. The difference between the two is generally not dependent on which objects -- mountains, coastlines, animals -- are selected for description or evaluation. Nor is it a matter of scale: panoramic views tend to be "popular," yet a work like Peter Mattheissen's The Tree Where Man Was Born uses panoramic views in a complex way. Popular responses to landscape are generally little more than an approval of the accepted standards of taste which are encoded in the popular experience of "wilderness."

As Walker Percy has explained, one major dilemma of the modern wilderness writer is to "recover" or "rescue" certain

special areas from their over-exposure in popular culture, or as Percy's phrases it, in the "symbolic complex." Consider El Capitan and Half Dome, Mount St. Helens, the Grand Canyon, the Everglades, Old Faithful, Denali (Mt. McKinley), Crater Lake, the Catskills, or the Adirondacks: all of these areas are icons of America's natural beauty, and all are included in our system of parks and preserves, which directs the millions of people who visit these areas each year. The Catskills, for example, have long been a source of interest for tourists and artists alike. We know that during the nineteenth century the Catskills inspired numerous stories, descriptions, images, and paintings. The setting for Washington Irving's "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" was only a short distance from the scene of Thomas Cole's well-known painting of Kaaterskill Falls; thousands of tourists, including many from Europe, came to the Catskill Mountain House or the Overlook Hotel, while more isolated figures, such as John Burroughs, spent their days on Slide Mountain or in Kaaterskill Clove. Today the Catskills are still considered a beautiful area for outdoor enthusiasts; yet few would quickly claim that they still provide a source of artistic inspiration. Can the modern writer share in the celebration of such places, or are they better left for the tourist mobs, while the artist seeks out a place of less obvious beauty and seeks to redeem it by its secrecy or its purely personal value? Can an

artist extricate an area such as El Capitan or Kaaterskill Falls from the "symbolic complex," from the process of popularization?

Most Americans experience "wilderness" by means of the parks which preserve such areas, and by the trails which are provided for hikers, naturalists, hunters, or tourists. These trails are more than simple paths for our convenience; they make many decisions for us. The association between trails and "good views" is not a matter of subtle hints and nuances -- it is quite clearly one of the major purposes of trails. Indeed, it seems to have been the major criteria in the listing of "The Ten Best Trails of the World," which recently appeared in Backpacker, which calls itself the "The Magazine of Wilderness Adventure." One of the selections is the Long Trail, which runs 265 miles from the northern border of Massachusetts to the southern border of Canada. The role of the trail is made quite clear:

This trail is designed to lift your spirits high. Whenever possible, it finds a ridge to follow; whenever the trees open enough for a view over the rolling Green Mountains, there you'll find the Long Trail. It seems to skirt every pond from Massachusetts to Canada. (67)

Here the active participation of a hiker seems to disappear, only to be replaced by the guiding hand of the Trail and those who "designed" it. All aesthetic desires will be taken care of; one need not search in vain for a view. All that is required is patience and trust, for the Trail will provide

an ample selection of ridges, views, and ponds. The trail acts as a silent tour guide, as the curator for visits to this museum.

The trail not only provides the physical opportunity to travel to a particular vantage point; it also mediates in the evaluation of such views. A clear example of this mediation can be found on the well-known Escarpment Trail in the northern Catskills. Few trails in the United States come as close to serving as a museum. In this case, the trail is an excursion along many of the actual viewpoints used by painters of the Hudson River School. It begins just above Kaaterskill Clove, "which so frequently served the painters of the Hudson River School as a subject that it must be considered one of their icons" (Metropolitan Museum of Art 117). The trail quickly ascends along the east side of Kaaterskill Falls, near the vantage point of Thomas Cole's painting, "Falls Of Kaaterskill." In fact, the trail leads people to the vantage points used by artists such as Jasper Cropsey, Sanford R. Gifford, Frederic E. Church, and Asher B. Durand, and even crosses Thomas Cole Peak near its northern terminus. Near the site of the old Catskill Mountain House, the trail also manages to cross Pine Orchard, one of the settings used for Cooper's The Pioneers (Metropolitan Museum 108-112, 117-124, 203-205, 222-227, 238-240).

Most of the guide-books to the Escarpment Trail do not

provide many details about the literature and art which are associated with this trail. They are, however, quite emphatic in their evaluations. The view from Artist's Ledge is "an excellent view of the Hudson Valley," while the view from a unnamed ledge one-half mile up the trail is also considered "excellent." The map suggests that the view from North Point exceeds these, and is thus labelled "spectacular." In case such suggestions are insufficient, the trail map also places small black stars near worthy viewpoints. Seeing these views from the trail is meeting Percy's "symbolic complex" head-on. There is little doubt that the views from the Escarpment Trail are indeed excellent; yet we do not see them as much as they are shown to us by the form of the trail and by the comments offered by maps and guidebooks. The presence of the trail implies that these are correct views, while the comments on the map make this evaluation explicit. The supplemental knowledge that these views are those of "classic" American painting serves as a final confirmation. These various "mediations" strongly influence our responses: like the caption to an "award-winning" photograph or the introduction to a short story in The Norton Anthology, the context of trails, maps, and comments anticipates our choices and evaluations. The prescribed role in such situations is to confirm and not to challenge, to accept and not to discover. As Percy says,

The highest point, the term of the sightseer's

satisfaction, is not the sovereign discovery of the thing before him; it is rather the measuring up of the thing to the criterion of the preformed symbolic complex. (395)

This entanglement in the various popular representations of wilderness is not simply a matter for curious hikers, weekend photographers, or amateur painters. The relation of trails to contemporary writing about wilderness is also problematic. There are numerous ways in which contemporary writers try to avoid, destroy, or re-invigorate popular ideas about wilderness. But what happens when writers do NOT make such an attempt? Certain popular trails have come to be closely associated with tourists and "good views;" thus it should not surprise one to find that Backpacker magazine not only listed the ten best trails, but also listed "The Ten Best Hiking Views in North America." The article begins with this claim:

Describe your favorite hike. Invariably, one of the first things you'll mention is the view, probably one that in a single sweep of the eye gives you a feeling for the essence of the whole region. (52)

For a typical listing of the values of such scenery, this description of Berg Lake in British Columbia will suffice:

You won't take this view lightly. To start with, chances are you won't even glimpse the peak you're here to see, it's that often buried in clouds and storms. And you'll also hear, and probably feel in your bones, the crashing sounds of glacier ice calving into the lake. But when the storm clouds clear, the mountain above shines brilliant in

sheets of ice and crumbling walls of semi-frozen shale. Long regarded as the monarch on the Canadian Rockies, Mt. Robson reigns with a fist of ice. From its massive flanks tumble dramatically broken glaciers that plunge directly into Berg Lake. So abrasive is the ice that the lake is milky white with glacial flour. (53)

On closer reading, one finds that the majority of these "Ten Best" descriptions actually feature the elimination or reduction of detail. At best, one is offered a litany of classic sights: a forest, a glacial lake, a snowy peak, a crystal blue sky, or an ominous storm. The images of "clouds and storms," of "crashing sounds," of "dramatically broken glaciers" is reminiscent of many nineteenth-century description of mountains, in which sublimity was often closely related to "all that expands the spirit, yet appalls." Yet in these descriptions, a natural scene is not judged by its beauty, but by its size and activity. We are left with a debased version of the tradition of "the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime." As Callicott points out, this predominant popular aesthetic offers little, and obscures quite a bit:

While painting and the other arts moved on to other fashions -- romanticism, impressionism, cubism, abstract expressionism, etc. -- and artifactual aesthetic theory in the work of John Ruskin, Clive Bell, Roger Fry, George Santayana, and others kept abreast, popular taste in nature remained more or less tied to the picturesque. And natural aesthetic theory languished. Hence we continue to admire and preserve primarily "landscapes," "sceneries," and "views" according

to essentially eighteenth-century standards of taste inherited from Gilpin, Price and their contemporaries.

The prevailing natural aesthetic thus is not autonomous, but derivative from art; it is conventionalized, not well informed by the ecological and evolutionary revolutions in natural history; and it is sensational and self-referential, not genuinely oriented to nature on nature's own terms. In a word, it is trivial.

Naturally occurring scenic or picturesque landscapes are regarded, like the art they imitate, to be precious social resources and are stored, accordingly, in "museums" (the national parks) or private "collections" (the landscaped estates of the wealthy). They are visited and admired by patrons just like their originals deposited in the actual museums and urban centers. (160)

Callcott correctly defines the major characteristics and problems of the recent popular aesthetic of nature. In summary, this aesthetic offers little promise for tourists, and even less for serious artists. The continued references to it in outdoor magazines only demonstrate its limitations. The "museum" attitude which is promoted by the popular aesthetic not only leads to a passive role for those who participate in it. It also contributes to a national land policy which retains areas of beauty in parks/museums, while assuming an attitude of benign neglect or open hostility towards lands which are not considered beautiful: a climber in Mount Ranier National Park can gaze from the peak and see the clear-cutting which lumber companies begin just outside the Park limits.

"Popular" aesthetics provide a convenient model for

tourists, but offer few possibilities for a serious modern writer. Yet such writers have had great difficulties in establishing a coherent aesthetic for contemporary American landscapes. For many American writers the "closing of the Frontier" seemed to signify the closure of certain American themes and settings -- there would be no more mountain men, no virgin land, no Indians, no Lewis and Clark expeditions. Writers sensed that the "green light" that Jay Gatsby saw was about to change, that we were. In the words of Robinson Jeffers, a "perishing republic." America had already become an industrial accident, a "waste land," or as F. Scott Fitzgerald put it, "A Garden of Ashes." It is not at all difficult to find examples of an "aesthetics of the nightmarish landscape." T.S. Eliot, Thomas Pynchon, William Gass, William Faulkner, Norman Mailer, and others have provided ample descriptions of our previous losses, and of even more horrific possibilities of future damage:

The oncoming world of parallel colostomies draining into the same main line, and the air of earth cities becomes carbon monoxide and lead, sulphur dioxide and ash, nitrogen oxide and the other particulates of the noxious, earth staggering with sewages that did not rot, synthetics, aluminums, oils and pesticides, fertilizers, detergents and nuclear spews, acids and plastics and salts in the soil, cakes of suffocation in the rivers, hazes of nitrogen effluent to cut off the light from the sky, a burgeoning of artificials to addict the soils, another year of pollutions to choke the planet. (Mailer, from "Of a Fire on the Moon")

Descriptions of the "Exploited Eden" have proliferated

in twentieth-century literature, and oil spills, toxic waste dumping, nuclear accidents, acid rain, and global deforestation will surely provide new variations on this theme. Considering the extent of our losses, how could American writers establish a renewed aesthetic, one which would, in the words of Leo Marx, "manage to suggest the lovely possibilities of life without neglecting its terrors?" (33). The advent of Modernism seemed to provide such an opportunity. The open landscape of the nineteenth century had suggested a range of innovations to the artists of the picturesque tradition. The diminishing landscapes and the muted dreams of the twentieth century required new techniques. Authors experimented with the revised spatial orders of Late Impressionist and Cubist painting; they used myth to suggest the larger implications of seemingly minor actions; their emphasis on hard, clear imagery re-invigorated even the most mundane situations; their drastic alterations of verse lines and sentence structures allowed them to catch the rhythms of particular actions with increasing precision. In certain ways, the settings, the themes, and the actions of Modernist texts seemed rather similar to their nineteenth-century predecessors. Yet the refinement of Modernist techniques gave renewed significance to familiar material: the tree by the side of the river, the troubled man seeking solace, the hunter loading his gun. Ernest Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River," from his

collection In Our Time, is an attempt to once again find solace, or perhaps even inspiration, in the American landscape. It is not a story of discovery, like so many nineteenth-century texts, but rather of recovery, of returning to what Hemingway calls "the good place...his home where he had made it."

In Hemingway's early works, images of beauty often stand out in bold relief against a background of violence; indeed, it is not uncommon to find scenes of violence which are portrayed in terms usually reserved for descriptions of beauty. Several of the interludes between the stories of In Our Time refer to battles and bullfights. These are not described in the "abstract" terms which Hemingway ridiculed in A Farewell to Arms; rather, each episode has the effect of a "composition," with details according to aesthetic, rather than moral, priorities.

It was a frightfully hot day. We'd jammed an absolutely perfect barricade across the bridge. It was simply priceless. A big old wrought-iron grating from the front of a house. Too heavy to lift and you could shoot through it and they would have to climb over it. It was absolutely topping. They tried to get over it, and we potted them from forty yards. They rushed it, and officers came out alone and worked on it. It was an absolutely perfect barricade. Their officers were very fine. We were frightfully put out when we heard the flank had gone, and we had to fall back (Chapter IV).

The placement of the barricade was "perfect," "simply priceless," "absolutely topping." Control and technique

fascinated Hemingway, and he sought to clear every description of blurred edges or confusion: "the man and the bull and the cape that filled and pivoted ahead of the bull were all one sharply etched mass" (The Sun Also Rises 217). Yet In "Big Two-Hearted River," the images of sudden and arbitrary violence recede, and the images of nature and solace seem to provide a relatively lasting sense of peace In a book which has repeatedly shown how peace was fragile and temporary. Such an ending need not surprise us. As Alfred Kazin has said of Hemingway, "Again and again in his work this often cruel writer shows himself to be an unabashed American romantic positively melting in the presence of BEAUTY" (370). Hemingway's aesthetic in "Big Two-Hearted River" has three major components: the creation of landscapes which can be understood as both real and imaginative; a reliance on the ideas of Impressionist painters such as Cezanne; and the attempt to restore and maintain beauty outside the compromises of history.

As the last and the longest story of *In Our Time*, "Big Two-Hearted River" is Hemingway's attempt to provide a sharply defined description of an actual landscape which could also be understood as the source of an interior journey; in this sense, his story maintains the American myth of redefining and regenerating the self through close experience with nature. The story depicts Nick Adams as he travels back to the north Michigan woods of his boyhood

after participating in the horrors of World War I. Against the background of shattered hopes and limbs, of arbitrary executions and decisions, Hemingway paints one of his most controlled and complex compositions. I emphasize composition, because the arrangement of the landscape in this story includes several alterations of the actual Michigan landscape. John Conron lists some of the changes that Hemingway made:

For symbolic purposes, Hemingway altered the country around Seney in several ways: gave it a sunken road like the one in Italy where Nick Adams was wounded in "A Way You'll Never Be"; put in a hill outside the burnt town for Nick's spiritual ascent; changed Seney's Fox River to the Big Two-Hearted river, actually forty miles north of the town; and put a swamp in the river's path. (483)

Indeed the landscape around Seney has been so consciously arranged that several critics consider it to be an interior landscape, one that defines and is defined by Nick's moods and memories. As Robert Gibb states,

The consensus has it that Nick's activities in "Big Two-Hearted River" represent nothing less than a psychological convalescence from the wounds, both physical and emotional, and that his attempts at restoring the wholeness of a personality occur at the banks of a river which is itself both physical and emotional, real and imaginary. (254)

Or, in the words of Malcolm Cowley, the river remains both "completely real" yet seems to be "a waking dream." It is true that the description of the landscape is far from

literal; it is also true that the various types of landscape are so closely aligned with Nick's mental states that one could consider this as yet another version of what Bernard Rosenthal calls the "romantic journey to nature," where the journey motif is structured in a way that juxtaposes "private myth against national myth, interior myth against exterior myth" (18).

I think that critics have over-emphasized Hemingway's interest in composing a landscape that was both "real and imaginary"; nineteenth-century writers, particularly the Transcendentalists, had already realized this goal. "Big Two-Hearted River" is not only the finest modernist version of the American myth of renewal through nature -- it also defines the goals and limitations of a modernist aesthetic of landscape. This story eventually becomes less an attempt to engage nature/wilderness/the primitive, and more an effort to use a common American theme as the locus for an experiment in Modernist aesthetics.

Aside from "symbolic purposes," at least some of the changes described by Conron were made to offer different vantage points which the relatively flat surface around Seney did not provide. While writing this story, Hemingway had a particular aesthetic in mind: as he wrote in a letter to Gertrude Stein, "I'm trying to do the landscape like Cezanne." If one looks at the first two descriptions of natural landscape in the story, one will find indications of

why Hemingway selected certain details, and why a reader could relate these selections to particular aesthetic priorities and possibilities. The first passage describes Nick after he has walked along the railroad tracks and come to a bridge over the river:

Nick looked down into the pool from the bridge. It was a hot day. A kingfisher flew up the stream. It was along time since Nick had looked into a stream and seen trout. They were very satisfactory. As the shadow of the kingfisher, mover up the stream, a big trout shot upstream in a long angle, only his shadow marking the angle, then lost his shadow as he came through the surface of the water, caught the sun, and then, as he went back into the stream under the surface, his shadow seemed to float downstream with the current, unresisting, to his post under the bridge, where he tightened, facing up into the current.

Nick's heart tightened as the trout moved. He felt all the old feeling.

While Nick stares intently at the trout in the water, the foreground and background shift and shift again. The straight, simple angles of the trout, the surface of the water, and the moving shadows each remain clear and stable -- yet their relations in space do not. Like a late Impressionist painting, the very idea of foreground, mid-ground, and background is questioned and disturbed. The "angles" and "surfaces," as in a Cezanne landscape, intersect in shimmering patterns. Nick's reaction to this scene is strong and direct: "he felt all the old feeling."

Soon after, Nick hikes along the road until he comes to

the top of a hill. John Conron and Robert Gibb refer to this as Nick's "spiritual ascent" or "spiritual climb," yet a closer reading of his "ascent" does not encourage a reader to share in any spiritual or artistic insight:

The road ran on, dipping occasionally, but always climbing. Nick went on up. Finally the road, after going parallel to the burnt hillside, reached the top. Nick leaned back against a stump and slipped out of the pack harness. Ahead of him, as far as he could see, was the pine plain. The burned country stopped off at the left with the range of hills. On ahead islands of dark pine trees rose out of the plain. Far off to his left was the line of the river. Nick followed it with his eye and caught glints of the water in the sun.

There was nothing but the pine plain ahead of him, until the far blue hills that marked the Lake Superior height of the land. He could hardly see them, faint and far away in the heat-light over the plain. If he looked too steadily they were gone. But if he only half-looked they were there, the far-off hills of the height of land.

Nick sat down against the charred stump and smoked a cigarette...

In contrast to the first passage, this one presents a "panoramic" view: the pine plain, the river, "the far-off hills." Yet rather than providing Nick with a moment of clarification, this extensive view seems to be a moment of frustration and distraction. The shimmering and precise details of the first passage give way to undifferentiated blocks of scenery: "ahead of him, as far as he could see, was the pine plain." After seeing the trout swim in the clear water, Nick "could hardly see" the hills, "faint and far away." When Nick saw the trout, "he watched them a long time," but "if he looked too steadily" at the distant hills

"they were gone." Instead of having "the old feeling," Nick smokes a cigarette and gazes casually over the pine plain. If, in the words of Octavio Paz, "a landscape never refers only to itself," but to a personal state of mind, a national character, or a transcendent power, then which type of landscape can most clearly refer to Nick's situation as a young, embittered veteran of war trying to find solace? The two landscapes mentioned here -- a clear trout stream and a hazy panoramic view -- are not only two different ways of painting landscape, or two ways of revealing Nick's thoughts. Above all, they are attempts to match Hemingway's constant desire for taut, direct prose with particular landscapes. Instead of a "sharply etched mass" of distinct forms, the pine plain -- and by extension, the sweeping views of a Bierstadt or a Church painting -- does not provide a suitable locus for Hemingway's prose.

The selection and emphasis of particular aspects of the landscape, the occasional reliance upon Cezanne and the ideas of other modern artists, and the firm insistence on direct, uncluttered sentences/views becomes not just a matter of proper taste, but an attempt to find solace through writing after a war in which many writers had said, in the words of Robert Graves, "good-bye to all that." As Alfred Kazin says in An American Procession,

Painting far more than writing suggests the actual texture of human happiness. Hemingway understood that; what excited him, as a writer, about

painting was a promise of relief from civilization, a touch of the promised land. (370)

In this attempt to gain a "touch of the promised land" by means of artistic mastery, Hemingway struggles with the limits of the aesthetic position he has chosen. In his book, Hemingway and Nineteenth-Century Aestheticism, John Gagin refers to the one of the conflicting tendencies of aestheticism: the personal and cultural tensions between a life of activism and a life of aesthetic self-reflection. He offers these comments on Nick's trip:

In some ways, Nick's detachment differs from that of the aesthetes. He never entirely suppresses the impulse towards action; the camping trip, for example, is composed of myriad small tasks. Because activism and aestheticism operate as a tension in Hemingway's work, the free play of consciousness is always intruded upon by thoughts of engagement. (26)

One cannot completely accept Nick's notion that "he had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs. It was all back of him"; yet it is obvious that Nick has already had all he wants of "engagement." The question in "Big Two-Hearted River" is how Nick will eventually re-engage himself after this retreat to the woods. Nick's consideration of future plans take the form of his decision not to fish the swamp:

Nick did not want to go in there now. He felt a reaction against deep wading with the water deepening up under his armpits, to hook big trout in places impossible to land them. In the swamp

the banks were bare, the big cedars came together overhead, the sun did not come through, except in patches; in the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be tragic. In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure. Nick did not want it. He did not want to go down the stream any further today.

The tension of this decision is lessened by the thought that such an action was not urgently required; as the story ends, we are told, "There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp." If one regards the setting as an interior landscape, then the swamp clearly suggests Nick's deeper and more threatening memories; however, considering the strong autobiographical strain in the story, "fishing" is also the actual opportunity of Americans to still salvage something from the landscape which had served to define them for three centuries. In the story, the presence of civilization seems to be retreating rather than advancing, since "there was no town...the thirteen saloons that had lined the one street of Seney had not left a trace." The train, which so frequently signals the disturbances of industry, had briefly stopped and then passed on. The burned pine forest would soon return to its previous condition, "a long undulating country with frequent rises and ascents, sandy underfoot and the country alive again." Nick too was "in the good place," and it seemed that he was then inviolate -- "He was settled. Nothing could touch him." Hemingway may not have re-opened the frontier, yet he seems to have found a way to enclose Nick in "the

good place...his home where he had made it."

"Big Two-Hearted River" appealed to the desire of many Americans to find a home somewhere "Back out of all this now too much for us." Aesthetic concentration and refinement became increasingly valuable as ways to recover meaning from landscape during an era of loss. Hemingway's aesthetic approach succeeded in replacing the repetitive, exaggerated, abstract, and cliched language of "popular" responses to landscape. To most modern readers and critics, his earlier works -- particularly The Sun Also Rises, In Our Time, and A Farewell to Arms -- remain valuable for the keen observations and precise physical details which Hemingway insisted upon in his descriptive passages. Despite Hemingway's skill at honing the aesthetic theories of modernism into "sharply-etched" sentences, his writing is also deeply indebted to certain aspects of "the prevailing natural aesthetic" previously summarized by Callicott:

The prevailing natural aesthetic thus is not autonomous, but derivative from art; it is conventionalized, not well-informed by ecological and evolutionary revolutions in natural history; and it is sensational and self-referential, not genuinely oriented to nature on nature's own terms. In a word, it is trivial. (160)

Callicott's accusations not only condemn the automatic affirmations of popular aesthetics, but also indict many of the ideas which inform modern literary aesthetics in general, and "Big Two-Hearted River" in

particular. Seen from the perspective of the literary academies, the terms of Callcott's claim seem a bit quirky. For example, most literary scholars are neither surprised nor dismayed by the fact that certain styles of writing owe much to prevailing styles of "art," be it the Hudson River School, later Impressionism, or American folk art. Likewise, readers expect that landscapes are "conventionalized" in certain ways; they can refer to Nick's "spiritual ascent" of the hill, or his "attempts at purification" in the river, only by relying upon assumed literary conventions about hills and rivers. Nor are most readers surprised that descriptions of landscape are "self-referential." In Emerson's terms, one often sees Nature as a symbol of the spirit of characters or authors; one also tends to read Hemingway's descriptions of Nature as reflexive, in the sense that they are more "about" writing itself than about pines, trout, or grasshoppers. While natural descriptions are at times aligned with "revolutions in natural history," readers who have endured Melville's cetology might be quite content if such "revolutions" were not explained in fine detail. Finally, the attempt to write "nature on nature's own terms" immediately raises the question of whether nature has its "own terms" independent of those assigned by culture and language. Yet before we completely reject Callcott's comments, we should consider whether a natural aesthetic could indeed measure up to his

standards, whether a natural aesthetic could be relatively independent from both tourist culture and art history. Such an attempt would need to cast off many of the associations and conventions which adhere to most natural objects, and to involve a wide and sophisticated range of ecological observation and theory. Can a book based on these ideas -- namely Aldo Leopold's A Sand County Almanac -- achieve these goals, attract a wide popular audience, and still sustain the interest of environmentalists, historians, philosophers, literary critics, and political activists?

Those who have read Aldo Leopold's A Sand County Almanac (1949) have called it "dangerous nonsense," and "an American classic" (Sumner, quoted in Callcott 189; Fritzwell 128). John Tallmadge calls it "a subversive book," while Lee Clark Mitchell claims that "Leopold's vision borders on the sentimental" (Tallmadge 115; Mitchell 274). Wallace Stegner calls A Sand County Almanac "a famous, almost holy book in conservationist circles," and suggests that a wider audience will eventually see it as "one of the prophetic books, the utterance of an American Isaiah" (233). The man whom Roderick Nash refers to as the "Prophet" drew upon his experiences as a trained conservationist, a teacher, and a political activist. After graduating from the Yale Forestry School, Leopold joined the United States Forest Service in 1909, and his work in New Mexico and Arizona led to the establishment of the first Forest

Wilderness Area in America. After founding the Wilderness Society with Bob Marshall, Leopold was a strong and determined fighter for political intervention to prevent the destruction of wilderness. From 1933 until his death in 1948, Leopold was a professor of game management at the University of Wisconsin, and spent much of his free time at "the Shack" on his land in the "sand counties" of central Wisconsin. Curt Meine's recent biography, Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work, shows that Leopold's range of experiences -- as a teacher, hunter, bow-maker, forest manager, canoeist, political activist, ecologist, writer -- provided the basis for an aesthetic of wilderness which was complex, evolving, and well-suited to both the artistic and political opportunities of the American land. Besides all of Leopold's explicitly political involvements, his later writings display an increased emphasis on the role of aesthetics in sustaining the possibilities of still finding value in the American land. A Sand County Almanac ends with the realization that our greatest challenge is not that of "building roads into lovely country, but of building receptivity into the still unlovely human mind" (295).

This "receptivity" was for Leopold an aesthetic problem which involved both an under-exposure to wilderness and an over-exposure to a culture which openly perpetuates the very sources of blindness to the value of wilderness. Leopold was especially concerned about the ecological and

aesthetic ideas which the popular enthusiasts for  
 "recreation" ignored or distorted:

There are those who are willing to be herded in  
 droves through 'scenic' places; who find mountains  
 grand if they be proper mountains with waterfalls,  
 cliffs, and lakes. To such the Kansas plains are  
 tedious. (179-80)

For Leopold, most American's tours of National Parks were well-intended but futile: "As a search for perception, the recreational stampede is footless and unnecessary" (292). Yet tourism was not just a matter of laziness or vulgarity, but a sign of more pervasive cultural problems. Leopold had open contempt for the "motorized ants" who would enjoy the beauty of Yellowstone and support its protection -- and then return to a life where a narrow economic outlook would sanction the destruction of marshes and other "non-scenic" areas.

The most immediate difficulty faced by Leopold was to create a natural aesthetic which, while disassociating itself from the models of artifactual aesthetics, would also avoid the clinical language and attitudes of field research and applied science. In Leopold's abundant descriptions of the natural world there are few references to painting or other arts; he was well-read in literature, and familiar with the traditions of Western art, yet he found that allusions to these traditions were attempts to evade and not confront the difficulty of writing nature in its full

complexity. However, in his explanations and theoretical comments on the "land" aesthetic, Leopold occasionally used the imagery of the arts: "The taste for country displays the same diversity in aesthetic competence among individuals as the taste for opera or oils" (179). In general, Leopold's discussions of "aesthetic competence" relied on these analogies with artifactual aesthetics to propose a set of alternatives which might have otherwise seemed too radical or too narrowly "scientific." Leopold did not propose to establish ecology as a "scientific" or "objective" model which was opposed to and completely independent from artifactual aesthetics. He did, however, want to shift the basis of Western natural aesthetics from art history to natural history.

This basic shift to an "ecological aesthetic" should first be understood within the larger context of what Allan Carlson calls "a cultural account of the aesthetic":

When the aesthetic appreciation of art is considered in light of a cultural account, the relevant part of our culture is that embodied in and revealed by art history and art criticism, while when aesthetic appreciation of nature is so considered, the relevant part of our culture is natural history and natural science. Nonetheless, in the manner in which a cultural account of the aesthetic requires knowledge of art history and art criticism to play an essential role in our aesthetic judgements about art, likewise a cultural account requires knowledge of natural history and natural science to play the same essential role in our aesthetic judgements about nature. (25)

The basic conditions for a natural aesthetic should not be understood as either/or choice between art history and natural history: in Carlson's words it is a "difference of emphasis." In particular, an "ecological" reading of landscape confronts the fact that a landscape can be ecologically damaged and still be considered "beautiful" by contemporary standards -- at times, the damage itself might actually enhance this "beauty." An obvious possibility for such a misunderstanding are the mountain lakes in the higher areas of the Adirondacks. From almost any viewpoint, the lakes are stunning in their clarity; the shoreline might include the picturesque contrast of the grey of an aging spruce tree against the red flame of a maple in autumn. Yet these same effects of clarity and contrast which might contribute to the "composition" of the scene are caused by acid rain. The clarity of the lake is increased as fish and plant life die; what Wordsworth might have called a "blasted tree" is not a sign of nature's power but of man's contamination. This odd and complex relation between damage and beauty becomes one of the central themes of A Sand County Almanac. In essays such as "Thinking Like A Mountain" and "Illinois Bus Ride," Leopold repeatedly shows how prevailing aesthetic models can contaminate our perception, and how an ecologically-informed aesthetic heightens our perceptions, our appreciation, and our outrage.

In his descriptions of damage and beauty, Leopold relies on an almost obsessive fascination with detail which had been sharpened by years of "reading sign." For Leopold, the ability to closely and actively "read" landscape was a means of salvaging value from any landscape:

Like all real treasures of the mind, perception can be split into infinitely small fractions without losing its quality. The weeds in a city lot convey the same lesson as the red-wood; the farmer may see in his cow-pasture what may not be vouchsafed to the scientists adventuring in the South Seas. (292)

Curt Meine exaggerates only slightly when he says, "There was never a piece of terrain that failed to excite Leopold's interest" (26). A Sand County Almanac cannot be properly understood until one realizes that Leopold's retreat at "the Shack" was not an area of classic beauty. By ordinary standards, it was "barren," eighty "wasted acres" (Meine 17; Flader 52-54) that were redeemed by Leopold's hard work and his naturalist's insight. However, his "ecological aesthetic" was not a naive attempt to deny that the quality of American landscape had been repeatedly violated:

One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds.... An ecologist must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well and does not want to be told otherwise. (197)

The various influences on Leopold's aesthetic ideas --

his extensive experiences in wilderness travel and management, his attempts to rely on ecological rather than artifactual models, his direct linking of aesthetics to the politics of the conservation movement, his determination to establish a "land ethic" -- are evident throughout A Sand County Almanac, particularly in two of Leopold's most important essays, "The Green Lagoons" and "Marshland Elegy." The "Green Lagoons" confronts one of the essential themes of American experiences of wilderness, namely the interest and reliance on exploration. The essay begins with the claim that "It is the part of wisdom never to revisit a wilderness," yet the essay quickly offers a series of descriptions which once again suggest the open possibilities of American landscape, in this case the Delta of the Colorado:

For all we could tell, the Delta had lain forgotten since Hernando de Alarcon landed there in 1540. When we camped on the estuary which is said to have harbored his ships, we had not for weeks seen a man or a cow, an axe-cut or a fence. (150)

The trip soon becomes a series of delightful surprises: the haunting presence of 'el tigre,' the Jaguar; a kettle of quail roasting over a bed of mesquite coals; game that was "too abundant to hunt" (151-54). While the essay had begun in a foreboding tone, most of it is a celebration:

We could not, or at least did not, eat what the quail and deer did, but we shared their evident

delight in this milk-and-honey wilderness. Their festival mood became our mood; we all reveled in a common abundance and in each other's well-being. I cannot recall feeling, in settled country, a like sensitivity to the mood of the land. (155)

In several ways, this essays resembles Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River." Both essays feature a retreat into semi-wilderness in the period following World War I, into a land where the acts of fishing, walking, and making camp are of means of confirming basic faiths. Both essays also have a sense of unfinished business: for Hemingway there "would be other days to fish the swamp," while for Leopold there were unexplained wonders and unseen jaguars to encounter. Both feature a sense of vitality and even exuberance in the presence of nature. For Hemingway there would indeed be many more adventures; ten years after "Big Two-Hearted River," he wrote The Green Hills of Africa, in which he was still able to say, "I could not believe we had suddenly come to any such wonderful country....This was a virgin country" (Green Hills 217). Yet for Leopold the fascinating sights of his trip were not an alternative that provided him with a lasting solace. "The Green Lagoons" ends with a sense of closure. There are questions to face as one Frontier finally dies:

Man always kills the thing he loves, and so we the pioneers have killed the wilderness. Some say we had to. Be that as it may, I am glad I shall never be young without wild country to be young in. Of what avail are forty freedoms without a blank spot on the map? (158)

Leopold's closing questions is not just a lament for a passing opportunity, but a calm rejection of a pursuit which Leopold considered fruitless, namely the search for wilderness adventures whose quality was judged by their remoteness or their exoticism. While Leopold rarely comments directly on Hemingway or on other nature writers, he does have quite a bit to say about wildlife and American culture. He often points to the Frontier mythology of the rugged pioneer/hunter as one of the ways in which American culture has repeatedly settled for limited -- and self-serving -- concepts of beauty. He states that the "Incredible intricacies" of the American land "were as invisible and incomprehensible to Daniel Boone as they are today to Babbitt" (291). Yet Leopold's claims are far more than boastful and over-simplified hindsight. Many of his claims about the limitations of the "pioneer" figure in American culture apply directly to the literary establishment's canonization of "classic" American texts written about the time of the Frontier's "closure." The image of the latter-day pioneer figures strongly in works such as Hamlin Garland's "Under the Lion's Paw," Frank Norris's The Octopus, Stephen Crane's "The Blue Hotel," Jack London's "In a Far Country," and in Dreiser's Sister Carrie or later works such as Faulkner's The Bear or Hemingway's Green Hills of Africa. In these works, nature or wilderness or landscape is quite often reduced to an

impersonal power, defined not in terms of its intricacies or its beauty, but in terms of its size, its violence, its arbitrary indifference to man. The descriptions of these landscapes are not informed by ecology, but by socio-political rhetoric. These works deserve our attention as powerful indictments of technology, class struggle, and social Darwinism; yet in these texts the inner workings of nature receive less attention than the inner workings of freight trains or grain reapers.

Leopold, by placing natural history and the land ethic at the center of American concerns about landscape, also suggests that we reassess the canon of American prose which has so frequently characterized the unique aspects "American" by references to our unique relation to the Frontier, the wilderness, or the "fresh, green breast of the new world." Many see natural history as functional writing: it is expected to promise and deliver an accurate depiction of certain objects or conditions, while featuring few "literary" techniques. When Leopold looked to literature for advanced ideas about landscape, he was often disappointed; readers who come to Leopold's work with the expectation of "literary" descriptions will have to adjust to Leopold's deceptively plain observations and phrasing.

"Marshland Elegy" is the first of sixteen essays which Leopold included under the heading "The Quality of Landscape." To most readers, the "beautiful" aspects of this

essay are not immediately evident; the essay describes a crane marsh in Wisconsin, a "morass," a place of "bogmeadows" and "mosses that clogged the pools" (101-02). For Leopold, such an area offered its own fascination, yet a recognition of its value means casting aside the prevailing categories of natural description:

Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language. The quality of cranes lies, I think, in this higher gamut, as yet beyond the reach of words. (102)

Leopold suggests that while a crane is an "ungainly hulk" by artistic standards, it has a "peculiar distinction." The presence of cranes is seen as a key to certain secrets, and their beauty is not that of a moment or a season, but of eons:

And so they live and have their being -- these cranes -- not in the constricted present, but in the wider reaches of evolutionary time. Their annual return is the ticking of the geologic clock. Upon the place of their return they confer a peculiar distinction. Amid the endless mediocrity of the common-place, a crane marsh holds a paleontological patent of nobility, won in the march of eons, and revocable only by shotgun. The sadness discernible in some marshes arises, perhaps, from their once having harbored cranes. Now they stand humbled, adrift in history. (103)

Leopold's phrase "adrift in history" is not the lament of a modernist who lacks a usable past; the "history" most essential to Leopold is natural history. Without such knowledge, animals and landscapes are seen in momentary

glimpses in which form, color, light, and composition serve as the dominant criteria.

The essay does not discuss the appearance or behavior of particular cranes; it describes only a few of the intricate features of the crane marsh itself. The essay is instead a reading of the marsh in terms of natural history from the time when "the glacier came down out of the north" to the arrival of the haymakers, "singing and drinking and lashing their teams with whips and tongue" (104-06). Yet Leopold does not settle for easy comparisons of untouched lands and drained swamps; instead, he forces us to consider our own judgements of cranes and swamps with both an immediate eye for detail and a reverence for a larger "sense of time." Nor does Leopold settle for standard accusation pitting farmer versus poet or tourist versus conservationist. Leopold closes "Marshland Elegy" with another reference to the relation between beauty and damage, a relation which is not clearly understood by either tourists or trained conservationists:

Thus always does history, whether of marsh or market place, end in paradox. The ultimate value in these marshes is wilderness, and the crane is wilderness incarnate. But all conservation of wilderness is self-defeating, for to cherish we must see and fondle, and when enough have seen and fondled, there is no wilderness left to cherish. (108).

Leopold's "ecological aesthetic" does far more than provide rigorous and detailed descriptions of beautiful or

damaged landscapes. As John Tallmadge explains, Leopold had other things in mind: "He seeks actively to change his readers. A Sand County Almanac is a subversive book. It questions the deepest values of our civilization and challenges us personally on every page" (115). A Sand County Almanac serves a purpose quite similar to that of Emerson's essay "Nature": the value of both works lies in their extensive influence on contemporary aesthetics of land, nature, or wilderness. Reading Leopold not only requires close attention to natural processes at work in a landscape: it also demands a reassessment of the ways in which various histories of "natural beauty" have been produced or obscured by popular tourist culture, by American writers, and by the literary academies.

In one of his key passages, Leopold claims that the role of natural history is not only to identify and study wildlife and natural objects, but to understand "their relation to the human beings who sing about 'my country' but see little or nothing of its inner workings" (209-10). Here Leopold not only criticizes the narrow vision of tourists and pioneers, but that of the "singers." He implicitly questions one of the essential motifs in American descriptions of landscape, namely the correspondences between Nature and the Soul, between landscape and mind. (In "Nature" Emerson had claimed, "Every hour and change corresponds to and authorizes a different state of mind"; Melville's Captain

Ahab exhorts, "O Nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies! not the smallest atom stirs in matter, but has its cunning duplicate in mind." > What is one to say of those "nature writers" who "see little of its inner workings?" Can a seriously limited understanding of nature's inner workings "authorize" anything but a limited or forced equivalency in mind? When one considers that few "major" American writers after Thoreau and Melville developed a sustained interest in natural history, one must also consider how this would necessarily compromise their aesthetic judgements. Leopold was not an isolated figure: "Leopold's achievements rested on more than a century of theological, philosophical, and scientific thought" (Nash 64). Leopold and similar thinkers have agitated our assumptions about popular and literary aesthetics, and questioned the role of aesthetics in the actual process of land usage in America. An equally pressing problem arises when we consider how a reassessment of natural aesthetics encourages us to reassess descriptions of American wilderness after Twain, Norris, Cather, and Hemingway.

## Chapter Three

"A Gate of Escape":  
Wilderness and Social Ideology

Lost in the barrio  
I walk like an Injun  
So Carlos won't suspect something's wrong here  
I dance in place  
And paint my face  
And act like I belong here

-- Walter Becker's "Throw Back the Little Ones"

We are, I am, you are,  
by cowardice or courage  
the ones who find our way  
back to this scene  
carrying a knife, a camera  
a book of myths  
in which  
our names do not appear.

-- from Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck"

There is a distrust, a cursing of women, that is unsettling. Women and machinery and the land are all spoken of in the same way -- seduction, domestication, domination, control. This observation represents no new insight, of course, into the psychology of development in Western culture; but it is not academic. It is as real as the scars on the faces of flight attendants I interviewed in Alaska who were physically and sexually abused by frustrated workmen flying to and from Prudhoe Bay.

-- from Barry Lopez's Arctic Dreams

America's cultural heritage has often been an attempt to surmount its own inherent limitations, to confront the traditions which included, in the words of Henry James, "no sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no

church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces..." (479). While early Americans clearly -- and at times proudly -- lacked most of these traditions, they did have a "new" world to explore, a wilderness area of tremendous range and beauty which distinguished this continent from Europe. From this wilderness came hopes and visions of institutions and customs which would confirm the exceptional status of America. This complex process of imagining, exploring, promoting, and settling the Frontier was often simplified by the use of wilderness trails, such as the Oregon or Santa Fe Trails. These trails, however, were more than just a necessity for westward travellers. Besides organizing and dispersing pioneers, trails also served as a means of self-definition for a nation which associated "trail-blazing" with progressive ideologies of American self-reliance. Yet these trails have also provided recent scholars with a series of violent or exclusionary images and incidents that agitate any calm faith in our Manifest Destiny. While recent Americanists have devoted their attention to trails in the pre-1890 period, there has been relatively little work done to show how the maps, parks, and trails of twentieth-century American wilderness both resist and perpetuate certain ideologies of race, class, and gender inherited from the nineteenth century.

The "Frontier" not only provided an area of

exploration and settlement, but was simultaneously used in America's attempts at self-definition and organization. From the epic Journeys of Lewis and Clark to the popular mythologies of Easy Rider, from Jefferson's sturdy yeoman farmer to Kennedy's "New Frontier," open land was associated with the continual refinement of democratic ideals. As Lee Clark Mitchell explains,

In each case the pose proclaimed: we have abandoned tradition-clogged societies to embrace a new, a free, a far richer life. America's wilderness seemed to provide a physically limitless and ahistorical setting in which men and women could imagine their finest self-conceptions fulfilled. The powerful fascination of that hope entwines more than three centuries of colonial and national experience. (3)

Several specific tendencies emerge from this "pose." The first is the rejection of those aspects of the past which were tainted by "tradition," particularly the tradition of European aristocracy. The Frontier seemed to offer a source of an "empire new," uncompromised by Euro-Asian influences:

Not wan from Asia fetiches,  
Nor red from Europe's old dynastic slaughter-house  
(Area of murder-plots of thrones, with scent left  
and scaffolds everywhere,)  
But come from Nature's long and harmless throes,  
peacefully bullded thence,  
These virgin lands, lands of the Western shore,  
To the new culminating man, to you, the empire new  
You promise'd long, we pledge, we dedicate.

(Whitman, "Song of the Redwood Tree")

In this poem, as in his "Song of the Broad-Axe," Whitman

portrays a bloody, decadent European tradition sustained by the violence of the scaffold and the executioner; the axes which strike at the redwoods will instead yield "Shapes of Democracy," rising from "Nature's long and harmless throes."

Frontier experience was also seen as evidence that we had freed ourselves not only from tradition, but from history itself; our destiny was not one of contingency or crass material gain, but one in which our "finest self-conceptions" became manifest in a setting that was both "physically limitless and ahistorical." Thus the Frontier came to be seen as a sort of crucible in which American democracy, freed from the constrictions of the Metropolis, could purify itself. This vision of American history dominates Frederick Jackson Turner's famous essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History":

For a moment, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant. There is not 'tabula rasa.' The stubborn American environment is there with its imperious summons to accept its conditions; the inherited ways of doing things are also there; and yet, in spite of the environment, and in spite of custom, each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and ideas, and indifference to its lessons, have accompanied the frontier. (227)

The third central theme depended on images of inclusion and unity: the West was not only for the landed aristocracy, but for the yeoman farmer, the illiterate hunter, both "men

and women." In one typical reference, William Giplin portrays pioneer family leaders on the Overland Trail, "without other guide than an indomitable perseverance, or other protection than their invincible rifles, and the wives and progeny clustered around them" (see Smith 38). Literary critics, including Henry Nash Smith in his book Virgin Land (1950), at times relied on similar imagery to describe the overland passage. Smith closes the first section of his book with this claim:

In view of the less attractive inferences that other thinkers have drawn from the notion of an American empire in the Pacific, one is grateful for the intrepid idealism that so triumphantly enabled Whitman to see in the march of the pioneer army a prelude to peace and the brotherhood of nations. (48)

American wilderness writing of the nineteenth century provides ample evidence of personal and national confidence arising from wilderness experience. One typical example is Clarence King's Mountaineering in the High Sierra (1872). King exemplifies the intelligent, adventurous, idealistic leader. The first person to scale Mount Whitney, he made numerous daring first ascents in the Sierras, and helped to establish the original boundaries of what is now Yosemite National Park. He was one of the leaders of the United States Geological Survey, and wrote Systematic Geology (1878), one of the standard texts of the period. King moved in a circle of friends that included John Hay and Henry

Adams.

King was also a skilled and evocative writer. Francis Parkman's and Richard Dana's earlier tales of adventure, and the aesthetic theories of John Ruskin and Alfred Bierstadt, provide the basis for his stories (Howarth x-xvi). They combine rousing ascents with moments of mature calmness and clarity:

All is forgotten; those murky clouds which in town life dispute the serenity of one's spiritual air drift beyond view, and over broods only the quiet sky of night, her white stars moving beyond fragrant pine-tops or lost in the dim tangle of their feathery foliage. Such is the mountaineer's evening spent contemplatively before his fire; the profound sense of nature's tranquility filling his mind with its repose. (242)

During his ascent of Mount Shasta in 1870, he and a partner stood on the summit ridge and "waved the American flag." His comments on the view from this summit resound with optimism and self-assertion:

I think such vastness of prospect now and then extremely valuable in itself; it forcibly widens one's conception of country, driving away such false notion of extent or narrowing idea of limitation as we get living on lower plains. (204)

King's "conception of country" is that of the bold climber and the calm aesthete; in the wilderness, "one fetter after another seems to unbind from your soul, leaving it free, joyous, grateful" (209).

King's descriptions of alpine scenery are quite varied

in their beauty and range of tones; his attitudes towards people are somewhat less appealing. While he resented any "narrowing idea of limitation," he never told his close friends about his common-law marriage to a black woman, Ada Todd, who bore five of his children -- she "did not know her husband's true name until shortly before he died" (Howarth xii). While King was often "free, joyous, grateful," this generosity of feeling often seems to be limited to alpine scenery and ambitious white males. His mountaineering essays feature numerous descriptions of the people then living in the Sierras, and his portraits of poor workers, Indians, and women display a condescending humor, reminiscent at times of Twain's Roughing It or The Innocents Abroad. Yet King's humor has a more brutal edge to it. At best, King's humor is amusingly awkward; at worst, it reveals a disdain and loathing that hints at hatred and violence.

In the same essay which proclaims his "grateful" spirit, he mentions the "flatness and sugary insipidity which characterizes the girls I chatted with on certain piazzas" (193). The following essays begins,

There are certain women, I am informed, who place men under their spell without leaving them the melancholy satisfaction of understanding how the thing was done. They may have absolutely repulsive features, and a pretty permanent absence of mind; without that charm of cheerful grace before which we are said to succumb. Yet they manage to assume control for certain. It is thus with mules. (209)

In his essay "Mount Whitney," King describes "vast  
 aiguilles, trimmed from summit to base with lines of slender  
 minarets, deeply fluted and surmounted with tall obelisks";  
 three paragraphs later he laments "the presence here of a  
 so large a share of her most degraded citizens; people whose  
 face and dress and life and manners are sadder than any  
 possibilities held up to us by Darwin" (231-32). King's  
 curiosity and his breadth of knowledge, his keen ability to  
 decipher eons of rock strata or the architecture of an  
 alpine ridge, are often coupled with flat, unsympathetic,  
 over-simplified portraits of "sadder" human lives. In  
 "Through the Forest," he exclaims, "Our eyes often ranged  
 upward, the long shafts leading the vision up to green,  
 lighted spires." Soon after, he witnesses an Indian funeral  
 ceremony, which prompts some of King's comments on the  
 "Indian question." He resolves that

If driven to the wall, I usually confess my  
 opinion that the Quakers will have to do a great  
 reformation in the Indian before he is really fit  
 to be exterminated. (34)

King's lapses into clumsy humor or needlessly brutal  
 honesty are more than just passing moments or the mistakes  
 of a relatively young writer. Many of the odd juxtapositions  
 in his work -- strong women and stubborn mules, expansive  
 views and degraded masses, woodland temples and plans for  
 extermination -- suggest the deep tensions and limitations  
 within the progressive view of American expansion into the

wilderness.

Within the last two decades, several Americanists have seriously questioned the ideologies of race, class, and gender which are implicit in the texts of scholars such as Turner and Smith, and in the canon of American literature. Prominent among these are Richard Slotkin's Regeneration Through Violence (1973) and The Fatal Environment (1985); Martin Green's The Great American Adventure (1984); Annette Kolodny's The Lay of the Land (1975) and The Land Before Her (1984); Lillian Schlissel's Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey (1982); Melvin Dixon's Ride Out the Wilderness (1988); Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen's Ideology and Classic American Literature (1986). In general, these critics are not "anti-Turner"; instead, they prefer to concentrate on the two limiting conditions which Turner only briefly mentioned in the passage quoted above. The wilderness was not a "tabula rasa": early Americans responded to the wilderness and its inhabitants in ways which showed that they had not escaped from the past, but were instead relying on "inherited ways of doing things," and on certain social images or ideologies which demonstrated the distinct influence of either European or "metropolitan" culture. The revisions and correctives suggested by these scholarly texts are too complex to discuss fully here; yet the basic arguments of most of these critics can often be discerned by referring to their images

of wilderness trails. While none of these books devotes itself primarily to the image of trails, all of these works refer to trails, particularly the Oregon or Overland Trail, as an index of certain attitudes, codes, or social possibilities.

Recent critics such as Slotkin and Green make much of Turner's hint that even in the wildest frontier, "the inherited ways of doing things are also there" (227). These two critics often point out that frontier ideologies of class, race, and gender were closely related to similar ideologies from the Metropolis. The "pioneer army" which took to the Overland Trail did not simply build a new society from the materials of the frontier; it was the Metropolis and its economic and social policies which had dictated "the kind of people that will go (or be sent) to the colonies, the kind of resources they will be interested in, the ways in which they will organize their exploitation and governance of the territory, and so on" (Slotkin Fatal Environment 43). A more significant contribution made by Green and Slotkin is to delineate the ways in which the conditions of the frontier provided a context in which such urban ideologies could be simplified, and used to justify distant actions which seemingly had little or nothing to do with wilderness. In The Fatal Environment, Slotkin shows how the prevalent rhetoric of accommodation or extermination which had justified the Indian wars became part of a "Last

Stand" mythology. In other words, social groups that were judged as uncivilized, unknown, or unproductive -- labor unions, recent immigrants, the working poor, free blacks -- were portrayed like renegade Indians ready to storm the forts of factory owners, respectable neighborhoods, and other "American" institutions. Martin Green, in The Great American Adventure, defines adventure as "the energizing myth of empire," one closely associated in America with the Frontier experience. Green examines the rationale for seeing wilderness experience or the Overland Trail as "a dramatic rite of passage to mastery and adulthood" (Lamar 51); he finds that both "mastery" and "adulthood" were defined in male terms, and that this terminology was the basis for social relations which relied on strict hierarchies while still passing themselves off as inclusive:

"Manhood" was also paired with some contrasting term -- as the affirmed or superior value -- in dozens of polarities of thought. Any male had to strive always to be a man and not a boy, in Hemingway adventures; a man and not an animal, in religious exhortations; a man and not a slave, in slavery narratives; and similarly, a man and not a coward, a man and not a mouse, a man and not a woman. At the same time, manhood also -- being such a sacred value -- spread out to mean all humanity, spread out beyond these antitheses to include the inferior or rejected term in each case; manhood/humanity thus included boys and slaves and women and cowards. (7)

Other critics have shown the ways in which the West or the Frontier was not "tabula rasa," but had already been prefigured in a series of cultural symbols distributed by

promotional pamphlets, political speeches, popular "dime" novels, or "Western" shows. Henry Nash Smith's Virgin Land explains how such symbols were widely distributed during the period of westward expansion; while the topography of the West was very complex, the actual first-hand reports of these conditions were few. The complexity of Western landscape was not well-suited to the promotional writings which would encourage westward migration, so a sort of symbolic shorthand was used, in which the West was seen as either "Desert" or "Garden":

The myths and symbols with which I deal have the further characteristic of being collective representations rather than the work of a single mind. I do not mean to raise the question whether such products of the imagination accurately represent empirical fact. They exist on a different plane. But as I have tried to show, they sometimes had a decided influence on practical affairs. (Preface to 1950 printing)

While most contemporary critics agree with Nash's claim that the West was defined by such a series of symbols, others, such as Annette Kolodny, have tried to examine the ideological basis for such symbols as "virgin land," or "free land." For example, why refer to the land as a "virgin?" Both of Kolodny's books show that many of the "fantasies" of the land were based on metaphors of seduction, marriage, or rape. In The Lay of the Land, she refers to the ways in which male adventurers or promotionalists saw the land as a "Paradise with all her

virgin beauties." In The Land Before Her, she sketches out a different tradition, an "alternative metaphorical design," a record of women's fantasies in which the "garden" of the American Frontier "implied home and community, not privatized erotic mastery" (xlii).

Lillian Schlissel's Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey also discusses the symbols that "pre-figured" the West, yet it also emphasizes the "empirical facts" and the "practical affairs" which are not the main focus of Smith or Kolodny. She tries "to reconstruct from the diaries in fine detail the daily lives of women, to separate out of the diaries those writings that pertained to the 'woman's sphere'" (12). Schlissel claims that it is necessary to carve out such a "sphere" because the previous records of the Overland Trail have made little or no attempt to discuss the difference between the daily lives and and the perceptions, dreams, and crises of men and women. In particular, she questions John Faragher's Women and Men on the Overland Trail, which states, "...men and women were part of a common culture, that they were, indeed, more alike than different" (15). In contrast, Schlissel concludes that there were major and almost systematic differences between the two groups. Besides mentioning relatively obvious distinctions -- that men were more likely to write about hunting than child-raising -- Schlissel discusses the ways in which women strove to maintain "a

semblance of their usual domestic circle" (14-15). They were the caretakers of the sick and injured, becoming, in Schlissel's words, "the actuaries of the road." Besides these attempts to maintain and consolidate social ties in the midst of sickness and death, there were also the submerged strains of resistance: "One must suspect, finally, that many women judged the heroic adventure of their men as some kind of outrageous folly thrust upon them by obedience to patriarchal ritual" (15).

Slotkin, Green, Kolodny, Schlissel, and Dixon all emphasize both the variety and vitality of texts which would be considered "marginal" or "non-literary" by traditional standards. These texts not only question or attack the dominant ideologies regarding land usage, "progress," Indians, or women; they also seek to establish their own "ways of seeing," to construct their own "place," which becomes both a home and the center for their perspective. While Melvin Dixon recognizes that American literature includes few responses of black Americans to wilderness, he does more than explain the reasons for this absence. He shows how a variety of texts, ranging from slave songs to Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man to Martin Luther King's last speech ("He allowed me to go up to the mountain...") create a renewed identity based on a geography associated with actual experience, Biblical images, or symbolic flights:

Afro-American writers, often considered homeless, alienated from mainstream culture, and segregated in negative environments, have used language to create alternative landscapes where black culture and identity can flourish apart from any marginal, "prescribed" place. King's mountain is but a culminating image of a triumph of space, of a height of consciousness; the mountain top has emerged over time from other figures of land and identity that continue to shape the verbal art of black Americans. (2)

Black writers had no Cumberland, Oregon, or Santa Fe trails to refer to as a model of epic adventure on the American continent; the image of the pioneer was reserved for Natty Bumppo, Lewis and Clark, Jeremiah Smith. In early slave songs, the wilderness was not imagined in terms of Frontier and Metropolis, but rather as "a place of refuge beyond the restricted world of the plantation." Dixon charts the importance of other "places of refuge" -- the wilderness, the underground, the mountaintop -- as places of Afro-American solidarity apart from the "plantation" of mainstream American literary culture.

It is tempting to suggest that Clarence King's disturbing comments were simply an unfortunate aspect of a period in American history which we have moved beyond. Yet the scholarship of Slotkin, Kolodny, and Green does not allow for such rationalizations. Slotkin points out the disturbing similarities between anti-Indian and anti-Viet Cong attitudes; Kolodny implies that the current ecological crisis is closely linked to certain male images of land and resource exploitation; Green finds that the more

continue in twentieth-century texts such as Hemingway's Green Hills of Africa or Mailer's Why Are We In Vietnam? Despite such reminders, the perpetuation and modifications of nineteenth-century ideologies are often obscured by what Roderick Nash calls the "wilderness cult" in American society. Certain tendencies in American society -- the establishment of National Parks or public land preserves, the recognition of Native American rights in acts such as the Alaskan Native Claims Settlement Act, the growing public interest in ecology -- seem to indicate that a more pluralistic and peaceful set of attitudes inform our social relations and our land use policies. Yet the cultural vocabulary of nineteenth-century wilderness experience is still so prevalent that writers often find themselves implicated within it. Three recent texts, Hugh Brody's Maps and Dreams (1981), Anne LaBastille's Woodswoman (1975), and Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony (1977) delineate the ways in which certain social ideologies are associated with certain forms of land use, adventure, and spiritual redemption. More importantly, these texts display the difficulties faced by recent writers who try to establish more pluralistic versions of "our" wilderness heritage.

Clifford Geertz has said, "It is in country unfamiliar emotionally or topographically that one needs poems and road maps" (86). Hugh Brody's Maps and Dreams examines

many of the issues raised by scholars such as Slotkin, Geertz, and Kolodny. In particular, he discusses the maps and dreams of two conflicting groups: the Indian tribes who live in an isolated woodland area of British Columbia, and the industries, especially the energy companies, who are interested in gaining rights to the Indians' lands. Geertz's comment and Brody's title suggest the important relation between poems/dreams and maps. One might be tempted to think of maps and dreams as two divergent representations of reality. In simpler terms, dreams are generally considered as a flight from the actual to a realm of fantasy or future possibilities; they are seen as ethereal, temporary, non-empirical. Maps are thought to have just the opposite effect of grounding us, of saying that we are here -- and NOT there. Maps are considered definite, reasonably permanent, and untainted by subjective views. Brody repeatedly agitates these two sets of associations. He shows that the very idea of mapping is a very questionable discourse, and the choices which are made or emphasized in the arrangements of a culture's "maps" depend on the tensions concerning their "dreams" of material, spiritual, and political existence: "By freezing slices of history, maps and movies mystify or obscure events and processes" (60).

Brody, an anthropologist who specializes in modern hunter-gatherer communities, was among those involved

In a project to allow the native Indians of British Columbia to map their own land in their way. As Brody explains, "The Indians of British Columbia made maps, explained their system, gave detailed information about their economy, and took us into the bush with them. They did so because they believe that their system will result in an understanding of their needs, and that this will in turn help establish and protect their interests" (177). These "interests" were in strong need of "protection": the West Coast Transmission Company was planning to build an extensive oil pipeline project through their land in the near future. In this clash, the maps and dreams of the Indians, their means of locating themselves both literally and existentially, are rendered all but invalid by a culture whose maps and dreams deny those of the Indians. There are no guns drawn, no horrible ambushes, no exterminations or raids; the violence of this conflict involves the metaphorical "ripping up" of someone else's map.

Brody's Maps and Dreams intersperses sections of anthropological study with first-hand narratives of the tribe's daily life. The climactic narrative, found in the chapter entitled "The Hearing," is the meeting between the tribe and the representatives of the oil company, who have come to the village in order to "listen to the people." A series of bitter ironies disturbs the meeting before it even begins: a few tribesmen skip the meeting, considering it

more essential to hunt one more bear before the oncoming winter set in; other Indians miss the meeting because they could not read the tortured bureaucratease in the company's announcement; those who attend feel intimidated by the numerous microphones and tape recorders which had been placed in their tribal meeting hall, a place where microphones had never been used before. In their own meeting hall, the Indians are displaced by the invasion of cameras and press people. Their speeches are often hesitant, or garbled in the slow and clumsy process of translation. The representatives of West Coast Transmission give what they must have considered a clear and well-defined summary of where the pipeline would go and what purpose it would serve:

With the use of the pipeline map, they gave numbers, routes, scraps of history: 444 miles of 56-inch diameter pipe along a 125-foot right-of-way; nine construction camps at 50-mile intervals, the nearest to be 46 miles way; at Mile 92 of the Highway there is already a compressor station. (256)

After their efficient presentation, the West Coast Transmission men began packing up their map. Yet the Beaver tribe was not quite satisfied, since "the people had more to say." They had taken out their "dream map," for if it was maps that the visitors wanted, then here was THEIR version of how to read the land:

It was a magnificent dream map. The dream map was as large as the table top, and had been folded tightly for many years. It was covered with

thousands of short, firm, and variously coloured markings. The people urged the chairman and other white visitors to gather around the table. Abe Fellow and Aggan Wolf explained. Up here is heaven; this is the trail that must be followed; here is a wrong direction; this is where it would be worst of all to go; and over there are all the animals. They explained that all of this had been discovered in dreams.

Aggan said that it was wrong to unpack a dream map except for very special reasons. But the Indian's needs had to be recognized; the hearing was important. Everyone must look at the map now. Those who wanted might even take photographs. They should realize, however, that the intricate routes and meanings of a dream map are not easy to follow. There was not time to explain them all. The visitors crowded around the table, amazed and confused. The centre of gravity had suddenly shifted away from procedural concerns, pipelines and terms and conditions, to the Indian's world. (267)

Despite the initial effect of the dream map, it became clear that the oil company personnel regarded it as a curiosity with no practical bearing on these matters; half-way through the explanation of the map, they were already packing to go. Their hasty and rude departure bewildered the Beaver tribe, but they still maintained a faith in the process of map-making. The next day, Joseph Atkin, one of the tribal leaders, said, "Pretty soon we'll fix it all up. We've made maps and everyone will see where we have our land."

This book opens with the claim, "The hunting and gathering societies of world have been sentenced to death." It is clear during this book that Brody expects a sympathetic response toward the plight of the Indians whose whole vision of the land has just been ignored and denied,

and whose land will be invaded as a result. Yet Brody complicates matters by constantly reminding the readers of their own ideological claims in this matter, of their own limited understanding of native American cultures, of their own allegiance to pipelines rather than trap-lines. Despite engaging his readers' sympathies for the Indians, Brody does not let them forget that their maps and dreams do not allow them to track animals in their dreams:

Some old-timers, men who became famous for their powers and skills, had been great dreamers. Hunters and dreamers. They did not hunt as most people do now. They did not seek uncertainly for the trails of animals whose movements we can only guess at. No, they located their prey in dreams, found their trails, and made dream-kills. Then, the next day, or a few days later, whenever it seemed auspicious to do so, they could go out, find the trail, re-encounter the animal, and collect the kill.

Maybe, said Atsin, you think this is all nonsense, just so much bullshit. (44-5)

Atsin's closing query is, in effect, asked of the reader. Brody refuses to let the reader make simple identifications based on emotion only. For Brody, responding to Atsin as a quaint, semi-mystical Indian, or being charmed by the exoticism of the dream map, are just kinder, gentler versions of the same ideological structure which invalidates land treaties. Brody repeatedly questions his own role in these matters, knowing that "the accumulation of knowledge about colonial or tribal populations is often a facet of control and exploitation" (xiii). He says, "I was haunted

by a thought that must have bothered many researchers: you might find out five or ten years later who you were really working for" (xiii). Brody's conflicts form a strong sub-text throughout the book, and lead to the adoption of several distinct voices. The even-numbered chapters are "research schemes and agendas," almost exaggerated in their reliance on 20 different maps and 9 tables of statistics; the odd-numbered chapters are an attempt to use less familiar means of inquiry, to "follow a route selected by the people" (xvi). The result is a fascinating accumulation of discourses, of anthropology and anecdote, of social statistics and dream narratives, of professional objectivity and openly partisan bitterness. Brody enlists the readers' support for the Indians, while constantly disengaging them from facile identifications or reductionist, either/or choices.

Anne LaBastille's Woodswoman initially seems to be a pleasant, straight-forward text in which a young American, troubled and alone, seeks solace and renewal by living in an isolated cabin. Her writing style is direct and uncluttered; there are none of the drastic shifts which occur in the texts of Brody or Silko. Yet the deceptive simplicity of this text becomes apparent when one considers the figure of a "woodswoman" in terms of the scholarship of Kolodny and Schlissel. They repeatedly remind us of the divergent ways in which men and women anticipated and

reacted to wilderness experience. In both of their texts, certain basic themes become prominent. The first was a sense of both captivity and dispossession: the women who went West rarely went of their own accord, since "women understood the decision to cross the continent as a man's decision" (Schlissel 28). Besides being a reluctant passenger on the wagon train, women were also "the unwilling inhabitant of a metaphorical landscape she had no part in creating" (Kolodny 6). While men often sought self-definition, wealth, or glory through adventuring, Kolodny refers to "the absence of adventurous conquest in women fantasies before 1860" (xliii). Instead, she claims, women projected their fantasies of a new or renewed home "on the spaces that were truly and unequivocally theirs: the home and the small cultivated gardens of their own making" (6).

Anne LaBastille's Woodswoman rewrites many of these mythologies of male/female experiences of wilderness. The book opens with a series of boating misadventures involving someone living near a remote mountain lake as the winter freeze-up approaches. The narrator is almost injured in a careless misuse of an outboard engine, then rescues three hunters who had been stranded in a sudden storm, and finally escapes being frozen in the midst of the lake after yet another rescue:

A flicker of fear jabbed at my heart. The lake was making ice faster than I could break it!  
The gravity of the situation suddenly struck.  
Could I make it back to my new home, or would I be

frozen fast in the middle of Black Bear Lake? If the ice imprisoned me in the boat, there would be no way to reach shore. The ice would not be thick enough to walk on, yet probably too thick to chop through with my oars. If only I had thought to bring an axe! It occurred to me that I might freeze to death overnight in my own boat within sight of the cabin. (5)

Within the first few pages, LaBastille portrays herself in terms of specific images and associations which had been denied to earlier "woodswomen." She is the homesteader, the builder of her cabin; she is the rescuer, literally risking death to help others; she is the adventurer, remaining at her winter cabin while all others head for safer places. Yet behind this assertiveness is a series of previous episodes which delineate the ways in which American concepts of wilderness experience still tend to exclude women, to make them feel "dispossessed of paradise" (Kolodny 3-13).

After the three brief narratives which begin the book, there is a longer section which begins "I had no place to go." LaBastille's claim that "she had no place to go" refers not only to a lack of shelter but a lack of accommodation within male-dominated concepts of wilderness. Her interest in the wilderness of the Adirondack Mountains began while tending horses and waitressing at a resort, where the most important rule was "NO DAYS OFF between JULY 4 and Labor Day" (74) Her boss, Morgan Brown, encouraged her interest in wilderness, and soon gave her a "nickname" which is used repeatedly in the book: "Daniel Boone" (76, 79, 83, 84).

(The first times he kisses her he says, "Sleep well, Daniel Boone.") LaBastille's love for wilderness is immediately placed within a series of male-images and traditions. She cannot imagine her own independence in the woods, but instead finds herself working everyday, or using Morgan's maps, equipment, advice, and nickname as reference points as she hones her wilderness skills. Meanwhile, her marriage to Morgan begins to disintegrate, and finally Morgan announces, "You must leave before the Fourth of July. I can't operate and open the hotel under this strain. You HAVE to find some place to go" (7).

She leaves and tries to find a "place." While establishing herself, she still defines herself by male images. She describes her final choice to live in an isolated cabin by referring to a common American image: "I had wanted to live in a Thoreau-style cabin in the woods," (7) and like Thoreau she moves in on July 4. During her first year, she meets Rob, an Adirondack wilderness guide. With his help, she strives to qualify as guide, a profession which was "mentioned with respect bordering on hero worship." However, just as she had been renamed Daniel Boone, just as she had patterned herself after Thoreau, she once again finds herself reading what Adrienne Rich calls "a book of myths/ in which/ our names do not appear." The legendary Adirondack guides which LaBastille refers to were all male: "Mitchell Sabattis, Chris Crandell, Artie Church,

Andy Carmen, Frank Baker, Lou Hathaway, Ira Parsons, Mike Cronin, and so on" (97). She eventually becomes one of 250 guides in the Adirondacks, one of "only two or three women" who had earned that title.

LaBastille repeatedly confronts the male/female images and roles of wilderness life. Her cabin is kept in immaculate order, and she refuses to chop down any of the trees surrounding it. Yet her building and heating needs soon require her to wield a chainsaw with great skill. Unlike the pre-1860 women whom Kolodny mentions, LaBastille frequently searches for "adventurous conquest," climbing numerous peaks and hiking the 112-mile Northville-Lake Placid trail. One of the more interesting reversals of roles involves her ownership of several guns. One night several drunken hunters land their boat near her cabin, and coo her name again and again. She grabs a "shotgun loaded with buckshot" and prepares for "whatever prank they had in mind." Nothing further happens, but the next morning she decides that such incidents will stop:

It seemed wise to....project an image which might prevent any future problems. I chose a beat-up Stetson, strapped a .38 caliber revolver to my hip, and pulled on a tall pair of boots. Racing my boat full-speed across the lake, I jumped out and ran up to the door of their camp. "Bang-bang-bang." No answer. Finally, a puffy-faced man in quilted red underwear opened the door sleepily.

Before he had a chance to say anything, I burst out with, "What the devil were you and your friends up to last night? Yelling my name across

the lake? If anyone of you sets foot on my land or even comes close to my dock without an invitation, I'll shoot first and ask his name later!"

I turned abruptly and strode away, hoping that my reputation as an ornery, pistol-packing woodswoman had begun. (38)

LaBastille repeatedly desires to "project an image," and she calmly pursues her skills as a guide, naturalist, cabin-builder, "ornery pistol-packing woodswoman" -- and lover. LaBastille's life was not one of isolation. Instead, her love for a man named Nick becomes one of the longer sections of the book, and becomes more significant when considered in terms of Kolodny's and Schlissel's ideas. Both Kolodny and Schlissel emphasize that few women went into the wilderness on their own accord. Often the husband would go first and send for the family when he became somewhat "settled"; more often the whole family would go along when the husband left. When Morgan Brown demands that LaBastille had to leave their home, she claims that "I had no place to go." But that soon changes, and in Adrienne Rich's terms, she begins "To have it out on her own premises," in her own cabin and by her own rules. When it becomes clear that she loves Nick, she invites him back to her cabin, and when he decides to accept an opportunity in Alaska, she politely but firmly refuses to follow him.

LaBastille does not simply refer back to the traditions of nineteenth-century wilderness that she had researched for one of her other books, Women and Wilderness. Her Ph.D in

wildlife ecology prepared her for advising work in conservation programs in Central America, and she continues to be a hard-working and insightful activist. Her interviews with other women activists, her knowledge of women's roles in contemporary wilderness, and her first-hand experiences provide a solid underpinning for her political commentaries. Yet like many wilderness writers, from George Catlin to John Muir to Aldo Leopold, she faces a particular problem: how to also involve the spiritual or mystical aspects of wilderness within these political statements. Muir said that he went to the mountains to "touch naked God," but in his political lobbying he was often willing to settle for slogans rather than ecstasy. One could say that Muir was a mystic who also had to learn to speak to Congress; LaBastille is a resourceful and practical writer who at times tries to play the role of seer. The epilogue of Woodswoman is reminiscent of the conclusion of Walden:

Sometimes I sit in my log cabin as in a cocoon, sheltered by swaying spruces from the outside world. From traffic, and noise, and liquor, and triangles, and pollution. Life seems to have no beginning and no ending. Only the steady expansion of trunk and root, the slow pileup of duff and debris, the lap of water before it becomes ice, the patter of raindrops before they turn to snow-flakes.

Then the chirp of a swallow winging over the lake reminds me that...there is always a new beginning. (278)

While her political comments are acute, LaBastille's spiritual vision often relies upon a naive form of

pastoralism, categorized by its sense of seclusion ("in a cocoon"), exclusion ("from traffic and noise"), the observation of nature's cycles ("trunk...ice...raindrops"), and a sense of timelessness ("life seems to have no beginning and no ending"). In a text which repeatedly reminds the reader that modern wilderness -- and social roles within that wilderness -- are constructs closely associated with ideologies of land use and gender, LaBastille concludes with a vaporous hymn which in effect ignores these influences. For LaBastille, there would indeed be "a new beginning." Her next book, Beyond Black Bear Lake, was written after the pressures from tourists, admirers, and developers threatened her little "cocoon," causing her to find a new homestead even further back into the Adirondacks. The name of her new cabin is "Thoreau II."

The landscape of Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony is a series of trails and roads, of worn paths among mesas and tourist-clogged interstate highways. Yet rather than relying on simplistic oppositions of American and Indian culture, Silko creates fascinating and re-invigorating combinations and interweavings of Indian/American myths, ceremonies, and journeys. In her recent essay, "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination," Silko refers to the importance of "the migration story: an Interior Journey." Many American stories -- ranging from the Journey of Lewis and Clark to those of Washington Irving, Ahab, or Nick Adams

-- share this motif of self-definition, psychic healing, or cultural consolidation by means of a significant journey into the wilderness. Yet the journeys which Silko commemorates are not only the ancient tales of mythological figures, but the migration journeys of contemporary native Americans. A key element of Silko's work is her attempt to retain the significance of these migratory journeys in an area which would seem to have lost many of its mythical aspects:

The Laguna Pueblo migration stories refer to specific places -- mesas, springs, or cottonwood trees -- not only locations which can be visited still, but also locations which lie directly on the state highway route linking Pagute village with Laguna village....Thus the landscape between Paguate and Laguna takes on a deeper significance: the landscape resonates the spiritual or mythic dimension of the Pueblo world even today. ("Landscape," 90-91)

Initially, it would seem that such an understanding -- or more specifically, a connection with the mythical dimension of landscape -- is not a common occurrence near a state highway. Silko's attempt is not only to retain a sense of spirituality linked to the open, untouched landscapes of the mythic past or the nineteenth century, but to establish a sense of place that can renew this spiritual connection to the land where we are here and now, to link the mythic with the immediate, the holy mesa with Interstate 66.

The opening pages of Ceremony depict a world which is damaged and sick. The central character, Tayo, is the

illegitimate son of a white man and his Indian mother. During World War II he witnesses a Japanese soldier smashing the skull of his dying brother with the butt end of a rifle. His stays in Army hospitals and bouts with alcohol have offered no cure for his shame, "battle fatigue," and nightmares. Early in the novel, while Tayo is aimlessly tending sheep one day, his war-damaged friend Harley suggests a "migration" to the highway. Yet the "locations" for this journey are not mesas but cheap bars:

Tayo shrugged his shoulders. They were twenty-five or thirty miles from the bars on the other side of the reservation boundary line. People called it "going up the line," and the bars were built one after the other alongside 66, beginning at Budville and extending six or seven miles past San Fidel to the Whiting Brothers' station near McCarty's. (24)

In the distance lie more troubling areas, places which the "destroyers" have claimed as theirs, places from which destruction threatens to radiate: Trinity Site, White Sands, and Los Alamos, a triad of sites where Indian ritual had been replaced by nuclear weapons testing. Much of the landscape description in *Ceremony* is nightmarish, and is matched by an equally horrific catalog of the degradation of a people who are losing contact with the land. Silko repeatedly refers to Highway 66 as the center of a new "migration" journey, one associated with self-hatred and waste:

The traveling made me tired. But I remember when we drove through Gallup. I saw Navajos in torn old jackets, standing outside the bars. There were Zunis and Hopis there too, even a few Lagunas. All of them slouched down against the dirty walls of the bars along Highway 66, their eyes staring at the ground as if they had forgotten the sun in the sky; or maybe that was the way they dreamed for wine, looking for it somewhere in the the mud on the sidewalk. This is us, too, I was thinking to myself. These people crouching outside bars like cold flies stuck to the wall. (107)

Like the peyote-eaters from N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn, these "cold flies" rely on ceremony, but one which is chosen selfishly and repeatedly abused. In a similar way, Tayo repeatedly finds himself involved with Leroy, Harley, and Emo, three acquaintances whose self-destructive energy usually leads them out on the open road. While they describe their escapades in terms of freedom, it is a freedom based on isolation. In casting off their ties to Indian society, their past, and their land, they create only a life of suffocation and nausea:

Some one groaned; he looked over to see who it was. He smelled vomit. Harley had thrown up all over himself. Tayo rolled down the window and drove with his head outside, the way train engineers did, the air rushing at his face as the watched the white lines of the highway fall past the truck.

He pulled off the highway at Mesita, and reached over and shook Leroy by the arm. He mumbled and pushed Tayo's hand away. He shut off the engine and looked at the village. The lights of the houses were as scattered and dim as the far-away stars. He left the keys in the ignition and rolled up the window in case the wind blew that night. One of them had pissed, and the rubber mat at Leroy's feet was wet, and with the windows rolled

up the urine smell steamed around him. He gagged as he pushed the door open, and something gave way in his belly. He vomited out everything he had drunk with them, and when that was gone, he was still kneeling on the road besides the truck, holding his heaving belly, trying to vomit out everything -- all the past, all his life. (168)

Silko considers numerous "ceremonies" throughout the novel, trying to relocate the sense of allegiance with the places and journeys which had upheld Indian spiritual life in the past. Tayo can no longer hope for consolation from his own tribe; their threats to ostracize him for his drinking and violence are more intimidating than helpful. Tayo's healing begins with a visit to Betonle, a medicine man of dubious reputation. His hogan rests on a bluff overlooking yet another misguided set of ceremonies along Highway 66:

The Gallup Ceremonial had been an annual event for a long time. It was good for the tourist business coming through in the summertime on Highway 66... The tourists got to see what they wanted; from the grandstand at the Ceremonial grounds they watched the dancers perform, and they watched Indian cowboys ride bucking horses and Brahma bulls. There were wagon races, and the ladies' wood-chopping contest and fry-bread-making race. The Gallup merchants raised prices in motels and restaurants all Ceremonial week, and made a lot of money off the tourists. They sold great amounts of liquor to Indians, and in those years when liquor was illegal for Indians, they made lot more money because they bootlegged it. (116)

Betonle is quite aware of the degradation which he witnesses daily, yet he remains in this place because he feels "comfortable" among the local hills, and is able to sustain

his will because of this closeness. Tayo, Betonle, and an odd young helper named Shush leave the violence and sordid commercialism of the Gallup area, heading back into the sandrock foothills for their own ceremony:

Tayo stood near the horses, looking down the path over the way they had come. The plateaus and canyons spread out below him like clouds falling into each other past the horizon. The world below was distant and small; it was dwarfed by a sky so blue and vast the clouds were lost in it. Far into the south there were smoky blue ridges of the mountain haze at Zuni. He smoothed his hand over the top of his head and felt the sun. The mountain wind was cool. It smelled like springs hidden deep in mossy black stone. He could see no signs of what had been set loose upon the earth: the highways, the towns, even the fences were gone. This was the highest place on earth: he could feel it. It had nothing to do with measurements and height. It was a special place. He was smiling. He felt strong. He had to touch his own hand to remember what year it was: thick welted scars from the shattered bottle glass. (139)

"It was the highest place on earth...It was a special place": this is a familiar refrain among wilderness writers. For Edward Abbey, the Utah desert is "...the most beautiful place on earth. There are many such places"; Hemingway's Nick Adams was able to find "the good place...his home as he had made it"; Anne LaBastille finds solace and "a new beginning" in her "cocoon" in the Adirondacks. These writers share a common goal to define the spiritual value of landscape. Yet they could hardly be more disparate in their explanations of how this spiritual moment is achieved, and

how the opportunity for similar moments should be preserved. When Tayo ascends to this "highest place," the novel is a little more than half-way finished. The power of Ceremony becomes apparent when Tayo comes down from the mountain, and tries to impress the value of his experience on a culture victimized by "witchery."

Silko refuses to let the novel degenerate into a predictable series of accusations involving Indian vs. white, path vs. highway, or ceremony vs. technology. While the novel boils with anger, Silko sees white industrial culture as an effect, rather than a cause, of evil, or as she calls it, "witchery." For Silko, references to the nineteenth-century legacy of land theft, deceit, and violence obscure deeper problems, and may even take the form of evasiveness; when Tayo laments, "They took almost everything, didn't they," Betonle responds, "We always come back to that, don't we?" (127). Betonle sees more immediate possibilities for confrontation and renewal within contemporary Indian culture, and sees himself as the new myth-maker ("I have made changes in the rituals") and the reconciler ("We can deal with white people, with their machines and their beliefs"). In fact, rather than judging the two cultures by their oppositions and divisions, Indians and whites are tragically linked together "in the middle of witchery's final ceremonial sand painting." The central myth of the novel, the emergence of "witchery," culminates in a

horrific image of Indians and whites as "one clan again, united by the faith the destroyers planned for all of them, for all living things; united by a circle of death that devoured people in cities twelve thousand miles away" (246). Tayo's final confrontation involves the violence which has consumed his friends and which literally threatens to end his own life:

He turned. The moon was rising above the last mesa he had crossed from the east. A transition was about to be completed: the sun was crossing the zenith to a winter place in the sky, a place where prayers of long winter nights would call out the long summer days of new growth. Tonight the old priests would be praying for the force to continue the relentless motion of the stars. But there were others who would be working this night, casting loose countermotions to suck in a great spiral, swallowing the universe endlessly into the black mouth, their diagrams in black ash on cave walls outlining the end in motionless dead stars. But he saw the constellation in the north sky, and the fourth star was directly above him; the pattern of the ceremony was in the stars, and the constellation formed a map of the mountains in the directions he had gone for the ceremony. For each star there was night and a place; this was the last night and the last place, when the darkness of night and the light of day were balanced. His protection was there in the sky, in the position of the sun, in the pattern of the stars. He had only to complete this night, to keep the story out of reach of the destroyers for a few more hours, and the witchery would turn, upon itself, upon them. (247)

Silko's Ceremony is among the finest recent novels about landscape and its relation to spiritual and political values. In contrast to both Brody and LaBastille, Silko is more forceful about the need to constantly reshape and

revise ceremonies and myths. Brody and LaBastille both emphasize the ways in which social ideologies prefigure people's responses to landscape and their assumptions about social roles in the wilderness. Brody presents a situation in which the process of image-making constantly pulls one towards simplistic models of good/bad oil companies vs. good/bad Indians. LaBastille, much like Arlene Blum in Annapurna: A Woman's Place, insists on her own presence within a series of male images about the wilderness. Both Brody and LaBastille provide startling contrasts between alternative ways of seeing, yet neither of them create what Annette Kolodny has called an "alternative metaphorical design." Silko takes a further step and begins to create her own mythologies. Thus stories and myths establish the renewed sense of being connected to the land, or as Betonie says, "comfortable." The struggle is not defined only in terms of land rights and treaty violations, of holy mesas and testing grounds, but in terms of stories and their appropriations. The scholarship of Slotkin, Kolodny, Green, Bercovitch and others have shown that the "destroyers" in their various forms have been willing and able to bring such stories within their reach, and to create a world in their own image. Tayo's valiant hope is "to keep the story out of reach of the destroyers for a few more hours, and the witchery would turn, upon itself, upon them."

## Chapter Four

The Stewardship of Wilderness In  
Thoreau, Faulkner, Snyder, and McPhee

Improvement makes strait roads; but the crooked  
roads without Improvement are roads of Genius.

-- William Blake's  
"The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"

The charming landscape which I saw this morning  
is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty  
farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and  
Manning the woodlands beyond. But none of them owns  
the landscape.

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Nature"

There is clearly not enough wilderness left for the  
rising number of people who say they desire it. It's  
not wilderness anyway if it only exists by our  
permission and stewardship.

-- Jim Harrison's  
"Passacaglia on Getting Lost"

The Glacier Peak Wilderness is probably the most  
beautiful piece of country we've got. Mining copper  
there would be like hitting a pretty girl in the  
face with a shovel. It would be like strip-mining  
the Garden of Eden.

-- John McPhee's Encounters  
with the Archdruid

One of the more disturbing questions from William  
Gass's In the Heart of the Heart of the Country tersely  
summarizes a dilemma of modern wilderness writers: "When  
I've wormed through a fence to reach a meadow, do I ever

feel the same about the field?" (2086) It is hardly surprising that writers would react with anger or disillusionment to the obvious obstacle of an owner's fence. One's reactions might be complicated if the "fence" -- be it barbed-wire, a treaty-line, or a National Park Boundary -- existed because of the direct or indirect actions of the author. Numerous texts about American wilderness -- most notably Thoreau's "Walking," Faulkner's The Bear, Gary Snyder's "Glacier Peak Wilderness Area," and John McPhee's Encounters with the Archdruid -- confront a bitter necessity, namely that the continued preservation of American wilderness depends on the public ownership of land. These authors often wrote of the value of wilderness while locating their travels in lands that were already mapped, sold, deeded, and allocated. In their texts, the most troubling image is not the "fence" which barred access to the land, but the "trail" which supposedly provided it. Trails have served as a means of release and as a tainted reminder of ownership; Thoreau, Faulkner, Snyder, and McPhee all address this issue as a contradiction of certain personal and cultural ideals.

Some might assert that land surrounded by fences and crossed by trails had already lost any right to be considered "wilderness." Yet it should be remembered that many of the most important texts about American wilderness do not offer tales of success, of some eventual epiphanic

moment in the presence of nature. Instead, many of these texts refer to the differing forms of interference encountered in the attempt to recover the value of wilderness. These compromises and conflicts may be closely related to the destruction of American wilderness, yet it would generally be a mistake to associate various forms of interference with a diminishing quality of writing about wilderness. As Leo Marx explains in The Machine in the Garden, many of the touchstones of American wilderness writing -- Thoreau's Walden, Melville's Moby-Dick, Clemens's Huckleberry Finn -- are not sustained escapes from the pressures of civilization; rather, as Marx shows in a series of readings, it is the sudden intrusion of social and historical pressure at the moment of epiphany which defines the difference between "simple" and "complex" pastoralism.

Marx aligns the "simple form of pastoralism" with popular and sentimental forms of expression. He admits that more and more Americans are becoming interested in the wilderness heritage of America; for example, areas such as the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone each receive over three million visitors per year. Yet the average length of stay at the Grand Canyon is a mere four hours. Marx has little hope that such behaviour can yield lasting benefits. He claims that a "simple" version of the pastoral "in culture at large is the starting point for infantile wish-

fulfillment dreams, a diffuse nostalgia, and a naive, anarchic primitivism" (The Machine in the Garden 11). As he points out in his later essay, "Pastoralism in America," such a "naive" and optimistic encounter with Nature is actually "a representative event of the dominant, progressive ideology" (57).

This "simple" version of pastoralism contrasts with more "complex" works by authors such as Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Twain, who often employed wilderness as a counter-force to the progressive/industrial ideology of the nineteenth century. Then why do these authors' central characters -- Hester Prynne, Huck Finn, Ahab -- find that their search for solace or truth in the wilderness ends in compromise, failure, or death? The machine in the garden serves as a metaphor for the problems faced by these characters. Marx claims that works such as Walden, Huckleberry Finn, and Moby-Dick all feature a moment which he calls "an interrupted idyll":

It often begins as another interlude of serenity, peace, and joy, but the mood in this case is abruptly transformed by the intrusion of a machine or some other manifest token of the dynamism of modern industrial society. So far from being an occasion for an optimistic view of history, the sudden intrusion of the machine upon the native landscape evokes feelings of dislocation and irony. (57)

Marx provides an insightful and troubling analysis of the complex relationships which American authors have had with wilderness. Yet his earlier work also leaves some major

questions unanswered; in particular, he declines to explain the extent to which the myth of the Machine In the Garden can generate both literary AND political texts about wilderness. The book ends with the claim that "the machine's sudden entrance into the garden presents a problem that ultimately belongs not to art but to politics" (364). His later essays, particularly those in The Pilot and the Passenger (1988), examine the pastoral themes of more directly political writers such as Sontag and Maller. Marx has also referred frequently to political manifestations of pastoralism, as in his recent essay, "Pastoralism in America," where he discusses the "universality and adaptability of pastoralism" and its relevance to "advanced industrial societies" (55). Although Marx mentions national parks, environmentalism, the anti-nuclear movement, ecology, and student protests, they are generally discussed in passing. Marx is a far better scholar of literature than he is of the politics of modern American wilderness.

Furthermore, the pairing of Machine/Garden implies that an author is disturbed by the Machine without having any affinity or complicity with it. The usual distinction of forces in such conflicts is between wilderness and development, between "sylvan fields" and "dark, Satanic mills." A somewhat more subtle compromise arises from the conflicts between wilderness and ownership -- yet this is not only the obvious conflict of the landless wilderness

mystic who stares in disbelief at the "No Trespassing" signs of the landowner. Writers face a more troubling situation when the landowner is the author himself, or a conservation group supported by the author. In this sense, land ownership is not opposed to the integrity of wilderness: it is the only way in which the integrity of the land can be saved from more troubling and permanent problems. Whether it is a town's land grants, a private citizen's hunting grounds, an area purchased by The Nature Conservancy, or a National Park, American writers have often participated in efforts towards the ownership of wilderness, ranging from Thoreau's calls for town-owned wilderness preserves to John Muir's fights for national parks to Edward Abbey's experience as a park ranger. While writers have fought for such methods of wilderness preservation, they have at times found that their own will to write about wilderness had been seriously compromised by the very actions they have supported. During these writers' own moments of epiphany or ecstasy, their joy is tainted by the very "machines" or forces which they have constructed.

As the wilderness areas of America continued to disappear throughout the nineteenth century, American authors began to intensify their questions about the relation of wilderness to ownership. Wilderness was no longer just the blank slate upon which Americans would sketch their portrait; rather than being the source

of democratic institutions. It gradually became the "product" of these institutions. The wilderness which had "created" American values would in turn be "re-created" by enlightened land policies. Among the writers of the American Renaissance, it is Thoreau who confronts the problem of interference, of wilderness and ownership, most directly. The presence of the machines of his neighbors came quite close to Thoreau's gardens: the Fitchburg railroad ran less than a mile from his cabin at Walden Pond. Yet for Thoreau, the sources of interference were much more pervasive and subtle than the fiendish scream of a train's whistle. In his essay "Walking," Thoreau registers his most telling complaints about interference and also proposes some of his least satisfactory suggestions about the ways in which wilderness writers might overcome this dilemma. "Walking" begins a period in Thoreau's thought when land ownership is figured as a symptom of the "evil days" to come. Yet his fears of "evil" are balanced by his growing understanding of the actual conditions of both private and public land ownership. Thoreau comes to include a more balanced assessment of ownership, one in which public land ownership is considered as a necessary challenge for "complex" American pastoralism.

"Walking" opens with a rejection of compromise, as Thoreau announces, "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness." Although the land around him

was undergoing constant development, Thoreau claims that his sauntering continues to hold the promise of discovery, since "two or three hour's walking will carry me to as strange a country as I ever expect to see....as good as the dominions of the King of Dahomey." Like a Daniel Boone stretching for his bit of "elbow-room," Thoreau repeatedly reminds us of how little his world has been tainted:

I can easily walk ten, fifteen, twenty, any number of miles, commencing at my own door, without going by any house, without crossing a road except where the fox and the mink do.

Yet like so many of Thoreau's works, "Walking" is at its best when it confronts the awkwardness of any attempt to find a sustained "primitive" relation to nature. The numerous references to "roads" in this essay make it clear that Thoreau does much of his walking along various thoroughfares, while judging some of them as forms of interference and others as sources of inspiration. At times, a road is associated with many of the "good works" which Thoreau claimed to avoid, with "the political world...that market-man...horses and men of business." Yet Thoreau does not shun all roads or compromises, and insists that "there are a few old roads that may be trodden with profit."

With the instinct to travel,  
I can get enough gravel  
On the Old Marlborough Road.  
Nobody repairs it,  
For nobody wears it;  
It is a living way,

As the Christians say.

(lines 18-24)

You may go round the world  
By the Old Marlborough Road.

(lines 66-67)

As one would expect in Thoreau's work, this veneer of doggerel does not completely cover his lurking suspicions that he had not managed to travel as far or as wisely as he might have wished:

But it sometimes happens that I cannot easily shake off the village. The thought of some work will run in my head and I am not where my body is, -- I am out of my senses. In my walks I would fain return to my senses. What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods? I suspect myself, and cannot help a shudder, when I find myself so implicated...

The possibility of being "implicated" involves the memory of "town" and its conditions for language, work, time, economy, and planning. It also refers to more concrete and practical matters, namely the "partitioning" of open lands:

At present, in this vicinity, the best part of the land is not private property; the landscape is not owned, and the walker enjoys comparative freedom. But possibly the day will come when it will be partitioned off into so-called pleasure-grounds, in which only a few will take a narrow and exclusive pleasure only, -- when fences shall be multiplied, and man traps and other engines invented to confine men to the public road, and walking over the surface of God's earth shall be construed as mean trespassing on some gentleman's grounds. To enjoy a thing exclusively is commonly to exclude yourself from the true enjoyment of it.

Let us improve our opportunities, then, before the evil days come.

Thoreau's depiction of these "evil days" is suggestive of the industrial rampage of the latter nineteenth century. Yet eventually one finds that his descriptions of these "evil" days are rather scattered and vaguely-defined; they finally seem to be based on a curious disdain, not the sense of urgency which one finds in the work of George Catlin or John Muir. His suggestions for countering this murky evil, for "improving our opportunities," border on the simple-minded. As Leo Marx has said of "Walking,"

In "Walking," which begins firmly enough, he cuts ideas loose from observations, and form crumbles into page after page of tedious, homiletic assertion. Now he speaks as an extreme primitivist-anarchist....in the end Thoreau's doctrine of "wildness" becomes indistinguishable from the shadowy bliss of infantile mindlessness. (82)

The very idea of the Law, and of the actual confines of ownership, are clearly disturbing to Thoreau. Yet rather than confronting these issues directly, Thoreau resorts to Transcendentalist sleight-of-hand. In "Walking," an essay one would like to value for its clear delineation of potential conflicts, terms such as "jurisdiction" simply evaporate:

The walker in the familiar fields which stretch around my native town sometimes find themselves in another land than is described in their owners' deeds, as it were in some faraway field on the confines of the actual Concord, where her

Jurisdiction ceases, and the idea which the word Concord suggests ceases to be suggested.

The reader's search for a sustained or direct resolution of the problem of ownership must lead beyond "Walking." Thoreau continues to find brief moments when he can avoid the distraction and intrusions of consciousness, politics, language, and other "man traps." Yet the finest moments of his later writings are not those of the "primitivist-anarchist," but those of struggle within the established patterns of land use. Thoreau's attempts to release himself from the "confines" of fences and lots are not often figured as trips to uncharted regions. Even in a passage where Thoreau states "my spirit is free," the image of the road still signifies Thoreau's attachments:

Now I yearn for one of those old meandering dry unhabited roads which lead away from towns -- which lead us away from temptation, which conduct to the outside of earth -- over its uppermost crust -- where you can forget what country you are traveling -- where no farmer can complain that you are treading down his grass -- no gentle man who has recently constructed a seat in the country that you are trespassing -- on which you can go off at half-cock -- and wave adieu to the village -- along which you may travel like a pilgrim -- going no-whither -- Where travellers are not too often to be met -- Where my spirit is free -- where walls and fences are not cared for -- where your head is more in heaven than your feet are on earth -- which have long reaches -- where you can see the approaching traveller half a mile off and be prepared for him -- not so luxuriant a soil as to attract men -- some root and stump fences which do not need attention -- where travellers have no occasion to stop -- but pass along and leave you your thoughts -- where it makes no odds which way you face whether you are going or coming --

whether it is morning or evening -- mid-noon or mid-night -- where earth is cheap enough by being public. Where you can walk and think with least obstruction (Journal June 21, 1851).

He writes in the same entry, "In roads the obstructions are not under my feet." Such claims strike one as an evasion of the actual question of land ownership, of how the diminishing possibilities of writing about wilderness and landscape are indeed substantial and urgent claims on his attention. In the above passage, one might assume that Thoreau associates himself with the "uninhabited roads," not with the "town," the "farmer," the "gentleman." One who pictures Thoreau walking "where walls and fences are not cared for...where earth is cheap enough by being public" should also remember how Thoreau earned most of his money during this period -- by surveying the lands of the town, the farmer, and the gentleman. As Leo Stoller claims,

No other occupation for which Thoreau qualified would have been as adequately symbolic as was surveying of the decision to accept life within an economic order based on profit. He established the bounds of farms about to change hands, laid out house lots to be offered the slow-growing population of the township, plotted new roads through the properties of enterprising real estate men, and more often than any other task, divided woodlots in preparation for their auction to lumber dealers....surveying pushed Thoreau into association with the local farmers and entrepreneurs who were his employers. What he saw of their life -- and more important, what he shared of it himself in the many hours of surveying -- intensified his antagonism to the social order of which they were all a part. (54-5)

It is tempting to see Thoreau's surveying as compromise or failure; as Thoreau said in "Walking," "I suspect myself, and cannot help a shudder, when I find myself so implicated." Yet it is this problem of "implication" which makes certain parts of his later writings so much more convincing and relevant than the naive and random suggestions of "Walking." While Thoreau continued to sense a strong opposition between the town and the woods, he occasionally suggested that the woods be saved or managed by the very town which threatened their destruction: "In the 1850's he made a proposal that each town in Massachusetts save a 500-acre piece of woods which would be forever wild: no lumbering, no changes at all" (Perrin 20). Instead of continued pleas for "absolute freedom and wildness," Thoreau adopted a position which would become more prevalent in the latter half of the century:

In his latest and soberest years, after he had reluctantly consented, on occasion, to think socially, he became, to some extent, that very tame and civilized thing, a "conservationist," and he even made a plea for the establishment of national parks. (Krutch 55)

For today's wilderness writers, accustomed and perhaps devoted to the idea of national parks and forests, Thoreau's surveying provides a striking image for their ambivalence:

The history of the woodlot is often...a history of cross-purposes -- of steady and consistent endeavor on the part of Nature -- of interference & blundering with a glimmer of intelligence at the

11th hour on the part of the proprietor...What shall we say to that management that halts between two courses? Does neither this nor that but botches both? ("Seeds" 396)

Thoreau may not have provided the solutions to the problem of ownership, but he has provided some key terms for recognizing its effects. These "cross-purposes" of "interference" and "management" are the legacy of twentieth-century wilderness areas, whose proprietors' general plan for easy tourist access in a pristine wilderness area certainly "does neither this nor that but botches both." They are also the legacy of certain twentieth-century writers -- Edward Abbey, William Faulkner, Peter Matthiessen, Gary Snyder, John McPhee, John Haines, Wendell Berry -- who have found that the inherent contradictions of management/wilderness are not just a modern problem, but a vital and recurring theme in American literature.

Few twentieth-century American writers have explored the bitter conflicts of land ownership with more intensity than William Faulkner. Yet Faulkner was far from a wilderness explorer; the value of his work is found in his attempts to recover the healing and primal power of the land from places where private owners, industrial concerns, and various "man-traps and other engines" had already staked their claims. Like Thoreau sauntering on the Old Marlborough Road, Faulkner's characters know there will soon be no

Frontier at all, and have already begun to search for "a living way" within the confines of contemporary land usage. In contrast to Thoreau, Faulkner presents these conflicts in terms which are both more indirect and more urgent. In Faulkner's time, the "evil days" prophesized by Thoreau had already arrived, and Transcendentalist attempts to leap beyond the confines of actual compromises no longer held much promise. The typical Journey for Faulkner rarely proceeds far without a reconsideration of land use and ownership:

A mile back he had left the rich, broad, flat river bottom country and entered the hills -- a region which topographically was the final blue and dying echo of the Appalachian mountains. Chicksaw Indians had owned it, but after the Indians it had been cleared where possible for cultivation, and after the Civil War, forgotten save by the small peripatetic sawmills which had vanished too now, their sites marked only by the mounds of rotting sawdust which were not only their gravestones but the monuments of a people's heedless greed. (The Hamlet 196)

Whether they are subject to the various passings of the Chicksaws, the daring waste of the later settlers, or the blind clutching of the Snopes, Faulkner's lands are never beyond ownership. For Faulker, the "evil days" foreseen by Thoreau are not simply a product of industrialization but of ownership itself, which inflicts its curse on a series of tenants.

These dual tensions -- of wilderness adventure confined and compromised by land ownership, and in turn, of land

ownership as a barrier against industrial development -- are two central themes of Faulkner's The Bear. The story was published in 1942 as part on the collection Go Down, Moses, but it is set in the 1870s, when the Frontier of had not yet "closed," when a trip to the woods, "bigger and older than any recorded document," was still "the best game of all." However, the terms of conflict -- of bear, man, wilderness, and axe -- are soon made apparent in this description of the Bear:

It ran in his knowledge before he ever saw it. It loomed and towered in his dreams before he even saw the unaxed woods where it left its crooked print, shaggy, tremendous, red-eyed, not malevolent but just big, too big for the dogs that tried to bay it, for the horses that tried to ride it down, for the men and bullets they fired into it; too big for the very country which was its constricting scope. It was as if the boy had already divined what his sense and intellect had not encompassed yet: that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes who feared it because it was wilderness (187).

It is indeed tempting to see this this story as a contest of "unaxed woods" resisting the attacks of "puny men," but to do so reduces the complexity of Ike McCaslin's attempts to find value in land that was already becoming "non-wilderness." One of Faulkner's hunting companions claimed that "In Old Reel Foot's days a man could travel for miles under the open timber and never see a road" (Utley 131). Yet The Bear is criss-crossed by images of roads, trails, paths, borders, and train tracks, and thus is far more than

a story about a young man's initiation into wilderness: in Thoreau's terms, Ike McCaslin first has to make a series of choices about "absolute freedom and wildness," and then about "interference" and "management."

The story begins with images of the forested wilderness which is to provide Ike's "novitiate":

The wilderness closed behind his entrance as it had opened momentarily to accept him, opening before his advancement as it closed behind his progress, no fixed path the wagon followed but a channel nonexistent ten yards ahead of it and ceasing to exist ten yards after it had passed. (189)

As the hunt continues, the sense of dislocation from the outer world increases, as there is no longer even a trail or path to lead back towards the town:

They rode for more than three hours through the rapid shortening sunless afternoon, following no path, no trail even that he could discern, into a section of country he had never seen before. (193)

As Ike grows more determined in his searches for the Bear, he gradually leaves behind the more obvious forms of interference, the camp, the clearing, the roads, the paths, the other hunters. Following Sam Fathers' advice, Ike even leaves the gun "by his own will and relinquishment." Yet he realizes that, in Sam's words, "You aint looked right yet." The next morning he sets out, ready to cast off everything in search of the Bear:

He had already relinquished, of his will, because of his need, in humility and peace and without regret, yet apparently that had not been enough, the leaving of the gun had not been enough. He stood for a moment -- a child, alien and lost in the green and soaring gloom of the markless wilderness. Then he relinquished completely to it. It was the watch and compass, he was still tainted. He removed the linked chain of the one and the looped thong of the other from his overalls and hung them on a bush and leaned the stick beside them and entered it. (201)

These images of the "markless wilderness" are a stark contrast to the images of the fifth and final section of the story, when, two winter's later, "he went back to the camp one more time before the lumber company moved in and began to cut the timber" (301). Instead of a "markless wilderness," Ike now "would hear the passing log train from the camp." Rather than shying away from "fixed paths," Ike actually rides the train to his meeting point with the other hunters. After Ike had first thrown away his compass and become lost, he had made a "cast to cross his backtrack"; now he recognizes his position in the woods by "one of the four concrete markers set down by the lumber company's surveyor to establish the four corners of the plot which Major de Spain had reserved out of the sale." After this trip he comes to realize "why Major de Spain had not come back, and that after this time he himself, who had to see it one time other, would return no more" (307).

It is tempting to over-emphasize this contrast of "markless wilderness" and the "train track," and to read

The Bear as a relatively simple modern fable, one in which the beauty of an untainted wilderness is opposed to the beast of a purely machine-driven culture. But to see this text simply as anti-progress or anti-development is to overlook the fourth section of the story, where Ike speaks of "himself and his cousin juxtaposed not against the wilderness but against the tamed land which was to have been his heritage." In this section it becomes clear that Faulkner finds himself in a dilemma similar to Thoreau's, where every decision involving ownership or wilderness seemingly "does neither this nor that but botches both."

Throughout the fourth section, Ike repeatedly claims that the land is cursed. Ike's self-accusations are not just a matter of deeds and land sales, but of "that whole edifice intricate and complex and founded upon injustice" (286). As Ike says:

"Cursed:" and again McCaslin merely lifted up one hand, not even speaking and not even toward the ledgers: so that, as the stereopticon condenses into one instantaneous field the myriad minutia of its scope, so did that slight and rapid gesture establish in the small cramped and cluttered twilight room not only the ledgers but the plantation in its mazed and intricate entirety.... (285)

Ike finds it easier to calculate his pain than his responsibility. At first he claims that his choice is both false and inconsequential, for the notion of "repudiation" is just a legal fiction:

"I can't repudiate it. It was never mine to repudiate. It was never Father's and Uncle Buddy's to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never Grandfather's to bequeath them to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never old Ikkemotubbe's to sell to Grandfather for bequeathment and repudiation." (247)

Despite Ike's self-righteousness and obfuscation, his land allotment will not just go away, and his cousin Edmond offers a more practical view:

So let me say it: that nevertheless and notwithstanding old Carothers did own it. Bought it, got it, no matter; kept it, held it, no matter; bequeathed it: else why do you stand here relinquishing and repudiating it? (248)

Ike does indeed "repudiate" his grant to the land, and spends most of his life living in a cramped rented room in town. He becomes a simple carpenter, justifying his action by noting that "the Nazarene had found carpentering good for the life and ends he had assumed and elected to serve" (296). Ike had previously looked to the Bible for a vision of a world where people held "the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood" (247), but the remainder of the fourth section depicts a world of brutal selfishness and degraded ideals. In this section, the trailing of Old Ben is paralleled by a similar trailless search, Ike's attempt to find Fonsiba. While this search also leads to a pathless wilderness, Ike's reaction is one of shock and anger:

"I will have to find her. I will have to. We have already lost one of them. I will have to find her this time." He did. Hunched in the slow and icy rain, on a spent hired horse splashed to the chest and higher, he saw it -- a single log edifice with a clay chimney that seemed in the process of being flattened by the rain to a nameless and valueless rubble of dissolution in that roadless and even pathless waste of unfenced fallow and wilderness jungle -- no barn, no stable, not so much as a hen-coop: just a log cabin built by hand and no clever hand either. (266)

Ike enters the log cabin, but does not find the image of the pastoral shepherd, the American woodsman, or any

"brotherhood" of communal owners; instead he finds a man

reading a book in the midst of that desolation, that muddy waste fenceless and even pathless and without even a walled shed for stock to stand beneath; and over all, permanent, clinging to the man's very clothing and exuding from the skin itself, that rank stink of baseless and imbecile delusion, that boundless rapacity and folly, of the carpet-bagger followers of victorious armies. (267)

Rather than being an image of "absolute freedom and wildness," this hut in the wilderness "fenceless and even pathless" is instead a monument to "that boundless rapacity and folly" of post-bellum America.

The traditions which had been associated with wilderness in the first parts of the story -- Independence, renewal, purification, humility, patience, friendship -- are all inverted, replaced by land speculation, fraud, and monopolies. The more responsible "owners" of the wild land, such as Major de Spain, are little match for the onslaught

of the lumber companies or the smaller but no less insidious efforts of private land speculators. The land that has been "cursed" by ownership was not sanctified by the act of "relinquishing" it -- someone was always quite ready to renew and perhaps even intensify the curse. Faulkner's The Bear delineates the ways in which ownership and wilderness, which had previously seemed contradictory, came to be seen as a necessary compromise, one which could conceivably be justified once land ownership was no longer aligned with "the whole edifice intricate and complex and founded upon injustice." In Faulkner's terms, those who had bought the land had been "dispossessed of Eden." America lacked an Eden, but possessed a Yellowstone, a Yosemite, a Grand Canyon. The questions were: who would own them, and would this ownership be a "curse?"

During the latter years of the nineteenth century, a growing number of Americans shared an apprehension similar to Ike McCaslin's, namely that wilderness would soon disappear under a system of strictly private ownership. This attitude did not suddenly spring up during the 1870s and 1880s. Lee Clark Mitchell marshals a wide range of sources which establish that "the commitment to the preservation of land itself grew out of state efforts to set aside scenic wonders and cities' recognition of the benefits of public parks," efforts which began in the 1830s (48). Yet as Roderick Nash explains in Wilderness and the American

Mind, the impetus to set aside large-scale wilderness areas did not yield results until a half-century later. While writers such as George Catlin had called for the establishment of nationally-owned "magnificent parks" as early as 1841, it was not until 1872, with the establishment of Yellowstone, that the National Park System began. The next few decades saw the creation of several of our most important parks: Yosemite (1890), Mount Ranier (1899), Crater Lake (1902), Grand Canyon (1909), Glacier (1910), Mount McKinley (1917), Acadia (1919), Bryce (1923), and Grand Teton (1929).

The history of the National Parks is long and varied, and has already received the attention of numerous scholars and historians. There has been a minor industry of books, ranging from coffee-table photo collections to more serious meditations, on the status of wilderness as it exists in the National Parks. Yet there has been a gap of silence, apathy, and open disdain between the literary community and the National Park system. In simple terms, the establishment of these parks, which seemed to many to be the most likely means of preserving American lands in time of economic pressures, apparently offered few possibilities for the modern writer. A harsh, accusatory tone marks the commentary about the parks, which are often associated with various types of tourism and overcrowding:

I am not going to talk about the well-equipped Republican clones you see marching like Hitler youth up and down the spine of the Rockies, or in any of the the national parks, national forests, wilderness areas in America. (Harrison 230)

Even those writers who actively support the idea of national parks have serious doubts. As Paul Schullery claims in

Mountain Time: Man Meets Wilderness in Yellowstone:

I warn you also that the national park idea is a philosophical rat's nest, a self-contradictory, ironic, incurably anomalous, and socially anachronistic bundle of challenges and frustrations....The American public has never received an adequate introduction to the national park idea. To them, or to most of them, the parks are little more than grassy Disneylands.... National parks, forests, monuments, and other federal reservations, as well as similar state areas, are all viewed, simply, as public places of recreation (72-73).

Modern writers who did continue to value landscape, wilderness, or wildlife, generally tried to find lands which offered a more personal vision than the parks; Aldo Leopold, Richard Nelson, Gretel Ehrlich, and Leslie Marmon Silko are notable examples. Those writers who chose to write about and within the park system soon came to share Thoreau's fears of the management which "does neither this nor that but botches both." The essential contradiction in American land-use policy within the National Parks is found in the directive to the Park Service, which was established by Congress in 1916. The Park Service was instructed to manage the parks and "to provide for the enjoyment of same in such manner as

will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." As more and more people began to visit the parks, the contradiction became the source of bitter debate: it seemed that the Service could not "provide for the enjoyment" of literally millions of visitors while also managing to leave these lands "unimpaired." The parks had provided a desperate means of ownership which would forestall the destruction of the wilderness:

For over a century wilderness advocates labored for just such a goal. They reasoned that preserving wild places depended on getting Americans into them without saws or bulldozers, only to find in their success the source of their greatest challenge (Nash 236).

This "challenge," this range of urgent problems, has continued to inspire writing which develops the theme of "complex pastoralism." Ideas about national parks, trails, and political activism in defense of wilderness are not common themes in recent American literature, but they are certainly essential themes in the writings of Gary Snyder. Snyder's poetry and prose is closely related to his numerous jobs: "The rhythms of my poems follow the rhythms of the physical work I'm doing and life I'm leading at any given time." His work as a forest ranger, trail-builder, logger, sea-man, and activist have generated a complex perspective of wilderness as a source of spiritual and literary values within particular economic systems.

Snyder became familiar to many readers through Jack

Kerouac's character, Japhy Ryder, from his novel, The Dharma Bums. At one point Ryder/Snyder exclaims,

I've been reading Whitman, know what he says, "Cheer up slaves, and horrify foreign despots," he means that the attitude for the Bard, the Zen Lunacy bard of old desert paths, see the whole thing is a world full of rucksack wanderers, Dharma Bums refusing to subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming....all of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, I see a vision of a great rucksack revolution, thousands or even millions of young Americans wandering around with rucksacks, going up to the mountains to pray, making children laugh and making young girls happy and old girls happier, all of 'em Zen lunatics...(97).

Kerouac's goofy enthusiasm for Snyder's version of "simple pastoralism" should not be allowed to distort the more serious aspects of Snyder's closely related concerns for wilderness and poetry. In one of his central images of writing, poetry is associated with the trail, as something solid and almost permanent, a careful arrangement of stone and earth. Snyder defines much of his writing as "Poetry a rip-rap on the slick rock of metaphysics":

Lay down these words  
 Before your mind like rocks.  
                   placed solid by hands  
 In choice of place, set  
 Before the body of the mind  
                   In space and time:  
 Solidity of bark, leaf, or wall  
                   riprap of things  
 Cobble of milky way,  
                   straying planets,  
 These poems, people,  
                   lost ponies with  
 Dragging saddles --

and rocky sure-foot trails.

("Riprap" lines 1-14)

Earth House Hold (1969) collects Snyder's varied interests in work, in various international attitudes and relations towards wilderness, in direct or indirect political activism, and in a wide variety of literary forms. As Charles Molesworth says, "Earth House Hold is best read as Snyder's epic -- in the sense that epic means a storehouse of cultural ideas and ideals" (66). Subtitled "Technical Notes & Queries To Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries," this text is "a gathering of essential information about our relatedness to the environment" (Molesworth 66). Snyder attempts to ground such "information" through his use of journals about work, study, and travel. In the essay "Buddhism and the Coming Revolution," Snyder mentions some of the basic changes he seeks as an alternative to industrial capitalism:

In fact, it is my view that the coming revolution will close the circle and link us in many ways with the most creative aspects of our archaic past. If we are lucky we may eventually arrive at a totally integrated world culture with matrilineal descent, free-form marriage, natural-credit economy, less industry, far less population and lots more national parks (93).

In the following essay, "Glacier Peak Wilderness Area," Snyder closely considers the ways in which "national parks" could be part of a "coming revolution." While Snyder has

claimed that his values "go back to the late Paleolithic," this essay makes it perfectly clear that Snyder focuses on the actual twentieth-century version of American wilderness. The essay is about his involvement with and within a wilderness area which is owned and supported by the very government whose policies Snyder rebels against. Unlike Thoreau, Snyder does not try to lead us "beyond the Jurisdiction" of civilization; instead, Snyder locates himself by commenting that he "wouldn't have known where, if it hadn't been for two Geological Survey men we ran onto, up here surveying the trail a bit for the 1/24,000 sheet to come out in another two years" (94). Throughout the essay, Snyder is attracted and distracted by the names of landmarks and camping areas, finding in these names both a sense of identity and of division. He does not see a river as a unified whole, but as a series of tributaries:

[Pugh creek goes into the Whitechuck  
 the Whitechuck goes into the Sauk  
 the Sauk goes into the Skagit  
 the Skagit goes into the Sound.] (95).

As Snyder and Allen Ginsberg continue "going along the trail traveling HIGH," their sense of place is provided and compromised by the constant reminders of the trail signs, which Snyder actually includes as part of the text:

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/
/      Whitechuck Trail      /
/
/      <-- White Pass    10  /
/      <-- Cascade Crest Tr 2 /
/
/-----

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/
/      Cascade Crest Trail  /
/
/      Indian Pass    13 --> /
/      White Pass     7 --> /
/      <-- Milk Creek Pass 9 /
/
/-----

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After Snyder and Ginsberg begin their ascent of Glacier Peak, roping together for passage through crevasses and icefalls, the writing becomes less distracted. One might say that it comes to resemble "wilderness" writing, in the sense that civilization seems to have been left behind by the transcendent action of climbing and poetic vision. Yet the eventual view from the summit is not the standard epiphanic moment of "mountain glory," but yet another reminder of how the possibilities offered by this "wilderness" are sustained:

A flock of birds, all cheeping and flying over the edge from void to void. Pumice again. Crampons off and start up tiring slidy rock. An hour and a half to the top. Mazama box chained to a rock -- a snowy crest -- mountains around, around, around around. I laughed and laughed. Allen was still coming up, a ways below.

Ross Petri climbed it just the day before, from the other side, with a group from Portland. Nice to know he's still climbing. To see his name in the summit book.

So many mountains, on so clear a day, the mind is staggered, and so looks to little things like pilot bread and cheese and bits of dried fruit. From Canada to Oregon, and ranges both east and west -- the blue mass of the Olympics far over hazy Puget Sound -- "You mean there's a Senator for all this?"

This seems to have been a crucial moment for Snyder, since five years later he wrote about this summit commentary in the essay "Why Wilderness?" from the collection Turtle Island (1974). In both essays, Snyder emphasizes that a metaphysics of wilderness is no longer possible or desirable outside of a political/economic understanding of how wilderness is preserved against the forces that threaten it. Snyder ends "Glacier Peak Wilderness Area" with a reminder of the violent land-grabbing which continues right outside the park boundary:

"Why you cutting back the brush along the road?"  
 "-- Can't get the Forest Service to do it --  
 have to do it ourselves --  
 so our guys won't run over each other  
 trucking out the logs." (102)

Snyder's perspective is "both transcendent and rooted in the physical world" (Molesworth 72). His texts pay homage to Thoreau and Muir; he associates national parks with "the coming revolution;" yet his years of work as a logger also tell him that no vision of wilderness is complete without

considering the economic forces which drive America to "truck out the logs."

The attempts to preserve a reasonable balance of economic and aesthetic needs are a dominant theme in the writings of John McPhee. His book Encounters with the Archdruid (1971) is a series of meetings and bitter debates between David Brower, ex-leader of the Sierra Club, and Charles Park (a mining engineer), Charles Fraser (a real estate developer), and Floyd Dominy (a dam builder and chief of the Bureau of Reclamation). As is his wont, McPhee rarely tips his hand about which side of the debate he supports, and his reticence encourages readers to judge for themselves. The greater issue of the text is whether wilderness experience, and wilderness itself, benefit from government regulation of lands.

Part One of the book, "A Mountain," features a trip to the same Glacier Peak Wilderness Area which Snyder had previously visited. McPhee's companions for the trip are Brower and Park. The conflicts which arise in the essay regard the pristine beauty of the area -- and the possibility that it would soon be open to large-scale copper mining operations, despite the apparent protection given the area by law, specifically the 1964 Wilderness Act:

In 1964, the United States Congress set aside this region and others as a permanent wilderness, not to receive even the use given a national park, not to be entered by a machine of any kind except in extreme emergency, not to be developed or altered

or lumbered -- forevermore. Within the structure of this so-called Wilderness Act, however, was a provision known as "the mining exception": all established claims could be made in any wilderness until 1984. (5).

Even in a garden which is "not to be entered by any machine of any kind," the threat of intrusion never disappears. The reliance on this theme alone, on the image of "virgin" land being "raped" by strip-mining, while suitable for environmentalist pamphlets, would hardly generate complex writing, and would hardly represent the complicated issues involved in the Wilderness Act. McPhee raises an equally pertinent point: to what extent does the establishment of wilderness areas compromise the appreciation of wilderness by the very people who love it and defend it? The essay soon announces that this "wilderness" is not that of the Frontier, the trapper, or the Oregon Trail:

Not far into the mountains...we had come to an oddly formal landmark. It was a sign that said, "You Are Now Entering the Glacier Peak Wilderness Area." In other words, "Take one more step and, by decree, you will enter a preserved and separate world, you will pass from civilization into wilderness." Wilderness was now that definable, that demonstrable, and could be entered in the sense that one enters a room. (7)

The sense of wilderness as a construct, as an area to be "established" or "set aside" by the same Congress which had supported the logging of old-growth forests, continues to gnaw at McPhee and his companions. They face two seemingly divergent sources of "interference." The first would be

the damage left by the copper mining, which would be like "hitting a pretty girl in the face with a shovel." Yet in Faulkner's terms, their more troubling conflict is not with the "puny men with axes"; like Ike McCaslin, they too ride a "train" into the unaxed wilderness. The "train" is the trail system, and the three hikers are quite open about their confused reactions to it. At separate points, McPhee bluntly asks Brower and Park if this Wilderness Area is indeed "wilderness":

I asked him [Brower] if, by his own standards, he would describe the terrain we were in as wilderness. "Yes, it is wilderness," he said. "The Sierra is what I love, but these mountains are perhaps the most beautiful we have." (14)

Having moved above the trees into a clear area, Park stopped to look back over the forest, the green lakes, the glacier, the snowfields, and the white peaks beyond. I asked him if, from his experience, he would call this wilderness. "No," he said. "Not with this trail in it." (17)

The most difficult moment for them occurs at Image Lake. (Image Lake was, incidentally, chosen as one of the "Ten Best Hike-In Views" in America by Backpacker magazine.) McPhee notes that the remaining possibilities for "wilderness experience" are tainted by the consumer culture which has recently sprouted to support the recreational aspects of wilderness, and by the trail system which efficiently leads hordes of people to a stylized confrontation with rugged peaks and alpine scenes. The

existence of Glacier Peak Wilderness Area is the direct result of the ideas and efforts of writers such as Catlin, Thoreau, Muir, Leopold, Abbey, and LaBastille: yet what would they say about this view of Image Lake?

Image Lake is very small -- a stock water pond in size -- and it stands in an open and almost treeless terrain. Slowly, we went around it, looking for a place to sleep. The sun was setting, and we had arrived much too late. We walked past tents along the shore -- blue tents, green tents, red tents, orange tents. The evening air was so still that we could hear voices all around the lake. We heard transistor radios. People greeted us as we went by. The heaviest shadows were in the northwest arc of the shore, so the air was particularly cold there, and space had been left. We took the space. We had come into the mountains from the east. These people had come in from the west. It had not been an easy trip for them, to be sure. The nearest roadhead was fifteen miles off and some four thousand feet below. Nonetheless, the lake that night had the ambience of a cold and crowded oasis. Shivering, I climbed up the slope to witness in the water the fading image of the great mountain. Objectively, the reflection was all it was said to be. But a "No Vacancy" sign seemed to hang in the air over the lake.

A real sign pointed the way to a privy. We collected fire wood, which was very hard to find, and when we had something of a blaze going and had all drawn in close around it for warmth, I said to Park and Brower, "Do you feel that you're in a wilderness now?" (58-9).

In his 1977 book, Coming into the Country, McPhee discusses the relation of wilderness, land ownership, and trails in terms of a much larger and more complex situation, the status of Alaskan wilderness after the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. In McPhee's words, this legislation acted "like a Jewel cutter's chisel

cleaving a rough diamond...effected the wholesale division, sub-division, patenting, parcelling and deeding out of physiographic Alaska" (18). Yet for McPhee and so many of the people who discuss the issue of land ownership in this book, the problem seems rather academic -- or, to be more precise, the signs of "ownership" in Alaska often seem rather distant. Just two hours north of Anchorage, one can hire a ride in a Cessna and fly north towards Denali without seeing another sign of civilization for one hundred miles; while most of the land is "owned" by the state, there is little evidence of this control. Nevertheless, most Alaskans bitterly resent any attempts to "lock-up" the land in government-owned parks. When they look to the national parks of the "lower 48," they imagine tourists, parking problems, permits and fees, rules and regulations. They do not welcome the establishment of parks or trails. As one ranger asked McPhee, "What can you do to improve an area that's perfect? What possible satisfaction could a hiker ever get walking on a man-made trail?" (276).

McPhee spends much of his time in Alaska with a team of government specialists in the Brooks Range, as they attempt to form some proposals for land use in this very remote area. One of the senior specialists, a man named John Kaufmann, makes several arguments that the land should be government-owned; yet he also holds that no intervention needs to take place, that the land would be left "as is":

If Kaufmann could have his way, at least a quarter of Alaska would be held as wilderness forever. After his five years of study and planning for Gates of the Arctic National Park -- an area twice as large as the state of Hawaii, four times the size of Yellowstone -- odds seemed favorable that it would be Congressionally confirmed. Kaufmann's total plans for the park's development -- his intended use of airstrips, roadways, lodges, lean-tos, refreshment stands, trash barrels, benches -- added up to zero. The most inventive thing to do as he saw it, was nothing. Let the land stand wild, without so much as a man-made trail. (78-9)

Here one can sense the role of the trail in the wilderness as form of "interference." An established trail generally precedes or at least accompanies other forms of intrusion: airstrips or roadways needed for would-be hikers, facilities for trail crews, maps for the tourists, regulations for the bureaucrats. The absence of trails likewise decreases the need for anything to support such trails. Yet can we say that this is wilderness "if it only exists by our permission and stewardship?" (Harrison 231). In this context, Kaufmann sees his efforts as both visionary and traditional:

"The proposals, up here, are for the future," Kaufmann says, and he adds, after a moment, "As Yellowstone was. Throughout the history of this country, it's been possible to go to a place where no one has camped before, and now that kind of opportunity is running out. We must protect it, even artificially." (27)

In several ways, this response epitomizes the idea of "interference" as it has appeared in the texts of Thoreau, Faulkner, and Snyder. Indeed the American desire for a

Frontier, however distant and obscure, is still a strong impulse. Areas such as Gates of the Arctic or Yellowstone are indicative of how deeply we revere such frontiers, yet the Gates of the Arctic or Yellowstone also represent the problematic notion that "we must protect it, even artificially." One need not be a cynic to be disappointed by the limited and contrived prospects for wilderness experience in modern America, but one should also recognize that an increased perception of disappointment, conflict, contradiction, or "artificiality" does not invalidate modern wilderness writing. Rather, the inclusion and open admittance of such tensions is a key element of the "complex pastoralism" which continues to define the shifting relation of wilderness to ownership.

Understanding the texts of modern wilderness writers requires that readers revise or set aside some of the expectations that they might have acquired from reading nineteenth-century wilderness texts. Wilderness writing may initially seem to offer the prospect of "absolute freedom and wildness," but even a casual reading of authors such as Irving, Cooper, Melville, Parkman, or Thoreau reveals the serious compromises faced by all of these authors. Thoreau's questions about "management" are based on a different set of expectations. Rather than seeing wilderness as an escape from civilization, Thoreau, Faulkner, Snyder, and McPhee all see wilderness as the product as well as the source of

social policies, particularly those regarding land usage. Rather than basing their hopes on a nostalgic longing to "get back to Nature," these writers focus their desire and anger upon a more complex understanding of actual "woodlots," "wilderness areas," and trails.

## Chapter Five

Canons and Trails: Critical Perceptions of  
American Wilderness Writing after 1880

The world is as young today as when it was created  
and this Vermont morning dew is as wet to my feet  
as Eden's dew to Adam's.

-- Herman Melville, from  
"Hawthorne and his Mosses"

It [Nature] inspires a painfully limited set of  
responses in "nature-writers" -- REVERENCE, AWE,  
PIETY, MYSTICAL ONENESS.

-- Joyce Carol Oates, from  
"Against Nature"

I saw an essential connection, I thought, in  
attitude, mind, allegiance -- something going on  
at the heart, something that might render  
cosmopolitan criticism trivial.

-- Thomas Lyons, from  
This Incomperable Lande

Writing about wilderness in twentieth-century America  
is a well-intended but futile effort to recover the power  
and complexity of those writers -- Cooper, Thoreau, Parkman,  
Melville, Twain, Whitman -- whose works are a direct  
response to the open frontier of nineteenth-century American  
wilderness. One finds this idea expressed almost auto-  
matically in literary histories of nature or wilderness  
writing: in general, scholars tend to align the closing of  
the Frontier in 1890 with a final closure of certain

literary possibilities regarding wilderness. It is not only literary critics who make this claim; a frequent theme of contemporary wilderness writers is the disturbing discrepancy between their claims of originality and insight, and their recognition that much of their work derives from nineteenth-century authors, texts, ideas, or forms. Recent scholarship concerning essential concepts of American wilderness has repeatedly overlooked the continual emergence of strong and original wilderness writers. In particular, it has not adequately examined how recent wilderness writing has responded to the legacy of "classic" authors, and how contemporary writers confront this "anxiety of influence."

It is tempting to argue that wilderness writing would be an unlikely product of post-Industrial American culture. There are abundant signs that portions of "the fresh, green breast of the new world" have been reduced to a "Garden of Ashes." However, the arguments for the diminishing possibilities of wilderness writing refer to difficulties which are somewhat more subtle than Three Mile Island or the Exxon oil disaster. Three different but related arguments concerning the decline of "nature writing" have been proposed in John Hildebidle's Thoreau: A Naturalist's Liberty (1983), Cecelia Tichi's New World, New Earth: Environmental Reform in American Literature from the Puritans through Whitman (1979), and Bernard Rosenthal's City of Nature: Journeys to Nature in the Age

of American Romanticism (1980).

One common thread in these arguments is the explicit sense that wilderness writing after 1890 is a futile gesture; indeed, these three critics see signs of decline far before the official closure of the Frontier. All three scholars point to major nineteenth-century authors who have exhausted the possibilities of a specific sub-genre or theme related to wilderness. For example, John Hildebidle states that he is "most interested in natural history as a literary method and indeed as a literary genre"; yet such a discussion is immediately restricted by the following claim:

It is my argument that Thoreau is in fact the last -- and in literary terms, overwhelmingly the most successful and important -- of the natural historians (Hildebidle 5).

Hildebidle locates Thoreau's work directly within the "sea change in the accepted aims and permitted functions of natural history writing." He implies that the far-ranging skills of Thoreau have been replaced by the narrow disciplines of the specialist: the wildlife biologist, the travel writer, the mountaineering guide. Furthermore, during the mid-nineteenth century a breach had opened between the logic of applied science and the literary tendency to see Nature as an Emersonian "symbol of spirit." Thoreau was the last writer to unify them:

Thoreau is arguably the last major American writer to believe that he could be both a scientist (in

some actual, non-metaphorical sense) and a man of letters, at the same time and in the same work (Hildebrand 95).

Such a distinction would seem quite appropriate to most literary scholars. While many readers might praise the works of Stephen Jay Gould, few would classify them as "literature." Likewise, critics who are familiar with the works of John McPhee would generally consider him a "man of letters" rather than a scientist. In the earlier nineteenth century, "natural history" was a relatively major genre; in the twentieth century, it seems to be an isolated curiosity, a distant cousin of both literature and science.

Cecilia Tichi's New World, New Earth provides a further explanation of our dislocation from the spirit of the land and of our loss of artistic opportunity. For Tichi, there is no longer a social vision of the power of wilderness to regenerate our spiritual life, and in turn to direct our political system towards a purified America. Her book upbraids contemporary environmentalists and scholars for their self-righteous over-simplifications of the Puritan plans for "human dominion over all the earth." She convincingly argues that early Americans had a far more complex understanding of this power of "dominion":

Far from heedlessly vandalizing the environment, early Americans saw its modification -- in fact, its reform -- as an ideological imperative that must proceed together with America's moral regeneration (Tichi viii).

Although many Americans might praise themselves for their improved "environmental conscience," Tichl claims that American writers after 1880 have placed little faith in the regenerative power of the environment:

The American New Earth, once realized successfully in the poems of Walt Whitman, has not again been wrought with aesthetic power in our literature... They have not continued from Whitman the American literary tradition of the New Earth. It is as if the-centuries-old ideology of environmental reform at last found full aesthetic expression in Romantic poetry, only to be repudiated in this century by writers unable to share the commitment to a millennial America. Twentieth-century writers who confront the American landscape in fiction and poems offer very little hope for the spiritual and environmental redemption of the nation and decry the spoilation of the landscape. In this way Sinclair Lewis, John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, Nathaniel West, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Thomas Pynchon, and even William Carlos Williams align themselves historically with the cataclysmic visions of Joel Barlow's Columbiad and with Cooper's Crater. (250-51)

Along with defining the troubled associations between wilderness and relevant aspects of science, writing, and civil religion, these three books also imply that a whole range of cultural possibilities -- what might generally be called American Romanticism -- were dissipated or destroyed during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Bernard Rosenthal, in his book City of Nature, discusses the importance and the decline of the "romantic Journey to nature," an adventure which was more metaphysical than physical:

When nature served as the metaphor for the regenerative quest, when artists sought their location in the universe, the passage took them to a region away from geographical America, away from any geographical place, to a mythic nature where they could escape from an "unnatural" plight. (26-27)

This "mythic" sense of nature seems to prevail in many categorizations of well-known texts about wilderness. The writings from the expeditions of John C. Fremont, John James Audubon, or John Wesley Powell are generally considered "historical," while those of Melville, Thoreau, or Whitman are seen as "literary." Yet for Rosenthal, both of these possibilities -- actual exploration and more interior or metaphysical journeys -- were seriously compromised during the late nineteenth century:

At some point in the nineteenth century, and historians may debate exactly when, the American journey into nature ended. The political frontiers had been conquered, and Western man, as Whitman affirms in "Passage to India," had circumnavigated the globe. If the American West was not a totally idyllic place, it nevertheless essentially redeemed the pledge of material prosperity nature had held. Political and economic problems remained, but the American journey to nature has been relatively successful. The romantic journey was also largely over in the sense that new literary methods of literary exploration engaged the attention of leading writers such as Adams, Crane, James, and Twain, although inquiries into the meaning of being remained fundamental to their writing. What had generally changed was the pattern of metaphor. Whether coincidental or not, the 'romantic' trope of a journey to nature in search of salvation ended at about the time that America fully possessed the promised land.

Except for Melville's Clarel and Billy Budd, the last richly poetic nineteenth-century exploration of what had already become an old dream appeared in Whitman's "Passage to India." The poem, dated 1871, explores again the romantic myth that by then bordered on nostalgia (23).

A reading of the criticism of Hildebidle, Tichi, and Rosenthal reveals a particular contradictory tendency, one which has continued to obscure the ways in which "marginal" or "sub-literary" genres and texts can contribute to a development of American concepts of wilderness. The texts of all three critics rely upon a wide range of source material from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For example, Hildebidle develops a strong argument regarding the pervasive influence of the natural history genre during the earlier nineteenth century. He does so by frequent references to two texts which are generally considered "semi-literary" or "non-literary," namely Gilbert White's Natural History of Selbourne and Charles Darwin's The Voyage of the Beagle; he also refers to numerous compilations of relatively obscure "natural history essays" collected by editors such as Meisel, Hicks, and Smallwood (Hildebidle 24-57). Tichi's New World, New Earth clearly explains how a "millennial imperative emerges in a mosaic pattern" of varied texts. Signs of this imperative could be read

In Cotton Mather's sermons, in Jedidiah Morse's geography books, in James Fenimore Cooper's novels, in Daniel Webster's political speeches.

They proceed in George Bancroft's United States history, George Perkins Marsh's conservationist tract, and in Frederick Law Olmstead's writing on landscape design. (ix)

Rosenthal, in City of Nature, also finds resonant images of American Romanticism among "minor works of the early nineteenth century" and "works so obscure that one is grateful for any edition": these include frontier diaries, tour guides, letters, and political speeches. All three critics are eager to reveal the wealth of lesser-known nineteenth-century texts that both invigorate and challenge the assumptions of better-known canonical texts.

Yet in their brief assessments of wilderness writing after 1880, they seem to shift their emphasis. Rather than portraying the development of a particular concept of American wilderness as it occurs in a wide range of genres and texts, they refer to a sudden sense of limitation among writers. They offer a relatively narrow range of twentieth-century texts to support this claim. When Hildebidle refers to Thoreau as the "last natural historian," he assumes our assent rather casually. He briefly refers to writers such as John Muir or John Burroughs, but declines to even mention why recent writers such as Joseph Wood Krutch, Aldo Leopold, or Edwin Way Teale do not deserve to be considered as skilled natural historians. Tichi states that "there is a strong suggestion on the part of these twentieth-century writers that the

collapse of the American spirit (correlatively of the shaped environment) is rooted in the fallure of the national imagination" (254). The writers she chooses to support this claim -- T.S. Elliot, Sinclair Lewis, Nathaniel West, John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and William Faulkner -- may indeed represent the dominant attitude of modern literary culture as defined by literary institutions, yet they hardly represent the vigorous range of opinions on the subject of wilderness. Rosenthal claims that the romantic journey to nature ended during the 1870s, and that "new methods of literary exploration engaged the attention of writers such as Adams, Crane, James, and Twain" (23). Thus Rosenthal's interest in "obscure writers" who contributed to the "romantic" experience of wilderness is conveniently replaced by a predictable, familiar, and narrow reliance on traditional texts. In conclusion, the same critics who have worked so admirably to provide a "mosaic" of texts concerning nineteenth-century American wilderness also seem unwilling to examine the wide variety of texts which continue to define American concepts of wilderness.

Other critics have previously recognized the importance of so-called "non-canonical" works about nature, landscape, or wilderness. Norman Foerster's 1923 book, Nature in American Literature, makes this claim:

A new sight, a new insight -- these are sought in all the literature from the time of Wordsworth to the present moment.

Nowhere are they more prominent than in the literature of America. With only two or three exceptions, all of our major writers have displayed both a striking curiosity as the facts of the external world -- an intellectual conscience in seeking to know them with exactness -- and an ardent emotional devotion to nature because of her beauty or divinity; and this curiosity and this devotion have become so pervasive that, especially in our time, even writers outside the main intellectual currents of the age -- such as contributors to rural newspapers and to college magazines in the most remote sections of the country -- reveal the new absorption in nature quite as clearly as the typical poets and essayists of the day, and perhaps more clearly than the great writers of the nineteenth century. (xiii)

This fascinating claim receives little attention in the book, since Foerster sought to define nineteenth-century attitudes and examinations of nature, and not to pursue the development of these ideas in later texts. He ends his work with a pair of chapters devoted to John Muir and John Burroughs, who are clearly representative of "post-frontier" authors, and who published a majority of their work as magazine articles. Yet Foerster went no farther than that, and those who may have revealed a "new" perception of nature "more clearly than the great writers of the nineteenth century" remain unmentioned.

The relative lack of attention paid to wilderness writing outside the canon is based on the assumption that the status of American wilderness after 1890 has greatly changed, and that this change has been almost entirely negative. A recognition of the destruction and waste of

American wilderness does not necessarily mean that wilderness writing has directly borne the brunt of this damage. The "complex form of pastoralism" thrives in situations where value is being lost; the greatest books about Alaska will not be those of the nineteenth century, but those of the twentieth. Hildebidle refers to a "sea-change" in the writing of natural history during the latter part of the nineteenth century; I would argue that a similar sea-change is gradually taking place during the latter half of the twentieth century. Hildebidle, Tichi, and Rosenthal provide distinct "mosaics" of lesser-known sources which not only serve as fascinating background material, but which have their own claims to be recognized as serious writing. These unfamiliar contexts may at first seem rather distant from literary matters, yet to deny or ignore them is to arrange a shallow and reductionist literary history. To paraphrase Tichi, there is a vital "mosaic" of texts about twentieth-century American wilderness. One can find evidence of this "mosaic" in a number of fine anthologies: Thomas Lyons' This Incomperable Lande (1989), John Conron's The American Landscape (1974), Frank C. Bergon's The Wilderness Reader (1980), Robert C. Baron and Elizabeth Darby Junkin's Of Discovery and Destiny (1986), and Daniel Halpern's On Nature (1987).

These anthologies feature dozens of talented and insightful writers, and their variety can be both thrilling and bewildering. Yet until the appearance of these recent anthologies, there had been no sustained attempt to suggest a unified or even closely related group of authors and texts which define twentieth-century American wilderness in the sense that Cooper, Irving, Emerson, Thoreau, and Melville, and Twain represent the nineteenth. Two of the most influential books about wilderness in American culture -- Leo Marx's The Machine in the Garden and Roderick Nash's Wilderness and the American Mind -- present very different conclusions about the status of post-1880 writing about wilderness. These differences are indicative of more pervasive problems regarding critical perceptions of wilderness and the canon of American literature.

As I've argued, Marx's Machine in the Garden remains one of the innovative studies of "complex pastoralism" in American culture and literature. For Marx, the image of the machine in the garden is more than an unusual contrast:

The sudden appearance of the machine in the garden is an arresting, endlessly evocative image. It causes the instantaneous clash of opposed states of mind: a strong urge to believe in the rural myth along with an awareness of industrialization as a counter-force to that myth. Since 1844, this motif has served again and again to order literary experience...It is a cardinal metaphor of contradiction, exfoliating, through associated images and ideas, into a design governing the meaning of entire works. (229)

Marx refers to these "associated images and ideas" as "ecological," in the sense that they are the potential basis for a proper arrangement of human society in relation to nature. He also aligns the goals and literary texts of major nineteenth-century writers with similar twentieth-century problems regarding wilderness, conservation, and writing. As he said in his 1970 essay, "American Institutions and Ecological Ideals,"

Anyone familiar with the work of the classic twentieth-century American writers (I am thinking above all of Cooper, Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman, and Mark Twain) is likely to have developed an interest in what we recently have learned to call ecology. (139)

Marx's writings insist on correcting the frequently naive assumptions of popular ecology by pointing out the sharp contradictions within America's "pastoral impulse," which can include both the "Environmental President" who all but denies the existence of acid rain, and the "radical" group Greenpeace, which raises funds with promotional rock videos on MTV. Marx's work provides an acute study of America's literary culture, and in turn calls for a re-examination of political rhetoric regarding wilderness.

Since the Wilderness Act of 1964, an increasing number of writers and scholars have sought to define or directly influence the political processes involved in preserving or destroying wilderness. Roderick Nash's Wilderness and the American Mind (1967, revised edition 1973 and 1982) is

valuable for its discussion of perceptive wilderness writers who have also participated in political decisions regarding wilderness or land usage. The book is relevant to modern discussions of the politics of wilderness because it provides an historical lineage and an intellectual context to recent battles between the Sierra Club and James Watt, between Adirondack State Park and housing developers, between environmentalists and Exxon. Leo Marx emphasized the power of certain "cultural symbols," particularly the image of the machine in the garden, to account for the genesis and perpetuation of certain literary responses and themes. While Nash does not separate ideas about wilderness from such symbolic patterns, he prefers to consider wilderness in close relation to popular attitudes about land usage, and in terms of those reformers who used their writing to save and protect the wilderness.

Nash is encyclopedic in his explanation of wilderness as an evolving idea. He explains the connections and differences regarding the Biblical concept of a wasteland and the Puritan evocation of a "moral wilderness," as well as the affiliations between the emergent devotion to nature arising from Romanticism and the popular "wilderness cult" in twentieth-century America. While the scope of this book is too wide to allow for very close readings of texts related to wilderness, Nash skillfully explains and assesses many controversial ideas and public figures involved in the

numerous figurations of "wilderness philosophy." His emphasis is on the social rather than individual communion with nature. While Nash frequently comments on the ways in which artists have tried to renew individual connections with nature, he is more concerned with how a society can and should establish such possibilities for larger groups of people. In this sense Nash's book is valuable for emphasizing the relation between the finest wilderness writers and the roots of wilderness activism: for Nash, the two are frequently synonymous. Wilderness and the American Mind thoroughly explains how deeply writers have influenced both our political and literary understanding of the lands they helped to save. But by emphasizing the political over the literary, he chooses a list of writers which might seem surprising to a student of American writing.

Apart from Marx's and Nash's respective points of emphasis upon the artistic and political aspects of wilderness, it initially seems that there are few major differences in their assessment of the importance of wilderness in American writing. Yet when one looks more closely at the list of authors who are prominent in each text, a certain divergence becomes apparent. From the period from 1700 to 1880, Marx's and Nash's choices are in general agreement. While they may differ in the choice or the significance of particular texts, the two critics share a basic interest in certain authors:

Marx:

Jefferson  
 Robert Beverly  
 Crèvecoeur  
 Cooper  
 Emerson  
 Hawthorne  
 Thoreau  
 Melville

Nash:

Jefferson  
 William Bartram  
 Crèvecoeur  
 Cooper  
 Emerson  
 George Catlin  
 Thoreau  
 George Marsh

After 1880, the list of notable authors shows no such sense of agreement:

Marx:

Twain  
 Fitzgerald  
 Hemingway  
 Faulkner  
 Frost

Nash:

John Muir  
 Aldo Leopold  
 Robert Marshall  
 Wallace Stegner  
 Edward Abbey

These two critics do more than emphasize different writers: they do not simply say a bit more or less about Twain or Muir. Of the five writers emphasized by Marx, Nash does not mention Twain or Hemingway anywhere in his book. He offers one passing comment regarding Frost. He mentions Faulkner and Fitzgerald only briefly, quoting short, familiar passages from The Bear and The Great Gatsby. When one looks at The Machine in the Garden, the writers praised by Nash are absent: Marx makes no references to ANY of them.

Some of these major discrepancies arise from differences in the authors' intellectual training and in their stated goals for each book. Marx is a literary critic specializing in nineteenth-century American writers; he is known for his

close and probing readings of famous texts. Nash originally wrote Wilderness and the American Mind as a graduate student in History, and his work tends to emphasize more general intellectual and social movements rather than close readings of key passages in specific texts. Marx's The Machine in the Garden is not so much about wilderness as it is about the "middle state," the garden, the realm of the pastoral. Nash's text places greater emphasis on wilderness as "wildness," as a place of primal values and untouched landscapes, as the setting for adventure or release. Marx's text closely scrutinizes the nineteenth century, discusses the twentieth century rather quickly, and includes no works written after 1930. Nash broadly surveys concepts of wilderness from the beginnings of America to the present, and in this sense he often skims over large periods. These differences are not only apparent in The Machine in the Garden and Wilderness and the American Mind. Marx's recent collection of essays, The Pilot and the Passenger (1988), continues to provide superlative readings of Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Twain, Frost, Mailer and Sontag. Nash's recent studies, including various essays, an anthology of writing on conservation and ecology, and a recent book on "radical" environmentalist groups and land ethics, have continued his support of lesser-known writers such as Aldo Leopold and Edward Abbey.

These two critics' differences in method and purpose

need not lead to an either/or situation in which one supports one "school" of wilderness writing or another. One should, however, seek to clarify why two very influential scholars offer such varying histories of how and why wilderness has continued to be a determining force in twentieth-century American culture. I will not rehearse the critical heritage surrounding writers such as Twain or Frost, for such ideas appear in hundreds of previous articles and books. However, the literary contexts for the writings of Muir, Leopold, Stegner, and Abbey are still unfamiliar to many Americanists. I will also include and evaluate the work of Barry Lopez, whose major books appeared after the 1982 publication of Wilderness and the American Mind. The same qualities which have made these writers so distinctive -- their knowledge and use of natural history, their insistence on direct political involvement, their ties to "Western" regions, and their lack of ties to the modernist tradition -- have often been the same criteria by which they are excluded from the canon of modern literature, and dismissed as "nature writers." In several ways, these writers not only seek to establish a vigorous tradition of writing and involvement with nature, but to question and revise the traditions present in the texts of more recognized American authors.

One of the major distinctions linking Muir, Leopold, Abbey, and Lopez is a sustained and well-informed interest

In natural history, an interest which is supported by years of actual experience in the wilds. For numerous modern readers, this emphasis seems problematic, since natural history is rarely considered as a genre of literary quality. Even those who have written in support of the natural history essay seem a bit embarrassed about their claims. In 1924 Philip Hicks said, "Great prose is not to be expected in the natural history field" (151); in 1990, Diane Ackerman says, "A nature writer is often thought of as a curiously dysgenic beast, part mystic, part oddball and overly solemn" (42). The specialization of Muir, Leopold, Abbey, and Lopez should not be confused with static, desiccated listing of obscure species. These authors do not imitate those who, in Wordsworth's phrase, "murder to dissect"; nor can they be compared with fact-blinded pedants such as Dickens' Thomas Gradgrind or Copper's Dr. Obed Bolt. Muir, Leopold, Abbey, and Lopez all take healthy leaps of flight and fancy. Yet they frequently remind readers that imaginings of nature in American writing lose vitality when they ignore Thoreau's dictum that "the frontiers are not east or west, north or south, but wherever a man FRONTS a fact." Like Melville, these writers believe that there are "cunning analogies" between nature and the soul; yet they also share Melville's sense that "in this world it is not so easy to settle the plain things. I have ever found your plain things the knottiest of all" (Moby

Dick "The Fountain").

Their texts do share a sense of allegiance with later natural historians such as Thomas Jefferson, Gilbert White, Charles Darwin, James John Audubon, and John Burroughs. As John Hildebidle explains, the nineteenth-century natural history essay was traditionally an expansive and all-inclusive form, whose audience and range of topics was anything but narrow: natural history became the departure point for comments on politics, religion, science, and all things both mundane and sacred. In Hildebidle's terms, writers often took "a naturalist's liberty." Thomas Lyons refers to these works as "rambles," with the dual sense of travel and digression (5). The natural history writings of Muir, Leopold, Abbey, and Lopez are also supported and informed by the advances in the study of ecology, by the "capacity to notice patterns in nature, and community, and to recognize that the patterns ultimately radiate outward to include the human observer" (Lyons xiv).

Barry Lopez's recent Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape (1986) depicts "a land where airplanes track icebergs the size of Cleveland and polar bears fly down from the stars" (xxix). The book displays the skills which Lopez had honed in his previous works: a keen eye for detail based on his training as a naturalist (Of Wolves and Men); a deep love of open and so-called "empty" areas (Desert Notes); his use of short stories and

mythology to re-shape the narratives which each culture assigns to animals and landscapes (Winter Count, Coyote Builds North America). Any reader of Arctic Dreams must soon confront Lopez's desire to read landscape by examining minute signs of "the enduring force of its natural history":

Like other landscapes that initially appear barren, arctic tundra can open suddenly, like the corolla of a flower, when any intimacy with it is sought. One begins to notice spots of brilliant red, orange, and green, for example, among the monotonous browns of a tundra tussock. A wolf spider lunges at a glistening beetle. A shred of muskox wool lies inert in the lavender blooms of a saxifrage....when stooping to pick up the gracile rib bone of an arctic hare, [I] would catch sudden and expected sight of the silken cocoon of an arctic caterpillar. (xxiv)

This attention to detail, when applied to the vast ranges of northern Alaska, might trouble those readers who agree with William Blake's claim that "where man is not, nature is barren"; even Wordsworth, who urges readers to "Come forth into the light of the things/ Let Nature be your teacher," refrains from such exact listings. The preceding passage from Lopez is by no means an isolated one: the first five chapters of Arctic Dreams are rather lengthy explanations of the behaviour of muskoxen, polar bears, narwals, and caribou. Lopez literally forces readers to adapt to the pace of observation that arctic landscapes and animals require; he makes few concessions to those readers who can hardly wait for "something exciting to happen."

In Lyon's terms, Lopez's observations gradually "radiate

outward to include the human observer." This itself is hardly unique: the texts of Irving, Hemingway, Faulkner, and Frost frequently define their human observers in terms of landscape or natural objects. Like these writers, Lopez tells of adventure, hunting, and self-identification with nature, yet Arctic Dreams delineates the ways in which these three types of action are drastically re-shaped by a landscape which seems almost unearthly due to its extremes of weather, light, isolation, silence, and death. Lopez repeatedly "describes" animals and landscapes which are still shrouded in mythology, which must be "understood" in terms of both science and magic, of studies and myths, of European and Inuit dreams. He says that "we know more about the rings of Saturn than we know about the narwhal" (126), and Arctic Dreams serves to record his tentative discoveries:

The first narwhals I ever saw lived far from here, in Bering Strait. The day I saw them I knew that no element of the earth's natural history had ever brought me so far, so suddenly. It was as though something from a bestiary had taken shape, a creature strange as a giraffe. It was as if the testimony of someone I had no reason to doubt, yet could not quite believe, a story too farfetched, had been verified in a glance. (125)

Lopez's dual interests in semi-scientific "testimony" and in semi-mythological, "farfetched" descriptions provide the themes for the next two chapters of Arctic Dreams, "Ice and Light" and "A Country of the Mind." In this book and in

Crossing Open Ground, Lopez shapes his ideas about landscape and narrative -- yet like the anthropologist Keith Basso, he also tries to formulate the ways in which native people use landscape AS narrative, rather than just the setting for narrative:

The place-fixing stories that grew out of the land were of two kinds. The first kind, which was from the myth time and which occurred against the backdrop of a mythological landscape, was usually meticulously conserved. (It was always possible that the storyteller would not himself or herself grasp completely the wisdom inherent in a story that had endured, which had proven its value repeatedly.)

The second kind of story included stories about traveling and what had happened to everyone in the years that could be recalled. It was at this place that my daughter was born; or this is where my brother-in-law killed two caribou the winter a bear killed all my dogs; or this, Titiralik, is the place where my snow machine broke down and I had to walk; Seensasaluq, this is a place my family has camped since before I was born.

The undisturbed landscape verifies both sorts of stories, and it is in the constant recapitulation in sacred and profane contexts of all these stories that keeps the people alive and the land alive in the people. Language, the stories, holds the vision together. (Lopez 298; also see Basso's "Stalking with Stories")

Like Moby Dick, Arctic Dreams is a tale of adventures in which the actual "adventuring" takes up a rather small portion of the text. Arctic Dreams has its own Ahab's and Ishmaels, its own monomaniacal captains and restless dreamers. The two closing chapters, "The Intent of Monks" and "A Northern Passage," are tales of adventure, discovery,

courage, and exploitation, the stories of John Davis, the Hudson Bay Company, Robert Peary, and the men of Pump Station #1 at the northern terminus of the Alaskan Oil Pipeline. These are the stories of the "disturbed landscape," of places where natural history is distorted and mythology contaminated by impatience, economics, and ambition. Yet Lopez does not reduce these explorations to a simplistic contrast of European vs. Inuit dreams; he is slow to judge these explorers as greedy, stupid, or destructive. He recognizes in their "dreams" the dual tendencies of self-actualization and desperation which continue to couple discovery with blindness:

The literature of arctic exploration is frequently offered as a record of resolute will before the menacing fortifications of the landscape. It is more profitable I think to disregard this notion -- that the land is an adversary bent on human defeat, that the people who came and went were heroes or failures in this. It is better to contemplate the record of human longing to achieve something significant, to be free of some of the grim weight of life. That weight was ignorance, poverty of spirit, indolence, and the threat of anonymity and destitution. This harsh landscape became the focus of a desire to separate oneself from those things and to overcome them. In these arctic narratives, then, are the threads of dreams which serve us all. (310)

Arctic Dreams is primarily a book of natural history, and clearly relies on what Hildebrandt has called "a naturalist's liberty." The extreme pairings within this text -- the colors of a lichen and the efforts of international expeditions, the studies of wildlife biologists and the

myths of the Inuit -- could have easily become a thematic free-for-all or a simplistic opposition of "primitive" and "modern" societies. Lopez uses natural history to unify these themes and to clarify his own varied responses. It is the most rewarding of Lopez's books: In the words of Ann Zwinger, such writing may serve as "a witness to a world of infinite variety and richness, of proven sense and reassuring order -- the world of the old-fashioned naturalist" (44). Lopez's debt to "old-fashioned" naturalism must, however, account for an order which is becoming far less "reassuring."

Natural history is not just a method of preparation, but a theme and an issue in the texts of Muir, Leopold, Abbey, and Lopez. While these four writers share an allegiance with past naturalists such as Audubon, their texts also reveal the subtle ways in which the study of ecology has informed recent natural history. Ecology has become a central metaphor in the works of Muir, Leopold, Abbey, and Lopez. Modern wilderness writers present ecology as a means of dismantling the implicit hierarchies of man/nature, human/non-human, anthropocentric/biocentric, which they consider the foundations of an abusive society. Andre Gorz states in Ecology and Politics, "The total domination of nature inevitably entails a domination of people by the techniques of domination" (20). Ecology actively seeks to dismantle these "techniques of domination." As Paul Sears

says in his essay, "Ecology -- A Subversive Subject."

My choice of title is not facetious. I wish to explore questions of growing concern. Is ecology a phase of science of limited interest and utility? Or, if taken seriously as an instrument for the long-run welfare of mankind, would it endanger the assumptions and practices accepted by modern societies, whatever their doctrinal commitments? (X1)

Other critics are more emphatic in their claims. Paul Shepard asserts that "the ideological status of ecology is that of a resistance movement. Its Rachel Carsons and Aldo Leopolds are subversive" (9).

This last aspect of ecology -- its tendency toward the politically subversive -- forms an essential difference between the writings of Twain, Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Frost, and those of Muir, Leopold, Abbey, Stegner, and Lopez. This does not mean that Twain or Frost are apolitical. As Leo Marx says in "Pastoralism in America," major American writers have often questioned "whether pastoralism might yet provide the basis for an effective ideology in the United States" (36). Yet Marx also questions the extent to which literature can resolve ideological tensions:

In the end, however, we come up against the difference between the prerequisites of a compelling literary view of life, which need not meet the test of feasibility, and those of a political ideology that must, in the long run, meet precisely such a test. (66).

While the writings of Muir, Leopold, Abbey, Stegner, and Lopez are often the scene of a sort of "ecstasy," a release from body, from compromise, from politics and from restrictions, they are more often balanced with the realization that any wilderness which exists in the lower forty-eight states remains so because of the stewardship of the same government which also sanctions nuclear stockpiling and acid rain. While the majority of these authors' works are not explicitly political, Muir, Leopold, Stegner, Abbey, and Lopez have all been very visible activists, often using their writing to defend particular areas or ideas: Muir founded the Sierra Club, Leopold led the Wilderness Society, and Stegner served as an assistant to the Secretary of the Interior.

The political visions of these five writers are related both to the rhetoric of conservation and the tradition of resistance exemplified in many texts of "classic" American literature. Obviously, writers such as Muir have sought to preserve particular areas or ecosystems such as Yosemite or the Grand Canyon. Besides these relatively short-term goals of "saving" the wilderness by legal means, these writers have made more substantial efforts to "re-create" or "re-form" the wilderness according to certain concepts of access, aesthetics, land ownership, and social ideology which offer the possibility of sustained benefits. I would not claim that these five writers'

Interest in ecology and politics has no precedent in American literature. Leo Marx is quite right to insist that nineteenth-century authors propose valuable and complex ecological ideals; Cooper's The Pioneers, featuring the "conservationist" (Natty Bumppo), the wasteful logger (Billy Kirby), and the compromising political presence (Judge Temple), is a small-scale prelude of battles between the Sierra Club, Weyerhaeuser Lumber, and Oregon's politicians. Yet Muir, Leopold, Abbey, Stegner, and Lopez, besides condemning ecological abuse, or creating characters who do so, also involve themselves directly in the political defense of certain areas. Thus these five writers have found themselves in a dilemma about the direct uses of writing in political situations. They acknowledge that this political involvement could limit the artistic value of some of their work in the sense that such efforts generally have the artistic life-expectancy of an editorial or pamphlet. Yet they also insist that wilderness in twentieth-century America cannot exist without political intervention.

Edward Abbey's Desert Solitaire (1968) is a record of Abbey's three seasons as a naturalist and ranger at Utah's Arches National Monument. The chapters of Abbey's text exemplify the diverse forms which Thomas Lyons has categorized in his recent essay, "A Taxonomy of Nature Writing," where he presents a loosely organized model for the numerous sub-genres of "nature writing": field guide,

natural history essay, ramble, back-country living, travel and adventure, farm life, man's role in nature (Lyons 3-7). Abbey does not have the patience of Barry Lopez, and his uses of the field guide style are limited to a few listings: in "Cliffrose and Bayonets," he mentions "the fourth plant community in Arches...the hanging gardens of fern, monkey-flower, death camas, columbine, helleborine orchid...so much for the inventory..." (33). Abbey's frequent references to the landscape use the more factual basis of the natural history essay as a brief prelude to the more personalized tones of the "ramble," in which a particular location yields a series of personal or cultural associations:

There are several ways of looking at Delicate Arch. Depending on your preconceptions you may see the eroded remnant of a sandstone fin, a giant engagement ring cemented in rock, a bow-legged pair of petrified cowboy chaps, a triumphal arch for a procession of angels, an illogical geologic freak, a happening....You may find proof for or against His existence. Suit yourself. You may see a symbol, a sign, a fact, a thing without meaning or a meaning which includes all things. (41)

The later chapters of the book feature Abbey's interest in other forms of nature writing. "Terra Incognita: Into the Maze" is a small-scale adventure of Abbey's "first descent" to the floor of an isolated canyon. Two versions of "farm life" appear in "Cowboys and Indians (Parts One and Two)," where Abbey comments on the problematic lives of cattlemen and Navajos. The cultural and literary aspects of "man's

role in nature" form the core of two of the last chapters, "Episodes and Visions" and "Bedrock and Paradox." Desert Solitaire is not only a record of Utah's landscape, but of the varied terrain of nature writing itself. Almost all of the sections of this text include directly political suggestions, yet these are linked with the other thematic concerns of the text: writing, work, greed, travel, law, wildlife, technology, religion, sex, and weapons. Thus the text engages political concerns without being reduced to preaching.

The sub-genre of "back-country living" best describes Desert Solitaire. Lyons claims that "this subtype, like the ramble, is a classic American form, but it tends to be much more critical and radical" (6). During the first two years of Abbey's work, Arches National Monument was an isolated and neglected land reserve. Like many nature writers, Abbey makes a series of contrasts between wilderness and "syphilization." Yet the "paradise" of Arches is not that of the traditional pastoral:

Now when I write of paradise I mean PARADISE, not the banal heaven of the saints. When I write "paradise" I mean not only apple trees and golden women but also scorpions and tarantulas and flies, rattlesnakes and Gila monsters, sandstorms, volcanos and earthquakes, bacteria and bear, cactus, yucca, bladderweed, ocotillo and mesquite, flash floods and quicksand. (190)

For Abbey the desert is not merely a harsh place, or an area which is "wild, majestic, and intolerable to sissies" (Geyer

43). The desert's stark beauty is closely associated with simplicity, resourcefulness, fear, and revolution. While the politics of Abbey and Gary Snyder often differ, they both rely upon the "back-country" as an alternative to strictly organized societies:

The country surrounds the city  
The back country surrounds the country.

(<u>Regarding Wave</u>, "Revolution")

For Abbey the back country is a source of release and solace: "We need the possibility of escape as surely as we need hope" (149). Yet he insists that wilderness is more than an area in which to escape from industry and authority -- wilderness is the staging ground for a coming battle:

The wilderness should be preserved for political reasons. We may need it someday not only as a refuge from excessive industrialism but also as a refuge from authoritarian government, from political oppression. Grand Canyon, Big Bend, Yellowstone and the High Sierras may be required to function as bases for guerilla warfare against tyranny. (149)

Abbey left Arches when he saw that "... after a million years of neglect. Industrial Tourism had arrived." He returned several years later to assess the changes which had occurred. In the chapter entitled "Polemic: Industrial Tourism and the National Parks" he recalls the first plans to build a paved road into Arches to generate more tourist revenues. Like Muir, Leopold, and Stegner, Abbey is

closely associated with the concept of national parks, but Abbey differentiates himself with one minor action:

The survey crew had done their job; I would do mine. For about five miles I followed the course of their survey line back towards headquarters, and as I went I pulled up each little wooden stake and threw it away, and cut all the bright ribbons from the bushes and hid them under a rock. A futile effort in the long run, but it made me feel good. (67)

Of all the writers I have mentioned, Abbey presents the most explicitly subversive political agenda for the defense of wilderness areas. In Desert Solitaire, his frequent political commentaries are lively and daring, and are sprinkled with humor, philosophy, and his own wealth of experience. Abbey soon graduated from pulling up stakes, and his later books continue to lay the plans for battle. His 1975 novel The Monkey Wrench Gang is a black-comedy featuring four disgruntled environmentalists who sense that industry, tourism, and wilderness cannot coexist peacefully. At first their antics include petty vandalisms, such as pulling up survey stakes, dismantling truck engines, and cutting down billboards. These acts soon escalate to the dynamiting of coal trains and power lines, and towards a plan to dynamite the Glen Canyon Dam. While the book's comic tone often undercuts the seriousness of these actions, there is no doubt that Abbey openly supports such actions. The Monkey Wrench Gang was one of Abbey's best-selling books; some readers got a good laugh out of the book --

others were more interested in its explicit directions for using dynamite. The radical environmental group Earth First! has received national attention for its "monkey-wrenching" efforts to save the old-growth forests of Washington and Oregon; these tactics include "tree-spiking," the destruction of logging roads, and bomb threats (Gabriel 34). Earth First! has served to remind main-stream conservation groups of their tendency to rely on compromise rather than confrontation, and to this extent Earth First! revitalizes the conservation movement. Yet as critics have rightly pointed out, Earth First!'s interest in ecology has masked a set of political attitudes which are naive, misanthropic, and more closely aligned with the politics of Barry Goldwater than Henry David Thoreau (Gabriel 64).

Abbey's political writings often suffer from the same problems. His later political statements still rely on the Thoreau-like exaggerations of Desert Solitaire. Yet in later works such as Beyond the Wall (1984), his tone is shrill, humorless, and bombastic, while the insights of his earlier commentaries are replaced by the blanket accusations of a cheap pamphlet:

Meanwhile the bad has become worse and the good is still on the defensive. Arches National monument, for example, has become a travesty called Arches National Park -- a static diorama seen through glass. The mining industry has transformed and malformed the fine old farm-and-ranch community of Moab, Utah, into a typical commercial industrial slum. The nuclear-power-and-weapons Mafia is attempting to establish a radioactive-waste dump

in the heart of the Canyonlands. Uranium is being mined right now in the northwest drainages of the Grand Canyon -- the only Grand Canyon on earth. For example. And in fact and in short and in sum the entire American West -- property of all Americans, home of the wild things, last strong hold of the Ghost Dancers -- lies under massive assault by the industrial armies of Government and Greed. (Beyond the Wall xvi)

Abbey's reference to "the entire American West -- property of all Americans" is also problematic, since the "West" seems both disparate and unfamiliar to scholars of American literature. As Richard Etulain states, "Serious study of western American literature is of recent origin" (147). The "West" which appears in the texts of Muir, Leopold, Stegner, Abbey, and Lopez often features unfamiliar themes and landscapes. They have done most of their best writing about the expanses of the American West, and of the ways in which the West, as an actual landscape and as a landscape deeply inscribed with myth, breathes forth its own language and character. Yet critics who label them as "Western writers" offer limited praise: one would not generally call Frost or Thoreau "Eastern writers." It might seem odd to claim that there is a geographical factor or bias at work in the establishment of the literary canon. Yet critics such as Bernard DeVoto and Jane Tompkins have pointed out that the canon of nineteenth-century American literature, representing a period of expansion and exploration, has been given a rather circumscribed center. In the 1940's, DeVoto repeatedly attacked the "Eastern

establishment," represented by critics such as Van Wyck Brooks, for their lack of interest in and understanding of Western writers (Robinson 39-40; Cowley 34-37).

Referring to F. O. Matthiessen's well-known list of American Renaissance texts, Jane Tompkins notes that the list includes "no works by writers living south of New York, north of Boston, or west of Stockbridge, Massachusetts" (200).

The scholarship of Marx, Tichl, Rosenthal, and Hildebrandt indicates that a similar process of excluding or simply ignoring twentieth-century "Western writers" still prevails. While the works of Thoreau or Melville have been considered "universal" statements on the American landscape, or of man's relation to nature, works such as Muir's My First Summer in the Sierra, Leopold's A Sand County Almanac, Stegner's Angle of Repose, Abbey's Beyond the Wall, or Lopez's Desert Notes are often branded as "western", "regional," "local," or "picturesque" writing. (Even supporters of such writers commit a similar error: Larry McMurtry calls Abbey "the Thoreau of the American West.") The writings of Bret Harte, Zane Grey, or Louis L'Amour, and the majority of Abbey's later fiction, justly deserve such negative comments; any critic who refers to Muir as a "regionalist" must also admit that these regions include the rocky shores of Scotland, the farmlands of Wisconsin, the Gulf of Mexico, the wilds of central Canada,

the peaks of the High Sierras, and the glaciers of Alaska. Nevertheless, the American West is still subject to a sort of literary colonialism. As Wallace Stegner has commented, "The eastern establishment had simply never paid attention to what had actually been produced in the West....many eastern critics, historians of literature, the people who make the textbooks and create the curricula of classes, have ignored many good things in western literature" (Stegner and Etulain 142).

The most obvious characteristics of the West derive from its vast stretches of open land, "of this very space that keeps Westerners sane and sometimes drives Easterners crazy" (Milton 208). Yet the West is not only the land of the Rockies, the Grand Canyon, and the High Plains; the West also has its own unique animals, flora, and geology, its own rituals, myths, and ever-present possibilities. As Wallace Stegner says,

The tradition represented by Thoreau and John Burroughs, the Walden-Wake Robin tradition of nature writing, has persisted in the West well past its peak in the East, simply because the West has had more nature for people to go out into. The affection for nature has been more nurtured by that opportunity. You could make quite a list of mature nature-writing works that have come out of the West. (Stegner and Etulain 142)

His enthusiasm for "mature nature-writing" is, however, of secondary importance in his own texts. Unlike Lopez, Stegner's landscape descriptions rarely display sustained

attention to "the enduring force of its natural history." Stegner actually judges this tendency as a limitation: "you can't make literature of nothing but landscape." In "The Marks of Human Passage," he claims that "the natural world is a screen onto which we project our own images; without our images there, it is as blank as the cold screen of an empty movie house" (16).

Of the five writers which Nash emphasizes, it is Stegner who is most interested in history, fiction, and characterization. He focuses his responses to the "several Wests" through the "lens" of particular people: the explorer John Wesley Powell, the scholar Bernard DeVoto, and one of his favorite characters, Joe Allston (see Beyond the Hundreth Meridian; The Uneasy Chair; The Spectator Bird.) He senses that classic American writing not only gave us beautiful landscapes, but peopled them with Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook, Ahab and Ishmael, Huck and Jim, Antonia and Jim Burden. Of the five writers emphasized by Nash, Stegner has been the most determined and the most effective spokesman for "Western" fiction and criticism. While he has criticized numerous Western writers for what he calls "coterie" work, he strongly relies on the influence of the West: "There is a kind of provincialism, minus the aggressiveness and self-consciousness, that encompasses the most profound things a writers has to say" (Stegner and Etulain 127). Two of his finest books, Angle of Repose

(1971) and The Spectator Bird (1976), are emphatically "Western." They concentrate on characters' responses and actions in terms of the Western landscape, its history, and its sharp sense of separation from the East.

Angle of Repose is generally considered his finest novel. It is the story of Susan Burling, a writer and artist, who marries Oliver Ward, a mining engineer. The two "easterners" trek over much of the West in search of a place where her art and his work can co-exist. They also search for that "angle of repose," a situation poised between free fall and security. Their story parallels that of the narrator, Lyman Ward. He is their grandson, a retired history professor who has been crippled by a bone disease, confined to a wheelchair, and reduced to sorting through Susan's papers as a means of therapy. He is both aided and tormented by his son Rodman, an over-intellectualized sociologist, and Shelly, a charmingly naive proponent of "liberated consciousness," who acts as his secretary, companion, and gadfly. Lyman Ward is Stegner's most evocative character, and the two share a certain restlessness: "Perhaps more than any other living American writer, Wallace Stegner embodies in his work and in his own life the cardinal fact of Western America in the twentieth century -- namely, that our rootlessness has never had the compensation of frontier activity" (Hudson 137).

At times these issues appear in form of "dialogue"

between Lyman and Susan. Lyman often seeks for some analogy to explain his efforts and his relation to his grandmother:

If Henry Adams, whom you knew slightly, could make a theory of history by applying the second law of thermodynamics to human affairs, I ought to be entitled to base one on the angle of repose, and may yet. There is another physical law that teases me, too; the Doppler effect. The sound of anything coming at you -- a train, say, or the future -- has a higher pitch than the sound of the same thing going away. If you have perfect pitch and a head for mathematics you can compute the speed of the object by the interval between its arriving and departing sounds. I have neither perfect pitch nor a head for mathematics, and anyway who wants to compute the speed of history? Like all falling bodies it constantly accumulates. But I would like to hear your life as YOU heard it, coming at you, instead of hearing it as I do, a sober sound of expectations reduced, desires blunted, hopes deferred or abandoned, chances lost, defeats accepted, griefs borne. I don't find your life uninteresting, as Rodman does. I would like to hear it as it sounded while it was passing. Having no future of my own, why shouldn't I look forward to yours? (20)

Forrest and Margaret Robinson have written of Stegner's use of the "middle ground" between history and literature; another critic claims that "the open marriage of history and literature will lead us to the best fictional treatments of the West" (Etulain 159). Yet Lyman Ward finds that he cannot disengage himself from "antecedents," from family, myth, history, and the condition which has made him a "Gorgon" who can only look straight ahead. His occasional confidant is an old friend named Al, whose defective speech and eyes allow him to sense Lyman's dilemma:

"The the are my working glatheth," he said.  
 "Quadruple focalth."

I looked at them. Four half-moons of magnification were ground into each lense. When I raised them and looked through them, the front of the building swam like hot taffy, and Al became a small crowd. "I thought I had a problem, trying to look straight ahead," I said, "What do you use them for?"

Tentatively, delicately, the wart emerged, touched the upper bow of Al's smile, withdrew again. Al stood chuckling, scratching his elbow. "I don't th'pothe a profethor would ever need anything like the the. But I'm alwayth having to fixth the mathineth. Ever try to thee with your head inthide a Bendixth?"

I get the message. Space being curved, tunnel vision and rigid neck could leave a man focused on the back of his own head. I don't know what the effect of quadruple focals on a historian might be -- nausea, maybe -- but there might be virtue in trying them on.

But whose head isn't inside a Bendix? (65)

Lyman explains his efforts in terms of an "angle of repose," the Doppler effect, curved space, and cybernetics. Yet when it comes to the idea of "pioneering," Lyman sees Rodman and Shelly, not Susan and Oliver, as examples of reckless adventurers. They are learning that, in John Berryman's words, "Pioneering means not feeling well" ("Homage to Miss Bradstreet"):

When frontier historians theorize about the uprooted, the lawless, the purseless, and the socially cut-off who who settled the West, they are not talking about people like my grandmother. So much that was cherished and loved, women like her had to give up; and the more they gave it up, the more they carried it helplessly with them. It was a process like ionization: what was subtracted from one pole was added to the other. For that sort of pioneer, the West was not a new country being created, but an old one being reproduced: in that sense our pioneer women were always more

realistic than our pioneer men. The moderns, carrying little baggage of the kind that Shelly calls "merely cultural," not even living in traditional air, but breathing into their space helmets a scientific mixture of synthetic gases (and polluted at that) are the true pioneers. Their circuitry seems to include no atavistic domestic sentiment, they have suffered emphatotomy, their computers hum no ghostly feedback of Home, Sweet Home. How marvelously free they are! How unutterably deprived! (246-47)

Like Thoreau, Lyman Ward finally comes to realize "that most lives are worth living even when they are lives of quiet desparation." Like Hawthorne, Stegner tries to chart a "usable past" as a way to provide some sort of order or repose within a "moral wilderness." He continues Willa Cather's efforts to explain the particular ways in which the West purified or destroyed personal values. He tries to use the "several Wests" as Faulkner used Yoknapatawpha County, as a source of legacies, myths, and icons. Angle of Repose won the Pulitzer Prize, and The Spectator Bird earned the National Book Award. Yet the reception of both books exemplifies what Stegner refers to as the tendency of the "eastern establishment... to ignore many good things in western literature." Stegner still bristles at the fact that The New York Times failed to review either book. As he says, "If you're a literary scholar and you go by the "Times Book Review," you will have a very odd canon of American literature" (Stegner and Etulain 97).

Muir, Leopold, Stegner, Abbey, and Lopez are beginning to receive a wider and more appreciative critical reception. John Muir has always been regarded as a fascinating "character"; recent commentaries by Frederick Turner and Edward Hoagland portray him as a major nineteenth-century thinker. J. Baird Callicott's recent collection of critical essays about Leopold's A Sand County Almanac features favorable commentaries from ecologists, literary critics, philosophers, and intellectual historians. Besides winning the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, Stegner has also received broad recognition for his stories, criticism, and biographies (Robinson 44). Edward Abbey's Desert Solitaire continues to attract a devoted audience; Thomas Lyons calls it a "classic" of American nature writing. Barry Lopez was awarded the 1979 John Burroughs Medal for Of Wolves and Men, and the American Book Award for Arctic Dreams. Yet in a general sense, their work cannot easily be accommodated within a literary canon based for the most part on the precepts of modernism and post-modernism. As Stegner insists,

Modern literature and western literature are somehow irreconcilable, at least up to now. The kind of western writer who writes modern literature immediately abdicates as a Westerner, and the kind who sticks to the Western attitudes is likely to be considered a little backward by the modernists (Stegner and Etulain 123).

Wilderness writers frequently sense this opposition between

their aims and the standards of modernism. Jane Tompkins summarizes the most essential of these standards: "psychological complexity, moral ambiguity, epistemological sophistication, stylistic density, formal economy" (xvii). Problems also arise from varying ideas about literary traditions, the role of "popular" forms, the reliability of narrations and narrators, and the relations of artists to society.

Wilderness writing has become one of the most distinctly "American" genres, in the sense that its development after 1870 has shown little European influence. For such writers, Europe is often seen as the continent of Nature rather than wilderness; the frontiers of its literature are colonial; its pastoral traditions appear artificial and distant from American concerns. It is also striking that for all the various travels of wilderness writers, Europe has been a rare stopping point. These contexts inform Edward Abbey's reference to "The Wasteland" as "that professorial poem"; his models for landscape come from Charles Marlon Russell, Muir, Thoreau, Audubon, Catlin, and Powell.

Wilderness writers are also hesitant to engage in disjointed or fractured narratives which remind the reader of the "fictions" or "constructs" of all writing. One should not expect a wilderness writer to exclaim, "The reader! You, dogged, un-insultable, print-oriented bastard, it's you I'm addressing, who else, from inside this monstrous fiction"

(John Barth). Authors such as Barry Lopez are not naive believers in the referentiality of language, but they consider overly reflexive writings to be an evasion or excuse. As Lopez says in "Landscape and Narrative," "The power of narrative to nurture and to heal, to repair a spirit in disarray, rests on two things: the skillful invocation of unimpeachable sources and a listener's knowledge that no hypocrisy or subterfuge is involved" (69).

While most nature writers feel somewhat distant from the academy, or from the modernist tradition, they do not share the modern artist's frequent sense of isolation from their audience or their country:

Artists broken against her,  
A-stray, lost in villages,  
Mistrusted, spoken against,  
Lovers of beauty, starved,  
Thwarted with systems,  
Helpless against the control.

(Pound, "The Rest" lines 3-8)

The pain felt by wilderness writers is often apparent; their country has made a habit of destroying their source of inspiration. Yet most would agree with Wallace Stegner's plea from "Wilderness Letter": "We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope" (155).

If one judges wilderness writers and texts not as a

series of literary codes, formal disjunctions, or intertextual references, but as an emphatically social discourse, one that consciously aims to inform and change certain beliefs, then wilderness writing -- and, I would emphasize, many other less familiar types of writing -- would require a different set of responses from critics and readers. In the words of Jane Tompkins, one needs to recognize the social effects of such texts:

I see them as doing a certain kind of cultural work within a specific historical situation, and value them for that reason. I see their plots and characters as providing society with a means of thinking about itself, defining certain aspects of a social reality which the authors and the readers shared, dramatizing its conflicts, and recommending solutions. It is the notion of literary texts doing work, expressing and shaping the social context that produced them, that I wish to substitute finally for a critical perspective that sees them as attempts to achieve a timeless, universal idea of truth and formal coherence (200).

If, as Jane Tompkins says, the canonization of literary texts is a struggle for representation in "the picture America draws of itself," then Leo Marx and Roderick Nash paint two rather different pictures of wilderness in America. Until the last fifteen years, few critics have sought to establish a cultural history of American wilderness which would include both Hemingway and Muir, both Frost and Leopold. Yet the seeming opposition between Marx and Nash is neither bitter nor irreconcilable. Marx himself offers a possible solution with his comments on the

"dialectical theory" of American culture. For Marx, this theory helps explain "why so much of our work involves the elucidation of conflicts between radically opposed views of the same persons, events, institutions, policies, and practices" (1988 x). Two of the more important conflicts discussed by Marx include Americans' tendency to see their land as Eden and as a "howling wilderness," and American writers' acceptance and distrust of vernacular language. A similar and resonant dialogue arises between The Machine in the Garden and Wilderness and the American Mind, between writers such as Twain and Muir. One cannot and should not overlook the numerous differences among these two books and these two groups of writers. However, there are stylistic, thematic, and social linkings, often based on such differences, by which these two "groups" of writers and texts can enter into dialogue with one another, linkings which could enliven both the teaching and the professional study of a cultural history of wilderness. Certainly Mark Twain's Old Times on the Mississippi and John Muir's My First Summer in the Sierra provide an intriguing contrast of the methods of "initiation," of learning to read a new landscape. The fiction of Faulkner and Stegner both address issues of regional writing, the knowledge and use of history, or the relation between land and character. Hemingway and Abbey are a pair of adventurers whose writing features disturbing and evocative images of violence and

beauty, or violence as beauty. Frost, being "well-versed in country things," would serve as a lively, if somewhat testy, commentator on Aldo Leopold's numerous essays on farming, such as "Axe-in-Hand." Even writers such as Fitzgerald and Lopez have points of correspondance: both The Great Gatsby and Arctic Dreams are stories of men -- and nations -- perpetually convinced that the light is still "green," that the darker and more tragic aspects of America's pastoral dreams will not finally undermine them. The texts of Twain, Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and Frost feature some of America's finest writing, yet all of these writers offer rather sketchy and limited portraits of American wilderness as an evolving twentieth-century concept. The texts of Muir, Leopold, Stegner, Abbey, and Lopez, while still relatively unknown to most Americanists, are a vital addition and corrective to the conceptions of wilderness that arise from more standard literary texts. As Ezra Pound said in his poem to Walt Whitman, "Let there be commerce between us."

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