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Editor

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Hacettepe University

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Contributors

Yanoula Athanassakis is an advanced graduate student at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She is currently finishing her dissertation titled, “Global Corporealities: Immigration and the Body in Contemporary US Narratives.” This work coincides with her role as Associate Managing Editor for Special Forums for the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*. She is Associate Director of the UCSB Program to Greece and teaches demotic Greek and Greek-American literature from abroad.

Jean-Daniel Collomb is a lecturer in English and American studies at Université Jean Moulin in Lyon, France. He wrote his PhD dissertation on John Muir’s life and work. His research is mainly focused on the history of American environmentalism from the second half of the nineteenth century to the contemporary period. He also has an interest in technological progress and its impact on American society.

Pembe Gözde Erdoğan is currently a PhD student in the Department of American Culture and Literature at Hacettepe University. She received her MA from the same department with a thesis titled “Historiographic Metadrama: Tony Kushner’s *A Bright Room Called Day* and *Angels in America*” in 2008. Her main fields of interest are postmodern American drama and novels, ecocriticism, and media studies.

Wendy Harding is professor of English at the University of Toulouse, France, where she is Assistant Director of the Research Group on “Cultures Anglo-Saxonnes.” She has co-authored two books on contemporary American literature with Jacky Martin: *A World of Difference: An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison’s Novels* (1994) and *Beyond Words: The Othering Excursion in Contemporary American Literature* (2007). She has also published a number of articles on twentieth-century American literature and edited several essay collections, including *Mapping American Space* (2006). She is currently working on a study of representations of emptiness in contemporary American nature writing.

James Kusch is Professor of Educational Sciences at Eastern Mediterranean University since 2007 where he also leads and collaborates with a university committee charged with organizing a Quality Assurance initiative to organize the university curriculum, research and evaluation systems. He was Visiting Professor at the University of New Brunswick in Canada in 2001 where he taught action research and qualitative research methods and was Professor of Curriculum & Instruction at University of Wisconsin Whitewater in the US from 1990 to 1999 where he served on Curriculum Articulation committees. In 1998 he led and conducted a program development project in Mathematics education in Riga, Latvia and in 2000, he worked with a program development project in UPEL of Caracas, Venezuela.

Shirley Geok-lin Lim earned her PhD at Brandeis University and is professor of English at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She has published two critical studies, and edited/co-edited *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*; *Approaches to Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior*; *Transnational Asia Pacific*; *Power, Race and Gender in Academe*, and *Sites and Transits*, and five anthologies (*The Forbidden Stitch* received the 1990 American Book Award). Recipient of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, she has published seven volumes of poetry (most recently, *Walking Backwards*), three short story collections, a memoir (*Among the White Moon Faces*, American Book Award winner), and three novels. She received the 2002 UCSB Faculty Research Lecture Award and was Chair Professor at the University of Hong Kong.

Jonathon W. Moses earned his PhD from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and has been employed at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology since 1993. He has authored, co-authored and co-edited a number of books, including *International Migration: Globalization's Last Frontier* (Zed, 2006) and (along with Torbjørn Knutsen), *Ways of Knowing: Competing methodologies and methods in social and political research* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). His research interests concern questions of globalization and sovereignty, and the role of philosophy in contemporary social science.

Michael Oppermann graduated from Hamburg University in 1990 with a PhD on German radio drama. Since then he has published numerous articles on film, radio drama and the postmodern novel. Michael Oppermann taught at Hacettepe University between 1987 and 1995. Since 1997 he has been the director of Abendgymnasium Bautzen in Germany.

Shaun O'Reilly is from the sprawling suburbs surrounding Dallas, Texas, where he completed a BA in English from the University of Texas at Arlington. He now lives and works in Reno, Nevada, working toward an MA in the Literature and Environment Program at the University of Nevada, Reno. His interests include Transcendentalism, concepts of wildness, new agrarianism, and creative writing, as well as the dynamic contribution of autobiographical narrative story to ecocritical scholarship.

Ufuk Özdağ is associate professor of American Culture and Literature at Hacettepe University in Ankara, Turkey. She received her PhD from the same university. Özdağ specializes in American fiction, environmental literature, ecocriticism, and in the intersections between literature and visual arts. Özdağ's book *Edebiyat ve Toprak Etiği: Amerikan Doğa Yazınında Leopold'cu Düşünce* (Literature and the Land Ethic: Leopoldian Thought in American Nature Writing) was published in 2005. She has initiated and has been offering literature and environment courses at Hacettepe, and she was one of the organizers of Turkey's first ecocriticism conference in 2009.

Andrew Polk is a PhD candidate in American religious history at Florida State University. He has two previous Master of Arts degrees in Biblical Studies and the History of Christianity at the Hazelip School of Theology and Yale Divinity School, respectively. He has published over twenty articles, essays, and book reviews with numerous scholarly journals and both popular and university presses. He is interested in the intersections of religion, politics, and war in American

history, particularly in regard to the way individuals and groups have formed and reformed their identities across these three mediums. His dissertation examines the way the Second World War and the emerging war culture of the 1950s influenced American religion, including the advent of the myths of the Judeo-Christian tradition and America as a bastion of religious freedom.

J. Meredith Privott received her MA degree in Literature and Environment at the University of Nevada, Reno, in 2010, with a concentration in American coastal women's literature. She now lives and teaches English in Charleston, South Carolina.

Scott Russell Sanders, a distinguished professor emeritus of English at Indiana University, is the author of twenty books of fiction and nonfiction, including, most recently, *A Private History of Awe*, which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, and *A Conservationist Manifesto*. Among his honors are the Lannan Literary Award, the John Burroughs Essay Award, the Mark Twain Award, and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. He lives in the hill country of Indiana's White River Valley.

Vidya Sarveswaran is presently a PhD candidate in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras). She works in the field of literature and environment or ecocriticism, with a special reference to the literary works of the American writer Terry Tempest Williams. Ms. Sarveswaran was a Fulbright Fellow with the University of Nevada, Reno, for the year 2008-2009. Her research interests include American, British and Indian literature, literature and the environment, Deep Ecology, drama, film studies, and creative writing.

Elizabeth Schultz, having retired from the University of Kansas in 2001, now balances scholarship on Herman Melville and on the environment with writing essays and poems about the people and places she loves. Recently, she has published a memoir titled *Shoreline: Seasons at the Lake*; the essays in *The Nature of Kansas Lands*; two collections of poems, *Conversations* and *Her Voice*; and a collection of short stories called *The White-Skin Deer: Hoopa Stories*. In 2007, she was a Distinguished Fulbright Lecturer in American literature in Beijing and in 2008 returned to China to co-organize an international conference on ecocriticism.

Scott Slovic is professor of Literature and Environment at the University of Nevada, Reno, where he helped to found the Graduate Program in Literature and Environment in 1996. The founding president of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) from 1992 to 1995, he has edited the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* since 1995. He has been a Fulbright Scholar in Germany, Japan, and China and a visiting professor at various universities in Asia, Europe, and Australia. The author, editor, or co-editor of fifteen books in the field of literature and environment, his publications include *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing: Henry Thoreau, Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, Barry Lopez* (1992) and *Going Away to Think: Engagement, Retreat, and Ecocritical Responsibility* (2008).

François Specq is professor of American Literature and Culture at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon, France, and a researcher affiliated with LIRE-SEMA (CNRS, UMR 5611). He is the author of

Transcendence: Seers and Seekers in the Age of Thoreau (2006) and has published translations and critical studies of works by Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, and Frederick Douglass. His next books, translations, and critical studies of Margaret Fuller's essay "The Great Lawsuit" and of Mary Austin's *The Land of Little Rain* are forthcoming from the Editions Rue d'Ulm, Paris, and from Le Mot et le Reste, Marseille.

Alexa Weik von Mossner is a docteur in the English Department at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, and currently a Carson Fellow at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Munich, Germany. She received her PhD in Literature from the University of California, San Diego, in 2008 and has published articles on ethnic and transnational American literature, environmental justice, cosmopolitanism, eco-cosmopolitanism, and environmental film.

Necip Erol Olcay graduated from Hacettepe University, Turkey, with a PhD on Library and Information Science. His interest in drawing and painting began during his undergraduate years at Hacettepe. His first exhibition took place in Ankara in 1978. His acquaintance with Hasip Pektaş in 1994—a well known artist in exlibris art—marked the beginning of his interest in this area. He has participated in various national and international exlibris exhibitions since then.

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Guest Editors' Introduction
Ecocriticism and a Conservationist Manifesto

Ufuk Özdağ and Scott Slovic

*The breeze will be sweet in your lungs
and the rain will be innocent.¹*

Scott Russell Sanders

World history has seen many manifestos—some political, others artistic. American author Scott Russell Sanders's environmentalist manifesto is uniquely visionary and inviting. Most manifestos are emphatic calls to action. Sanders's does more than that. In addition to offering a compelling formula for living human lives that take the future into account and will help to create "a culture of conservation," Sanders helps readers re-imagine what it means to be human in the context of the natural world, what it means to live in a way that considers the limitations and requirements, the "expectations," of the world beyond ourselves. The forty core declarations of his "Conservationist Manifesto"² urge readers not to confuse financial wealth with real wealth, to understand that we must work collectively to protect our "common wealth,"³ not only for our own good, but for the sake of generations to come.⁴ One of the important ideas in Sanders's manifesto is the notion that "[c]onservation means not only protecting the relatively unscathed natural areas that survive, but also mending, so far as possible, what has been damaged" (211). This restorationist sensibility is particularly important as we begin the second decade of the twenty-first

1 From Scott Russell Sanders's last essay, "For the Children" in *A Conservationist Manifesto* (227).

2 See Sanders, "A Conservationist Manifesto" in *A Conservationist Manifesto* (209-19).

3 See Sanders's essay, "Common Wealth" in *A Conservationist Manifesto* (25-42).

4 In "For the Children," Sanders addresses the children of the future, and states, "...I believe we can change our ways, we can choose to do less harm, we can take better care of the soils and waters and air, we can make more room for all the creatures who breathe. And we are far more likely to do so if we think about the many children who will come after us, as I think about you" (224).

century, for much of the planet, as we all know, has been meddled with on small or large scales—it has nearly all been “scathed,” so to speak. And yet that does not mean we should love altered landscapes any less than our dreams of pristine wilderness.

We have decided to launch this special ecocriticism issue of *JAST* with Sanders’s “A Conservationist Manifesto,” for it might be said that the academic field known as ecocriticism, which has existed formally for some three decades and is becoming more global in scope everyday, has contributed to the foundations of the Manifesto. Although Sanders is generally thought to be a “nature writer” rather than an ecocritic per se, he has in fact published important commentaries on American environmental writing, such as the 1987 essay “Speaking a Word for Nature.” For the most part, though, he has devoted his distinguished career to exploring the meaning of his own life in relation to other people and to the larger planet in many volumes of narrative essays. He has also demonstrated a special ability both to ask profound questions about what Lawrence Buell would call our “environmental imagination” and to call for concrete changes in individual and collective behavior. In a sense, Sanders’s work bridges the divide between reflection and engagement that many ecocritics consider to be an essential tension within the field. Ecocriticism, now institutionalized in the West thanks to the efforts of numerous writers and critics, often seeks to “reverse” the very “destructive trends” that Sanders articulates in his Manifesto, albeit by way of the relatively indirect and subtle strategies of literary criticism. It is worth stating, too, that the environmentally destructive trends typically targeted by ecocriticism are also the product of western civilization’s industrial processes, and in this sense ecocriticism is a form of self-critique and self-correction. However, since environmental destruction has now become a global phenomenon, regardless of which cultures actually started the problems that now confront us, it seems important that ways of thinking about this destruction (and about our species’ deeper relationship with the planet) become equally global.

As more and more scholars in the literary profession begin to incorporate ecocritical perspectives in their studies, various methodologies are gaining popularity.⁵ Glen A. Love’s forceful statement back in 1991 that “the most important function of literature today” might be to “redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world” helped to spur the ecocritical movement during its formative years (213). Lawrence Buell’s

5 Among a number of books on the pedagogical approaches, *Teaching North American Environmental Literature* by Laird Christensen et al. is a valuable collection on ecocritical praxis.

four criteria⁶ in his seminal *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), that helped to clarify what it means to categorize texts as “environmental,” was crucial to the growing institutionalization of the field. Cheryll Glotfelty’s groundbreaking introduction to 1996 collection *The Ecocriticism Reader*, titled “Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” argues that “[a] strong voice in the profession will enable ecocritics to be influential in mandating important changes in the canon, the curriculum, and university policy” (xxv)—and indeed many of these “important changes” have come to pass during the decade and a half since that book was published. Peter Barry’s breakdown of “what ecocritics do”⁷ in the final chapter of his second edition of *Beginning Theory* (2002) expands into new tasks for the ecocritic, such as those explained by Buell in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, all contributing to Sanders’s “culture of conservation”:

But how much will environmental criticism in literary studies matter to those outside its own disciplinary cloister, let alone to the lay world outside the academy? ... [T]he answer so far looks more encouraging in the pedagogical arena than in that of critical discourse. As teachers and citizens,

6 Buell’s four criteria, in brief, are: the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history; the human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest; human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation; and some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text (7–8).

7 According to Barry, “[ecocritics] re-read major literary works from an ecocentric perspective, with particular attention to the representation of the natural world; They extend the applicability of a range of ecocentric concepts, using them of things other than the natural world--concepts such as growth and energy, balance and imbalance, symbiosis and mutuality, and sustainable or unsustainable uses of energy and resources; they give special canonical emphasis to writers who foreground nature as a major part of their subject matter, such as the American transcendentalists, the British Romantics, the poetry of John Clare, the work of Thomas Hardy and the Georgian poets of the early twentieth century; They extend the range of literary-critical practice by placing a new emphasis on relevant factual writing, especially reflective topographical material such as essays, travel writing, memoirs, and regional literature; They turn away from the ‘social constructivism’ and ‘linguistic determinism’ of dominant literary theories (with their emphasis on the linguistic and social constructedness of the external world) and instead emphasise ecocentric values of meticulous observation, collective ethical responsibility, and the claims of the world beyond ourselves” (264).

ecocritics of both first and second waves have been highly inventive, indeed exemplary, in breaking down classroom walls to send students into the field, in inspiring them to move on to postgraduate destinations of various sorts in the environmental area, in joining forces with artists and activists, and sometimes in undertaking significant creative or activist endeavors themselves. On the other hand, the market for ecocritical publications so far has been chiefly academic, and within academia chiefly largely confined to professors and students of literature, with relatively modest lateral percolation effect. (Buell 132)

Briefly sketching the history of ecocritical scholarship today reveals some especially significant developments in its evolution: for instance, a more socially-oriented ecocriticism in the past decade energizing global and regional activism and a growing readership. One only needs to remember Buell's statements in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* on the role of the environmental justice movement in second-wave ecocriticism. Another important development in the field is an increasing emphasis on the intersections between the arts and the sciences, which is now surfacing in ecocritical praxis. Some of the modes of ecocritical scholarship today that seem especially rich in spurring the evolution of a new culture of conservation emphasize the practice of textual analysis in conjunction with ideas drawn from neo-bioregionalism, global concepts of place, evolutionary biology, risk theory, feminist theory, ecotheology, postcolonial theory, environmental justice, and environmental ethics, to mention a few examples.

While preparing this special issue of *JAST*, in light of its being the first Turkish publication devoted to ecocriticism, we envisioned the various essays in this special issue to reflect the expansive field ecocriticism has recently become, in its progression from the study of the rich vein of American nature writing to a highly diverse field, now encompassing ecocritical readings of world environmental literatures and cultures, all contributing, yes, to "a culture of conservation." Indeed, the essays in this issue, ranging from new approaches to timeless American nature writing by the likes of Henry David Thoreau and John Muir to the exploration of a recent nature writing, from studies of literary representations of environmental racism to examinations of ecodrama, reflect some of the current diversity in the field.

Reading the classics of American nature writing from new angles, we experience the intellectual recharging that seems to be forever needed. With

François Specq's essay, "Thoreau's Environmental Humanism," focusing on the winter work of the Walden Pond ice-cutters [the profit-oriented "busy husbandmen"], the concluding chapters of *Walden*, the seminal 1854 book that arose from the author's experiences on the outskirts of Boston, Massachusetts, in the 1840s, gains new dimensions. Specq's essay makes a strong case that the land-surveyor Thoreau's intention was to re-transcendentalize the lake. In view of the ongoing destructive effects of the *market economy* upon the American landscape (and throughout the world) more than a century and a half after the publication of *Walden*, the spiritual maxim "to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life" remains profoundly important, but it is easier said than done.

Ecocriticism, in its most basic definition, is the study of human expressions (artistic and otherwise) of the relationship between human beings and the natural world. But, one could argue, it is also the study of how science and technology, over the ages, influence, or have an impact on, that relationship. Jean-Daniel Collomb in "John Muir and the Ambivalence of Technology" delves into the nature of this influence. Collomb states: "Muir's hesitations and qualms regarding technology are worth studying in that they may provide us with a dissenting account of America's technological coming of age at the dawn of the American century." His insight into a little explored area in the prominent nature writer's work—Muir's "reluctant fascination for technical progress"—is important in showing both the counter-technological strand of American culture and the ironic affinity for technology in the mind of one of America's leading environmental thinkers and writers.

The exploration of recent nature writing texts is what feeds ecocriticism with new energy. Wendy Harding's "Scripting the Wilderness" is a close reading of a recent example of place-oriented writing: Don Scheese's "The Inhabited Wilderness." Published in the spring 2009 issue of *ISLE*,⁸ Scheese's meditative account of a hike in the Manti-La Sal National Forest, explores the ruins of the ancient native people known as "Anasazi"—the ruins that "remind us" not only "of the inevitability of our own mortality,"⁹ but also of the way nature heals itself

8 Scott Slovic, in the "Editor's Note" for this issue of *ISLE*, states that Scheese's text "delicately engages with the wilderness debates of recent decades by showing how our solitary experience of remote places might bring us to consider the paradox of an 'inhabited wilderness,' a paradox some would argue is inherent in the very phenomenon of wilderness" (201).

9 See Scheese, "Ruins fascinate us with their enigmatic silence. Ruins haunt us with their lonely and poignant beauty. Ruins remind us of the inevitability of our own mortality" (352).

in the absence of humans. In Harding's essay, though, Scheese's text gains new dimensions; it becomes a *montage* of "scripts." "Scripts are an integral part of social experience," says Harding, "and they are also our way to insert ourselves in the world. To script the wilderness is a way to inhabit it, to mark it with a human trace while still conserving it. Scripts occupy a middle ground between reality and imagination, in other words, the terrain of the aesthetic."

Ethnic minority communities' exposure to environmental hazards, a significant topic in the field of environmental justice ecocriticism, is taken up by Alexa Weik's "Mysteries of the Mountain: Environmental Racism and Political Action in Percival Everett's *Watershed*." Weik's ecocritical reading of the 1996 novel, *Watershed*, by a contemporary African American writer, emphasizes the issue of *environmental racism*, a term that was coined by the African American civil rights leader—also a leader of the environmental justice movement—Benjamin Chavis¹⁰ back in 1987. The essay is important not only for its emphasis on local engagement, but also for the parallels between the civil rights movement and "the continuity between the civil rights struggle and the environmental justice movement that Robert Bullard and other influential scholars in the field see," as Weik points out.

Yanoula Athanassakis's essay, "L.A. and T.J: Immigration, Globalization, and Environmental Justice in *Tropic of Orange* and *Sleep Dealer*," offers a fresh perspective for ecocriticism by looking at a literary text in dialogue with film. This essay, focusing on the issue of environmental justice at the U.S.-Mexico border, contributes to current ecocritical and environmental justice studies, revealing the significant connections between these two fields. Athanassakis argues that Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* and Alex Rivera's sci-fi film *Sleep Dealer* help illuminate how issues of environmental justice—environmental degradation and corporate greed—manifest themselves specifically in the U.S.-Mexico border regions. Her reading of the two texts in the context of "biopolitical violence" and the processes of economic globalization seems to intensify the need for "a culture of conservation."

10 See the "Introduction" to *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, & Pedagogy* in which Adamson, Evans, and Stein discuss the background to Chavis's coining the term *environmental racism* and his own definition of the term: "racial discrimination in environmental policy-making and the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of people of color communities for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and history of excluding people of color from leadership in the environmental movement" (4).

Lawrence Buell, in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, pointed to a significant gap in ecocritical studies: ecological drama criticism. A contribution to the newly emerging drama studies in ecocriticism appears in the form of Pembe Gözde Erdoğan's "Hunger and Lead: An Ecocritical Reading of Robert Schenkkan's *The Kentucky Cycle*." Erdoğan points out that in *The Kentucky Cycle* "land is not important just because it is 'the setting' of the play, but also because it is one of the play's major characters." Weaving together Aldo Leopold's "land ethic" and Theodore Roszak's ecopsychology, Erdoğan brings to the fore how the play, with its focus on environmental degradation of a place and the complex connection between place and its human communities spanning generations, can be an important medium in creating environmental awareness in the theatre-goers.

Turning back to where we started, let us remember that Scott Russell Sanders states: "[c]onservation means not only protecting the relatively unscathed natural areas that survive, but also mending, so far as possible, what has been damaged." This reminds us of a heart-warming forecast by E.O. Wilson: "Here is the means to end the great extinction spasm. The next century will, I believe, be the era of restoration in ecology." Ufuk Özdağ, in her "An Essay on Ecocriticism in 'the Century of Restoring the Earth'" articulates her vision of a new *restoration ecocriticism*, which might soon become a future focus in ecocritical scholarship. The devastation of the planet we have witnessed in recent years has been beyond words—in fact, as Özdağ was drafting her essay, the explosion-damaged Deepwater Horizon drilling rig was spewing millions of gallons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico, along the southern coast of the United States. But in an archetypally American spirit, thinking hopefully even in the face of disaster, she argues that now is the time to restore the damage . . . both with our pens and with the actual collective effort of the human race.

In addition to expressing our appreciation to the authors who contributed the above-mentioned articles, we wish to offer special thanks to Scott Russell Sanders for generously allowing us to reprint his "A Conservationist Manifesto"; and to Shirley Geok-lin Lim, the internationally acclaimed writer and critic, and the recipient of numerous awards, for contributing her evocative recent poem, "Domestic Garden." We are honored to publish Vidya Sarveswaran's new interview with renowned American nature writer Terry Tempest Williams, who was recognized by the Utne Reader as a "visionary," one of the Utne 100 "who could change your life." Williams is the author of such classic works of environmental literature as *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (1991) and *Finding Beauty in a Broken World* (2008), among many others. For the Book Review section of the special issue, we approached our colleague

Elizabeth Schultz and Scott Slovic's graduate students Shaun O'Reilly and Meredith Privott. We thank them all for their engaging and in-depth reviews of *Ecopoetics 6/7* (2006-2009), edited by Jonathan Skinner; Ian Marshall's *Walden by Haiku* (2009); and the 2010 second edition of Sandra Steingraber's *Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment*. In the Film Review section, our gratitude goes to Michael Oppermann for his review of Michael Moore's *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009). We would also like to note that although this is officially the Fall 2009 issue of *JAST*, we actually compiled the issue during 2010.

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A Conservationist Manifesto¹

Scott Russell Sanders

1. The work of conservation is inspired by wonder, gratitude, reason, and love. We need all of these emotions and faculties to do the work well. But the first impulse is love—love for wild and settled places, for animals and plants, for people living now and those yet to come, for the creations of human hands and minds.
2. In our time, the work of conservation is also inspired by a sense of loss. We feel keenly the spreading of deserts, clear-cutting of forests, extinction of species, poisoning of air and water and soil, disruption of climate, and the consequent suffering of countless people. We recognize that Earth's ability to support life is being degraded by a burgeoning human population, extravagant consumption, and reckless technology. The most reckless technology is the machinery of war, which drains away vast amounts of labor and resources, distracts nations from the needs of their citizens, and wreaks havoc on both land and people.
3. The scale of devastation caused by human activity is unprecedented, and it is accelerating, spurred on by a global system of nation-states battling for advantage, and by an economic system addicted to growth and waste. So the work of conservation becomes ever more urgent. To carry on in the midst of so much loss, we must have faith that people working together can reverse the destructive trends. We must believe that our species is capable of imagining and achieving fundamental changes in our way of life.
4. Even while we respond to emergencies—keeping oil rigs out of wildlife refuges, saving farms from bulldozers—we must also work for the long-term healing of land, people, and culture. Conservation means not only protecting the relatively unscathed natural areas that survive, but also mending, so far as possible, what has been damaged. We can't undo all of the damage. No amount of effort or money, for example, will restore the roughly fifty percent of the world's coral reefs that are now dying or

1 "A Conservationist's Manifesto" © 2003 by Scott Russell Sanders; first published in Helen Whybrow, ed., *Coming to Land in a Troubled World* (Trust for Public Land, 2003); collected in the author's *A Conservationist Manifesto* (Indiana UP, 2009); reprinted by permission of the author.

dead because of pollution, dynamiting, and ocean warming. But we can replant forests and prairies, reflood wetlands, clean up rivers, transform brownfields into parks, return species to their native habitats, and leave the wildest of places alone to heal themselves.

5. The cost of such restoration is so great, and the results so uncertain, that we should make every effort to prevent the damage in the first place. Although skillful work may help, all healing ultimately depends on the self-renewing powers of nature. Our task is to understand and cooperate with those powers as fully as we can.
6. Conservation should aim to preserve the integrity and diversity of natural systems, from the local watershed to the biosphere, rather than to freeze any given landscape into some ideal condition. Nature is never fixed, but in constant flow. If we try to halt that flow, we may cause more harm than good, and we are certain to waste our energies. When we speak of ecological health, we do not refer to a static condition, but to a web of dynamic relationships. We ourselves are woven into that web, every cell in our bodies, every thought in our minds.
7. Lands, rivers, and oceans are healthy when they sustain the full range of ecological processes. Healthy wild land filters its own water and builds its own soil, as in ancient forests or unplowed prairies. Agricultural land is healthy when it is gaining rather than losing fertility, and when it leaves room for other species in woodlots and hedgerows. Whether wild or cultivated, healthy lands and seas are diverse, resilient, and beautiful.
8. Healthy villages and cities are also diverse, resilient, and beautiful. No human settlement can flourish apart from a flourishing landscape, nor can a family or an individual thrive in a ruined place. Likewise, no landscape can flourish so long as the inhabitants of that place lack the basics of a decent life—safe and adequate food and water, secure shelter, access to education and medical care, protection from violence, chances for useful work, and hope for the future.
9. Concern for ecological health and concern for social justice are therefore inseparable. Anyone who pits the good of land against the good of people, as if we could choose between them, is either ignorant or deceitful.
10. Justice and compassion require us to use the Earth's bounty sparingly and to share it out equitably. For citizens in the richest nations, this will mean living more simply, satisfying our needs rather than our wants. For

citizens in the poorest nations, this will mean satisfying basic needs in ways that are least harmful to the land. For all nations, this will mean slowing the growth in human population—an effort already underway with some success—and it will mean eventually reducing our numbers until we are once more in balance with Earth's carrying capacity.

11. A concern for justice also requires us to provide for everyone, regardless of location or income or race, the opportunity for contact with healthy land. All people deserve the chance to breathe clean air and drink clean water, to meet birds and butterflies, to walk among wildflowers, to glimpse the primal world of big trees and untamed rivers, rocky shores and starry nights.
12. Justice to other species requires us to preserve habitats where our fellow creatures may dwell. Through farming, fishing, hunting, and the harvesting of trees and other plants, we already use nearly half of Earth's biological production. We have no right to claim so much, let alone more. Simple gratitude to other species for the nourishment, instruction, companionship, and inspiration they have given us should be reason enough to fight for their survival. Concern for our own survival should lead us to protect the web of life by preserving a vast and robust range of habitats, from backyard gardens and schoolyard prairies to marine sanctuaries and deep wilderness.
13. Justice to future generations requires us to pass along the beauty and bounty of Earth undiminished. Our politics, economy, and media betray an almost infantile fixation on the present moment, seeking or selling instant gratification, oblivious to history. We need to develop a culture worthy of adults, one that recognizes our actions have consequences. If we take more than we need from the riches of the planet, if we drain aquifers, squander topsoil, or fish the seas bare, we are stealing from our children. If we fill dumps with toxic waste, fill barrels with radioactive debris, spew poisons into the atmosphere and oceans, we will leave our descendants a legacy of grief. Conservation aims to avoid causing harm to our children, or their children, or to any children ever.
14. Whatever else we teach our children, we owe them an ecological education. We need to give them time outdoors, where they can meet and savor the world that humans have not made—pill bugs on a sidewalk, a swarm of tadpoles in a puddle, a tree for climbing, a sky aflame with sunset, a kiss of wind. Such contact gives promise of a lifelong joy in the presence of nature.

By the time they finish school, children who have received an ecological education know in their bones that the wellbeing of people depends on the wellbeing of Earth, from the neighborhood to the watershed to the planet.

15. Whether children or adults, we take care of what we love. Our sense of moral obligation arises from a feeling of kinship. The illusion of separation—between human and non-human, rich and poor, black and white, native and stranger—is the source of our worst behavior. The awareness of kinship is the source of our best behavior.
16. Just as all people belong to the same family, regardless of the surface differences that seem to divide us, so all living things are interrelated. We depend on the integrity and services of Earth's natural systems, from enzymes in our bellies to currents in the oceans, from bees pollinating fruit trees to ozone blocking ultraviolet light.
17. The integrity we perceive in nature is our own birthright. We swim in the one and only stream of life. By recognizing that we are part of this vast, subtle, ancient order, we may be restored to wholeness. A sense of communion with other organisms, with the energies and patterns of nature, is instinctive in children, and it is available to every adult who has ever watched a bird or a cloud. A sense of solidarity not only with all things presently alive but also with generations past and to come, may free us from the confines of the private ego.
18. Recognizing that the land is a unified whole, and that human communities are inseparable from this unity, conservationists must work across the full spectrum of habitats, from inner city to wilderness. And we must engage every segment of the population in caring for our shared home, especially those people who, by reason of poverty or the circumstances of their upbringing, have not viewed conservation as a pressing concern. In other words, conservation must be thoroughly democratic.
19. Our present economy is driven by the pursuit of private advantage. The global market sums up billions of decisions made by individuals and businesses in their own self-interest, with little regard for the common good or for ecological consequences. Therefore, we cannot expect the marketplace to protect the quality of air and water, the welfare of communities, or the survival of species, including our own.

20. As a result of the triumph of the market, the human economy is disrupting the great economy of nature. The same corporations and individuals that profit from this disruption also perpetuate it, by controlling advertising, the news and entertainment media, and much of the political system.
21. Governments and businesses promote endless growth, which is a recipe for disaster on a crowded planet. Even the slowest growth, if it continues long enough, will exhaust Earth's resources. There is no such thing as "sustainable growth." There is only sustainable *use*.
22. In order to live, we must use the Earth—but we should not use it up. For the sake of our descendants, we must learn to grow food without depleting the soil, fish without exhausting the seas, draw energy from sunlight and wind and tides. We must conserve the minerals we mine and the products we manufacture, recycling them as thoroughly as a forest recycles twigs, leaves, fur, and bone.
23. Only by caring for particular places, in every watershed, can we take care of the planet. Every place needs people who will dig in, keep watch, explore the terrain, learn the animals and plants, and take responsibility for the welfare of their home ground. No matter what the legal protections on paper, no land can be safe from harm without people committed to care for it, year after year, generation after generation. All conservation, therefore, must aim at fostering an ethic of stewardship.
24. Many of the places we care for will be public—state and national forests, wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, parks. We hold these riches in common, as citizens, and we need to defend them against those who seek to plunder our public lands for the benefit of a few. In an era obsessed with private wealth, private rights, and private property, we need to reclaim a sense of our common wealth—the realm of shared gifts, resources, and skills.
25. Our common wealth includes the basic necessities of life, such as clean water. It also includes the basic grammar of life, the evolutionary information embodied in the human genome and in the genes of other species. We should modify that genetic inheritance only with the greatest care, after public deliberation, and never merely for the sake of financial profit or scientific curiosity. We should respect the genetic integrity of other species. We should guard the human genome against tampering and commercialization. These essentials of life belong to all people, and our rights in them need to be fully and forever protected.

26. Even as we defend our public lands, we must encourage good conservation practice on private land—farms, ranches, family forests, factory grounds, city lots, yards. How well these places are cared for will depend on the owners' vision and skill. While conservationists respect private property, we never forget that such property derives its protection from a framework of law, and derives its market value largely from what surrounds it. The public therefore has a legitimate interest in the condition and treatment of *all* land, including that held in private hands.
27. In the long term, we cannot protect land, either public or private, without reducing the demands we make on the earth. This means examining every aspect of our lives, from our houses and malls to the cars we drive and the food we eat, from our forms of entertainment to our fundamental values, considering in every domain how we might be more thrifty and responsible.
28. While changes in our private lives are essential, they are not sufficient. We must also insure that businesses, universities, foundations, and other institutions practice good stewardship and that governments protect the interests not merely of wealthy elites but of all people, indeed of all creatures. And we must resist the cult of violence that turns homes, workplaces, cities, and entire countries into battlefields. We must therefore engage in politics, supporting candidates and policies that are favorable to conservation and social justice and peace, opposing those that are indifferent or hostile to such causes, making our voices heard in the legislature and the marketplace.
29. If we are to succeed in reversing the current devastation, the attitudes and practices of conservation must become second nature to us, like comforting a hurt child, like planting seeds in the spring. So the aim of conservation must be more than protecting certain parcels of land, vital as that work is. The aim must be to create a culture informed by ecological understanding and compassion at all levels of society—in the minds and practices of individuals, in households, neighborhoods, factories, schools, urban planning offices, architectural and engineering firms, corporate board rooms, courthouses, legislatures, and the media.
30. In seeking a way of life that is durable, we have much to learn from those indigenous peoples who have lived in place for many generations without degrading their home. When such people are uprooted by enslavement, economic hardships, or war, they are torn away from the ground where

their stories make sense. We must help them stay on their native ground, help them preserve their languages and skills, for their experience can enrich our common fund of knowledge about living wisely on Earth.

31. We cannot all be native to the places where we live, yet we can all aspire to become true inhabitants. Becoming an inhabitant means paying close attention to one's home ground, learning its ways and its needs, and taking responsibility for its welfare.
32. Conservationists also have much to learn from people who still draw sustenance from the land—hunting, fishing, farming, ranching, gardening, logging. The most thoughtful of these people use the land respectfully, for they understand that Earth is the ultimate source of wealth.
33. If we are to foster a culture of conservation, we will need to draw on the wisdom and moral passion of religious communities. Until the past half-century, no religious tradition has had to confront the prospect of global devastation brought on by human actions, yet every tradition offers us guidance in honoring Creation. The world's religions call us away from a life of frenzied motion and consumption, teaching us to seek spiritual rather than material riches. They remind us to live with gratitude, respect, affection, and restraint.
34. If we are to foster a culture of conservation, we will also need to draw on the full spectrum of science, from astronomy to zoology. We need to know everything science can teach us about how natural systems function, and how damaged systems may be restored. We need to emulate scientists in working cooperatively across nationalities and generations, in adding to the common store of knowledge, in seeking the truth and speaking clearly.
35. Scientists, in turn, need to be guided in their research not merely by what is financially or professionally rewarding, but by what is ecologically and ethically sound—refraining, for example, from research that would turn our genetic inheritance into private property. Whether scientists or not, we should all be concerned with how science is conducted and how technology is applied, for we must all live with the results.
36. While there is much in the work of conservation that we can count—acres saved, whooping cranes hatched, oaks planted—there is much that cannot be measured in numbers. To convey the full impact of conservation, we need to tell stories, make photographs and paintings, share dances and songs. We need to listen to the people whose lives have been enlarged by

a community garden, by the glimpse of sandhill cranes flying overhead, by the spectacle of salmon returning to spawn in a free-flowing stream.

37. Every conservation project tells a story about our values, about our reasons for conserving land or buildings or skills. We should convey these stories as eloquently as we know how, in words and pictures, in ceremony and song. We draw strength from tales of good work already carried out, from the prospects for restoring landscapes and communities, from the human capacity for taking care, and from the healing energies in the universe.
38. Our largest stories are those of cosmology. Whatever tales we tell about the origin and flow of the universe, and about our place in the scheme of things, will shape our sense of how we should behave. If we imagine ourselves to be participants in a grand evolutionary story, recipients and bearers of cosmic gifts, we are more likely to feel the courage, reverence, and delight necessary for doing good work in conservation over the long haul.
39. Although conservation requires a long-term commitment and a large-scale vision, the work itself is local and intimate, rooting us in our own place, awakening us to our own time, moment by moment. It is joyful work, however hard it may be. In the face of loss, it is brave and hopeful work.
40. Conservation arises from the perennial human desire to dwell in harmony with our neighbors—those that creep and fly, those that swim and soar, those that sway on roots, as well as those that walk about on two legs. We seek to make a good and lasting home. We strive for a way of life that our descendants will look back on with gratitude, a way of life that is worthy of our magnificent planet.

**Interbeing:
An Interview with Terry Tempest Williams**

Vidya Sarveswaran

As a Fulbright Scholar, I had the opportunity to meet with Terry Tempest Williams at the Department of English, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, in February 2009. Before the formal interview began, Terry and I walked a shared labyrinth. For me the walk itself was a treasured one and I view it as a metaphor for the sacred spaces within oneself that Williams passionately talks about in her writings. In the interview, we discussed several issues ranging from the personal to the political and the sacred. Terry's openness toward life and other cultures, her warmth, enthusiasm, and refreshing idealism, are a few things that I brought back home with me.

VS: Although you are known as an “environmental writer,” you are clearly connected in powerful ways to other people. Could you tell me something about the people—family, writers—who have particularly influenced your writing?

TTW: Of all the people who have influenced me, the first would certainly be my grandmother Mimi. I think she really brought me into a larger sphere of what nature is, even human nature, and at a time when there were not that many global citizens in Utah. Now we have a global bond. That was not the case growing up. I grew up in a very staunch, strict, Mormon background. Salt Lake City in the 1950s and 1960s was very insular. The Mormon community became too small for my grandmother. She really sought her solace outside. She was a student of J. Krishnamurti and she went to a hiding to study his works. When she came back, she brought back oak leaves from the tree under which they sat. Krishnamurti, Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, and Alan Watts—I thought they were all Mormons. My grandmother brought that kind of scope to our family. We would spend the night with her and lingered in bed to collect our thoughts. She would ask us what kind of dreams we had had. She was an enormous influence. She gave me my first Peterson field guide to birds, when I was five. It had three lines that said “I love you” inscribed inside and that was our little secret. My love of nature was really tied to the love of my grandmother, and certainly my parents. My father was into pipeline construction and our livelihood came from the land. So in reality, there was no separation between our relationship to

the land, relationship to family, and our relationship to spiritual life. It was all interconnected. My mother was another great influence, especially her grace. I think she really embodied a sense of peace which I carry through with me.

Ted Major was a significant influence. He was the director of the Teton science school. Coming from a Republican Mormon household, he was the first Democrat I ever met. I went to the Teton school and I met him through Flo Shepard in the year 1974. These people were instrumental in giving me a larger point of view. An ecological view, perhaps. All the things that I had loved instinctively and intuitively suddenly assumed a scientific grounding, a biological grounding and an ecological awareness. I went to school with Flo as my advisor to get my masters degree in educational and cultural foundations. I ended up staying in a science school with Ted Major, where my husband Brooke and I went to, after our first year of marriage. So these people loom large.

Wangari Maathai was another powerful influence. In 1985, I was at the United Nations Decade for Women, conference that was held at Nairobi. When I left the conference, I ended up following her to the villages to see what this Green Belt Movement was all about. It was again tied to women. That was when I realized that women in Kenya were carrying an environmental crisis on their back. I saw women traveling eight to ten hours a day in search of water and firewood and I tried to learn what that meant in terms of deforestation. I was so inspired by Wangari, that I came home and started the Green Belt Movement of Utah. This I did, not only to raise money for Wangari's movement, but also to talk about deforestation here in Salt Lake, and to justify what it means to live in a place of aridity. Wallace Stegner was again an important mentor who talked about the unity of drought and issues about living in a place, a place that Mary Austin would rightly call "A land of little Rain." Certainly Edward Abbey was a deep influence and I would call him the Sacred Rage. His *Desert Solitaire* with its Colorado Plateau. Barry Lopez was an early influence. He was with Ed Abbey in nineteen seventy nine at the University of Utah, where he said "I exhort you to write as a young woman who lives on the edge of the Great Salt Lake," and that's been an important friendship. My husband Brooke has been a powerful influence. We've been together for the last thirty five years, and have both in many ways been refugees in exile. The sense of community which is embedded in us is very important to us. Brooke's great, great grandfather was Brigham Young who created Utah, and I still feel the pioneering spirit in us, because of our roots. Now, our son Louis Gakumba from Rwanda. How would you ever imagine that a prayer or a plea to give me one wild word, would ultimately lead us to our son? One can never know the paths of fate. The magic of the two of us meeting. So, these would be some of the influences along the way.

VS: I notice that each of your books is distinct from the next one both thematically and structurally. Is that a conscious effort on your part?

TTW: I appreciate that. I think especially in academics, people like to put you in a box. It has not been conscious. I think the path of my books reflects the evolutionary path that I have been on as a human being. Each of my books begins with the question which is burning in me that keeps me up at night- that which will not allow me to sleep. Beginning with *Pieces of White Shell*. We all tell stories that evoke a sense of place. I never forget reading a book by Marie Louise Von Franz called *Creation Myths*. She is a Jungian psychologist and she talks about the creation myth—Adam and Eve in the same context as the changing woman giving birth to a child, monster slayer, myths of Kali and helps us realize that we are story beings and nobody has a lock on the truth. Sharing stories were a part of my conditioning. You know for me, it was being present in the Navajo reservation and asking them, “What is a story?” And having the elders, having the children and the women saying, that story is an umbilical cord that connects us to the past, the present, and the future and it keeps things alive. They believe that it becomes the conscience of the community. That was so important to me.

In *Refuge*, I talk about the two things that I have always held as a constant. My mother (my family) and the bird river refuge. Suddenly in nineteen eighty three, it all turned to quicksand. My mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. The Great Salt Lake was rising. The question that was burning in me was how do we find refuge in change? And that’s how deeply ingrained the two parallel paths were. I’ll tell you a story that is perhaps indicative about the struggle. My mother had died, my grandmother had died. There was a family reunion which is a tradition in Mormon culture with the Rommeleys—my maternal clan. I went to the family reunion, to my aunt’s place. We call her aunt B. She is a six foot eight inches tall woman who greets me at the door and she says “Ah Terry how are you?” and looks directly at my stomach to see if I am pregnant yet. I said, “I am doing great aunt B,” and she said, “What are you doing with your life?” In other words, why aren’t you a mother? And I say that I am writing. And she says “What are you writing?” and I told her about the rise of the Salt Lake and the death of mother and she looked at me and she walked away. For a moment, I wondered if I had gone mad. Is there no connection here? And finally, when I came home I remember thinking maybe there is no connection. I immediately went in and got my easel that I had used as a child and two magic markers. I put mother on one side and circled it. I put Great Salt Lake on the other and circled it. I put down things that were associated with

mother in this book. Family, cancer, Latter Day Saints, Mormon Church and all things associated with the Great Salt Lake—Bird River migratory, flooding, bird refuge and circled it again, and thought there was no connection. Then I put my name down at the bottom, “TTW,” and circled it. I then drew two lines joining the two circles to my name and I realized when I stepped back that I had drawn a map of the female reproductive system. Then I thought I can do this. There is a connection. It was my mother, in a way also my grandmother. There is a price that we pay when we forego our own creativity I realized that, that was the secret of the book and I had the courage to go forward. The book was released after Mother died. The book was not really about Mormonism, it was about humanity. It was about each of us. How we breathe our lives and how we breathe our deaths. It was in that moment that I kept thinking, “What do I believe in? What do I trust?” Because at that moment, whatever I had trusted most was gone. Just as my mother had brought me into this world, she had gone into the next. *Leap* was a seven-year meditation. It was once again a question of what do I believe in? Why was the body, the body of the triptych, my body denied from me? How do I look at the body of the triptych? Why was I raised beneath the panels of heaven and hell? I think I really wrote myself out of the church in that book and ended up in the desert. And after that in *The Open Space of Democracy*, George Bush takes off after 9/11, and the question really was how do you *Find Beauty in a Broken World*? How do you pick up the pieces and create something whole? So you know these books reflect my own spiritual path. And at this point I must say that writing is a spiritual path for me. It’s about being fully present despite the anxieties of life. To be present in a life that is interrelated and interconnected. Not just as a species, but as living beings.

VS: In addition to your strong connections to other people, I find a lot of introspection, purification, harmony, and a dancing celebration or affirmation of all beings in your writing. What I mean is a sense of oneness. What were the influences that bring about this oneness?

TTW: I think it is in us as human beings. Don’t you? Maybe it’s what we’ve forgotten in these times of modernity—and what is in us to remember. If you look at Native cultures—and especially their rituals—Hopi, Crow Mother, Kokopelli, carrying the sorrow of the world or asking for health. These rituals are something that have existed for thousands of years. You know even in Mormon culture in the temple there are rituals. I can only imagine all the rituals in Hindu culture. I think these rituals and ceremonies strengthen all our lives and remind us in a sense to what we are connected to, if they remain fresh and not become commodified. But for me, my spiritual life has always been connected to the

land and from an earliest age I remember that there has always been a deep sense of both regard and obligation. There has always been a deep sense of care. Living in a landscape like this one cannot hide from the overarching sky, the sun, heat, snow and drought. It is a very powerful and dynamic physical place. I grew up with prairie dogs and their lives are not very different from mine. I was used to rattle snakes at the backdoor and caribou peering through my window. It was a very animated life. You know as a child I remember seeing a white bird and it looked like a robin, but a robin has a red breast and I thought what is this? There was always this variation. I then called my grandmother and said “Mimi, I think I just saw a white robin in the backyard, but nobody believes me.” She said “Trust your instincts. You know your birds.” I went to college and read Emerson and Thoreau and thought “I am not a Mormon, I am a Transcendentalist.” There has always been this deep, deeply connected sense to the Other.

VS: What about Deep Ecology. Were you inspired by Deep Ecologists?

TTW: I certainly knew about Arne Naess and Sessions. I read their books on Deep Ecology. I don’t know if it was a big influence. It seemed very intellectual to me. I remember being schooled by Paul Shepard. He was a deep ecologist. Gregory Bateson who spoke about the pattern that connects was certainly an influence. Is that what is deep ecology then? What is it? What do you think?

VS: For me, deep ecology basically acknowledges the affirmation of all beings...

TTW: In that case, I guess I am a deep ecologist. I do not identify with the intellectual discourse of the genre. My affinity is more with the land itself. The animals and an ecological state of mind like the native peoples. Even among religions the early tenets of religion say that the world was created in spirit before it was actualized and all beings have a spirit and a spiritual presence on earth. You know how it was. That was the kind of thinking I was raised upon. Maybe Mormons were deep ecologists. When we think about deep ecology, I remember one conversation in particular in Ted Major’s house in Jackson, Wyoming. I think what deep ecology meant to me was the human—spiritual element tied to the biological element and that was a new connection in terms of Western thinking. That’s how my grandmother lived her life and that’s what she taught us. In the room where we slept there was this huge gold painting of the Buddha. It was enormous. It was painted in gold and had little human beings and all the species around him. He had half open eyes. Eyes that denote both the interior and the exterior. She raised us on that. So there was this very

strange, wonderful connected world that my grandmother gave us and that too in the midst of a very staunch Mormon culture.

VS: The concept of wholeness or the tension between wholeness and brokenness—is an oft-repeated theme in your work, perhaps most explicitly in your new book *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*. Could you tell me how you became aware of this paradigm of wholeness and brokenness and why you find this to be such a rich and evocative theme in your own experience and perhaps more widely in human societies?

TTW: I think certainly in my life time as a resident of the interior West in the United States, I watched the land completely fractured and filled up. I just took a young man from China as a part of a class activity to the Great Salt Lake and he fell asleep. He had witnessed too much space. He didn't know how to accommodate it. He said that there was nothing in his language that could talk about this kind of emptiness except in spiritual terms. I think for me that was my norm. I get anxious if there are too many people. I need open spaces to reflect upon and to reflect back on. I witnessed that brokenness within myself. You know with the loss of my mother, not being unique at all, but by being human. Maybe to be human is to engage in that paradox between brokenness and wholeness. I realize that if *Refuge* and *Leap* had gotten married, they would have given birth to *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*, because I think this is a synthesis of those two books and in a way I created my own triptych after contemplating Bosch's triptych and I didn't realize that until the book was done.

VS: Scholars seem to divide your writing into three dimensions: Poetics, Politics and Erotics. I find a fourth dimension that I would label Sacrality. How would you link it to the other three?

TTW: I think it is the basis that all three emerge from. I think that is the sacred element.

VS: Another thing I've noticed in your work is a strong focus on the "present moment." I associate this with something you said in an interview with reference to *Refuge*, where you stated "Nakedness was my shield." Could you say a bit about ideas like "nakedness" and "presentness"? Do you even see these as related ideas?

TTW: To be present is the only thing I know and I can really count on. And I think that it is perhaps of the fact that I grew up knowing that my mother was so sick, and that she could die at any moment. So all that we had was the

present. Because, to look ahead and to project ahead was too painful. I think I learnt that at an early age. My grandmother again took me at a very young age up to the mountains in Utah and taught me about J. Krishnamurti's choicest awareness of the moment and what it means to be present and I remember that clearly. Though, as a child I couldn't grasp what that really meant. But, I watched the way in which my grandmother responded to the world and thought, that that must be the choicest awareness of the moment. That you are completely present in the moment and that if you are present then the bell rings. You know, when we were today at the labyrinth, I don't think the ringing of the bell was an accident. I think it's this awareness of synchronicity. When the outer world and the inner world emerge. I think for me, that moment is sacrality. You know *Finding Beauty in a Broken World* is about presence. It's about following the path of inquiry. But by being present in it, by bearing witness to it, I used to think that bearing witness was a passive act. I don't think that anymore. I think when you bear witness some fundamental shift takes place and your consciousness is expanded, and in an expanded consciousness your actions become different. "Nakedness is my shield" means that if you are in the present, then there is no fear in terms of what the past is, or what the future may bear. So all that you have is your own vulnerability in the moment. To me it is through your own vulnerability that you forge a connection to humanity or to any being, and I think even with the prairie dogs. I was always present with them and that's why they could be present with me. Because, I think there was a call that was transferred. It is like being with another human being, it's not being anthropomorphic. When you are spending time in wild places, when you are fully present, that's when the magic occurs again and again. I believe that the nature of the sacred is in *Being Present*.

VS: When you talk about these subjects there seem to be Buddhist echoes in your writings. Are you conscious of any influences from Eastern philosophers other than J. Krishnamurti that you just mentioned?

TTW: I'm not a Buddhist and I know very little about it. I was raised under the picture of The Buddha. I was terrified at times because I knew The Buddha was always watching. That was really a part of my family. I cared enough to go to the Kalachakra ceremony conducted by the Dalai Lama, even though I knew nothing about it and there was a part of me saying, "How dare you do this?" I think coming out of such a strong, orthodox tradition, I don't ever imagine that I would go back into any other tradition. To me it's again, taking up which is broken, fragmented and creating a whole and I think each of us has our own spirituality. You know maybe the truest form of spirituality again is the

present—that, which is. This is what the Buddhists believe in and also perhaps an attraction about the religion. I don't have a formal meditation practice. But whether I'm walking a labyrinth, whether I'm riding, or whether I'm walking in nature, it is a walking meditation. It is a case of slowing down and being attentive. It's about being present and it's about not letting the mind being cluttered so that you can really be with someone else or something else, and also be aware of what's happening. I think in that heightened state of awareness you begin to see the pattern of things. To me that's what I love, and that's why I love life.

VS: In spite of a sense of rootedness to place, especially Utah, that permeates your work, I find in your writing a certain universality that transcends geophysical spaces, particular landscapes or communities. When you write about Africa in *An Unspoken Hunger* or Spain in *Leap* or Italy and Rwanda in *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*, I feel as if you're somehow reaching beyond the specificities of your specific background. I wonder if you could say something about how you see your work reaching out to explore big (“universal”) questions and to reach readers who may live in distant parts of the world, perhaps even India, and have very different lives than your own.

TTW: I think as you said right in the beginning we are human beings first, and perhaps every book that has been written, every piece of literature is regional. It is personal in one sense. I believe that which is most personal is most general. If we can really only be honest with who we are as human beings, then every other human being can recognize that humanity in themselves. I do believe in the power of specificities of nature, of Great Salt Lake, Abissis, Long billed curlew, Sage and Rabbit Brush. By creating that kind of specificity, the ideas that may be universal are not abstracted, but are grounded in what is real in time and space. So when you read about a landscape in *Refuge*, there is some correlation in India in terms of what you know in Madras.

VS: Like the Tsunami perhaps.

TTW: Yes. Exactly. Very good association. The flood is a universal symbol and whether it is the tsunami or the rise of the Great Salt Lake, loss is a part of that changing dynamic landscape. I think these are universal themes that are brought into personal focus through specificity, that are understood in the heart of every human being.

VS: A lot of your writing talks about healing the earth, healing the body, and healing the heart. Has your writing helped you heal?

TTW: I think it has. In many ways writing for me is my spiritual practice. Whenever I sit down to write, I light a candle. It says to me that now we are in sacred space outside of normal time. I also usually have a bowl of water, when the candle tips over, I can dowse it with water (she laughs) in case there is a fire! I was just kidding. But what it really means to me is that there are days that go by, weeks that go by and nothing comes. You know there is nothing on the paper and I would have torn it away. But the water has lowered and evaporation has occurred. If evaporation is occurring, then something else is occurring surely as well.

VS: Have you been able to forgive people? The Terry in *Refuge* is different from the Terry in *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*. As an objective reader, a student or a scholar perhaps, I can see the growth in the individual. What do you think?

TTW: Well, I have certainly grown and changed. Even in *Refuge*, I look at what happened when I saw the owls were gone. They had been killed. The only gesture available to me was this (points her middle finger up). Then I realized that it was a pretty weak gesture. But for me, at that time it was such a radical statement. But by the end of the book, once again . . . one can't plan all this. It's just the way one evolves. What was my quest actually? The answer is civil disobedience. You know where I cross that line with other women and the Shoshone people. It was an act of civil disobedience and has a larger political context that was filled with more compassion and consciousness, and I think *Refuge* was important to my own healing. I also saw that it helped me with the death of my mother and grandmother. Also *Refuge* taught me that death belonged to a larger context like nuclear testing, and nobody could have been more surprised than I. I realized that it was a part of the story. When I wrote the piece, on the clan of one breasted women, it was not connected to *Refuge*. I did not see the connection. A group of friends who were doing a magazine came up with a theme. The theme was crossing the line. That is when I wrote the piece. A friend of mine met me after my mother's death and Mimi's death and said, "How are you?" And I said, "I belong to the clan of one breasted women." That was the first time, I heard that. And then I started learning about the dream that I had often had. A flash of lightning over an illuminated desert, over and over again. One day I had dinner with dad and he said, "How are you?" and I said, "Dad I can't sleep" and told him about the dream. He said, "You saw it." And I said, "Saw what?" He said, "Remember the day. It was September seventh. You were on Diane's lap and she was pregnant with your brother Steve. We were driving from California and we pulled over and we saw the mushroom cloud on the

desert floor.” That was a revelation to me. “Trouble growing up in the American South West, drinking contaminated milk from contaminated cows.” These are lines from the clan of one breasted women. The essay came together as a series of mosaics and desperation to understand, to make others understand. The fact that I belonged to the clan of one breasted women and that nine women in my family have had mastectomy, several of them were dead. How do I make people understand? Maybe they will understand the court cases. Irene Allen vs. The United States government. If they don’t understand that, then perhaps they will understand fiction. You know with the fictional aspect crossing into Mercury . . . me . . . crossing that line.

So it wasn’t until I gave that reading at a fundraiser for radio of Utah, a community radio station, did things make sense to me. I thought nobody in the world I know will be there and nobody would care and nobody in my family would know and I stand up, and then my father walks in. I was terrified. I had two choices—to sit down or to continue, and I continued. My father came up and said he wanted to take me to dinner. We actually had dinner in a sleazy, smoke filled bar. My father looked at me and said, “Terry, you are angry.” I was so shocked by that. I don’t think I ever perceived myself like that. He said, “You’re angry and you have reason to be.” And we both sobbed. I think it was in that tender moment that my father gave me permission to go ahead to tell the truth, especially even in a culture that did not honor the voice of women. And it was in that moment I realized that, that was the epilogue of *Refuge*—my political invasion. So there has been tremendous growth, and I could never imagine that my voice would be a voice rooted in politics of place, and ethics of place. But as you said, what drives me is the spiritual component. The rest has been almost by accident. In pursuit of the sacredness of all things.

VS: How does writing integrate with the other facets of your life? Your life as a woman and as an activist?

TTW: I feel it’s all the same. To me writing lies in a life engaged, in family, in marriage. I view myself as a mother. But by the same token, Obama is elected President and meanwhile in a midnight manoeuvre the media reports that Bush and Cheney have put Utah’s wilderness up for sale for oil and gas leases. In the midst of my recent book tour and having no time, I made time to write an op-ed piece for the *L.A. Times*.

That was crucial to me and again it is just seamless. You know in the midst of juggling these things, I am struggling to work this with the editor and I didn’t think they would ever let me publish this op-ed.

George W. Bush and Dick Cheney are riding bear back and backwards and holding on to their dictums. These op-ed pieces, these long meditations were central questions. Teaching, family—it's all a very rich blessed life which is all mixed with paradox, complications, and humanness.

VS: I think your activism is a kind of reflective activism. Can you comment on that?

TTW: Maybe, sometimes. We just gathered on Saturday and the gathering was called peaceful uprising. The only thing I could think about peaceful uprising was the ascension of swans at the Great Salt Lake on that great day. We raised money for thirty-two young people to be able to go to DC to participate on March second at one of the largest pro-demonstration on behalf of the planet on climate change. We were trying to commit civil disobedience in our best clothes and in great peace. This is just a first step and hopefully thousands of people from around the world will be there next time. But for the next generation it will allow them to engage in a way—a novel way, it's going to be something virtual, online. Something happens when you stand shoulder to shoulder with people. Reflective activism can be a sacred rage for people like Ed Abbey. But for me, I am mindful of the effect that these things have on people and that is a part of my world. I was desperate to recover my lost poetry. I am not sure if a book can ever be a tool of activism or a path of discovery. On the other hand, I look at a small book like the *Open Space of Democracy* and that absolutely had a point of view. Liberty, democracy, and hope are what it talks about with the Arctic as its centerpiece.

VS: You seem to believe in civil disobedience. Are there any particular sources for your interest in non-violent social activism?

TTW: Gandhi. I don't know if I have a romanticized view of who he was, but I know who he has been. For me from reading his autobiography, I simply love his understanding of gesture. Spinning cotton that was not British, the Salt march, how he engaged. Gandhi was an inspiration and so were Thoreau and Martin Luther King. People who have put their presence on the mind and in the name of social change, with no knowledge of what that outcome would be. That kind of compassionate leadership, the fierceness of their character and yet the largeness of their heart has touched me in many ways—of all of them.

VS: Do you think literature (your writing, in particular) helps in the process of cultivating an ecological consciousness?

TTW: I don't know. As I said, I have never seen anyone reading my book [laughs], and I live in the American West where I have many, many enemies

[laughs again] who would love me to just disappear. In spite of a painful discourse that is going on in this country. I hope I have been able to see this sense of compassion, a compassionate depth, and you know, for me, it's about creating a space for listening. For me, that's the most I can do.

That in between two covers of a book, that between the craft and the questioning, there is stillness in the text that creates a sense of listening so that the reader can contemplate, so these books become an extended meditation. Because I think it is through the deep listening to our own hearts, to the hearts of others, and to the mind itself that will create an ecological understanding beyond ourselves.

Domestic Garden

Shirley Geok-lin Lim

Unseen, seeming everywhere, the garden
spiders have been webbing hedges and low
bushes. Chain-link fences steely locked
are looped in veils that glow

bedewed. Sun will soon drink dry the vapors.
In this hour silver kerchiefs
so fine no human can clutch them lie
on tops of pruned juniper, daisies,

rosemary and hibiscus, their aerie
fairy frailties lies where tangled wasps,
aphids, and even bumbling beetles
have been expertly wrapped

in silk, then turned to liquor, to be sipped—
inebriate of death. Sheets and wheels, funnel
mouths leading as gates somewhere
concealed keep death invisible.

Just like the cat, secret about her movements,
although not so secretive as Arachnids,
in the underbrush stalks the gopher
holes for babies and snaps the lizards' heads,
before jumping into the domestic bed
with the affectionate clueless mistress.

Henry David Thoreau's Environmental Humanism

François Specq

While Thoreau's early call for nature preservation in *The Maine Woods* is well-known and has been a cornerstone of the environmental movement, paradoxically less attention has been paid to the companion call that is introduced in the penultimate chapter of *Walden*:

Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic and wildness,—to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground. At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of Nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and Titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets. We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander. (317-18)

This call appears as the conclusion of the last two chapters of the book before the "Conclusion," and I would like to show how it is the logical outcome of Thoreau's thinking in these last two chapters ("The Pond in Winter" and "Spring"), which foreground three different modes of environmental consciousness or awareness. These chapters have often been seen as less "ambitious," because they seem to adhere to the conventions of seasonal literature. But, as Lawrence Buell warns us, "from now until spring, seasonality dominates. To some extent this change makes the latter third of *Walden* a more conventional logbook. In other ways,

the appearance of straightforwardness increases the opportunities for deviance” (*The Environmental Imagination* 244). And I would like to suggest that they actually offer a sustained, if not systematic, exploration of three competing modes of environmental awareness. By this notion, I mean three different ways of approaching, if not bridging, the gap between matter and consciousness.¹

These three different modes correspond to the three highlights of these chapters: Thoreau’s charting of Walden Pond (“sequence 1”), the ice-cutters’ harvest of the Walden ice (“sequence 2”), both from “The Pond in Winter,” and the famous flowing sandbank passage from the “Spring” chapter (“sequence 3”). My contention is that these passages should be read in conjunction—not as merely seasonal narrative, but as rhetorical argument—and that, to put things in a nutshell, they exemplify a move from a denial of materiality in the name of commonly conceived humanism, through misguided, all-too-human materialism, to true materialism. The latter, which may ultimately matter more than idealism, is premised on a double awareness of the concreteness of one’s environment and of the materiality of language, thus amounting to a more fully realized form of humanism. I would also like to propose that the three passages correspond to three different rhetorical modes—allegorical, literal, symbolic—and that Thoreau’s environmental awareness, in *Walden*, is eventually grounded in symbolism: although emphasizing *Walden*’s reliance on the symbolic mode is hardly news, this has usually been understood through the New Critical focus on purely formal features.

1. Nature and the Ethical Translation: The Rhetoric of the Ideal

In January 1846, Thoreau, who was a professional surveyor, carried his surveyor’s tools—“compass and chain and sounding line” (*Walden* 285)—to the ice-locked pond and drew a careful map of its shoreline, with more than a hundred soundings of its depths, an experience he reported in *Walden*’s antepenultimate chapter, “The Pond in Winter,” which also includes a copy of the map itself (286). Thoreau’s extended passage on drawing a map of Walden Pond is fundamentally divided into two parts: the cartography of the lake, on the one hand, and its translation into an ethical lesson, on the other. This two-part structure reflects the tension between two contradictory approaches to transcendence: put briefly, cartography is meant to de-transcendentalize, as

1 This exploration of varieties of awareness in *Walden* will thus extend Scott Slovic’s foundational discussion of the notion of “awareness” in *Seeking Awareness*, whose chapter on Thoreau is devoted to the Journal.

Thoreau's purpose is to disprove legends about the lake's bottomlessness; then the ethical translation appears as a way of re-transcendentalizing.

Mapmaking appears as a Humboldtian activity—answering Humboldt's call for the “delineation” of “nature's physiognomy” (*Cosmos* I:81). As Laura Dassow Walls notes, “Thoreau's local would always speak to the cosmic: *Walden*, like *Eureka*, was a response to Humboldt's *Cosmos*” (*Passage to Cosmos* 264).² And we will here remember that the opening page of *Walden* (evoking Thoreau's desire to write as if “from a distant land” [3]), echoed Humboldt's notion of the equivalence between experiment and the infinity of the world: “The study of a science that promises to lead us through the vast range of creation may be compared to a journey in a far-distant land” (*Cosmos* I:50). Within that tradition, the map represents the synthesizing power of knowledge. The most central aspect of the mapmaking process, in the rhetorical economy of Thoreau's text, is that the lake is objectified: it becomes an object of rational knowledge, undergoing an ontological transformation by being experienced as a site of measurement rather than imagination, which is here dismissed as fancy: “The amount of it is, the imagination, give it the least license, dives deeper and soars higher than Nature goes” (288). Through this process of imaging—as distinct from and opposed to imagining—the otherness of nature is denied, or rather reduced, as it is bent to our frames or to our reason (as advocated by Humboldt : “the traveler . . . is guided by reason in his researches” [*Cosmos* I:51]), if not to our will. Mapmaking relies on a disjunction between matter and consciousness, and on the simultaneous belief in the possibility of bridging the gap intellectually: although the mapmaking process is not entirely devoid of sensory perception, the otherness of nature is eventually subsumed.

The map is a spatial construct intent on communicating meaning in a “linear” fashion, drawing on such principles as logical progression, deduction, progress—hence its possible enrolment in the banner of expansion, as suggested by Humboldt:

... so ought we likewise, in our pursuit of science, to strive after a knowledge of the laws and the principles of unity that pervade the vital forces of the universe; and it is by such a course that physical studies may be made subservient to the progress of industry, which is a conquest of mind over matter. (*Cosmos* I: 53-54)

2 I believe that Laura Dassow Walls's parallel invites further consideration, to which this article would like to contribute, although a full analysis goes beyond its scope.

The beautifully scalloped shape of the outlying, asymmetrical body of water called Walden Pond, however, may be read as an oblique comment on the American passion for the dehumanization of space by geometry—which goes as far back as William Penn’s gridiron plan for Philadelphia (1681), and, even more dramatically, the US Congress’s Land Ordinance of 1785, that divided the Northwest Territory (West and North of the Ohio River) into uniform sections and enabled surveyors to impose a rectangular grid pattern on the landscape obsession—and more particularly on westward expansion and Manifest Destiny.

In the rhetorical economy of the text, however, the map primarily assumes that it is possible for the perceiver to transpose the physical world into a different order of reality: it is, strictly speaking, a process of *translation* (i.e., a removal or transference from one condition to another)—“What I have observed of the pond is no less true in ethics” (291). The associated claim is that it is thus logically possible to subject the physical world to another kind of translation (almost in the old religious sense of removal from earth to heaven), that results in its appearing as an allegory of man’s moral physiognomy. Thoreau here seems to echo Emerson’s famous maxim in *Nature*: “The axioms of physics translate the laws of ethics” (*Emerson’s Prose and Poetry* 38). In this version of environmental awareness, the material world is not just matter, but almost immediately endowed or imbued with allegorical meaning, if we agree on defining allegory as an illustration of the general by the particular, a particular which may be circumscribed. It is predicated on the idea that it is possible to apprehend the correspondences through rational thought (vs. the imagination or even the “folly” that is later at the heart of Thoreau’s sandbank passage in the “Spring” chapter). Allegory is imagination in the service of discursive meaning—i.e., based on logical sequence rather than substitution or symbolic equivalence. Making sense of the world in this way thus involves, not only imposing limits, but erasing (“translating”) its material dimension.

In spite of the strong humorous undercurrents, which may invite us not to take the narrator’s statements too seriously, mapmaking, *in the economy of Thoreau’s text*, essentially enacts an idealizing of nature, which desubstantializes and produces closure (or enclosure) of the real, and seems to be governed by a desire to escape contingency (thus following Humboldt’s call for “trac[ing] the *stable* amid the vacillating, ever-recurring alternation of physical metamorphoses” [*Cosmos* I:xli]): however playfully, mapmaking seems to deny or resolve the mutability of things, thus enforcing or supporting a rhetoric of the ideal.

But, one may again wonder, is the narrator's allegorical reading of the lake to be taken seriously? Or is he only paying lip-service to conventional allegorizing in the Emersonian manner or in the typological tradition? In my view, Thoreau only toys with the idea of allegory, and the last two chapters of *Walden* are meant to celebrate symbolism at the expense of allegory, which will eventually be dismissed as too rational, discursive, and linear. Buell argues that in the mapmaking passage Thoreau "completely suspends the 'poetic' dimension of *Walden* for the nonce and lets geometry take over" (*The Environmental Imagination* 276). It would be too reductive, however, to think that the map just blocks vision: mapmaking opens up vision, precisely because it is the first time we have had a way of figuring what the lake looks like. And what kind of geometry it foregrounds! If the narrator seems to reject fancy's vagaries ("the imagination, give it the least license, dives deeper and soars higher than Nature goes" [*Walden* 288]), it is only to let fancy (or is it imagination?) hold sway again later in the "Spring" chapter. Thoreau pokes fun at the reader, when he dismisses the free play of the imagination. But, I think that Buell is also right when he points to one of the undercurrents of the passage as testifying to Thoreau's anxiety about the possibility of reconciling poetry with science (*Environmental Imagination* 276).

To be sure, Thoreau's surveying of Walden Pond is mock-serious, and it seems to be meant as a parodic version of the individual's necessary contribution to socially accepted endeavors. Thoreau draws on and half-ironically bows to the figure of the Humboldtian explorer and his humanist focus on knowledge, the better to give it a twist subsequently. To the extent that it represents socially acceptable work, mapmaking, as intellectual appropriation of the pond, anticipates and parodies the exploitation—i.e., the economic appropriation—of the Walden ice, which immediately follows, as the second part of "a diptych of 'enterprise' scenes" (*Environmental Imagination* 277). It thus contributes, if examined carefully, to a questioning of all those conventions and standards by which most human beings hope to define and attain normality or comfortable stability.

2. Ice-Cutting or the Law of Substraction

The middle sequence is devoted to the harvesting of the Walden ice: the winter following the pond survey, a crew of a hundred ice-cutters arrived at the pond to cut the ice for shipment to the tropics. The ice-cutting parallels the mapmaking sequence insofar as it is a socially acceptable undertaking. The first two sequences should indeed be envisaged together, as aspiring to social approbation or commercial gain. Mapmaking, however auto-derisive, was still

nodding to social recognition—which was certainly important to Thoreau (he was a sought-after land surveyor), but whose pressure he also often lamented, as indicated by his famous and repeated metaphor for surveying—“tending the flocks of Admetus”—and by his statement in this passage:

[We] are conversant only with the bights of the bays of poesy, or steer for the public ports of entry, and go into the dry docks of science, where they merely refit for this world, and no natural currents concur to individualize them [i.e., our thoughts]. (*Walden* 292)

Thoreau’s statement shows that scientific inquiry was not meant to appear as his preferred form of environmental awareness.

Beyond the semi-parodic relation between sequence 1 and sequence 2, however, the second sequence fundamentally differs from the first because it does not correspond to any form of inquiry. In this middle sequence, matter is just matter—neither allegorical nor symbolical. It is a mere resource to be exploited for practical purposes and material gain. Note, however, how Thoreau denounces the economic logic behind ice-cutting (294), but remains friendly to the poor fellows who are the agents of environmental degradation (295), even trying his hand at the logging of the ice. This logging of the ice is not liable to any form of translation, even less to a transcendentalizing process. Even more than the mapmaking passage, the ice-cutting one is predicated on the power of sequence, linearity, and causality. Ice-cutting intrinsically negates any form of substitution, but favors repetition of the same (as indicated by the telling image of the contractor’s commissioning the exploitation of the Walden ice “in order to cover each one of his dollars with another” [294]). This is a process of mere duplication and replication: instead of producing difference or expansion, it contracts and reduces the world. Exploitation is based on a principle of repetition and identity. Or, put differently, the only substitution it operates is of stasis for process and energy (seasonal flux): the massive, monumental, static icestack is meant to substract matter from its normal life cycle, and to disrupt or blur the normal succession of seasons (thus also suppressing contingency, like mapmaking but in a different way). This is because ice-cutting is based on a capitalistic downplaying of the present in favor of future interest. On the contrary, Thoreau’s environmentally-friendly logging of the real (especially in his *Journal* or *log*) is primarily meant to enhance one’s relation to the present.

Both the measuring of the pond and the harvesting of its ice appear as fables of perfection, each in its own way: mapmaking nods in the direction of ideal or transcendentalizing wholes, ice-cutting toward a perfectly regular icestack

that appears as a paradoxically reductive *transposition* of wholeness (and here we may also hear echoes of Humboldt's desire for "wholes"). Like mapmaking, it enacts a suppression of the contingent. But, Thoreau suggests, the contingent and the particular cannot be eliminated without eliminating life itself—without draining life of its substance (hence Thoreau's diametrically opposite desire "to individualize [our thoughts]" [292]). In sequence 2, matter is simultaneously and paradoxically treasured and dematerialized (because the only conversion or translation it is liable to is monetary). The ice-cutters embody—or are the driving belt of—a materialistic worldview, but it is a materialism of substraction (and extraction, for that matter! although the lake will eventually be replenished, as Thoreau emphasizes [297]), as opposed to the one that is propounded in the "Spring" chapter, to which I would now like to turn.

3. Disowning the Rhetoric of the Ideal and Reclaiming Materialism

The third sequence focuses on the thawing bankside of the "Deep Cut" of the railroad skirting Walden Pond. It is often regarded as *Walden's* climax, and it has generated a wide range of commentaries. It is also understood as the culmination of the book's seasonal pattern. It is important to be aware, however, that to some extent it is a constructed event—which Buell even describes as a "conceit," as he points that it was "introduced into the last drafts," and that it "drew on periods of thaw that took place in December, January, and February" (*Environmental Imagination* 245, 246) rather than in Spring. This certainly points to a specific purpose—perhaps what Thoreau called the discovery of the "spring of springs" (*Walden* 41)—and it reminds us that Thoreau deliberately orchestrated the final stages of his book to achieve maximum impact—so much for those who have insisted on the death of the author.

Inquiry

In a way, mapmaking and the sandbank passage form a kind of arch, in the sense that they are both forms of inquiry, as opposed to the central ice-cutting passage, in which there is no inquiry at all. By inquiry, I do not mean a metaphysical inquiry into the origins and ends of the universe, but rather into its material dimension: the earthly configurations of lake, ice, and sand. If the shadow of metaphysics still reverberated in sequence 1—eventually leading to a containment or subsumption of matter—there's nothing metaphysical in the third sequence. Sequence 3 is a striking ode to the preeminence of matter and concentrates upon a concrete and palpable reality—as opposed to the artificialized matter of the ice-cutters. The richness of the earth's surface with its natural coloration, its mineral and organic wealth as suggested in a phenomenological approach, the sensuous, nearly tactile pleasures constitute

the writer's central stance. The writer remains earthbound, and he intends to make the most of this limitation—but the idea is certainly quite different from Humboldt's desire "to trace the stable."

In this sequence, as in sequence 1, but even more so, Thoreau appears as subverter of all productive systems, and as promoter of an art disdainfully indifferent to any social approbation or commercial gain—he was certainly eager "to transact some private business" (19). He appears as a figure resisting social expectations or aesthetic integration. The passage points to the profoundly anti-institutional dimension of Thoreau's prose. I think it is hard to imagine *today* what the sandbank passage *as literature* represented at the time—i.e., a rejection of literature itself as institution. It is hard to understand what Thoreau's famous etymological ramblings (312) represented at the time, in a widely tamed or even decorous literature—in some sense it made it analogous in its impact to Dickinson's use of language. In this passage, Thoreau seemed to owe no obligations to society and even to be oblivious to the fact that society existed. The way lay open to forgetting all education or literacy, all received ideas:

The whole bank, which is from twenty to forty feet high, is sometimes overlaid with a mass of this kind of foliage, or sandy rupture, for a quarter of mile on one or both sides, the produce of one spring day. What makes this sand foliage remarkable is its springing into existence thus suddenly. When I see on the one side the inert bank,—for the sun acts on one side first,—and on the other this luxuriant foliage, the creation of an hour, I am affected as if in a peculiar sense I stood in the laboratory of the Artist who made the world and me,—had come to where he was still at work, sorting on this bank, and with excess of energy strewing his fresh designs about. I feel as if I were nearer to the vitals of the globe, for this sandy overflow is something such a foliaceous mass as the vitals of the animal body. You find thus in the very sands an anticipation of the vegetable leaf. No wonder that the earth expresses itself outwardly in leaves, it so labors with the idea inwardly. The atoms have already learned this law, and are pregnant by it. The overhanging leaf sees here its prototype. *Internally* whether in the globe or animal body, it is a moist thick *lobe*, a word especially applicable to the liver and lungs and the *leaves* of fat, (*labor*, *lapsus*, to flow or slip downward, a lapsing;

globus, lobe, globe, also lap, flap, and many other words,) externally a dry thin *leaf*, even as the *f* and *v* are a pressed and dried *b*. The radicals of lobe are *lb*, the soft mass of the *b* (single lobed, or B, double lobed,) with a liquid *l* behind it pressing it forward. In globe, *glb*, the guttural *g* adds to the meaning the capacity of the throat. The feathers and wings of birds are still drier and thinner leaves. Thus, also, you pass from the lumpish grub in the earth to the airy and fluttering butterfly. The very globe continually transcends and translates itself, and becomes winged in its orbit. (*Walden* 306-07)

We are here confronted with an art too frenzied to lend itself to even a minimal obligation to communicate—be it truth, method, or value—but an art intent on the circulation of energy, on the relations between mysterious though concrete phenomena. Through a radical disruption of our ordinary modes of seeing, Thoreau gives us the “real,” *literal* form of the transaction between nature and consciousness, finally refusing to separate matter and spirit.

Acknowledging Otherness

That radicality sets this passage apart, even from the first sequence, with which there are a number of crucial differences.

The first one may be encapsulated in the sweeping statement that the prevailing aesthetic mode moves from the picturesque to the grotesque: one will notice that Thoreau explicitly refers to one of the high priests of picturesque description and theory, William Gilpin, in the course of the mapmaking passage (287), whereas he underlines (in italics) a reference to the aesthetics of the grotesque in the sandbank passage (305). The grotesque appears as a metaphor for non-linearity, for the liberation from standard, orthodox worldviews (and for metamorphosis). One must emphasize the anti-picturesque character of the thawing bank passage. The picturesque was oriented toward “giving scenery culturally and aesthetically respectable forms and meanings” (Grove Dictionary, “Picturesque”). At a time when one of the central aesthetic aspirations was for “associations,” those offered by Thoreau in this passage (including the excrementitious), were certainly not the favored ones... The picturesque relies on disembodied thought and perception (with a focus on the ocular), whereas the body plays a central role here. The picturesque is also a mode that focuses on legibility (as a worthy, if slightly paradoxical, inheritor of the Enlightenment)—i.e., on the possibility of reading and rationally ordering the landscape. In

sequence 3 there is indeed a form of ordering, but one that has much more to do with a mystical—or is it proto-ecological?—sense of generalized relationality: the idea that “the Maker of this earth but patented a leaf” (308). And here, perhaps, Thoreau confronts the possibility that the world is illegible or impossible to read rationally—that the fabled Book of Nature is now so irremediably timeworn that it can only be apprehended through a somewhat chaotic sequence of words and syllables.

The second crucial difference between sequences 1 and 3 is the focus on the unmeasured and unmeasurable, that appear as the essence of poetry (as also suggested by Humboldt). If mapmaking meant delimiting or imposing limits, the sandbank passage, on the contrary, appears to be predicated on the opposite notion of the value of having “our own limits transgressed” (318), as Thoreau sums up his thought at the end of the “Spring” chapter (sequence 4)—our own limits, i.e. also our own constructs. This in particular involves transgressing the limits of language (the linguistic material), i.e. its mastery over the world—just as we are requested to acknowledge the uncontainable flowing or flowering of matter. It is an economy of excess and not containment (see “excess of energy” [306]). In particular, it focuses on the imagination as exceeding—though certainly not suppressing—knowledge derived from experience, and it is also simultaneously inscribed and dependent on signifying processes which disrupt access to logical meanings and definable objects. Excess is fundamental: in Thoreau’s view, nature is what is in excess of all things human. In a way, whereas imagination, in the first sequence, was part of and support for a larger humanist project, Thoreau here accepts the idea of an imaginative process that is dissociated from imaging (it is more difficult to picture the world evoked in the sandbank passage) and distinct from any easily definable or transparent meaning. If mapmaking appeared as a fundamentally humanist project, the sandbank passage foregrounds a form of imagination which recuperates matter and exceeds conceptual definition—but does certainly not negate meaning. Or, put slightly differently, it questions or suspends linguistic meaning, but not human significance. Such an approach points to the impossibility of fully grasping (i.e. synthesizing) our experience of the world, and thus ultimately serves as ground for Thoreau’s plea for nature at the end of the “Spring” chapter:

At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable... (*Walden* 317)

In the concluding sequence, which may also appear as the rationale for Thoreau's Journal, nature retains its otherness, as there is an acceptance of the gap between nature and consciousness: nature has been acknowledged as a force both within and outside the human, and, specifically, as what exceeds and disorients, but also animates, human language. And language in its materiality is precisely what in its turn prevents the assumption (or *Aufhebung*) of nature into human consciousness.

In his attempt at breaking out of closure, Thoreau fought to attain the purity of a *tabula rasa*, of a new beginning, of raw materials instead of prefabricated, inherited ideas and ideals. He seems to be eager to devour language itself raw, not just a woodchuck (210). His language here is irrational, even *unfathomable*, as opposed to the pond (which can be fathomed but also recuperated by reason and rationality, as the "ethical translation" indicates). Language is not just a tool but seems to play an active role and to reduce the degree of control exercised by the perceiver: in that sense in the sandbank passage Thoreau puts himself—i.e., the human—at risk: he accepts losing control of the real as part of one's accomplishment of one's humanity; he accepts the existence of nature as exceeding our control and our signifying process. The reader is not invited to mentally picture/image realistic attempts at mastering the real (such as mapmaking or ice-cutting), but to engage in a process of figuring new, hitherto unthought of and ungraspable relations to the physical world and forms of awareness. He thus puts himself at risk, insofar as he chooses to ignore all the safety devices which we construct for ourselves in order to slip past the dangers that are inherent in our being-in-the-world. The goal is not to communicate an abstractly figurative meaning, but to create through the linguistic material a heightened awareness of the environment, where the reader can experience the imaginary dimension of sensation. Far from threatening perception, this denial of transparency and linearity is precisely what enriches and enhances awareness.

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John Muir and the Ambivalence of Technology

Jean-Daniel Collomb

One may introduce John Muir in several different ways. He was an amateur scientist, a nature writer, an indefatigable advocate of the national park system and one of the co-founders of the Sierra Club. The so-called Deep Ecologists have singled him out as an early proponent of biocentrism (Naess 33). To many others he was a nature lover in the romantic vein. Such a pluralistic portrayal bears testimony to Muir's eclectic temperament and dynamism but it can also give rise to some contradictory impressions. Never is this more obvious than when one broaches the subject of Muir's perception of technology. In the biography Linnie Marsh Wolfe wrote about Muir, the author of *My First Summer in the Sierra* emerges as a hermit who thrived as long as he kept aloof from human civilization. In a similar fashion Richard Cartwright has depicted Muir as a kind of modern-day John the Baptist (16). No doubt all of this is true. On several occasions Muir felt no compunction in turning his back on human civilisation and there were no places he disliked as much as big cities. This, however, is not the whole story. Muir was also a mechanic and an inventor of remarkable ability. Although he did not consistently endorse technical progress in the way many of his fellow Americans were apt to do, it would be misleading to assert that he was wholly estranged from it. Muir's hesitations and qualms regarding technology are worth studying in that they may provide us with a dissenting account of America's technological coming of age at the dawn of the American century. What is more, Muir's reluctant fascination for technical progress and eventually his inability to set limits to it reflects the sheer potency and attractiveness of technology in American culture. This said, let us not forget that, Muir being from Scotland, his case is also relevant to the West at large, and not simply to American culture.

John Muir, Son of the Enlightenment

From a very early age Muir was fascinated by science. He would read any book about science—or about any other subject for that matter—he could lay his hands on. In addition he was adept at the applied sciences and was fond of inventing new mechanical devices. In his autobiography entitled *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, Muir draws a list of the countless inventions he had managed to create on the Wisconsin farm where he spent his teenage years:

After completing my self-setting sawmill I dammed one of the streams in the meadow and put the mill in operation. This invention was speedily followed by a lot of others,—waterwheels, curious doorlocks and latches, thermometers, hygrometers, pyrometers, clocks, a barometer, an automatic contrivance for feeding the horses at any required hour, a lamp-lighter and fire-lighter, an early-or-late-rising-machine, and so forth. (Muir, *Boyhood* 122)

The fact that Muir's father was a deeply religious man who despised science made matters complicated for the young inventor. More often than not, he managed to finesse his father's opposition. That is why it is fair to depict John Muir as an inheritor of the Age of Reason. Indeed his youth bears some resemblances to the youth of Benjamin Franklin, a man who has come to epitomise the spirit of the American Enlightenment. Like Franklin, Muir was largely self-taught and his work ethic enabled him to acquire knowledge about a wealth of different subjects. Muir's lifelong thirst for knowledge is also reminiscent of Franklin's devotion to learning and self-improvement.¹

After leaving the family home, Muir did not shed his interest in the applied sciences—quite the opposite. For instance during the two and a half years he spent at the University of Wisconsin, Muir's talent as an inventor did not go unnoticed. A letter written by a man who had studied alongside Muir at the time contains an edifying description of Muir's study:

The room was lined with shelves, one above the other, higher than a man could reach. Those shelves were filled with retorts, glass tubes, glass jars, botanical and geological specimens, and small mechanical contrivances. On the floor around the sides of the room were a number of machines of larger size whose purposes were not

1 Muir's inventions were often aimed at setting his environment in order. He also sought ways to make farm work less gruelling through the use of mechanical devices. It must be borne in mind, however, that this was to be done against the will of his father to whom such endeavours smacked of hubris. That is also why Muir devised an early-rising machine which allowed him to wake up very early in the morning to read before going to work. After he left his family, he went to the State Fair in Madison where his inventions were highly praised (*Boyhood* 131). For a more detailed analysis of Muir's inventions, see Stephen J. Holmes (52).

apparent at a glance, but which I came to know later.
(Badè 89-90)

In 1863 Muir left the University of Wisconsin with no professional plan in mind. At this moment of his life he was not willing to start a career. He felt magnetically drawn to the wilds and just enjoyed studying and observing nature at close range. In the vein of Alexander von Humboldt and Charles Darwin, Muir roamed and explored the wilderness in order to get to know it. The naturalist observed natural phenomena, drew comparisons and tried to make connections and draw conclusions. In an entry of his journal in January 1870, Muir expressed his willingness to study nature by coming into close contact with it:

If my soul could get away from this so-called prison, be granted all the list of attributes generally bestowed on spirits, my first ramble on spirit wings would not be among the volcanoes of the moon. . . . I should study Nature's laws in all their crossings and unions; I should follow magnetic streams to their source, and follow the shores of our magnetic oceans. . . . Alas, how little of the world is subject to human senses! (*Unpublished Journals* 43-44)

Muir's dream bears testimony to the priority he always gave to scientific work in the field. For instance, he would often send plant specimens to Harvard botanist Asa Gray but when Gray asked him to come and teach on the east coast, Muir declined the offer. He much preferred staying in California where he could revel in nature's harmony. In Muir's view going into the wilds was much more important than reading books: "No amount of word making will ever make a single soul to *know* these mountains. As well to warm the naked and frostbitten by lectures on caloric and pictures of flame. One day's exposure to mountains is better than cartloads of books" (*Unpublished Journals* 95). That is why Muir never stopped exploring nature throughout his life. But, as a young man, after leaving his *alma mater*, he also needed to make a living. As a result he took several jobs as a machinist or as a foreman in various places. In Meaford, Canada, Muir was hired by one William Trout to work in a factory where brooms and rakes were produced. After a while Muir proved his technical ability and came to play a central role in the way the factory was run. Most notably he volunteered to improve the machinery used in the factory (Holmes 52). One year later, in 1866, Muir joined a sawmill called Osgood, Smith & Co and located in Indianapolis. One entry of his diary suggests that factory work turned out to be more than a way to make ends meet: "I greatly enjoyed this mechanical work, began to

invent and introduce labor-saving improvements and was so successful that my botanical and geological studies were in danger of being seriously interrupted” (Badè 153). Once more it did not take long before his talents were acknowledged by his employer who asked him to run the sawmill. In both cases Muir’s bosses did their best to convince him not to leave—all to no avail.

Moreover several laudatory remarks on technology can be found in his writings. For example, in his autobiography, Muir gives a bleak picture of farm work on the Wisconsin Frontier before technology started being used to relieve farmers from some of the most gruelling tasks they had to perform: “In those early days, long before the great labor-saving machines came to our help, almost everything connected with wheat-raising abounded in trying work . . . —and it often seemed to me that our fierce, over-industrious way of getting the grain from the ground was too closely connected with grave-digging” (*Boyhood* 107). Here technology undeniably makes life easier than it used to be. Not only was Muir prepared to acknowledge the benefits of technology for the health of men, he could also sometimes take pride in his own technical achievements. In October 1898 he visited a rake factory in Massachusetts which reminded him of his spell at Trout’s factory in Canada. He then wrote in his diary that he “could make rakes at half the cost of those made here” (*Unpublished Journals* 369). Significantly Muir felt some pride in what he had achieved as a machinist. At first glance therefore all those anecdotes and remarks conjure up an image far removed from the portrayal of John Muir as a recluse who shied away from human society and modern sophistication. Yet on further examination Muir’s perception of technology sounds highly ambivalent.

The Reluctant Technologist

On several occasions Muir left the factories he worked for in a fairly sudden manner. Such was the case for instance at William Trout’s factory in Canada. Muir decided to quit after part of the factory burnt down. Although Trout did his utmost to convince Muir to stay on, the latter refused to comply and left for Indianapolis. The most spectacular illustration of Muir’s proclivity to desert his job in an abrupt fashion occurred at the Osgood, Smith & Co. sawmill. One night, Muir accidentally injured one of his eyes and lost his sight for a few weeks. After such a traumatic experience he had no intention of holding on to his job. On account of the many hours he had spent operating the sawmill he had come close to never seeing the wilderness he cherished again. As soon as he recovered he decided that he would quit his job and set out for South America to walk in the footsteps of his intellectual role model the German natural philosopher Alexander von Humboldt. Muir embarked on a thousand-mile walk to the Gulf

of Mexico. After having been subjected to the mechanical rhythm of the sawmill, his first impulse was to run away into the wilderness. The same pattern kept recurring, as if Muir could only bear the pace imposed by technology for a while. Furthermore Muir did not always enthuse over the achievements brought about by technical progress. The railroad best exemplifies the triumphant march of technical progress in nineteenth-century America; and in those days the steam engine was certainly the most revered token of the gospel of progress. Muir for one was in two minds about it. In an article about the Grand Cañon of the Colorado published in *The Century Magazine* Muir began by cautiously praising the advent of the railroad in the American West (790). However he went on to state that the railroad, this most popular by-product of human genius and technical know-how, paled in comparison with the sublime scenery which surrounded it: "I was glad to discover that in the presence of such stupendous scenery they are nothing. The locomotives and trains are mere beetles and caterpillars, and the noise they make is as little disturbing as the hooting of an owl in the lonely woods" (790). Such a statement has to be interpreted within the context of early twentieth-century America. In effect Muir was giving short shrift to the gospel of progress. He wanted to remind his contemporaries that wild nature could create things that far surpassed the greatest exemplars of technical progress.

Overall it is very difficult to give a fair account of Muir's view of technology. Why was Muir prone to contradict himself when contending with technical progress and the consequences thereof? Why did he take such an ambivalent approach to technology, now being fascinated by it, now being put off by it? Certainly Linnie Marsh Wolfe overstates the case when she contends that John Muir was an adversary of progress (*Life of John Muir* 33). At any rate, it seems reasonable to assert that Muir could be quite uncomfortable with the notion of progress underpinned by technology which most of his fellow Americans enthusiastically endorsed. The works of French philosopher Jacques Ellul may help us account for Muir's deeply ambivalent attitude.

John Muir and Ellulian Theory

For Jacques Ellul, technology has to be regarded as a principle. Put simply the term does not just apply to machinery—it is also relevant to all realms of human experience, whether material or not. Broadly speaking Ellul claims that the domination of technology tends to usher in a society in which the search for efficiency overrides all other objectives. In what Ellul dubbed the technological society the drive for efficiency becomes the most—if not the only—legitimate pursuit men indulge in. Ellul concedes that technology has

always performed a role at all stages of human history. Nevertheless he holds that the Enlightenment and the advent of Western modernity marked a radical departure from the kind of attitudes as regards technology which had prevailed before. As time went by, men had to abide more and more by the principles and demands of technology. According to Ellul, technology has a tendency to become ever more autonomous when not restricted by customs and cultural or religious limitations. So much so that technology may gradually come to hold sway in all areas of life. Ultimately, Ellul argues, technology is bound to “algebrise the world” (*Bluff* 274), to subject nature to a purely mathematical form of rationality. To Ellul, one of the most striking consequences of the establishment of the technological society is that all values which are distinct from the pursuit of maximum efficiency are either marginalised or reshaped in order to fit the technological framework: “Technical progress now stems from the search for efficiency only. . . . An individual is allowed to take part only insofar as he or she discards all the concerns which are now regarded as being of minor importance like aesthetics, ethics or imaginativeness” (*Technique* 69 my translation). It is worth noting that Ellul marks the late nineteenth century in the West as one of the moments when the technological cult could be most acutely felt (*Bluff* 323). That is why Ellulian theory may be useful to shed some light on Muir’s ambivalence as regards technology.

Ellul holds that man usually struggles to cope with life in a purely rationalised environment: “. . . the most perfect machine remains purely rational . . . Man is not. In addition man is not rational in his feelings, opinions, behaviours but, what is more, he suffers in a purely and exclusively rational environment” (*Bluff* 315-16 my translation). John Muir’s life provides some enlightening evidence of man’s inability to thrive in an environment where technical rationality was all-pervasive. At Trout Mill in 1865, Muir wrote a letter to his friend Emily Pelton which read: “. . . it seems as though I should be dragged into machinery whether I would or no—for the last three or four months I have been inventing machinery about twenty-four hours per day” (Letter). His achievements notwithstanding, Muir was feeling more and more uncomfortable in the confined atmosphere of the factory. He left a few months later. The first chapter of *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf of Mexico*, which Muir wrote after recovering from the eye injury he sustained in Indianapolis, also speaks volumes. The first pages of his travel journal are significant: “My plan was simply to push on in a general southward direction by the wildest, leafiest, and least trodden way I could find, promising the greatest extent of virgin forests” (1-2). Muir’s impulse was to vanish into the wilderness to seek some sort of a *catharsis*.

More generally, his relentless efforts to promote the national park system can be interpreted as an attempt to relieve industrial America from the worst effects of the increasingly mechanised way of life it fostered. Ellul's point seems to be further substantiated by the wilderness cult which took centre stage in urban America toward the end of the nineteenth century and afterwards. The more American life was being rationalised and bureaucratised, the more American citizens longed for wild playgrounds where the impact of technology would be conspicuous by its absence. In other words the triumph of technology came at a cost and it had to be alleviated by the preservation of wild places seemingly free from the influence of human rationality. Thus Frederick Law Olmsted's city parks and John Muir's national parks can be regarded as offsetting the dulling rationality of life in industrial America.

Another aspect which is relevant to Ellul's thinking is Muir's blunt refusal of the "algebrisation of the world." During the second half of the nineteenth century the influence of positivism was making itself felt. According to Leszek Kolakowski, the proponents of positivism put the emphasis exclusively on observable facts. To them the notion of a dichotomy between matter and spirit was null and void. Positivism rested on a purely materialistic approach which rode roughshod over any principle deemed non-rational and unscientific (Kolakowski 10-18). The proponents of positivism, who wholeheartedly espoused the gospel of progress, thought that the world could indeed be algebrised and controlled through the use of science and technology. Nothing could have been more remote from Muir's perception of nature—and of science for that matter. Though Muir thought highly of science, he took a stand against the unmitigated dominance of sheer rationality which was consubstantial to positivism. In Muir's opinion imagination and aesthetics had as large a part to play as reason. In that regard he was in line with two of his role models, the German natural philosopher Alexander von Humboldt² and Henry David Thoreau (Walls).

2 As a child, Muir was fascinated by Humboldt's account of his voyage to South America from 1799 to 1802. So much so that he dreamt of walking in Humboldt's footsteps. He first attempted to do so in 1867, but to no avail (after walking from Indiana to Florida, Muir was struck by malarial fever and had to give up his plan). Yet he did eventually go on a trip to South America in 1911 (for a detailed account of this trip, see *John Muir's Last Journey*, ed. Michael P. Branch). Humboldt deeply influenced Muir's approach to nature in that he claimed that nature had to be observed in the field, that nature ought to be interpreted as a whole and that rationality and aesthetics were not mutually exclusive, quite the contrary. In fact he viewed science as an amalgamation of both. Muir subscribed to the main tenets of Humboldtian science—which foreshadowed ecology—until the end of his life.

Central to Muir's mindset was the notion that the mystery of nature would never be eliminated. To be sure Muir did encourage his fellow Americans to go into the wild and study nature at close range. This did not mean, however, that man would ever get to *know* nature in its totality. Nor was it desirable that man should one day be able to harness nature completely. Muir firmly believed that some wild areas were so infused with divine grandeur that men had the moral duty to preserve them as sanctuaries. But if, in some given areas, nature was to be conceived of as a sacred trust, it would become problematic to manipulate it with a view to bending it to human desires. To someone like Muir, the use of technology on a large scale in a place like Yosemite Valley was tantamount to the desecration of a holy temple. Progress and the concomitant triumph of technology were all very well, but they could not prevail everywhere. There were places where wild nature, not man, had to retain the upper hand. In *A Thousand-Mile Walk*, the writer/naturalist expresses a wish that the human invasion of the natural world somehow be limited:

. . . even of the land only a small portion is free to man, and if he, among other journeys on forbidden paths, ventures among the ice lands and hot lands, or up in the air in balloon bubbles, or on the ocean in ships, or down into it a little way in smothering diving-bells—in all such small adventures man is admonished and often punished in ways which clearly show him that he is in places for which, to use an approved phrase, he was never designed. (179)

The underlying message is that man does not belong everywhere and that the manipulating influence of technology should not be allowed to extend to the whole world. Such a call for self-restriction would have been anathema to proponents of positivism. In *The Maine Woods*, Henry David Thoreau had also castigated the shallowness and emptiness of the kind of material development at work in the United States: "The Anglo American can indeed cut down and grub up all this waving forest and make a stump speech and vote for Buchanan on its ruins, but he cannot converse with the spirit of the tree he fells—he cannot read the poetry and mythology which retire as he advances" (229). Such qualms echo Ellul's critique of technical progress as a self-perpetuating process without a definite purpose. Certainly to the likes of Thoreau and Muir, there was more to nature than the mere opportunity to manufacture goods and make profits.

And that is one of the reasons why, in the early 1890s, the editor of *The Century Magazine* Robert Underwood Johnson managed to convince Muir to

act publicly in favour of the national park system. For preservationist-minded activists like Johnson the fledging parks could come in handy since they could be used as tools to limit the expansion of technical progress and commodity exploitation. In places such as Yellowstone, aesthetics and recreation were to be given free rein. It must be added however that Richard West Sellars has shown that many of the early supporters of the national parks shared a utilitarian agenda. After all, the railroad companies which had a vested interest in the development of tourism were instrumental in creating the first national parks, although they were not the only factor contributing to the parks' creation (Sellars 9). As for Muir he was thinking and acting along completely different lines. Although he undeniably ranked among the most efficient promoters of tourism of his time, deep down Muir thought Yosemite had value in and for itself regardless of whether men would have access to it (*Unpublished Journals* 16; *Thousand-Mile* 138). Yet Muir did not mind collaborating with people with an agenda different from his own—as long as it furthered his purposes. He knew that the parks, whatever the interests that had contributed to their birth, stood as bulwarks against the complete algebrisation of nature which was already well underway. Or did they?

The Limits of Compromise: Technology Unbound

John Muir was wary of economic development and technical progress but he was also well aware that his was a minority opinion. Maldwyn A. Jones refers to late nineteenth-century America as “a push-button civilization” (331) in which technology took centre stage and came to shape people's life and habits more and more. In *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, Richard Hofstadter argues that one of the traits which distinguishes America from Europe is “a widely shared contempt for the past” (238). The upshot is that, as the industrial revolution unfolded throughout the Western world, technical changes did not encounter as intense an opposition in the United States as in Europe where traditions and old customs were more rooted in people's experience (239-40). This is not to say, Hofstadter adds, that technical progress went on unhindered in the United States but many more voices rose to oppose this trend in Europe. Hofstadter mentions the examples of Carlyle, Ruskin, Goethe and others. As far as America is concerned, he does mention Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville and Henry Adams but the main exception in the American context appears to have been Henry David Thoreau: “Thoreau's *Walden* was, among other things, a statement of humane protest, a vision of the dead men, the lost life, buried under the ties of the railroads. He was immune to the American passion for the future; he was against the national preference for movement,

expansion, technology and utility” (240). In a passage of *Walden* reminiscent of Ellul’s critique of the invasion of human life by technology, Thoreau castigates the new technological order: “Men have become the tools of their tools” (25). Such a dissenting opinion went largely unheard in a society almost wholly committed to the mechanical age. In his history of the resistances to technology, François Jarrige seems to uphold Hofstadter’s point. In the chapter he devotes to the nineteenth century, he focuses mainly on Europe and mentions the United States only briefly, contending that the belief in the goodness and power of technology was then becoming one of the props of American national identity. Consequently very few dissenting voices made themselves heard at the time. Jarrige also cites Henry David Thoreau as a notable exception (92).

America’s passion for technical progress made matters more difficult for those who were willing to say a word for wild nature. Since Muir wanted to make a difference by convincing public opinion, he could hardly take a radical path. Rather than launch an onslaught on the nefarious effects of technical progress, he sought to promote tourism which, he believed, would provide the political support necessary to preserve places like Yosemite valley. In other words he would not confront technical progress and economic development head-on but would only suggest that limits be set to them in some areas. To be sure technology would prevail and man would master nature in a more thorough and spectacular way than ever before. Yet some preservationists hoped that this would not be the case everywhere. To them some spots of outstanding beauty had to be exempted from the triumph of technical progress. In those tracts of land, the technical manipulation of nature was to be kept at a minimum—or even be absent. It should be noted that the preservationists rooted for the national park idea for various reasons which sometimes made for strange bedfellows. Some responded to a nationalistic impulse. In their view the wilderness was worth protecting as a remnant of the mythical age of the Frontier. California’s sequoias for example were to be America’s answer to the age-old monuments of Europe (Schama 188-91). Some other preservationists conceived of the national parks as components of the rationalising process at work in the United States. National parks were places where city-dwellers could go to have a break from pressures of urban life, without which the health of the nation would be put at risk. Without occasional access to wilderness, the nation might eventually become dysfunctional. All this did not really matter to Muir who was only willing to protect nature from “the temple destroyers” (Muir, *Hetch Hetchy* 817). Moderation and compromise looked the best way to achieve this goal. In adopting such a strategy, however, he failed to take on board the ambivalence of technical progress and its unexpected consequences. Ironically enough Muir

soon had to grapple with a movement he had upheld from its beginnings in the 1890s—Gifford Pinchot's conservationism.

In many ways, Gifford Pinchot, who was the head of the U.S. Forest Service from 1905 to 1911, embodied the faith in technical progress which was so pervasive in Muir's times. Pinchot, who prided himself on inventing the very concept of conservation (Pinchot 325), did his utmost to promote the values underpinning Ellul's technological society. His aim was to turn the United States into a highly efficient nation through the use of the applied sciences. Muir and Pinchot were on good terms and at first the former supported the latter. Muir, who had roamed the American West for many years, regarded Pinchot's brand of conservation as a vast improvement on the wasteful and destructive ways of the pioneers he had witnessed as a farm boy on the Wisconsin Frontier and as a grown man in California, Nevada, Colorado, Alaska and elsewhere. Somewhat reluctantly he endorsed the conservationist agenda of the Division of Forestry—renamed Forest Service in 1905 (Miller 126-35). Surely, he thought, science and rational planning would serve nature's interests better than the maddening free-for-all to which the American West had long been accustomed.. No doubt this was true. But the rub was that, unlike Muir, Pinchot had very little time or inclination to reflect upon the ambivalence of technical progress and the limits which men ought to impose thereon. In fact Pinchot thought that science and the promotion of efficiency, what Samuel P. Hays has called "the gospel of efficiency," were the best ways to serve the common good. He discarded any resistance to his conservationist platform either as the result of short-sighted ignorance or of the selfish opposition of the so-called special interests, the *nemesis* of the American progressive.

The attitude of the Forest Service as regards the national parks highlights the inability of the conservationists and, more broadly, of the proponents of the technological society, to accept limitations derived from a non-technological *ethos*. As suggested by its name, the Forest Service was in charge of managing the forest reserves (whose name changed to national forests in 1907). Yet their prerogatives did not extend to the national parks. Gifford Pinchot and Henry S. Graves, who took over from him as head of the Forest Service in 1911, tried very hard to bring about the transfer of the management of all national parks to their agency (Steen 114). Their plan was to apply to the parks the same technical norms they had devised for the national forests. Pinchot deemed it absurd not to make the most of the natural resources contained in the parks. The notion of the inviolability of the parks was a reproach to the conservationist promotion of "national efficiency" (Pinchot 349). Since men were capable of using the land

in a rational way thanks to their scientific and technical knowledge, Pinchot wondered why America would abstain from economic development in places where it could flourish. This was all to no avail since a new federal agency called the National Park Service was set up in 1916. Though Pinchot's and Graves's efforts came to nothing, it is worth noting that they pushed for a transfer on the ground that the parks were hindering the course of technical progress, in this case a rational version of commodity exploitation.

As time went by, Muir grew increasingly uncomfortable with Pinchot's relentless drive for efficiency. Once an ally of the conservationists, Muir became their bitter foe when San Francisco's municipal authorities applied for a permit in 1906 to build a dam in Hetch Hetchy valley, which was located within the precinct of Yosemite National Park. Muir's Sierra Club³ and a few other organisations fought very hard to scuttle the project, which they saw as an outright attack on the idea that the parks should remain inviolate forever—that is, free from commodity exploitation. By contrast Gifford Pinchot openly supported the San Francisco scheme because he deemed it necessary to the material development of the state of California (Miller 172). In his view the beauty of the valley was not sufficient to block a project that was to enhance the growth of San Francisco and shore up economic development. The account of the Hetch Hetchy controversy (H. Jones 82-169) should not detain us any further. Suffice it to say that the Sierra Club and its allies lost the battle for the preservation of the valley in 1913.

In the sublime setting of Hetch Hetchy Valley a dam symbolized the sheer strength of technology and man's ability to master nature to cater to his own needs. To the likes of Gifford Pinchot, it was unthinkable not to reap material profits from Hetch Hetchy when technology could provide the means to this end. For their part the preservationists had chosen to emphasise the aesthetic worth of the valley. However, in the technological society which was gradually coming into its own, such concerns were bound to be given short shrift. The fact that the controversy dragged on for several years serves to suggest that technological rationality did not always rule supreme and did encounter some opposition.

3 The Sierra Club was founded by Robert Underwood Johnson, John Muir and a few middle-class intellectuals in the San Francisco Bay area in 1892 with a view to preserving and enhancing Yosemite National Park and advocating the fledging national park system at large. The Club's board of directors resorted to political lobbying and sought to popularise the appeal of American wilderness. They also hoped to cash in on John Muir's national reputation. Muir was the president of the club from 1892 until his death in 1914. Today the Sierra Club is one the main environmental organisations in the United States.

But the eventual construction of the dam left little doubt as to who actually had the upper hand. Significantly, Muir had been so confident as to believe that technical progress could be relied upon to a point and then subjected to what he saw as higher purposes. It was not long before he was proved wrong. As the American century was about to begin, it was Gifford Pinchot, not John Muir, who had the edge. In the contemporary debate technology is often labelled as a means to avert environmental hazards. No doubt this is true to some extent. Yet the case of John Muir should give us pause for, in the technological society, there is also an inherent risk in allowing technical progress to become autonomous and self-perpetuating and to become a meaningless end in itself.

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Scripting the Wilderness

Wendy Harding

The literature of place poses the problem of writing about what is beyond the self—and therefore beyond the immediate range of human experience—through the filter of human consciousness. This conundrum is most acutely felt in writing about wilderness, which, in the context of American culture, is generally conceived of as “an area where the earth and community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”¹ The perplexity of the writer faced with the challenge of writing about a place where, by definition, he does not belong can be felt in the title of Don Scheese’s essay “The Inhabited Wilderness.” This brief text about a hike into Hammond Canyon in Utah shows how a particular writer responds to the challenge; at the same time, it challenges readers to find ways of responding to texts about place, a genre to which the usual critical methods are not adapted.² The present study offers a close reading of Scheese’s “The Inhabited Wilderness” as an example of a new interpretative model designed to respond to the literature of place.³ Like others of its genre this text departs from a prior experience that is personal and irrecoverable and creates a new literary space made of words. The text is a montage of what I call “scripts” proposing different responses to and interpretations of the land.

Scheese’s account of a solitary hike in the Manti-La Sal National Forest plunges readers into a time and place—an August afternoon in the Utah wilderness—in which quotidian concerns seem to be suspended. Is Scheese appealing to readerly fantasies of escape? This seems unlikely given the firmly stated terms of the text’s conclusion: “Ruins are the bones of the past, to which we return again and again, seeking answers to the most profound inquiries about human existence” (352). Unlike escapist travel literature, the essay

1 The definition comes from the Wilderness Act of 1964, Section 2 (c).

2 Scott Slovic considers this problem in *Going Away to Think*. Responding to Terry Tempest Williams’s question about what ecocritics do, he suggests that beyond specific narratives, critics can engage in the work of “contextualization and synthesis” (34).

3 I am indebted to Jacky Martin for his invaluable contribution to my investigation of these questions.

asks readers to consider weighty ontological issues. Still it does not feel like a philosophical meditation. On the contrary, it issues a compelling invitation to consider places, cultures and concepts as if they formed a coherent landscape to visit and contemplate vicariously. At the same time, the text is neither an anthropological nor a geographical study. Rather than recounting a systematic exploration of either space or time, the writer ranges freely through different moments, places, and cultures. Fragments or flights of thought, held together by idiosyncratic principles, cohere around a speaking subject. How does the text interest readers in the exploration of places that they have never visited, make them empathize with cultures long departed, and then acquiesce to a series of vaguely discordant concepts? To try to answer these questions by adopting a detached critical stance is to risk failing to understand the text's particular aesthetic choices and its persuasive force.

To follow the text's development, to remain close enough to it to respect its particular continuity and coherence, this study adopts the hypothesis that, like numerous examples of the nonfictional literature of place, Scheese's essay deploys various scripts that readers can trace and take up. The term "scripting" highlights the choices writers make, as well as the effect their selectivity has on readers. It offers an alternative to the concept of representation, which is problematic because it implies that the writer can observe external objects and in turn exhibit them to another observer, the reader, through the medium of words. Scripts organize in textual form a montage of events, places, people and ideas that have occurred or are imagined to occur in real-life circumstances. In the particular case of the literature of place,⁴ scripts trace mental geographies in which references to actual places are fertilized by a human response, and conversely, mental activity is fashioned by its inscription in non-human settings.⁵ Scripts are multi-faceted: they refer to the external world and the speaker's internal experience; they straddle referential and textual space, pointing back to past events and creating new encounters for readers in the future. Rather than splitting the representing subject from the represented object, the notion of scripting emphasizes the interaction between inside and outside.

Scripting place is very different from either mapping or narrating it, although these functions may be evoked in scripts. Maps evoke places through the application of orthogonal coordinates to an empirical simulation of a particular

4 The generalizations made in this study concern a corpus that has proved difficult to classify, as Lyon has shown in *This Incomperable Land*.

5 The origin of the notion of scripts as mental geographies is suggested by Alison Deming's perception of her writings as "geographic and mental habitats located on the borders of change" (Deming 10).

terrain. Scripts may refer to traditional maps, but they gear that evocation to different objectives. Things that are important in maps—landmarks, routes, or topography—receive less attention than the uncharted spaces, the dead ends, the accidents, the encounters, or the epiphenomenal features that catch the observer's eye but escape the cartographer's notice. Scripts transform impersonal maps into humanized places. Scripts may also evoke stories; nevertheless, their relationship to narrative is far from being straightforward.⁶ Stories are fundamentally concerned with evolution in time, and conventionally they move from an initial situation toward a resolution. Scripts are less concerned with origins or closure; they develop in rhizomatic formations. Though they do not ignore the element of time, they often uncover the past in fragmentary form. In contrast to cartographers and storytellers, scriptors organize impressions about space and time into configurations of tension and interaction in order to produce concerted effects.

One of the scripts in "The Inhabited Wilderness," refers to the hike that the author took in the Utah backcountry, but it cannot be read as either a guide to the terrain or a simple description of events. The trajectory is endowed with its own empiric logic: a walker decides to explore a little-known canyon to discover an Anasazi cliff dwelling and eventually returns to the trailhead. Yet the scripts that start from this referential basis are not only multiple but also widely divergent in empirical terms. Their function is not only to describe a particular exploration, but also to clarify and problematize certain issues about man's relation to externality.

Scripts are not simple transcriptions or even constructions of events, since those definitions posit a distinction and hierarchy between a plane of experience and a plane of representation, as well as a constructing subject able to extract herself from a chain of events. For Don Scheese, the act of representation is an experience as absorbing as the canyon adventure. It is an experience of a different nature and in a different medium. Instead of having to tackle the difficulties of progressing in the wild, the scriptor contends with the necessities of expression and communication. So Scheese retrieves, selects and organizes details issuing from the hike, aggregating a more or less wide array of sometimes discrepant terms in order to provoke certain reactions in readers. Far from disentangling or

6 Patricia L. Price speaks of the importance of stories in allowing human beings to connect with places: "They would not exist *as places* were it not for the stories told about and through them. Stories constitute performative, mimetic acts that conjure places into being and sustain them as the incredibly complex, fraught constructs that they are" (xxi). While I agree with this statement, I want to distinguish the formal aspects of narration from those of scripting. The distinction allows a better understanding of the non-fictional literature of place.

finalizing them, “The Inhabited Wilderness” maintains these terms in a state of suspension that puts readers in a situation of energized indecisiveness.

In Scheese’s essay, scripts appear to be deployed ineffectually in textual space to evoke an experience that somehow remains inexpressible. This apparent failure demonstrates the difference between aesthetic scripts and pragmatic ones. The latter are oriented toward action, toward regulating or facilitating our interactions with others and the world around us. Pragmatic scripts attempt to eliminate information that would detract from their efficacy. The map of the Manti-La Sal National Forest to which Scheese refers in his essay is an example of this kind of script. It excludes all details that are not deemed pertinent for reading the topography of the land. Everything that is left out could be seen as subscripts, indeterminate sets of alternative or cognate utterances that fringe the selected script but that would detract from its applicability. In aesthetic texts, these subscripts are allowed to surface alongside the scripts, creating effects such as indeterminacy or ambiguity. Scheese permits this duality from the outset with the oxymoronic title suggesting two mutually exclusive types of space. Finally, pragmatic scripts differ from aesthetic ones in the way in which they configure space. To return to the example of maps, pragmatic scripts tend to focus exclusively on observable external features. By contrast, and this is particularly pertinent to the nonfictional literature of place, aesthetic scripts make connections between the external world and the human subject.

“The Inhabited Wilderness,” is compounded of four different scripts of unequal length relating to Scheese’s Hammond Canyon adventure. Although pertaining to a common subject, these scripts are fairly autonomous in orientation yet together they produce a combined effect. There is a first *topological* script, by far the longest and the most detailed, which describes the excursion from the trailhead into the canyon and back. There is a much shorter *epiphanic* script organized around the discovery of the Anasazi dwelling place as “inhabited wilderness.” A third *conceptual* script organizes a meditative sequence enouncing concepts supposed to elucidate that discovery. The brief final *lyrical* script is a sustained rhetorical flourish attempting to suggest the import of the previously analyzed discovery.

The first script describes the exploration proper. It is the closest to empirical reality and paradoxically, though it is placed under the aegis of reality and thus creates the expectation of factual discourse, it also suggests highly personal readings of the landscape. The hike’s factual development is the pretext for the construction of a very elaborate topological script in which the conceptual values brought into play bear only a glancing relation to the hiker’s

movements *in situ*. These values are superscripted upon the hiker's movements so that his successive positions suggest a semantic configuration of space—it is in this sense that scripts can be described as mental geography. The first visual marker concerns the elevated or depressed status of objects in space. The cliff dwelling that is the ostensible goal of the excursion is situated at a lower altitude than the trailhead where the hiker has to return to retrieve his vehicle. The bottom of the canyon lies below the two previous positions that seem to stand for places of human habitation (cliff dwelling and car), although because of the waterfall and the shaded area, the bottom of the canyon is described as “the perfect place to have lunch” (348), an ideal but temporary resting place. This static geography is set into motion, turned into a suggestive scenario, by the hiker's trip that takes him from the security of his vehicle, through the idyllic pause at the bottom of the canyon, to a site of perplexity engendered by the visit to the Anasazi dwelling, and back to the trailhead. The fact that the hiker confesses that: “I regretted that I had not brought my sleeping bag and more food, for I longed to spend further time exploring this canyon . . .” (351), suggests that he leaves the ancient ruin and returns home reluctantly, although we never know for sure which of the sites that mark his passage in the canyon have his preference or whether he is lured by the thought of other, unexplored places. This undecidability is reinforced by complementary details signaling that none of the highlighted places is considered as ideal: the trailhead from which he departs is threatened by thunderstorms, the shady canyon bottom has only a trickle of water, and the cliff dwelling is rather claustrophobic. The indeterminacy should not be seen as a flaw in the text but as a gap inviting the reader's participation.

The global impression of indeterminacy is reinforced by the alternation of bright and dark spots in the description:⁷ the somberness of the forested trail alternates with open vistas disclosing impressive figures such as “voodoos, pinnacles and buttresses of red sandstone” (348); graced with the bright tinkle of the waterfall, the shady spot on the canyon floor is also marked by the traces left by flash floods, and it contrasts with the rock formations “flar[ing] like matchsticks in the afternoon light” (348); the “cumulo-nimbi massing” (347) contrast with the “blue dome of the sky” (350). This disconcerting scrim of

7 This pattern of contrasts recalls Scheese's analysis of the Thomas Cole painting, *The Oxbow*, in his book, *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in American Literature*, as does the presence of the creator in the landscape he describes: “In nature but also dwarfed by nature, relatively inconspicuous, he appears to be conscious of his dual role as dweller in and creator of nature” (3). Art becomes a means of inhabiting nature, of connecting the human and the non-human; this is just one of the many possible interpretations of the essay's title.

flickering light and shadow creates an atmosphere of uncertainty that prepares readers for the “discovery” which is the theme of the second script.

Another striking aspect of the topological script concerns disparities in the quality of vision associated with the various positions in space. While some vantage points open narrow and restricted vistas, others offer wide-ranging panoramas. The Anasazi habitat is represented from a variety of angles: from the outside, “glasses” though binoculars, it appears as “something odd niched between a horizontal gap in the rocks,” or as “a dark slit in the wall,” or “a narrow cave.” The impression of cramped exiguousness is confirmed by the hiker’s impression inside the dwelling: the abandoned granaries are so dark and confined that the hiker quickly feels claustrophobic and “seeking for fresh air and light again, [he] crawled outside” (350). As opposed to the restricted perspective “through the small portholes that served as windows” (350) that the Anasazis are imagined to have used, the hiker enjoys a bird’s eye view of the canyon: “Beyond . . . Below . . . Across . . . Up Canyon . . .” (350). In the cumulative layering of that visual mini-script, we are invited to rediscover the canyon from the narrator’s panoptic eye and in the very place where the Anasazis were supposed to have been posted.

Imbricated in the play of contrasting perspectives is another opposition scripted onto the topography of the canyon: that between observed and imagined details. Juxtaposed to the precise observations and measurements of a scientific investigator, who examines “the five separate structures . . . in turn, slowly and methodically” (349), are the imagined scenes of a writer who conjures up visions of the “extended family” who once lived there, “huddl[ing] around a fire for warmth” (350) or “mak[ing] love and h[olding] ceremonies” (351). The cave dwellings appear as both archeological sites for investigation and, on the contrary, zones of mystery—“black holes of antiquity” (349)—that swallow up all claims to know them. The topographical script invites readers to organize spatial values and to respond to the challenge of being in several places and times at once. Both inside and outside spaces are amenable thanks to the scriptor’s introspective projection and detached observation. Scheese’s evocation of the canyon creates one of Alison Deming’s “mental habitats” (10) in which the empirically familiar terms of subject, object, and context are deactivated and rethought interactively in keeping with each other. The different points of the topographical script jointly and collectively create a multi-polar space that is the starting-point of the next script.

The second, epiphanic script is based on a series of contradictions that, in keeping with my unresisting approach, I will not attempt to disentangle. It is organized in two flights of personal introspection. The first response to the cliff

dwelling comes when the hiker attains a position within twenty feet of them: "It is hard to describe my feelings as I stepped on the ledge that gave me an eye-level view of the ruins . . ." (349). Instead of representing something new and unexpected that would correspond to the definition of a discovery, the speaker expounds in a very structured discourse his response to what he has seen. The script is very logically ordered, passing from a feeling of "Awe," to "Respect," to "a tinge of fear" (349), in response to the impression of a haunting presence. Paradoxically, the object of the discovery remains if not exactly absent at least stated in very general terms: "ruins," "structures," "realm of ghosts," "the absence of a human presence in a place where humans had once lived and thrived . . ." (349). The second phase of the epiphanic script begins after the full exploration of the ruins. Having inventoried the contents of the dwellings, the speaker exits in order to contemplate and record his findings from the all-embracing position outside and the comfort afforded by "the shade of the overhang" (351). Again, as in the previous passage, he focuses not so much on the place itself as on the nature of the epiphany that he experiences. He considers all the coincident factors attending his discovery—the solitude, stillness and remoteness of the site—that seem to converge on the realization that he feels connected to the former inhabitants of the cave. Finally, he hits upon the revelation highlighted in the essay's title; he has an intimation of "inhabited wilderness" (351). But what does the phrase mean? The canyon could not have been identified as a wilderness when it was inhabited by the Anasazis; it has become one because it has ceased to be occupied. Is it now a wilderness disturbed by the hiker's presence or a deserted site haunted by the vestigial traces of humanity?

The impression of having reached a culminating point in the text is mitigated by accessory considerations. The first concerns the hazy manner in which the previous inhabitants of the cliff dwellings are evoked. In spite of the fact that the hiker has visited similar archeological sites and been instructed about the early occupants of the canyons from those "institutional, impersonal tours" (347), his evocation of their daily life is extremely sketchy and commonplace—it is difficult to distinguish these early Amerindians "hoping and praying for no killing frost, adequate summer rains, and winter snowfalls" (351) from the average Midwestern farmer. The elaboration of the "discovery" concludes with a series of questions about the Anasazi that reveals how little the speaker knows about them (351-2). He leaves the site "with more questions than answers" (352), sure only of his urge for further exploration.

Several explanations could be produced at this point to account for the emphasis on his present-day discovery rather than archeological insights. We could dismiss the discovery script as solipsistic or as a reenactment of the

Eurocentric appropriation of American space. These reductive readings would be erroneous because they would privilege one or the other terms in the scripted relation established in space, across time, between the Anasazis and the hiker. The two occupants of the cliffs seem to be competing for pride of place but neither, if my characterization of scripts as tensional structures is valid, can be decisively chosen as preeminent. Although the hiker stresses his “special feeling of solitude” (351), it is obviously the Anasazis’ former occupation that endows the place with significance. The tension in the script between presence and absence gives the scene its particular pathetic and enigmatic aura. The “profound connection with the past” (351) felt by the narrator depends on the effacement of one or the other parties concerned: to imagine the Anasazis living their idyllic lives, one has to forget the hiker’s intrusion, but to affirm his recapturing of their universe one has to admit their extinction. An atmosphere of fluctuating uncertainty defines the epiphanic script. The hiker’s “profound connection with the past” is offered as a tentative, stopgap explanation that obviously fails to accomplish its function. It is superscripted by the more obscure and contradictory concept of “inhabited wilderness” which is the object of the next script.

The obvious, even glaring proof of the expressive flaw in the epiphanic script is suggested in the title’s contradictory terms. This contradiction is both the text’s focus and its blind spot. How can a place be classed as wilderness when it bears the signs of habitation and, correlatively, how can one inhabit a wilderness without automatically changing it into a humanized space? That contradiction is an enigma that appears conspicuously while remaining completely unexplained. In fact, the contradiction is not as symmetrical as implied: if a human can choose to inhabit a wilderness, a wilderness does not choose to be inhabited. This sounds trivial. And indeed it is trivial until we realize that because of the passive voice, it is not so much a question of the act of “inhabiting” as the state of being “inhabited.” No one in particular inhabits the wilderness yet it is said to be “inhabited.” Exactly by whom, the text refrains from disclosing. Is it by the Anasazis centuries ago? Is it by the ghosts of those former inhabitants? Is it by the wandering hiker who temporarily visits the place? Or is it by something else that the text is trying to decipher. The contradiction contained in the term “inhabited wilderness” is the driving force at the back of all the scripts contained in the text, but the deployment of scripts leads to no conclusive resolution. This inconclusiveness is a characteristic of the third “conceptual” script.

What is remarkable about this script is that it offers a string of pregnant concepts given one after another without any analysis of their connections. The

term “inhabited wilderness,” seamlessly leads to “rewilded landscape” (351)⁸ which in turn suggests the notion of “interrupted space” (352) that glancingly calls up the notion of the “sacred.”⁹ Rather than producing logical links that would weave those heterogeneous notions into a coherent discourse, the author admits that he had difficulty finding words to describe the import of the experience: “I groped for words adequate for the moment as I wrote in my journal” (352). Naturally this reference raises the question of the relation of the text we are reading to this journal. What has become of the missing text or pre-text? Is the published text supposed to contain the words that could not be found on location? Are the words in the quotations that follow “adequate for the moment” or are they the sign of a mind still groping? This avowal of the failure of language is perhaps the writer’s feint, aiming not to mislead us but to guide us where he wants us to go. The narrator’s earlier description of the clinking of shards of Anasazi pottery that “broke the silence” (350) offers a clue. This gesture foreshadows the narrator’s failed attempts at expression, which also replicates the “crude petroglyphs” that are characterized as the “doodling, as it were of these prehistoric inhabitants” (350). The fragments and the doodling are somehow, like the essay, efforts to link humanity to the environment they inhabit.

In his search for the adequate expression to capture the experience, the scriptor lists a series of concepts that seem not so much to account for anything as to create a sense of expressive incapacity. He ceases to assume responsibility for articulating his own impressions and resorts to outside authorities; he summons Cronon, McPherson and Eliade to testify in his place. A quotation within a quotation produces an effect of ever-receding distance, as Eliade’s text is cited from MacPherson’s *Sacred Land*. Then, in an ever more remote *mise en abyme*, Scheese mentions “a photograph of an Anasazi ruin in southeastern Utah” (352) that McPherson includes in his book with a caption from Eliade’s text. The hermeneutic circle is finally closed, but its center is empty or too full—there are no words for what has to be experienced by visual means, at the heart of experience.

The conceptual script turns out to not to explain but to underline the failure of explanation. Indeed, Cronon’s article about the Apostle Islands presents an innovative concept that seems to counter the topographical script in Scheese’s essay. Cronon critiques the official representation of wilderness “as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by

8 The term is derived from William Cronon’s essay, “The Riddle of the Apostle Islands.”

9 Both the term “interrupted space” and the suggestion of the sacred come from a passage that Scheese quotes from Mircea Eliade’s book, *The Sacred and the Profane*.

man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain” (Cronon 36).¹⁰ The separation of nature and culture in this legal definition of wilderness matches the trajectory of Scheese’s lonely hike into the canyon and harmonizes with his explication of the “rewilded landscape” as: “a place once settled by humans and then abandoned, reverting back to, and reclaimed by, nature” (351). By contrast, Cronon advocates a new “wilderness area” concept in which the traces of human habitation would still be visible: “I would argue for a few locations outside of the designated wilderness which, although still managed to protect wilderness values, could be modestly restored and actively interpreted so as to help visitors understand the historic landscapes of logging, quarrying, farming, and early tourism” (Cronon 42). In short Cronon lays the stress on the traces of settlement while Scheese, at least initially, seems to be looking for a place away from human society.

Is it a case of misquotation, of insufficient documentation, or of a deliberate attempt to subvert another person’s text? None of these interpretations quite fits, yet the pattern of apparent misappropriation continues. After “grop[ing] for words” (352), the author subsequently hits upon a passage in McPherson’s *Sacred Land* from which he extracts a reference to Eliade’s description of how the sacred occupies “interrupted space” (Macpherson 123; Scheese 352). In Eliade’s study, sacred space is indeed “interrupted,” in the sense of separate from “the mundane world of daily life” (Macpherson 123; Scheese 352), yet it always remains in close proximity to the quotidian: “For it is not a matter of geometrical space, but of an existential and sacred space that has an entirely different structure, that admits of an indefinite number of breaks, and hence is capable of an indefinite number of communications with the transcendent” (Eliade 57). As a matter of fact, it is the proximity with the sacred that gives coherence to the mundane. This is in direct contradiction with the definition that Scheese appears to favor in his sense of the sacred as emanating from the effacement of human presence. In his own account of his experience, awe and reverence are linked to solitude. This word, or its variant “alone,” is repeated four times in the paragraph relating his thoughts on leaving the cliff dwellings (351). What are we to make of the curious conjunction of the scriptor’s apparent abdication of authority and his misappropriation of quotes?

The apparent abandon of conceptual responsibility associated with the decontextualization of borrowed concepts converges on the realization of a certain

10 Cronon quotes this passage from the 1964 Wilderness Act and favors a presentation of landscape that would not “remove, erase, or otherwise hide historical evidence that people have altered a landscape and made it their home” (39).

form of eerie transcendence that does not include humans but arises out of the signs of their former presence. Scheese's discovery of the traces left by the vanished cliff dwellers is indispensable in his evocation of the special quality of the place. His wilderness experience is both solitary and peopled—"inhabited." He insists on mentioning that "there were no other footprints besides mine" (347), while admitting that "others had been here before me" (351). He concedes that he has experienced a similar feeling of solitude "numerous times before on wilderness trips" (351), but insists on a new element, "a profound connection with the past" (351). Words or concepts finally seem inadequate to account for the experience, and the narrator's feelings cannot be attached to any identifiable constituent in the scene. Scripting becomes a form of abstention, a deliberate reticence. This self-effacement allows the surrender to pure existence in space-time.

Scheese's sacred instant is a form of possession rather than an epiphany; it is the total absorption in and of the potentialities of the site in which he has immersed himself. The site itself is inhabited, haunted by his presence, but his personal physical existence as subject has become immaterial, for it has been absorbed in the landscape. Indeed, through his imaginative engagement with his surroundings, Scheese seems to achieve something comparable to the state of being that elsewhere he attributes to ancient cultures: "[B]efore the decline of 'primitive' cultures and the emergence of agricultural and then industrial societies, before the alienation of the human species from its wilderness condition, there was a time when people felt no need to retreat to a pastoral haven because where they lived was where they wanted to be—they were at home in nature and felt no separation from it" (Scheese 2002 37-38). This is another interpretation that can be given to the intriguing passive form of the verb "inhabit"—at the moment when the occupation of space is maximal, the occupier abandons the claim to being a causal agent. He both exists and disappears in the experience; maximal existence equates with maximal disappearance. Perhaps more than other forms of writing, the nonfictional literature of place seems to put into relief the interaction between self and non-self that is inherent in experience. In contrast to the novel, where place is often relegated to the background, or to the supporting role of giving definition to human characters, the kind of text we are looking at places the human and non-human at center stage and shows them in interaction. Topological scripts become scripts of self and vice versa.

The final script which I have identified as "lyrical" comes as a kind of anticlimax after the first three, for it moves to a degree of generality that seems to contradict the questing, questioning restlessness of the previous scripts. The conclusion rests on a very emphatic accumulation of parallel constructions, each offering a generalization ("Ruins fascinate us . . . Ruins haunt us . . . Ruins

remind us . . . Ruins mesmerize us . . . Ruins are . . .” (352). A curious sentiment of perplexity permeates the Romantic effusion that accompanies the topos of the ruin. Alongside the *memento mori* theme, the contemplation of ruins seems to elicit a curious impression of alacrity. “[T]heir enigmatic silence” (352) provokes the paradoxical conviction that they contain important teachings. An impression of beauty contrasts with a morbid reminder of bones. The crucial turning in this concluding script is the unexpected appearance of the inclusive “us” that for the first time associates readers with the speaker’s experience. Whatever lessons we may extract from the lyrical finale, it fails to capture the unique personal experience that the other scripts have tried to convey.

The notion of “script” used so far as a heuristic concept needs to be further investigated. “Scripts” are the various verbal patterns that reflect our interaction with the world and that pertain both to the non-human world and to our humanity, uniting both into an indissociable complex. Scripts are not distinct from experience; they are part and parcel of our interaction with the world. Scheese’s text produces a scenario of facts concerning the development of the hike: nevertheless, it is much more than the simple transcription of an experience.

Written expression as documentation or as note taking during and after the hike is integral to the initial experience, and this dimension of experience forms a part of many excursions. However, once the writing activity becomes the unique object of a person’s interest, it becomes a totally different kind of experience. Expression becomes an end in itself. The interaction that is at the heart of the writing experience is no longer with reality but with the medium in which writers choose to express themselves and the situation of communication that they anticipate for the finished product of their activity. Written or, for that matter, any other forms of expression are experiences in communication. These experiences are never *sui generis*, they habitually feed, like Scheese’s text, on previous experiences that are rethought and redesigned in order to further a specific communicative objective.

A few important observations are in order at this point that are of particular relevance to the kind of texts that are habitually classified as environmental writing, nature writing, or the literature of place. First, even if the written text has the status of an artifact, it is incomplete in itself. It cannot be comprehended without reference to previous experiences, and it is itself an authentic and complete experience that is not resolved in the examination of its written content. The written text is more than a representation producing an image, a reconstruction or a projection of an exterior reality. The referent cannot be

detached from either the context of reproduction, the activity of the reproducer, or the reception situation.

Viewing texts as montages of various scripts puts the emphasis on the synergy between past experience, the specificity of the artist's medium, and the anticipation of reception. The most obvious consequence of this new critical approach is that it ceases to assess or explicate from such exterior templates as subject matter, the author's personality, or generic distinctiveness. In its very title, "The Inhabited Wilderness" explicitly announces that it does not refer to the exploration of a specific canyon, or to South Western cliff dwelling or to the Anasazi culture but to some more complex relation that the text is going to investigate. Something strange and exceptional seems to occur after the visit of the cliff site when the speaker confesses: "with the ruins at hand and the incontrovertible proof of human existence and activity next to me, I experienced a profound connection with the past that I had not felt on previous wilderness sojourns. I had entered an inhabited wilderness . . ." (351). The ambivalent impasse highlighted in the title appears to be the generating center of Scheese's essay. Readers are encouraged to follow its irradiation and circulation throughout the text's multiple scripts.

While this text is a classic exemplar of the literature of place, it would be difficult, except by reference to very superficial criteria like "region," "nature," "exploration" or "discovery," to pinpoint the generic features that establish such a classification. Although the essay evokes a specific site in the American South West, it is far from being limited to landscape description. Nevertheless, this particular text offers a sampling of the various types of discourse that can be found in contemporary literature of the environment. Description, meditation, lyricism or exhortation interweave in one place-oriented text. Far from being diversions or interpolations, these different threads contribute to the definition of an absent but problematic center.

What distinguishes the literature of place from the scripts we encounter in daily life is that in certain circumstances, not necessarily but frequently associated with experiences in natural environments, individuals find themselves momentarily or for an extended period of time, deprived of available pre-defined scripts. They are left without the possibility of determining how they are going to negotiate the challenge of the present moment, and even more crucially, how they are going to be affected by the exterior circumstances that they cannot assign to any recognizable script. They seem to be cast adrift in space. The world seems at the same time too large and too intangible to embrace. These moments of disorientation, when presence and absence are felt simultaneously,

like Scheese's experience at the cliff dwelling, lie at the core of wilderness-centered writing. They are frequently experienced in encounters with animals, with extreme or exceptional environmental conditions, or as in Scheese's text, with the vestiges of past cultures, although it would be a mistake to tie them down to any specific places or occurrences.

The experiencing subject is either forced to improvise or to rely on familiar conceptual frames such as anthropocentric projections or canonic scripts borrowed from science, anthropology or history. These discourses serve as stopgaps, makeshift expedients. Although this does not disqualify them, they are bound to fall short of expressing the fullness of the experience. The challenge of the unknown, the unpredictable or the overwhelming cannot be met or "scripted," that is, completely translated into scripts. This is in part the situation in which the speaker in Scheese's essay finds himself when he announces "something about [his] trip . . . allowed [him] to think of it as a 'discovery'" (351). The vague use of "something," the word "allow" and the quotation marks used to mark the inappropriateness of the word "discovery" indicate that because of the ineffability of his experience, he authorizes himself to use an approximation, that its real significance is unnamable. And, as if to prove that point, he immediately embarks on a series of conceptual conjectures, which in their very accumulation prove that they can, at best, be considered as makeshift equivalents. In order to confront the unknown/unknowable, what Adorno calls the "non-identical" (95)—that which cannot be matched with anything else—writers naturally resort to all sorts of discursive justifications. The first reaction is to evoke esoteric identifications such as Nature, Wildness, Mystery, Transcendence, Exteriority, or Alterity to evoke extreme but contrasted emotional responses such as awe, terror, panic or ecstasy, and to write a justification or scenario for their existence.

Discourse can render acceptable the scandal of the coexistence of the known and the unknowable that is part and parcel of human subjectivity. In the literature of place, scripts are responses to the inexpressibility of what is exterior to humanity; they not only attempt to give it expression but also to attenuate the impossibility of attaining adequate expression. More specifically than other forms of writing, the literature of place has the paradoxical aim of confronting the unknowable with the aim of giving it plausible expression, a dilemma that Adorno expresses with particular force: "What in artworks is structured, gapless, resting in itself, is an after-image of the silence that is the single medium through which nature speaks" (Adorno 96). This analysis of Scheese's essay has tried to show that what Adorno envisages as a silence that demands expression is the generating center of the text and the source of its

aesthetic dimension. The essay's multiple scripts draw attention to an aporia that might be viewed as a block, interruption or failure in expression, but which is, on the contrary, a source of generative power. "The Inhabited Wilderness" proceeds to develop from its very cryptic title a series of complementary and partially overlapping scripts that all approach, although never quite reveal, a buried, glimpsed, or unknown insight. The scripts are like the layers of an onion, protecting an unattainable, lost, irrecoverable center. This hypothetical center reflects the intolerable pressure of all the utterances that could have been produced and that the text has displaced by its univocal and exclusive existence. It is the subliminal dream of total expression or ideal expressiveness that the text misses in trying to reach.

The real nature of aesthetic texts is conflictual: they stage a struggle for expression and the combat is all the more poignant as they must, as in Scheese's text, present an appearance of composure. Again, this seems to correspond to Adorno's conception of the artwork: "The aim of artworks is the determination of the indeterminate" (Adorno 165). The core of indeterminacy at the center of aesthetic texts, aggravating as it feels for both writer and reader, becomes all the more tantalizing as, exceptionally, in the context of the literature of place, it seems to be accessible, almost tangible. Scripts confront the evidence of inexpressibility—of the irreconcilable gap between experience and discourse—while assigning themselves the task of giving it expression. In "The Inhabited Wilderness," "something" literally dawns upon the hiker in the form of a "discovery" (351). Whatever stands revealed, "discovered," seems to be infused with pertinence, yet the speaker abandons the quest for optimal formulation at the end of the essay.

The new direction that Scheese's essay takes in the final paragraph is scarcely predictable if we consider that the preceding scripts were devoted to unraveling the repercussions of a hike in the wilderness. In concluding, the narrator directly addresses readers in a manner that, since Thoreau, is not infrequent in the literature of place. He exhorts us to adopt a certain attitude, to envisage a certain course of action. This raises the question of the performativity of texts. Does the literature of place have the capacity to provoke us or incite us to act in connection with our environment? Can texts of this kind have an ecological impact? This is the question that ecocriticism has been debating from its origin. The notion of scripts can point a way out of the deadlock that opposes essentialist and constructivist critics. If it is hard to accept that nature is a socio-cultural construction that excludes the non-human, it is also difficult to conceive of an essential nature that is separate from humanity. Scripts are an integral part of social experience, and they are also our way to insert ourselves

in the world. To script the wilderness is a way to inhabit it, to mark it with a human trace while still conserving it. Scripts occupy a middle ground between reality and imagination, in other words, the terrain of the aesthetic. Aesthetic texts do not clarify or formalize issues; they do not fix agendas; they do not constitute political action. Other texts perform those roles more efficiently. The role of aesthetic texts is to mirror the complexity of the issues involved in the ecological debate or, more generally, in our insertion in the world; they are able to show the reversibility of arguments and the relativity of positions. Scripting wilderness in an aesthetic text is a way to evade the established discourses that fix it in ideology. By loosening up the terms surrounding the subject, by creating gaps and zones of indeterminacy, scripts allow us to begin to imagine more responsible forms of connection with place. Scheese's essay confronts readers not with a brief or a message, but with *an open*, multi-entry mental itinerary that we are free to explore or to ignore. It raises questions about humanity's relation to the land, questions addressed both to the Ancient Ones and to the present.

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**Mysteries of the Mountain:
Environmental Racism and Political Action
in Percival Everett's *Watershed***

Alexa Weik von Mossner

Hydrologist Robert Hawks has escaped to the mountains somewhere north of Denver to get away from the city and from his personal problems with his girlfriend. In the solitude of the wintry landscape the black protagonist of Percival Everett's 1996 novel *Watershed* hopes "to fish and think and be alone" (4). But what was planned as a Thoreauvian wilderness retreat quickly turns into an ecological murder mystery when two FBI agents are found dead in the nearby lake. Almost against his will, Hawks, who regards himself as a disinterested and apolitical scientist, becomes involved in the Plata Indians' desperate fight for environmental justice—and for their very survival. The mountain, as one of the rebellious Indians puts it, "is dying" (19), and so will the Plata Indians if they cannot prove what the US government is doing to them. A secret depot of Anthrax and other biological weapons high up on the mountain has begun to leak into the groundwater and the government tries to cover up the fact by diverting a poisoned creek into the nearby reservation of the Plata tribe. This way, it is explained, no white Americans will suffer harm.

Watershed thus rather unambiguously connects the poisoning of the fictional Plata Creek to what Rev. Benjamin Chavis has termed "environmental racism": the deliberate targeting of minority communities for exposure to toxic and hazardous waste sites and facilities.¹ The fact that the deadly contamination

1 Rev. Benjamin Chavis, the former head of the NAACP, coined the term in the early 1980s while he was executive director of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Injustice (CRJ). He became aware of the possible relation between racism and exposure to environmental hazards when the predominantly African American residents of Warren County, NC asked the Commission for help in their struggle to prevent the establishing of a PCB disposal site in their community. Chavis—who was arrested in the course of the (unsuccessful) protest—decided to conduct a national study and published the influential *Toxic Wastes and Race: A National Report on the Racial and Social-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites* in 1987. The findings of the study suggested a strong correlation between race and hazardous waste dumping and a deliberate targeting of minority communities for waste facilities.

is brought into the reservation through a river is of particular significance. Contaminated water supply, as countless advocates of environmental justice have shown, is one of the many ways in which environmental hazards continue to affect Indian reservations.² In 1980, the *Report of Women of All Red Nations* declared that “to contaminate Indian water is an act of war more subtle than military aggression, yet no less deadly” (qtd. in Brook 111). Viewed from this perspective, the US government in Everett’s novel has declared war on the Plata Indians; a war characterized by an extraordinary callousness. The government might not contaminate the environment *in order to* kill Native Americans, but their death is tacitly accepted as insignificant collateral damage. And while we do not find an environmental justice battle in the many flashbacks to Robert Hawks’s youth as a black boy in Denver, the unbridled violence of American police officers that we encounter there is just another expression of the same ideology of racism.³

Hawks learns to understand this continuity in the course of the novel. His scientific and personal connectedness to the Plata mountain range and his experiences with individual Plata Indians slowly erode his detached attitude. The title of Everett’s novel thus points toward two inseparable and interrelated forms of watershed. One is geological, the other personal. It is through his experiences with the land and the people that live on it that Hawks arrives at his personal, life-changing watershed moment. When he finally discovers

2 Daniel Brook goes so far as to call the injustices imposed on Native Americans “environmental genocide” (“Environmental Genocide: Native Americans and Toxic Waste”). Other discussions of environmental inequity in relation to Native Americans include: Jace Weaver’s *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996); Gail Small’s “Environmental Justice in Indian Country” (*Amicus Journal* (1994): 38-40); and Kristin Shrader-Frechette’s *Environmental Justice: Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005).

3 As Kate Berry reminds us in “Race for Water” (1998), “using the term race in conjunction with Native Americans seems inappropriate to many scholars, and, more particularly, to the many Native Americans who do not consider themselves to be a racial minority . . . The connection is with a particular band, community, tribe, or nation of origin, not with a generalized racial group” (102). However, I share Berry’s insistence that despite this fact “the impact of race . . . cannot be easily brushed away” (102). Rather, when approaching the issue of environmental justice, we must recognize “the significance of race as an idea around which social action and political practices are organized,” particularly in the US (Berry 102-03). Historically, race and racism as ideas and ideologies have definitely informed and continue to inform the environmental injustices imposed on Native Americans, without much regard for their own self-understanding.

the dam that has been secretly built high up on the mountain to divert the poisoned water into the reservation, the monstrosity of that fact fills him with a rage so deep that he cannot help but follow in the footsteps of his grandfather, a committed civil rights activist who was willing to risk his life for his beliefs. Unlike his grandfather, however, Hawks engages himself on behalf of an ethnic community that is not his own, supporting a group of Native Americans in their struggle against environmental racism. The story of the unwilling environmental justice activist, whose fear, weakness, and tremendous courage make him so refreshingly human, thus shows some remarkable parallels to the history of the multifaceted environmental justice movement as a whole. After all, Robert Bullard and many other influential scholars in the field understand the movement as a continuation or renaissance of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and '70s, a renaissance that, in spite of its inevitable shortcomings, aims to transcend both ethnic and other boundaries in order to fight for a common social and ecological agenda.

Watershed does not pretend that such a common fight is easy or natural. As Lawrence Buell points out, Everett successfully avoids “simplistic polarizations of citizens and authorities . . . as well as simplistic conflation of nonwhites” (257)—a fact that has also impressed Native American writer Sherman Alexie. In his introduction to *Watershed*, Alexie writes that he “used to believe that only Native American writers should write about Native Americans” (vii)—only to explain in what follows how reading Everett’s novel changed his mind in this regard. “In *Watershed*,” Alexie claims, “Percival Everett portrays African-American and Native American characters that are startlingly original and eccentric” (x), and he lauds the novel for its complex and ambiguous portrayal of *all* of its characters, be they white, black, or Native American. There are no easy or natural alliances in the novel, either in the personal or in the political realm, and Lawrence Buell is right when he insists that “it is the environmental factor that finally brings folks of opposite backgrounds together” (258). The natural environment of the fictional Plata mountain range, and the water that flows through it, is what connects all of the novel’s protagonists—friends, allies, and enemies. And it is Robert Hawks’s deep understanding of this natural environment, and the various actors that interact with it, that in the end forces him to choose sides and to put his scientific knowledge of the mountain and its aquifer to a new—and now political—use.

Reading *Watershed* as an Environmental Novel

African American writers are not generally considered prime producers of environmental fiction. As Kimberley Smith points out in *African American*

Environmental Thought (2007), people tend to assume that “250 years of slavery would have left black Americans permanently alienated from the American landscape” (1). However, the fact that African Americans developed their relationship to the natural environment of the United States in very peculiar circumstances does not mean that this relationship is non-existent, unimportant, or meaningless. The particular strength of black environmental thought, Smith argues, lies in its interest in the question of “how humans’ relationship to the environment is affected—and often distorted—by racially oppressive political, social, and legal institutions and practices” (6). The opposite is true also. Not only do racially oppressive practices shape humans’ relationship to the environment, but, as Ian Finseth reminds us in *Shades of Green* (2009), “racial subjectivity matters to how human beings perceive, narrate, and interact with nature” (12). Finseth insists that “when we talk of the ‘culturally constructed’ status of nature, we need to remain keenly aware of how the racial dimension of ‘culture,’ as lived individually, enters into the equation” (13-14). People of different racial and ethnic backgrounds and with differing histories, values, and experiences will likely construct nature in very different ways.

In certain ways, Percival Everett further complicates the issue. Not only does he resist categorization as an *African American* writer (he wants to be considered an American writer with no ethnic labels attached); in his novels he also often insists on the fluidity and indeterminacy of race, confronting his audience with characters who defy racial stereotyping and broad generalizations. *Watershed* is a particularly fascinating text in this regard because it undermines the long-accepted dichotomy between black urbanism and Indian closeness to “nature,” confronting us with a black protagonist who is familiar with both city and country and with young American Indians who have no sense of place on the land of their elders and who know very little about the natural environment. Hawks lives in the urban space of Denver and works at a university, but he is also very familiar with the Plata mountain range, where he has conducted much of his scientific research on aquifers and groundwater flow. As a scientist, he interacts at least on one level with the natural environment in the objectifying way that we consider typical of (white) Western science. However, he also has an affective relationship to the mountains. In a Thoreauvian manner, he loves to live alone in his little cabin in the woods, spending his time fishing and thinking. On the other hand, many of the younger Plata Indians Hawks meets in the course of the story have not grown up in the reservation and in close proximity with their ancestral lands, but in Los Angeles or other big cities. They are quite familiar with urban spaces but they know nothing of Plata mountain, and they thus depend on the by far superior knowledge of the black man Hawks.

Watershed thus collapses accepted preconceptions of African American and Native American relationships to “nature” and forces us to reconsider “racial” subjectivity in the interaction with the natural environment.

Interestingly, despite Everett’s resistance to racial stereotyping when it comes to his characters’ relation to nature, his protagonist’s personal journey in the novel fits surprisingly well into the “recurring pattern” that Ian Finseth has detected in 19th-century African American novels that include a temporary retreat of the main character into nature. Finseth observes in these 19th-century texts the following development:

a remove from culture to nature that interrupts the flow of daily existence; an intimate sensory encounter of the perceiving mind with its natural surroundings; the stimulation of self-reflective awareness, particularly of the personal past and future; the reevaluation of social relations and social knowledge prompted by the irrealization of the ordinary; and then the individual’s turn to the cultural sphere, but in a shifted relation to it. (20)

We will see that Hawks’s personal journey indeed passes through all of these stages (and in this order), even as the complex structure of *Watershed* makes it difficult to decide precisely when and where the story truly “begins.” We will also see, however, that in this regard, too, Everett complicates things. Not only are the relationships between racialized humans and nature different from what we might have expected—the space of nature *itself* turns out to be no pristine wilderness but instead a realm that has been historically shaped and continues to be shaped (and destroyed) by human interaction and manipulation.

The story, in fact, begins with its ending. Claiming that “my blood is my own and my name is Robert Hawks,” the first-person narrator informs us that he is “sitting on a painted green wooden bench in a small Episcopal church on the Northern edge of the Plata Indian Reservation, holding in my hands a Vietnam-era M-16” (1). With him in the church are “seven other armed people,” all of them Native Americans, as well as two FBI agents—one of them dead, the other still alive (1). Outside are “two hundred and fifty police” (1). This, we realize after reading through the whole novel, is already the result of the choices that Hawks is going to make in the course of the story. These choices lead him not only to become involved in an environmental struggle against the US government; they also force him into an armed confrontation with the American police. Interestingly, the shootout in the reservation church is also

the moment in which Hawks decides that he must tell the story to the public, “my own incriminations aside,” because “there is no one else in whom I place sufficient trust to attempt a fair representation of the events” (2). His storytelling thus becomes a political act. Hawks not only ends up risking his life to get the evidence of environmental crime to the authorities; his personal engagement is also evident in the fact that he feels committed to let the rest of the world know what is *really* happening on Plata mountain.

Even before being presented with the moral choices that result from the events in the story to be told, however, the reader is confronted with the presumably non-fictional statement that “landscapes evolve sequentially”—the first sentence of the novel—followed by a brief excerpt from a 1873 text by Edward Parmele Smith which claims that “such an event as a general Indian war can never occur in the United States” (1). Such fictional and non-fictional fragments frequently interrupt and in obscure ways comment on Hawks’s first-person narration. They include excerpts from historical treaties, fictional police and medical reports, as well as Hawks’s scientific reports on the watershed of Plata Mountain. In addition, Hawks includes at irregular intervals flashbacks to his own past as a black boy in Denver and to events in the city that immediately preceded his arrival in the mountains. Out of this complicated structure, a narrative emerges that gives us glimpses into Hawks’s personal history and psyche. As a boy, he immensely admired his father and grandfather—both committed civil rights activists—but he also learned about the bitter consequences of their engagements in a profoundly racialized society. We learn that the marriages of both father and grandfather failed, and that Hawks’s grandfather killed himself after he lost his license to practice medicine as a result of his political activism.

These traumatic experiences have left a deep impression on Hawks. Not only has he become a man who is incapable of committing himself in a romantic relationship, he also declares that he does not “believe in race” or “America” and is not interested in racial politics (153). As a result of his childhood experiences in a racialized society, Hawks has become a deeply antisocial and disconnected person, and we learn that he has chosen the profession of a hydrologist not least because he believes it to be thoroughly apolitical and disinterested. Considering himself “an objective, hired gun” (152), he claims that he puts his scientific knowledge into the service of whoever pays his salary.

This, more or less, is Hawks’s situation when he enters stage one of the pattern that Finseth is suggesting: “a remove from culture to nature that interrupts the flow of daily existence” (21). We learn that Hawks frequently retreats to his cabin in the mountains when he has had enough of the city and

other people. This time, he has even taken a leave of absence at the university, and he is planning to spend it alone in the wintery woods. When his girlfriend Karen, with whom he is leading a troubled on-and-off relationship, accuses him of wanting to get away from her, he calmly responds that he only wants “to go fishing. I like fishing. It relaxes me” (5). His remove from the “cultural realm” of Denver to the “natural realm” of Plata Mountain indeed does interrupt the flow of his daily existence, if only for a time. And he also soon experiences an “intimate sensory encounter . . . with [his] natural surroundings” (Finseth 20), enjoying the fishing and somewhat less enjoying the patching of his cabin’s flimsy roof when snow begins to fall.

However, this solitary retreat into nature does not last very long. Soon the scene gets crowded with all kinds of people, and Hawks is forced to realize that the ecological space of Plata Mountain is neither lonesome nor peaceful. He first meets Louise Small Calf, a dwarfish Plata Indian woman who fixes his broken truck and hitches a ride to the nearby lake, and who later in the same night shows up half-frozen at the door of his cabin with no explanation of her actions in the meantime. Next, Hawks is confronted with the news that two FBI agents have been found dead in the lake and a number of state officials—local police, state police, and the FBI—turn up at his door, all asking questions about Louise. Hawks, the disinterested scientist in his nature retreat, *lies* to all of them. He protects Louise from the investigators but insists that he does not really know why he is doing so. However, despite his professed unwillingness to engage with racial or political issues of any kind, his curiosity about Louise and her culture leads him deeper into her world than he first admits to himself. Before he knows it, he begins to *care* about the Plata Indians he meets, and—as it tends to be in life—the more he cares the more he gets involved. He not only drives Louise’s mother—who is sick with a mysterious disease that might or might not be related to environmental hazards—to the local hospital; he also is invited to and attends a peyote ceremony of the Native American Church. His fascination with the Plata Indians only deepens once he learns that they are involved in a violent environmental justice struggle against the American government.

Resisting Environmental Racism

Louise and several other Plata Indians whom Hawks meets through her are members of a militant group called the “American Indian Revolution” (AIR), which is trying to prove that the American government is—deliberately or through callous negligence—contaminating Plata land and killing Plata people. The name American Indian Revolution, the personal background of their leader Tyrone Bisset, and the big shootout in an Indian reservation spark—

perhaps not entirely unintentionally—associations to the historical American Indian Movement (AIM) and its eventful history.⁴ William Handley maintains that *Watershed* “is a novel in which history weighs heavily” (305) and this certainly is true. Sherman Alexie explains in his introduction to the novel that “Everett fictionalizes the 1970s political battles on the Lakota Sioux Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, combines them with fictional and real events during the 1960s civil rights battles for African Americans, and sets it all on a contemporary and fictional Indian reservation” (ix-x). Everett himself, of course, writes in the Acknowledgements section of his book that “the Plata Reservation and the Plata Nation presented in this work are fictitious and are meant to bear no direct or indirect resemblance to any existing place or people” (202). However, reading Alexie’s introduction one shares Handley’s suspicion about whether one “should believe Everett’s claim that the Plata Indians do not even bear an indirect resemblance to any people” (307). In fact, interested readers will not only detect parallels to the 1973 Wounded Knee Incident and the 1975 Pine Ridge Shootout—both sited in the South Dakota Pine Ridge Reservation—they will also be able to locate the La Plata Mountain on a Colorado map.⁵

Yet given Everett’s insistence that both the characters and the landscape of his tale are “complete fiction,” it seems fair to simply take note of such parallels and approach the narrative on its own terms. And in *Watershed*, the escalating conflict between Native Americans and US Government agents centers exclusively on an environmental assault on the lives of the Plata Indians—an assault that has been planned and effected by the American military-industrial complex.

4 Tyrone Bisset, as Hawks remembers not without awe when first meeting him, has “been tried for the murders of yet two other FBI men on the Cold Deer Reservation in South Dakota,” but not convicted, because “much of the evidence of the government turned out to be fabricated or altered” (133-34). Despite his acquittal, however, Hawks believes Bisset is “still a fugitive” (134), a man hunted by the American government.

5 During the 1973 Wounded Knee Incident, followers of the American Indian Movement occupied the town of the same name in the Pine Ridge Reservation in protest against the US government. The occupation led to a 71-day standoff with US Marshals, the FBI and other law enforcement agencies, until the AIM activists finally surrendered. The 1975 Pine Ridge Shootout refers to another armed confrontation between AIM activists and the FBI, one that cost the lives of two FBI agents and one AIM activist. The subsequent investigation led to the arrest of three Native Americans suspected to have been involved in the shootout. Two of them were acquitted, one of them, Leonard Peltier, was convicted. The evidence used for Peltier’s conviction, however, remains the subject of much controversy to this day. In his acknowledgements, Everett thanks Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, the authors of *Agents of Repression: The FBI’s Secret Wars against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* for sending him “some documents I found helpful.”

While the events in the novel might be pure fiction, the environmental hazards generated by military sites which American Indian communities are exposed to are far from fictitious. Sociologists Gregory Hooks and Chad Smith state in a 2004 article that “the geopolitical demands of the world’s remaining leading military power pushed the United States to produce, test, and deploy weapons of unprecedented toxicity” (558), and that it is particularly Native American lands, “which are positively associated with the count of extremely dangerous sites” (567).⁶ The US military, Hooks and Smith argue, has “systematically used and damaged Native American lands” (563), in their choices of location for dangerous military facilities.⁷ In *Watershed*, it is also the US military and not a privately-owned company that stands behind the environmental assault on the Plata people. The American government, Tyrone Bisset explains to Hawks, at some point in the past purchased biological bombs containing anthrax from the British military, which had tested them in the Scottish Gruinard Bay with disastrous results. Ever since, the US army “has been illegally storing anthrax bombs and other kinds of biochemical agents [in underground tanks] on the north end of the reservation . . . Any leaks would be carried by the groundwater . . . right into the Plata or down the Dog into the lake, or simply into the aquifer” (140). As Hawks soon discovers, such a leak exists and is leaking anthrax and/or other extremely dangerous contaminants into the groundwater and thus into the creek that flows through the Plata Reservation.

Based on the risk assessment code (RAC) assigned by the Army Corps of Engineers, the hazard severity of the case portrayed in *Watershed* would have to

6 Glossing the well-known concept of the capitalist “treadmill of production,” Hooks and Smith coin the term of a state-supported “treadmill of destruction,” which, in their view, better defines the kinds of mechanisms that tend to bring toxic waste sites in close proximity to Native American homes. Native Americans, the two authors explain, did after all “not ‘choose’ the location of reservations in the context of the markets,” and “many of the toxic wastes are generated by the military (not private firms)” (559).

7 Throughout the 19th century, the authors explain, the government sold large pieces of land to white settlers and businessmen or donated it to railroad companies. In the end, the land that remained federal property tended to be in the least attractive or exploitable parts of the western states—and often in close proximity to the similarly disadvantaged Indian reservations. This remaining federal land was where the steadily growing military complex built its facilities, where it stored and tested its new and increasingly toxic munitions—including nuclear, chemical and biological weapons (see Hooks and Smith 563-64). As a result, military-owned hazardous storage and waste sites tended to be—and still tend to be—next to the homes of Native Americans.

be classified as “catastrophic”—the worst case scenario in this code.⁸ But while the potentially “catastrophic” drainage in *Watershed* would call for immediate intervention by the American government to prevent the worst, its intervention is limited to the diverting of the contaminated water in a way that it will *only* affect American Indians. The perfidy and deliberateness of this particular plan is, of course, a creation of Everett’s imagination. However, the American reality is not far off: As Hooks and Smith point out, we can read in the *Fiscal Year 2001 Defense Environmental Quality Program Annual Report to Congress* that “sites on Indian land often receive low relative-risk scores, which means that cleanup at these sites may be deferred for many years.”⁹ The real-life callousness and indifference, then, is not necessarily too far removed from the perfidious plan executed in Everett’s novel. In *Watershed*, Hawks is deeply affected by this assault on the natural space of Plata Mountain *and* on the lives of a discriminated minority. This, in turn, forces him to make a decision about the level of his own engagement.

From Scientific “Disinterestedness” to Personal and Political Action

As a hydrologist, Hawks cannot help but be aware of at least that part of Native American environmental struggle that concerns water. Even before he becomes personally involved with the Plata Indians, his profession necessitates such knowledge. Early on in the novel, Hawks is confronted with two drunk and aggressive farmers who want to know from him, the expert, “whose water” it is (30). Hawks, clinging to his long-cultivated disinterest, first takes refuge in claiming that he “only stud[ies] water” and that he does not “know whose it is” (30). But, insisting that he *must* have an opinion, one of the men keeps pushing the issue:

“Them Injuns, they just want all the water for themselves,”
he said, “they’re just fuckin’ greedy.”

“Well,” I said, “what they want it for won’t use it all up
either. Seems to me there’s a lot of water. Besides, the
treaty says it’s theirs. They were here first.” (30)

Here it becomes clear that Hawks knows exactly *whose water* it is. He is familiar with American water law in the arid West of the country, which—following for historical reasons Spanish (and essentially Moroccan) water law—adheres

8 US Army Corps of Engineers 2000: Appendix B.

9 US Department of Defense. “American Indian and Alaska Native Initiatives.” *Fiscal Year 2001 Defense Environmental Quality Program Annual Report*, quoted in Hooks and Smith, 566.

to the “doctrine of prior appropriation.”¹⁰ This principle, explains Native American Studies expert Jace Weaver, “creates a hierarchy of users based upon the date each first began to first withdraw water from a given source. Those that are first in time are first in right” (85). The priority dates assigned to Indian tribes “was the date when the reservation first came into being, thus effectively ranking Natives first in this hierarchy of appropriators” (Weaver 86). However, this does not mean that Indian American ownership of water rights remained uncontested. “The fight for water rights,” Phyllis Young points out in “Beyond the Waterline,” “is an ongoing struggle for Indian people all over the Americas” (88). Because of the scarcity of water in the western United States, there have been countless attempts to take away the old rights of Indian tribes.

Hawks, in talking to the two farmers, shows not only his awareness of American water rights per se, his impatience indicates that he is also aware of the Native American struggle for those rights. His interlocutors sense this, too. “See, I knew you had an opinion,” one of the men says and seems almost satisfied. “You’re on their side.” “If I have to be on a side,” Hawks answers calmly, “I guess it won’t be yours” (30). If pressed to take sides, he chooses the side of the Native Americans, although he knows nothing yet of what the government is doing on Plata Mountain. Why he does so is not further explained, and it is particularly unclear to Hawks himself, who throughout the majority of the story keeps wondering why he is doing the things he is doing. In the end, however, he has to admit to himself that his “desire to know” what is going on on Plata Mountain has become much more than simple curiosity. Driven “by a longstanding, unanswered, personal quest to understand my grandfather” (153), the man who did not hesitate to sacrifice his license to practice medicine in order to help a shot civil rights activist, Hawks finds out what it means to care about and fight for the lives of other people. Also, he recognizes important parallels between African American and Native American histories of abuse. Louise, Tyrone Bisset, and the other members of the AIR are not, in Hawks’s eyes, criminals, even though Bisset has been accused of murder. He sees them as members of an oppressed and discriminated community who fight against an overpowering opponent for their environmental rights and their very lives, and he wants to protect and help them.

10 The water law east of the hundredth meridian in the US is, we learn from Weaver “borrowed from England. The governing principle is one of riparian rights. Simply stated, whoever owns land adjacent to a stream or lake is entitled to the reasonable use of water from it as long as it does not interfere with the rights of other riparian uses. The right runs with the land and may not be sold separate from it” (Weaver 85).

Only after Hawks has confessed his solidarity and sympathy with the Indians do we learn that the two murdered FBI men in Plata Lake were in fact not killed by the AIR, and that the agents were actually allies trying to help the Indians to find out what was happening on the mountain. Almost too appropriately, one of the helpful agents “was an Indian, the other was black” (147), suggesting an interracial alliance between African and Native Americans in this fight against environmental racism. This, of course, casts a different light on the question of who is behind the murders. It slowly dawns on Hawks that the American government might be involved in this, too. He decides to grant the AIR the favor they have asked of him: to help Dicky Kills Enemy, who, as a Plata Indian, “doesn’t even know the mountain” (148), because he grew up in Los Angeles, climb up to find out what, exactly, the government has been doing there. Hawks, as Leland Krauth puts it, “knows the mountain. He has mapped it, fished it, traversed it, photographed it, and analyzed it scientifically” (323). Getting to know the Plata Indians, however, and their uneven struggle against the American government, puts his knowledge into an entirely different perspective—and he accordingly puts it to a new use. He feverishly re-reads his own work on the Plata Mountain drainage and realizes that the flow of one creek has been strangely diminishing while at the same time the flow of another creek—which leads directly into the reservation—has been unusually high, although both are fed by the same aquifer. Determined to find the reason for this inexplicable phenomenon, Hawks climbs the mountain in the middle of a major blizzard. There, he finds the answer to his question: “in the middle of Dog Creek was a dam, a real honest-to-goodness poured-concrete dam” (167) as well as a professionally built pipeline that drains the poisoned waters into the creek that leads into the Plata Reservation.

This is the watershed moment in Hawks’s life. When soon after Louise, Bisset and the others are trapped in the reservation church, it is he who leads the food transport across the mountain. It is also he who in the end crawls through a—perhaps contaminated—irrigation ditch to bring a roll of film to the Naturalist’s Conservancy which will prove the government’s illegal and murderous practices and thus help the Plata Indians in their fight against environmental injustice. Despite its postmodern, experimental form *Watershed* thus ends in the way that Finseth sees as typical for the 19th century African American novel: “the individual’s return to the cultural sphere, but in a shifted relation to it” (20). Hawks is transformed as a result of his sojourn into the natural environment of Plata Mountain. His time “away” has profoundly changed him and his relation to the world. It is important to note, though, that in Everett’s novel “nature” is at no point the remote wilderness that Hawks initially constructs for himself. This,

too, is something that Hawks learns as a result of his experience in and with this environment. The peaceful wilderness he was seeking does not exist in the mountains north of Denver. Instead, this environment has for centuries been the site of environmental, political, and social struggle between Native Americans and the US government. This particular realm of American “nature,” then, never has been outside of American culture and politics, and it thus cannot provide an escape from it.

Everett goes even further, however, in his depiction of the Plata Mountain environment and the people who interact with it. Finseth reminds us that “the natural world . . . functions as both agent and slate in the creation of meaning, and this meaning binds all the qualities of personal experience (memory, desire, pain, curiosity, need) to the larger, social, ethical, and ideological contexts in which the individual lives” (21). In *Watershed*, the natural world is of central importance in the creation of meaning, and it brings together people with very different histories and cultures. “My mother is as much part of this land as Silly Man Creek,” explains Louise at some point the close connectedness of the older Plata generation to the natural environment, “our way tells us that when the river dies, so will our people” (18). Hawks learns to accept this truth as a result of his experiences. His own and the Plata Indians’ relationship to Plata Mountain are profoundly different, and yet it is their common relationship to the mountain, and their respective knowledge of it, that eventually brings them together in a common political struggle. If the charismatic Hiram Kills Enemy asks Hawks provocatively whether he is “a Buffalo soldier” (35) when they first meet on the reservation—referring to the black soldiers who fought Indian tribes for the American government in the second half of the 19th century—this distrust is overcome when they fight side by side against environmental racism. It is their common relationship to and embeddedness in a particular natural environment that helps them to arrive at a common understanding and a common political cause.

Thus, in *Watershed*, not only does “the desire to know more [become] a historical quest that leads Everett’s narrator . . . to discern the connections and differences between African- and Native American experience under American colonialism” (305), as William Handley notes; it also emphasizes the continuity between the civil rights struggle and the environmental justice movement that Robert Bullard and other influential scholars in the field see. After all, as Bullard reminds us, Martin Luther King—who figures prominently in Hawks’s memories—was “on an environmental and economic justice mission for the striking black garbage workers” of Memphis when he was assassinated in 1968

(Bullard 151). The environmental justice movement, as Martin Melosi and many other scholars in the field acknowledge, has “its historic roots in civil rights activism” (Melosi 5), and while, as Melosi also points out, there has been a significant amount of tension between environmental justice advocates and traditional environmentalists, the movements have increasingly attempted to find common ground in recent years. Today, major national and international efforts are in progress to synchronize the activities of various environmental justice groups from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

In a way, the story of Robert Hawks parallels this development. Where Hawks’s father and grandfather stand for the civil rights movement of the 1960s, he himself seems to stand for the continuation and transformation of that movement in the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century. “Race still matters,” argues Robert Bullard in his 2001 article on environmental justice; and it does for the very same reasons it matters for Hawks in the novel, despite his refusal to believe in the concept. But that does not mean that one should not continue to aim to transcend the restrictions of race-thinking in a consolidated action on behalf of social and environmental justice. This is what also Sherman Alexie seems to have learned when reading Everett’s novel. If he starts his introduction with his well-known statement that “only Native American writers should write about Native Americans” (vii), he ends it by criticizing his own essentialism in this regard, wondering whether he should “care about the identity of the people who write great and challenging books about Indians” (xii). He lauds Everett for making him “doubt [his] closely held beliefs” and forcing him “to look at the world in new ways” (xii). *Watershed* challenges such closely held beliefs, not only about authorial authority, but also about the relationship between race, ethnicity, and the natural environment, and their role in American history and present-day society. In the novel, the protagonist learns to understand this complexity and acts accordingly. Whether this is meant to be a call to political action can only be decided by the individual reader when looking at his or her current environment.

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**L.A. and T.J.: Immigration, Globalization, and Environmental Justice
in *Tropic of Orange* and *Sleep Dealer***

Yanoula Athanassakis

*all 2,000 miles of the frontier
stretched across from Tijuana on the Pacific,
.
to the end of its tail
on the Gulf of México.
It waited with seismic sensors and thermal imaging,
with la pinche migra,
. . . with coyotes, pateros, cholos,
steel structures, barbed wire, infrared binoculars,
INS detention centers, border patrols, rape,
.
the deportation of 400,000 Mexican
citizens in 1932,
coaxing back of 2.2 million
braceros in 1942
only to exile the same 2.2 million
wetbacks in 1953.*

—Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (197-98)

In the epigraph above from Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997), the narrator dramatizes the past and present tension between the United States and Mexico and depicts the US-Mexico divide as a threat of "barbed wire" and "thermal imaging" lying in wait to detain and violate illegal immigrants. The 2,000 miles of the "frontier" are a combination of land, water, and air—yet the narrator focuses on the "steel structures" of "barbed wire" that have now become synonymous with media images of the border region. Multinational corporations in search of cheap labor have long looked to Tijuana as a source of profit and

unregulated business practices.¹ By putting Alex Rivera's sci-fi film *Sleep Dealer* (2008) in dialogue with Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, I examine literary and visual manifestations of natural resources and the manner in which national and cultural boundaries are violently mapped onto them.² In the connective tissue between *Tropic of Orange* and *Sleep Dealer* there is a shift in concern over how environmental degradation and corporate greed manifest themselves on the US-Mexico border regions.

Filmic and literary representations of nature against the backdrop of post-9/11 US politics of national security and globalization reveal that the fluid mediums of water and air defy the logic of "uniform" borders and corporatization. Taken together, *Tropic of Orange* and *Sleep Dealer* confront the very real issues of such things as NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) and the Department of Homeland Security's continued efforts to build a US-Mexico wall. Founded in 2002, the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was established as a response to September 11th and one of the stated purposes of "Operation Gatekeeper" is to enhance the militarization and materiality of the US-Mexico border; it serves as a further recourse to what former President G. W. Bush referred to as the "confusing patchwork" of US governmental structures and aims to both metaphorically and tangibly construct a "uniform" barrier.³ Although Operation Gatekeeper was created under the Clinton administration

1 A recent film of interest addressing the infamous labor practices of the maquiladora factories in Tijuana is *Maquilapolis* (2006). Based on principles of community-driven activism and environmental justice, this film addresses many of the issues broached in both *Sleep Dealer* and *Tropic of Orange*.

2 I thank Carl Gutiérrez-Jones for pointing me towards *Sleep Dealer*.

3 One of the DHS's main aims is to "protect our homeland" by restructuring governmental agencies from a "confusing patchwork" to a uniform entity (Bush). US-based Global Security claims to be the "leading" source of non-government sponsored information on US security. Its experts point to forty tunnels discovered after 9/11 running underneath US-Mexico fences as a major threat to national security: "Large-scale smuggling of drugs, weapons, and immigrants takes place today through these tunnels" ("Homeland Security"). Particularly interesting is the conflation of America's global "War on Terror" with the issue of illegal immigration. Global Security describes one such half-mile tunnel from San Diego to Tijuana of "inordinate sophistication," purportedly 60-80 feet deep: "It was wired for electricity . . . a very modern warehouse . . . there was a hatch in the floor . . . like the hatch which Saddam had secreted himself in." US legislation reflects the crescendo of anxiety as both opponents and supporters of immigrant rights officially express a fear of vulnerable and unsurveyable borderlands. Global Security is by no means an unbiased source of information but its prominence as an influential media outlet is undeniable. Founded by John Pike in 2000, it survives on advertising income and caters to news reporters. Most important for my purposes is that it presents Operation Gatekeeper as a necessary recourse to ease anxieties over terrorism.

by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in 1994, the Department of Homeland Security's stated reasons for its maintenance is to protect American citizens from illegal "aliens" and anti-American "terrorists."⁴ In *Sleep Dealer's* post-9/11 future, the imbalance of power in transnational exchanges is symbolized by a dam but the battle over pollution and water rights is cloaked in the garb of US national security and anti-immigration policy.

Environmental justice activism has long pointed to the absurdity of national boundaries as they alternately claim and mine resources while disclaiming and disowning the resulting issues of human rights violations and toxic dumping. Immediately preceding the epigraph at the beginning of this article Yamashita's narrator describes how Arcangel—the 500-year-old pseudo-mythological figure fighting against past and present oppressions south of the border—drags a broken-down bus on his back and with it the Tropic of Cancer. The cables hook into his battered flesh, he bleeds into the earth, and he slowly pulls the bus along like "the burden of gigantic wings, too heavy to fly" (197). The narrator states that this "superhuman" feat, as sensational as it is, can only be understood by those present: "The virtually real could not accommodate the magical. Digital memory failed to translate imaginary memory . . . it could not be recognized on a tube, no matter how big or how highly defined. In other words, to see it, you had to be there yourself." The text then shifts to the italicized free verse previously excerpted: "*all 2,000 miles of the frontier / stretched across from Tijuana on the Pacific . . .*" (197). The self-anointed messiah of the oppressed, Arcangel's thoughts may very well be those expressed in the free verse interrupting the prose but Yamashita's narrative strategy leaves it ambiguous as to whether these are collective or singular musings in speech or thought.

The "New World Border" (the narrator's play on "New World Order") and Arcangel's superhuman strength cannot be recorded into anything but human memory in the immediate proximity; yet Yamashita's splicing of digitally-inspired prose, poetry, and the manner in which she organizes the "grid" of her novel all contribute to the reader's experience of disorientation and thorough blurring of fiction and fact. "In other words," to quote Yamashita, you—the reader—are there experiencing the catastrophic effects of free trade and globalization, you are there trying to keep track of "the frontier" and the "end of its tail" and the "deportation" of human flesh in 1932 (under Depression-era anti-immigration raids) and the "coaxing back" in 1942 (the "Bracero Program") and the "exile"

4 Please see George W. Bush's posted statement, "Proposal to Create the Department of Homeland Security."

of the “same 2.2 million / wetbacks in 1953” (INS’s “Operation Wetback”).⁵ Moral ambiguities abound as the reader is also coaxed back and forth between the familiar and the bizarre, the “real” and the surreal. Yamashita creates a discursive space in which one can begin to imagine the ethical complexities of border control. Just as the “frontier” snakes back and forth as a terrible animal of biometric tools and violence, so too Yamashita presents her characters in such diverse ways that it becomes impossible to define them as one thing or another; through both form and content she pushes the borders of the reader’s imagination to *re-imagine* his ideas of citizenship and human rights. *Sleep Dealer* and *Tropic of Orange* effectively challenge Yamashita’s narrator’s statement that experiential knowledge is the only effective mode of knowledge acquisition; in fact, “the virtually real” scopic regime of *Sleep Dealer* and the textual pastiche of *Tropic of Orange* deftly confront issues of biopolitical violence and environmental injustices on the US-Mexico border. Rivera’s post-9/11 discourse on US security reveals the “steel structures, barbed wire” and “infrared binoculars” in Yamashita to be the thinly-veiled machinations of corporate greed as it divvies up natural resources in contested territory.

Environmental Justice and Ecocriticism

The gendered and nationally-inflected war over the natural resources of water (in *Sleep Dealer*), fruit, and human organs (in *Tropic of Orange*) is synecdochic of the ecological destruction inherent in rampant—markedly American—global capitalism. Gendered violence traverses borders as a result of rapid economic growth and encapsulates contested geopolitical issues of ownership, immigration, and “Third World” labor rights. *Sleep Dealer* and *Tropic of Orange* foreground the biopolitical violence that accompanies contemporary restrictions of global capital; not only its appropriation of natural resources, but also the expropriation of bodies, organs, blood, and tissue. Environmental justice activists would argue, as does Vandana Shiva, that the “enclosure of the commons” benefits the rich and harms the poor (53). The “commons” as Shiva terms them are those things which should belong to all people equally: the earth’s resources. Ecocriticism, or the study of literature of the environment and of literature linking humans to their physical surroundings, is increasingly overlapping with issues of environmental justice. Spurred by the civil rights movement and Rachel Carson’s foundational *Silent Spring* (1962), environmental justice activism draws attention to the often concurrent exploitation of nature

5 For more on immigration law please see Calavita’s “U.S. Immigration and Policy Responses,” and Massey, Durand, and Malone, “System Assembly: A History of Mexico-US Migration.”

and humans and to the accompanying intersections of race, class, and gender.⁶ The interlocking nature of ecocriticism and environmental justice has become so prominent that environmental critic Lawrence Buell refers to it as part of the “second wave” of interest from the field. The first wave, offers Buell, was more narrow-minded and hierarchical in its extension of romanticized idealizations of true natural beauty; the revisionist second wave draws attention to the manner in which urban decay and sprawling technopoles have forced us to face the socially-constructed and permeable membranes between man and nature (22-23). In part responding to the work of international activism and grassroots movements like those led by Vandana Shiva and Ken Saro-Wiwa, second wave ecocriticism has expanded and further explored, as Buell notes, the “organicist models” of the environment (21).⁷

Although the importance of nature and place to the construction of multi-ethnic identity is fundamental, within the United States the green movement has by and large been received as virtually white.⁸ In a prescient and galvanizing call for inquiry, Cheryll Glotfelty wonders, “Where are the other voices?” (xxv). Second-wave ecocriticism—with its increased attention to environmental justice—works against monolithic configurations of nature and, Buell adds, stands as a “critique of the demographic homogeneity of traditional environmental movements and academic environmental studies” (115).⁹ Indeed, Buell’s breakdown of first and second wave ecocriticism implicitly suggests that there might be more waves to come.

6 Please see the co-authored introduction to *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy* (Adamson, Evans, and Stein). For the connection between ecocriticism and race please refer to Joan Martínez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor* (172).

7 Please see Susan Comfort on Ken Saro-Wiwa and Rob Nixon, “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism.” For more on the intersections between postcolonial studies and ecocriticism, see Dominic Head’s “The (im)possibility of Ecocriticism.”

8 Alison H. Deming and Lauret E. Savoy’s *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World* (2002) has seventeen personal essays by multiethnic American authors explaining how the natural world was fundamental to the shaping of their identities. Please also see Greta Gaard, “Women, Water, Energy: An Ecofeminist Approach” (especially pages 160-64).

9 To be clear the “green movement” has taken different forms around the world. Because the two works I treat here are in large part focused on US-Mexico relations and US attitudes I am speaking of the environmental justice movement within the United States. Please see Ursula Heise’s cogent critique of the lack of a “transnational” turn in environmental studies and US environmental justice; also see Greg Garrard on the localism of ecocriticism as a field (178).

In response to Glotfelty's call in 1996 for the evolution of ecocriticism into "a multi-ethnic movement" with a "diversity of voices," we can say that this work has already begun (xxv). In fact, the Spring 2009 issue of *Multi-Ethnic Literature of the US (MELUS)*, taking as its subject "Ethnicity and Ecocriticism" directly addresses such concerns. Co-editors Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic propose a "third wave of ecocriticism, which recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries" (6). Perhaps there is a third wave, or perhaps what we are seeing is a renewed acknowledgement of the inherently *trans*-national and global dimensions of the natural. It existed in Buell's first wave, it is certainly there in the second, and critics are now looking to the relationship between literature and the environment to narrativize and clarify much of what is currently taking place in the United States. In both *Sleep Dealer* and *Tropic of Orange* "natural" elements of the borderlands and land formations function as metaphors for issues of globalization and environmental justice and their attendant gendered implications. The border is portrayed as a US-run entity that absorbs what it needs and rejects what it does not want.

The filmic and literary representations of the border region and its resources focus on the unsustainable model of bartering with nature and the violence involved in the purchase and sale of it (water, oranges, bodies, etc.) The sale of nature is directly and inextricably linked to the rape and death of the most disenfranchised and particularly to the fate of women. In Julie Sze's cogent analysis of environmental justice literature she suggests that *Tropic of Orange* serves as a "case study of how to 'read' environmental justice perspectives" because the "novel's insights about globalization, immigration, and labor highlight how contemporary struggles are linked to the historical exploitation of nature and people of color" ("From Environmental Justice Literature" 163). Sze further highlights Yamashita's linkage between past and present exploitation of natural and human resources by proposing that the abrupt and frequent temporal shifts in *Tropic of Orange* function as a reminder that present-day "corporate domination cannot be separated from historical colonialism" (171). In Yamashita's postindustrial Los Angeles the perils of globalization directly reference a genealogy of colonial violence and exploitation.

L.A., T.J. and Empire

Tropic of Orange takes place over the span of seven days and revolves around the lives of seven characters. At the beginning of the novel Yamashita provides a grid, called "HyperContexts," that maps the characters and events into chapters,

days, and names, mirroring the grid of traffic and flow of products in and out of Los Angeles. Yamashita's choice to entitle her grid "HyperContexts" self-reflexively points to the central role that new forms of media play in a developing global order. The list of characters includes Gabriel Balboa, a Pulitzer-prize seeking newspaper reporter dating Emi, an Asian-American news reporter who continually pushes Gabriel towards new media and whose homeless grandfather (Manzanar) becomes a leading figure as he conducts a symphony of sound amidst the pandemonium of Los Angeles. Gabriel purchases a home in Mexico in an effort to reconnect to his roots and find solace from the fast pace of L.A.; when he finds it difficult to care for the home he lets Rafaela move in with her young son. Rafaela's estranged Chinese-Singaporean husband, Bobby, continues to work in L.A. The two remaining characters are Buzzworm, an African-American grassroots activist and "Arcangel," the symbolic archangel of the people.

Tropic of Orange begins with the image of Rafaela sweeping Gabriel's home in Mexico, trying to cleanse it of the plant and animal life that invades it daily. The natural world in *Tropic of Orange* seems at first displaced in the uber-urban landscape of Los Angeles but it is an unstoppable force in Mexico. Gabriel's house is situated on the Tropic of Cancer, the northernmost point latitudinally reached by the sun. While the Tropic of Cancer is a line that people have understood as separating the North from the South, Yamashita toys with notions of hemispheric lines. Picked from Gabriel's backyard in Mexico, a single orange harbors the loose end of the Tropic of Cancer. As the orange travels north through Mazatlán, it pulls the line with it, and North and South no longer apply as descriptive terms for Mexico and North America. With this change in vocabulary come a whole slew of changes. Arriving in Los Angeles, the Tropic of Cancer brings the warmth, the sun, and the very basics of the hemispheric south that steadily follow the orange's path. In Molly Wallace's trenchant analysis of how the rhetoric of NAFTA touts eventual economic union between the US and Mexico she points to the metaphoric employment of the weather as a rhetorical device to "naturalize capitalism" (145). In her discussion of the *Tropic of Orange* Wallace cites Yamashita as somebody that is not only engaging with the politics of globalization and free trade, but as someone that is looking to the "politics of the discourses" surrounding such phenomena (148). Yamashita's portrayal of Gabriel as a do-gooder is complicated by his relationship to Mexico and the exact politics of discourse to which Wallace refers. As a member of the media Gabriel tries to sort out truth from fiction and he becomes aware of his role in disseminating half-truths—to himself and others—about the state of affairs in Los Angeles and the relationship of California to Mexico.

The irony of Gabriel's colonialist attitudes towards Mexico is only underscored by his family's and friends' suggestion that he buy a house in his real homeland, "East L.A." (224). Describing Gabriel's impulsive desire to buy a house on the Tropic of Cancer in Mexico, the narrator states: "It had begun one summer when Gabriel felt a spontaneous, sudden passion for the acquisition of land, the sensation of a timeless vacation, the erotic tastes of chili pepper and salty breezes, and for Mexico" (5). Although Gabriel is aware of his "romantic" notions of Mexico and what it would mean for him to build a home and decorate it in an "old-fashioned" style, it is not until the end of Yamashita's novel that he begins to synthesize the series of events and his own responsibility in them. When Rafaela barely survives a severe beating and sexual assault, Gabriel returns to Mexico to find her in tatters: "I thought she might fall in love with me but she was only fixing up my house, and I was part of a net of favors and subtle harassments that unconsciously set her up. And she had taken this beating for me. It was my story" (225). Gabriel grows conscious of the "net" of the world, the interwoven manner in which one's actions affect and change the course of events. Similar to the series of events in *Sleep Dealer*, the power of (*super*)natural elements is what ultimately awakens Gabriel's understanding of his global responsibility reaching across national borders.¹⁰

Although the violence against Rafaela's body is most extreme, migrant and immigrant bodies in *Tropic of Orange* all exhibit the fleshly wounds of imperialism. Bobby's body is paid special attention in the novel; it is constantly in motion and he is presented as a cyborgian entity. The description of his flesh is a machinated amalgamation of movement, ceaselessly toiling to make ends meet: "Ever since he's been here, never stopped working. Always working. Washing dishes. Chopping vegetables. Cleaning floors. Cooking hamburgers. Painting walls . . . Recycling aluminum. Recycling cans and glass. Drilling asphalt. Pouring cement. Building up. Tearing down. Fixing up. Cleaning up. Keeping up" (79). The country that offers him political asylum contemporaneously enslaves him into a drone-like existence. In Chapter 34, "Visa Card—Final Destination," Bobby goes to rescue the little girl (Xiayue) who some criminals claim is his niece or distant relative. When Bobby meets her in Mexico he buys two fake passports and tells her to act as his daughter. In order to successfully smuggle her into the US he changes her look: "Get rid of the Chinagirl look . . . Now get her a T-shirt and some jeans and some tennis shoes. Jeans say Levi's. Shoes say Nike. T-shirt

10 Just as Rudy Ramírez realizes that he is responsible for the death of somebody whose life tells a story similar to that of his immigrant parents, so too Gabriel realizes that Rafaela fights for survival against actions like his.

says Malibu. That's it" (203). Treating her like a blank text Bobby encodes her as a little American girl; the "Chinagirl" look signifies production of labor while the American girl look connotes the mindless purchase and consumption of that labor. Bobby and Xiayu "Drag themselves through the slits jus' like any Americanos. Just like Visa cards" (204). Their bodies act as plastic passports to belonging within US borders, and American citizenship is attained through buying power—at the expense of Bobby's humanity. Symbolically completing his transformation from flesh to a worker drone, Bobby becomes the plastic Visa/visa card and is waived through the border by INS officers.

Tropic of Orange concerns the global trade of people, bodies, and products as "goods" and underscores the resulting byproducts of the trade of nature and biology when treated as "goods"—especially as they travel into the United States. The commodification of immigrants as laboring bodies, of women as factory workers and sex slaves, and of peripheral characters as wasted members of traditional conceptualizations of American citizenship naturally lead to critiques like that of Julie Sze who argues that Yamashita's work is a commentary on neoliberalism and free trade: "Yamashita's text reveals that women of color, along with transportation networks, embody how production and consumption work . . ." ("Not by Politics Alone" 30). I look within the people and "women of color" to the immigrant and migrant workers in Yamashita's text and the trade of "natural" resources. Valuable resources from Mexico, Central, and South America cross the border in the form of fruit, water, human tissue and organs, drugs, and labor, and they are symbolized by a single orange. In addition to the flow of goods, in the following sections I examine the moments of disjuncture when "free trade" is symbolically or tangibly blocked—when capital aggrandizes resources. The visual and literary representations of these moments reveal a subversive voice that denies ownership of nature to corporate and national entities.

Bartering with Bodies

Even among the motility of Yamashita's borders old habits of ethnoracial biases and violence die hard. Arcangel's self-proclaimed "manifest destiny" is to "go North," to be a "Conquistador of the North" (132, 198). Fighting for the Third World, Arcangel uses the stage name "El Gran Mojado" (or "The Great Wetback") while his enemy symbolizes the First World and is called "SUPERNAFTA," or "SUPERSCUMNAFTA." The two symbols of North and South, First and Third Worlds face off in a large arena in Los Angeles replete with all the vestiges of a WWF pro-wrestling match. Arcangel announces the match to the stadium: "Ladies and Gentlemen! Welcome to the Pacific Rim Auditorium here at the very Borders. (And you thought it was a giant bookstore. Ha!) (256)."

The “very Borders” to which Arcangel refers are not only those marking the land of the US-Mexico border, but also the liquid borders extending out to the Pacific Rim. His planetary conceptualization of borders further implicates capitalism as an enemy of the planet.¹¹ Or, following Ruth Hsu’s argument that SUPERNAFTA symbolizes whiteness, Arcangel then represents all that works against subjugation and injustice (78). Even as Arcangel is certain of his destiny to conquer “the North” and rectify centuries of injustices, he is stopped at the US-Mexico border by officers of the Immigration and Nationalization Services. As the borders of economic trade come down, US immigration laws become increasingly stringent, thus highlighting the dichotomy between American attitudes towards products versus people.

“Free trade” takes on a whole new meaning when the borders are warped across space and time as Arcangel pulls the thread of hemispheric divides with him; furthermore, Yamashita’s portrayal of trade is troubling because of the kind of “things” we see traded: little girls, organs, labor, and drugs. The trade of laboring bodies and products is underlined when the sale of human organs becomes a major plot twist and weds the various narratives together. Rafaela mistakenly gets mixed up in an organ smuggling operation spanning South, Central and North America, and run by Doña Maria’s son, Hernando (151). Certain that Hernando is after her son’s kidneys, Rafaela flees to the border but is eventually confronted by Hernando and an epic battle ensues. Unfolding in a violent scene of transmutation and sexual violence, Rafaela’s body becomes symbolic of ethnically marked and gendered bodies globally:

Two tremendous beasts wailed and groaned, momentarily stunned by their transformations, yet poised for war. Battles passed as memories: massacred men and women, their bloated and twisted bodies black with blood, stacked in ruined buildings and floating in canals; one million more decaying with smallpox . . . But that was only the human massacre; what of the ravaged thousands of birds once cultivated to garnish the tress of a plumed potentate, the bleeding silver treasure of Cerro Rico de Potosí, the exhausted gold of Ouro Preto, the scorched land that followed the sweet stuff called white gold and the crude stuff called black gold, and the coffee, cacao and bananas, and the human slavery that dug and slashed and pushed and jammed it all out and away forever. (220)

¹¹ For a full engagement with this important scene in the novel please see Sue-Im Lee.

As the “tremendous beasts” battle, Rafaela’s body channels the long history of mythical, imperial, and colonial violence against women, or what Julie Sze terms the “environmental cost of colonialism” (“Not by Politics Alone” 39). Mixing fantasy and reality, violence and love (they were “copulating in rage, destroying and creating at once . . . blood and semen commingling”), Yamashita suggests how difficult it is to separate fact from fiction, especially when the acknowledgement of truth brings personal responsibility. Yamashita extends this violence to nonhuman victims. The human “massacre” is also the rape of the land, of the “birds” and of precious metals, “bleeding silver” and “black gold,” of fruit and vegetable products cultivated by forced “human slavery.” Yamashita draws a parallel between the violent attack against Rafaela and the forgotten and repeated rape and pillaging of whole bodies of people and species. When Rafaela at last consumes her enemy, relief comes in the form of celestial birds pulling away the blanket of night: “Suddenly the sky was a chorus of heavenly chanting, a terrible blessing, and a great fluttering of millions of wings withdrawing nightfall away” (222). The battle symbolizes a crisis in definition between human and animal, male and female. The boundaries of the human and the natural are pushed to their extreme when spatiotemporal laws as we understand them unravel and disintegrate.

As much as laboring bodies are shown to be those of immigrants in Yamashita women’s bodies are particularly susceptible to the ills and perils of globalization. Rafaela’s experience as a young mother moving between Mexico and America is clearly meant to speak to an assemblage of issues facing immigrant and low-wage workers, and particularly women within migrant and immigrant communities. It is the body of her two lead female characters that endure life-threatening gruesome violence (Emi and Rafaela), and it is the laboring bodies and hands of women that are a major theme in the text. With increased economic freedom comes decreased corporeal safety: from violence, from toxins, from malnourishment and poverty. The chaos and destruction in Los Angeles can be traced to the organ-smuggling trade from South to North, from the Third World to the First, to the drug trade, to the trafficking of women and “goods” in which one space is forcefully mined for the economic prosperity of another. When the malleable thread that is the Tropic of Cancer shifts, the harm done to another place also shifts. Because there are no national borders in a natural landscape, the “laws” of pollution and toxic dumping do not apply. In *Tropic of Orange* it is as if the destructive pollution caused by overconsumption comes to haunt Los Angeles, thereby suggesting that the sovereignty of the body, like that of that nation, is a shared responsibility.

The interconnectivity of Yamashita's novel is significantly technological and media-driven. To describe the relationship between people instead of the "web of life" Yamashita might offer the "grid" of life.¹² Yamashita's grid integrates the technological with the biological and pushes the limits of what defines "life." Towards the end of *Tropic of Orange*, Emi's estranged and homeless father, Manzanar Murakami, takes on a significant role in challenging traditional schematizations of human existence and he reconfigures Yamashita's "grid." Manzanar, a former surgeon who has by all accounts disgraced the Japanese-American community of Los Angeles becomes a conductor of freeway symphonies: "Little by little, Manzanar began to sense a new kind of grid, this one defined not by inanimate structures or other living things but by himself and others like him. He found himself at the heart of an expanding symphony of which he was not the only conductor" (238). Manzanar conceives of the new "grid" of life as having multiple agents at the helm conducting the music of movement and life but ones that are not defined solely by human direction and traditional forms of "living things" as he calls them. Yamashita ambiguously positions him and others like him (the "expanding symphony") as the rhizomatic agency of a new model of community and organization.

Operation Gatekeeper and the Net of NAFTA

I follow the thread of environmental degradation and im-/migrant subjectivity from Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* to *Sleep Dealer* where virtual border-crossing extends from sea to land, liquid to solid, for noncitizens and green-card holders alike. While *Tropic of Orange* takes place in Los Angeles and the borderlands in it are those of tangible land *Sleep Dealer* is focused on Mexican and Chicano subjectivity and the experience of escaping *from* the U.S. Yamashita's irony and humor succeed in making *Tropic of Orange* a quick, even fun read while *Sleep Dealer's* darker edge forcefully leads viewers to consider the ramifications of unbridled industry and our relationship to the natural world. *Sleep Dealer* (2008), the directing debut of Alex Rivera (who also co-authored the screenplay with David Riker), is a futuristic sci-fi movie set mostly in the Mexican border town of Tijuana. Rivera admits that his modest budget would not allow for the "biggest" sci-fi film but his goal was to make the "'truest' sci-

12 Although in an interview Yamashita shares that the grid called "Hypertexts" at the beginning of the novel was at first used for her own organizational purposes, she admits that it can be read "on many levels." Yamashita elaborates: "As I said, the hypercontext at the beginning of the book was a spreadsheet that I initially used to map out the book . . . I hope that the book can be read on several levels. Every reader takes away a different read, a different book" (Interview with Elizabeth Glixman).

fi ever” by making a film that “seriously imagines where our world might go” (Director’s Statement).

The world has already reached a breaking point at the US-Mexico border as rising tensions over human rights and toxic poisoning are coming to a head. Rivera’s futuristic rendering of current issues adds urgency to issues of environmental justice which can sometimes become overshadowed. The long and tumultuous history between the United States and Mexico often focuses on the borderlands between the two countries. Part of the United States Department of Homeland Security’s effort to secure US borders is the US-Mexico “wall” that continues to be built and reinforced to stave off illegal immigration;¹³ the rhetoric used to justify budgetary commitments from the US government is largely based on an economy of fear—fear of terrorism, fear of illegal immigration, and fear of increased trade in weapons, prostitution, human slavery, and drugs. Often the boundaries between these discrete fields of anxiety blur and overlap.

The militarization of US borders and the agenda to increasingly incarcerate illegal aliens crossing the border flies in the face of a US declaration of “free” trade and open borders, of a global connectivity between Canada, the USA, and Mexico. In 1994, the United States officially began the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). While David Nevins suggests that the US-Mexico border “is today more part of Americans’ geographical imagination” than ever before, the rhetoric behind the creation of NAFTA was meant to demonstrate the increasingly borderless nature of North America and the positive—economic—benefits of “free” trade between Canada, the US, and Mexico (13).¹⁴ Even as concerns grew over NAFTA’s negative impact on illegal immigration, migrant workers, women, the environment, and American workers, NAFTA’s critics are frequently silenced by accusations that their concerns are

13 The US-Mexico “wall” is not a true wall but a series of barriers from various time periods and constructed from a variety of materials. Joseph Nevins writes: “At the beginning of the 1990s, what existed there [the San Diego borderlands] in terms of a boundary fence in the area had gaping holes” (6). See pages 6-14 and 211-18 of *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond* (Nevins).

14 Legislation and campaigning for the North American Free Trade Agreement began under George Bush and continued under Bill Clinton. Signed by Clinton on September 14th, 1993, it was implemented on January 1st, 1994. Please see the United States Department of Agriculture’s description under “North American Free Trade Agreement” and the Justice Department’s report entitled: “Background to the Office of the Inspector General Investigation.”

invalid or exaggerated.¹⁵ What does it mean that NAFTA was signed within a year of the launch of Operation Gatekeeper? While the United States and Mexico were politically aligned in the purported dismantling of economic borders, the United States Congress was debating the border wall and the feasibility of something like Operation Gatekeeper.¹⁶ And while the “border wall” is arguably more of a patchwork of fencing and outposts, what sits irrefutably at the center of interest regarding both NAFTA and Gatekeeper are the rich, sprawling array of natural resources; whole ecosystems surround the “shared” watershed on the US-Mexico border and experts estimate that between 70-75 percent of the Tijuana River basin is located in Mexico.¹⁷

The narrative of *Sleep Dealer* involves three main characters: Memo Cruz, Luz Martinez, and Rudy Ramírez. Memo is from the small village of Santa Ana del Rio and his father is “mistaken” for an aqua-terrorist and killed by a privately-sponsored US drone. Santa Ana’s water supply—and thus the livelihood of its people—is controlled by a militarized dam complex (a subsidiary of Del Rio Water) whose surveillance includes hunting and killing “aqua-terrorists” live on a gladiatorial-style US television show. Memo’s passion in life is technology and he voyeuristically listens in on the lives of others through his homemade transmitter. One evening he mistakenly overhears a conversation from the San Diego corporate headquarters of “Del Rio Security” and his signal is identified by the security company as a frequency intercept; they lock onto his coordinates and later flash images of people vaguely resembling 9/11 terrorists as they broadcast the attack on Memo’s home by the drone pilot for Del Rio Water. The pilot, Rudy, is himself a second-generation American from immigrant parents who begins to suspect that he was given faulty information in the killing of Memo’s father. Because Memo blames himself for the drone attack and because his father’s income is now lost, he travels north in search of work in Tijuana. En route, Memo meets the mysterious and beautiful Luz, a fledgling writer who posts what you might call “mindblogs” for a pay-for-memories market called “Trunode.”

15 Please see the “Overview” section of *NAFTA Revisited*. In reference to the environmental and human cost of NAFTA, economists Gary Clyde Hufbauer and Jeffrey J. Schott write that “critics grossly exaggerated their magnitude” (4).

16 For more on opponents of NAFTA, please refer to the March 2000 NAFTA report “Five Years after NAFTA” by the Center for Immigration Studies (page 3; page 17 end note 1).

17 Please see Lawrence Herzog who estimates 70 percent (201), and the United States Department of Commerce press release regarding the Tijuana River estuary (estimating 75 percent, contact given as David Hall).

In the future of *Sleep Dealer* a person can connect to a network through her “nodes” and directly input her thoughts into blog or diary entries. These entries are Luz’s livelihood, and when a client becomes interested in Memo’s story Luz’s motivations for helping Memo are questionable at best. The nodes also function as gateways to enhanced somatic and psychological experiences wherein a person can “plug in” to a range of sexual, drug-induced fantasies—but Memo’s goal in acquiring nodes is to be able to work in large factories that outsource laboring Mexican bodies to US corporations. When Memo plugs in at work he is actually operating machinery in San Diego, CA. The poor labor conditions, the “undocumented” and unregistered node implants, the high risk of electrical shortages (and thus death), all contribute to the term “sleep dealer.” Workers are lulled into deep states of exhaustion when they are plugged in. US corporations are in effect bartering with the sleep of Mexican workers.

In the post-9/11 future of *Sleep Dealer* US border security is used to further corporate interests and to dominate and control natural resources. For this reason *Sleep Dealer*’s “rookie drone pilot” Rudy begins to wonder about the boundaries of the human and the place of ethics in drone attacks. In a scene in San Diego, CA, Rudy’s identity is revealed as the man purchasing Luz’s stories. After the attack on Memo’s father, “the aqua-terrorist,” Rudy asks his father—a decorated US military veteran with a noticeable accent—if he ever had any “doubt” about what “he did in the war.”¹⁸ Rudy’s American accent contrasts with that of his parents when his father assures him that he does not regret his actions and that he remains a proud member of the US military. Although Rudy is not clearly a part of the US military, the boundaries between the militarization of the dam and anti-terrorist precautions—and thus those of nature, technology, and politics—are blurred beyond recognition.

The visual representations of corporeal communication and of wires running into veins suggest that in *Sleep Dealer*’s “future” the reliance on technology has overtaken humanity. The environmental justice movement was mostly explored in the sciences and social sciences, but of late the humanities have been indispensable to opening up questions about the nature/culture divide. Raymond Williams astutely argues that “the idea of nature is the idea of man” (50). Man constructs nature, Williams continues, and all “that was not man,” became nature—it had to be fundamentally separate and unspoiled to be “natural” (56). While experts debate the statistical evidence of the troubling intersections of discriminatory policies concerning women and minorities, none

18 Although the flash of an image featuring Rudy’s father at war is ambiguous the desert setting makes strong overtures to the US occupations of both Iraq and Afghanistan.

will deny that in the crossover between toxicity and humans we are not only at fault but adversely effected. *Sleep Dealer* weds the image of man, nature, and machine in ways that do not allow one to clearly discern one from the other.

The *Drones* episode that features the killing of Memo's father is one such example that demonstrates how accelerated economic development driven by technology can lead to imbricated layers of dehumanization. The scene preceding the drone attack begins with a short montage of images of evidenced insurgency demonstrating why "companies fight back." Agitated crowds of Mexicans in Del Rio are said to be in "constant crisis" and the "Mayan Army of Water Liberation" is represented by black-masked individuals on grainy film resembling footage of ransom and beheading videos from the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Del Rio area is carefully billed as the "southern sector water supply" and not part of Mexico's territory. Putting aside the incongruities of national borders being transposed onto natural resources of liquid and air, the erasure of any acknowledgement that the watershed is firmly on the Mexican side points to the dangers of a "future" that uses national security to do as it pleases.

In *Sleep Dealer* multinational corporations have taken control of the "southern sector" of the globe and continue the long history of embodied violence. *Tropic of Orange* also focuses on the various bodies most impacted by globalization and colonial rule. As Julie Sze notes, Yamashita's magical realism and postmodern narratological approach push the boundaries of truth and reality in ways that challenge the reader to "understand the contemporary politics around free trade and globalization in an ideological and historical context" ("From Environmental Justice Literature" 171). *Sleep Dealer* offers a narrative of disembodied as well as embodied violence and explodes the barrier between the colonization of bodies and ideologies; in the future of Trunode, Luz's thoughts can be bought and sold through the virtual reality network and their commodification implicitly acknowledges surveillance. Rapid economic development and an increased scarcity of natural resources lead to a future of outright domination of the poorest by the richest and the weakest by the strongest. In the geography of post-NAFTA "free trade" human rights are eclipsed by capitalist-driven greed.

The struggle over water rights and trade agreements unveils the imbalance of power in US-Mexico relations. A moment of levity in *Sleep Dealer* occurs when Luz takes Memo to the beach. Surveying the Pacific Ocean for the first time in his life, Memo asks about the tall black bars extending out into the water. Luz laughs and replies that the US has put them up to keep out the "terrorist surfers" because it is "where the border wall ends." As absurd an image

as that is, enmeshing the iconic global image of a laid-back Californian surfer with that of an anti-American terrorist, it exposes the raw—racialized—nerve at the center of *Sleep Dealer*.

American Studies and True Sci-Fi

In the *Drones* episode featuring the murder of Memo's father the white, garishly American announcer pits Rudy against Memo's father and uses the banner of the American flag to cloak the extreme violence needed to continue mining natural resources in contested territory. The announcer makes sure to point out that Rudy is flanked by advanced flying cameras, the "fly-eyes." The level of surveillance is weighted equally with the impact of the drone and the viewer is given a split second of insight into how power manifests itself. The irony of the director's hope to make the "truest' sci-fi film" is that for those scholars looking to American Studies from an ecocritical perspective, *Sleep Dealer* brings current and past issues to the forefront of ongoing debates on water rights, trade agreements, and human rights on the US-Mexico borderlands.

In the ebb and flow of globalization and technological advances lie the human and nonhuman bodies of evidence. As these tides of change sweep in and recede, they pull back to reveal the aftermath of human choices—often the most negatively impacted entities are those with the least amount of agency and visibility. It is this delicate balance of systems that American Studies has only recently begun to fully question and explore. When looking at cultural productions from an ecocritical perspective, we must not only consider the balance of the ecosystem but how that system is written about and what it reveals about US attitudes and in turn attitudes *towards* the U.S. The environmental justice movement began as an attempt to redress the tacit complicity of the government and its people in inappropriate land use, toxic dumping, dangerous labor conditions, and the denial of a voice to the—often ethnically marked—poor and working classes most impacted, but as the movement continues to grow its concerns are being recognized as universal.

It is this very universality translated into "globalization" that can sometimes lead to a blanketing over of issues or a sense of paralysis to the everyday individual hoping to make a difference. The narrative pastiche of *Tropic of Orange* weaves together an intricate portrait of present-day Los Angeles with all of its flaws and beauty and draws the reader into the story of each character. *Sleep Dealer* picks up the thread of the exploitation of human labor and natural resources and presents a narrative of multinational corporations taking ownership of the bodies and land of Mexico. One widespread view of ecocriticism, here expressed

by Richard Kerridge, is that it “seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis” (5). Yet in looking to *Sleep Dealer* and *Tropic of Orange* one might suggest that they are both responding and entering into new dialogues with their audiences about the very incoherency of the world. In her work on *Tropic of Orange*, Ruth Hsu convincingly suggests that part of Yamashita’s narrative strategy is to “decenter” readers’ notions of Los Angeles and to disorient them in terms of their spatiotemporal imaginaries (77). Far from romanticized idealizations of man’s connection to earth, the artists at hand are disseminating images of increased distance from nature while also pushing audiences to think of the ways in which humans are ever more reliant on technology. *Sleep Dealer* and *Tropic of Orange* are a chorus of voices in answer to calls like those of Usula Heise for “environmental literature and ecocriticism . . . to engage more fully with the insights of recent theories of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism” (383). Cultural productions of the environmental justice movement are more and more demonstrating the relevancy and importance of the field of ecocriticism outside of academia. Taken together *Tropic of Orange* and *Sleep Dealer* add urgency and weight to Adamson and Slovic’s proposed “third wave” of ecocriticism which “transcends ethnic and national boundaries” while respecting “ethnic and national particularities” and to Heise’s call for a transnational turn within ecocriticism. In tackling issues of globalization and international commerce *Sleep Dealer* and *Tropic of Orange* foreground the biopolitical violence that accompanies the corporate-driven parsing up of global capital on the US-Mexico border; where Yamashita leaves off (pre-9/11) Rivera picks up and through his direction of *Sleep Dealer* he offers a powerful commentary on US anti-terrorist policies cloaking continued colonial and corporate interests.

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**“Hunger and Lead”: An Ecocritical Reading of Robert Schenkkan’s
*The Kentucky Cycle***

Pembe Gözde Erdoğan

There is value in any experience that reminds us of our distinctive national origins and evolution, i.e. that stimulates awareness of history. Such awareness is “nationalism” in its best sense.

Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (177)

Creating a true awareness of history, in the sense that Leopold mentions above, entails a far larger definition of history itself, one that would incorporate a history of environment together with human history. Although in his book Leopold was originally referring to experiences like boy-scouting, Robert Schenkkan’s 1991 play *The Kentucky Cycle* also, albeit in quite an ironic manner, offers its audiences a similarly valuable historical awareness. This essay, in trying to prove the play’s value as environmental literature, will analyze its place in the new, more human-centered trend appearing in ecocriticism through the help of Aldo Leopold’s notion of the land ethic and through the newly emerging field of ecopsychology. Moreover, this paper will also try to establish that the play’s status as a realistic Broadway piece gives it an additional advantage in the ecocritical discourse that other works of EcoTheater do not have since its purpose is to reach large audiences that are not already engaged with environmental issues.

Our first task, which is quite a difficult one, is to establish what exactly scholars or dramatists mean when they say “EcoTheater.” Some prominent scholars, like Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs, have explored relationships between the stage and places beyond the stage but still ecologically oriented theater criticism is rarely found in prominent anthologies of ecocriticism. Lawrence Buell, in his 2005 book *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, draws attention to the fact that ecological drama criticism constitutes a significant gap in ecocritical studies. There are many regional performance groups that produce theater with environmental concerns and that have given their art names like Theater in the Wild, EcoTheater, EcoDrama, and Green Theater. In their productions, these groups mostly focus on regional or local environmental issues and try to

raise awareness through highly minimalistic, improvisational, and experimental performances. In their surveys of the activities of these groups, scholars like Lynn Jacobson and Downing Cless have noted that EcoTheater is a “theater of place”; localism is the key characteristic of ecological theater. Nevertheless, *The Kentucky Cycle*, not only with its regional productions in places like Los Angeles and Seattle, where theater communities are more open to environmental issues, but also with its Broadway productions and with its realistic and epic stance, shows us that theater does not have to be distinctively local or highly experimental to be valued as ecocritical. As Theresa J. May points out in her article “Frontiers: Environmental History, Ecocriticism and *The Kentucky Cycle*,” the play is “the first mainstream American play to stage the complex interdependency between capitalism and the environmental crisis” (162). Most importantly, analyzing *The Kentucky Cycle* will remind us that theater in general and realistic theater in particular (both of which have been mostly neglected in green studies) can be viable means to propel the audiences to think ecologically.

Written after a visit by Schenkkan from southern California in 1981 to the Appalachian region of eastern Kentucky, the play is a cycle comprised of two parts and nine plays with a total running time of more than seven hours. What made Schenkkan interested in the region in the first place was the perplexing gulf he witnessed between the poor mine workers and the rich company owners. He described, in his “Author’s Note” to the play, the social map of the region as “extremes of poverty and wealth existing very close to one another but without any acknowledged relationship, without any sense of community” (334).

Intrigued, Schenkkan did extensive research on the history of the region, a history which he discovered was fraught with violence and courage. In the play, Schenkkan uses one specific fictional family, the Rowens, as his way of representing the history of the region. In his note to the play, Schenkkan explains how the play kept writing itself and became a cycle rather than one play because the events he was creating constantly needed historical roots and gained significance from their relationship to the past actions of the people of the region. Thus, what Schenkkan sets out to write (a play about eastern Kentucky) turns out to be nothing less than a rewriting of the history of the region from a different perspective. This history, now, has an additional focus together with the human subject: the land. Schenkkan shows us that he is a Leopoldian nationalist; reevaluating the origins and evolution of a nation by incorporating the story of the land into the more general nationalist narrative of history.

Schenkkan’s additional interest in the implication of the land in human history is obvious in the way he pays attention to the fact that the contradictions of the region were very visibly written on the land:

What made this all so striking in eastern Kentucky was how closely the physical landscape of the area seemed to embody this social contradiction, this dichotomy of simultaneous abundance and need. It was, at one and the same time, some of the most beautiful mountain scenery in the country and some of the most devastated. There were lush mountain forests full of oak and pine, flowering dogwood and azalea; and then you'd turn the corner and the other side of the mountain would have been strip-mined completely away—all vegetation long since bulldozed off, the fertile topsoil buried under a slag heap of crushed rock and mine tailings so heavily sulfurous that heavy rainfall literally leached out a mild form of sulphuric acid. It looked like the moon. (334-35)

The play, as May also notes in her article, is nothing short of a revisionist environmental history and Schenkkan is essentially an environmental historian: “Environmental historians challenge the notion of history as a story of political, economic and military events; and instead posit a history told as the chronicle of the relatedness between humans and their ecological context” (May 161). However, this is not the only thing Schenkkan is offering to his audiences in *The Kentucky Cycle*. In addition to his land-based historiographic perspective, Schenkkan, in his intricate characterization and staging, also acts as an environmental psychologist and gives insights to human beings' attitudes toward the land.

Lawrence Buell, in his famous article “Representing the Environment,” notes that in literature the nonhuman environment is usually used as “the setting”: “deprecat[ing] what it denotes, implying that the physical environment serves for artistic purposes merely as backdrop, ancillary to the main event” (177). In *The Kentucky Cycle*, however, land is not important just because it is “the setting” of the play, but also because it is one of the play's major characters. This land is the life-shaping force of the people living on it; it gives them profit, it is the ground on which they have spilled one another's blood, it is the soil in which they have buried their enemies and kin, and it is a “thing” they have fought over and dreamed about, bought and sold and lost and regained.

Watching the play, the audiences witness generations after generations of the same family, from 1775 to 1975, struggle through life and difficult conditions in the region, without much of a feeling of responsibility toward their communities. The hero of the first play of the cycle, *Masters of Trade*, is

Michael Rowen, an over-ambitious and violent Irish immigrant who arrives in the mountains of Kentucky to make a place for himself in this new country called America, this land of opportunity. Michael has been killing people ever since he was seven, and, true to his past, he kills another immigrant, trades guns with Indians and gives them poxed blankets, kidnaps an Indian woman and rapes her to start his lineage in the New World, and kills his first-born daughter and buries her body in the mountains. Shocked by Michael's unabashed violence, a Native American asks him what kind of an animal he is, and Michael answers, "a necessary animal" (22).

Michael's actions, stated very briefly here, are actually premonitions of what is to come, as the descendants of Michael will stay true to the legacy of the Rowen name and commit unforgivable crimes against their fellow human beings and their environment. Over the next five hours the audience members will watch some of the most horrific crimes committed in the history of humanity. People kill their fathers, banish their mothers and sell their brothers into slavery. Bloody feuds take shape between families over the land in which families kill members of other families regardless of women and children. We see these people lose their land out of ignorance since they cannot decide on the actual value of the land they live on and sell it for very little amount of money. Later, as mining enters the region, we witness the degradation of these people and the land in the hands of big companies and unions.

In a sense, *The Kentucky Cycle* is much more than the history of one region: it is the history of a nation. As Schenkkan suggests, it is "a quintessentially American story" (335). The play is not just commenting on eastern Kentucky or Appalachia but on America; it is a chronicle of the crimes committed by a people all over the continent. This endless cycle of violence and loss actually questions and criticizes many different facets of American cultural and natural history. As David Mazel reminds us, the American wilderness has always been a big part of the National Symbolic: "Environmental discourse constitutes not only a specifically American *nature* but also a particular conception of an American *nation*, and ecocriticism can thus be aligned with the contemporary critique of the 'national narrative'" (xviii). In the play, the capitalist system that arrives with industrialization and urbanization brings about the banking system, the materialistic justice system, the speculators and sharecroppers, and the big companies, especially the mining companies which gain their main profit from exploiting their employees and the land. This history includes wars as well; wars to gain more territory, wars fought over economic institutions like slavery, and wars fought overseas to interfere in the businesses of other nations like

Korea. Moreover, the play also demonstrates how some of these people use and abuse the rhetoric of Christianity to further their cause in gaining more land and economic power. In fact, the scope of *The Kentucky Cycle* is too broad to be summarized here. In representing the tragic story of a nation, the play explores many American myths that have shaped the mindsets of capitalist society. Schenkkan reminds us that the play is ultimately about American myth-making: the Myth of the Frontier, the Myth of Abundance, and the Myth of Escape. The character Michael Rowen stands as a mouthpiece for these myths when he says:

And now here, at last, I'm a man of property meself, on the kind of land ya only dream about. Dirt so rich I could eat it with a spoon. I've but to piss on the ground and somethin' grows. I've corn for whiskey and white oaks for barrels to put it in and a river to float it down and sell it. I've everythin' I've ever wanted: the land, and to be left alone on it. I'm richer than that snot-nosed boy ever dreamed he'd be. (35)

This illusion of unlimited abundance and riches and having the license to “go and grab it” has always been at the core of the identity of this new man called the American. Michael talks about this new American: “It’s a grand land of opportunity, it is, with plenty of scratch to be made for those with an itch! All that, and enough room for a man to stretch out and lose himself entirely. Become somethin’ new. Somethin’ different. A new *man*. That’s what we’re makin’ here in Kentucky, Mr. Tod. New men” (15). As this “new man” with his greedy, ambitious and capitalistic mindset has been the most powerful shaping force of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, the play also gains a universal significance for the spectators as a morality tale that questions the firm beliefs in abundance, individualism, and opportunity while showing the dangers of ignoring the need for a certain kind of morality and a feeling of responsibility. Theresa May also reminds us that this frontier ideology “gave ‘Americans’ permission to take from the land when ever, where ever and what ever their economic ambition required; to make ‘nature’ the ‘servant’ of mankind” (166).

Schenkkan’s morality tale becomes highly relevant to the field of ecocriticism at this point. If we take the play as an environmental work, it shows us a new stance in environmental writing. What the play does is not to marginalize the human subject to the position of a mere observer and philosopher, like most nature-writing do, but to put the human subject center stage. It seems to show us that, to be able to think ecologically and biotically, first we will have to see

ourselves critically in a larger ecological context. I think, *The Kentucky Cycle* appears as a representative work of a new path in ecocriticism. It is one of those works that contribute to a different, and this time much more beneficial approach to anthropocentrism.

At the heart of this new approach to the human subject in environmental writing is the understanding that, as Kathleen Wallace and Karla Armbruster so aptly put it, “nature and culture are interwoven rather than separate sides of a dualistic construct” (4). Dominic Head probes deeper into this issue in his article “The (im)possibility of Ecocriticism” by coining a new model called “the utilitarian anthropocentrism.” According to Head, seeing the evocations of the natural as divorced from the social world is a common tendency in green studies and is, ultimately, detrimental to its cause. Head’s model of the ecological text, and ecocritical operation, different from the existing ecocritical practice, recentres the human subject. This new understanding of anthropocentrism is, according to Head, “not a free-floating conception of inherent value in nature” (29), but rather an examination of how human beings, throughout history, have evaluated and shaped the nature around them. Borrowing the ideas of Andrew Dobson on the two different types of anthropocentrism (a strong kind and a weak kind), Head favors the latter for the future of ecocriticism:

Human self-realization is dependent upon an identification with the non-human world, not because of the benefits that can be gained, but because human activity of any kind has no meaning without such an identification. As Dobson puts it: “anthropocentrism in the weak sense is an unavoidable feature of the human condition.” This rationale of value is a prerequisite of political activity. In contrast to the notion of inherent value in nature, weak anthropocentrism “reintroduces the human onto the agenda – a necessary condition for there to be such a thing as politics.” (29)

Thus, if an environmental text such as *The Kentucky Cycle* wants to *change* the attitudes of the public and *move* them into action, it cannot do so by ignoring the role of the human subject in the degradation of nature. This new focus on the human subject in the ecocritical field gives us the opportunity to see how nature and culture (human beings) shape one another and how the two cannot be handled separately. Thus, the play fits into the widest definition of ecocriticism, as Garrard sees it: “the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself” (5).

As a morality tale, with the issues of ethics and responsibility at its core, the play ultimately reminds us of the hopes of Aldo Leopold. Leopold, when he wrote his famous “The Land Ethic,” hoped to show people around the world a new way of considering what is right and what is wrong. He was among the many ecologist philosophers who tried to establish that environment and biotic communities, or as he collectively puts it, “the land,” also have value outside the economic sense and deserve the respect human beings show one another. As he puts it, “A land ethic reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land” (221). In *The Kentucky Cycle*, we see the land constantly being defined by its economic value, by its potential to benefit its owners. What’s more, the land constantly loses its economic value in the market system. The judge who comes to claim the land of Rowen family in exchange of their debts puts it very eloquently: “Land is just dirt, Mr. Rowen. It’s worth only what the market is willing to pay for it. No more, no less” (102).

In his representational and symbolic use of the stage, Schenkkan further emphasizes the view of land as dirt. The stage instruction to the play states that in the center of the oval stage is “a large, rectangular pit full of an earthlike substance” (ix). This small pit full of dirt both gives a universal symbolic meaning to “the land” and also denotes the human beings’ attitudes towards it. It is a symbolic representation of Earth which these people regard as a handful of dirt. As the staging is the only element of the play in which Schenkkan moves away from conventional realism, the symbolic significance of the minimalist field of dirt becomes evident.

The debasement of the land, together with the exploitation of poor people reaches its peak when mining enters the region. One character paints the picture of a horrific future that becomes true in the subsequent plays of the cycle:

First, they cut down *all* your trees. Then they cut into the land, deep—start huntin’ those deep veins, digging’em out in their deep mines, dumpin’ the crap they can’t use in your streams, your wells, your fields, whatever! And when they’re finished, after they’ve squeezed out every nickel, they just move on. Leaving your land colder and deader’n that moon up there. (202-03)

This shows the extreme objectification and exploitation of the land and of the biotic communities, a Leopoldian nightmare. Such behavior, John Mack tells us, is peculiarly Western; an attitude he calls “species arrogance”:

Actually we (by “we” I mean, by and large, citizens of Western and other industrialized nations) do have a *psychology*, or at least a *prevailing attitude*, conscious and unconscious, toward the Earth. We regard it as a thing, a big thing, an object to be owned, mined, fenced, guarded, stripped, built upon, dammed, plowed, burned, blasted, bulldozed and melted to serve the material needs and desires of the human species at the expense, if necessary, of all other species, which we feel at liberty to kill, paralyze, or domesticate for our own use. (282, emphases added)

What is more catastrophic from a Leopoldian sense is the fact that the people *The Kentucky Cycle* portrays do not even have any sense of responsibility or morality towards one another. Leopold’s hope for humanity was to expand the sense of community among them to include the land. However, these characters show us that human beings are even incapable of treating one another responsibly within a frame of community. The violent exploitation and murder of the land is coupled with the violent exploitation and murder of people living on it. Thus, the play vividly evidences that the frame of ethics that Leopold was aiming to push forward is actually regressing towards a disastrous end.

This “species arrogance,” this obsession with material things in people, this disrespect toward fellow living things around them cannot be seen just as a historical condition anymore. This condition has literally become a mindset, the psychology of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The violent images the play bombards us with makes us think that these people are not even *sane* anymore. The human condition portrayed in *The Kentucky Cycle* brings the play closer to another field of ecology that also puts the human agent center stage: ecopsychology. The premises of this relatively new branch of psychology give ecocritics a new starting point in handling the human subject in relation to nature. Ecopsychologists think that there is something wrong not only with the nature outside but also with the nature of human soul. Claiming that personal is planetary, these psychologists are trying to redefine sanity within an environmental context, suggesting that ignoring our relationship with the nature around us is, as Lester Brown puts it, “a form of self-destructive blindness” (xvi). Theirs is a plea for a growing appreciation of our dependence on nature, a plea for us to see that our health and well-being is inextricably bound to the health of the planet.

One of the leading ecopsychologists, Theodore Roszak claims that modern psychotherapy fails to reach beyond the family and the society in exploring the

idea of sanity. Roszak suggests that, at the most basic level, human beings are sympathetically bonded to the Earth that mothered them into existence:

In fact, our wishful, willful imprint upon the natural environment may reveal our collective state of soul more tellingly than the dreams we wake from and shake off, knowing them to be unreal. For more consequential are the dreams that we take with us out into the world each day and maniacally set about making “real”—in steel and concrete, in flesh and blood, out of resources torn from the substance of the planet. Precisely because we have acquired the power to work our will upon the environment, the planet has become like that blank psychiatric screen on which the neurotic unconscious projects its fantasies. Toxic wastes, the depletion of resources, the annihilation of our fellow species; all these speak to us, if we would hear, of our deep self. (5)

In a similar vein, the natural environment in the play, as much as human beings change and shape it, also is a shaping force of individual and group psychology and identity. Through a subtle procession, the play shows us that the influence between the land and the people living on it is never one way: hurting the land eventually hurts the people. Theresa May, even though she thinks the play fails in totally deconstructing the frontier discourse, does note that it suggests a deep ecologist’s notion of a bond between human beings and “nature.” In the first plays of the cycle, while the environment was not still depleted to its core, certain characters were able to establish a more instinctual connection with the world around them. Patrick Rowen, son of Michael and a Native American woman named Morning Star, talks about hunting, but his notion of hunting is quite different from hunting for game or for economic profit:

When I hunt, I don’t “pretend” I’m a deer or nothin’. I just *am*. I’m out here in the woods and things just get real ... still ... or somethin’ ... It ain’t magic or nothin’. It’s just ... When I reach that place, when I just *am*, there, with the forest, then it’s like I can call the deer or somethin’. I call’em and they come. Like I was still waters and green pastures, ‘stead of hunger and lead! (51)

This primal, primitive connection with nature that is being gradually lost is one of the main ecological standpoints of the play. As May suggests, “In *The*

Kentucky Cycle, a ‘sense of place’ is a sense of self. Landscape does not stop at the edge of our skins, but penetrates, reciprocates, resonates. The play posits that we are shot through with the terrain around us. What we call our ‘identity’ is a collaboration with the palpable world” (171). As the characters violently tear themselves apart from the nature surrounding them, they become alienated not just from the land but from one another, and eventually from themselves. Morning Star establishes this connection between the land and the psychology of its people very well in her warning to her son:

Star: I never understand this. What you two have is never enough. You work from sunrise to sunset and you can’t plow all what you have now, but you want more. More *land!* Why?

Patrick: It’s the only thing that lasts.

Star: You live like that, Chuji, you live a lonely life. (60)

Living lonely lives is indeed what most characters in the cycle do; without any sense of community, people of *The Kentucky Cycle* waste their lives away in greed, alienation and depression. As the characters move further away from their association with the Earth, the cycle of this madness, of this irresponsibility perpetuates itself through generations. In the same vein, Schenkkan himself comments about “the disassociation” he sees in the people of his country:

The poverty and the environmental abuse I witnessed there were not simply a failure of economics. It went much deeper than that; hence our continual failure to “social engineer” meaningful changes there. It was a poverty of spirit; a poverty of the soul. ... [D]isassociation quite accurately describes the state of our lives *today*, not just in eastern Kentucky but *all* over the country. People feel “disassociated” from each other and from their environment. They feel out of touch and disconnected. They feel helpless. And that sense of helplessness breeds a terrible anger. (337-38)

This poverty of the spirit, hence, makes *The Kentucky Cycle* a suitable case study for ecopsychologists. After all, it was Roszak who said, “ecopsychology ... commits itself to understanding people as actors on a planetary stage who shape and are shaped by the biospheric system” (15). Starting from such a theatrical analogy, Schenkkan presents us such actors on such a planetary stage and

redefines the very convention of psychological realism in theater; a realism that explores the psychologies of the characters from an ecological perspective and which reveals them not as victims of the conditions of their environment but as perpetrators of crimes against that environment.

Playwright G. Thomson Fraser has noted the need for theater to take up environmental concerns:

Today, we humans have taken center stage in a worldwide drama to preserve the planet that only the gods of antiquity might find amusing. Theater is used to entertain and to inform, to draw us through dynamic conflicts and profound transformations. Theater has always held a mirror up to an audience and reflected back society and the individual as he/she struggles with self-inflicted or gratuitous obstacles. Theater is now challenged to take up environmental global concerns, to serve as a tool for our continued survival. (10)

The place of *The Kentucky Cycle* in environmental theater is a very important one. In addition to redefining the concept of psychological realism, the play also reminds us how useful big, realistic theater productions can be for the environmentalist movement. In their article “Performing the Wild: Rethinking Wilderness and Theater Spaces,” Adam Sweeting and Thomas Crochuni establish an association between realistic theater spaces and protected wilderness zones that leads them to favor more improvisational and outside experiences as they regard realistic theater “artificial.” Another reason of their criticism of realistic theater comes from the fact that it nourishes a kind of passivity in the audience and “makes theatrical audiences respond emotionally rather than intellectually to the spectacle of social problems” (329). Even though I highly agree with this Brechtian view of realistic theater, at this point I would like to suggest “emotional response” as a much-needed and viable tool to create environmental sentiment. It was, after all, Aldo Leopold who said, “It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value” (223). If, as ecopsychologists claim, people are emotionally bonded to the Earth, then, emotional response, as much as intellectual response (if not more) should also be the goal of environmental theater.

Schenkkan offers us a realistic, universal representation of the human condition on Earth. A Leopoldian nightmare that is, unfortunately, not only

fictional but also extant in reality. He shows his audience that the land, the environment is not just “out there” but has a history; a history inseparably bonded with the history of people living on it. In this sense, *The Kentucky Cycle*, as a play that also reached Broadway and thus mass audiences, is a valuable story for all humanity, a moral lesson. Most theater pieces or groups that have been labeled as Ecotheater are community based events that seek to address the specific issues of those communities. Adhering to the notion that “ecology” comes from Greek “oikos” and “logos” and meaning the “logos of oikos” (the home), these theater experiences value what is local, regional and home-based. However, I would like to suggest here that there is another sense of “home” in all of us that is more universal, related to the Earth, our mother and *The Kentucky Cycle* speaks to such a sense of home. The critical value of the piece has been largely overlooked because people label it as a piece of mainstream realistic Broadway theater. What these people miss is that Schenkkan’s play has a power beyond all other pieces labeled Ecotheater; it aims at giving a moral lesson to audiences who are least expecting to receive one. Scott Slovic, in his Foreword to *The Greening of Literary Scholarship*, quotes an e-mail he received from David Quammen in which Quammen talks about a similar issue in environmentalist discourse:

Among the firmest of my professional convictions is that a writer who wants to influence how humans interact with landscape and nature should strive to reach as large an audience as possible and NOT preach to the converted. That means, for me, flavoring my work with entertainment-value, wrapping my convictions subversively within packages that might amuse and engage a large unconverted audience, and placing my work whenever possible in publications that reach the great unwashed. (viii)

Theresa May points out the fact that when the play actually reached Broadway it did not receive favorable criticism and concludes that since Broadway is not a “fertile soil” for ecodrama, this demonstrates the play’s success as “a milestone of ecotheatre” (174). However, I believe that a play like *The Kentucky Cycle* is one of the stronger weapons that theater has in the struggle to reach “the great unwashed” and mainstream theater should not be discouraged by the negative criticism the play received on Broadway. Schenkkan’s play shows us the significance of theater in the ongoing fight for the well-being of our community and many more such plays are needed to reach the mainstream theater audience

as well as the local communities. Theater has always been exploring the direct relationship between human agents and the land they live on. From *Oedipus, Rex* to *The Cherry Orchard*, from Lorca’s Spain to Shepard’s America, the land has always been a symbolic manifestation of the corrupt and stale mindsets of people living on it. What remains for playwrights and audiences is to recognize that this interrelationship is actually beyond symbolic.

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An Essay on Ecocriticism in “the Century of Restoring the Earth”

Ufuk Özdağ

A powerful admonition: ecocritics ... need contact not just with literature and not just with each other, but with the physical world.

Scott Slovic

The larger system is the biosphere, and the subsystem is the economy. The economy is geared for growth...whereas the parent system doesn't grow. It remains the same size. So as the economy grows...it encroaches upon the biosphere, and this is the fundamental cost...

Herman Daly

I went to the land of sagebrush, towering pine trees, and clear blue skies, in 2010, to spend my sabbatical year in the English Department at the University of Nevada, Reno, which has the major graduate program in the U.S. devoted to Literature and Environment.¹ In the future, when I look back to this year, I will remember it as a meaningful time that gave me a unique opportunity to explore the dedicated literary activities of American ecocritics in saving the planet from ongoing environmental injustices. I will also remember it as the time when the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded and blighted the Earth, devastating the Gulf of Mexico.

Paradoxes akin to my own experience are frequently recast in American environmental writing: on the one hand, an attitude of dominion over the land, and on the other, the strong attitude of the committed writers and the

1 The program, offering both MA and PhD degrees in English with an emphasis in Literature and Environment, was established in 1996. See <http://www.unr.edu/cla/lande/main.html>

literary establishment to save the land from any further attempts to devour it; on the one hand, the forces of a growth-based economy leading to deepening unsustainability in local environments, and on the other, tremendous generation of creative writing and literary criticism advocating, in the words of Aldo Leopold, “living on a piece of land without spoiling it.” The net result, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, was the creation of a brand new field of literary study, spearheaded by American scholars, which they preferred to call “ecocriticism.”² For American ecocritics, “[n]othing could be more salutary at [that] stage than a little healthy contempt for a plethora of material blessings.”³

Ecocriticism has been gaining increasing recognition around the world. Many will agree that this is a milestone in the history of literary studies, for the growing numbers of literary scholars stepping into this interdisciplinary field are making an attempt to become self-taught in at least some aspects of environmental sciences. Their aim is to forge a change in the apocalyptic direction of the world and foster “a culture of conservation”⁴ that will relearn the moral benefits rather than the material benefits of a world in decline. The movement is an *exciting* one for those scholars in the English-speaking world and in the West already exposed to and acquainted with its basic tenets, but the movement is a *challenging* one for international scholars who are just beginning to find their way into the field, for their self-appointed entry into the field means they need to master a whole array of studies from the movement’s first, second, and third “waves”⁵ during its first three decades.

In the U.S., where the movement first emerged, some giant steps have been taken over the past two decades: early or neglected environmental texts and writers have been rediscovered⁶; canonical literatures have been reexamined

2 The field’s name, ecocriticism, coined by William Rueckert in his “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in 1978, has at present assumed other names, such as environmental literary criticism and green studies.

3 I borrow these words from Aldo Leopold’s “Foreword” to *A Sand County Almanac* (xix).

4 See Scott Russell Sanders’s “A Conservationist Manifesto,” in the book that bears the same title, for references to “a culture of conservation” (211-19).

5 For a discussion of first and second wave ecocriticism, see Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (17-28). For Scott Slovic’s overview of the field’s newest developments, see his essay, “The Third Wave of Ecocriticism: North American Reflections on the Current Phase of the Discipline” (4-10).

6 See Cheryll Glotfelty’s comparison of the evolving stages of ecocriticism to feminist criticism in “Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis” (xxii-xxiv).

from an environmental perspective; the sense of place in literary texts, neglected for centuries, has successfully been integrated into critical analysis; anthologies of all sorts in the area of place-based education have been compiled for a green pedagogical renaissance; various approaches to the study of physical place in literary texts have been established; and edited theory and praxis volumes have filled entire bookshelves. This literary activism has led to some on-the-ground activism, which in turn has led to important conservation accomplishments; various environmental organizations and nature centers have been founded following the earlier examples.⁷ And, to continue these advancements, a number of post-graduate programs at universities have been established. In the rest of the world, where the movement is just emerging, all this pioneering work that has already been done for the past two decades is creating a sense of urgency to catch up with the movement's many accomplishments. But the sense of urgency is not only to catch up with the western accomplishments, but also to discover unique schools of ecocriticism drawing ideas from other cultures.

In this regard, we, the literary scholars in Turkey (and elsewhere in the world), need to discover how our ecocritical approaches will be different from and also complement the already existing ecocriticisms of the western world. Perhaps, the first challenge would be to figure out why ecocriticism came late to Turkey or to other parts of the world.

Today, for the question what fueled the emergence of ecocriticism as a new field of study in the U.S., one comes across a number of summarizing efforts for "its institutional formation"⁸ with the front-page environmental problems at their base. But today what is less voiced is that the environmental problems leading to such a formation were only a by-product of a growth economy that created an excess of consumerism and a wasteful kind of living which has permeated American life in the past several decades—a life style that went on until 2008 when global capitalism came to a crisis (although many certainly continue to live as if the current economic crisis has no connection

7 See the chart in Daniel J. Philippon's *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement*, for the evolution of early environmental organizations (3).

8 See the list of reference for these summarizing attempts in Ursula Heise's "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism" in *PMLA* 121.2 (March 2006): 504-05. In this essay, Heise conceptualizes the delay of the "academic interest" in environmentalism to "the development of literary theory [under the influence of mostly French philosophies of language] between the late 1960s and the early 1990s."

to excessive consumerism). In the words of James Gustave Speth, “[f]or all the material blessings economic progress has provided, for all the disease and destitution avoided, for all the glories that shine in the best of our civilization, the costs to the natural world, the costs to the glories of nature, have been huge and must be counted in the balance as tragic loss” (1). In the 1980s when literary scholars started paying attention to nature’s degradation, the social order based on the systematic fostering of consumption in a growth economy (which, according to Herman Daly, “has become uneconomic”⁹) was going full force. So, it seems to me that what was more alarming for the American literary scholars, who would soon create the “literary and political renaissance,”¹⁰ was not, perhaps, the environmental problems, per se, but the growing consumerism that peaked in the 1980s, during the Reagan years. Thus, various individuals and groups consciously sought an alternative lifestyle, such as the “simple living” that American nature writers in the Thoreauvian tradition had long been articulating. One only needs to remember, for example, Alan Durning’s *How Much is Enough: The Consumer Society and the Future of the Earth*, published in 1992, the same year the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was founded, and Donald Worster’s prophetic call for “a new post-materialist economics” (219) in *The Wealth of Nature*, published in 1993. It was around this same time that some radical economists started deconstructing neoclassical economics and promoting more forcefully for the need to forge a new economy based on natural systems, on sustainability, on green businesses in service to the environment, to the communities, and to future generations; Daly, the founding father of ecological economics, extensively explained his idea of an alternative economy—a steady-state economy that takes the carrying capacity of the environment into account—in his *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development* (1996), the publication of which coincided with *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. As a matter of fact, during these early years American ecocritics, with their publications, were giving implicit support to the emerging field of “ecological economics” that was fueled by the publication of Daly’s *Steady-State Economics* in 1977. I think this explains more fully the rise of interest

9 See Herman Daly, “A Steady-state Economy,” Sustainable Development Commission, UK April 24, 2008, <<http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=775>>. Daly in this work argues that “[e]cological economists have offered empirical evidence that growth is already uneconomic in high consumption countries.”

10 I borrow the phrase from John Tallmadge in “Foreword” to *Teaching North American Environmental Literature* (2).

and the unprecedented enthusiasm in American nature writing and various environmental texts that lay a heavy emphasis on “simple living,” fueling the emergence of ecocriticism—a field of study whose founders may not have guessed, at the time, the path of its progression and expansion in the following decades. Now, they might also provide the foundation for a reorganization of American economic thought.¹¹

During the years when ecocriticism started emerging in the U.S., environmental problems were likewise front page news in Turkey: Chernobyl had exploded in Ukraine with serious impact on our Black sea coastal areas; wetlands spanning an area as large as the Marmara Sea were being drained; wide expanses of woodlands were being clear-cut across the country, leading to increased soil erosion; the sea ecosystems were collapsing due to harmful fishing methods, and the seas were becoming “cross” in the words of our Yaşar Kemal.¹² There were ongoing announcements on public radio and two or three TV channels, saying elderly people should not go outdoors as air pollution was a life-threatening health hazard. Our demoiselle and eurasian cranes, legendary birds of Turkish cultural and literary imagination that once came in flocks of thousands, had disappeared from our skies; our cities lacked proper garbage disposal methods; we could not swim in our once crystal clear seas due to dumping of waste in the waters ... the list can go on endlessly. And yet, despite these environmental ills that permeated every corner of the country, literary scholars in Turkey were not yet showing an interest in the ecocritical movement that was emerging in the U.S. because consumerism, which fostered the ecocritical movement in the U.S., was not yet a fact of life in Turkey: Turks, during these years—apart from a small minority—did not have a wasteful style of living; consumerism had not been welcomed at our doors; we did not yet have huge glittering shopping malls in every corner. Turkey was unaware of ecocriticism in these early years because Turkey was not a part of the global consumerist culture yet; the economic policies had not yet placed emphasis on consumption. This is not the case anymore: Turks, within two-decades, have created a systematic culture of consumption and have now embraced a wasteful style of living.

11 My words here echo Barry Lopez’s statement: “I suppose this is a conceit, but I believe this area of writing will not only one day produce a major and lasting body of American literature, but that it might also provide the foundation for a reorganization of American political thought.” See Lopez, “On Nature” (297).

12 The reference is to Yaşar Kemal’s novel, *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman* (1978), in which one of the central characters says, “the seas became cross” because of massive dolphin harvesting in the Turkish coastal waters.

Turkish economic policies began to change in the late 1980s with Turgut Özal¹³—a fan of American consumerism. As prime minister, he radically changed the economy of Turkey by the privatization of many state enterprises. When he passed away in 1993, a year after ASLE was founded, the shift from state-dominated to privatized economy had already been established, and Özal’s dream of transforming Turkey into a “little America” had started showing its first signs. The effects of the policies he initiated for the advancement of modern capitalism are full force now, and our literary scholars are alarmed about the new set of values afflicting more people every day. I think this might be the reason why ecocriticism is arriving in Turkey. An umbilical cord exists between ecocriticism and the growth economy; thus, now we, Turkish ecocritics, need the wisdom of a “steady-state economics.”

Ecocriticism is, in fact, arriving in Turkey, but basic questions remain: how is the literary scholar just stepping into the field of ecocriticism going to bridge the gap with the western ecocritical world that has gone through its first and second waves and is currently trying to define its third wave? How are the academics in our country going to speedily produce the pedagogical anthologies to be taught in all educational levels in the school system? How are we to spread ecocriticism urgently in an expanding economy, so that ensuing academic activities and publications hopefully will affect decision makers, local land managers, natural resource managers, local governments, governmental agencies and NGOs, in their adoption of environmentally secure policies for the greening of entire landscapes?

For me, one of the most basic needs is to convey the richness of ecocritical practices to as many Turkish literary scholars as possible so that an army of dedicated ecocritics will embrace all phases of the movement and begin offering, in their home institutions, literature and environment classes both at the graduate and undergraduate levels, guiding future ecocritics. For this very reason I went to Reno, to spend my sabbatical as a participant in UNR’s Literature and Environment Program. My goal was clear: I was going to get a first-hand experience of this major program and also get a good chance to audit the prominent ecocritic Scott Slovic’s ENG 745 “Ecocriticism and Theory” graduate class; I was going to update myself on current trends and also discover how the professor was guiding young ecocritics in their learning processes and various projects. Although I’d been teaching and publishing on American nature

13 Turgut Özal (1927–1993), Turkish prime minister and the eighth President of Turkey, is known as the leader who procured the transformation from state-dominated to privatized economy; capitalism.

writers for the past several years, I knew that breathing this air would make a tremendous difference; I needed all the input and recharging I could get in a few months time so that I could try to put this unique experience into words.

A number of definitions exist for the term “ecocriticism”; let me attempt one for the “ecocritic”: my impression is that ecocritics are literary scholars who feel kinship with nature (whether they admit this or not), and are determined to transfer, through their writing, teaching endeavors, and activities, this life-concern, as well as the issues they feel compelled to speak about, to as many people as possible, with whatever literary, artistic, aesthetic, and rhetorical means available, for deep down they feel the ultimate needs of the earth. Earlier in his career, in his inspiring essay on “Ecocriticism: Storytelling, Values, Communication, Contact,” Professor Slovic listed several ideas/strategies that he thought were “essential for ecocritics to keep in mind, essential to the vitality and meaningfulness of what we’re doing.”¹⁴ Narrating a significant moment in his encounter with the Japanese philosopher Masanobu Fukuoka in 1994, Slovic stated: “... those of us who work at universities might be able to contribute to society’s understanding of nature if we remember to pay attention to nature itself, if we don’t lose ourselves in lectures, theories, texts, laboratories... [E]cocritics need contact not just with literature and not just with each other, but with the physical world.” I find this to be significant advice, for, after all, my understanding of ecocriticism is that the field is helping to restore the world into the one we were born into (not more than half a century ago).

Due to spatial constraints, my experience of “contact” in ENG 745¹⁵ is expressed here in compressed form in the light of my observations – a meaningful span of time for myself, for the rest of the international scholars and the nine graduate students, who the professor in his first class teaching urged to “contribute to the cutting-edge of the discipline of ecocriticism.”

The first thing I explored in “Ecocriticism and Theory” class was that the class contents had embraced Professor Slovic’s “third wave” definition of the movement, a new wave of ecocriticism “which recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries; this third wave explores all facets of human experience from an environmental viewpoint.”¹⁶ In

14 See Slovic, *Going Away to Think* (27-30).

15 The course syllabus, along with 30 essays by prominent ecocritics (provided as electronic reserves), listed 17 books, many of which were bringing to the forefront the need for this very “contact” with the physical world.

16 See “Guest editors’ Introduction: The Shoulders We Stand On,” in *MELUS* 34.2 (2009)

other words, the class contents embraced both the first and the second waves of the movement and was reaching out into a third wave. Professor Slovic, in addition to nine MA and PhD students taking his class, had invited seven international scholars to audit his class. The first day of his class, he'd provided a nine-page-long syllabus and requested that the international auditing group keep up with the reading assignments and contribute to the class discussions. The course description stated:

This graduate seminar will provide students with a broad foundation in one of the avant-garde movements in contemporary literary studies. Major focuses of the course will be new theories of place (including globalist and neo-bioregionalist thinking); comparatist approaches (cross-cultural, cross-ethnic); social and environmental justice in relation to ecocriticism; ecocritical approaches to visual culture and popular culture; ideas of animality; new approaches to gender and the body; and the relationship between ecocriticism and environmental aesthetics.

The first class meeting was held on January 19th; this day coincided with the anniversary of an important environmental disaster: on this day, the North Cape spill, which took place off the coast of Rhode Island in 1996, had released an estimated 828,000 gallons of home heating oil into the coastal waters and had caused enormous destruction to the physical environment. In this first meeting, the class discussed various definitions of ecocriticism, which led me to think what an important literary historical moment arose when Professor Cheryll Glotfelty defined ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.”¹⁷ During the class meeting, students discussed various Western Literature Association position papers from the mid-1990s, as well as PMLA letters that emphasized not only theoretical aspects of the field, but its relevance to practical dimensions of human experience, such as national borders, economics, and environmental and social justice.

The second class was held on January 26th, three days after the Port Arthur oil spill in the Sabine-Neches Waterway at Port Arthur, Texas. On this date, two vessels [the oil tanker *Eagle Otome* and a barge being pushed by the towboat *Dixie Vengeance*] collided, and 462,000 gallons of crude oil escaped through a hole in

for Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic's definition of third wave ecocriticism (6-7).

17 See Glotfelty, “Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis” in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (xviii).

the side of the tanker. So it was meaningful to talk about a “metacritical grounding of ecocriticism” in reference to many essays in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996). Professor Glotfelty’s “Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” and other essays, in this groundbreaking book, the book that created a turn in the academic interests of numerous literary scholars including mine, was now influencing the MA and PhD students. During the three-and-a-half-hour class, Professor Slovic gave particular emphasis to Timothy Morton’s essay “Introduction: Toward a Theory of Ecological Criticism,” published in his *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), to see “whether we have a viable new form of ecocriticism developing,”¹⁸ which led me to think that we Turkish ecocritics need to master the “old” ones urgently so that we can appreciate the new forms that seem to be emerging.

The third class was held on February 2; this was the anniversary of the 2007 oil pipeline spill in Rusk County in northern Wisconsin, a major environmental disaster in state history that contaminated the local waters of this bioregion—the accident resulted in the release of 176,000 gallons of Canadian crude oil. This class hour brought the discussion of “new applications of bioregional thinking.” The class discussed Tom Lynch’s *Xerophilia*, particularly his view of bioregionalism, one that “promotes the maintenance of at least some degree of local self-reliance against increasing dependence upon inter-regional and global trade.”¹⁹ The class also put some thought into the question in the syllabus, “Is it still appropriate to think in terms of specific places in the age of globalization?” A first group of students presented position papers on experimental ecocritical readings of Thoreau’s *Walden*, the only American nature writing text to date that has been translated into Turkish. While listening to the position papers and knowing the enormous influence of American nature writing on the emergence of ecocriticism, I kept thinking of some ways in which at least a number of important nature writing texts could be translated into Turkish. I also thought about the ways in which the important UNR English Department course offering on nonfiction writing that focuses on nature writing could be initiated in our literature departments as well.

When the class met for the 4th time on February 9, China Investment Corp, the world’s richest sovereign wealth fund, was revealing that it is the No. #4 investor in the US Oil Fund. In this class session, our topics were deterritorialization, eco-cosmopolitanism, and the discourse of globalization. The

18 These words are from Professor Slovic’s class syllabus.

19 See Tom Lynch, *Xerophilia* (19).

class discussed Ursula Heise's *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008), especially her emphasis on the "task of ecocriticism with a cosmopolitan perspective" (62).²⁰ The limitations as well as rewards of the imagination of the global community [as opposed to the commitment to the local community] in understanding the concept of place came to the fore. We all had a clear understanding of what it means to "think globally" and concluded "we need new scholarly terminology and paradigms in order to understand *global interconnectedness*."²¹

The 5th class was held on February 16, three days after the impressive movement, Hands Across the Sand, the largest gathering in the history of Florida, to oppose offshore oil drilling. Thousands of Floridians, representing 60 towns and cities and over 90 beaches had joined hands to protect their coastal economies, oceans, marine wildlife, and fishing industry, and to cherish clean energy and renewables. On this day, the class talked about *Arab/American: Landscape, Culture, and Cuisine in Two Great Deserts* (2008), the important work of Gary Paul Nabhan, the ethnobotanist committed to recovering native food traditions²² and to validating local knowledge, with a close look at postcolonial and comparatist approaches to ecocriticism. A second group of students presented position papers on Nabhan's book. During the class hour, students also discussed Patrick D. Murphy's influential essay, "Refining through Redefining Our Sensibilities: Nature-Oriented Literature as an International and Multicultural Movement" in his *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature* (2000), a book that much contributed to the expansion of the field of ecocriticism. The questions to tackle were: "What are the opportunities and pitfalls of cross-cultural comparison? Is comparative ecocriticism an appropriate response to our growing awareness of global citizenship?"

The 6th class was held on February 23. This was the anniversary of the 1980 oil tanker explosion off the island of Pulos, Greece, that had caused a 37-million-gallon spill. On this day, the class discussed the essays in the collection *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*

20 In Professor Heise's book, see especially the chapter, "From the Blue Planet to Google Earth: Environmentalism, Ecocriticism, and the Imagination of the Global" (17-67).

21 I borrow the words from Professor Slovic's class syllabus.

22 Gary Paul Nabhan, during a recent talk in Wisconsin, stated that "despite economic downturn, there is a resurgence of healthy food farming, and that local food sales have had rapid growth even while the globalized economy has been collapsing." September 28, 2010.

(2005),²³ “with a focus on the theorizing of postcolonial ecocriticism.” On this day, we learned how colonial presence created violence in the landscapes and changed the environments in the Caribbean. Many writings related to the postcolonial ecocritical dialogue came to the fore, including Rob Nixon’s essay “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism.”²⁴ During this class meeting, Professor Erin D. James joined us and clarified why Caribbean literature is important for post-colonial scholars. She stated that there is no place on earth altered as much as the Caribbean, and that post-colonial themes are very much environmental.

The class met for the 7th time on March 2, the anniversary of the 1982 oil disaster in Uzbekistan, known as the largest inland oil disaster in history, which caused 88 million gallons of oil to spill from an oil well at Fergana Valley. On this day, the class discussed the future of ecocriticism, with a focus on Lawrence Buell’s *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005). Buell’s writing on the impact that environmental justice movement had on environmental criticism led me to think of the numerous past environmental injustices in Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan, and a wishful thought that the future of environmental criticism will see a great deal of literary activism from this vast area as well. During this class meeting, the students also explored Buell’s concept of the ecocritical movement as a sequence of first and second waves and agreed with his concept of the field as a “palimpsest” (consisting of overlapping phases) rather than a strictly consecutive sequence of one wave followed by another.

The 8th class was held on March 9, when the 30,000 Ecuadorians were suffering because of Chevron’s massive contamination, the dumping of billions of gallons of wastewater from oil operations into the rainforest and the abandoning of nearly 1,000 open, unlined pits containing crude oil. During this class meeting, the students began discussing social justice, environmental justice, and ethnicity as ecocritical paradigms. The major text of this week was *The Environmental Justice Reader* (2002),²⁵ published six years after *The Ecocriticism Reader*. The class discussed environmental justice as the area of study that minority [and also low-income] communities should not be exposed to environmental hazards and that they should take part in the decisions affecting their own environments;

23 Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey et al., eds. *Caribbean Literature and the Environment* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2005).

24 For Nixon’s essay, see the collection edited by Ania Loomba et al., *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005) 233-51.

25 Joni Adamson et al., eds. *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics & Pedagogy* (Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2002).

discussions led to the important conclusion that environmental justice proposes an ethic of restraint, which extends not only to the land, but also to the world's waters. On this day, a third group of students presented position papers on Linda Hogan's novel, *People of the Whale* (2008).

Following the Spring Break, the class met on March 23rd, one day earlier to the anniversary of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill that occurred in Prince William Sound, Alaska in 1989, and spilled hundreds of thousands of barrels of crude oil. The event is considered to be one of the most devastating environmental disasters, and various studies have found that ethnic groups like Native Alaskans were the most devastated of all groups affected by the spill. On this day, the class discussed the contents of the special issue (Summer 2009) of *MELUS: Multi-ethnic Literature of the United States*, the issue devoted to ethnicity and ecocriticism. Essays by T. V. Reed and Annette Kolodny were at the forefront during the class meeting. A central question to tackle for this class meeting was "How might the focus on ethnicity help ecocritics to tease out new meanings from literature (and other texts) and contribute in new ways to practical discussions of environment and society."²⁶

The following class meeting was on March 30th. On this class day, President Obama announced plans to open up vast new areas to offshore oil drilling. Only three weeks before the burning images of Deepwater Horizon oil rig appeared in the news, the class discussed the collection *Ecosee: Image, Rhetoric, Nature* (2009),²⁷ an important book on visual rhetoric that wants us to be aware of the power of images in the ongoing domination of nature. The class meeting focused on the contribution of rhetorical analysis studies to ecocriticism. Among other issues connected to analyzing a text rhetorically, W. J. T. Mitchell's 1994 book *Picture Theory* came to the fore and helped clarify the connections between the role of the visual image and environmentalism. I much admired the cover design of *Ecosee*: the blue planet a blue human-eye-pupil. I saw that this blue-eye of the book was not only seeing the environments from a Western perspective, but also opening up fresh ideas to see the environments on a global scale. The class also considered Al Gore's book *An Inconvenient Truth*,²⁸ filled with visual images of the worsening global warming, and the lively class

26 From the class syllabus.

27 Sidney I. Dobrin and Sean Morey, eds. *Ecosee: Image, Rhetoric, Nature* (Albany: SUNY P, 2009).

28 Al Gore states, "the truth about the climate crisis is an inconvenient one that means we are going to have to change the way we live our lives" (284).

discussions led me to think what could be some of the ways in which politicians across the world can be made more environmentally aware.

On April 6th, the class met again. One year earlier, on this day, the U.S. Department of the Interior had exempted BP's Gulf of Mexico drilling operation from a detailed environmental impact study. BP had indicated in their permit application that an oil spill was "unlikely," and had stated that if an oil spill did occur it would cause "no significant adverse impacts." On this class day, the primary text was *Environmentalism in Popular Culture* (2009),²⁹ a book that exposes the ways in which popular culture shows environmental injustices as "natural." The class discussed Noël Sturgeon's "strategies for connecting texts ranging from advertisements to children's cartoons to today's essential political concerns,"³⁰ and appreciated the way Sturgeon systematically brings feminism and environmental justice into connection with one another. During the class meeting, Professor Michael P. Branch joined us and gave a talk on the role of humor in environmental studies.

The next class meeting was on April 13th. On this day, Bill McKibben, the important environmentalist and author was interviewed³¹ on his latest book, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* (2010). As a way to explain the unconventional spelling of "eaarth," McKibben stated, "The conceit is that we really have built a new planet. Substantially different enough from the one that we were born onto to warrant a new name." He went to say: "We need to do two things. One, put a price on carbon so that we really begin to ween ourselves aggressively from fossil fuel. Even when we do that we'd be very wise to re-examine our economic life. Stop thinking constantly about expansion, and start thinking more about security. That implies getting away from too-big-to-fail, not just in banking, but in energy, in agriculture, and in almost everything we do." During the interview, McKibben pointed at a grave misunderstanding in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*: "[Smith] didn't say that [the economy] is to grow forever getting bigger. In fact, he was pretty clear that there was a place at which that no longer made sense. What economists have failed to realize from the beginning, the economy is a subset of something else, and that something else is the natural world. There comes a point in which infinite growth no longer works. This is the moment finally when

29 Noël Sturgeon. *Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of the Natural* (Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2009).

30 From the class syllabus.

31 Interview can be reached at: <http://marketplace.publicradio.org/display/web/2010/04/13/pm-earth-new-reality-q/>

those limits are at hand.” On this day, the class discussed the book, *Animal Rites* (2003).³² As we talked about the fate of the animal in Cary Wolfe’s book, the use of fossil fuels was wreaking havoc on animal habitats across the world. A fifth group of students presented position papers on New Zealand author Witi Ihimaera’s *The Whale Rider* (2003), the story of a Maori girl who traveled the seas astride a whale. Elsewhere, during the presentations, people of the world were denying their kinship and interdependence with creatures of the oceans polluting and overfishing earth’s vital waters.

April 20th, on the very day when Deepwater Horizon exploded—the worst environmental disaster in the history of the world to date—the class met again. Only two days to Earth Day, after the blowout and rig fire, oil started gushing into the Gulf and went on for 86 days, destroying the ecologically sensitive coastal regions. On this day when Mother Earth saw a tremendous assault on its body, the class talked about “ecocriticism and the body.” The discussion of Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman’s *Material Feminisms* (2008)³³ (a book that critiques the retreat from materiality) in relation to Val Plumwood’s *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* was a timely topic, indeed. The class gave particular attention to Alaimo’s essay on “Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature” for its emphasis on “the material turn in feminist theory.” In addition to this, one student presented a position paper on Terry Tempest Williams’s *Finding Beauty in a Broken World* (2008).

The last class meeting was held on April 27 when more oil was gushing into the Gulf. With incessant news in the media, we became more aware of the reality of the global oil spill phenomenon, that, for instance, the people who live in the Niger delta—the region that contains fragile wetlands—have had to live with Shell oil spill catastrophes for decades, that massive spills are no longer news in this vast land, and that the world is simply blind to the oil spills here.³⁴ On this class day, students discussed Timothy Morton’s *Ecology Without Nature* (2007) in relation to excerpts from various books on environmental aesthetics by philosophers Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant. During the meeting, the class also paid attention to the “Ecocriticism” chapter in Peter Barry’s *Beginning*

32 Cary Wolfe. *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003).

33 Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, eds. *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2008).

34 For information on oil spills in the Niger Delta, see, Susan Comfort, “Struggle in Ogoniland: Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Cultural Politics of Environmental Justice” (229-46).

Theory (2002); and I remembered how Barry's insightful ecocritical reading of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (with a focus on the "black and lurid tarn . . . by the dwelling," pointing at "an eco-system damaged beyond repair") once clarified to me what ecocriticism was.

By the end of the semester, the graduate students—Meredith, Shaun, Keira, Kyle, George, Katja, Beau, Coral, Tamara—the future ecocritics, had mastered ecocritical theory from all facets of human experience. Most important of all, from my perspective, their various projects reflected the need for "contact" with the physical world. At the end of the term, PhD candidate Kyle Bladow rephrased the deepening role of the ecocritic, as well as that of future ecocritics:

*I think it's crucial that scholars in the humanities continue to prioritize how humanity interprets, understands, and celebrates the more-than-human world, so that we can continue to learn how the stories we tell and the metaphors we use influence how we impact this world in a time of so much anthropogenic ecological degradation.*³⁵

The lines above ultimately show we are in a conundrum. So much anthropogenic ecological degradation. To this, I would like to add Speth's observation: "[G]lobal-scale environmental problems . . . are constantly interacting with one another, typically worsening the situation" (39). After a semester of *bringing the biosphere home*,³⁶ and studying texts on various environmental issues [a semester under the signs of planetary ruin], we all had a renewed understanding of the need to "think globally" before we "act locally."

Turkish ecocriticism. The delegates of the Sixth World Wilderness Congress resolved that the 21st century be declared "the Century of Restoring

35 Personal communication with Kyle A. Bladow, PhD student in the Graduate Program in Literature and Environment, University of Nevada, Reno. June 1, 2010.

36 Mitchell Thomashow, in *Bringing the Biosphere Home*, the book that gives us "guidelines for learning how to practice biospheric perception," states: "[f]rom wherever you are, the biosphere is there too" (217). Earlier in the book, Thomashow writes: "What happens thousands of miles away across the globe may dramatically affect your neighborhood. And the local development project just down the road from you may prompt a wave of ecological and political changes that will reverberate in communities you've never even heard of. Wherever you live, whatever you think about, developing an understanding of global environmental change dramatically expands your scope and vision" (3).

the Earth.” Restoration of degraded lands and diminished wildlife populations is the grand legacy of Aldo Leopold. Scott Russell Sanders, in his “A Conservationist Manifesto,” has made a forceful call for land restoration, saying “[c]onservation means not only protecting the relatively unscathed natural areas that survive, but also mending, so far as possible, what has been damaged” (211). Therefore, I envision embracing what I would like to call a restoration ecocriticism, in “the Century of Restoring the Earth.” This will give rise to not only conserving lands but also restoring damaged lands.³⁷ I envision a Turkish ecocriticism that will give rise to a healthy skepticism for our new corporate culture, consumerism, and commercialism so that we contribute to re-ecologizing our economy; I envision a Turkish ecocriticism that will highlight the merits of local natural histories and ecologies embedded in their literatures, a movement that will create interest in “wanting to learn the stories of [one’s place]” and teaching this very literature, on location.³⁸ Wendell Berry, in a recent lecture, made an important projection for the future: the need to prepare students for “local adaptation.” I envision a Turkish ecocriticism that will contribute to filling in a gap in the education system, teaching, in Berry’s terms, local biology/ecology, so that young people, having acquired the “loyalty,” do not seek jobs in “great corporations.”³⁹ I envision a new Turkish ecocriticism that will light the fire for a nature writing mania in our country, for “narrative expressions” of local lands tell us best “what constitutes an environmental value.”⁴⁰ The wealth of information and inspiration for the Turkish ecocritic is available both in Western ecocritical texts and in our own heritage. One only needs to explore, patiently and committedly,

37 For a case study on restoration ecocriticism, see Ufuk Özdağ, “Keeping Alive the Memory of the Amik: Environmental Aesthetics and Land Restoration.” *Facing the Past, Facing the Future: History, Memory, Literature*. Ed. A.C. Hoff. (Istanbul: Bahçeşehir UP, 2011). Forthcoming.

38 See Cheryl Glotfelty, “Finding Home in Nevada? Teaching the Literature of Place, on Location” (346). Also see *Literary Nevada* (2008), edited by Glotfelty, a valuable anthology that “enables readers to discover Nevada through stories and poems” (Preface xxviii), and will inspire Turkish literary scholars for compiling such collections on Turkey’s landscapes.

39 Wendell Berry, in a recent speech, has pointed at a lack in the education system, that “without loyalty to any place,” students have sought jobs in “great corporations.” See Works Cited.

40 See Satterfield and Slovic, “Introduction: What’s Nature Worth?” (11). For a discussion of the significance of environmental writing on a keener perception of the lands, and on environmental laws and policies, also see Slovic, “There’s Something About Your Voice I Cannot Hear: Environmental Literature, Public Policy and Ecocriticism” (59-68).

the literary output of the centuries long Central Asian ancestors of the present day Turks, the Anatolian and Central Asian Turks' shamanistic past, the Orhon inscriptions [the oldest written documents of the Turkish language], the myths of the Oguz Turks, Anatolian Sufism, and Anatolian people's literary heritage, past and present, embedded in our *Toprak Ana*⁴¹ to bring out the ecological impulse at the root of them all and to bring back engagement with our lands. For me, these should occupy a central place for the school of ecocriticism in Turkey.

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41 The reference is to our culture of a harmonious co-existence with Mother Earth.

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***Ecopoetics*, no.6/7, 2006-2009. Ed. Jonathan Skinner.**

Bowdoinham, ME:

Periplum Editions, 2009. 324 pp.

Elizabeth Schultz

I'm far more interested in the weeds, the things growing in the cracks, the things not quantifiable or qualifiable and what their relationship is to a larger picture that we may not be able to understand in terms of aesthetics.

mIEKAL aND

Early poets half shaman, half sibyl, spoke for this flow of our transformations into animals, kinds of weather.

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge

Instead of speaking of poems as "green life," I propose them to be mushrooms—as the fruiting bodies of a broad social mycelia.

Gary Snyder

Beginning with its first issue in 2001, *Ecopoetics* has grown fatter, fuller, and sassier with each issue. This most recent issue, comprising 324 pages, includes a special feature on Australian ecopoetics, edited by Michael Farrell, as well as interviews, essays on poets, poetic essays, poems written in circles, in multiple fonts, on the horizontal, in translation, black-and-white and color photography, photographs of art in nature, ekphrastic poetry, "a radio play in one act," a class assignment, the reproduction of a child's handwritten field notes. The language of these poems is in English, Spanish, beetle; they draw on scientific information, historical documents, astute observation of nature, newspapers, personal experience; they appear in traditional poetic forms, haiku, prose paragraphs, journal and diary entries; they interface with photographs, drawings, graphs, calligraphy. This issue of *Ecopoetics* includes a variety of weeds and mushrooms growing in the cracks of human culture, in general, and poetic aesthetics, in particular; indeed, the success of this issue lies in its diversity of expression, a diversity which collectively questions, explores, and expands the understanding of ecopoetics itself, its subjects and its praxis.

Ecopoetics has insisted from its first issue that ecopoetics be inclusive, opening up space to embrace place, opening up nature to include human nature. In his introduction to issue 6/7, *Ecopoetics* editor Jonathan Skinner, links the challenges for the contemporary environmental movement—“complexity, interconnectedness, fragility, and time”—with contemporary ecopoetics. However, the work in this issue addresses the planet’s degradation and exploitation through imagery, allusion, form, and celebration rather than by statistics, prescription, and exhortation. *Ecopoetics* encourages us as readers and writers of ecopoetics to perceive global as local, ourselves as organisms, and poems as transformative. Although individual poems in *Ecopoetics* continue to represent nature, referencing a range of creatures and elements, the compelling energy of *Ecopoetics* emerges from living and breathing poems, created by processes beyond printed technology and exercising influence beyond printed technology.

By including a feature on Australia, *Ecopoetics* goes global. However, with few exceptions these Australian entries are grounded in particular Australian places: “the red pulsating land before me” (Alf Lord), “Somewhere among shifting sandhills / there is a fold, / a slit where the mind’s eye grafts in dimensions that have no horizon” (Simon West). Several poems evoke desiccation and the yearning for water: “this sunburnt and arid desert continent” (John McBain), “Hedge fragile white in a southerly. / Tinder touchwood dry tender would touch” (Jill Jones), “see me for what I am, ploughing dry ground” (John Kinsella). Australia is, however, connected the world at large as Kinsella links the continent’s farmers with “wheat markets in Iraq and India,” Lucy Dougan thinks of a friend in Spain, considering that he “scout[s] the landscape / for shy traces of the local” and concluding that both of them are “listening for rustlings, tending weeds / and working quietly at the edges.” Other entries in *Ecopoetics*, while evoking disparate world cultures, also focus on the specificities of locale. Translator Luis Aguilar-Moreno comments on Cuban Jose Marti’s “War Journal,” noting that it “bursts into nature,” freed from line breaks to explore the wildness of a Caribbean landscape and of war. In the poems of Mexican Angelica Tornero and Antonio Ochoa, whose works appear in English across the page from the original Spanish, a specific sensual world is deeply felt as it also is in “Highest Rainforest” by Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo of Madagascar. While the linguistic experiments of Alec Finlay and Stuart Mills, both of whom are English, allow them to name natural images, their general allusions to field and garden are trans-Atlantic. North Americans, Alistair Noon and Kate Schapira, however, explicitly evoke Wuhan and Xiantao, China, in their writings—Noon through reference to myth, history, and contemporary environmental destruction,

Schapira through transcribing the changing contexts for a riverbank biking trip, a baby, a half-eaten peach. Writings by other North Americans in *Ecopoetics* wander the continent, grasping at strange weeds and familiar mushrooms in both city and country, but seeking to connect and explore with natural and unnatural growth in both places. In his poem, "Jerusalem Everywhere You Go," Timothy Bradford identifies the dangers of amorphous globalization which may dissolve into mere exotic travel, warning, "The Amazon tribes remain as remote as the ruins of Paris / or the sands of the Aracama Desert to the permafrost of Alaska. / They disappear like certain Maya Cities, never to deface the New Jerusalem of Zimbabwe."

Several writers in *Ecopoetics* perceive the origins of poetry in the structures, motions, and sounds of earth and human body. As if familiar with aboriginal songlines, Australian poet-essayist, Louise Crisp, claims, "The only way I know to write is to walk," and Bonnie Cassidy, writing of the Australian poet, Jennifer Rankin, finds Rankin's poems, not in archives, but most profoundly in the ever-evolving and flourishing land where Rankin lived. Visiting this land, Cassidy realizes that "The Mud Hut" about which Rankin wrote is not an architectural dwelling, but the earth itself, which, like her poem "transfers reality like water through a cell." North American poets also find walking a correlative for writing ecopoetry. An essay on John Muir discusses Muir, walker, climber, and observer of minute flower and massive glacier, also as poet correlating the patterns in his writing with his recognition of patterns in nature, "plotting his own narrative sequence as a way of tracing the unapparent sequence of lives shaped by the harmonious force and form of glacier flow." Other poet-walkers, Theodore Enslin and Gary Snyder, are also shown to correlate the body walking and breathing not only to the rhythm and meter of poetic lines but also within a particular place. Snyder points out the physical relationship of heart-beat, breath, pace, verse, and feet to poetic tradition. In his stunning essay on Enslin, which is followed by photographs of Enslin's notebooks and his poems, Matthew Cooperman notes that the poems have "an acute performativity" and "an incantatory quality" making their fabric "of the body." Poet Linda Russo, writing on soundscape and generating sound through poetic word play in her own "Achilles' Helix," discusses the defining particularities of sound in any environment and the importance of its evocation in referencing any environment, despite its ephemerality.

Several writers here suggest that the poems in *Ecopoetics* may be understood in relation to energy: they spring from creative energy, and they generate transformative energy—by experimenting with new poetic forms and language, by making change itself their subject, and by their impact on readers. Thus,

although Forrest Gander evades the question of identifying poetry in any essential way with ecology, he nevertheless relates the creation of coal to the creation of a poem in “The Future of the Past: The Carboniferous & Eco-Poetics,” asserting that “A poem, even excavated from its context and the time of its writing, is a curiously renewable form of energy.” Kyhl Lyndgaard and Gary Snyder expand upon this possibility in their interview in *Ecopoetics*, with Snyder proposing that “the best literature requires the deepest compost.” The imagery in both of their poems implies that fire from deep compost—like poetry—warms the bones or lights the night. In his “Ecopoetics Statement,” Benjamin Friedlander succinctly tells us that “Language is a / Dumping ground that // Produces its own / Content.”

Among poems in the collection explicitly drawing on nature to illuminate transformation are Karen Leona Anderson’s “Snowshoe Hare,” Stan Apps’ “Pumpkins Please,” Mei-mei Berssenbrugge’s “Green,” Tyler Doherty’s “R.I.P.,” and John Estes’ “Mantlepiece.” Several of these poems refer to the transformative qualities of death and to the procreative possibilities of new life forms emerging from death. Thus, in Doherty’s poem a Christmas bonsai is recycled among the spring iris, and Estes, perhaps like the gnawing saprophytes in his poem, “can’t wait to repossess” the skull of a rotting steer carcass. In their poems, Anderson and Apps suggest the interconnections between humans and other living beings. In precise detail, Anderson’s poem observes how humans have changed the environment for creatures, such as rabbits and ourselves, for we are not unlike them—“our blood and waste and water” also “shiver through the woods.” The implication in Apps’ poem, one of the few in this issue of *Ecopoetics* relying on formal meter and rhyme as well as humor, plays with the sense that we are what we eat, and that both pumpkins and poetry make for good eating. Berssenbrugge’s long poem is like a walk in the woods, where shifts in color and form caused by light and wind and spatial juxtaposition change her very way of seeing: “The glow is an inner informational process connecting moment to moment in a kind of spontaneous karmic outline, crow in wind, elms.”

Rachel Blau DuPlessis’ “Draft 72: Nanifesto” is a poem of imperatives, on the one hand, a list of self-help guides for the individual to create a better personal life, on the other, a list of mandates for communities, towns and nations, for the world at large to reform life on the planet. Some of DuPlessis’ imperatives are abstract—“Saturate the imperfect moment with intransigent audacity”; others demand new ways of interacting with nature—“Loop your vines between the trees”; “Respect honey, and even more, the bees.” All of her imperatives, so emphatically addressed to readers, imply her conviction that the energy of poetry

creates change and can also create community, transcending national and ethnic boundaries, transcending species boundaries while attending to the particular place and the particular creature. In multiple ways, this issue of *Ecopoetics* embraces a similar ecopoetic dynamic. Matthew Cooperman, in his description of Theodore Enslin's work, gives eloquent expression to this dynamic: "The social contract of poetry might be founded on a principle of conservation: on the transference of energy, here to there, then to now, a movement of energy across space-time that locates, proprioceptively the living body of place and person."

Sandra Steingraber. *Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment*. 2nd Ed. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo P, 2010. 414 pp.

J. Meredith Privott

While our understanding of cancer as a growing global epidemic has increased exponentially since 1997—or, since Sandra Steingraber's impressive volume *Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment* was first published—little has changed in United States environmental or chemical policy. What has emerged over the years, however, is a mounting intolerance against industry laws and practices that are antiquated, and, in many cases, unconstitutional. As Steingraber's decision to publish an updated second edition of *Living Downstream* (in addition to her work being turned into a feature-length documentary film) demonstrates, US readers—academics and non-academics alike—are listening ever more carefully to the writer and biologist who significantly picked up where Rachel Carson left off.

While Steingraber provides a thorough, yet eloquent scientific investigation of the relationship between environmental contamination (with a focus on chemical waste) and cancer, one of the most impressive features of her work is the seamless weaving of her own personal experience with bladder cancer into her investigation, along with the search for her “ecological roots” (xv) that lie at the heart of her diagnosis. Diagnosed with bladder cancer, a “quintessential environmental cancer” (xii), at just twenty years old, Steingraber was confused and provoked by her doctor's questioning if she had ever worked at a tire factory, or in the aluminum industry. An unusual set of diagnosis questions, and her becoming yet another member of her family to be diagnosed with cancer, Steingraber was decidedly compelled to understand what was happening inside her own body, in her family, and most deeply, in the very place she had been raised. As she explains in the preface to her work, beyond her scientific motivation as a biologist is a “deeply personal stor a memoir set on the east bluff of the Illinois River where I grew up” (xiv). It is therefore Steingraber's combined pursuit of her own ecological roots, and of the “unintended environmental consequences” (xiv) of drastic agricultural and industrial transformations taking place across

the United States, that makes *Living Downstream* an inherently strong work of environmental writing.

The second edition of *Living Downstream* extensively explores six new but clear trends that have deepened our understanding of the link between cancer and the environment over the past twelve or so years, and the careful exploration of these new trends in the second edition work cleanly to corroborate Steingraber's original evidence. As Steingraber asserts in the forward to her second edition, we should now acknowledge: that cancer causation is far more complex than we originally thought; that epigenetics, or the study of how substances alter gene expression, is a necessary field for understanding cancer and its link to the environment; that endocrine disruptors (like atrazine, a notorious herbicide and suspected carcinogen) play a role in the formation of cancer cells; that the *time* of exposure in a individual's life (namely, pre- or post-puberty) is just as important a factor in creating cancer cells as is the *amount* in an exposure; that foreign chemicals should not be studied in isolation within the body, as they occur only in *combination* within the body; and finally, that the precautionary principle should be used as an environmental model in every society, and not just in the European Union (xviii-xxi).

Each of the twelve chapters of the text explores a different theme, factor, or element found in the relationship between pollution and cancer (such "Time," "Space," "War," or "Air," "Water," "Fire"), and each chapter provocatively illustrates the challenges now posed by each of the six new scientific findings. What Steingraber most significantly emphasizes throughout her work is just how *elusive* a concrete understanding of the relationship between the environment and cancer is—and really, how elusive that relationship will probably *always* be. The problem—which Carson understood, and which Steingraber profoundly returns to—is that this elusiveness has served as the logic for charging ahead blindly, for complying with dangerous (arguably, criminal) chemical and industrial practices, and for accepting carcinogenic or harmful products as a part of our lives—because there's no proof of harm (yet). As *Living Downstream* details, the reactionary logic of allowing potentially dangerous substances to enter our environments until real harm is demonstrated (a clear recipe for disaster) has shaped the inadequate systems through which we regulate chemicals and their by-products, and their potential for harm. Furthermore, no national or federal cancer registry exists in the US, often leaving states to develop makeshift systems for studying cancer or other environmentally-derived illnesses, which in turn are ineffective in determining where cancer cluster communities may exist.

And yet, though Steingraber thoroughly outlines the inadequacies of current US chemical, industrial, and environmental practices, nowhere in the text does she plead any kind of radical or unreasonable change in policy that could serve as a deterrent for skeptics. She does make a definitive stand against the continued use of non-renewable resources, particularly coal and petroleum; however, as she happily points out, we have finally reached the point where we must find substitutes for those two sources that are responsible not only for climate change, but are also the two main substances that carcinogenic synthetic chemicals are derived from (xxvii). While Steingraber does raise issues of environmental justice very subtly—particularly when she discusses such concepts as “toxic trespass” (34)—some environmental justice advocates may critique Steingraber for not more strongly emphasizing or treating the ethical implications of unjust and disproportionate land use, where certain groups of people (often determined by race and class) typically bear the environmental burden of American society. However, Steingraber fully asserts in her discussion of “ecological roots” and of the precautionary principle in her final chapter, “Ecological Roots,” that a “human rights perspective” is really the only tolerable view through which we can begin to change our current systems of regulation (279-80). Furthermore, a full treatment of the relationship between environmental justice, the environment, and cancer is another work entirely into and of itself. Steingraber only asks her readers for a *real* consideration of the link between cancer and environment, and as it is impossible for any reader to finish *Living Downstream* without questioning the very way we live our lives and how we arrived at the problems we now face, she absolutely accomplishes her original goal in writing this work, and in publishing an updated second edition.

**Ian Marshall. *Walden by Haiku*. Athens, GA:
U of Georgia P, 2009. 239 pp.**

Shaun O'Reilly

The presumption seems to be growing old, the one that claims we have exhausted any new, exciting, and critically relevant readings of Henry Thoreau's *Walden*. At least Ian Marshall has set out to uncover the secret that, apparently, there is still more treasure there. Marshall's unique take on *Walden* is one that honors the traditional notions of the book while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of its understanding, witnessed in the book by Marshall's actual rephrasing and repositioning of words to create "new work" (poetry) from the prose. He tackles the question in his eloquent introduction, posing, "is it a new *Walden* I present here? No, I would not claim that—but haiku teaches us to notice and appreciate anew what is old and familiar to us" (xxiii). So Marshall's incorporation of this unique poetic form immediately brings innovation to his analysis; he convincingly accomplishes this "looking anew" while taking a glance at old, faithful *Walden* through the importantly beautiful, simple, and natural lens of Japanese haiku.

The book is particularly balanced, with equal explanations and elucidations on the history of *Walden* and the history of the haiku form. One senses the passionate connection Marshall has to each aspect of the book and his appropriate handling of specific ideas and terms draws the two together here in a way that is personally reflective of the author and highly interesting and accessible to readers. In fact, it is difficult to categorize the book as being *solely* related to *Walden*; it is an informative introduction to haiku as much as it is anything else. In some ways, *Walden* can seem to be simply the most perfect template with which to exercise and teach the elements of haiku. With different intentions, but as the same book, this work could easily be titled "*Haiku by Walden*." Ultimately, this balance undergirds the relational and relevant play of Marshall's textual analysis of both Thoreau's masterpiece and haiku form.

Also, one can easily detect that Marshall has done extensive research of these texts. The layout of the book reflects the careful handling of ideas and concepts related to such a famous American iconoclastic text and such a regarded form of poetry. After the effective and enlightening introduction, the book offers the

chapter “*Walden* by Haiku,” proceeding chapter by chapter through Thoreau’s *Walden*, and offering different haiku derived from each. Here, Marshall uses the space after the poems to share insights into aspects of the haiku form. He is not yet relating how he came to one or another exact wording for a “Thoreauvian haiku,” but more illuminating how different aspects of the poetic form function in different ways, and how Thoreau’s famous work (and the beautiful phrases therein) intimately connect with the tenets of haiku. So the early parts of this book share Marshall’s haiku from *Walden* but concentrate on form, word-choice, and the particular *feel* of haiku as text. His first chapter focuses on these distinct, important elements of haiku poetry, specifically as they relate to the various haiku he has come to, and formed, within chapters of *Walden*.

Marshall states that the “Sounds” chapter of *Walden* perhaps presents the most “haiku moments” (21). As haiku is about sensing what is *outside* one’s self instead of continually looking *inward*, Marshall argues that readers can sense this same transition in the successive pages of *Walden*, and that Thoreau is most dramatically making this turn in “Sounds.” Thus, Marshall offers his strongest haiku derived from the “Sounds” chapter: “furniture on the grass / white sand and water / scrubbing the cabin floor” (17); “a winter morning / cockerels crow clear and shrill / the earth resounding” (21).

Reading Marshall’s creations of Thoreauvian haiku is an interesting practice for those familiar with *Walden*. One’s knowledge and intimacy with the prose-origin of *Walden* lends that these new poems do not seem to stand on their own quite as competently as when they are considered together, in the way Marshall offers them, creating a particular portrait of haiku collections. One is not necessarily struck by this or that poem, but perhaps more by the paired, intentional compilation of Thoreau’s poetic words arranged on the page together. It is fitting to consider them chapter by chapter (per *Walden*), and the convincing organization speaks to the author’s intuitive connection to the original American text as well as his instincts for organizing its poetic form in a manner that adequately compliments both the “old” and the “new.”

The second full chapter of Marshall’s book now turns to explicate the excerpts from *Walden* that have been “translated” into haiku for this book. Through this process Marshall observes that “the most important ideas of *Walden* generally find expression in the most haiku-like language, language that relies on concrete diction and imagery, with frequent juxtaposition of images” (xvi). So in “part 2” of the book Marshall points to sources and gives commentary on how these passages of *Walden* sparked thoughts and images of haiku in his mind. As much as the previous chapter focused on elements of

haiku, this section focuses on a sort of poetic deconstruction of Thoreau's prose, relating the process of hunting for the passages that might function especially well in this new form and work. The feeling is that including this section was not necessarily a *must* for Marshall, in terms of the creation a book. Perhaps by attaching pictures of the pond to accompany the newly formed poems, *Walden by Haiku* might have functioned well as a coffee table book. But, the ecocritic endeavors to offer a deeper look into his work within this section by detailing every choice phrase for the poetry. And it is this depth of explanation that presents yet another compelling facet to this book, allowing it to function in delightfully accessible and critically important ways all at once. Here Marshall finds an avenue to comment in new and particular ways on interpretations of *Walden*. It is work that needs to be done, and Marshall's fresh form of analysis reflects his critical style, one that consistently counters a more monotonous tendency of some traditional approaches.¹

Thus, it seems that readers receive exactly what is advertised in Marshall's unique handling of *Walden*. His engaging presentation of prose, poetry, and commentary uniquely fits together to offer something colorful to Thoreauvian studies and to the work of viewing or understanding traditional American literature through a comparatist lens that senses new connections by considering other cultural literary traditions and forms. This book is an excellent example of how to perceive foundational aspects of literary works in new ways, while expertly showing one's work. It will be difficult to argue with Marshall's concoction of originality, textual commentary, and cultural history. And it is hard to ask for more in one ecocritical book.

1 See Marshall's creative use of "narrative scholarship" in works like *Story Line: Exploring the Literature of the Appalachian Trail* and *Peak experiences: walking meditations on literature, nature, and need*.

***The Federalist Papers*. Edited by Ian Shapiro, with Essays by John
Dunn, Donald Horowitz, and Eileen Hunt Botting. New Haven, CT:
Yale UP, 2009. 579 pp.**

By James Kusch

The Federalist Papers (FP from now on) consists of eighty-five letters originally published in New York newspapers between October 1787 and August 1788 under the pseudonym of Publius. The FP were the collaborative labor of three men who sought to gain popular support for ratification of the new US constitution: Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison. Ian Shapiro, the editor of this book, remarks that Publius was a political creation. Publius was named for Publius Valerius Publicola, the consul who restored the Roman republic following the overthrow of the last Roman king, Tarquin the Proud. This new edition serves as a forum for three scholars from the American political science community—John Dunn, Donald Horowitz, and Eileen Hunt Botting—to share their insights about the FP.

John Dunn argues that the FP gave evidence in its time on the future shape of collective democratic thought. He argues that never before had authority been grounded in public reasoning *sans* social or cultural preconditions. Dunn argues further that the FP set a strategy whereby the people were themselves distinguishable from the government. The people were essential for authorizing the constitution, but at the same time were excluded from exercising the power to govern (493). Dunn writes that at the core of agreement on the FP among its authors were two judgments: 1) a peremptory requirement for a strong central government, and, 2) the hope of establishing a stable republican regime that might endure indefinitely. One might argue that the main concern of the three authors was whether the constitution would be acceptable at all. From a 21st century point of view, Jay, Hamilton, and Madison were risk-takers who presented the constitution and its preamble as a done deal. The problem remained, however, how to sell it and how to persuade the body politic that they were in this together with the authors for the duration.

Donald Horowitz writes about how the authors of FP appreciated the need for the constitution to be mediated by the people and explains how the FP brought self-interest into harmony with the common interest. Other historians of

eighteenth-century America such as Gordon Wood and Willi Paul Adams claim, conversely, that the American idea of popular sovereignty was “the decisive achievement of the American political imagination,” that occurred at one of the most creative moments in the history of political thinking. Horowitz avers an American skepticism of the FP that persists into the twenty-first century. He claims that the FP have had broad appeal throughout the world in terms of choices which emerging states have made in forming constitutional governments. Horowitz tells us that the FP was a mimetic device for constitutional design which produced various effects in nation-states that he characterizes as diverse or homogenous. A different argument might suppose that the conscious willing of itself into political existence would denote a people as a unified group capable of political action. Horowitz makes the spurious claim that certain debates present in the FP have continued to “play out” in a “third-wave democratization” that began in 1984. This claim is a reach in implying that somehow the authors of the FP held a prescient view supportive of Samuel Huntington’s thesis about a “clash of civilizations” (see endnote 24).

The third essay, by Eileen Hunt Botting, takes up questions of representation rights among the largest majority of the time—women. Did the legitimacy of the republic rely on the joint participation of both sexes? She closes her argument by calling for a full public interrogation of patriarchy, hoping that the design of a truly democratic government which recognizes the contributions of all its citizens might serve as an inspiration for modern feminism. But Botting’s argument begs certain questions such as, How does a people give birth to itself as a collective subject? Or, who actually has the right of laying down the rules of a new society? How does a body politic declare its will? If “the people” are properly understood, how are they subject to laws? Should they *all* give birth to the law that governs them? Finally, ought the origin of law to be unanimous, since mere majority rule most probably relies on a prior rule or agreement?—as in the case of the FP, e.g., either the Articles of Confederation or possibly Rousseau’s *Social Contract*.

This edition of the FP offers familiar primary-source material for the student of eighteenth-century America. Editor Ian Shapiro claims that the three additional essays explore the composition of the FP, discuss recent experiments with democracy and constitution-making around the world, and explain how early advocates of women’s rights responded to eighteenth-century debates that were configured with the FP. But there is little that is new about the FP in the three essays by Dunn, Horowitz and Botting. Their arguments are neither nuanced nor do they reflect much of what could be called a critical perspective. One could hope that essays written about the FP might, at a minimum, isolate

The Federalist Papers

the dilemmas faced by the lawgiver/founders at the quasi-mythical time of constitutional creation. These were profound dilemmas concerning self-authorization that can be associated with constituent moments wherein a new power usurps the reigning norm, rule, and authority. There is nothing in the essays that indicates the extent to which democratic politics claims to speak according to self-authorized principles. In brief, the times in which the FP were composed were exceptional times and the authors were exceptional thinkers. The rules they modified with the writing of the FP were less interesting than the exceptions they produced. Political writing that would give attention to the acts of self-authorization in the writing and ratification of *The Federalist Papers* would add much to our understanding of the times and of the thought that the times produced.

**Andrew S. Finstuen. *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants:
The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham,
and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety.*
Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2009. 255 pp.**

Andrew Polk

In *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants*, Andrew Finstuen challenges both the scholarly and popular notion of post-World War II American religion as having been shallowly subservient to pervading notions of American superiority and the “American way of life.” While not denying that this “captive revival” existed, Finstuen insists that there was an additional theological revival that rivaled, and openly critiqued, the former. He locates the heart of this theological revival in the way the Christian concept of original sin spoke directly to American’s deep anxiety over both the physical threats of the cold war and the angst created by America’s sudden material wealth. According to Finstuen, the key proponents of original sin—Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich—were able to connect to the American populace on a deep and profound level, giving rise to a vital revival of theological reflection and engagement among the laity. These “lay theologians” thus wrestled with America’s place in the emerging world order as they simultaneously grappled with their own, seemingly contradictory, state of existence.

Finstuen divides the work into two parts. The first section recounts the general state of affairs in post-war America and the Protestant Church’s attempt to engage America’s increasing angst. Finstuen first details the nature of America’s “Age of Anxiety,” and then proceeds to establish the way his three exemplars engaged that age. The third chapter examines each man’s conception of original sin and the way all three differed in specifics, yet agreed that the American, and, indeed, universally human, predicament could be explained by the pervasive element of sin as a fact of human existence. Finstuen’s second part then recounts each man’s engagement with his popular audience, exploring the way he integrates theology into counsel and the way their audiences integrated the leaders’ theology into their own thought and actions. This second section is by far the more interesting and informative of the two, and Finstuen’s masterful

amalgamation of primary sources and insightful analysis is sure to impress both his scholarly and popular audiences.

Finstuen's work is not without weaknesses—most notably his tendency to overemphasize the commonality of his three subjects—yet these are far overshadowed by his excellent prose and superb ability to capture both the rational processes and intimate pathos of his subjects. *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants* surely disputes the notion of post-war American religion as wholly captive to American culture, yet its lasting influence will more likely be its challenge to the false dichotomy between elite intellectualism and popular experience. This dichotomy is most often expressed in the academy through the distinction of theology and lived religion or intellectual and social history, depending on one's particular academic discipline. Finstuen convincingly demonstrates, at least in the decades between 1945 and 1965, that the American laity were intimately involved in the process of theological discernment. Future scholars would do well to follow Finstuen's example and pay close attention to the way formal theology was, and still is, received and assimilated by the general populace.

***Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville,
and the Modern Prospect.* By Paul A. Rahe. New Haven, CT:
Yale UP, 2009. 374 pp.**

Jonathon W. Moses

In *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift*, Europe and America have come to suffer under a spirit of uneasiness, discontent and world-weariness. If we are to believe this book's cover jacket, Professor Paul A. Rahe can help us understand the meaning of our modern political malaise by examining the nature of our liberal democracy through the work of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Tocqueville.

If this is the objective, then the project fails. Indeed, it is doubtful that it could ever succeed, as the world has changed in important ways since Montesquieu, Rousseau and Tocqueville took quill into hand. There can be no doubting the remarkable insight and contribution that these men conveyed to modern thought and our understanding of democracy—but it is folly to expect them capable of clairvoyance, and it is problematic to claim that liberal democracy suffers from a despotic disease. The latter project, alone, would require a monograph of its own to convince more critical readers.

Professor Rahe's book can be fruitfully divided in two. The bulk of the book offers an impressive reading of these three fundamental thinkers for the modern democratic project. Rahe's grasp of each author's work, their individual biographies, and the context in which they wrote, is impressive, even brilliant. I was mesmerized by the story he tells—his breadth of scope, eruditeness, and grasp of context—along with the rather surprising ways in which he is able to link the lives of these three influential thinkers.

This part of the book comes highly recommended as a text for graduate course work in democratic thought, political theory, or French intellectual history. Indeed, Professor Rahe is able to challenge many conventional interpretations by employing careful, contextually anchored readings from each of the three authors. For example, my own prejudices about Montesquieu—based on an admittedly Americano-centric reading (e.g., by the way he is employed by both Federalist and anti-Federalists alike)—were drawn out in the open by the forcefulness of Professor Rahe's careful reading. In this light Montesquieu ceases

to be the naïve admirer of English institutions, as Rahe points to the role that “terror” plays as the driving principle in Montesquieu’s England—a place, Rahe notes, that has an “undeniable kinship with despotism” (37).

From these careful readings, we learn how the modern intellectual project can be understood with reference to a common theme or assumption about humankind. Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Rousseau are each discussed in light of their willingness to accept a more plastic, or flexible conception of man, where the modern man’s state-of-mind is “decisively shaped neither by sin nor by nature as such—but by the form of government under which he lives” (117). Following Rousseau, each author acknowledges the “infinite *perfectibilité* of man” and the democratic state can be seen as a mold by which modern man is formed. For Professor Rahe, it is this focus on the perfectibility of man that is “emphatically modern” (119).

So far so good. From this point of pivot, we might expect the closing chapters of the book to show us examples of how modern liberal democracies continue to embrace such a positive and pliable notion of humankind. In contrasting this conception of human nature against those that emanate from the more fundamentalist corners of the Islamic world, for example, we might begin to wonder whether modern liberal democracy has really veered so far from its roots. Similarly, this point of comparison might have been used to shine light on the way in which different political currents within contemporary liberal democracies employ competing conceptions of human nature to frame their political strategies (as in, e.g., George Lakoff’s *Moral Politics*).¹ In this light, it is less certain that our own political world can be characterized as “emphatically modern.”

Unfortunately, the closing chapters of the book take a different, more destructive, turn. While the first 220 pages build an impressive and reasonable argument that draws heavily on careful, detached, and contextually sensitive analyses, the closing sixty pages skip across recent history with shocking disregard for the complexity of the issue under study. While I read the first part of the book with great admiration and respect for the author’s vigilant study and deliberation, I found myself shrinking in embarrassment over Rahe’s cathartic outburst of political rhetoric, remarkable exaggeration, and simplistic readings of contemporary politics.

1 Lakoff, George. *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*. 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 2002.

For Rahe, Europe today suffers from an obnoxious disease, the main symptoms of which include a long list of worn clichés: stagnation, fanciful visions of social democracy, a haunting agnosticism, a lazy and unproductive work force (incapable, even, of reproducing itself), and a place where “women nonchalantly arrange for the extermination of their offspring as yet unborn” (240). Likewise, Americans are chided for abandoning their religious and moral heritage and for rejecting their spirit of individual responsibility (270). Rahe would have modern man surrounded by tyrannical ambition and servile temptation; despotism lies behind every corner. In these closing pages, I longed for an editor that might step in and save the author from himself.

The biggest part of this book is a remarkable contribution to our understanding of three very influential thinkers in the Western canon of political thought. These chapters describe and interpret Montesquieu's, Rousseau's and Toqueville's contributions to the modern democratic project in a way that is accessible and useful to a very wide readership. This work is to be commended and recommended. But the contribution of the closing chapters, and the attempt to extend the work of these thinkers into the modern era, is more suspect, speculative, and ultimately unsuccessful. It is a shame that this polemical outburst was allowed to taint what is otherwise an outstanding contribution to our understanding of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Tocqueville.

***Capitalism: A Love Story* (Michael Moore 2009)**

Michael Oppermann

Michael Moore's most recent documentary is a remarkable addition to his series of highly successful non-fiction films which includes *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) and *Sicko* (2007). The title *Capitalism: A Love Story* is not as ironic as it seems to be because, as we learn in the course of the film, the young Michael Moore admired the system because it offered an impressive variety of ice creams. Such romantic notions of capitalism, however, have become obsolete especially in the wake of the financial crisis and the 700 billion dollar bailout that was jammed through Congress in 2009. For Moore that bailout symbolizes a coup d'état, a final take-over of the country by the "Goldman Gang." It marks the end of a negative development that has favoured the profits of a scrupulous minority over the interests of the common man.

Something has gone badly wrong in God's own country...

Moore illustrates his point by a series of examples from different layers of life:

- Early on in film, a family in North Carolina is seen videoing their own eviction by police force. They lose their home because the police are forced to act as agents of the banks, and the speculators who are already waiting like vultures for another home sold at bargain price.
- In another scene a carpenter is boarding up the residence of a family who lose their home of 40 years.
- In February 2009 a plane crashed near Buffalo. Moore reveals that the two pilots, rather than concentrating on the plane's descent, were actually talking about their (incredibly low) salaries shortly before the disaster.
- Banks and corporations have started to take out so-called "dead peasant" life insurance policies on their employees; needless to say, the payoffs go to the companies.
- Young people were unjustly imprisoned in a privatized juvenile detention center in Pennsylvania. Two judges apparently received millions as a compensation for their "efforts" from the facility owners. Even the law, we

learn, is subject to ruthless financial interests. It can be twisted in virtually any direction if the financial “incentives” are strong enough. Human life, we have to conclude, is evaluated only in terms of money. All notions of decency and care seem to have completely disappeared from present-day America.

In fact, Moore’s film describes a process that sociologists have labelled as reification, a term which points to the intrusion of all areas of human life by capitalist logic.

Moore’s answer to this process lies in a return to the spirit of his first film *Roger & Me* (1989) which emphasized the power of solidarity. History seems to repeat itself in the *Republic Windows and Doors Factory* in Chicago where, in 2008, workers occupy their factory after the management decided to close the plant. Eventually the workers win an average of 86,000 dollars per person. This example shows that individuals can win over the system and that solidarity can fight corporate power.

Capitalism: A Love Story is not Michael Moore’s strongest movie. The narrative is loose, and the individual episodes seem to be a bit jumbled. Even Moore’s agitprop tactics are close to self-parody, as it is exemplified by one of the last scenes in the movie. The filmmaker drives an empty armored truck to the headquarters of Citibank and other bailout recipients asking for the taxpayer’s billions. Of course, his request is being turned down. But what did Moore expect? The impression is that even Moore himself did not believe in the success of his operation.

Another major flaw is Moore’s insistence on comparing today’s America with ancient Rome. Comparisons are always problematic and the analogy between the decline of the Roman Empire and the decline of capitalism is a bit too simplistic to make sense. It is effective, though, because the film uses the analogy to emphasize a new spirit of hope which is associated with President Obama. Moore seems to believe that Obama is the only one who can save America from the fate of the Romans. Even Moore has to admit, though, that Goldman Sachs was the largest private contributor to Obama’s presidential campaign.

There is no doubt that *Capitalism: A Love Story* is a highly entertaining and revealing film. There is also no doubt, however, that it cannot match the standards of the finest critique of present-day America that has hit the screen in recent years, of *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (Alex Gibney 2005). Gibney’s documentary (which is based on the best-selling book of the same name) is far more coherent in its narrative and far more hard-hitting in its

extremely negative commentary on the impacts of an excessive deregulation. By concentrating on one event only, the infamous Enron disaster, and by showing how capitalist ideology turns into a synonym of insatiable greed, the film is as deeply disturbing as it is revealing. Contrary to Moore, Alex Gibney lays bare the changes in the political and legal structures which allowed an almost totalitarian view of the so-called free market to pave the way towards a total triumph of individual greed over the needs and interests of the people. Moore's vision of society is more romantic; he likes to engage in the old tale of the good guys against the bad. Individual vices are rarely presented as the result of a specific social framework. Therefore, his recipe for the current political and financial crisis is fairly simple; it seems that all with courage and strength (like himself) who emphasize the rights of *Mr. Smith*. In that respect Moore is a radical democrat. His trust in the value of solidarity, in strikes and various forms of civil disobedience is not an expression of some kind of left-wing ideology; it is, on the contrary, rooted in the American Constitution. For Moore the opposite of capitalism is not socialism but democracy.

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All correspondence for *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* should be addressed to:

Nur Gökalp Akkerman & Barış Gümüşbaş

Department of American Culture and Literature

Faculty of Letters, Hacettepe University

Beytepe - Ankara / Turkey

e-mail: nurgok@hacettepe.edu.tr

gumusbas@hacettepe.edu.tr

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