American Literary Environmentalism, 1637-1872.

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AMERICAN LITERARY ENVIRONMENTALISM, 1637-1872

A Dissertation

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in

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by

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To my father, Sanford Mazel
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ABSTRACT

The American environment is a mythic narrative that has served to mystify the social and economic relationships linking people and place. This study examines the early writing of the environment, from the 1637 Pequot War to the creation of the first national parks in the late nineteenth century. Chapter 1 draws on the work of Michel Foucault and Edward Said to theorize "literary environmentalism" as a knowledge-power formation that functions as a domestic Orientalism. Chapter 2 theorizes the narratological and psychosociological bases of environmental constructions generally before analyzing two colonial texts whose literary environmentalism is paradigmatic: John Underhill's *Newes from America* (1638), which writes the New England wilderness via tropes of gender and race that explicitly link the environment's description to its possession, and Mary Rowlandson's *The Soveraignt and Goodness of God* (1682), which recapitulates but also complicates these figures.

Chapter 3 analyzes James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), paying particular attention to how its wilderness serves to naturalize the regeneration of a racially "pure" American civilization. Chapter 4 analyzes three works related by their linked constructions of Yosemite Valley. Lafayette Bunnell's account of the Mariposa Indian War (1851-1852), *The History of the*
Discovery of the Yosemite, utilizes an aesthetic discourse to justify the ethnic cleansing that accompanied the "discovery" of Yosemite. Frederick Law Olmsted's 1865 management report on the new Yosemite Park implicates the national park idea in an urban-industrial ideology of "social sanitation through outdoor recreation." Clarence King's Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada (1872) links environmentalism and literary realism to the exigencies of a fast-maturing corporate capitalism.

My concluding chapter analyzes the idea of the "postnatural" in two contemporary ecocritical texts, Bill McKibben's The End of Nature and Rebecca Solnit's Savage Dreams. McKibben's work recapitulates the early colonialist and capitalist trope of the "virgin wilderness," while Savage Dreams refuses the concept of an originary nature and adopts a more promising mode for a genuinely revisionist environmental writing, one that refuses to seek in nature the sorts of lessons and remedies available only through a conscious engagement with this nation's own cultures.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Literary Environmentalism

From far Dakota's canyons,
Lands of the wild ravine, the dusky Sioux, the lonesome stretch, the silence . . .
The battle-bulletin,
The Indian ambuscade, the craft, the fatal environment. . . .

--Walt Whitman, "Death-Sonnet for Custer" (401)

In glorifying Custer's death at the Little Bighorn, Whitman conflates an act of resistance to United States colonialism with what may justly be called a canonical landscape. He writes of "far" lands, of what is not present at the scene of reading and can therefore only be represented, and his representation utilizes a language at once both romantic and racist, a language scarcely able to distinguish people from place: the ravine is "wild" and the Sioux are "dusky," but both seem equally insignificant within the vastness of the landscape itself. Indeed the wildness and the duskiness seem to function identically, as parallel markers of what is really important: the very otherness of a grand western landscape in which the canyons, the people, and the resistance are all of a piece.

Whitman uses the term environment here with an etymological precision that is fundamental to this study. While the term "literally refers," as Richard Slotkin has argued in Fatal Environment, to General Custer's "being
surrounded and killed by Indians,"

Whitman means it to suggest something more: the idea that Custer's death completes a meaningful myth-historical design, a grand fable of national redemption and Christian self-sacrifice, acted out in the most traditional of American settings. And it is essential to the illusion of this myth that Custer's fate seem somehow implicit in the environment, a moral and ideological lesson which seems to emerge from the very nature of things—as if Nature or God composed the story and assigned its meanings, rather than men.

In this way, "[a]n environment, a landscape, a historical sequence is infused with meaning in the form of a story" (11). And like Slotkin's Myth of the Frontier, this environment has been (and remains) complicit with the notions of capitalism and Manifest Destiny which have, again in Slotkin's words, "been the building blocks of our dominant historiographical tradition and political ideology" (15).

Like the notion of the frontier, this storied American environment has a lengthy and continuous history, with roots in the colonial period and an undiminished power today. But it would not quite be accurate to speak of a "Myth of the Environment," as if the environment were something we have a myth about. Rather, the environment is itself a myth. It is a "grand fable," a complex fiction, a widely shared, seldom questioned, and by now ubiquitous nationalistic narrative. Nor would it be accurate to say that the environment is merely a narrative, for that would be to underestimate narrative's tremendous power to imagine and shape the world. (Consider those other narrated fictions, gender, race, and nation.)
This power of narrative is something for which on the one hand we might be thankful. The idea of the environment, after all, is coextensive with the environmental movement, and thus with an entire constellation of genuinely progressive political reforms. On the other hand, the environment's ideological underpinnings are by no means entirely consistent with the ideals of Green politics. As is true of the Myth of the Frontier, much of the environment's power and durability resides in its unseen ideological efficacy, in its ability to obscure basic economic, political, and historical relationships—particularly in the way it "substitutes" itself "for the complexities of capital formation, class and interest-group competition, and the subordination of society to the imperatives of capitalist development" (Slotkin 47). By thus obscuring reality, the idea of the environment has come to provide Euro-Americans with "a new basis upon which to understand their presence in America" (Greenfield 205)—that is, with a useful stance from which to misunderstand that presence, to mystify rather than clarify their relationships to both the land and the people they have tried to displace from the land. The "environment" has helped to enable—and helps still to sustain—many of the very forces and activities that environmentalism claims to oppose.

Give Me a Sign

Slotkin insists that "[t]he present forms in which our myths appear embody not only the solutions to past problems
and conflicts; they contain the questions as well, and they reflect the conflicts of thought and feeling and action that were the mythmakers' original concerns" (20), and this is certainly true of the environment. But our environmental myth thus perdures only as part of the discourse of environmentalism; it continues to make sense only through the continuing efforts of those institutions charged in one way or another with dealing with it or speaking for it. The environment seems stable and real only because it is reconstituted, on a daily basis and at the most seemingly benign levels of perception, within living institutions and interlocking systems of signs.

To demonstrate what I mean, to clarify what this study frames as the broad cultural politics of literary environmentalism, I would like to turn now to figure 1. Depicted in this Jim Dunagin cartoon is a landscape of mountains, trees, and a meandering stream—a traditionally attractive vista, an apparently pristine environment, a scene we all "know" to be pleasing. It is just the sort of place where one might expect to find a roadside marker of some kind, though no such marker is present. In the upper left-hand portion of the panel are a woman and her male partner, viewing the scene from a position that commands both the frame and the represented landscape. With her head turned toward the man, she asks, "Are you sure this is a scenic view? There's no sign."

Wittingly or not, this cartoon is about the readability, ontological stability, and sexual politics of
"Are you sure this is a scenic view? There's no sign."

Fig. 1. Problematizing landscape. Cartoon by Jim Dunagin. Baton Rouge, La. Advocate (30 October 1993): 6B.
landscape. It is about how rivers and trees and mountains—categories of the tangible, enumerable aspects of a territory—are constructed as beautiful, as worthy of special notice and protection, as part of "the environment" in precisely the sense I am trying to develop, and finally it is about who authorizes such constructions. The joke depends, of course, on our knowing, without being told by the missing roadside marker, the absent sign, that the view is scenic: only with this knowledge can we see the woman's question as laughable. But without the authorization of the sign, the only way of knowing this for sure would be by virtue of some innately knowable presence, some ability of scenery to signify itself as such without mediation: one should be able to tell, just by looking. But what if landscape lacks such presence? What if we take this woman's question seriously, and begin to share her suspicion that perhaps it is not the landscape that grounds the sign, but the sign that grounds the landscape? Simply by reading "sign" here in its semiotic sense, we can enlarge these questions into questions about the discursivity of the environment itself.

The cartoon depicts a location where one might normally expect to find an interpretive marker of some sort, an authorizing sign; it depicts a situation where signs establish norms. If, as this study maintains throughout, it is not the landscape that grounds the sign but the other way around, what is it that in turn authorizes the sign? To put it another way, in a deliberate double entendre, who erects
the sign? The cartoon gives clues. First, the woman speaks in response to the man's assertion (not part of the caption but clearly implied by it) that the view is indeed scenic. That his words can be left out of the caption in this way indicates that his interpretation of the landscape-text is the unmarked reading, the default, the assumed—just as his is in general the unmarked gender. It is his reading and his authority that are presumed an adequate substitute for those of the absent road-sign; institutional authority and male authority are aligned and, in a pinch, interchangeable.

By contrast it is the woman's reading—unauthorized, eccentric, laughable—that questions and problematizes the institutional-male, which is to say, patriarchal, sign. It is her reading that challenges not only a particular reading of a particular landscape but also the seductive and ingrained illusion of landscape-as-presence itself.

Thus far I have treated the woman in the cartoon as if she were a speaking subject. But within the signifying economy of patriarchy, "woman" does not truly speak; lacking in presence, like the "far canyons" of the western landscape, she is written—by "man," much as Dunagin has indicated in the cartoon, where the female figure is positioned so as to be encompassed within the man's view of the scene, while she, by contrast, cannot take in man and landscape simultaneously, but only separately. He sees her in the environment, while she sees him apart from it and viewing it. Suggesting the woman's identification with and the man's separation from the environment, this composition
neatly illustrates concepts that have come to be challenged by ecofeminism. For this woman to speak as she does—rather than remain as silent as the rest of the landscape and simply be seen—can itself be seen as an ecofeminist act.

In contrast to the cartoon, the photograph shown in figure 2 is no joke. It depicts the uncontested operation of a patriarchal literary environmentalism. In this photo, taken in Yosemite National Park, we again see a woman and a man viewing a scenic landscape. Between landscape and viewers, however, is now interposed the sign, whose surface defines the plane through which the landscape is visible—purportedly even more visible than it would be otherwise, since such signs are thought to help one see and understand more clearly what lies behind them. As before, the male figure dominates the visual space of the illustration, encompassing the woman within his view of the environment while remaining apart from it himself. His outstretched arm and pointed finger foreground a particular feature of the environment; his female companion looks where she is bid to look and listens to the words that presumably accompany the gesture. But this time there is no implied challenge to the man's authority. If the woman has a different reading of the landscape, there is no indication of it. The authorizing interpretive sign, which dominates the scene nearly as much as the male figure, in fact forecloses on any such divergent interpretation, just as it physically encloses the woman between itself and the man. The sign mediates for both humans, but it seems to restrict only her.
FIG. 3-1. Visitors to specific parks and other recreation areas often seek experiences that build upon knowledge from previous visits. Yosemite National Park, California. (Photo by Grant W. Sharpe)
Environmental Literacy, Environmental Politics

As we will see below, the American environment has been fundamentally gendered and racialized by largely unconscious narrative and psycho-sociological processes; it possesses certain political valences by the mere virtue of having been brought into discourse by particularly situated human beings. Beyond this most basic level of environmental politics is another, implied by the notion of the environment's totality, of its consisting, supposedly, of everything that surrounds one. This totality cannot in practice refer inclusively and exhaustively to the infinity that remains after a finite subset—whether some personal "I" or communal "we"—is abstracted from everything else. As the object of the study and concern and political action of environmentalism, as a manifest target in concrete practices, the environment is necessarily finite and particularized.

Any politically actionable environment, that is, rests upon two creations of difference. First there must be an initial discrimination of an outside from an inside (signaled in figure 2 by the interposing of the sign between the viewers and the object viewed). Second, there must be a secondary marking off and foregrounding of some targeted portion of the remaining totality (signaled in figure 2 by the man's pointing finger). But what part shall we thus privilege with our attention? Out of an infinitude of possibilities, what is to count as environment? Surely not everyone will agree on what counts—or if there appears to
be an agreement, one may reasonably suspect that not everyone has been in on the choosing. In engaging this level of environmental politics, the critic is free to challenge claims of universality and objectivity, to ask not only "What has come to matter?" but also, "What has come to matter to whom?" The critic is also free to ask whether what in any specific instance comes to count as the environment is that which matters to the culturally dominant, and finally to explore the ways in which the construction of the environment is itself an exercise of cultural power.

All this speaks to the insinuation of politics not merely into explicit environmentalist practice—where one is used to seeing and analyzing it—but into the environment itself, where it remains inaccessible to the traditional critic. Underlying my approach to what is coming to be called "ecocriticism" is the conviction that the critic should highlight this more elusive politics. Ecocriticism should help us realize that our environmental concerns are not exclusively of the order of "Shall this forest be preserved? or "Shall this river be dammed?"—important as such questions are—but also of the order of "What has counted as the environment, and what may count? Who marks off its conceptual boundaries, and under what authority, and for what reasons? Have those boundaries and that authority been contested, and if so, by whom? With what success, and by virtue of what strategies of resistance?"

These questions of boundary and authority will sound analogically familiar to anyone who has followed the last
decade's controversies over the literary canon and notions of cultural literacy. The national parks can be thought of as a canon of environments, a collection of Great Texts whose meanings have been considered transparent and unchallengeable, and whose political utility has been to stabilize a particular vision of the culture that has so reverently preserved them. The canonized environments of the national parks have for the most part been "read" and "taught" in ways that today's cultural conservatives would approve: as if, "transcending accidents of class, race, and gender," in the words of Lynne Cheney, they embodied "truths" which could "speak to us all"—helping thereby to unify what these critics see as an otherwise fractured and stratified society (14). As William Bennett put it (in what seems a cruelly ironic metaphor), the study of the Great Books makes us all "shareholders in our civilization" (4).

More than a century ago, Frederick Law Olmsted had said much the same thing about beautiful scenery. As a wealthy member of the New York elite, Olmsted was quite literally a "shareholder" in his civilization; he was also the first superintendent of the then-new Yosemite State Park, and he felt landscapes like Yosemite's should be made available to as many people as possible--should be widely read and widely taught--because they exemplified great truths that could help unify a badly divided nation. (He outlined these views during the Civil War). They could also be the means to an aesthetic and moral education that would help reduce crime, elevate the public taste, and level class distinctions.²
In arguing for the edifying powers of landscape, Olmsted saw himself as arguing against a certain type of reactionary park opponent, "the ignorant exclusive," in the words of his mentor, the landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing, who has "no faith in the refinement of a republic" and who would prefer to see marvelous landscapes pass into private ownership. Downing was arguing in favor of the preservation as a public space of New York's Central Park; Olmsted, extending a developing ideology of public outdoor recreation from the urban to the wilderness setting, quotes Downing at length in his pioneering report on the management of the Yosemite Park. The anti-park elitists, Downing had predicted, would eventually be proved wrong and would "stand abashed,"

before a whole people whose system of voluntary education embraces (combined with perfect individual freedom) not only schools of rudimentary knowledge, but common enjoyments for all classes in the higher realms of art, letters, science, social recreations and enjoyments. Were our legislators but wise enough to understand, today, the destinies of the New World, the gentility of Sir Philip Sidney, made universal, would be not half so much a miracle fifty years hence in America, as the idea of a whole nation of laboring men reading and writing was, in his day, in England. (qtd. in Olmsted 21)

For both Downing and Olmsted, the environmentalism of the early park movements was part of a larger array of democratic reforms. There are several points I could mention here: that Downing's invocation of a universal literacy (and Olmsted's foregrounding of that invocation in his own report) is just one more turn on the trope of
nature-as-text; that the two men's managerial vision
projects for the United States a highly suspect teleology of
"progress"; that the insistence on the "voluntary" nature of
a literacy compatible with "perfect individual freedom"
might be seen as actually betraying a certain nervousness
about that freedom, and so on. But what I wish to stress is
how the comparison of the U.S. parks movement to England's
early literacy movement makes the most spectacular New World
landscapes into Great Books that can edify the masses, that
might turn each of us into a model citizen like Sidney.

Clearly the sort of literacy Olmsted had in mind was a
version of what E. D. Hirsch has termed "cultural literacy."
Hirsch theorizes cultural literacy, quite simply, as
"information that our culture has found useful, and
therefore worth preserving." This information can quite
objectively "be identified and defined" (ix); it "is not a
mystery" and "can be taught to all" (xiv). As with the
national parks, however, the notion carries with it an aura
of privilege. "Only a small fraction" of this information
"gains a secure place on the memory shelves of the
culturally literate," and the importance of that select
fraction "is beyond question"—precisely because it serves
as a "collective memory [that] allows people to communicate,
to work together, and to live together" in "shared
communities". In fact, according to Hirsch, cultural
literacy is "a distinguishing characteristic of a national
culture" (ix); it "helped create the nation-state" and "can
perpetuate it and make it thrive."³
As several recent studies have established, however, neither the concept of literacy nor its consequences are as straightforward as critics like Hirsch seem to believe. Recent critiques have made it impossible to view literacy straightforwardly as a disinterested provision of skills giving access to "information"; it must be seen instead as a complex and highly interested organization of reading and writing activities in the interests of the state. Following such recent theorists as Harvey Graff and Wlad Godzich, this dissertation treats environmental literacy as "a shorthand description for a determinate set of relations that we have to language"—to what literary environmentalism repeatedly tropes as the language of nature—"relations that [arise] under, and [are] conditioned by, concrete historical circumstances" (Godzich 5). As such, literacy is thus something that "can be understood only in terms of its historical development" and only by remaining attentive to its "social and cultural contradictions" (Graff, Legacies vii, 265).

Graff stresses the material bases and ideological utility of writing throughout its history. This utility is apparent even in the "early civilizations of Babylonia and Egypt," where "writing developed partly out of the need to keep accounts and insure property rights." In this "historical use of writing," "social consolidation, standardization, power, and control overlapped" and were even then "closely tied to the exigencies of the state and
empire, to the expanding need for "legitimation and reproduction; order, control, and regulation; administration and centralization" (Legacies 19). In eighteenth-century Europe, notions of a widespread literacy became linked more specifically to notions of moral progress (173-174), and by the nineteenth century, the meanings and uses of literacy continued to proliferate, forming "new configurations" and new "relationships between literacy and industrialization" (260). By the time of the early national parks movement, literacy was felt specifically to condition a "controllable, docile work force, willing and able to follow orders" (262).

In addition, "however nominal" literacy might prove in practice, it was more and more held to signify "in theory the observance of an ordained and approved social code" (Graff, Legacies 263). Most broadly:

The moral bases of literacy accompanied the shift from a moral economy to a political economy in Western Europe and North America from the late eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. It developed in response to sweeping societal transformations . . . . Literacy was expected to contribute vitally to reordering and reintegrating the 'new' society of the nineteenth century; it represented one central instrument and vehicle in the efforts to secure social, cultural, economic, and political cohesion in the political economy of the expanding and consolidating capitalistic order.

Literacy was not a straightforward reform but a wide-ranging and conflicted technology. It would help effect a massive societal transformation, replacing "traditional popular culture with new values and habits" (including, as we shall see, the new sensibilities underpinning tourism and
landscape appreciation). Still, its primary goal remained "recreating cultural hegemony" in the new order (263-264).

By Olmsted's time literacy was thus expected to carry a complex ideological burden, and certainly not all of its uses were unproblematically progressive. Indeed, "[i]ts potential for liberation was at best one use among many, and perhaps not the dominant one" (Graff, Legacies 340). Even so, conservatives were often apprehensive about literacy's deployment. Some, "haunted by fears of too much education," felt "it would weaken society by alienating people from manual labor, threaten the natural social order, [and] promote social mobility" (174). Such fears were ameliorated primarily by a growing conviction "that the masses should be schooled properly" (262):

Reformers insisted that 'moral training, including rudimentary reading, would make men content with their lot, not ambitious, and that education would increase social stability, not disruption.' The social transformation required a replacement for traditional ranks and deference; schooling, with literacy the vehicle for its moral bases, was to be the new social cement. In part, reformers prevailed by arguing that their program would serve conservatives' own goals: stability, discipline, and deference. (315)

At the "core of the emerging consensus" was an "emphasis on social morality" (315); "morality" in fact became the concept that mediated the concerns of conservative and reformer and enabled the consensus that made literacy campaigns possible.

The "notion of literacy" that would thus become "operative" was precisely that advocated by conservatives
such as Bennett and Cheney, a cultural but not a critical literacy. It was, in Godzich's terms, "a restricted literacy" that provided "for competence in a specific code, with little, if any but the most rudimentary, awareness of the general problematics of codes and codification in language" (5). Despite such restrictions, however, literacy remained problematic for conservatives. "Happily," as one study has it,

literacy like education more generally cannot be reduced to behavioral conditioning. It endows people with skills that they can (although do not always) use to receive and emit messages of an almost infinite range, a range that in any event escapes the control of those who imparted literacy. . . . Literacy is potential empowerment. (Arnove and Graff 26)

Despite sometimes elaborate precautions, a "genuinely radical political culture developed during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and literacy was a part of it" (Graff, *Legacies* 324).

Interpreting Landscape: The National Park System

Whoever expounds a text . . . is an interpreter. And no such person can go about the work of interpretation without some awareness of forces which limit, or try to limit, what he may say. . . . I am describing the world as it is or as we all know it, and am doing so only because its familiarity may have come to conceal from us its mode of operation.

--Frank Kermode (72-73)

It is in this context of literacy as a contingent, thoroughly political, and contested sphere that I wish now to examine a specifically environmental literacy, as it has
come to be provided by the National Park Service. The sign depicted in figure 2 is not just an isolated marker calling attention to a unique natural entity. It is, rather, one element among many in a consciously constructed signifying system, in that particular form of literary environmentalism known to the National Park Service personnel who practice it as "interpretation." Because it is so completely methodized within the Park Service bureaucracy, "interpretation" leaves behind it explicit traces that in other forms of literary environmentalism are more deeply effaced. I want to take advantage of the comparative transparency of interpretation and analyze it here as a sort of introductory case study of the operation of environmental literacy, as a demonstration of the theoretical concepts discussed so far and a gesture toward the chapters to come. Taking seriously the woman in figure 1, I want to analyze interpretation as a highly interested, historically specific form of nature writing, an officially sanctioned but also contested system for making nature signify particular and desired meanings.

Though it has roots in the late nineteenth-century nature-study movement championed by such educators as Liberty Bailey and Anna Botsford Comstock, environmental interpretation more properly begins with Enos Mills, "the father of nature guiding," who as early as 1889 was conducting educational field trips in what was to become Rocky Mountain National Park. Mills worked in an unofficial capacity, but following the creation of the Park Service in 1916 he argued publicly that guides such as himself should
be taken on as regular employees (Weaver 29). Park Service director Stephen Mather was cool to the idea at first, but gradually came to see in interpretation a way to build appreciation for the parks among a public whose commitment to wilderness preservation was still shaky. He seems to have first realized the full potential of interpretation during a 1919 lecture by the ornithologist Loye Holmes Miller, whose superb presentation had attracted an audience both large and enthusiastic—a combination that was "exactly what Mather was seeking" to counter the influence of "those persons who would selfishly destroy park values." Mather asked Miller to bring his show to Yosemite, where he would be designated a "special ranger" and paid a salary. Miller agreed, and worked in the summer of 1920 as the first officially sponsored national park interpreter (Weaver 29-32; Mackintosh 7).

Miller's employment marked the beginning of the "carefully directed and planned public contact work" that would quickly spread from Yosemite to Yellowstone and then the other parks to become "the most direct and most important function of the service." Over the following decades, with the help of sizable private grants and donations, interpretation was integrated into the park system as a whole. To coordinate interpretive activities, Mather in 1921 appointed Ansel Hall chief of the service's Education Division. Two years later, Mather upgraded this division and placed it on an equal footing with the Service's two other major administrative units, the
divisions of engineering and landscape architecture. Almost from the beginning, that is, the Service treated the discursive construction of the park environment just as seriously as the material construction of any other park facility (Weaver 32; Mackintosh 13).

Hall began at once to systematize interpretation. He set up a training program, the Yosemite School of Natural History, and formulated criteria for applicants for the new position of Ranger Naturalist. (Prerequisite to the Yosemite program, for example, were at least two years of college.) Hall also organized the Yosemite Museum Association, later replaced by the Yosemite Natural History Association, whose task was to gather and disseminate information on the park's natural and human history, contribute to the educational activities of the Yosemite Nature Guide Service, promote scientific investigation, maintain a library, study and preserve the customs and legends of the Native Americans of the region, and publish Yosemite Nature Notes in cooperation with the Park Service (Mackintosh 10, 13-14). The Association functioned as a sort of clearinghouse, assembling and relating the work of a heterogeneous group of academic specialists--biologists, historians, educators, anthropologists, and sociologists--in ways that were invaluable to the more modestly educated rank-and-file of park interpreters. Similar associations sprang up at other parks, forming a broad, interdiscursive institutional base for more refined and authoritative constructions of the various park environments.
From the beginning, interpretation was driven not so much by the park visitor's desire to learn but by the Service's desire to educate and persuade, to use the public's interest in spectacular scenery to build support for preservation. By the 1950s, interpretation had become an overt environmental politics, ostensibly grounded in the 1916 legislation establishing the Park Service, whose two major objectives were "to provide for the enjoyment" of and "to use and conserve" the parks. In fulfillment of the first aim, as then-director Conrad Wirth wrote in 1953, interpretation gave the visitor the "background of information necessary for his fullest understanding, enjoyment, and appreciation of these areas." In fulfillment of the second, as Wirth added in a rather revealing metaphor, interpretation served as an "offensive weapon in preventing intrusion and adverse use" of park lands. For interpretation "to contribute to preservation" in this way was seen as both "obligation and opportunity" (Mackintosh 105).

This sense of interpretation as an opportunity had grown apace with the steady increase of tourism in the parks, particularly following World War II. By 1957 the historian Christopher Crittenden--noting that annual park visitation had surpassed the 250-million mark--could welcome interpretation as a "new means of reaching our people," a "new channel of mass communication." (In figure 3, Jim Dunagin wryly suggests the pitfalls of conserving parklands by using them for "mass communication." ) To this "great and
Fig. 3. A new channel of mass communication. Cartoon by Jim Dunagin. Baton Rouge, La. Advocate (4 July 1994): 6B.
wonderful opportunity," Crittenden added approvingly, interpretive professionals had responded with a flurry of activity, developing "new and very effective techniques and methods of telling their story," experimenting

with many things: with different methods of restoring or reconstructing historic buildings, with ingenious maps and dioramas. . . . They have introduced special lighting and sound effects. In toto they have tried out scores and hundreds of devices in order that objects might become to the visitor seeable and hearable.

Did all these things just happen . . . without rhyme or reason? Obviously they did not. They are merely evidence of a new approach, a new philosophy. This latter is interpretation, the effort to make real and vivid to our people our common heritage. (qtd. in Tilden xii)

The Service's interpretive intent remained the same: not merely to reify nature but, as Frank Kermode said of literary interpreters, "to establish harmony between canonized texts" (78)—to enlist each park landscape in a totalizing framework, to inscribe it within a particular metanarrative and thereby naturalize a particular liberal-humanist notion, in this case Crittenden's "common heritage."

The new narrative technology being developed held great promise in this regard. While welcome and useful, however, all this activity posed special problems. Sometimes the new techniques proved just as exciting as the natural objects being interpreted, threatening to overwhelm the message with the medium. And in a rapidly expanding bureaucracy rife with experimentation, fragmentation seemed inevitable. How was the Service to monitor and unify the content of its
message? Interpretation could not be allowed to "just happen"; it would have to be systematized and disciplined to a greater degree than before. That in turn would require "a new philosophy," a theory, and that theory would be provided largely by Freeman Tilden's *Interpreting Our Heritage* (1956)—a book still highly regarded by park interpreters and widely used in their training.8

Tilden posited interpretation as multi-media narrative, an active, innovative, and responsive storytelling practice. The interpreter must become adept at "making a few words tell a full and moving story" (57); the "lifeblood of satisfying interpretation," he insisted, "flows from the proper and ingenious use" of "devices of language" such as metaphor, simile, and analogy (30). The process is thus more artistic than scientific, but science nonetheless remains useful as an authorizing device, inasmuch as it fosters "a vision of the continuity of law which looks like a purpose in nature" (28). What sort of purpose are we supposed to envision in nature? Tilden approvingly cites an interpretive ranger who, ostensibly speaking of processes of erosion and plant succession, "told a thrilling story of the way the rock under our feet was attacked by the physical and organic forces; how vegetation begins; the creation of little harboring places in the rocks; the coming of grasses, of shrubs, finally of trees. Our grasses, our forests" (39). Without much effort, nudged by the images of the "rock" and the "little harboring place," we can read here a thinly veiled retelling of the familiar story of the arrival
of the persecuted pilgrims at Plymouth Bay, and the subsequent raising of villages, towns, and cities—a providential metanarrative of progress and civilization, mapped onto the historical field of the appropriation and development of "our" nation, mapped finally onto the naturalizing field of the park environment. This, writes Tilden, was stellar interpretation, capable of holding its audience of travel-weary sightseers in "rapt attention" (39).

Textualizing Landscape

If the teacher is the guide, the curriculum is the path. A good curriculum marks the point of significance so that the student does not wander aimlessly over the terrain, dependent solely on chance to discover the landmarks of human achievement.

— William J. Bennett (6)

Of the many ways of writing environment as readable text, perhaps the most revealing is the interpretive genre known as the SGT or self-guided trail (see figure 4). The SGT, which came into its own "as a major component of the overall interpretive program" because of "budget problems [and] lack of personnel," is an integration of "natural" and written signs into a single text, "a meandering footpath along which the visitor's attention is drawn to interesting or unusual features which might otherwise be overlooked or not fully appreciated." Though designed to place visitors "in direct contact with the park or forest resource" (Sharpe 247), such trails obviously afford a highly mediated contact, with their natural elements carefully preselected and then foregrounded and glossed by the written sign. Out
FIG. 14-3. Permanent stations should not be crowded together as in the above example, but should be at least 75–100 ft (23–30 m) apart. Visitors will ignore some stations when the trail gets crowded. (Photo by Grant W. Sharpe.)
of a multidimensional and anarchic web is thus distilled a linear sequence of signifiers, ordered into an apparently coherent and monologic text that "will develop an awareness of what makes up that environment" (250).

In designing the self-guided trail, interpretive personnel are encouraged to "put a story together" "which will unfold logically as the visitor moves from station to station" (Sharpe 254). To tell such a story well—to maintain reader interest and achieve narrative closure—the interpreter must pay attention to the written trail markers' location as well as their content. This is a matter of syntax—the markers must be "oriented perfectly so there is no misunderstanding about what is being interpreted" (266)—and of suspense: the interpreter should "[w]ind the trail around rock outcrops, trees, or other features," since the narrative is "more exciting if you can only see short segments at any one time" (254). The interpreter must take care in general not to work at cross-purposes to the Park Service's designs upon the reader. One training text, for example, warns against laying out an SGT by "mark[ing] the trees along the route with paint or axe blazes," because doing so "disfigures the trees" (254)—damaging the trees themselves, to be sure, but also, as my added italics are meant to suggest, disrupting their efficacy as figures, as signifiers of a pristine environment.

Not just the SGT but all forms of interpretation are designed to render the environment readable. According to the National Park Service's Personal Training Program for
Interpreters, interpretation must "help the visitor derive meaning from [the] environment" (18). Before designing a project, interpreters are to ask themselves, "When you are in the role of a visitor in an unfamiliar environment, how do you derive meaning?" (23). This is a matter not merely of pedagogy but also of epistemology, of "the organized knowledge and ways of knowing within the areas to be interpreted" (16). Since "increasing the number of ways by which a visitor can look at something rather than looking at many things in just one way, helps a visitor derive meaning from an environment" (23), interpreters should access the full range of knowledges consolidated for them by such groups as the Yosemite Natural History Association. At its most effective, that is, interpretation constructs the environment interdiscursively.

Illusions of Presence

The controlling fact governing the development of educational work in the National Parks is that within these reservations multitudes are brought directly in contact with striking examples of Nature's handicraft. To lead people away from direct contact with nature, to beguile them into a building where they are surrounded by artifacts . . . is contrary to the spirit of this enterprise. The real museum is outside the walls of the building and the purpose of museum work is to render the out-of-doors intelligible.

--Hermon Carey Bumpus (104)

As is suggested by the oxymoronic phrase "to make real," the Park Service's vision of interpretation--read here as a naive theorizing of literary environmentalism itself--proves highly problematic. On the one hand, Tilden
writes that interpretation in the field is superior to education in the classroom precisely because it is only in the field that the student "meets the Thing itself" (3). This is the popular notion of the natural environment as a site of complete, unmediated presence— as exemplified, for example, in the advertisement reproduced in figure 4, which posits "the out-of-doors" as the site of "authenticity" and informs us that in the outdoors "there are no perceptions. Only reality." On the other hand, even though interpreters "work closely with the [natural] feature itself" and are "in direct contact with" the park visitor, they nonetheless "have a lot of media to rely on" (Sharpe 6)— and of what use are media but to mediate between viewer and scene?

Despite the putative reality and presence of the park environment, visitors "depend on park interpreters to tell them what it's all about" (Personal Training 4). To "stand at the rim of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado is to experience a spiritual elevation that could come from no human description of the colossal chasm," but it nonetheless requires the work of a vast institution, of "[t]housands of naturalists," to reveal "something of the beauty and wonder, the inspiration and spiritual meaning that lie behind what the visitor can with his senses perceive" (Tilden 3-4). With what, then, is the visitor in direct contact? Not the real after all, it seems, but only some inconsequential surface, for the "true interpreter" must lead the visitor "beyond the apparent to the real" (8). The visitor depends upon the interpreter's presumed ability, as Kermode put it
There's no pretending. You either have what it takes to make it in the out-of-doors, or you don't. It's called authenticity. Given that people have been wearing our outdoor wear since 1830, it seems fair to say we've earned that distinction.

Fig. 5. The outdoors as the site of unmediated reality. 
*Summit 1* (Fall 1990): 72.
in the case of the interpreter of the literary text, "to elicit senses not available to persons of ordinary perceptions" (78). Interpreters are "in the business of conducting readers out of the sphere of the manifest" (85) and into the highly mediated sphere of environmentalist discourse.

In doing so, writes Tilden, the effective interpreter "pare[s] away all the obfuscating minor detail and drives straight toward the perfection" of the story (31). Interpretation is a highly selective process of foregrounding and suppression, and this suggests a critical strategy for a poststructuralist ecocriticism or green cultural studies: to inquire into what has been deemed "minor" or "irrelevant" to the "perfection" of interpretive stories, and to ask by whom and for what reasons such decisions have been made. Such a criticism would attempt to bare the more subtly concealed devices of literary environmentalism, to recover enough of its "obfuscating" details to breach the closure of its texts and keep the environment openly problematic.

Tilden quotes the following motto from a Park Service administrative manual: "Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection" (38). Omitted here is the step that makes the interpretive process circular rather than sequential: "through protection, interpretation." With the circle closed in this way, interpretation is no longer a mere intermediate step toward the goal of protection; what
we see instead is that in preserving landscapes we also preserve the "grounds" of the stories we tell about them. We must now consider the possibility that we value the stories at least as much as we do the environment "itself," that while literary environmentalism clearly tells stories in order to protect the landscape, it also preserves the landscape in order to tell stories. In this formulation—if I may simplify—the task of the environmental historian is to ask what happens when someone alters the environment, while the task of the ecocritic is to explore what happens when someone tries to alter the stories, and to give those stories a genealogy by recovering their histories and contexts.

One could also describe the ecocritic's task in terms of the earlier discussion of literary canonicity. To the traditional critic, canonical works quite pointedly do not speak of the specificities of existence in racialized, gendered, and class-stratified societies; rather they "tell us how men and women . . . have grappled with life's enduring, fundamental questions"—by which, of course, is meant such platitudes as "What is justice? . . . What is courage? What is noble?" (Bennett 3). The Great Books are not to be taught in an "ideological manner," "as if they were . . . subordinated to particular prejudices" (16) but rather in ways that allow us to "protect and transmit a legacy" that is thought to be damaged by critical and divergent readings (17). Indeed, writes Lynne Cheney, criticism which aims "to expose and refute their biases" is
not legitimate intellectual activity at all but rather an unacceptable "form of political activism" (12). What to Cheney is unacceptable, however, seems to me to be precisely what is necessary, and the questions I wish to ask of our Great Landscape-Texts are very like the questions she explicitly proscribes: "What groups did the authors of these works represent? How did their works enhance the social power of those groups over others?" (12). I propose to enlist the nation's environmental narrative in a critical rather than just a cultural literacy.

A Heritage Preserved for Him

Taking my cue from the gender politics implicit in figure 2, I would like to give a brief example of what I have in mind. In 1957, Park Service director Conrad Wirth wrote that interpretation's job is "presenting, for the benefit of every American, an interpretation of the unique heritage preserved for him in the National Park System" (qtd. in Tilden vii). Is there any contradiction in Wirth's promise that interpretation would benefit every American by illuminating a heritage preserved for him? It is true that women had worked in interpretation since at least 1917, when the federal government licensed Esther Burnell as a nature guide in what today is Rocky Mountain National Park. By the 1980s, in fact, the number of women in the profession actually equalled or exceeded that of men (Sharpe 10; Mackintosh 74). But this apparent gender equality owed less to an enlightened Park Service mentality than to the creation of an interpretive ghetto, created as male rangers
who associated natural-history work "with qualities lacking in 'he-men'" gravitated toward other positions. (In addition, interpretive positions were not on the fast track for career advancement.) Women, on the other hand, were considered in all the usual ways to be especially suited to the work; where men were considered "too independent and hard to control," women were thought "natural hostesses, more outgoing." One supervisor, citing "studies in industry," claimed women were better able "to perform duties of a repetitive and routine nature," while another found them "more susceptible to instruction, more obedient, and . . . less of a management problem" (Mackintosh 16; 73-74).

With their presence in interpretation less an expression of gender equality than a function of gender stereotypes, it is not surprising that feminist rangers only comparatively recently began to contest interpretive constructions of gender. It was not until the 1970s that interpreters at Morristown National Historical Park in New Jersey appropriated that park's rural landscape to ground a chapter of Herstory, pointedly casting women as active and capable agents by stressing their role in the American Revolution as "both camp followers and those left to manage daily farms while the men were fighting." Such innovations were received only cautiously within the profession, which displayed a sense of reaction and containment even where it was apparently sympathetic. While admitting, for example, that "the presence of women has desirably expanded and
enriched interpretive content," administrators stressed that care must "be taken that undue emphasis is not given tangential female roles at the expense of primary park themes." This comment presaged a more general retrenchment that would occur when James Watt ran the Department of Interior. "As late as 1979," wrote one observer, "environmental education [had been] an essential management function for every park." But during the Reagan years, "a back-to-basics movement" squeezed out all but the most traditional forms of interpretation, "frown[ing] on programs not directly based on park resources or extending too far beyond them." The interpreter's job once again became only "to interpret the resources and themes of our parks, not to function as subject matter educators or as spokespeople for special causes" (Mackintosh 71-75). Morristown's modestly feminist interpretation was eclipsed as "female roles" in the nation's history were thus declared the merely "tangential" concerns of a "special cause."

Environmental constructions may be contested along lines of race as well as gender, as is clearly evident in recent events at Little Bighorn National Monument--a park whose very name was until quite recently a matter of bitter dispute. Little Bighorn, of course, is the location of George Armstrong Custer's "fatal environment," the famous 1876 battle in which Sioux and Cheyenne troops defeated the warriors of the U.S. Cavalry. In 1879 the War Department declared the site a national cemetery and erected a memorial to the dead U.S. cavalrmen, but no memorial was set up to
honor the Indian dead, and the monument itself, in a
development from the usual custom, was named not after the
location (Gettysburg, Antietam, Pearl Harbor) but after the
losing commander: Custer Battlefield.

In 1925, a Northern Cheyenne woman petitioned the
Secretary of War to allow the placement of a memorial to her
father, who had died in the 1876 battle. The War Department
did not answer, and the issue apparently lay dormant until
the American Indian Movement renewed the woman's request in
1976. By this time the site had become a national monument
under the management of the National Park Service. Like the
War Department, the Park Service ignored the petition; in
response, AIM first placed an unauthorized plaque of its own
at the perimeter of the site and later, in 1991, conducted a
protest march at the monument. By this time Ben Nighthorse
Campbell had been elected as the nation's first Native
American in Congress, and Barbara Booher, the second Native
American to attain such a rank within the National Park
Service, had been appointed monument superintendent. That
same year, six decades after the original request and only
after a rancorous debate, Campbell sponsored and Congress
approved legislation authorizing the construction of an
Indian memorial and renaming the site Little Bighorn
Battlefield National Monument.10

Even after the name change, however, interpretation at
the site continued to operate within racist institutional
constraints. In 1989, one of the monument's rangers, Randy
Parker, reported that he had been instructed to stop
recommending to visitors that they read Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* as background material. What Parker thought would help visitors to a more balanced understanding of Indian-white relations had been deemed "too biased" by the monument's park historian; not only that, but it was not for sale at the Visitor Center's bookstore. Superintendent Booher supported Parker, but had no authority over the bookstore, which—in an arrangement typical of the park system—was operated by an independent nonprofit group, the Custer Battlefield Historical and Museum Association. When, in response to a letter-writing campaign begun by Parker, the Association's book-review committee took up the matter, the vote was 4-3 not to carry the book. (None of the committee members were Native Americans.) Booher then asked the Association's board of directors to override the review committee; they too voted against the book, by the even greater margin of 5-1.11

Theory: Literary Environmentalism as Domestic Orientalism

> It made the slovenly wilderness
> Surround that hill.

——Wallace Stevens, "Anecdote of the Jar" (129)

Until recently, the critic of environmental literature has tacitly assumed the existence of an entity, "the environment," as both the motivation for and the object of environmentalism. As should be clear by now, this study approaches "the environment" instead as a construct, not as the prediscursive origin and cause of environmental discourse but as an effect of that discourse. As a set of
represented relations, an idea rather than a presence, "the environment" becomes manifest as what Michel Foucault called a dispositif, a strategic category that organizes around itself the heterogeneous disciplines that claim (in this case) "the environment" as their common object of study and concern. The environment is that particular abstraction that can be studied not only by what we think of as environmentalists per se— that is, not just those who work to protect it— but by all those whose pronouncements have described it and elaborated upon it and validated it as worthy of attention in the first place: the artists who find it beautiful, the scientists who find it complex, interconnected, and fragile, the theologians who find it spiritually regenerating (however much they may once have found it, as uncontrolled nature, vile and dangerous), the sociologists who find it an antidote to the ills of urban society, and so on.

In the traditional reading of Stevens's "Anecdote," the famous jar not only exercises dominion over the wilderness but retrieves it from "perceptual chaos," thereby rendering it visible to the observer. In much the same sense, the environment makes objects, processes, disciplines, and languages sprawl intelligibly around it, creating a sense of order and relation out of an otherwise slovenly complex of words and things. The environment is the epistemological catalyst that allows us to perceive as unified and logical such recognizably environmentalist discourse as this quote from Tu Wei-Ming, which I have selected almost at random.
The unprecedented scientific and technological achievement that enables us not only to survey all boundaries of the good earth but even to measure the thickness of the air we breathe is certainly an established fact. Yet, a more compelling actuality is the realization of how precious and precarious this lifeboat of ours is in the midst of the turbulent ocean of galaxies. This realization, heightened by a poetic sensitivity and infused by a religious sense of awe, impels us to recognize as professionals as well as concerned citizens of the world that we ourselves now belong to the category of the endangered species. This poignant recognition is deduced from the obvious fact that we have mercilessly polluted our own habitat.\(^{13}\)

One would be struck by the sheer breadth of this sort of statement, were it not so familiar. In physical scope it ranges from the local to the galactic; colliding audibly within it are the varied languages of geography, biology, atmospheric science, politics, ethics, and theology; its rhetoric swings from the mundane and technical to the belletristic. How is it that such polyphonic text can strike us as authoritative and not merely cacophonous? Certainly its persuasiveness is enhanced by the urgency of its genre (the jeremiad) and by its appeals to established forms of authority. But it is the discursive mediation of the environment itself, as an apparently stable and self-evident center, that prevents such prose from seeming as opaque as the fictional Chinese encyclopedia quoted by Foucault in *The Order of Things*, that prevents us today from sensing how at some earlier time, not really so long ago, such words might have struck us as possessing "the exotic
charm of another system of thought," perhaps prompted us
even to shake our heads at "the stark impossibility of
thinking that."14

It is this interdisciplinarity, this intersection and
interlocking of discourses—and of the diverse and often
divergent ways of knowing the world for which individually
they speak—that creates the epistemological space within
which environmentalism may refer intelligibly to its object.
In this study I use the term "literary environmentalism" to
refer not narrowly to consciously engaged environmental
politics, but more broadly to the discursive processes of
constructing the environment—by studying it, by describing
it, and originally, as this study will show, by possessing
it. The material and historical contexts within which these
processes take place do not completely determine the
environment, but they nonetheless prevent it from being, in
the words of Edward Said, "a free field of thought and
action" (3). Nor can literary environmentalism be seen as a
self-evidently pure and "good" resistance to an external and
"bad" force that "exploits" the environment. For however it
may represent itself and its history, environmentalism has
not always operated in isolation from or strictly in
opposition to power, but rather has often been an
establishment and consolidation of power, an alignment with
many of the forces it claims in the broadest terms to
oppose. Necessarily, environmentalism seeks constantly to
buttress the speaking and acting authority of its agents by
establishing links, whether between those agents as
individuals, between individuals and institutions (both new and preexisting), and between one institution and another. Out of this peopling and institutionalizing of environmentalism, this expansion and refinement of its network, comes the elaboration of its discourse, the incorporation of the otherwise unrelated ways of classifying, measuring, and describing its object so evident in the example above.

This study therefore views literary environmentalism not simply as the written record of a political movement, nor solely as Literary Environmentalism, as the production of that movement's most inspirational and now canonical texts. Literary environmentalism is rather the textual manifestation of a larger cultural practice, of an ensemble of interlocking ideas, people, and institutions, of what is today a sprawling formation within which environmental discourse attains its intellectual, popular, and legal authority—a formation within which the environment itself has been invented and naturalized. In other words, I treat literary environmentalism as a sort of Orientalism, as the latter has been formulated by Said: a "created body of theory and practice" (6), the "corporate institution" empowered to deal with the environment "by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it" and even "ruling over it" (3). Of the infinite potential modes for exercising power, literary environmentalism will be seen as just a particular "style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority" (3) over the territories and lives—in
particular, as we have already begun to see, the territories and lives of Native Americans, of women, of the poor—for which the environment is invoked as a representation and which it inevitably misnames.  

**An Environmental Prehistory**

This dissertation explores what might be called the prehistory of the environmental movement by analyzing the shifting constructions of that movement's object, the environment "itself," from the early colonial period to the creation of the early national parks. I will not pretend that the range of texts I have selected for that purpose is particularly representative; genuine representativeness did not seem possible, and I was guided by other considerations. I chose, for one thing, to privilege the popular over the conventionally literary; hence my choice of three books that were best-sellers in their time: Mary White Rowlandson's *The Soveraignty and Goodness of God*, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, and Clarence King's *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada*. (The latter has the additional advantage that the Yosemite landscape it helped to write remains a tremendously popular text in its own right; unlike much of the landscape of, say, Cooper's New York, Yosemite is still "in print" and still widely read in the "original edition." ) I also wished simply to introduce some fresh material into the discussion of "environmental literature," to present alternatives to what seem to have become regular fixtures in the field; hence the fact that this study contains little Henry David Thoreau and absolutely no John Muir.
In Chapter Two of this study I theorize some specific narratological and psychosociological bases of American environmental constructions before analyzing their operation in two colonial texts whose literary environmentalism strikes me as paradigmatic. John Underhill's *Newes from America* (1638), a combined promotional pamphlet and account of the Pequot War, writes the New England wilderness via tropes of gender and race that explicitly link the environment's description to its possession. I then turn to Mary Rowlandson's *The Soveraignty and Goodness of God* (1682), which recapitulates but also considerably complicates these figures. Lacking the blustering self-assurance of Underhill's account, Rowlandson's writing is tentative and nuanced, marked by hesitations and resistances that suggest the possibility of radically rewriting the American environment.

Chapter Three analyzes *The Last of the Mohicans*, paying particular attention to its construction of a gendered and racialized "wilderness" which, in its "virgin" purity, may serve as the ground of a perpetual regeneration of a "pure" white American civilization. But however much the novel tries to naturalize its visions of racial and natural purity—and however much it tries to make its wilderness landscape self-originating—the elusive and profoundly troublesome figure of Magua always manages to frustrate such aims. This repeated disruption steadily erodes the novel's confidence in the "reality" of the wilderness it writes, reducing the story towards the end to a series of skits and
masquerades that destabilize the very categories of "nature" and "culture"—suggesting thereby that nature itself is fully performative in the sense developed by Judith Butler in her analyses of sex and gender.

Chapter Four examines three noncanonical works related intertextually by their contributions to the canonicity of a fourth text: the Yosemite landscape. Lafayette Bunnell's account of the Mariposa War (1851-1852), The History of the Discovery of the Yosemite and of the Indian War which Led to that Event, demonstrates the role of aesthetic discourse in neutralizing the genocidal horrors of a paradigmatically violent "environment," the Euro-American invasion and conquest of Yosemite. Frederick Law Olmsted's "The Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove," the first management report on the newly established Yosemite State Park, implicates the very idea of the national park in an ideology of what might be called "social sanitation through outdoor recreation," a conservative social praxis that had already proved effective in the urban and suburban East by the time Olmsted adapted it to the wilderness of the West.

Continuing the theme of the East writing the West, I turn to Clarence King's Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada to demonstrate the links between environmentalism, literary realism, and the exigencies of a fast-maturing corporate capitalism. Using his surveying and mountaineering activities as figures for struggle, competition, progress, and domination, King writes brilliantly of landscapes now preserved as national parks, but simultaneously mystifies
the social and economic developments that were to so completely transform the remainder of the state.

In my concluding chapter I take up the question of the "postnatural" as it has been developed in two contemporary ecocritical texts, Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature* and Rebecca Solnit's *Savage Dreams*. McKibben claims his work to be postnatural, but naively recapitulates the early colonialist and capitalist trope of the "virgin wilderness"; Solnit, by contrast, refuses the concept of an originary nature altogether and adopts a much more promising mode for a genuinely postnatural environmental writing. Radically resituating the reader of the Yosemite environment in what she terms the "hidden wars of the American West," Solnit makes a point of recovering the voices that have been silenced by traditional forms of environmental literature. *Savage Dreams* refuses to seek in nature the sorts of lessons and remedies that are in fact available only through a conscious engagement with one's own culture.

I do not pretend to have written a full-fledged history of the environment. My goals have been much more modest. I hope first of all simply to have demonstrated that the environment has a history, that it is not simply "out there" waiting either to be destroyed or preserved but rather that it brings considerable historical and ideological baggage to every discussion about it. Second, I hope that this study can suggest ways to bring the environment into larger debates about imperialism, gender, race, and class, and concomitantly to develop ecocriticism into a viable and
productive form of postmodern intellectual work. Certainly we need a clearer understanding of the relations between capitalism, colonialism, and environmentalism, for without such an understanding, green movements risk running at cross-purposes, naturalizing forms of social oppression even as they combat the other toxic residues of the New World Order.

Notes to Chapter One

1 Analyzing a variety of contemporary ecological discourses in The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life: Nature's Debt to Society, Andrew Ross argues that environmentalism threatens a reactionary "revival of appeals to the authority of nature and biology." He notes the historical flirtations of fascist groups with ecology and conservation (4) and suggests that "we may soon be engaged yet again in the struggle to prevent nature becoming the referee of our fate" (5). Also instructive in this vein are the chapters "Think Like a Mountain" and "Nazi Ecology" in Luc Ferry's The New Ecological Order.

2 Olmsted 21. I discuss Olmsted's views in much greater detail in Chapter Four.

3 Hirsch xiv. Hirsch's claim that the most crucial knowledge can be readily identified and defined is itself problematic, since the first of these terms implies a simple recognition of a fact and the second the assignment of a meaning. Hirsch's conflation of these terms indicates how the idea of cultural literacy naturalizes value judgments as simple "information."

Interestingly enough, just as Olmsted invokes literacy in his theorizing of the environment, Hirsch argues for the importance of cultural literacy by citing its utility in comprehending environmentalist discourse (xiii).

4 In addition to the works cited in the text, see Raymond Williams, Writing in Society; Harvey J. Graff, The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City; and Elsa Auerbach, "Literacy and Ideology."

5 With Congress at first reluctant to sponsor interpretive activities, the Park Service looked to outside funding to pay for them and created quasi-independent
organizations to help coordinate them. In 1918 Charles D. Wolcott, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, formed the National Parks Educational Committee, which with Mather's assistance created the nonprofit National Parks Association, among whose purposes were "to interpret the natural sciences which are illustrated in the scenic features, flora and fauna of the national parks and monuments, and to circulate popular information concerning them in text and picture" (Mackintosh 6). To further such efforts, John D. Rockefeller helped fund the museum at Mesa Verde National Park in 1923; the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial Fund and the Carnegie Corporation paid for interpretive facilities at Grand Canyon National Park, including a museum that opened in 1926; and the Loomis family, owners of the Los Angeles Times, funded a museum that opened in Lassen Volcanic National Park in 1929. The federal government did not fund any comparable facility until 1930 (Mackintosh 12).

6 Interpreters are urged, for example, not to "rely upon a limited set of time-honored techniques without examining their current appropriateness" but instead to make use of "[c]urrent knowledge about human behavior in leisure settings" that will "suggest alternative interpretive strategies" (Field and Wagar 44).

7 Grant W. Sharpe notes that in addition to its overt political value in environmentalism, interpretation has an "often overlooked" "management aspect," affording a variety of concrete benefits ranging from "favorably promot[ing] the image of the agency which supplies it" (4) to providing "substantial assistance to law enforcement through educational persuasion" (18).

8 Tilden's book has had considerable influence. William C. Everhardt, as head of the National Park Service's Division of Interpretation and Visitor Services, advised his interpretive staff in 1965 not just to read but to "[r]eread Freeman Tilden's Interpreting Our Heritage," since "[t]here isn't anything much better" (United States, Interpretive Planning). Ten years later, Everhardt noted approvingly that "for nearly a generation the profession has been guided conceptually and philosophically by the teachings of Freeman Tilden, through his classic, Interpreting Our Heritage" (Sharpe xi).

9 In the field of higher education, some ten years later, the same sort of gender inequality still obtains. According to a study reported recently in The Chronicle of
Higher Education, women make up 41 percent of new higher education faculty overall. But women are "far more likely to be employed in non-tenure track positions than males," and at research institutions approximately two men are hired for every woman (Magner 18).

10 For more information (and a sampling of opinions) on the renaming of the Little Bighorn National Monument, see "Winners" 33; Lynch 11; Ward 76-87; Will 6B; and Kilpatrick 6B. Since the renaming, archaeologists have employed sophisticated technology for reinterpreting the Little Bighorn site. See Amato 293; Fox, Archaeology; and Fox, "A New View" 30-37, 64-66.

11 For details of this controversy, see Lockhart 11A.

12 Pack 58. "Anecdote of the Jar" may well be the most frequently analyzed of Stevens's poems. The most persistent theme in its readings is that "a wild and disorderly landscape is transformed into order" by the "presence" of the jar. That order is not natural, however; it is wholly "a product of the human consciousness," and "acts in the imagination" (Baker 127). Order does not originate in nature, but is the effect of "man's desire for wholeness," which "leads . . . toward sur-roundness" (Riddel 43). One critic writes that one of the poem's "critical points is that the jar, while it may reflect the hill on which it stands . . . is not nature" but a reflection, and "[o]nce nature is reflected, it is art--the domain of the imagination and not of the real world" (Perlis 47).

Yvor Winters disagreed with this prevailing view of the poem, finding it "a purely romantic performance," "an expression of the corrupting effect of the intellect upon natural beauty":

The jar is the product of the human mind . . . and it dominates the wilderness; but it does not give order to the wilderness--it is vulgar and sterile, and it transforms the wilderness into the semblance of a deserted picnic ground. (229)

13 Tu Wei-Ming 19. Another contributor to Worldviews and Ecology, Thomas Berry, writes:

General ecological studies can be too abstract or too theoretical to constitute a recognized scientific discipline. Biological and geological studies can be too specialized. Environmental ethics is a much needed study, yet it cannot proceed in any effective manner without a larger understanding of the natural world. The . . . realm[s] of poetry and the natural history essay
are important to establish the emotional-aesthetic feeling for the wonders of the natural world and to awaken the psychic energies needed. . . . But these humanistic insights are themselves mightily enhanced by a more thorough understanding of the identifying features and intimate modes of functioning of bioregions.

None of these studies can be done in isolation from the others. . . . The relationship of humans to the earth requires all these modes of inquiry, all these modes of expression. (236)

And Tu Wei-Ming writes: "Far-sighted ecologists, engineers, economists, and earth scientists, intent on developing a communal critical self-consciousness for 'saving spaceship earth,' have made an appeal to poets, priests, artists, and philosophers" (20).

14 Foucault xv. Of course, some people have never found environmentalist discourse to make much sense; one thinks here of the irreducibility of the differences explored in John McPhee's Encounters with the Archdruid, in which, as the title suggests, one of the protagonists seems to find environmentalism utterly alien as a system of thought.

15 To demonstrate the extent to which my approach is indebted to Said, I quote the following from Orientalism, and invite the reader to substitute, more or less freely, "environment" for "Orient," "literary environmentalism" for "Orientalism," and so on:

[I]t needs to be made clear about cultural discourse and exchange within a culture that what is commonly circulated by it is not "truth" but representations. . . . In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation. The value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a statement about the Orient therefore relies very little, and cannot instrumentally depend, on the Orient as such. On the contrary, the written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such "real thing" as "the Orient." Thus all of Orientalism stands forth and away from the Orient: that Orientalism makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient, and this sense is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, "there" in discourse about it. And these
representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects . . ." (21-22).
CHAPTER TWO
Acts of Environment

The discussion thus far has repeatedly suggested the contingency of environmentalism's object, the environment. The environment is never freely constructed but rather is shaped by the needs that prompt its invocation and the processes involved in its representation. The environment is first of all a word, an element in a discourse, and thus "populated," as Mikhail Bakhtin has it, "with the intentions of others" (294). It is also a narrated fiction, and thus shares formal properties common to all narrative. Finally, as a product of the imagination it is both limited and enabled by specific psychological processes, the workings of anxiety and desire. I wish now to take up these matters of etymology, typology, and psychology—all preparatory to reading John Underhill's 1638 promotional pamphlet, Newes from America, and Mary White Rowlandson's captivity narrative, The Soveraignty and Goodness of God, as paradigmatic exercises of literary environmentalism at specific and formative moments in American environmental history.

Etymology

A root verb plus a suffix, "environment" once quite straightforwardly denoted "the action of environing": environment (OED). But with the obsolescence of the verb "to environ," meaning to "encircle" or "surround," this
active sense has been lost, so that we no longer hear it the way we do in nouns such as *judgement* and *government*—words that still resonate with the senses of the judges who judge and the governors who govern, and that immediately recall the legal and political structures which empower those judges and governors. Even when we use such terms as mere nouns, and despite the work of ideology to cast them as natural and inevitable, we still sense in them their constructedness, their historicity and mutability and politicization. Judgments and governments are easily seen to be not merely found, but enunciated, made, and imposed—products of human will and activity, backed up, in the final analysis, by the specter of violence.

What remains of our sense of environment, by contrast, is not any action but a simple thing, not a fiction that has been made but a fact that has been discovered. Thanks to a nominalizing process that effaces both act and actor, we no longer speak of what *environ* us, but of what our environment *is*. This is not a trivial distinction, for restoring to environment the sense of its originary action allows us to inquire into not only what environ us, but how it came to do so, and by means of what agency—questions crucial to the discussion that follows.

If, as the *OED* suggests, environment originates in action, what is the nature of the act, and who is the actor? Put another way, is there a concrete noun that can be cast as both agent and grammatical subject in a simple sentence directly describing this originary, performative sort of environment? The *OED* is of little help in disentangling
today's environment-as-noun from the earlier environment-as-verb, circularly defining the former as "that which environs." This circle is not broken when the dictionary attempts a definition-by-enumeration, by defining the environment as "the objects or region surrounding anything," for this simply yokes the noun to a substitute verb, surround, which though not obsolete is more or less synonymous with environ. This is a mere deferral that does not solve but merely disguises the problem of the definition's essential circularity. It seems clear that whatever the concrete entities enumerated by the dictionary, they do not comprise environment-as-noun until and unless they perform environment-as-action; we are no closer than before to knowing what the environment is in the absence of such action—or, to put it in two different but related ways, what ontological immanence or absolute presence it possesses that allows us to utter it as a noun plain and simple.

The way out of this circle, I believe, is to uncover the agency at work in acts of environment. We must shift our attention from the merely grammatical subject—the elusive environment-as-noun—to something whose agency is as real in fact as we assume the environment to be in speech. We need to focus on the speaker who is environed, on precisely that element which, suggestively enough, is left out of the dictionary definition. Bearing in mind the political valence of the question, the identity politics implied by its plural pronoun, we need to stop asking what the environment is, stop trying to enumerate its defining
elements, and ask instead, "How is it that these enumerated elements have come to environ us?" The answer lies in the presumption of the presence of, and ultimately in the act of entry by, the speakers who can sensibly say, "our environment." It is not any action on the part of our surroundings that has made them our surroundings, but the onset of and the continuation of our being here: a matter not of ontology, but of politics and history. The originary and defining environment-as-action, to which environment-as-noun always points and from which, however remote, it is logically inseparable, points in turn to specifiable acts of entry and occupation. It is these that account for our being environed, and hence of "having" an "environment" that we can, in an anthropocentric and self-effacing and depoliticizing shorthand, deploy as a noun.

We speak of "the environment," of environment-as-noun, as some sort of genuine (as opposed to merely grammatical) agent that "environs" "us," native, conqueror, and immigrant alike, as if all shared the same history of environment-as-action. Why this strange construction in which fully agentive human actors are grammatically cast as passive and undifferentiated objects? As noted above, when people first enter a region they have not previously known and begin to speak of it as their surroundings, the region itself has done nothing in particular to metamorphose from terra incognita to environment. What precipitates environment is entry. Environment corresponds to, is the inverted expression of, a simultaneous and logically complementary penetration—a word I use now consciously to introduce an
analogy between environmental and sexual discourses. As a variety of feminist critics have pointed out, coitus can be thought of not only as a penetration but also as, say, an incorporation (as above, the two actions can be thought of as logically complementary), yet the hegemonic term is nonetheless penetration, privileged precisely because it foregrounds a dominating, masculine sexual agency. Use of a term such as incorporation, with its ascription of sexual agency to the female, is proscribed by a phallic code that effaces female sexuality generally.¹ In its complementarity to originary acts of penetration, environment is clearly analogous to incorporation. Yet within environmentalist discourse, penetration is not foregrounded but effaced; agency is ascribed exclusively to what is in fact its inescapably passive correlate. Given that this discourse is otherwise unmistakably phallic, such a construction seems odd indeed, until we notice that it has the rhetorical effect of purging environmental discourse of that discomfitting history of colonialist and capitalist "penetrations"—discovery and exploration, conquest and commodification, the now-nameable environment-as-action, the "rape of the land"—which precipitated the Euro-American environment in the first place, a history which, in the performative sense I have been trying to develop here, may now be viewed as that environment. The code shifts attention from palpable actions and intentions and focuses it upon an abstraction which not only lacks agency and presence, but whose very conjuring is a mystification.
Typology

The *OED* defines the environment—in its contemporary usage in the discourse of environmentalism, that is, as environment-as-noun—as the "sum total" of "that which environs; the objects or region surrounding anything." I dealt earlier with the implications of the environment's putative totality; here I wish to focus on the definitional primacy of the externality that is implied in this definition, on the way the very idea of environment divides the world into insides and outsides. The terms here suggest a way of theorizing "the environment" as it is represented in and as it performs in the narratives of literary environmentalism, specifically, in terms of Jurij Lotman's theory of narrative plot typology. According to Lotman, the mythic narrative features at root just two types of characters,

those who are mobile, who enjoy freedom with respect to plot-space, who can change their place in the structure of the artistic world and cross the frontier, the basic topological feature of this space, and those who are immobile, who represent, in fact, a function of this space. . . .

[A] certain plot space is divided by a single boundary into an external and an internal sphere, and a single character has the opportunity to cross that boundary. (167)

On the most fundamental narrative level there are, as Donna Haraway puts it in adumbrating this passage, only two characters: "the hero and the limit of his action or the space through which he moves" (234). Haraway deliberately uses "he" in this formulation because the narrative hero is the "creator of differences," the one who differentiates his interior from his exterior and as such is "structurally
male." The female is "both the space for and the resistance to" such marking (234). She is "an element of plot-space," in the words now of Teresa de Lauretis, "a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter" (44).

Though Lotman wrote specifically of myth, de Lauretis of Hollywood cinema, and Haraway of the deep structure of scientific thought and research, it is not hard to recognize in this pre-gendered "matrix and matter" the environment as generally represented: ahistorical, ontologically stable, utterly objectified, like any other feminized object in patriarchal discourse "fixed in the position of icon, spectacle, the one looked at, in which the subject sees the objectification of his action and subjectivity" (Haraway 234). The "fixing" of the environment in this position will prove to be a sort of environmental exploitation in its own right—not the obvious sort of physical destruction that might appear to motivate the environmentalist narrative, but the more fundamental conceptual appropriation, by the very locating of its boundaries and identification of its properties, of environment as raw cultural material. Like "Woman," this material is not only endlessly reconstructed, but proves to have as one of its primary attractions its endless availability for such reconstruction, as a sort of renewable resource for constructing the masculine subject on both the individual and the national level, through the shifting and proliferating narrative strategies of literary environmentalism.
Psychosociology

We have yet to recognize the full implication of the mother as a primary landscape.

—Paul Shepard (98)

Environment's implicit differentiation between that which surrounds and that which is surrounded, between self and other, is a process not solely semantic and narrative, but also psychosocial. In examining the way that "America's oldest and most cherished fantasy" has been that of "the land as woman, the total female principal of gratification—enclosing [environing] the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose, and painless and integral satisfaction" (Lav 4), Annette Kolodny critiques the demarcation of the (male) self and the environment in terms congenial to this study, most particularly in the way her model contextualizes the psychological and links it directly to the literary. In the seventeenth century, Kolodny demonstrates, such quasi-environmental images as "Eden, Paradise, the Golden Age, and the idyllic garden" were recast in response to contingent historical and social realities, "subsumed in the image of an America promising material ease without labor or hardship, as opposed to the grinding poverty of previous European existence." The New World promised the European

a resurrection of the lost state of innocence that the adult abandons when he joins the world of competitive self-assertion; and all this possible because, at the deepest psychological level, the move to America was experienced as the daily reality of what has become its single dominating metaphor: regression from the cares of adult life and a return to the primal warmth of womb or breast in a feminine landscape. And when America finally produced a pastoral literature of her own, that literature hailed the essential femininity of the terrain in a way European pastoral had never
dared, and, from the first, took its metaphors as literal truths. (6)

Material history here becomes psychologically grounded metaphor, which then underwrites a naturalized gendered "reality." Though there may be an "instinctual drive embedded in" this fantasy of a feminine landscape (7), it is determined not solely "by personal psychology" but also "by social context" (Land xii). What Kolodny terms "regression" here in fact seems shaped less by some universal desire to escape from adulthood than by a fully contextual wish to escape the rigors of an early capitalism, with its competition and poverty, and into a fantasized and idealized precapitalist Eden. But of course there could be no such escape; Kolodny stresses that the dynamics of an expansionist colonialism ensured that "the suppressed infantile desires unleashed in the promise of a primal garden were inevitably frustrated,"

thwarted by the equally pressing need to turn nature into wealth. In a capital-accumulating economy, this demanded, on the one hand, competition . . . and, on the other, a willingness to violate the very generosity that had once promised an end to such patterns.2

The specifically psychological component of Kolodny's model is worth elaborating in some detail. This could be done in several ways, but most useful to my purposes—not least because literary environmentalism comes to rely so much upon the gendered discourses of science—is the object-relations approach taken by Evelyn Fox Keller in her analysis of the scientific construction of nature. For the infant, Keller writes, "[b]oundaries have not yet been drawn to distinguish the child's internal from external
environment" (81). At this early time, the external environment consists "primarily" of the mother, who is "experienced as an extension of the child" until, via the experiential stages outlined by Jean Piaget, the child "learns to distinguish between self and other, between subject and object." This ability to perceive self as separate from environment in turn "allows for the recognition of an external reality to which the child can relate—at first magically, and ultimately objectively." (I am using "environment" here as Keller uses it, to refer generally to the "not-me" of the developing subject, rather than to the more specific, operationally defined environment of environmentalist discourse.)

This process, "fraught with intense emotional conflict," is often described teleologically as "development," but in fact does not lead unambiguously from an inferior state to a superior one, since along with the emergence of the mother as a separate being comes the child's painful recognition of his/her own separate existence. Anxiety is unleashed, and longing is born. . . . Out of the demarcation between self and mother arises a longing to undo that differentiation, an urge to reestablish the original unity. At the same time, there is also a growing enjoyment of autonomy, which itself comes to feel threatened by the lure of an earlier state. (81)

Maturity in this model is not achieved by attaining the highest possible level of autonomy, but by successfully negotiating the contradictory forces of autonomy and desire, by becoming "sufficiently secure to permit momentary relaxation of the boundary" between self and other (82). This is the final but difficult step "of reintroducing
ambiguity into one's relation to the world" (82-83).

This ambiguity, this "blurring of the boundary between subject and object," inevitably "tend[s] to be associated with the feminine" (87). Keller quotes Hans Loewald:

Against the threatening possibility of remaining in or sinking back into the structureless unity from which the ego emerged, stands the powerful paternal force. . . . While the primary narcissistic identity with the mother forever constitutes the deepest unconscious origin and structural layer of ego and reality . . . this primary identity is also the source of the deepest dread, which promotes, in identification with the father, the ego's progressive differentiation and structuralization of reality. (86-87)

Thus in addition to the familiar gendering of the environment itself as feminine, this model predicts a gendering of the ways of relating to that environment. For the masculine subject especially, the already difficult step of "reintroducing ambiguity into one's relation to the world" is made more difficult to the extent that it requires a voluntary assumption of gender ambiguity in a society that compels gender clarity. As we will see more specifically in my discussion of John James Audubon and James Fenimore Cooper, relating to nature becomes a matter of gender politics.

In the early stages of development, the difficulty of moving from unity to autonomy is eased by an intermediary between self and other that the British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott terms the "transitional object." (Winnicott's example is the baby's blanket.) As a signifier, this transitional object is unmotivated, that is, it does not intrinsically signify the mother, but does so only because such a meaning has somehow been assigned to it, as a trope
in the fluid signifying system of the maturing child. Though the blanket itself is eventually given up, it is neither forgotten nor repressed, as Winnicott stresses, but rather "loses meaning" (5). It simply ceases to signify, as other objects displace it in a mediative system that changes but continues unabated, since the need for mediation never disappears. The "transitional phenomena," in this model, "become diffused . . . spread out over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and 'the external world as perceived by two persons in common,' that is to say, over the whole cultural field" (5).

At least part of the tremendous power of the "natural" environment to signify within the cultural field owes to its continuing ability, as trope rather than "real" object, to negotiate the tense boundary between interdependence and autonomy. That it will, as the "natural" portion of Winnicott's cultural field, be strongly gendered is almost inevitable, since (regardless of the specific shape it takes as signifier) its raison d'etre, its collective and earliest signified, remains the mother. This environment-as-transitional-object is not the "reality" of the world whose welfare is ostensibly environmentalism's concern, no more than the blanket is the mother. It is a construct serving not its own preservation but psychosociological need.

How can any of this help us read environment in a specific historical and textual instance? The theoretical discussion suggests that literary environmentalism will represent nominal environments via the effacement of performed environments, specifically, via the misnaming of
penetration as environment. Such representations will collapse time and action into space and place, reducing the complexities and politics of the historical to the comparative simplicity and apparent neutrality of the geographical. In the process, they will also mark off a feminized narrative space within which a masculinized subject can recognize, to repeat Haraway's formulation, "his action and subjectivity." Finally, as displaced object of desire, as that whose delimitation both produces the self and threatens to subsume it, this putatively agentive and feminine space will be ambiguously constructed, something toward which the subject is drawn yet also fears.

John Underhill's 1638 pamphlet Newes from America illustrates these processes so well that it is almost paradigmatic. As a description of both the Pequot War and the Connecticut landscape, it exemplifies the collapsing of an antecedent environment-as-action onto environment-as-noun, in the process revealing the origins of a gendered and racialized trope of landscape that will be accessed over and over again in American literary environmentalism.

Warre-like Proceedings and Speciall Places

We know today—indeed it was known in 1876, but was hushed up—that George Armstrong Custer and his men were not ambushed at the Little Bighorn. They were, however, quite literally and fatally environed, and I think Walt Whitman's use of the term in his "Death-Sonnet for Custer" is instructive, invoking as it does the older and explicitly military sense of environment even as it silences the activity of history into the passivity of landscape—into
the "wild ravines" and "lonesome stretches" that would eventually be canonized in the National Park system. The enduring fascination with Custer's "fatal environment," as Richard Slotkin has argued, owes not only to the way it rattled an apparently smug nation, but also to its apparent reification of the notion of a powerful Native American people whose renewed "aggression" could rationalize the continuing seizure of their lands. Though by far the best known, the Custer myth was not the first to accomplish this self-serving transformation of history into landscape-text. The pattern had been set more than two centuries earlier, in the Pequot War of 1637.

Originating in the desire of British colonists for Pequot territory in what is now Connecticut, this conflict's casus belli was a series of reciprocal kidnappings, murders, and skirmishes involving English and Dutch colonists as well as Pequot, Niantic, and Narragansett Indians--though it was specifically against the Pequots that the General Court of Massachusetts declared war. An expeditionary force was quickly drawn up, consisting of approximately a hundred Englishmen and a backup force of Mohegans and Narragansetts, led by John Mason and John Underhill. This expedition sailed out of Saybrook and cruised eastward along the coast toward the Pequots' fortified village on the Mystic River. Instead of attacking directly, the colonial force sailed right on by to the east, "deluding" the Pequot warriors in a way that "bred in them a securitie" (Underhill 36). The Puritan force then turned northward into Narragansett Bay, landed secretly, and marched south and west overland--in
order, as Mason wrote, to "come upon their Backs" (2) and
storm the lightly guarded fort where the Pequot women,
children, and other noncombatants had been sequestered.
Completely fooled by these tactics, the Pequot guards were
still asleep when the Englishmen attacked at dawn, Mason at
one entrance of the fort and Underhill at the other. Waking
amidst the slaughter, the Indians recovered quickly and
began to drive the Puritans back. Mason and Underhill, at
opposite entrances to the village, then set fire to the
wigwams and retreated outside, watching as the fires, "both
meeting in the centre of the fort, blazed most terribly, and
burnt all in the space of halfe an houre . . . many were
burnt in the Fort, both men, women, and children" (Underhill
39). The fort had held at least four hundred people, and
Underhill noted that "so many soules lie gasping on the
ground so thicke in some places, that you could hardly passe
along" (39-40). Those who did manage to escape the fire
were picked off by the soldiers outside, and by Underhill's
estimate, not more than five got out alive. All but broken
after this massacre, the remaining Connecticut Pequots were
quickly dispersed, captured, or killed, and English
colonists immediately began occupying their newly conquered
territory.³

For a "civilized" author writing for a "civilized"
audience, the chronicling of such "savage" events posed an
obvious problem. As Underhill summed it up: "It may bee
demanded, Why should you be so furious? (as some have said)
should not Christians have more mercy and compassion?" (40).
Both Mason and Underhill, in their separate accounts of the
war, respond with a similar rhetorical strategy, a
displacement of agency and responsibility that was crude but
well calculated to satisfy a Puritan audience: "God was
above them," wrote Mason of the Pequots, "making them as a
fiery Oven . . . Thus did the Lord judge among the Heathen,
filling the Place with dead Bodies!" (9-10). The massacre
was not the Puritans' own work, but "the LORD'S DOINGS"
(14). Both authors repeatedly cast themselves and their men
as passive, mere "feeble instruments" in the hands of God,
contrasting their own passivity against the fictional agency
of the victims, whose putative actions are deemed to justify
both the magnitude and the indiscriminacy of the slaughter:

[W]hen a people is growne to such a height of bloude, and sinne against God and man, and all confederates in the action, there hee hath no respect to persons, but harrowes them, and sawes them, and puts them to the sword, and the most terriblest death that may bee: sometimes the Scripture declarereth women and children must perish with their parents. (Underhill 40)

The rhetoric here displaces agency onto an undifferentiated
Other ("all confederates in the action"), shifting
responsibility for the action onto God and mystifying any
worldly motives for the massacre. The discourse bonds
action with thing in an obfuscating manner that will prove
characteristic of later literary environmentalism. The
Puritans, writes Mason, "got not the Land in Possession by
their own Sword," but rather because the "LORD was pleased
to smite our Enemies . . . and to give us their Land for
an Inheritance" (front.; 21). Underhill makes the same
linkage, promising the reader in the very first sentence of
his own account that he will "performe these two things,
first give a true narration, of the warre-like proceedings that hath been in New England these two years past," and second "discover to the Reader divers places in New England, that would afford speciall accommodations to such persons as will Plant upon them." He immediately reiterates: in the "Relation of our warre-like proceedings" he will "interweave the speciall places fit for New Plantations, with their description" (1). He will entangle "proceedings" and "places," action and noun, the two facets whose interweaving it was our purpose, in the etymological discussion above, to disentangle. With events and their narration thus beginning to be subsumed into place and its description, Underhill writes precisely of "the scenic Connecticut countryside" (Nelson 12)—of the "scene" of history and aesthetic attraction both, of "scenery" in the dual sense that still reverberates confusedly in the discourse of environment.

**The Dangers that Hedge It About**

Underhill's text is particularly instructive in the way it conflates event and place in an explicitly feminized landscape that visibly encodes its narrative and psychological groundings. This is most evident in the map (figure 6) included in Newes from America, immediately after the title page, as a sort of preface to the verbal text following it. This figure's sexual symbolism has been ably analyzed by Anne Kibbey, who first noted both that the "illustration of the Puritan men attacking the Pequot fort is also a drawing of a vagina" and that the massacre itself "was the culminating fusion of sexuality and violence," closely linked to the concurrent persecution of Anne
Fig. 6. "A culminating fusion of sexuality and violence."
Hutchinson (110). What remains to be discussed is the way the figure's houses and palisades have been drawn to resemble teeth, which is to say, the use the figure makes of the motif of the *vagina dentata*.

Found in one form or another in the mythology of many cultures, this image, with its recasting of penetration as an aggressive incorporation, its projection of male sexual violence onto a castrating female sexual "appetite," bears psychological and cultural overtones significant to our understanding of gender, violence, and the American environment. Kibbey argues that Underhill's drawing signifies in a fashion that is "subverbal" and "dissociated from language" (110), expressing not only its manifest content but also the very degree of its repression, the degree to which it is verbally inexpressible. I suggest here that the content itself, the particular metanarrative inscribed by the drawing upon the paradigmatic environment of Mystic, is a version of the myth of the culture-hero known as Toothbreaker. One version of this story describes how "[t]he first men in the world were unable to have sexual relationship[s] with their wives until the culture hero broke the teeth of the women's vaginas." Whether it is the persecuted Anne Hutchinson or the pictorially feminized Pequot Indians, violence and misogyny--the woman *palizado*, or *beaten*, as Underhill labels her on the map--is claimed as a prerequisite to the establishment of the Puritan faith in the New World. His mission at Mystic being to secure the conditions for a new establishment of Puritan culture, Underhill casts himself as Toothbreaker: "Hear Entters
Captayne Underhill," the sexual pun being not just about penetration but what is perceived as the foundational act of begetting culture upon nature, an act performed in faithful Aristotelian style by the self-defining masculine subject upon a feminine environment.

Paralleling this narrative model of the vagina dentata motif is a psychological model, outlined by the psycho-analyst and critic Marie Bonaparte in her reading of Edgar Allan Poe's novel, Berenice. Bonaparte, "elaborating a remark by Freud" in light of Poe's peculiar anxieties, stresses the equation of mouth and vagina and considers the notion of the vagina dentata and its accompanying threat as 'a factor with roots deep in infantile experience.' At first it was the infant who displayed aggressive, i.e., occasionally biting behavior towards his [sic] mother's breast. Later it is the adult who, due to a sense of guilt stemming from his infantile behavior, feels threatened by a mother who intends to castrate him. (Malotki 206)

Vagina dentata imagery is thus "interpreted as a projection of the unconscious anxiety of castration and is associated with male impotence" (206). Bonaparte characterizes Poe's sexuality as an irreducible complex of love and hate, "both sadistic destruction and necrophilia" (218), as a splitting between action and object, violence toward and yearning for the same thing, destruction and nostalgia--certainly familiar pairings in both environmentalist and colonialist discourse.

Whether in the "subverbal" language of Underhill's map or the displaced anxieties of Poe's character Egaeus, "the danger of sexuality, the punishment that threatens all who
yield," finds expression in an obsession with teeth, specifically in

the notion of the female vagina being furnished with teeth, and thus a source of danger in being able to bite and castrate. . . . when Egaeus yields to the morbid impulse to draw Berenice's teeth, he yields both to the yearning for the mother's organ and to be revenged upon it, since the dangers that hedge it about make him sexually avoid all women as too menacing. His act is therefore a sort of retributive castration inflicted on the mother whom he loves, and yet hates. (Bonaparte 218)

This oedipality finds its echo in the feminized landscape whose penetration and occupation are keenly desired but threatened by, in Bonaparte's words, "the dangers that hedge it about." The writer of the colonialist environment must work to maintain this love and this hatred in some psychologically tenable relation, whether crudely, as in Underhill's tale of "warre-like proceedings" and "speciall places," or with the greater sophistication of later environmental narratives.

This Wilderness Condition: Mary Rowlandson's Narrative

Immediately after setting foot on the soil of "New England," William Bradford described that contested territory as "a hidious and desolate wildernes," drawing in his account upon the biblical narrative of the Forty Years' Wandering and the conquest of Canaan, invoking one invasion to authorize another. Spinning out this conceit in his History of Plymouth Plantation, Bradford laments that his own people could not "as it were, goe up to the tope of Pisgah, to vew from this wildernes a more goodly cuntie." Not only was there no such mountain near Plymouth, there was no such "goodly cuntie" to see from it. There was nothing,
Bradford makes clear, but wilderness. More accurately, that "nothing" was the wilderness, for the term as he is using it refers not to any palpable reality, but quite pointedly to an absence, to absence itself. This wilderness is perfunctorily described as full of "wild beasts and wild men," but when Bradford's description shifts from such stock generalities to the concrete and specific, it necessarily reverts to the negative: "they had now no freinds to wellcome them, nor inns to entertaine or refresh their weatherbeaten bodys, no houses or much less townes to repair too" (96). It is the same emptiness that John Eliot would describe as the "wilderness where nothing appeareth but hard labor and wants" (qtd. in Nash 26), a place devoid of materiality and signification, where nothing appeareth and whose only positivity is its provocation of human action: "labor" engendered by "wants," the latter term being readable as absence and as wish, as the machinery of desire.

This is precisely the wilderness of that earliest of American frontier classics, Mary Rowlandson's 1682 captivity narrative The Soveraignty and Goodness of God. It is a wilderness posited almost exclusively by circumlocution, in the unmistakeable language of lack:

[M]y thoughts ran upon my losses and sad bereaved condition. All was gone, my husband gone . . . my children gone, my relations and friends gone, our house and home and all our comforts within doors, and without, all was gone (except my life) and I knew not but the next moment that might go too. (326)

We had husband and father, and children, and sisters, and friends, and relations, and house, and home, and many comforts of this life: but now we may say, as Job, "Naked I came out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return." (336)
The wilderness is where Rowlandson has "no Christian friend near" (327), where she loses her child—which loss, rather than any positive characteristic of her physical surroundings, renders her in "this wilderness condition" (329). It is never the sort of landscape that subsequent travelers might recognize by her descriptions of it; it is precisely "the wilderness where there was nothing to be seen" (359).

The terror of this defining blankness can be more fully appreciated in terms of the Puritan habit of grounding both personal experience and social order in a pervasive textuality, in the belief that there was nothing, as Adrienne Rich put it, "so trivial that it could not speak a divine message." The high stakes and uncertainty of salvation made the Puritans eager and anxious readers of their surroundings, a people for whom even the "piecemeal thoughts of a woman stirring her pot" were "clues to her 'justification' in Christ" (x). Such readerly introspection played a key role in Puritan ideology and governance, even during the best of times, and in the aftermath of a tremendous public trauma such as King Philip's War it was partly through acts of revision, a reassignment of meanings in this saturating social text, that "Puritanism could once again govern, by virtue of explanatory cogency, the entire range of human experience" (Breitweiser 8).

There was nothing in the Puritan universe that did not, or at least could not, signify. But by virtue of what interpretive code? Like any reader confronted with a seemingly unreadable text, Rowlandson's mission in the
wilderness becomes a hermeneutic one, that of creating and justifying an interpretive stance and practice. Rich quotes Anne Bradstreet on the importance and difficulty of such a mission:

[A]dmit this be the true God whom we worship, and that be his word, yet why may not the Popish religion be the right? They have the same God, the same Christ, the same word: they only interpret it one way, we another." (xi)

For the seventeenth-century Puritan, the difficulty here is not just individual and idiosyncratic, but communal and doctrinal. It is not merely the justification of the individual in Christ that was at stake, that demanded closure; the justification of the "wilderness errand" itself demanded not polysemy but a particular and authoritative interpretation, for "if Archbishop Laud and the Hierarchists back in England were right," as Rich put it, "what was one doing, after all, on that stretch of intemperate coast?" (xi).

What, indeed, was one doing there? For the captive Mary Rowlandson, frightened, hungry, freezing, and bereaved, that question would have taken on an even greater urgency, and she would by habit have attempted to read her surroundings, her wilderness environment, in search of an answer. As she herself put it, her "earnest and unfeigned desire" was for a "token" or "sign" (329-330)--but that was precisely what the wilderness could not, by definition, provide.

It was when confronted with this sort of "vast blankness," writes Nash of the New England coast's earliest white settlers, that "couraged failed and imagination
multiplied fears" (26). And it is indeed the imagination that populates the otherwise empty Puritan wilderness, that makes it teem, if not with tangible rivers and mountains and trees, at least with the innumerable "troubles" and "difficulties" and "afflictions" (Rowlandson 2) that make it as allegorical as the landscapes of Pilgrim's Progress or the Inferno— in Rowlandson's words, a "lively resemblance of Hell" (326), the "valley of the shadow of death" (363), a "horrible pit" (364)— an inscription of the "real" landscape of New England into an imported cultural landscape. More particularly, Rowlandson's narrative can be read (as I read that of John Underhill) as an inscription of the psychosexual dynamics of environment as manifested at a particular historical moment, in this case King Philip's War.

Rowlandson's task differed somewhat from that faced by Underhill in chronicling the events at Mystic. Where the Pequot War was naked white aggression, the events of 1675-76 constituted a genuine and substantial native resistance—the most effective of the entire colonial period. Philip's Wampanoags, the Narragansetts, and other allied tribes attacked some ninety settlements, completely destroying twelve of them and killing several thousand colonists. In proportion to the white population of the time, it was the worst war in Anglo-American history, claiming the lives of one in sixteen colonial combatants and severely disrupting commerce and trade. To many back in England it called into question the viability of the colonial endeavor itself.6

The defeat of the Indians in 1676 helped allay such doubts. But the psychological specter of environment, which
this war may be said to have embodied, would continue to haunt representations of the event. Where John Underhill had employed the trope of the toothed vagina to project white penetration and aggression onto a feminized and potentially castrating Indian environment, cartographically figured as *vagina dentata*, Puritan accounts of King Philip's War tended to signify the native threat via an even more active and specific imagery, quite freely characterizing the conflict in terms of an improper and unrestrained female sexuality that threatened masculine power, as in this description of how King Philip cemented his "conspiracy":

[H]is first Errand is to a Squaw Sachem (i.e. a Woman Prince, or Queen) who is the Widow of a Brother to King Philip, deceased, he promising her great rewards if she would joyn with him in this Conspiracy, (for she is as Potent a Prince as any round about her, and hath as much Corn, Land, and Men, at her Command) she willingly consented, and was much more forward in the Design, and had greater Success than King Philip himself. (Present State [1])

This Indian queen--named only by the "unnatural" conjunction of her sex and her power ("Squaw Sachem," "Woman Prince")--at once genders and demonizes the resisting native. It is utterly "vain," as we read elsewhere, "to expect any thing but the most barbarous usages from such a people amongst whom the most milde and gentle sex delight in cruelties, and have utterly abandoned at once the two proper Virtues of Womankind, Pity and Modesty." The castration anxiety underlying this construct is at times explicit. What Underhill's map had merely implied is in this account performed:

[T]wo men coming from Malbury to Sudbury, were set upon in the Woods by a Great Number of Indian Women, armed with clubs, pieces of Swords, and the
like, who by their numbers having over-mastered the two poor Travellers, that had nothing but small sticks to defend themselves with, beat out their brains, and cut off their privy members, which they carried away with them in triumph. (New and Further 4)

Thus does the motif of the vagina dentata reappear in the guise of penis captivus. I wish now to read The Soveraignty and Goodness of God in terms of the loss and retrieval of the phallus—of what would have been deemed Mr. Rowlandson's, of Mrs. Rowlandson as she had functioned for her husband in Lancaster society. He had been the parish's first minister, while she was the daughter of the village's wealthiest resident and largest landholder. She thus "completes" him not only sexually but socially and economically, and what is held captive is, among other things, the status and economic power that he had gained through her. Cotton Mather described the situation thus:

Mr. Rowlandson (the faithful Pastor of the Church there) had his House, Goods, Books, all burned; his Wife and all his Children led away Captive before the Enemy. Himself (as God would have it) was not at home, whence his own person was delivered, which otherwise (without a Miracle) would have been endangered. (qtd. in Howe 92)

Mary Rowlandson's captivity here becomes just one loss, among others, suffered by her husband. This loss in turn stands in for that unnamed loss which would have presumably been inflicted upon his own person, with the bodily imagery of an endangered "person" subtly but continually figuring captivity of the wife as potential castration of the husband.

Predictably, then, the captive narrator functions to "shelter the masculine covenant" (Howe 97). This function
becomes clearer after the Third Remove, when Rowlandson comes into possession of a plundered bible. This is a crucial turning point in the story, and I would suggest that part of the suspense now centers on the return of not just Rowlandson but of the bible itself. It becomes a narrative of the captivity of the sacred word, and it is this primal word, injected where previously there was none, that begins the transformation of what had been "an unmarked Christianography" (99) into the sort of legible wilderness we will find in The Last of the Mohicans. In this view, Rowlandson functions not as independent writing subject but as bearer of the phallus, a writer by proxy, shepherding the logos through an as-yet uncoded space.

Rowlandson begins her sojourn in a wilderness like that described by Bradford, a wilderness that is no positive landscape at all but a condition, the mere site of her bewilderment. It is a place where she literally does not know how to respond or what to do, even with her most basic emotions: "Although I had met with so much affliction, and my heart was many times ready to break, yet could I not shed one tear in their sight: but rather had been all this while in a maze, and like one astonished" (336). Trapped where there are no signs, Rowlandson longs for one. Her "earnest and unfeigned desire" is for nothing more than a "token," a "sign" (329-330). But how can the wilderness be made to signify? It is the bible that now, like the jar in Tennessee, begins to systematize and encode the space around it. Once Rowlandson is able to advert to this text, she can alleviate her bewilderment. Her account up to this point
has offered absolutely no description of the landscape as a presence, but that landscape now becomes, in lockstep with a mediating and authorizing scriptural gloss, the object of a recognizable description:

[Q]uickly we came to wade over the river, and passed some tiresome and wearisome hills. One hill was so steep that I was fain to creep up upon my knees, and to hold by the twiggs and bushes to keep myself from falling backward. My head also was so light that I usually reeled as I went, but I hope all these wearisome steps that I have taken are but a forewarning to me of heavenly rest. "I know, O Lord, that thy judgements are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me," Psalm 119:75. (340)

For virtually every description of this nascent geography, Rowlandson evokes a biblical landscape to match. To read and describe the landscape, she must simultaneously read her Bible, in which the real landscape is to be found—the real landscape of which the merely physical landscape through which she travels is but a type, a comparatively inconsequential manifestation:

We began this remove with wading over Baquag river: the water was up to the knees, and the stream very swift, and so cold that I thought it would have cut me in sunder... [B]ut in my distress the Lord gave me experience of the truth, and goodness of that promise, Isaiah 43:2. When thou paspest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. (348)

At last, after many weary steps, I saw Wachusett hills, but many miles off. Then we came to a great swamp, through which we travelled, up to the knees, in mud and water... I thought I should have sunk down at last, and never got out; but I may say, as in Psalm 94:18, When my foot slipped, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up. (350-351)

Here, perhaps, is the beginning of an environmental interpretation, of the enlistment of the physical landscape
in a legitimating master narrative—the initial writing of a landscape that the Euro-American would be able to read in order to justify her presence within that landscape. And while from a modern standpoint it may seem difficult to view *The Soveraignty and Goodness of God* as "nature writing" or "environmental literature," it is nonetheless important to our understanding of those genres because it so clearly thematizes the gendered and historically responsive practices that this study terms literary environmentalism.

**The Wilderness Where There Was Nothing to Be Seen**

Mary Rowlandson saw what she did not see said what she did not say.

--- Susan Howe (128)

Rowlandson’s early characterization of wilderness-as-absence sounds like nothing so much as the Western discourse of "Woman," that fictional sex which, as Luce Irigaray put it, "is not one," which "has nothing to show" and whose "sexual organ represents the horror of nothing to see" (352). Wilderness and Woman are both predicated on their own negation, on a refusal to "see" them as anything but what they are not. In the first instance this is accomplished by means of a profoundly anti-ecological vision of a disorderly nature and an ethnocentric dismissal of native culture qua culture, in the second via androcentric hierarchies in which "[f]emale sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters" (350). Also negated in each case is an entire realm of speech and writing. Rowlandson repeatedly posits wilderness as the site of a sort of un-speech, an unintelligible "din," the "noise and hooping" (330) of a feminized native Other.
Shifting and confusing, as unreadable as the wilderness in which it is found and of which it is, really, just another "bewildering" component, this is the speech of those who are "unstable" and "mad" (352), the complete antithesis of a trustworthy speech: "there is not one of them that makes the least conscience of speaking the truth" (342), "[s]o like were these barbarous creatures to him who was a liar from the beginning" (344).

Thus figured as predating the Fall and the onset of the Law—"a liar from the beginning"—this is a surviving (hence also a resisting) speech, one that has not yet, if I may make explicit now the analogy I have been drawing with écriture féminine by citing the words of Hélène Cixous, been "called in by the cops of the signifier." Rowlandson's typologizing wilderness discourse functions to bring this wild din "into the line of order," assigning each of its elements "to a precise place in the chain that's always formed for a privileged signifier," piecing it "to the string which leads back, if not to the Name-of-the-Father" then, in a "twist" that would seem to apply to the activity of the bible-toting female captive, "to the place of the phallic-mother" (347).

In thus encoding what had previously been defined as uncoded and indescribable, Rowlandson is not so much objectively describing the wilderness as she is beginning to replace it with something else, with a new discursive formation that will be called (and still is called) by the same name, but whose effects will prove entirely different. As a crucial term in the dialectic of civilization and
sagacity, wilderness is to be subjected to what Cixous terms the "phallogocentric sublation" (341), canceled but also preserved and elevated within a larger synthesis. Wilderness as the disorienting, chaotic, and inexplicable is to be sublated into a reified hueristic, an unabashedly explanatory construct.7

In this new discourse, wilderness becomes less and less Other and more and more "at one with the phallocentric tradition" (Cixous 337). It is in this sense no longer "wilderness" at all, and the ease with which it can continue to pass under the same name may owe in part to the deployment of the phallic mother to reinscribe it—just another instance, perhaps, of the phallocracy deploying women "to mobilize their immense strength against themselves," to be the "executants" of men's "virile needs" (336). Rowlandson is enlisted as the mystifying agent of a new literary environmentalism, as the nominal agent through which patriarchy apostrophizes the wilderness with a version of Cixous's facetious admonition: "Hold still, we're going to do your portrait, so that you can begin looking like it right away" (347).

If this emerging literary-environmentalist discourse is in this way sublative, writing and elevating wilderness only by simultaneously negating and misnaming it, how can it be thought of as the discursive vehicle for a future wilderness preservation? What kind of preservation is it that is thus predicated on a cancellation? Environmentalism would indeed later preserve landscapes physically more or less unaltered, but only by means of an incessant and increasingly
institutionalized teaching and stabilizing of what those landscapes mean, a radical alteration of the destabilizing character that would once have defined those lands as wilderness.

Is there, perhaps, an alternative to this preservation that is simultaneously an erasure, a possibility for a preservation that would mean more than simply keeping an expanse of land untrammeled, a praxis that would include such preservation but also exceed it, challenging rather than reinforcing the codes that negate the earlier notion of the "wild"? Taking my cue from Cixous's reference to the unconscious as "that other limitless country," "the place where the repressed manage to stay alive" (337), I suggest that such a praxis would take seriously the old idea of wilderness as both a geographical place and a psychic and cultural condition while refusing the earlier characterizing of wilderness as lack. It would be analogous to an écriture féminine, a writing that "un-thinks" the negating phallogocentric order (339), that breaks the codes which otherwise reign in the wild and make it speak for something else. It would preserve wilderness as difference rather than alienating it from its own wildness and fashioning it into a mystified outlier of civilization. Reconstructed in a discourse that is, in Irigaray's words, "somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason" and "inaudible for whoever listens . . . with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand" (353), this wilderness would be as foreign to a modern environmentalist as today's "environment" or "global ecology" might have been to a seventeenth-century Puritan.
In the particular case of Mary Rowlandson, this other wilderness writing would be the expression of a thoroughly disoriented body rather than a putatively satisfied soul, a writing from a wilderness experienced as difference. For Rowlandson, certainly, the conditions for such a writing were in place, with the tremendous emotional disruption of her losses and captivity recalling what Cixous speaks of as the moment when a feminine writing becomes possible, "that radical mutation of things brought on by a material upheaval when every structure is for a moment thrown off balance and an ephemeral wildness sweeps order away" (337).

Rowlandson's experience must have palpably outstripped the language in which she was constrained to relate it, and Mitchell Breitwieser has remarked on the ubiquitous and irreducible excess in her narrative, about how, in "a kind of ideological misfire," thoughts "come forward that do not reduce entirely to exemplary status" (8). Instead, Rowlandson repeatedly encounters "intensities of memory that resist rather than aid exemplary reduction," and such "intrusive dissonances" contribute to a "ruination of meaning that allows various anomalous glimpses" of "interdicted subjective presences otherwise almost completely absent from the seventeenth-century New England archive" (9). Refusing or unable to ignore completely what "experience did to comprehension" (12), her text "breaks through or outdistances her own and her culture's dominant means of representation" (10) to become "a transcription of reality's astonishing and at least discursively hurtful impact on systems of coherent representation" (11).
This excess is foregrounded in the Narrative at least partly because of the conjunction of particular cultural and historical imperatives. There was, for example, the political necessity, always present but heightened following King Philip's War, of reassuring those who doubted the wisdom of the colonial enterprise. Counterposed to this was the theological necessity of producing and maintaining that state of acute anxiety over salvation so central to New England Puritanism. The first of these demanded a certain closure in the interpretation of the local history and geography, while the second thrived in a textual atmosphere of polysemy and deferral in which one could read those places and events incessantly, but could never be sure of their meaning, any more than one could be sure of one's own election. It is in general difficult enough for texts to smooth over what Lukács has called the "discrepancy between intention and performance" (qtd. in Breitwieser 13); in Rowlandson's Narrative, the intentions themselves operate at cross-purposes. The text repeatedly arrives at impasses created by the dichotomies that structure it, oppositions between anxiety and reassurance, deferral and closure, the personal and the political, the individual and the communal, alienation and integration, experience and ideology, and (Breitwieser's particular topic) grieving and exemplification.

Thus as Rowlandson tries to fit her experience into the dominant discourse she finds that discourse's language, with its typological conventions, to be woefully inadequate. She encounters irreducible dichotomies that repeatedly drive her
narrative into a mode of dé-pense, of un-thinking a
totalizing and communalizing framework of representation
unable to do justice to her specific experience and her
personal, psychological need. The result is a double edge
that is at times haunting:

I can remember the time, when I used to sleep
quietly without workings in my thoughts, whole
nights together, but now it is other ways with me.
When all are fast about me, and no eye open, but
His who ever waketh, my thoughts are upon things
past . . . I remember in the night season, how
the other day I was in the midst of thousands of
enemies, and nothing but death before me: it is
then hard work to persuade myself, that ever I
should be satisfied with bread again. But now we
are fed with the finest of the wheat, and, as I
may say, with honey out of the rock: instead of
the husk, we have the fatted calf: the thoughts of
these things in the particulars of them, and of
the love and goodness of God towards us, make it
true of me, what David said of himself, Psalms
6.6. I watered my couch with my tears. Oh! the
wonderful power of God that mine eyes have seen,
affording matter enough for my thoughts to run in,
that when others are sleeping mine are weeping.
(365)

Audible in this passage are the resistances and refusals
that keep open the possibility of a "wildness" which her
narrative functions more generally to foreclose. It
foregrounds, first of all, Rowlandson's continuing
alienation rather than her integration into the communal:
while the others are sleeping, she is weeping. Mentioning
"God's goodness to us" but stressing what is "true of me,"
it relativizes even as it universalizes, refusing, finally,
to subserve personal experience to political exemplification.

In a mode that is decidedly "un-thinking," Rowlandson
posits in this passage a temporal frame that juxtaposes the
elements of experience and exemplification, yoking them
together in ways that highlight their irreducibility. She does not assign her bewilderment and pain to some distant past, which would allow her to deploy the immediate present as a separate and more mature site of reassurance and comfort. Instead she replaces that logical temporality with an asynchrony in which a season is compressed into a night and the events of years past can be said to have occurred just "the other day." This living past does not prefigure the present but rather actively contests it; thus Rowlandson insists that "it is," not "was," "hard work" to wring any assurances out of her experience.

Because it sustains the sort of anxiety that fueled Puritan zeal, this acuteness of memory can be viewed as having a certain theological efficacy. But it also alienates Rowlandson from her peers and disrupts any communal agreement on the meaning of her experiences. This aspect of the text, this disruption of the drive toward closure and stabilization, is foregrounded and epitomized where one might least expect it to be—in the psalm quoted in the passage above. This biblical allusion might appear to be an appeal of the same sort that putatively grounds Rowlandson's descriptions of the New England wilderness, a finalizing referral to biblical authority. But the psalm itself expresses not so much David's suffering, and the meaning of that suffering, as it does his bewilderment, his inability to understand his suffering and make it exemplify. Not merely his "bones," as he puts it, but also his "soul" is "sore vexed" (KJV Psalms 6:2-3). It is not his physical suffering but precisely this vexation of the soul from which he asks deliverance, and no
such resolution in sight: "[B]ut thou, O Lord, how long?" (6:3). The psalm's subject is not suffering but deferral, and it is no accident that, while David insists "[t]he Lord hath heard my supplication" and "will receive my prayer" (6:9), he nowhere gives the least indication that God has answered or even will answer that prayer. It is significant that at such a moment of personal crisis Rowlandson refers her readers to a psalm whose subjects are precisely bewilderment and the longing for and deferral of closure.

At certain key points, Rowlandson's Narrative refuses even the stark dichotomy of presence and absence in terms of which the wilderness at first had been constructed. Commenting on "the extreme vanity of this world," she notes how "one hour I have been in health, and wealth, wanting nothing: but the next hour in sickness and wounds, and death, having nothing but sorrow and affliction" (365, my emphases). She juxtaposes the most apparently inassimilable opposites: one hour it is presence, the next it is absence that structures her existence. But the two terms do not remain wholly distinct, and Rowlandson underscores their interpenetration, characterizing "presence," the putatively positive and self-sufficient term, by means of a double negative, "wanting nothing"--lacking lack, as it were, but also, as she soon makes clear, desiring lack. Reciprocally, the negative term is formulated as a sort of positive, as a having of nothing. Rowlandson moves immediately to exploit the ambiguity of "wanting" as both lack and desire:

Before I knew what affliction meant, I was ready sometimes to wish for it. When I lived in prosperity . . . and yet seeing many, whom I preferred before myself, under many trials and afflictions, in sickness, weakness, poverty, losses, crosses,
and cares of this world, I should be sometimes jealous lest I should not have my portion in this life. . . . But now I see the Lord had his time to scourge and chasten me. The portion of some is to have their afflictions by drops, now one drop and then another; but the dregs of the cup, the wine of astonishment, like a sweeping rain that leaveth no food, did the Lord prepare to be my portion. Affliction I wanted, and affliction I had, full measure (I thought) pressed down and running over. (365-366)

In a mixing of categories that leaves all ultimately confused, absence becomes a "sweeping" plenitude, a "full measure" "running over," and so on. Such paradoxes create an impasse that the text highlights but refuses to resolve. At the end of the narrative, where we might expect an attempt at closure, we find instead this reopening, this preference for the disorienting "wine of astonishment" over the sobering milk of exemplification. Rowlandson preserves her experience of wilderness in a de-pense, a refusal of the writing by which that wilderness is more generally sublated, and faintly audible in this refusal is the language with which the wilderness might have been written.

Wildness and Wilderness

[What a splendid contemplation . . . a magnificent park, where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse, with sinewy bow, and shield and lance, amid the fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes. What a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to the view of her refined citizens and the world, in future ages! A nation's Park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty!]

--George Catlin (261-262)

"Wilderness," writes Roderick Nash, is a term "heavily freighted with meaning of a personal, symbolic, and changing
kind." It is not an easy term to define, however, even on the most practical level, where "land managers and politicians have struggled without marked success to formulate a workable definition." As with environment, wilderness cannot be defined down simply by enumerating its components; instead "the number of attributes of wild country" seems to be "almost as great as the number of observers." This relativity and subjectivity, which preclude any "universally acceptable definition," stem from the fact that while the word is a noun it acts like an adjective. There is no specific material object that is wilderness. The term designates a quality (as the "-ness" suggests) that produces a certain mood or feeling in an individual and, as a consequence, may be assigned by that person to a specific place. (Nash 1)

Just as an environment points to an action of environing, and ultimately to a speaker whose environment is a misnaming of a penetration, so too does wilderness point to both action and speaker. It is said to produce a certain mood or feeling, but this action of "bewildering" cannot reasonably be said to originate with the landscape, to constitute part of its ontology; instead it reflects a mood of the speaker--initially induced by an inability to read the landscape--that is projected back onto the environment. Wilderness is a misnaming of an anxiety as a geography.

For the Puritans, as we have seen, the mood that traditionally characterized wilderness was one of uncertainty and lack. To be bewildered was to find oneself without the means to choose between a confusing array of "conflicting situations, objects, or statements" and the danger of bewilderment is the possibility that, lacking
proper guidance, one might stray (OE wilder) from the proper path. (In addition to Rowlandson, one thinks here of Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown.") "[C]onceived as a region where a person was likely to get into a disordered, confused, or 'wild' condition," writes Nash, the key image was "that of a man in an alien environment where the civilization that normally orders and controls his life is absent" (2). This early conception thus relates wilderness to power, for its defining absence is precisely the absence of that pervasive complex of signs and institutions which order and control and establish norms—power more or less as it came to be understood since Foucault.

People native to and living in the wilderness, to the extent that they were perceived as disordered and uncontrolled, were themselves considered wild, and to the extent that they threatened to disorder the lives of the "civilized" Europeans with whom they came in contact, they were functionally equivalent to the wilderness and readily conflatable with it. The close conceptual link between "wild" landscapes and "wild" people, that is, was not one of simple equivalence—the Puritan did not think of Indians simply as wild animals—but rather stemmed from their functional alignment in the Euro-American dialectic of wilderness and civilization. It should not be surprising, then, to find scholars ascribing parallel roles to both Native Americans and to wilderness. In The Savages of America, for example, Roy Harvey Pearce examines "what it meant for civilized men to believe that in the savage . . . there was manifest all that they had long grown away from"
(ix). In America, he concludes, such men "could survive only if they believed in themselves," and up until the middle of the nineteenth century,

that belief was most often defined negatively— in terms of the savage Indians who, as stubborn obstacles to progress, forced Americans to consider and reconsider what it was to be civilized and what it took to build a civilization. Studying the savage, trying to civilize him, destroying him, in the end they had only studied themselves, strengthened their own civilization, and given those who were coming after them an enlarged certitude . . . in the progress of American civilization over all obstacles. (ix)

This is the Indian as savage, as one term in a dialectic through which the American might define (notably) himself as civilized. But it was not alone in serving such a function. There was also the wilderness, about which Roderick Nash makes much the same claim:

Wilderness was the basic ingredient of American civilization. From the raw materials of the physical wilderness Americans built a civilization; with the idea or symbol of wilderness they sought to give that civilization identity and meaning. (xv)

Pearce and Nash both distinguish between, on the one hand, "real" Indians and their "real" lands, and on the other hand the idealized Other, the scripted actor in a psycho-historical drama of American identity. In wilderness is not so much the preservation of the world, as Thoreau would have us believe, as of the self. And any tangible, prediscursive "realities" of native peoples and landscapes are more or less irrelevant in this process, are perhaps even obstacles, to be overcome not with guns and plows but with words, through the discursive construction of an Other with the required attributes—of a savage and a wilderness
intertwined into a savage wilderness. Like the Orient and the Oriental within Orientalism, this wilderness came to be viewed as both a source of civilization and as that civilization's "cultural contestant," in Said's words, as "one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other," the "contrasting image" against which it may define itself (1-2), "a sort of surrogate and even underground self" by means of which "it gained in strength and identity" (3).

By the time George Catlin issued his call for a "nation's Park," the wilderness and the Indian were parting ways in Euro-American thought. Only the one was destined for preservation; the other would be forced onto the reservation. The wilderness that had begun only as a negative term demarcating the positive attributes of civilization was becoming less of a resistant and dangerous opponent and more and more securely a possession, an attribute, a source of pride that could be subsumed into civilization and begin to take on a positivity of its own. It could be fashioned into an object whose proper appreciation was a mark of the civilized individual, and whose preservation was the mark of a refined civilization.

This reconfiguration can readily be situated in the history of the early United States republic. Following the Revolution, Nash notes, "[i]t was widely assumed that America's primary task was the justification of its newly won freedom" (67); Americans therefore "sought something uniquely 'American,' yet valuable enough to transform embarrassed provincials into proud and confident citizens." Their problem was that the "nation's short history, weak
traditions, and minor literary and artistic achievements seemed negligible compared to those of Europe." The solution lay in the fact that "wilderness had no counterpart in the Old World":

nationalists argued that . . . wilderness was actually an American asset. Of course, pride continued to stem from the conquest of wild country, but by the middle decades of the nineteenth century wilderness was recognized as a cultural and moral resource and a basis for national self-esteem. (67)

A certain problem had been posed by the founding and stabilizing of a national identity upon processes of destruction that, as white Americans were coming to realize, could not go on forever. Catlin's early environmentalism offered a neat solution: a wilderness that no longer had to be opposed but could be assimilated and deployed by its very preservation, as Italy might do with the Sistine Chapel, and whose deployment could be made all the more effective by a discursive inflation of the wilderness's value—a task which would require that the sparely described, almost blank Puritan wilderness of a Mary Rowlandson be replaced by the richly textured, endlessly readable romantic landscapes of a James Fenimore Cooper.

Notes to Chapter Two

1 See Penelope 186-187. Instead of "incorporation" one might use other terms denoting the obverse of "penetration," but, reflecting the asymmetry of a patriarchal lexicon, no such term seems exactly complementary in the full range of its connotations. Marie Bonaparte uses the term "incorporating" in her own discussion of female sexual pleasure (Female Sexuality 105).

2 Land 4. Even at the most literal of levels, this desire to escape a burdensome history and society was conditioned by the capitalism one wished to escape, for the
fantasies in question were circulated most widely by the colonial promoters themselves (Land 9).

3 For details and a range of recent interpretations of the Pequot War, see Drinnon 35-57, Kibbey 92-94, and Nelson 12-16.

4 See Leach 1152. See also Legman 429-434 and Thompson 164, 213.

5 Leach 1152. Leach writes of this motif only as part of Native American folklore; Jay Mechling, in an analysis of contemporary alligator jokes, demonstrates that "the image of a toothed vagina" also circulates much more widely and is "still powerful in [Euro-]American male folk materials" (79).


7 For the Puritan, wilderness was not "natural" in today's sense of being "governed" solely by the "laws of nature"; it was thought of, rather, as ungoverned, chaotic. We cannot "believe" in wilderness in this earlier sense any longer, no more than we can conceive of a place in the universe that is not subject to the "laws of nature." Even the chaotic is now considered to follow the predictable patterning described in modern chaos theory.

8 Nash 5. There has been a working definition of wilderness in this country ever since the Wilderness Act of 1964 fully codified the term. "A wilderness," according to the act, "in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain" (qtd. in Grumbine 377). Four elements of this formulation will prove important in this study. Its stress on wilderness as uninhabited land, where "man" only "visits," effaces the history of early nonwhite presences on the land. Its universalization of "man" as denoting all of humankind similarly effaces a set of nonmasculine presences on and interpretations of the land. Its binarism—the contrast it draws between the natural and the humanly altered landscape, and the sharp boundary that is thereby implied—helps reify the notion of a "natural" or "divine" inscription. Finally, the legislation's use of the classic form of the speech act—the way it declares that wilderness
is "hereby recognized," created through the perlocutionary force of its enunciation--links it to the imperialist performativity of the Spanish requerimiento, discussed at length in Chapter Three.
CHAPTER THREE
Performing Wilderness in The Last of the Mohicans

He slew them, at surprising distances,
with his gun.
Over a body held in his hand, his head
was bowed low,
But not in grief.

He put them where they are, and there
we see them:
In our imagination.

—Robert Penn Warren, Audubon: A Vision (3)

Literary environmentalism traditionally views nature, and in particular nature's idealization, the "wilderness," as intrinsic and prediscursive, as an original, readable body, a natural inscription whose legibility is logically prior to any cultural marking. In this chapter I want to critique this "wild" natural body along the same lines as Judith Butler's critique of the prediscursive human body. Following Butler, I wish to examine nature as a body "described through the language of surface and force" and "weakened through a 'single drama' of domination, inscription, and creation." Just as a sort of "corporeal destruction" is required "to produce the speaking subject" (130), I want to examine how, in order for nature to "speak," to signify "itself" through an apparently unmediated textuality, nature "itself" must be similarly dominated, inscribed, created—in short, destroyed. And I can think of no better introduction to such a seemingly
paradoxical project than the paradoxical career of John James Audubon, that great lover of and prodigious destroyer of natural bodies.

Prologue: Shooting as Writing

Longing for the preservation in words of what he knew was to disappear in reality, Audubon pinned his hopes at first on the art of his contemporary, the famed novelist Sir Walter Scott. "How many times I have longed for him to come to my beloved country," wrote Audubon in his journal in 1826, that he might describe, as no one else ever can, the stream, the swamp, the river, the mountain, for the sake of future ages. A century hence they will not be here as I see them, Nature will have been robbed of many brilliant charms, the rivers will have been tormented and turned astray from their primitive courses, the hills will be leveled with the swamps, and perhaps the swamps will have become a mound surmounted by a fortress of a thousand guns. Scarce a magnolia will Louisiana possess, the timid Deer will exist nowhere, fish will no longer abound in the rivers, the Eagle scarce ever alight, and these millions of lovely songsters be driven away or slain by man. Without Sir Walter Scott these beauties must perish unknown to the world. (182)

I quote this passage partly to demonstrate the prescience of Audubon's early environmentalist sensibility—his sympathies seem modern enough, even if some of his specific predictions are off the mark—and partly to highlight his own anxiety as a writer, his conviction that his own work was somehow inadequate to the task of representing and memorializing the American wilderness. As it turned out, that anxiety was unfounded. Audubon was no Sir Walter Scott, yet he could write well enough when he chose to, and for several
generations now his work has been routinely included in anthologies of nature writing.

Audubon had a paradoxical sense of his own environmentalism as both discursive and economic, as both idealist and stubbornly materialist. Remarking in 1835 that America was still inadequately chronicling its vanishing wilderness, he wrote that this was not "because no one in America is able to accomplish such an undertaking." He may still have considered himself inadequate in this regard, but he conceded that authors such as Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper had proved themselves quite capable. The problem, rather, was that in spite of the work of such writers the loss of nature was proceeding "with such rapidity, as almost to rival the movement of their pen[s]" (Audubon, *Delineations* 5). The image here is of an almost direct transmutation of disappearing things into newly appearing words, of a discursive economic engine that mixes labor ("the movement of their pens") with natural raw material to produce the cultural commodity of text.

It was perhaps inevitable that Audubon would thus associate the representation of nature with its consumption. He had already done a good deal of work in taxidermy—a form of nature writing that directly and visibly transforms referent into signifier— and later in life he would support himself through the sale of his famed paintings, each of which had cost the life of not just one but several, sometimes hundreds, of birds. Throughout his life, that is, Audubon participated in an economy that quite consumptively commodified and traded in various aspects of wild nature, in
a system in which the destruction of nature was quite
clearly not going to be prevented—Audubon never saw that as
a genuine possibility—but could at least be compensated for
by the concomitant production of valuable artifacts.

Driven by his own sometimes dire financial
circumstances, Audubon almost singlehandedly took the
emerging literary-environmental economy of his time to a new
level. A financial failure earlier in life, he turned his
fortunes around with his elephant-folio edition of Birds of
North America, selling nearly two hundred copies at $1,000
per set. In convincing publishers and patrons of the value
of what we recognize as a forerunner of the large-format,"coffee-table" nature book, Audubon was doing more than
helping inaugurate a practice that still flourishes today.
He was also demonstrating that, via the mediation of art,
nature could participate in a new and more direct way in
culture—not, as in the Puritan conception of wilderness, as
the irreducibly Other accessible only via a troubled and
sometimes traumatic confrontation, but as an object directly
exchangeable for, and thus commensurate with, other objects
in the marketplace.²

Philosophically, Audubon would appear to have been a
neoplatonist. He was so famously prolific with his gun
precisely because he wished to make each of his
representations true to an ideal type that was not to be
found in any single bird but could only be inferred from the
collectivity.³ In so doing, he "'typified' nature," in the
words of Donna Haraway; he "made nature true to type,"
deploying his gun to reduce nature's unruly individual variation to an imagined underlying structure (38). This reliance upon the typifying gun makes particularly manifest the way that the "real" "body" of nature is transmuted and made to participate directly in the cultural order, a realm to which--in a thoroughgoing mystification--it is still held by definition to be opposed.4

In Audubon's taxidermy and in the paintings based upon it, the body of nature is quite literally emptied out and made to signify on its surface. In this specific instance the writing instrument that accomplishes this, that destroys the body and allows it to re-emerge as cultural artifact, is figured most strongly not as the paintbrush or pen but as the gun. Positioned as it is at the very beginning of that chain in which a living bird becomes first a stuffed figure and only secondarily a painted image--first a surface and then an image of a surface--it is the rifle and not the paintbrush that first mediates between the "real," "prediscursive" body of nature and its destruction and inscription. And inasmuch as destroying a target implies the previous existence of that target, the act of shooting provides a powerful figure for the reification of a prediscursive natural body.5

Sadly Abused by Man

Given Audubon's eventual successes, why would he have felt that without the particular aid of Sir Walter Scott the beauties of the wilderness "must perish unknown to the world"? It is tempting to answer that Audubon saw in Scott
a figure who could popularize an environmental movement—someone whose literary skill (like that of John Muir later in the century) could charm and motivate the public, whose fame could popularize the movement, and whose cultural authority could legitimate it. But to say this is to project the goals and strategies of a later environmentalism onto a time when they didn't exist. For Audubon, the danger seems to have been not that the wilderness would perish "unknown," but simply, as I suggested above, that there would be little in the way of cultural accomplishment to show for its loss. It would never be exchanged for anything possessing the sort of perpetual circulability traditionally secured only in the marketplace of the high-cultural artifact. In 1826, he might have had little inkling of his own eventual stature; he would indeed have had little reason to think that "nature writing" would become a form of belles lettres at all. But by that time the cultural ascendency of fiction, and of the novel in particular, was perfectly evident, and Scott was perhaps the most prominent novelist then taking a direct interest in landscape.

It is not really surprising, then, that Audubon would have wished particularly for Sir Walter Scott to take on the job of immortalizing the wilderness. Nor is it surprising that Audubon would eventually pronounce James Fenimore Cooper a capable substitute, for Cooper shared with Audubon both an admiration of Scott and an early environmentalist sensibility. In his environmentalism, in fact—in the intensity of his response to the destruction of the wilderness and in his fictional modeling of a specific
stance toward that destruction—he clearly outstripped Audubon. As John F. Lynen put it, in economic terms that echo Audubon's own formulation, Cooper's regret at the loss of wilderness was not mere "sentimental nostalgia," but arose "from the agonizing doubt whether civilization is worth the terrible price men pay for it," and his novels are driven partly by "the quest for some solid reality which justifies the settlement of the wilderness" (174). Audubon, as late as 1835, could still question "[w]hether these changes are for the better or for the worse" (Delineations 5); Cooper by this time seems far less ambivalent. In Nash's words, Cooper "held no brief for exploitation," and in Natty Bumppo he created a character who not only "honored the wilderness and used it respectfully" but also could serve as the author's mouthpiece in a repeated "condemnation of the exploiter" (76-77).

In this view, it is Cooper himself speaking when Natty Bumppo laments how "the beauty of the wilderness [has] been deformed" by settlers who "scourge the very 'arth with their axes," or of how "natur is sadly abused by man, once he gets the mastery."6 That such environmentalist sentiments are indeed Cooper's own is suggested by their universalization within the Leatherstocking series—particularly in The Last of the Mohicans, where, instead of being associated with a particular character or social or racial group, they are articulated through a variety of voices, both savage and civilized, both narrated and narratorial.7 In The Last of the Mohicans, it is only a certain semi-civilized type that
does not share this basic environmental sensibility: a white American implicitly figured as merely transitional, as too advanced to possess the natural wisdom of the savage but not yet refined enough to possess the aesthetic sophistication of the fully cultured. In the novel's otherwise Manichean world, a love of wild nature occupies both poles, being absent only in this presumably transitional middle realm that will eventually, one supposes, be eliminated by a civilizing and aestheticizing process—a process in which Cooper would perhaps have seen his own novels as participating.

Cooper would also have realized that this sort of American, closer to Audubon's ambivalence than to Natty Bumppo's platitudinous assurance, was more typical of his readership. He would not have wanted to delineate the character of the exploiter sharply enough for readers to recognize themselves—or for Cooper to recognize himself—as the object of the novel's condemnation. The exploiter has therefore only a vague and shifting presence, never being depicted in detail or explicitly named. Unlike the nature-loving proto-environmentalist, who speaks confidently through a universalizing range of identifiable voices, the exploiter in *Mohicans* is camouflaged in passive constructions—as when the woods mysteriously "are gotten rid of"—or in misplacements of agency—as when it is not people who damage Glenn's Falls but simply "the application of the water to the uses of civilized life" (55-56). The result is a faux dialectic in which the environmentalist viewpoint circulates as a fully embodied position, that of the
exploiter as a shadowy foil. In ways such as these, the genre of fiction afforded Cooper certain literary-environmental strategies that Audubon's environmentalist nonfiction could not. In particular it allowed Cooper to create a space within which to posit an environmentalist sensibility unfettered by the contemporary colonialist and capitalist realities that would have considerably complicated its expression.

**Human Values and Natural Forms**

To understand *The Last of the Mohicans* specifically as literary environmentalism—and not merely a novel informed by a recognizeably environmentalist sensibility—I want to turn first to Cooper's novelistic technique. The one aspect of that technique which relates him most directly to Sir Walter Scott, from whom he borrowed it, is his handling of the convention of the picturesque. More particularly, as Blake Nevius has shown, Cooper learned from Scott how to "combine picturesque action with picturesque scenery" (2), and here the student may be said to have outdone the master, for with Scott, "after a lapse of time we can recall his characters and actions more vividly than his physical settings," while with Cooper what we tend to remember is not any action but a set of brilliantly evoked wilderness tableaux (4). In thus adapting and intensifying this particular aspect of Scott's technique, Cooper made a decisive move toward literary environmentalism—whose primary effect, after all, is to naturalize narratives by writing them as landscapes, and to do so convincingly enough that, as Nevius says, we forget the originary action.
Arguing in similar terms for the primacy of Cooper's scenery over his plots, John F. Lynen has suggested how and why Cooper's fiction might have taken this turn. In particular, Lynen suggests how the literary-environmental qualities of Cooper's work hinge on questions of technique, how they spring from the author's choices in handling such basic formal challenges as plotting and characterization. Foremost among Cooper's shortcomings as a novelist, according to Lynen, "is the static quality of [his] characters," it being "representative of Cooper's method" that his "personages cannot change or grow" (178). This rules out the usual handling of plot, for in a novel "whose situation remains unchanging, action is most completely a matter of finding things out" (183), and the only "real" plot consists "in the reader's and characters' understanding of facts which remain constant" (176). Instead of developing in the usual sense, changing in response to the action, Cooper's characters are simply "seen in the process of discovering the truths of their situation" (178).

To formulate action and characterization as such a process of discovery poses the problem of how the reader is to find out what the characters are to find out, and how to replicate in the reader the sense that "the truths of their situation"--the emphasized pronoun here referring both to characters and to readers--were there to be discovered all along. In order for Cooper to "manage" his novel's "real action," it becomes necessary that "the landscape should contain in its visible elements all the social and psychological truths the story will bring into view."3 The
adventures themselves do little more than "provide the occasion for beautifully realized tableaux" (183), while the novel's "true action" proceeds somewhere behind the surface events, in the form of a constant implication and suggestion. It is

the movement of the author's thought, as he describes the landscape, [that] foreshadows the pattern of the story he will tell. . . . The process of perception in which Cooper engages the reader through his description of the setting enacts in brief the process by which the narrative will develop. (172-73)

The key to the action, the truth that is to be discovered, remains "always an inference, always something intuited from the tableau of the presently visible world" (175).

An example of such a tableau and such an inference is this deceptively objective-sounding description of a wilderness landscape, offered up by the narrator in the quiet lull that succeeds the gun battle at Glenn's Falls:

The uproar which had lately echoed through the vaults of the forest was gone, leaving the rush of the waters to swell and sink on the currents of the air, in the unmingled sweetness of nature. A fish-hawk, which, secure on the topmost branches of a dead pine, had been a distant spectator of the fray, now stooped from his high and ragged perch, and soared, in wide sweeps, above his prey; while a jay, whose noisy voice had been stilled by the hoarser cries of the savages, ventured again to open his discordant throat, as though once more in undisturbed possession of his wild domains. (81)

This scene provokes in the admiring Heyward "a glimmering of hope," a "reviving confidence of success" that will rally him "to renewed exertions." It is thus not only picturesque but also inspiring— but inspiring of what, exactly? We know as readers what Heyward cannot know as a character: that
while it is indeed the "undisturbed possession" of America's "wild domains" that is at issue, those domains are to be wrested not only from the Indians and the French but also, soon enough, from the British. We can readily sense in this passage a patriotic history rewritten as a description, a thinly veiled picture of the American colonies following "the uproar" of the French and Indian War itself. The victorious British crown, which maintains a shadowy presence throughout the novel as one of the "distant monarchs of Europe" (15), is written into this particular scene as the fishhawk, "a distant spectator of the fray," perched securely at the apex of a now-quiet empire. Indeed it was that very security--the fact that the colonists no longer needed Britain to defend them against the French and Indian threat--which had enabled the drive toward independence: no longer "stilled by the hoarser cries of the savages," the "noisy voice" and "discordant" notes of colonial discontent make themselves heard immediately in the silence.

Exceeding the plotting function identified by Lynen, such "descriptive" passages narrate and gloss mythic passages in American history, presaging the later work of the National Park Service interpreter. For the ranger as for the novelist, the process of managing such "plots" is one of naturalizing key elements of a national ideology. Indeed, as Lynen stresses, Cooper's "main problem in shaping his narrative" is "to manage the revelations naturally, so that the hidden essentials of the situation seem to rise to the surface of consciousness as if they had always been there and are now in the process of being noticed" (179-80).
This is, significantly, a matter of implicating the reader, for the trick lies in the "action of the reader's mind as [notably] he comes to recognize the social scene through the natural scene," thereby realizing, consciously or otherwise, "that a single order underlies both society and nature" (174).

The inscribing of particular colonial histories into Cooper's wilderness landscape is underwritten by narratives of gender and race that are themselves coded into that landscape. As has proved to be consistently the case with the literary-environmental object, the wilderness of The Last of the Mohicans is constructed by collapsing verb into noun, history into place, narration into description—all via tropes of sexualized violence directed against a racialized Other. Lying always beyond some "impervious" but nonetheless always permeated "boundary" (1), Cooper's wilderness is probed and explored until, as the narrator summarizes, there is "no recess of the woods so dark, nor any secret place so lovely, that it might claim exemption from the inroads" of Europeans (11). Figurations of just this sort of coitus-writ-large (eerily repeating John Underhill's earlier troping of the wilderness as a female body to which has been ascribed the pseudo-agency of "environing") are ubiquitous in the novel. "After penetrating through the brush," says the narrator of Natty Bumppo, "matted as it was with briars, for a few hundred feet, he entered an open space" (125); elsewhere we read of a silence in the adventurer's camp "as deep as that which reigned in the vast forest by which it was environed" (15),
of an "impenetrable darkness" "[w]ithin the bosom of the encircling hills" (190). Such imagery replicates the castration anxiety so prominent in News from America: "the forest at length appeared to swallow up the living mass [of armed troops] which had slowly entered its bosom" (15).

Neatly linking tropes of gender and race, Cooper writes his wilderness as a womb whose fertility will ensure a posterity for whites but not for Indians. Early in the novel, Heyward's party "enter[s] under the high, but dark arches of the forest" (22), then "penetrate[s] still deeper" (28) to arrive at Glenn's Falls, where Uncas and Chingachgook expose "the much prized secret of the place" (52). That prized secret, predictably enough, turns out to be a cave, a sort of primitive Ur-womb which, in sheltering the English couple, Duncan Heyward and Alice Munro, shelters the symbolic progenitors of an as-yet unborn white nation. In this context, the word "prized" is particularly multivalent, becoming readable not just as "highly valued," but also as "seized," and again as "pried open" (OED)—the single term collapsing the tropes of both virgin and whore, the much-prized and the much-pried, in a context of violence and warfare that is very much about both the seizing and the future (racially pure) repeopling of the wilderness.

Part of the viciousness of the virgin/whore dichotomy—invoked in The Last of the Mohicans as it usually is, as a totalizing binarism—is that it leaves no room for conceptualizing rape, a figure that might more appropriately represent colonial acquisition of native land. The novel's caves do, nonetheless, recall John Underhill's mapping of
the violated Indian palizado at Mystic. As at Mystic, for example, each of Cooper's caves features an anatomically correct set of openings, front and back. But in Cooper's case the accompanying narrative is thoroughly mystifying, lacking the unabashed honesty of Underhill's account. Indeed, Cooper turns the Pequot story on its head, for now it is a white lineage that is threatened by Indians, via a dual forced entry that replicates exactly the assault by Mason and Underhill at Mystic: "the cavern was entered at both its extremities" (88).

The genocidal subtext in such scenes is not hard to uncover. An emblematized white reproductive capability survives the Hurons's sexual/military assault; Alice is "delivered" from the cave, captive but alive, just as she is "delivered" a second time from the book's other symbolic womb, the cave at the Huron village (263). Her survival in this second instance stands in contrast to the death of the ailing young Indian woman, whom Heyward, pretending to be "a great medicine" (246), has been charged with curing and who clearly serves as a foil for the young, marriage-bound white woman.9 (Notably, Alice is thus "born" in a sort of trans-racial drag, passing herself off as the ill Indian maiden whose very life Alice seems to appropriate even as she performs it—one of the many links between drag and performance I will explore later in this chapter.) In a combined racial and sexual politics, the landscape becomes the vehicle for selectively breeding a future for whites but not for Indians, a strategy of naturalizing—landscaping—genocide as a simple failure to reproduce.
Cooper relies heavily on this sort of literary-environmental poetics in his handling of characterization as well as plot. Lynen notes how Natty Bumppo’s static and shallow “wisdom” amounts to little more than “vague Unitarian pieties” and quite reasonably asks, “[How can] such a bundle of received ideas and attitudes amount to a personality?” (187). The answer is by developing an illusion of genuine character for Natty in what might be called the novel’s ideological, as opposed to physical, space, “in the affinity between human values and natural forms.” It is thus

the landscape [that] creates him, just as he, in turn, interprets it. . . . [G]uided by Cooper’s statements, we unconsciously transfer to Leatherstocking our own responses to the novel’s landscape. His behavior as a person acting within the landscape seems to spring from such thoughts and feelings as we ourselves have in merely looking at the scene. Leatherstocking’s identity is the product of our novelistically controlled view of nature; he becomes a person because his response to nature is validated by our own. (187-88)

But our own responses, which supposedly validate Natty’s, are themselves conditioned by a long tradition of literary-environmental interpretations, among whose precursors we might place those of Natty himself. This interdependence points not to a logical circularity but to a dialectical interaction between writer and reader, interpreter and interpretee. Interpretive speech is expected and designed to enact or awaken some state—new yet already present—in an interlocutor; it is necessarily directed toward someone, and in The Last of the Mohicans, that someone is preeminently Duncan Heyward. If it is in Natty that Cooper delineates
the figure and activity of the environmental interpreter, it is Duncan whom he casts as the prototypical interpretee, the American type for whom interpretation is to be performed.

Following the initial battle at Glenn's Falls, the narrator explains how the "sudden and almost magical change" from the stirring incidents of the combat, to the stillness that now reigned around him, acted on the heated imagination of Heyward like some exciting dream. While all the images and events he had witnessed remained deeply impressed on his memory, he felt a difficulty in persuading himself of their truth. . . . Every sign of the adventurers had been lost, leaving him in total uncertainty.

This "magical change" that links events and images, replacing an active combat with a passive, surrounding stillness, neatly evokes literary environmentalism's mystified writing of violent history as peaceful environment. This environment cannot signify itself, however; it must be interpreted, a process temporarily blocked by the contrived absence of the interpreter, Natty. And as Lynen argued, it is this narratorial management of interpretation--of the discovery of the fixed truths of the landscape--that constitutes the novel's "real" plot.

Heyward is left looking about him in bewilderment and awe, like a Puritan captive waiting for a sign from God, or an uninitiated tourist in a national park waiting for the ranger in the green uniform to tell him what it's all about. Scenes such as this establish a particular relationship between Natty and Duncan in their respective roles as interpreter and interpretee, a relationship replicated between narrator and reader. Such scenes emphasize in
particular the opacity of the landscape to the uninitiated, the utter dependence of the interpretee upon the interpreter. When Natty leaves the scene at Glenn's Falls, Duncan's problem is cast explicitly as a fundamental problem in knowing, "a difficulty in persuading himself of [the] truth" of things, a problem in the interpretation of images that have impressed themselves onto his memory but cannot by themselves signify any definite meaning. Mediation becomes crucial: without the interpreter, Duncan is left "in total uncertainty"; devoid of the "signs" that have been "lost," the wilderness simply ceases to signify.

It is for Duncan, more than any other character, that the book's formative interpretation of the American environment is to be performed—and through him, on behalf of its contemporary readers. As Nina Baym has pointed out, it is Duncan and not Natty whose presence dominates the novel: he is the only character to appear in every scene; his is the "line of sight [that] organizes the action," even though "some awkward plotting . . . is required to carry this through"; and virtually all of the action is "viewed from his perspective." Heyward functions "as the reader's surrogate, the position from which readers would view the action if they were in the action" (73). He is more than just a surrogate, however, for the novel also figures him as patriarch and progenitor. As the aristocratic southerner and ambitious officer getting an intense education in the harsh realities of wilderness warfare, exhibiting his heroism and fortifying his character in the French and Indian War, he is readily recognizable as a youthful George
Washington, a fictionalized father-to-be of his country.\textsuperscript{10} As such, his union with the racially pure and properly feminine Alice—and his pointed rejection of the racially "tainted" Cora—assures in advance the racial and gender purity of not only the idealized American citizen but also the future model of the interpreter. Duncan and Alice become prototypes of all those whose character and citizenship are to be perfected, just as Freeman Tilden would have it a century later, through the guidance of environmental interpretation.

The novel's interpretation is in this sense both present- and future-oriented, shaping not just Duncan Heyward but also his descendants, Cooper's idealized American readers. This blurs a certain distinction that might otherwise be set up between a narrator who interprets for the reader and a character (Natty) who interprets for other characters. Instead, interpretation at both levels can finally be seen as directed to readers, the one working to perfect them through a direct interpellation in the present, the other working indirectly, positing readers as hereditarily already-perfected by virtue of their figurative descent from their "father." As Duncan's descendants, we are to discover as already existing in ourselves the truths that the characters are to discover as already existing in the landscape. Lynen's argument must thus be taken a step further, for it is not merely the novel's characters that are treated as static, but also its readers. The American environmental narrative is discoverable not only in the landscape, but also in our own fictive ancestry.
A Singular and Ill Concealed Disdain

"Book!" repeated Hawk-eye, with singular and ill-concealed disdain; "do you take me for a whimpering boy, at the apron string of one of your old gals; and this good rifle on my knee for the feather of a goose's wing, my ox's horn for a bottle of ink . . . ? Book! What have such as I, who am a warrior of the wilderness, though a man without a cross, to do with books? I never read but in one, and the words that are written there are too simple and too plain to need much schooling; though I may boast that of forty long and hard working years."

--James Fenimore Cooper (117)

There remains to be written a history of this metaphor . . . that systematically contrasts divine or natural writing and the human and laborious, finite and artificial inscription. It remains to . . . follow the theme of God's book (nature or law, indeed natural law) through all its modifications.

--Jacques Derrida (602)

Propounded by an illiterate eccentric with no formal education, with no institutional affiliation, with none of the usual accoutrements of authority beyond his white race and male sex, the environmental interpretations of someone like Natty Bumppo might strike readers as at least a little suspect. And to the extent that they are directed to a particular interlocutor in a particular time, place, and situation, they should strike us not as universal but as local and situated. How does The Last of the Mohicans work to overcome these handicaps, to establish Natty's authority as an interpreter of the wilderness? More fundamentally, how does the novel establish that there is anything "there" in the wilderness to interpret in the first place?
In the first of the epigraphs above, figuring the New World wilderness as a stable text, as "God's book," Natty valorizes and masculinizes the old notion of a preexisting, "natural" writing and marginalizes and feminizes that of a secondary and "artificial" human inscription. He claims to read only in the book of nature, which in its divine transparency can speak immediately and truthfully to all. But this contemptuous and sweeping avowal—a claim made emphatically enough to betray some nervousness—is at once qualified by Natty's offhanded admission of all those years of study. If the book of nature is in fact so transparent, just what has he been working so hard at? Evidently, reading even a natural inscription can be laborious. This casual admission wrecks the otherwise neat binarisms that would at first seem to bound and structure Natty's textual wilderness, reinserting the artificial into the natural, the opaque into the transparent, the human into the divine.11

Aligned with Natty's privileging of a natural over an artificial inscription is his privileging of speech over writing, and this avowal also runs immediately aground. In Chapter 3, where the proudly phonocentric woodsman expounds upon the "ways, of which . . . I can't approve," he ranks the literacy of his own culture among them:

It is one of their customs to write in books what they have done and seen, instead of telling them in their villages, where the lie can be given to the face of a cowardly boaster, and the brave soldier can call on his comrades to witness for the truth of his words. In consequence of this bad fashion, a man who is too conscientious to misspend his days among the women, in learning the names of black marks, may never hear of the deeds of his fathers. (31)
Perhaps this is in part a mere psychological defense, the blustering of an otherwise proud character inwardly troubled by his illiteracy. Regardless of how it is intended, it succinctly outlines nearly the whole of the phonocentric pose, positing writing as feminine, mediated, distanced from its referent, and unreliable—as absence and deferral—and speech as masculine, direct, close to its referent, and authoritative—as presence and identity. This seemingly simple formulation is riven with contradictions, however, not the least of which is the way it identifies a putatively superior reliance upon speech with a putatively inferior race. For it is "the pale faces," as Magua puts it in a formulation similar to Natty's own, who do not have true speech; whites "have two words for each thing, while a red skin will make the sound of his voice speak for him" (91). Even more disruptive is Natty's admission that writing sustains the very privileges to which he opposes it, that his illiteracy denies him access to that racist and masculinist cultural heritage referenced here as "the deeds of his fathers."

I want now to trace out the novel's thematizing of its own "nature writing" via a sustained reading of two closely related tropes: that of a divine inscription, which is manifested variously as the inscribed body of the Indian and the inscribed body of wild nature, and that of a fully present speech, figured most powerfully and revealingly by what Natty terms the "speech" of his rifle, Kill-deer. In Mary Rowlandson's narrative it is the Bible whose circulation both initiates and works to stabilize the
wilderness's textuality; in *The Last of the Mohicans* it is the phallic rifle, *la longue carabine*, that tropes this fundamental literary-environmental activity. Deployed in parallel functions, the categories of a present speech and a natural writing are both posited by their binaric opposition to the notion of an artificial inscription, to writing in the popular sense of the word. And the novel will thematize the failure of both categories as a locus of stable and self-evident "nature." *The Last of the Mohicans*, in a way that correlates closely with Butler's conception of performativity, concludes by locating a radically textualized wilderness neither in speech nor writing, but in performance, or rather coperformance, that enlists the reader in the ongoing cultural production of the environment.

**What Say Your Old Men?**

Natty's phonocentrism can be seen as clumsily enacting the paradoxical way that books, in Barbara Johnson's words, "rebel against their own stated intention to say that speech is better than writing" (43), as just another "modification" of the general "theme of God's book." But his pose falters in much more politically charged ways within the colonial context of the novel. Natty laments his ignorance of the deeds of his fathers during an overtly political argument with Chingachgook over the justice of England's taking of Delaware land; the scene dramatizes the native contestation of a self-serving imperialist narrative even as it points up the role of literary environmentalism in defusing and containing such contestation.
Defending the ethics of white conquest, Natty maintains that his own people's activities have been no worse than those of the Mohicans. Chingachgook, suspecting that the white people's own histories would undermine that claim, challenges Natty to back up his assertions by citing his own tradition. "You have the story told by your fathers," the Delaware chief points out. "What say your old men?" (30). This certainly appears to be a decisive move, for the story recorded by his fathers is precisely what Natty must now admit he does not know; thus pressed, he can only point up his illiteracy. Put to the test by a member of a genuinely speech-centered culture, Natty's own phonocentricity is exposed as a wholly figurative stance without any real contestatory force. As a mere inability to read and write, illiteracy can at best be only a figure for the positivities of orality and phonocentricity which Natty pretends to privilege. The immediate result is that Natty finds his entire position negated, and he is forced into a series of embarrassing admissions—that "there is reason in an Indian" (30), that "every story has its two sides," and that Chingachgook's "traditions" are "true" (31).

Chingachgook, by contrast, is able to access the deeds of his fathers, and it is precisely on that account that he takes charge of the conversation, narrating "what my fathers have said, and what the Mohicans have done" (31): a history of his own people that justifies their claim to the territory taken by the whites. This counternarrative cannot be refuted in any obvious way, for its pathos depends upon its being true. Instead of being refuted, it is merely
interrupted and contained, first by having the conversation bleed off into a discussion of the cause of the tides (31-32)—a rewriting of politics as natural science—and then, when Chingachgook resumes his narrative, by the timely arrival of Uncas (33).

There is, however, a crucial sense in which Natty does manage to access and deploy his own heritage, and in the genuine imperial contestation which this chapter only dramatizes, this deployment proves decisive after all. Illiterate though he is, Natty does know at least one thing about his fathers, for he knows that he is "genuine white." And he knows at least one thing more, "that all the Bumpos could shoot; for I have a natural turn with a rifle, which must have been handed down from generation to generation" (31). In contrast to Chingachgook's rich oral heritage, Natty's illiteracy leaves him with only a bare genetic legacy, the "fact" of his race and an inherited skill in shooting, upon which to base his own claim to the land. The novel—mystifying the real primacy of literacy in colonialist ideology—boils the ethics of conquest down to the notion of a superior race, and the fact of a superior firepower.

I Will Tell/Kill You

"Words built the world and words can destroy the world. . . ."
"Well, you take the words; I'll take the rifle. That's the only word I need. R-i-f-l-e."

—Ishmael Reed (81)

Pressed by Chingachgook to relate the story told by his fathers, Natty suggests that his rifle can somehow speak for
him. But this is hardly the only time the novel invokes shooting as a figure for speech. Elsewhere, for example, Natty refers to a gun battle as a "conversation," in which he offers to "let 'kill-deer' take a part" (208); during another battle he requests of his comrades that until he signals otherwise, "nothing speaks but the rifle" (328). Thus when Tamenund asks "Which of my prisoners is la Longue Carabine?" and Heyward answers, "Give us arms... Our deeds shall speak for us!" (295), we are invited to read the ensuing shooting contest as a sort of debate, and Natty's superior shooting as a sort of eloquence, a great oration comparable to those delivered in the same scene by Tamenund, Magua, and Cora.

But what sort of words are spoken by a firearm? However one might choose to translate such speech—"I hereby declare you a corpse," perhaps, or in the more specific colonial context of the novel, "I hereby pronounce you a subject of my king"—it obviously does more than merely convey information. The pronouncements of the rifle are not mere constantives, that is, but performatives in the classic sense, speech acts that instantiate by means of their very utterance a genuine change in the status of their interlocutors.

Deconstructed by Chingachgook, Natty's phonocentrism does not simply vanish; rather it is driven underground, as it were, to lodge in this figure of the speaking gun. Resurrecting itself there as a performative speech, it can revive the old dream of a full presence in which word, intention, and result—locution, illocution, and
perlocution—are one. The novel seems fascinated by such speech and allegorizes it repeatedly, perhaps most notably in the suspenseful shooting contest of Chapter 29 and at the moment of Magua's demise in Chapter 32.

The performativity of the speaking gun parallels that of another imperialist speech act, the Spanish Requerimiento, or "requirement." Drafted in its "classic form" in 1512 by Palacios Rubios, this formal document was intended to address "the wide range of perplexing problems" posed by the discovery of the Indies (Dickinson 300). Spaniards such as Rubios worried in particular about two things: the questionable ethics of conquest and colonization, and the possibility that "civilized" men might revert to "savagery" during lengthy sojourns among utterly foreign peoples. In response, the Spanish imperial bureaucracy required its agents to read the Requerimiento aloud to native populations upon first contact, reasoning that such a performance would, at that crucial moment, both affirm the conquerors in their own European identity and legitimate the conquest itself. More precisely, the reading was itself considered the act of subjugation: by declaring natives to be subjects of the Crown, it was held to make them subjects of the Crown.12

The speaking gun similarly subjugates the native as it sustains the identity of the colonial. In Newes from America, John Underhill records that

wee had an Indian with us that was an interpreter, being in English cloathes, and a Gunne in his hands, was spied by the Ilanders [members of the Block Island tribe], which called out to him, what are you an Indian or an English-man: come hither,
saith he, and I will tell you, he pulls up his cooke and let fly at one of them, and without question was the death of him. (7)

In the midst of this fluidity—signaled by an Indian speaking a white man's language, dressed in a white man's clothing, and carrying a white man's weapon—Underhill assigns to the gun the power of stabilization, the ability to accurately name the speaker's race, to answer the question, "What are you?" even as it subjugates its native interlocutor: "I will tell/kill you." Notably, the speaker's name is never actually mentioned; the passage concerns not the name itself but the act of naming. This image of a man in a cross-racial drag, irrefutably identifying himself in a virtuoso performance—and thereby suggesting the performativity rather than any "natural" fixity of identity—reappears much later as the Leatherstocking, Cooper's white man in Indian clothing. Underhill's Indian here anticipates the way that Natty and other characters in The Last of the Mohicans will perform—as Indians, as animals, as "nature"—in what Marjorie Garber has termed narrative transvestism (13). And the interpreter's fatally stabilizing speech anticipates (right down to the seemingly obligatory sexual pun) how the speaking gun is to function in Cooper's novel.

No End to His Loping

In contrast to the sweeping formality of the Requerimiento—ritualistic, mediated, embedded in a universalizing hierarchy—the performative speech of the woodsman's rifle seems decidedly informal, personal, direct,
and ad hoc. But the two practices function in much the same way, and I want now to read the shooting match in Chapter 29 of The Last of the Mohicans as a fictional equivalent of the Requerimiento. Natty's shooting is performed as part of a first-contact scenario, before an assemblage of native people at the brink of subjugation; it is also, as in the episode from Newes from America, prompted by a crisis of identity--by Duncan Heyward's impersonation of Natty. And it is again a violent and patently sexual exchange, in this case between the rifle and the two (notably) domestic utensils that are its targets--an earthen vessel (297) and a hollow gourd (299).

Natty sees his own identity most securely fixed in his race, in his sense of himself as "genuine white," "a man without a cross" (though he repeats these phrases frequently enough to betray some anxiety about the matter). But at this crucial point in the novel, his identity hinges literally on his inherited skill with the rifle. It is not as a white man that he is most renowned, but as la longue carabine, as a great shot, and when Duncan challenges his identity, it seems perfectly logical that a shooting match should be proposed as a foolproof way to settle the issue. Natty's final shot does indeed appear to secure his claim once and for all. With this shot his "word" is made "good," and the scene would seem rather straightforwardly to emblematize stability in naming and authority in speech--both who has it (the white male colonial), and how it is attained (through a violent negation of the sexual and racial Other). The narrator figures Natty's impressive
performance as a grounding of language, an end to deferral: "It decided the question, and effectually established Hawk-eye in the possession of his dangerous reputation" (300). The episode seems to undo the metaphysical damage sustained in Natty's ill-fated argument with Chingachgook back in Chapter 3, successfully substituting his inherited shooting ability for his inaccessible written heritage.

But more is at stake here than just Natty's identity. Also at issue is the fixity of identity itself, and it is certainly suggestive that the rifle so frequently fails to speak unambiguously. Even in this seemingly straightforward shooting contest, Natty does not reestablish his identity until the univocality of the rifle has first been brought into some doubt. For reasons not made very clear—apparently to express his contempt for Heyward's challenge—Natty lets off his first shot without appearing so much as to aim. He does this apparently casually but actually, as the narrator makes clear, quite calculatedly: Natty intends his shot to be not only more accurate than Heyward's, but also more expressive, and to the extent that it thus signifies on two levels at once it is no longer a transparent speech but one requiring interpretation. It is paradoxically because Natty's performance is so convincing that his audience is divided on whether to attribute the rifle shot to skill or chance:

The first impression of so strange a scene was engrossing admiration. Then a low, but increasing murmur, ran through the multitude, and finally swelled into sounds, that denoted lively opposition in the sentiments of the spectators. While some openly testified their satisfaction at so unexampled dexterity, by far the larger portion of
the tribe were inclined to believe the success of the shot was the result of accident. (298)

Rather than pinning down identity and meaning, the rifle's speech simply fuels another round of contestation within an interpretive community. Faced with this deferral, we would do well to ask just what, precisely, we are to take as Natty's "unexampled dexterity": his shooting or his acting?

When Underhill's native marksman fires at his enemy, the narrator assures us that he "without question was the death of him." But in The Last of the Mohicans we find no such assurances. Instead we find just the opposite, acts of marksmanship that repeatedly prove at the most crucial moments to be ambiguous. This is most notably the case with the shooting of Natty's great nemesis, the one target he cannot seem to pin down, the ultimate test of le longue carabine's stabilizing power: Magua. It is Magua who seems to epitomize deferral itself, who repeatedly evades the significations allotted him. "[T]here never will be an end to his loping," as Natty puts it, using a word that aptly suggests the perpetual sliding of the signifier, "till 'kill-deer' has said a friendly word to him" (186), and Magua does indeed seem to escape every effort made to contain him.

Even at the novel's climactic death scene there is no certain closure, for the cause of Magua's death is left unclear even here. Circumstances certainly imply that the Huron is finished off by a "word from 'kill-deer,'" but the question is rather pointedly left open. Just where we might expect certainty, the story foregrounds images of fluidity
and indeterminacy, leaving the shooting of even such a great marksman as Natty to fail as the trope of a present speech. "A form stood at the brow of the mountain," says the narrator in the novel's penultimate scene, "on the very edge of the giddy height, with uplifted arms, in an awful attitude of menace." Surely this menacing form must belong to Magua, and "[w]ithout stopping to consider his person, the rifle of Hawkeye was raised" (338). But just before firing Natty realizes he is aiming not at Magua, the novel's personification of evil, but at Magua's utter opposite, the "glowing countenance" of David Gamut. A second later, the real Magua "lopes" into view and attempts, once again, to dodge the bullet that would name him:

\[ \text{He made a desperate leap, and fell short of his mark; though his hands grasped a shrub on the verge of the height. The form of Hawk-eye had crouched like a beast about to take its spring, and his frame trembled so violently with eagerness, that the muzzle of the half raised rifle played like a leaf fluttering in the wind.} \]

One might here repeat the words of Underhill's interpreter and ask of Natty, "What are you, an Indian or an Englishman?" It is again a moment of extreme instability, with the signifiers of racial and sexual identity sliding out of control, leaving the putatively civilized white man "crouched" like a "beast"—bestial in his crouched posture and eagerness for the kill, impotent in his inability to make his half-erect gun "speak."

When Natty finally does fire, the actual utterance is played down, camouflaged in subordinate clauses:

\[ \text{Without exhausting himself with fruitless efforts, the cunning Magua suffered his body to drop to the length of his arms, and found a fragment for his} \]
feet to rest upon. Then summoning all his powers, he renewed the attempt, and so far succeeded, as to draw his knees on the edge of the mountain. It was now, when the body of his enemy was most collected together, that the agitated weapon of the scout was drawn to his shoulder. The surrounding rocks, themselves, were not steadier than the piece became for the single instant that it poured out its contents.

Thus does the rifle speak— but to what effect?

The arms of the Huron relaxed, and his body fell back a little, while his knees still kept their position. Turning a relentless look on his enemy, he shook his hand in grim defiance. But his hold loosened, and his dark person was seen cutting the air with its head downwards, for a fleeting instant, until it glided past the shrubbery which clung to the mountain, in its rapid flight to destruction. (338)

Here the reader cannot say of Magua that Natty "without question was the death of him"; the narrator juxtaposes Natty's rifle shot and Magua's apparently fatal fall but refuses to link them in any causal relationship. If Magua indeed had to summon "all his powers" just to "draw his knees on the edge of the mountain," might he not have dropped off through sheer exhaustion? There is no real evidence that Natty has in fact killed Magua; except for the single word "destruction," there is no evidence to suggest even that Magua has died. We do know that Magua has escaped every previous attempt to contain him; why not this one as well? Before passing judgment, we would do well to file for habeas corpus. Where indeed is the body? The novel's final chapter does show us the bodies of Cora and Uncas; we can say with certainty that Cora is killed by one of Magua's "assistants," and Uncas by Magua himself (337). But the body of Magua is withheld from us.14
Even if we accept that Magua has died, we still cannot say how. By Natty's bullet? By simple exhaustion? There is in the end no way to decide; just where we might expect closure, the novel presents us with an enigma, an imaging of the end of deferral as itself a deferral. During its most crucial performance—when this most powerful figure of a fully present speech might most securely ground its claims—the rifle speaks loudly yet seems strangely silent.  

A Natural Inscription?

Early in the novel, spying the antlers of a deer just visible through the dense foliage of the forest, Natty brags to Uncas that he will take the buck "atwixt the eyes, and nearer to the right than to the left." Uncas finds this hard to believe:

"It cannot be! ... all but the tips of his horns are hid!"

"He's a boy!" said the white man, shaking his head while he spoke, and addressing the father. "Does he think when a hunter sees a part of the creatur, he can't tell where the rest of him should be!" (34)

The "marksman's aiming" has here become, in John Lynen's words, an exercise in "mak[ing] the mind conform exactly to the conditions of nature" (188)—and among the conditions implied by this passage is a regular and predictable structure, a system of formal relationships that allows the tips of the horns to locate the rest of the animal. The ability to access this structure is not claimed by Natty for himself alone, but for any skilled hunter, and his claim is held to be true not just of this particular deer, but of any such creature. The ability is neither idiosyncratic nor
contextual, that is, but general, not parole but langue. It is a function of that structure by means of which signs on the surface of nature can indicate the realities underneath. Shooting here tropes the reading—and by implication the very existence—of the divine inscription itself, of the preexisting system without which the wilderness cannot be thought of as both natural and readable.  

But is this structure truly "divine" or "natural"? Can a "pure" or "virgin" nature exist that is also transparently legible? That is, can the term "wilderness" as it is used in The Last of the Mohicans have any sensible referent? The novel repeatedly raises these questions but rather pointedly refuses to answer them. In the scene above, for example, Natty makes a constative claim—about nothing less than nature's very structure—and offers to prove it by hitting the buck in a precisely predicted spot. But before he can be put to the test Chingachgook intervenes, reminding Natty that firing would reveal their position to their enemies. The "typifying" power of the rifle is asserted, but never tested. Thus let off the hook, Natty need no longer prove his assertion; instead he merely authorizes it. His response to Uncas's argument is reduced to an ad hominem dismissal—"He's a boy!"—and an attempt to align himself with the authority of the boy's father (who notably refuses to take sides). The shift is from a neoplatonic claim of an absolute formal structure to the strategic utterances of the sophist, to "mere" rhetoric, a shift reminding us that the antlers themselves, from the moment they are invoked as a signifier, are no longer natural but rhetorical. As such,
like any other signifier, they are no longer connected either physically or semantically to what Natty must now merely assert as their signified. Natty cannot know that the antlers are not in fact connected to a human being rather than a deer—a distinct possibility in a novel which, as we shall see, repeatedly has its human characters performing a cross-species drag.

In *The Last of the Mohicans*, Natty shoots neither at white people nor at such "good" Indians as the Delawares, but rather at animals and such "bad" Indians as the Hurons. This pattern limns the readable body of the wilderness at which he takes aim, which his rifle is to "typify." It manifests and objectifies this body in what for Natty are two not-so-distinct loci: the body of the "wild" Indian as well as that of the wild landscape. These bodies are presented as naturally inscribed, but key passages in the novel undermine this presentation, suggesting instead that we may think of them, in Judith Butler's terms, as having been made to signify on their surfaces.

The body of the wilderness is presented (and simultaneously problematized) as part of a natural inscription that preexists any reading of it and is held to be always distinguishable from any merely human writing. Every time the fleeing Magua tries to cover his tracks, for example, altering the signs of his passage by laboriously writing a human landscape that mimics the "natural" one, the woodsmen are consistently able to follow the trail. Tracking becomes reading, a matter of tracing out a string of differences, and the fact that Natty eventually does hunt
Magua down is not so much a vindication of his pathfinding skills as a reification of the divine inscription, of the notion that there is a preexisting text to be found in nature in the first place (which in turn is perhaps the enabling presupposition of "nature writing").

The emblematic activity here is the close reading of the artful writing of nature. Notably it is the doomed Uncas, "quick of sight and keen of wit" (213) who ultimately proves the best reader, able to pick out the trail even when Natty and Chingachgook have lost it. Natty explicitly and favorably contrasts this pathfinding prowess to the reading ability of "the young white, who gathers his learning from books, and can measure what he knows by the page" (213). Magua's great skill, by contrast, is writing "realistically," consciously arranging the marks that signify his presence so that they will be indistinguishable from what is held by his readers to be the preexisting field of natural signifiers. Whenever possible, he traverses "a rock, or a rivulet, or a bit of earth harder than common," any place where his passage will not create difference, will not alter significantly the natural configuration of the wilderness. Nonetheless the woodsmen, reading with an extreme skepticism, consistently manage to pick out the human from the natural signifier: whenever Magua's artifice "severed the links of the clue they followed, the true eye of the scout recovered them at a distance, and seldom rendered the delay of a single moment necessary" (214).

At length, however, Magua's nature writing does come close to succeeding. "The trail appeared to suddenly have
ended" (214), and even though the foresters "applied
themselves to their task in good earnest," their
"examination resulted in no discovery" (215). They try
again, this time "going over the ground by inches":

Not a leaf was left unturned. The sticks were
removed, and the stones lifted—for Indian cunning
was known frequently to adopt these objects as
covers, labouring with the utmost patience and
industry, to conceal each footstep as they pro-
ceeded. . . . At length Uncas . . . raked the
earth across the turbid little rill from the
spring, and diverted its course into another
channel. So soon as its narrow bed below the dam
was dry, he stooped over it with keen and curious
eyes [and] pointed out the impression of a
moccasin in the moist alluvion. (215-16)

Fleshing out the implications of this clue, the landscape-
readers quickly establish that David Gamut, with the largest
feet in Magua's party, had been made to go first; carrying
Cora and Alice, the Hurons had then followed precisely in
his footsteps, leaving just the one print concealed by the
water. "I can now read the whole of it," exclaims Natty,
choosing this moment to make explicit the trope of the
wilderness-as-book (216, my emphasis).

The critical practice of the adventurers is to
diligently seek out the human signifier. But how can they
recognize it when they see it? They can do so only by its
difference from the natural signifier, by the difference
between the bent twig and the straight one, the moccasin
print and the undisturbed mud. From Saussure we know that
it is only out of such differences that meaning itself may
arise; more importantly, we know that in such a system
"there are only differences," and while "a difference
generally implies positive terms between which the
difference is set up," Saussure emphasizes that "in language there are only differences without positive terms" (120). The novel's opposition of a natural to a human inscription—as two separate, opposable systems, each with its own independent positivity—is therefore illusory, for the very comparison of the natural and the human—the very observation of their difference—inscribes them in a single system of differences. This system can be considered neither "natural" nor "cultural," for that very distinction arises within the system and cannot precede it.

Uncas's discovery of this human footprint reprises that moment so crucial to western metaphysics, the "emergence" of "man." It is the mythic moment of origin, the "discovery" of that initial difference which makes it possible for "culture" to differentiate itself from its foundational Other, "nature"—the sort of moment replayed in contemporary discourses by such events as the discovery of an early hominid fossil, or the teaching of a chimpanzee to sign. "A cry of exultation immediately announced the success of the young warrior," says the narrator, and the "the whole party crowded to the spot," with Natty regarding the moccasin print "with as much admiration as a naturalist would expend on the tusk of a mammoth or the rib of a mastodon" (216).

But why must this moment be reprises here, at this particular juncture of this particular novel? The aim of the close reading is to locate the white maidens—particularly Alice, the imperiled future of a civilization that will fade back into savagery if, as its symbolic
progenitor, she is suffered to bear the children of a "natural" race. Haunting the novel on the one hand is this specter of miscegnation, whose mere biological possibility challenges the racialist notion of fundamentally separate orders of humanity. But in addition there is the gradual erosion of the nature/culture distinction itself, as the adventurers' closer and closer reading of the landscape-text uncovers that distinction's artificiality. In order to sustain a literary-environmental discourse that opposes "civilization" to "wilderness" (and white to red, male to female, and so on) the adventurers must sustain the nature/culture system; to maintain that system they must rescue Alice, whose purity alone can (symbolically) reproduce it; to rescue Alice they must follow her trail, and to trace out her trail they must parse ever-finer distinctions between nature and culture. It is Magua, always profoundly troublesome, who threatens to expose this circularity, this lack of any genuine origin. It is Magua who drives them to the borderland where difference and meaning seem to disappear, and it is precisely there that the mythic origin of culture must be asserted and celebrated anew.

Along with the human trail, of course, is rediscovered the wilderness through which it leads and against which it is conceptualized. It is only through the recognition of the not-quite-effaced "human" signifier, the trace of Magua's earlier passage and intention, that wilderness-as-natural-inscription once again becomes conceivable. In this sense Natty Bumppo is never in an uninflected or untrammeled
"wilderness" at all, nor can he be. The writer of nature—Magua or his equivalent—is always and must always be one step ahead of the "discoverer" of nature. Of course, literary-environmental discourse can continue to treat its object as natural only through the banishment of that prior human marking; just as environmentalist discourse will generally efface the early presence of native Americans in order to conceive of a "virgin" American wilderness preservable in a "pure" state, so Natty must hunt down and eliminate Magua and his "polluting" human mark.

Yet without that mark, the wilderness fades into illegibility—another reason, perhaps, why *The Last of the Mohicans* becomes so strangely silent at the moment of Magua's long-anticipated "destruction" (338). When Natty has his peripatetic antagonist where he wants him, clinging precariously to the cliffside, ready to drop any moment under the strain, it is, as we have seen, a moment of intense liminality. Natty has just moments ago mistaken the gentle David Gamut for the evil Magua, while the narrator uncharacteristically figures the white hero not as savvy woodsman but as bloodthirsty animal, "crouched like a beast about to take its spring" while "the muzzle of the half-raised rifle played like a leaf fluttering in the wind" (338). It is difficult, finally, to know what to make of this image of semi-erection, of a wavering phallus which confounds the nature/culture boundary rather than clarifying it. Natty does, however, manage to raise his rifle. He shoots, Magua falls, but we still do not know whether it is a bullet from Kill-deer that brings the Huron down, or
simple exhaustion. At this most crucial point, has the typifying power of the rifle again been merely asserted, without being proved? A glance at Magua's corpse, a reading of his transfigured body, might settle the matter, but that body is never seen again—perhaps, as I prefer to believe, because finally it could not be tracked down.

**A Performance Worth Regarding**

> [T]he compelling force of transvestism in literature and culture comes . . . from its instatement of metaphor itself, not as that for which a literal meaning must be found, but precisely as that without which there would be no such thing as meaning in the first place.

---Marjorie Garber (390)

"Long ago," wrote Anne Sexton in "Red Riding Hood,"

"there was a strange deception / a wolf dressed in frills, /

a kind of transvestite." When Marjorie Garber quotes from this poem in her *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (375), we most readily assume that what is "strange" about the "deception" is the image of a male wolf in female attire, the crossing of the boundaries of sex and gender. Yet is it not also disconcerting to ponder the crossing of species boundaries, to view this durable image of the nonhuman dressed up as the human? I want now to treat cross-species drag and performance as a form of transvestism in its own right, a confounding of the natural in the accoutrements of the cultural (and vice-versa).

Always an index of broader cultural crises, transvestism invites the contextualizing and historicizing of texts that foreground it. Transvestism "puts in question identities previously conceived as stable, unchallengeable,
grounded, and 'known,' and "this disruptive act of putting in question" is "precisely the place, and the role, of the transvestite" (13). In particular, transvestism points to a "category crisis," a "failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable" (16). Paralleling Judith Butler's claims for the performativity of sex and gender, Garber argues for "the extraordinary power of transvestism to disrupt . . . the very notion of the 'original.'" Category crisis itself is seen ultimately as "not the exception but rather the ground of culture"; by forcing and negotiating such crisis, transvestism in fact "creates culture" (16, my emphasis).

Shirley Samuels has suggested that in writing *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper may have been influenced by a Leni-Lenape origin myth in which

> the drawing of human beings into culture is accomplished by the pursuit and consumption of the natural. . . . The emergence of persons is thus linked to the marking of the difference between what's natural and what's cultural: nature worship only becomes possible once the separation between persons and nature has been violently effected.¹⁹

Any blurring of this "violently effected" separation raises the specter of the submergence of persons, in a sort of "miscegnation between nature and culture" (89), and the latter half of Cooper's novel thematizes just this threat. Beyond the merely personal interests of the white men who seek the two white women out, the motivation is as much to frustrate Magua's sexual claim on Cora as it is to facilitate the courtship of Alice and Duncan. This obsession with racial stability is just one facet of the
broader aim of effecting and maintaining separation generally; it is necessarily bound up with the fixing of other threatened categories, such as those of gender and class, that are also seen as natural. Near the conclusion of the novel, for example, the liberal Munro makes a plea for a general equality of gender, class, and race, hoping that, if only in the afterlife, "the time shall not be distant, when we may assemble . . . without distinction of sex, or rank, or colour." Natty does not simply reject this plea, but stabilizes "sex, rank, and color" all at once by subsuming them in the arche-category, nature: "To tell them this," he says, "would be to tell them that the snows come not in the winter, or that the sun shines fiercest when the trees are stripped of their leaves!" (347).

But despite such conservative pronouncements of a naturally fixed cultural order, the plot shift from chase to rescue in The Last of the Mohicans occasions a discursive shift from a foundationalist to a relativist and performative worldview. Before, the heroes' strategy hinged upon the correct "close reading" of the wild body, a strategy predicated upon a traditional view of Truth and epitomized by the ability of careful reading to expose Magua's artificial inscription--his artifice--by distinguishing it from the seemingly natural inscription of the wilderness. Once the two women have been located, however, the heroes rely almost wholly on artifices of their own, on rhetoric and performance, on the contextualized understanding of signifying practices seen as strategic rather than simply "true" or "false." As the novel
approaches its finale, its groundings move away from Natty's notion of a stable nature and toward the fluidity of performance—suggesting that nature is not "natural" at all but performative.

Critics have long complained of how Cooper's always-shaky plotting threatens to break down entirely toward the end of The Last of the Mohicans, and of how this threat necessitates the absurd substitutions which end up carrying the plot—Heyward's impersonation of a native healer, Natty's performance of a bear, Uncas's decidedly superior performance of that bear, Chingachgook's performance of a beaver, and so on. But it is not just the plot that is breaking down by this point: in addition, the crucial silences of the speaking gun and the persistent insinuation of human rhetoric into the putatively natural inscription of the wild body precipitate a sense of category crisis, of a breakdown in the very structures by means of which nature and culture have been separated in the first place. In the wake of these twin failures, the book's drag scenes are not ludicrous at all, but predictable attempts to reinstate the threatened categories via another strategy.

Traveling deep in enemy territory, Duncan Heyward is brought up short by what he will later discover to be a beaver pond, but at first takes to be an Indian village:

The water fell out of this wide basin, in a cataract so regular and gentle, that it appeared rather to be the work of human hands, than fashioned by nature. A hundred earthen dwellings stood on the margin of the lake. . . . Their rounded roofs, admirably moulded for defence against the weather, denoted more of industry and foresight, than the natives were wont to bestow on their regular habitations. . . . [T]he whole
Heyward ponders this scene for several minutes, then sees the "suspicious and inexplicable movements" of what he takes to be natives but are really animals. He next spies a human form which he and Natty both take for an Indian but is really a white man, David Gamut. When all is revealed a moment later, the narrator explicitly implicates his readers in these unwitting performances, as usual aligning their point of view with Heyward's:

The reader may better imagine, than we describe, the surprise of Heyward. His lurking Indians were suddenly converted into four-footed beasts; his lake into a beaver pond; his cataract into a dam, constructed by those industrious and ingenious quadrupeds; and a suspected enemy into a true friend. (222)

Neither Gamut nor the beavers have been consciously performing here; they have not been wearing masks which they suddenly doff so as to reveal the "true" significations of their "natural" surfaces. The "converting" is accomplished rather by the narrator, who disguises his own activity in the passive voice ("were suddenly converted"). Occupying the position of grammatical subject that is thereby emptied out we find various manifestations of "nature": the lake, the cataract, the putatively "natural" Indians, and the Other more generally: the "enemy." The narrator further effaces his own agency by subordinating his descriptions and manipulations to the imaginations of his readers. Yet the effect--the reader's surprise--is the same as the shock that
would have been effected by a consciously performed drag. This little parable of misrecognition "acts" just like a performance, yet appears "natural," a mere mistake on Duncan's part.

Even after this naturalized performance has been revealed, after the confused categories have supposedly been clarified, there remains a certain residue of confusion. The narrator leaves us not quite sure whether beavers are wild (undomesticated animals) or civilized (intelligent and industrious beings who construct well ordered communities). The cultural continues to feel strangely natural, even as the wild (cataract and lake) remains oddly artifactual and human (dam and pond).

Later, at this same spot, Chingachgook dons the mask of a beaver and affords readers a "real" performance of nature. The spectacle this time is not that of a white man taking animals for humans but of an Indian taking a human for an animal. As a party of Huron warriors file past the pond, they pause to allow a member of the party to address this "beaver" as his totemic kinsmen. The warrior speaks "as if he were addressing more intelligent beings" (284); as the Hurons proceed into the forest, we readers find out what they never do: that they had been observing a more intelligent being.

Had any of the Hurons turned to look behind them, they would have seen the animal watching their movements with an interest and sagacity that might easily have been mistaken for reason. Indeed, so very distinct and intelligible were the devices of the quadruped, that even the most experienced observer would have been at a loss to account for its actions, until . . . the party entered the forest, when the whole would have been explained,
by seeing the entire animal issue from the lodge, uncasing, by the act, the grave features of Chingachgook from his mask of fur. (285)

Unlike Duncan, the novice woodsman, the experienced Hurons should not have been so easily taken in. The narrator makes it sound simple enough: all they had to do was turn around and look. The plot, however, requires that they not look—doing so would disconcert the adventurers' battle plan—and so they do not. In this scene the success of Chingachgook's performance is notably not attributable to his skill; his performance is marred by "distinct and intelligible" "devices" that might easily have tipped off the observer. The ability to detect the original beneath the mask—to limn the wilderness by separating the natural from the cultural—is no longer seen as a matter of acuteness of perception, of the sort of "close reading" performed upon the landscape earlier by Uncas and Natty; it has instead become just another narratorial device.

There is a certain playfulness in the way Cooper highlights his narrator's and his readers' complicity in these performances, but the question they raise is serious enough: How are we to know that any object presented to readers as natural or original—right on up to that object viewed as the most natural, that sine qua non of nature, the wilderness—is not itself performed, a performance that a self-effacing narrator chooses not to reveal to us in the same way Cooper's narrator refuses to reveal Chingachgook to the Hurons? Significantly, I think, this question arises at just the spot where Heyward was himself taken in. If the
novel interpelleates us as Heyward's symbolic descendants, the legatees of his readerly skills and weaknesses, it also warns us to read with caution, to keep in mind the possibility that beneath the surface of the signifiers of the wild lay not some wild essence or foundation, but merely the "grave features" of a human intention esconced in a "mask of fur."20

According to Judith Butler, what is parodied in transvestism is not any particular identity, but the very "notion of an original . . . identity" (138). At the Huron camp, Duncan praises Natty's performance of the bear in terms that similarly privilege performance over original, noting that "the animal itself might have been shamed by the representation" (257). Natty responds that he should be a poor scholar, for one who has studied so long in the wilderness, did I not know how to set forth the movements and natur of such a beast! Had it been now a catamount, or even a full sized painter [panther], I would have embellished a performance, for you, worth regarding! But it is no such marvellous feat to exhibit the feats of so dull a beast; though, for that matter too, a bear may be over acted! Yes, yes; it is not every imitator that knows natur may be outdone easier than she is equalled. (257-258)

Reappearing in this parody is the figure of the book, of Natty's years of reading of the natural inscription. But here, reading is only a sort of hueristic, no longer an attainment of Truth but a prelude to performance. Before, Natty's scholarship had consisted of reading nature, learning to aim, making his mind "conform" to the wilderness, and it culminated in shooting, in proving out the truths inherent in nature's preexisting structure. Here,
however, nature study culminates in drag and performance, in the active creation of surface significations whose truth or accuracy is contingent, ultimately ascertainable only in the local efficacy of a performance.21

The emphasis on drag in The Last of the Mohicans thoroughly undermines the earlier notion of the wilderness "as mute, prior to culture, awaiting the inscription-as-incision of the masculine signifier for entrance into language and culture" (Butler 147-148). Like the human body, the "body" of "nature" must be seen as "not a 'being,' but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field" (139).22 To introduce this episode that so tellingly interweaves the themes of nature, culture, gender, and performance, Cooper quotes from A Midsummer Night's Dream, and the allusion neatly foreshadows the chapter's theme of the play within the play, preparing us for the dizzily nested performances to follow. It also succinctly emblematizes what I have taken to be the very "meaning of this masquerade" (256), the performativity of wilderness "itself." "Have you the lion's part written?" asks Snug in this epigraph, linking one of our most potent symbols of wildness to the thoroughly human realm of discourse and performance. Answers Quince: "You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring" (255).

Notes to Chapter Three

1 I want to examine "by what enigmatic means" the wilderness has "been accepted as a prima facie given that admits of no genealogy." Butler writes that [e]ven within Foucault's essay on the very theme of genealogy, the body is figured as a surface and
the scene of a cultural inscription: "the body is the inscribed surface of events." The task of genealogy, he claims, is "to expose a body totally imprinted by history." (129)

Noting, however, the way that Foucault referred to "the goal of 'history'" as the "'destruction of the body,'" Butler continues:

As 'a volume in perpetual disintegration,' the body is always under siege, suffering destruction by the very terms of history. And history is the creation of values and meanings by a signifying practice that requires the subjection of the body.

2 This sort of commodification of nature was not unique to Audubon, but in his case it is acutely obvious, if only because he personally participated in the entire process. He observed and shot the birds; he then represented them, via the arts of taxidermy and writing as well as painting; he then sought out and developed a market for those representations; and he finally supervised their material reproduction and distribution. It is in Audubon's case particularly easy to see the literary environmentalist's activities not as a break from but as continuous with the earlier, more obviously economic activities of the sawmill owner and the taxidermist.

3 Audubon's love of hunting has been widely noted. I would add here an incident, detailed in Audubon's letters, that very curiously links the gun to issues of gender, representation, and identity. In February of 1821, when Audubon was in New Orleans, a woman secretively commissioned him to draw a nude portrait of her. Upon returning to this job each day, Audubon found that the woman herself had worked on the drawing, "not, she explained, because she was dissatisfied, but because she wanted to mingle her own talents with his." The portrait finished, the woman then "signed it as though it had been her own," placing Audubon's name "in a dark corner where it would be difficult to find" (Adams 232). As payment she purchased an expensive gun Audubon had picked out earlier and which she had engraved with an emblem of her own design.

Not long after, along with hundreds of other men and presumably with his new gun in tow, Audubon spent a day hunting the golden plovers then arriving in huge flocks in Louisiana. His own take is unreported, but he estimated the kill that day alone at 144,000. His biographer, Alexander Adams, writes cagily of Audubon that "[t]he adventure with the erotic woman had done much to raise his spirits and so had the sight of the golden plovers" (234).

4 Elaborating on the "historical mode of signification" that has produced gender, Butler has theorized the dynamics
of this mystification. If "the creation of values . . . requires the destruction of the body," then that very destruction implies that "there must be a body prior to that inscription, stable and self-identical, subject to that sacrificial destruction," so that the very fact of inscription seems to point to and to valorize (for we only "sacrifice" what we value) some prediscursive natural body. Butler continues with the observation that "cultural values emerge as the result of an inscription on the body, understood as a medium, indeed, a blank page." But in order for this inscription to signify . . . that medium must itself be destroyed—that is, fully transvaluated into a sublimated domain of values. Within the metaphorics of this notion of cultural values is the figure of history as a relentless writing instrument, and the body as the medium which must be destroyed and transfigured in order for "culture" to emerge. (130)

5 I will examine in detail the operation of this figure in Cooper's violent wilderness novel, The Last of the Mohicans, but it could be traced as well through other texts in what might be considered a distinct genre of "nature writing" that emanates, like Audubon's, from the barrel of a gun: the trophies and essays of the noted conservationist Teddy Roosevelt, for example, or (as Haraway has so vividly shown) the dioramas created for the American Museum of Natural History by Carl Akeley (26-54). Audubon in this sense should not be seen as a "minor" nature writer, but as one of the creators of the very object and medium of nature writing, as an inventor of nature "itself."

6 Pioneers 80, 290; Mohicans 121. All subsequent Cooper quotations are from Mohicans.

7 Even such a demonized character as Magua, presented more generally as an inveterate liar, is perceived as speaking a truth when he says of the exploitative, land-hungry "white man" that "his gluttony makes him sick," that "God gave him enough, and yet he wants all" (301). In a novel that more generally condemns the crossing of racial boundaries, this universalized appreciation of nature is one of few points on which voices both white and red find common ground.

8 It is only when the novelist cannot have his story thus "directly conjured from the natural scenery" that he resorts to his sometimes absurd plots: "Cooper tends to an excess of action because, in a more fundamental sense, he can portray no action at all. Since his characters cannot develop, their deeds" function mainly to create "visual panoramas rather than a coherent story" (Lynen 179).
This exemplary maiden and her partner, one of the Hurons' "bravest young men" (256), are the only Indian couple put forth by the novel, as are Alice and Duncan, as a procreative link to a racially unmixed future. Heyward is spared the burden of any responsibility for figuratively dooming an entire race by his failure to cure this woman: "A single look was sufficient to apprise the pretended leech, that the invalid was far beyond his powers of healing"; the "slight qualm of conscience which had been excited by the intended deception, was instantly appeased" (253).

Heyward's foil here is the aged Tamenund, regarded, like Washington, as the father "of a nation" (Mohicans 305). A figure "deeply venerated" and "well beloved," Tamenund has "the dignity of a monarch, and the air of a father" (294). The similarity of the two names is obvious enough, each with three syllables, each syllable of the one retaining a phonological correlate of the other: Wash/Tam, ing/en, ton/und. It is significant that the elderly chief's star is fading as that of the young white officer is rising.

My argument in this section draws upon Eric Cheyfitz's "Literally White, Figuratively Red," especially his comments on The Last of the Mohicans' figures of the book, writing, and orality (91-92 n. 17).

According both Spaniard and native a precise place in a global teleology, the Requerimiento fixes identities for both speaker and auditor, reaffirming the colonial in his familiar heritage and completely reconstructing the Indian into a "religious and legal fiction," in Cheyfitz's words, a "pure figure" whose own specificities are "formally denied" (74). The document's narration of the deeds of the (Church) fathers subsumes native histories into an all-encompassing patrilineage, claiming thereby a preexisting and eternal dominion over both native peoples and their lands.

These differing stresses on ritual and iconoclasm might be seen as corresponding to contemporary Catholic and Protestant theological styles. See Kibbey 42-64.

Mohicans features two extended episodes that foreshadow Magua's demise, and in each the narrator is ambiguous as to the efficacy of the rifle and fails to "produce the body." During the battle at Glenn's Falls, a Huron sniper is wounded and dislodged from his perch in an oak tree. Duncan Heyward calls for a shot that would end the man's suffering, but Natty refuses to fire again, citing the need to preserve powder. Then, contravening his own advice, he makes as if to fire anyway. "Three several times the scout raised his piece in mercy, and as often prudence
At length, one hand of the Huron lost its hold, and dropped exhausted to his side. A desperate and fruitless struggle to recover the branch succeeded, and then the savage was seen for a fleeting instant, grasping wildly at the empty air. The lightning is not quicker than was the flame from the rifle of Hawk-eye; the limbs of the victim trembled and contracted, the head fell to the bosom, and the body parted the foaming waters. . . . and every vestige of the unhappy Huron was lost forever. (75, my emphasis)

This studied silence can be compared to the way, following an earlier battle scene, Natty goes around making sure his Huron victims have in fact been dispatched, making a "circuit of the dead, into whose senseless bosoms he thrust his long knife, with as much coolness, as if they had been so many brute carcasses" (114). Natty has reason for this brutality. Just moments earlier, Magua had been engaged in a furious and seemingly fatal struggle with Chingachgook. Natty tried to pick off the Huron with Killdeer, but--in yet another image of a category crisis, an extreme fluidity, that occasions a figurative impotency--he found the two Indian bodies indistinguishable, too tightly intertwined to get a sure aim. Chingachgook finally gets the upper hand and manages to stab his foe, apparently killing him. "Magua suddenly relinquished his grasp," we read, "and fell backward, without motion, and, seemingly, without life." Natty, "elevating the butt of the long and fatal rifle," then wishes to settle the matter with a blow to Magua's skull.

But, at the very moment when the dangerous weapon was in the act of descending, the subtle Huron rolled swiftly from beneath the danger, over the edge of the precipice, and falling on his feet, was seen leaping, with a single bound, into the center of a thicket of low bushes, which clung along its sides. The Delawares, who had believed their enemy dead, uttered their exclamation of surprise, and were following with speed and clamour . . . when a shrill and peculiar cry of the scout, instantly changed their purpose, and recalled them to the summit of the hill. (114)

The precipice, the falling, the last-minute failure of the rifle--all these prefigure the circumstances of the novel's climax and warn us that rumors of Magua's death ought always to be considered premature.

My argument in this section elaborates on Cheyfitz's characterization of Natty Bumppo as a "consummate 'reader'" of nature (66).
Throughout *The Last of the Mohicans*, the Indian body is assumed to be as transparently readable as the wilderness of which it is figured as a part. Consider the narrator's comments on the shooting of the Oneida sniper in Chapter 19. "In place of that eager and garrulous narration, with which a white youth would have endeavoured to communicate" such a triumph, Uncas prefers "to let his deeds speak for themselves" by "quietly expos[ing] the fatal tuft of hair, which he bore as the symbol of victory" (195). Chingachgook performs a close reading of this fragment of a body, placing "his hand on the scalp, and consider[ing] it for a moment with deep attention" before proclaiming: "Oneida!" (195-6).

Natty proceeds to explain to Duncan that while "to white eyes there is no difference between this bit of skin and that of any other Indian," Chingachgook can read it "with as much ease as if the scalp was the leaf of a book, and each hair a letter" (196). The palpability of the scalp approximates and figures the sort of presence that western metaphysics associates with speech, and Natty attempts to infuse that presence into his own figures of writing and the book. It is notable—but by now should not be surprising—that this linguistic parable is occasioned by the shooting of the Oneida. See Cheyfitz 92.

The novel posits no successor to the skilled readers Natty, Chingachgook, and Uncas. The future belongs instead to Heyward, whose notions of language are quite different from Natty's. When, for example, Magua questions Heyward about the whereabouts of Uncas, whom Magua is hotly pursuing, Heyward's linguistic sophistication allows him to turn deferral into delay:

"Le Cerf Agile is not here?"
"I know not whom you call the 'nimble deer,'" said Duncan, gladly profiting by any excuse to create delay.
"Uncas," returned Magua, pronouncing the Delaware name with even greater difficulty than he spoke his English words. "'Bounding Elk' is what the white man says when he calls to the young Mohican."
"Here is some confusion of names between us, le Renard," said Duncan, hoping to provoke a discussion. "Daim is the French for deer, and cerf for stag; élan is the true term, when one would speak of an elk."
"Yes," muttered the Indian in his native tongue; "the pale faces are prattling women! they have two words for each thing, while a red skin will make the sound of his voice speak for him." Then changing his language, he continued, adhering to the imperfect nomenclature of his provincial instructors, "The deer is swift, but weak; the elk is swift, but strong; and the son of 'le serpent'
is 'le cerf agile.' Has he leaped the river to the woods?"

"If you mean the younger Delaware, he too is gone down with the water." (91)
The signifier slides endlessly and the exchange ends not with an absolute but with a conditional: "If you mean . . . " As Magua tries to pin it down, the signified literally gets away from him. Heyward's strategy exemplifies Cheyfitz's notion of colonial figuration as a way of "precisely not understanding the other" (74).

19 Samuels 89. In its arguments concerning gender and performance, this chapter is indebted to Samuels's insights in "Generation through Violence."

20 The coperformances at the beaver pond reaffirm John Lynen's contention that Cooper's wilderness landscapes, just like his plots and his characters, are completely dependent for any force they may have on our active cooperation as readers. The reifying traffic between "human values and natural forms" is for Lynen rooted in our desire to make sense of the inconsistencies and gaps in the text. In Butler's terms, such "[c]oherence is desired, wished for, idealized," and "this idealization is an effect of a corporeal signification"--of a mask of fur, in this case, an outside that signifies but does not reliably correspond with an inside.

21 The overwhelming sense of a "natural" body is an effect, writes Butler, with "no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (136). And, as with cross-gender drag, the cross-species drag that so engages the reader of The Last of the Mohicans "implicitly reveals" a completely "imitative structure." Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency . . . [This notion of] parody does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is of the very notion of an original, . . . a fantasy of a fantasy, the transfiguration of an Other who is always already a "figure" in that double sense. The "original" is revealed as "an imitation without an origin," and what "postures as an imitation" is a "production," part of a "perpetual displacement" (138).

22 Certainly the novel portrays its wild performances as culturally situated, directed toward specific interlocutors rather than any "universal." In order for Heyward to perform the Huron healer, for example, Chingachgook must reinscribe his civilized body as "savage," a process compared, appropriately enough, to landscape painting (228).
"[T]he Sagamore can . . . make a natural fool of you," through a practice figured as fully artifactual, as an oxymoronic "making" "natural" that cannot be assimilated into any foundational notion of an un-made nature.

Chingachgook, "long practised in all the subtle arts of his race," proceeds to draw upon Heyward "the fantastic shadow that the natives were accustomed to consider as the evidence of a friendly and jocular disposition," making sure that "[e]very line that could possibly be interpreted into a secret inclination for war, was carefully avoided" (229). The Indian body that was earlier as transparent as its twin, the body of the wilderness, is now to be signified by an intentional alignment, not with any universal inscription, but with the customs and codes of a specific interpretive community.
Yosemite's early history has been recounted several times, most recently by Rebecca Solnit in *Savage Dreams*, and I will review the story only briefly here.¹ For centuries, Native Americans of California's Miwok tribe had lived in and around the valley, creating a history of their own which, like the Miwok people themselves, still disrupts the "official" historical narrative of the region.² That official history, the Euro-American "written record," began late in the fall of 1833, when Joseph Reddeford Walker tried to lead a party of fur trappers across the Sierra Nevada to the Pacific Ocean and got bogged down in the snows of the Sierra Nevada, somewhere along the high mountain divide between the Merced and Tuolumne rivers. According to the memoir of Zenas Leonard, it was while searching for a way off of this divide that he found himself looking down upon huge waterfalls that would, as he put it, "precipitate themselves from one lofty precipice to another, until they are exhausted in rain below," and upon cliffs that seemed "to be more than a mile high." This was almost certainly the "first white sighting" of Yosemite Valley. But because Leonard's account was not widely circulated at the time and generated no public interest in the region, historians have generally declined to credit him with the valley's
discovery. In order to "count," a discovery must be more than a first white sight; it must also introduce the object into discourse, and Leonard's account almost immediately fell into obscurity. There is no evidence that the Walker party exercised even the most perfunctory of the discursive privileges of the "first white man to see," that of naming what has been seen.

The white men who finally did exercise this Adamic prerogative were members of the Mariposa Battalion, participants in the so-called Mariposa Indian War of 1851-1853. The excuse advanced for this lopsided "war" was the killing of three men at a trading post owned by James Savage, an opportunistic and extraordinarily successful miner, trader, and frontiersman whom Rebecca Solnit has aptly compared to Joseph Conrad's Mr. Kurtz (338). Savage's main concern in the events appears to have been to shore up his sagging trading empire, which had been based largely on his personal initiative and authority; the war may, in fact, have begun as little more than "a personal vendetta" (272). But Savage managed to convince local authorities that this isolated incident at the trading post might spark a mass uprising, and he was authorized to form a militia unit, the Mariposa Battalion, and to place himself in charge.

The war itself was neither spectacular nor particularly successful. Tracking a group of Miwok families led by Chief Tenaya into Yosemite Valley in March of 1851, the battalion found only one Indian among the abandoned villages—an elderly woman who had been unable to flee with the rest. Rather than pursue and engage the absent Miwoks, Savage and
his men spent the next three days systematically searching
the valley floor, torching every dwelling and all the food
stores they could find—a scorched-earth policy that
eventually brought many of Tenaya's followers, if only
temporarily, to the reservation. It was during this brief
initial foray that the soldiers decided to christen the
valley "Yosemity," apparently in the mistaken belief that
this was its native designation. A second Mariposa
expedition followed in May, pursuing and capturing Tenaya
and several dozen followers who had slipped away from the
reservation. In 1852, responding to a report that Miwok
tribesmen had killed two white miners at Bridalveil Meadows,
federal troops invaded the valley, where they found and
summarily executed five Indians. Tenaya, meanwhile, had
left the reservation a second time and crossed the mountains
to live with a group of Paiute Indians in eastern
California. He was never recaptured, and died in 1853—not,
apparently, doing battle with the whites but as the result
of an argument with some Paiutes.³

As newspaper accounts of the Mariposa War filtered to
the outside world, attention shifted from the fighting to
Yosemite itself. Public interest in the valley grew
exponentially, and by 1863 the movement was afoot to
preserve it as a park. The details of this crucial
institutionalization, unfortunately, are still not clearly
understood. California's Senator John Conness, who
introduced the Yosemite park bill in Congress in the spring
of 1864, claimed later that the idea had been presented to
him by several "gentlemen . . . of fortune, of taste, and of
refinement," but he did not name them. Future park superintendent Fredrick Law Olmsted may or may not have been among them; other likely candidates include Thomas Starr King, who was the author of a popular book on New England's White Mountains and who was then planning a book on the Sierra Nevada, and Israel Ward Raymond, a representative of the Central American Steamship Transit Company (which stood to benefit from increased tourist travel to California). This first park bill was not prompted by any organized popular movement; unlike most later environmental legislation, it sparked no public debate and was approved rapidly and quietly in Congress. President Lincoln, preoccupied with Civil War matters, signed it into law in the summer of 1864.4

First View: Lafayette Bunnell and "The Best Prospect Yet"

[T]o aestheticize morality is to make it ideologically effective. . . . If the aesthetic comes . . . to assume the significance it does, it is because the word is shorthand for a whole project of hegemony, the massive introjection of abstract reason by the life of the senses. What matters is not in the first place art, but this process of refashioning the human subject from the inside, informing its subtlest affections and bodily responses with this law that is not a law.

--Terry Eagleton (40, 42-43)

Little would be known of the Mariposa War, and even less about the Mariposa Battallion's "discovery" of Yosemite, were it not for the participation of Lafayette Bunnell, who recorded the events in his **Discovery of the Yosemite and the Indian War of 1851 Which Led to that Event**. Bunnell was born in Rochester, New York in 1824 "and carried
to Western wilds in 1833," the same year that Zenas Leonard had peered down into the valley from its snowbound perimeter. In the West, as Bunnell rather apologetically wrote, his "opportunities for culture were limited"; in particular he "found that the experiences of frontier life" had not provided him with "the best preparations for literary effort" (ix). His Yosemite book, "his first attempt at authorship," was also his last; no one has ever called The Discovery of the Yosemite a literary masterpiece.

Why did Bunnell write the book at all? Like Zenas Leonard before him, he was the most literate member of his party and may on that account have felt a special responsibility for chronicling events. He claimed that the many secondhand accounts of the war were "so mutilated or blended with fiction" as to warrant "a renewed and full statement of facts," and he did not deem it "just" that readers "should forget the deeds of [the] men who had subdued her savages, and discovered her most sublime scenery" (ix). On the other hand, he waited nearly thirty years before publishing his own version of those events; it seems likely his real motivation was a desire to link his name and fortunes retroactively to what had become a world-famous locale.

Neither Bunnell's timeliness nor his accuracy concerns me here, however. Much more interesting is The Discovery of the Yosemite's literary-environmental structure, its casual and ubiquitous linkage of "subdued savages" and "sublime scenery." Representative in this regard is the book's description of Major Savage's burning of a native food
cache—a passage that Bunnell seems to have crafted carefully and that is worth quoting in full. A certain quantity of captured food had been set aside for the soldiers' own use, but as their work was nearly complete, this reserve, too, has been put to the torch. Bunnell, meanwhile, has just returned from a day of "exploring," enjoying the scenery and searching for any remaining food stores; "the flames were leaping high" as he addresses himself to Savage:

I briefly, but with some enthusiasm, described my view from the cliff up the North Cañon, the Mirror Lake view of Half Dome, the fall of the South Cañon and the view of the distant South Dome. I volunteered a suggestion that some new tactics would have to be devised before we should be able to corral the "Grizzlies" or "smoke them out." The major looked up from the charred mass of burning acorns, and as he glanced down the smoky valley, said, "This affords the best prospect of any yet discovered; just look!" "Splendid!" I promptly replied, "Yo-sem-i-te must be beautifully grand a few weeks later when the foliage and flowers are at their prime, and the rush of waters has somewhat subsided. Such cliffs and water-falls I never saw before, and I doubt if they exist in any other place." I was surprised and somewhat irritated by the hearty laugh with which my reply was greeted. The major caught the expression of my eye and shrugged his shoulders as he hastily said "I suppose that is all right, Doctor, about the water-falls, etc., for there are enough of them here for one locality, as we have all discovered; but my remark was not in reference to the scenery, but the prospect of the Indians being starved out, and of their coming in to sue for peace. We have all been more or less wet since we rolled up our blankets this morning, and the fire is very enjoyable, but the prospect that it offers to my mind of smoking out the Indians is more agreeable to me than its warmth or all the scenery in creation." (91-92)

The difference between these two men, the axis of their misunderstanding, is figured compactly in the word
"prospect," by which Savage means a pleasing vision of the future but which Bunnell takes to mean the aesthetic beauty of the presently visible landscape. This ambiguous term, "prospect," in fact has a long history in colonialist travel narrative. Mary Louise Pratt has shown how it invariably implicates such writing in an imperialist teleology, how it points always toward "the goal of expanding the capitalist world system." In the texts which foreground this sort of dual "prospect,"

European enterprise is seldom mentioned, but the sight/site as textualized consistently presupposes a global transformation that, whether the I/eye likes it or not, is already understood to be underway. In scanning prospects in the spatial sense—as landscape panoramas—this eye knows itself to be looking at prospects in the temporal sense—as possibilities for the future, resources to be developed, landscapes to be peopled or repeopled by Europeans. (125)

The distinction between the presently visible landscape and the imagined future occupation and reconfiguration of that landscape tends to become blurred in such writing. Bunnell, for example, uses "prospect" in its present-tense sense of "scenery," but also enlists the present scene to prefigure a peaceful future when the unpleasant and distracting "rush" of events will have subsided and "the foliage and flowers [will be] at their prime." Similarly, Savage's genocidal work is future-oriented (the fire will eventually result in the Miwoks "coming in to sue for peace") but also presently satisfying (its warmth "is very enjoyable"). This temporal confusion is further complicated in this particular text by the fact that the narrator—who speaks in the eighteen fifties—is the same "I" as the author—who writes nearly
thirty years later, from within the reconfigured future toward which the text points.

It is important to note that Bunnell does not see the battalion's genocidal activities as any less ethical than Savage does. Bunnell is not horrified by the major's laughter, merely "irritated"; he does not see the battalion's activities as unethical, merely distasteful. What he arrogates to himself in passages such as this is not a moral high ground but a superior sensibility, and in the process what strikes us today as the crucial issue, the immorality of ethnic cleansing, is deflected from ethics to aesthetics.

In so doing, The Discovery of the Yosemite exemplifies the more general ideological function of aesthetic discourse. As Terry Eagleton has shown in his analysis of Alexander Baumgarten's Aesthetica--the philosophical treatise, published in 1750, which first theorized the modern notion of the aesthetic--such discourse should "be read as symptomatic of an ideological dilemma," of what was then a vexing question: "how can reason, that most immaterial of faculties, grasp the grossly sensuous?" The answer lay in the aesthetic, conceived as a new form of "cognition" that "mediates between the generalities of reason and the particulars of sense" (15). Through such mediation, power becomes "aestheticized," rendered "at one with the body's spontaneous impulses, entwined with sensibility and the affections" (20). The primary ideological effect of this aestheticizing is to significantly "transform the relations" between "morality
and knowledge" (28). The Earl of Shaftesbury would make this transformation more explicit, claiming, as Eagleton summarizes, that

there is somewhere within our immediate experience a sense with all the unerring intuition of aesthetic taste, which discloses the moral order to us. Such is the celebrated "moral sense" of the eighteenth-century moralists, which allows us to experience right and wrong with all the swiftness of the senses. (34)

The aesthetic aligns morality with "the springs of sensibility," positing a moral sense that "consists in 'a real antipathy or aversion to injustice or wrong, and in a real affection or love towards equity and right, for its own sake, and on account of its natural beauty and worth'" (34). This mapping of the rational onto the sensual has a tremendous ideological efficacy, because "feelings, unlike propositions, cannot be controverted" (38).

The aesthetic becomes "an ethics entwined with the sensuous affections," an "alternative" to a genuine ethics (35). But where a genuine ethics would concern itself with reasoning out the morality of actions, the aesthetic routes such concerns into an appreciation of the beauty of what is (above all) seen—just as Bunnell's play on the "prospect" collapses action-in-time into a timeless "view":

Beauty, truth and goodness are ultimately at one: what is beautiful is harmonious, what is harmonious is true, and what is at once true and beautiful is agreeable and good. . . . "For what is there on earth a fairer matter of speculation, a goodlier view or contemplation, than that of a beautiful, proportion'd, and becoming action?" . . . Truth for this passed-over Platonist is an artistic apprehension of the world's inner design: to understand something is to grasp its proportioned place in the whole. (35, my emphases)
In Bunnell's case, this atemporal, spatialized "whole" functions as a sort of synchronic equivalent to the self-serving capitalist teleology whose goal is the acquisition and transformation of the entire American continent. To view the (literally) spectacular Yosemite landscape is to apprehend Manifest Destiny itself, the larger design within which acts of genocide have their "proportioned place."

In The Discovery of the Yosemite, Bunnell invokes the temporal and the atemporal simultaneously, setting up a division of ideological labor in which he aestheticizes the battalion's activity while the less sophisticated Savage rationalizes it. Savage subordinates the sensual pleasure of the warmth afforded by the burning food stores to the rational prospect of military victory; he rejects feeling in favor of the prospect offered to his "mind," his calculated awareness of the likely historical effect of his actions. He understands the rightness of his actions through reason, albeit a reasoning we today find repugnant. Bunnell, by contrast, opts for the prospect that presents itself to his eye. He understands essentially the same thing—he no more doubts the rightness of his actions than does Savage—but he apprehends this skewed morality aesthetically, in a mode of understanding which today we do not find repugnant at all.

Bunnell repeatedly stresses his own aesthetic apprehension and just as frequently contrasts those tender feelings to the obliviousness of his less sophisticated companions. He writes that "very few of the volunteers seemed to have any appreciation of the wonderful proportions
of the enclosing granite rocks" (90), and he quotes Savage as saying that Yosemite was just "what we supposed it to be before seeing it, a h--- of a place" (92). His aesthetic sensibility serves as the class marker distinguishing him from his crude comrades-in-arms:

To obtain a more distinct and quiet view, I had left the trail and my horse and wallowed through the snow alone to a projecting granite rock. So interested was I in the scene that I did not observe that my companions had all moved on. (64)

[T]he coarse jokes of the careless, and the indifference of the practical, sensibly jarred my more devout feelings . . . as if a sacred object had been ruthlessly profaned, or the visible power of Deity disregarded. (68)

From my ardor in description, and admiration of the scenery, I found myself nicknamed 'Yosemity' by some of the batallion. . . . From this hint I became less expressive, when conversing on matters related to the valley. My self-respect caused me to talk less among my comrades generally. (95)

In foregrounding this class dichotomy, Bunnell is aestheticizing and nationalizing his readers as well as the landscape. "[R]efashioning the human subject from the inside," to recall Eagleton's words, he interpellates his readers as subjects who can (mis)understand the narrated events as morally justifiable by virtue of the beauty of the landscape. The reader's only moral obligation is to appreciate "the visible power of Deity"; as appreciation becomes the locus of ethics, any persisting guilt may be displaced along class lines, onto those who are "coarse" and "indifferent" to natural beauty.
Second View: Frederick Law Olmsted, Social Engineer

Scholars and environmentalists alike have stressed the fundamental importance of the preservation of Yosemite Valley. To David Brower Yosemite was "a key starting point for environmentalism in the United States"; to Hans Huth it was the "point of departure from which a new idea began to gain momentum," namely the systematic approach to landscape preservation which would culminate in the National Park System, an "institution admirably suited to fill the needs of the [American] people" (48). Just as important as the legislation itself was Yosemite's first management report, written in 1865 by the new park's first superintendent, the noted landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. "With this single report," according to Laura Wood Roper, "Olmsted formulated a philosophic base for the creation of state and national parks" which "made explicit and systematic the political and moral ideas" implicit in Congress's creation of the park and "which not only justified their unexampled action but established it as sound precedent" (Olmsted 13). The report has "since his time become a fundamental policy of the National Park Service" (Todd 145).

As we shall see, Olmsted found in Yosemite far more than a mere landscape. He thought himself "a sort of social engineer," wrote Roper, "whose function was to civilize men . . . and to raise the general level of American society by exerting a beneficent influence on environment" (282). He hoped to make Yosemite the cornerstone of a wide-reaching social technology that could, among other things, unite and consolidate a fractured national identity, improve the
nation's supposedly worsening physical and mental health, and elevate the public morals. The valley's ability to accomplish all this cultural work—its perceived ideological efficacy—clearly did not inhere in the landscape itself; it was inscribed there, in response to specific historical events: the Civil War, the growth of urbanization and industrialization, and the capitalist restructuring of the West. Far from being "natural," the Yosemite which became the initial object of an institutionalized environmentalism owes its modern "nature" to a complex intersection of aesthetic, sociological, ecological, and other discourses attendant upon those events. Its genealogy may be traced in particular through two northeastern urban reforms: the so-called "rural cemetery," and New York's Central Park.

The rural cemetery movement began in Boston in the eighteen twenties as an expression of a growing dissatisfaction with life in an increasingly crowded and heterogeneous city. The movement was contemporaneous with the development of the earliest Boston suburbs, and the rural cemetery can in fact be seen as analogous to the suburb, with the relocated grave serving, like the suburban home, "as a haven in a heartless world" (Farrell 106, 110). The new burial practice was also a sanitation reform, one of several civic improvements then under consideration in response to a population explosion that, in the fifty years since the Revolution, had put severe pressure on local environments. Problems of air and water pollution in particular were felt to be exacerbated by the interment of corpses in overcrowded city cemeteries.5
As early as 1822, Boston residents had debated (but not approved) a proposal to ban in-city burials. Of course, even had such a measure passed, a simple ban on in-city burials could not in itself have solved the problem; new cemeteries would be needed outside the city. But who would create and manage them, and how would they be financed? How large should they be? Who might be interred there? Might the land set aside for them perform social functions other than just burial? In debating such questions, rural cemetery advocates moved beyond their initial concern with sanitation to larger social and political issues. Some wondered "whether vault burial was discriminatory within a democratic society" (Sloane 44), others whether government should or should not become involved in the matter. For our purposes it is worth noting that the debate foregrounded and integrated several themes that would find expression not only in the new cemeteries, but also in New York's Central Park and finally in California's Yosemite Park: questions not only of sanitation, but also of democracy, of ecology, of preservation in perpetuity, of government's role in preserving and managing public lands. The rural cemetery movement would transform what had been almost exclusively a religious topic into a new and far more expansive discipline. Distanced from the churchyard, burial would be regulated more and more within the discourses of science and aesthetics--particularly as these two discourses came to be combined in the new discipline of landscape architecture, whose early development as a profession was intimately bound up with the rural cemetery movement.
Theorizing Burial: From Mummification to Museumification

In 1825, three years after the defeat of Boston's proposed ban on in-city burials, the interment problem was taken up again by a prominent Cambridge physician, Jacob Bigelow. "[I]mpressed with the impolicy of burials under churches or in churchywards approximating closely to the abodes of the living," as one contemporary put it, Bigelow met at his home with a number of prominent Bostonians and inaugurated the movement that would culminate in 1831 with the dedication of the first of the rural cemeteries: the 72-acre, carefully landscaped Mount Auburn. (Other cities followed Boston's lead, most notably New York, whose Green-Wood Cemetery opened in 1838.) A botanist as well as a physician, Bigelow was a member of the medical faculty at Harvard and a founding member of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. He was also an enthusiastic admirer of William Cullen Bryant's "graveyard poetry," and it was thus perhaps inevitable that the cemetery movement he founded would realize in concrete practice the popular romantic conflation of death and burial with picturesque scenery.

In arguing for the utility of his scheme, Bigelow infused this sort of romantic aestheticism with the contemporary scientific discourses of sanitation, botany, and ecology. "[S]o inseparably do we connect the feelings of the living with the condition of the dead," he is recorded as saying in his address to the 1825 meeting, that it "is incumbent upon us . . . to analyze . . . the principles which belong to a correct view of the subject."
Foremost among those principles is a complete rejection of any sort of mummification, and an acceptance of the rapid and "natural" decomposition of the corpse. Bigelow secularizes his argument, basing it not on theology but on the observation of "nature":

If we take a comprehensive survey of the progress and mutations of animal and vegetable life, we shall perceive that this necessity of individual destruction is the basis of general safety. The elements which have once moved and circulated in living frames, do not become extinct nor useless after death;—they offer themselves as the materials from which other living frames are to be constructed.

This recognizeably ecological rhetoric highlights natural cycles and interdependencies and predicts dire consequences for ignoring them:

The plant which springs from the earth, after attaining its growth and perpetuating its species, falls to the ground, undergoes decomposition, and contributes its remains to the nourishment of plants around it. The myriads of animals which range the woods or inhabit the air, at length die upon the surface of the earth, and if not devoured by other animals, prepare for vegetation the place which receives their remains. . . . Were it not for this law of nature, the soil would soon be exhausted, the earth's surface would become a barren waste, and the whole race of organized beings, for want of sustenance, would become extinct.

It is "[m]an alone, the master of the creation," who, at his own peril, "does not willingly stoop to become a participator" in this "routine of nature" (qtd. in Walter 29-30).

Bigelow condemns the tremendous efforts made in other cultures to preserve the human corpse. Shifting his strategy, he invokes the rhetoric of democracy rather than
ecology, noting how the only reasonably successful attempts at embalming "are cases of extraordinary exemption . . . such as can befall but an exceedingly small portion of the human race." The "common fate," by contrast, is to obey "the common laws of inert matter." Mummification is not merely elitist and un-American, but also unnatural, a useless "resistance" to inexorable leveling processes that obliterate social distinctions—processes which must be obeyed if we are not eventually to "gather round us the dead of a hundred generations in a visible and tangible shape"— and "what custom," asks Bigelow, "could be more revolting?" (Walter 32-33).

To prevent such a political and environmental catastrophe, nature "ordains" that, like everything else in nature, human bodies "should moulder into dust." Bigelow's compactly dialogic argument skilfully blends this secularized Christian voice with the discourses of the noble savage and the democratic discourse of individual dignity. "[T]he sooner this change is accomplished," he continues, "the better"; decomposition should occur "peacefully, silently, separately—in the retired valley or the sequestered wood," because there "the soil continues its primitive exuberance" and "the earth has not become too costly to afford to each occupant at least his length and breadth" (Walter 34). Having repeatedly constructed ecological process as a social, sanitary, and aesthetic good, Bigelow's argument finally makes a seamless segue back into a naturalized Christianity:

This can be fitly done, not in the tumultuous and harassing din of cities,—not in the gloomy and
almost unapproachable vaults of charnel-houses,—but amidst the quiet verdure of the field, under the broad and cheerful light of heaven, where the harmonious and ever-changing face of nature reminds us, by its resuscitating influences, that to die is but to live again. (35)

Despite the stress on death and decomposition, the longing for eternity has not disappeared but has merely been redirected. As "consecrated ground" that is to "remain forever, inviolate" (13), it is now the cemetery landscape rather than the human body which will be mummified. Greenwood's charter makes elaborate legal provisions for the cemetery's "permanence," insuring funds for the site's "perpetual care" and exempting the land "forever" from taxes and assessments that might eventually necessitate its foreclosure and sale (Cleaveland iv). Management at the site itself is preservationist; "ample provision is made" to insure "the perpetual embellishment and preservation of the grounds" (v), with the cemetery's "noble and varied forest-growth" in particular to be "studiously preserved, except where convenience or necessity require[s] its removal" (vi).

The desire for mummification has been displaced from the human body onto the body of nature, in terms that closely prefigure the "revolutionary" land-management policies later formulated by Olmsted for Yosemite.

What Bigelow was proposing in 1825 was not just a new form of burial but an entirely new kind of public space. The rural cemetery was to be public and secular, democratic and sanitary, and museumified in a permanently picturesque state. Because such spaces were without precedent in the United States, their creation entailed considerable
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financial risk. Regardless of whether the new cemetery was a for-profit, nonprofit, or government-run enterprise, there was the nagging question of whether enough lots would be sold to sustain the enterprise. The organizers "were committing their association to centuries of burying the dead," as one historian put it, "but what if the public would not buy?" (Sloane 45). To hedge their bets, the cemetery founders joined forces in 1829 with the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, which for some time had wished to create an experimental garden on a large scale. It was to be a mutually beneficial arrangement: the cemetery organization would not have to bear the full financial risk of the venture, while the Horticultural Society felt the combined garden and cemetery "would ultimately offer such an example of landscape gardening as would be creditable to the Society" (46). As it turned out, this arrangement was not so mutually beneficial after all; the Horticultural Society did put up the six thousand dollars for the purchase of the Mount Auburn site, but the planned experimental garden never materialized (Rotundo, "Rural" 235). Nonetheless, the link between the rural cemetery and the science of horticulture—so crucial to the professionalization of landscape architecture—would endure through the end of the century.

Fulfilling early hopes that it would be not merely a "repository of the dead" but also "a place of consolation for the living" (Walter 28), the rural cemeteries quickly became popular sites of recreation, often attracting hundreds of visitors per day. By mid-century the crowds at New York's Green-Wood Cemetery were estimated to exceed
thirty thousand visitors annually; they "strolled the
grounds, guidebook in hand," "enjoying the fresh air" and
"picnicking along undulating paths" (Jackson and Vergara
19)—much as they would do in Yosemite a generation later
(see figure 7).

This popularity made the new cemeteries a logical site
for the exercise of a certain cultural work that in fact
they had been expected to perform from the very beginning.
Jacob Bigelow, for example, had appreciated the "didactic
implications of the new landscape aesthetic" realized by the
rural cemetery (Farrell 100); a contemporary characterized
these spaces as providing the opportunity "to meditate on
present plans and future prospects" in a beautiful and
inspiring, yet also morally chastening, environment—where,
as Wordsworth put it, one may "recognize / In nature the
language of the sense, / The anchor of our purest thoughts"
(Walter 5, 7). Another observer noted how the new
cemeteries prompted "the sentiment of retrospection and
reverence which embalms forever the examples of the
benefactors of our race" (Farrell 108).

"Virtuous Habits of Play: Central Park

Apparently it was William Cullen Bryant who first
popularized the idea of a large-scale park for Manhattan
(Rosenzweig and Blackmar 24). But it was Andrew Jackson
Downing, the prominent landscape architect and protégé of
Frederick Law Olmsted, who first saw clearly that such a
park could, in its didacticism and its normalizing of
tastes, systematically replicate and broaden the
disciplinary functions of the rural cemetery. Downing, in
fact, conceived of the urban park as essentially a scenic cemetery without the graves, inaugurating an association of the two that would long endure on the institutional level.\(^6\) Downing joined forces with Bryant, and in 1851 the state legislature approved their proposal for what would become Central Park. Appointed as superintendent of the project was Frederick Law Olmsted, Downing's friend and former pupil. Olmsted admired the writings of both Bryant (whom he knew personally) and Ralph Waldo Emerson. He had been particularly impressed with the latter's recently published essay, "Nature," and agreed with the Transcendentalists generally about "the moral value of nature." He adhered as well to the Jeffersonian vision of a democracy stabilized by a rural citizenry (Todd 48-49). Olmsted was himself an inveterate New Yorker, however, and knew perfectly well that the nation's future character was to be increasingly urban, that even the wilderness of the far western frontiers would eventually be exhausted. One way to characterize his wide-ranging work is to see it as mediating the tensions between frontier ideal and industrial reality, as an attempt to sustain a rural democratic vision for what was becoming an urban citizenry.

Central Park was not to be a cemetery, but Olmsted nonetheless envisioned it as a species of sanitary reform. His work during the Civil War as a member of the United States Sanitary Commission (the future Red Cross) had involved sanitation as we think of it today, activities aimed at preventing the spread of infectious disease (notably, given our topic, through the proper disposal of
corpses). But in the mid-nineteenth century the term "sanitation" had a much broader range of connotations. Along with today's familiar usages, as the OED makes clear, it connoted an absence of "deleterious influences"--of the social as well as the biological sort. "Sanity" could mean what today we think of as a strictly physical health, but carried in addition a connotation of what today we might term "wholesomeness." Health was considered "as much a moral as a biological condition," while disease "was associated with 'dissipation,'" which included such activities as drinking, gambling, and boxing, and Olmsted saw in these notions of "sanitation" the potential for a full-fledged conservative social reform (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 24).

Olmsted was a prominent officer in the new American Social Science Association, and believed that "a social climate was evolving favorable to the promotion of a collective concern for the physical and moral welfare of all Americans" (Todd 33, 35). He and his Central Park supporters considered their proposal a "sanitary" or "health" measure in the most broadly social terms, and at the root of society was the family, the crucial nexus where the park was to work its magic. Reform advocates believed the park "would provide a site for 'healthy' and 'manly' exercise," with Bryant stressing the contribution of parks "to the health . . . and to the morals of the community." In contrast to rough male sports or the temptations of "brightly lighted streets" . . . a park would encourage family outings and inspire "home associations." (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 24-25)
"A park," added Bryant, "might promote 'good morals and good order' by encouraging virtuous habits of play as well as work" (26). Many liberal observers believed at the time that "women's ill health" in particular "reflected their general lack of opportunity for physical and mental development," and that an urban park would provide a particularly valuable chance for "'fair pedestrians to [engage in] healthful and natural exercise'" and find relief from "the burden of domestic duties" (25). (Of course, by setting aside a small portion of the city's public space as a site where women might "properly" appear, park proponents simultaneously legitimated the continuing segregation of the sexes elsewhere.)

Like advocates of the rural cemetery, park proponents practiced a not-so-subtle class politics of "elevating" their putative inferiors. Downing, for example, declared that proper landscape architecture could embody "moral rectitude" in "rational enjoyments," and thereby "soften and humanize the rude," while the New York Horticultural Society's backing of the park was motivated by its vision of "botanical gardens that would enhance 'cultivation'--in both senses of the word" (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 29-30). Robert Minturn and his wife Anna Mary Wendell, two of the project's earliest advocates, also came to see the park in such a light. Throughout the eighteen-thirties, the Minturns had been well known philanthropists, friends of the beggars who crowded their door, but Robert's approach to poverty then took a conservative turn. Deciding in 1843 that "personal benevolence was a 'dangerous species of charity,'" he gave
his support instead to the New York Association for the Improvement of the Poor,
which maintained that the "injudicious dispensation of relief" was the chief cause of increasing poverty. Its agents would separate out the "incorrigible mendicants" (who were to be packed off to the almshouse or the penitentiary) from the deserving poor (who were to be given limited physical relief and ample advice on remedying the character flaws that had landed them in poverty).

Minturn's fellow park advocates may well have agreed with his basic class sympathies, but tried to convince him "that a park would be a less repressive means of reforming the character of the city's working classes" (26). This easy conceptual shift from the penitentiary to the park suggests that the park was to function, in Althusserian terms, as part of the Ideological State Apparatus, disciplining the poorer classes via a "less repressive" regulation of tastes and norms rather than a direct use of force.

Olmsted, along with his partner in the park enterprise, Calvert Vaux, cast this ideological work as an exercise in democracy. While designing the park the two gradually moved "from defining pastoral scenery as the aesthetic goal of a public park to a larger social philosophy that claimed, as Vaux put it, to 'translate Democratic ideas into Trees & Dirt'" (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 136). Olmsted in particular expressed an unshakeable faith in the elevating powers of his own class. In his second annual report on Central Park he wrote that the purpose of this public space was to provide "healthful recreation for the poor and the rich, the young and the old, the vicious and the virtuous"—the parallelisms here betraying his real sympathies—by exerting
"a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence upon the most unfortunate and lawless classes of the city" (131, 241). "Rejecting the views of his 'cowardly conservative' opponents, for whom class-based cultural divisions were fixed," Olmsted believed members of the lower classes should and could acquire "the refinement and taste and the mental & moral capital of gentlemen." The "moral influence" of public parks, like that of public schools and libraries, offered a way for the working classes to acquire that "capital" as a means of cultural improvement. (241)

Olmsted's class may have closely guarded its genuine, economic capital, but it had "moral capital" to spare, and one reason for making the park as attractive as possible was to enable it, in Olmsted's words, "to force into contact the good & bad, the gentlemanly and the rowdy" (139). In precisely this way, "the power of natural beauty lay in its social influence as well as [its] aesthetic pleasure," and a judiciously naturalized landscape might have "a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence upon the most unfortunate and most lawless classes of the city,—an influence favorable to courtesy, self-control, and temperance" (131).

Despite the supposedly inherent abilities of landscape to uplift and refine, however, none of this would happen "naturally." Olmsted believed firmly that it was necessary that the ruling class teach the people how best to use the park. The public, that is, "would have to be 'trained' to use a park" (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 5). On the one hand, Olmsted had long believed that beautiful landscapes could "materially promote Moral and Intellectual Improvement" by
"instructing us in the language of Nature," as if nature could speak to us without mediation (qtd. in Todd 49). On the other hand, "[i]n order for the park to exercise its 'harmonizing and refining influence,' the public needed not just firsthand contact with natural beauty"--an unmediated experience of nature--"but also 'efficiently controlled and judiciously managed' supervision and guidance" (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 140). As Olmsted reported to the Central Park commissioners shortly after being hired as superintendent, in language that presages the interpretive programs that would later be formalized by the National Park Service, "[a] large part of the people of New York are ignorant of a park, properly so-called. They will need to be trained to the proper use of it, to be restrained in the abuse of it." By "abuse," Olmsted means the sort of "careless stupidity" which he felt stemmed from notions that the park was "'like a wood,' with which Americans associated 'the idea of perfect liberty'" (239).

Ten years later, just before resigning his Central Park superintendency and leaving for the wilderness of California, Olmsted cited the comparatively small number of arrests that had been made in Central Park as evidence in favor of such his theories, noting in his journal that "[t]he American public is one of the easiest in the world to regulate if any body will take the responsibility of regulating it" (258).

The Power of Scenery

In 1863, Olmsted resigned his Central Park position in a dispute over park policy and took a job in California
managing the Mariposa County mining properties of the former explorer and Republican presidential nominee, John Charles Frémont—land near Yosemite Valley that had once been under the control of Major James Savage. Olmsted's social connections, his experience with Central Park, and his physical proximity to Yosemite all drew him naturally into the circle of elite Californians who were then discussing the proposed state park. When Congress passed and President Lincoln signed the Yosemite bill in 1854, Olmsted was appointed to the commission charged with managing the new grant and quickly became its head.7

Up to this time the primary spheres of operation of landscape architecture, the cemetery and the park, had been exclusively urban and suburban. The seamlessness of Olmsted's transition to managing the new wilderness park underscores the fundamental parallels in social function underlying both cityscape and wilderness landscape, suggesting that this initial institutionalizing of environmentalism had less to do with preserving the Yosemite environment "itself" than with contemporary social concerns. The environmental reform that took the form of the national park was in fact continuous with the reform of the urban cemetery and the city park, reforms that became "environmental" only because of Olmsted's theory of the socializing utility of nature.

On August 9, 1865, during a visit to the valley with the other commissioners, Olmsted wrote the commission's initial report—the first written text to issue from the bureaucracy of the newly institutionalized environmentalism.
This report has since come to be regarded as remarkably prescient and foundational, a sort of environmental magna carta that established the "philosophic base" for future park preservation (Olmsted 13). Subsequent treatments of park history would foreground the overtly environmentalist aspects of this philosophy while all but ignoring its implicit social theory, obscuring the degree to which Olmsted and his fellow commissioners saw environmentalism as a vehicle for implementing broadly social aims.

Drawing on his Central Park experience, Olmsted viewed the valley's preservation as the creation of a work of art—as just one of several of the great public artworks completed during the Civil War. To get a clearer sense of how Olmsted believes art to function—how for Olmsted it participates directly and decisively in history—I quote the report's preamble at some length:

> It is a fact of much significance with reference to the temper and spirit which ruled the loyal people of the United States during the war of the great rebellion, that a livelier susceptibility to the influence of art was apparent, and greater progress in the manifestation of artistic talent was made, than in any similar period in the history of the country.

> The great dome of the Capitol was wholly constructed during the war, and the forces of the insurgents watched it rounding upward to completion for nearly a year before they were forced from their entrenchments on the opposite bank of the Potomac; Crawford's great statue of Liberty was poised upon its summit in the year that President Lincoln proclaimed the emancipation of the slaves. Leutze's fresco of the peopling of the Pacific States, the finest work of the painter's art in the Capitol; the noble front of the Treasury building with its long colonnades of massive monoliths; the exquisite hall of the Academy of Arts; the great park of New York, and many other works of which the nation can be proud, were brought to completion during the same period. (13-14)
Art for Olmsted has considerable power. The image of the "insurgent" Confederate soldier watching the completion of the dome emblematizes Olmsted's belief in the ability of art to reform the wayward citizen, and its role in democracy and social unification—the same powers he had attributed earlier to the carefully contrived (yet "natural") landscape of Central Park. These beliefs spill over into Olmsted's descriptions of the physical landscape of Yosemite Valley, which he terms "the greatest glory of nature" precisely because of "its union of the deepest sublimity with the deepest beauty" (16, my emphasis).

Olmsted's rhetoric underscores his larger concerns with the health of the body politic, a concern that combines economics, psychology, and political science into an emerging environmentalist discourse of what might be called "social sanitation through outdoor recreation." Olmsted describes two specific advantages that will accrue from the park. The "first and less important" of these is economic, "the direct and obvious pecuniary advantage which comes to a commonwealth from the fact that it possesses objects which cannot be taken out of its domain." He argues in effect for environmental preservation as a form of sustainable development, as opposed to the sort of resource extraction economy epitomized by the recent Gold Rush, whose deleterious ecological and social effects had become painfully obvious to him while he was managing the Mariposa Estate. He describes how the "industrious and frugal people" of Switzerland have utilized their scenery to common
advantage, with revenues from tourism having supplied "for many years the larger part of the state revenue . . . without the exportation or abstraction from the country of anything of the slightest value to the people." For California and the United States, he concludes, Yosemite might prove "a similar sort of wealth to the whole community" (17).

More important than mere pecuniary and ecological advantage, however, were "considerations of a political duty of grave importance to which seldom if ever before has proper respect been paid by any government in the world." Olmsted couches this argument in terms vaguely psychosociological:

It is a scientific fact that the occasional contemplation of natural scenes of an impressive character, particularly if this contemplation occurs in connection with relief from ordinary cares, change of air and change of habits, is favorable to the health and vigor of men and especially to the health and vigor of their intellect.

Without such recreation, in situations "where men and women are habitually pressed by their business and household cares," they are susceptible to "a class of disorders" that include such forms of "mental disability" as "softening of the brain, paralysis, palsy, monomania, or insanity." Less severe but more frequent results of a lack of outdoor recreation are "mental and nervous excitability, moroseness, melancholy or irascibility," all conditions which incapacitate the sufferer "for the proper exercise of the intellectual and moral forces" (17) -- that is to say, conditions which render the sufferer unfit for productive
labor. Reprising the argument he had made earlier in defense of Central Park, Olmsted writes that recreation generally offers its "greatest blessing" to those classes of Americans traditionally excluded from it: the poor more than the rich, and the "agricultural class" more than the urban. "Women," he adds, "suffer more than men" (20).

Despite its emphasis on inclusiveness, Olmsted's vision is hardly a democratic one. Rather it universalizes and normalizes a particular set of tastes and makes of them a foundation not only of aesthetics but also of sanity and morality. On the one hand there are "faculties and susceptibilities of the mind" that are "called into play by beautiful scenery," and "there can be no doubt that all have this susceptibility." The "power of appreciating natural beauty," so "intimately and mysteriously associated with the moral perceptions and intuitions," is natural and universal, "something which the Almighty has implanted in every human being." Yet "with some" this mental susceptibility "is much more dull and confused than with others." Olmsted's theorizing in fact consistently implies an elitist and racist teleology in which Yosemite's preservation marks a milestone not so much of the history of environmentalism as of the history of American taste and culture, a teleology that relegates dissenters to the realm of the uncivilized:

The power of scenery to affect men is, in a large way, proportionate to the degree of their civilization and the degree in which their taste has been cultivated. Among a thousand savages there will be a much smaller number who will show the least sign of being so affected than among a thousand people taken from a civilized community. (20-21)
Landscape appreciation becomes just another axis of
difference, closely allied with the axes of race and class,
though theoretically distinct from either. "This is only
one of the many channels," Olmsted concludes, in which the
"distinction between civilized and savage men is to be
generally observed" (21). The Yosemite landscape will
function not merely to sustain the mental health of the
civilized individual, but also to define the degree and mode
of the individual's civilization, aestheticizing, as we
shall see more clearly with Clarence King, the existing
class hierarchy.

Third View: Clarence King

Clarence King, geologist and writer, founder of the
United States Geological Survey and author of the best-
selling Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada (1872), arrived
in California in 1863, the same year as Frederick Law
Olmsted. King had gone West to join the newly formed
California Geological Survey, which he felt would offer him
field experience to supplement the classroom training he had
just completed at Yale's Sheffield Scientific School. He
and Olmsted had been friends back east, and when Olmsted
took over the management of the old Mariposa Estate, he
asked King to help inventory the property's mineral
resources. With the geological survey in hiatus, King
agreed.

The Mariposa needed the attention of someone like King.
The huge, gold-rich estate had been owned since 1847 by John
Charles Frémont, the explorer and fomenter of the Bear Flag
Revolt that wrested California from Mexico. At first the
Mariposa's mining operations had been profitable enough, in spite of Frémont's haphazard management. But by the time Olmsted took over its superintendency in 1863, both the estate and the general had seen better days. As Thurman Wilkins tells it, "[t]hat famous grant, some seventy square miles in extent, had slipped from General Frémont's absentee control," and to make good on the estate's many encumbrances "the general's creditors had formed the Mariposa Mining Company and thrown its stock upon the market." It was precisely because "production at the mines had slumped" that Olmsted sought out the expertise then available from survey members such as King.8

In less than fifteen years, that is, the Mariposa had slipped from the grasp of the archetypal rugged individualist and into the hands of the eastern capitalist. The Mariposa was in this respect a microcosm; events there presaged and typified the economic transformations that would occur with greater and greater rapidity in the West of the latter nineteenth century, events widely perceived in terms both mythic and economic: as the inexorable passage from a heroic to a prosaic age, from the bold enterprise of the hero to the systematic exploitation of a northern and eastern capitalist technocracy.9 Clarence King would play a significant part in facilitating and mystifying this western commodification. In his adventure writing, he consistently "celebrat[ed] a romantic ideal of self-reliant heroism" (Howarth xii), while his professional activities, by bringing western resources more and more under the sway
of corporate investors, just as consistently functioned to foreclose on such local enterprise.

In 1864, King was already thinking ahead to his greatest professional triumph, the ambitious Fortieth Parallel Survey, which would map and inventory a vast swath of the West and lay out the path for a transcontinental railroad. But his first survey was far more modest. After the creation of the Yosemite State Park, Olmsted appointed King to determine the boundary of the new grant and produce a map. Amid what he described as the "prosaic labor of running the boundary line" (Mountaineering 120), King had plenty of time to admire the scenery, which seemed to him to be itself a mythic western narrative, the visible record of an older and more heroic order. The boundary line ran through the High Sierra country above the valley walls, where it seemed that the ice-age glaciers had only recently retreated, leaving behind bare expanses where "[n]ot a tree nor a vestige of life was in sight." It seemed a place where life was just beginning, offering to King a vision of the bleak Eden of the Darwinists he so much admired. Peering down into the valley, now verdant but once filled with rivers of ice, he found it impossible "not to imagine a picture of the glacial period" when ice-erosion sculpted Yosemite into its present morphology. He depicts the scene as it must have appeared in the Pleistocene era:

Granite and ice and snow, silence broken only by the howling tempest and the crash of falling ice or splintered rock, and a sky deep freighted with cloud and storm,--these were the elements of a period which lasted immeasurably long, and only in comparatively the most recent geological times have given way to the present marvellously changed
condition. Nature in her present aspects, as well as in the records of her past, here constantly offers the most vivid and terrible contrasts. Can anything be more wonderfully opposite than that period of leaden sky, gray granite, and desolate stretches of white, and the present, when of the old order we have only left the solid framework of granite, and the indelible inscriptions of glacier-work? To-day their burnished pathways are legibly traced with the history of the past. (130-131)

Nature for King is a mythic history, the readable record of tumultuous passages, from storm to calm, from savagery to civilization, from wilderness to metropolis, most generally from a primitive (but admirably heroic) past to a civilized (but lamentably prosaic) present. Throughout Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada, he is most particularly struck by the contrasts between the naked granite expanses of the heights and the luxuriant forest growths below--where "richness of soil and perfection of condition" sometimes actually "prove fatal through overcrowding." The Sierra landscape for King is a map of the human world, a Malthusian narrative full of proto-ecological warnings for the future, its forests "wonderfully like human communities" where "[o]ne may trace in an hour's walk nearly all the laws which govern the physical life of men" (119).

A Realist Aesthetic

In 1870, during a respite from the fieldwork of the Fortieth Parallel Survey, King reviewed a pseudo-scientific travel narrative, James Orton's The Andes and the Amazon, for the Overland Monthly. Though his friendship with Bret Harte had everything to do with King's receiving this assignment, he was nonetheless an appropriate choice for the
job, for two reasons. As a working geologist, he was familiar with the new ideas then being introduced by science into the popular imagination. And as a developing writer, who had already published a travel piece of his own in the Overland and was at work on several more (which would be collected in 1872 in Mountaineering), King was grappling with the special problems inherent in writing about little-known lands. These two facets of King's career—the literary and the scientific—were not as disparate as might at first seem, for both involved the same challenge: that of reading and writing western landscapes in a way that would be comprehensible to his largely eastern audience. As both reader and writer, King thought of himself as a "realist"—as a sensitive observer capable of perceiving the way things "really" are and an objective writer whose words faithfully mirrored that reality. I want now to read King—the geologist as well as the writer—as he reads the landscape, and to problematize his seemingly straightforward conception of realistic representation. In particular, I want to show the close relationship between King's realist texts, his work as a scientist and the ongoing capitalist appropriation of the landscape itself.

King's critique of The Andes and the Amazon focuses on a departure from what appears in retrospect to be a key part of his developing literary aesthetic. In particular, he faults Orton for failing to convey anything which the reader has not already encountered in the accounts of previous writers, for occupying that uninteresting middle condition where he has neither the naïve sensitiveness of a new traveler,
nor the penetration of the practiced observer. No sooner is he mounted upon a mule than he begins to recognize things with a reckless freedom. The ghosts of Humboldt and Darwin flank him upon either side. What they had seen, he sees. Not once does he lift his eyes from the dusty trail, but confines himself to the rôle of a corroborator. (King, "Current" 578)

Orton, that is, has failed to elicit any genuinely new sensations in the reader, for whom the book is a mere "corroboration" offering only the chance to "recognize" what has been encountered before—in this case, in the travelogues of Humboldt and Darwin.

King's emphasis on the desensitizing effect of repetition and, especially, of "recognition" would seem to make him an early exponent of the sort of formalism codified later by Viktor Shklovsky, for whom "the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known," "to make objects 'unfamiliar'" (58). But for Shklovsky, making the reader "see" rather than merely "recognize" is a matter of effort, of "art as technique"; the object must be "defamiliarized" in order to remove it from the domain of automatized perception. King is suggesting another means of attaining the same end, a means implicit in his specific concern with narratives of travel and exploration—a genre characterized by special limitations but also special opportunities. In the words of Mary Fuller, such narratives "document a situation of enunciation in which the matter of speech, the topic, the referent, physically existed but was always going to be physically absent from the place of speaking and listening" (46). This conception suggests special problems which I
will address later; what is important here is that in the genuine exploration narrative, the "matter of speech" begins as something unfamiliar to the reader. To represent such material using the technique of some preceding travel writer hardly makes it any newer; if anything, this begins the process of familiarizing it. The exploration narrative thus seems to be particularly amenable to mimesis, for the obvious way out of the dilemma is to avoid any evident technique at all, to reproduce the object unadorned in its already-unfamiliar reality. For King this crude realism is the "technique," suggested in his critique of Orton, of the naive traveler who need only read the landscape sensitively and then mirror it faithfully for the reader.

King's account in *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* of a ride to a remote camp suggests that he conceived of his descriptive nature writing as just such a mimetic reproduction:

> I was delighted to . . . expose myself, as one uncovers a sensitized photographic plate, to be influenced; for this is a respite from scientific work, when through months you hold yourself accountable for seeing everything, for analyzing, for instituting perpetual comparison. . . . No tongue can tell the relief to simply withdraw scientific observation, and let Nature impress you. (108)

The movement from science to literature is for King a shift from the active to the passive, from analysis to impression, from the production of knowledge about the landscape to the mimetic reproduction of the landscape. Though this movement takes him into a literary mode, it is paradoxically a movement away from language (it is something about which "no
tongue can tell"). What King sees himself moving toward is not words about things, but things themselves—particularly, as the reader of *Mountaineering* quickly becomes aware, things in their most basic and immutable manifestations. This tendency certainly reflects King's concern with what, as a geologist, he naturally viewed as the "hard, materialistic reality" of nature (253), but it is also consonant with a peculiarly American conception of the "real," in which, as Lionel Trilling put it, "reality is always material reality, hard, resistant, unformed, impenetrable, and unpleasant" (qtd. in Sundquist 16). This conception of a rock-solid reality appealed not only to the geologist in King, but to the writer as well, for—to use Trilling's words again—"that mind alone is felt to be trustworthy which most resembles this reality by most nearly reproducing the sensations it affords" (17). If mimesis is the key to representing landscape memorably, then mimesis that somehow does justice to a landscape's most fundamental and enduring phenomena is the key to representing it truthfully and convincingly.

Thus it is hardly surprising to find in King's nature writing the recurring tendency "to reduce things to their bare essentials, to strip away the superificies of vegetation, animal life . . . and human culture"; in doing so, he seeks in stone a foundation for a more trustworthy language:

[He] is not only seeking accurate knowledge of the unexplored mountains of California, but direct unmediated experience of the absolute, primal world of matter. . . . King's descriptions of the Sierra mountainscapes are attempts to recreate in
language an unmediated experience. (Fontana 25)

Certainly King's writing is most energetic in those mountaineering episodes that take place above timberline, where the last settlements and the last vegetation have been left far below and he is left alone to contend with the primal simplicity of rock and ice. But the fact that his attempts to mirror "unmediated experience" produced some highly energetic stories hardly validates the literary theory behind them. In fact the linguistic claim underlying King's aesthetic—that matter and experience can pass into language with the same directness and fidelity with which landscape passes into image in photography—would almost immediately be called into question by a series of bizarre events in his own career.

The Footprints of a Man: Deconstructing Landscape

Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada appeared in 1872. Mark Twain's Roughing It appeared that same year, but it was Mountaineering which was hailed by the Overland as "the book of the season." The book was well received elsewhere as well, and within two years would sell out five printings (Wilkins, Mountaineering v). Its popularity received an unexpected boost from King's involvement in the Great Diamond Swindle of 1872, a scam which had begun two years earlier when two men posing as miners appeared in San Francisco carrying a sack of rough diamonds. The two men—Philip Arnold and John Slack—were secretive at first, dropping just enough hints to start the entire city talking about their cargo and the mine from which it must have come. The diamonds were appraised, first in San Francisco and
later by the Tiffany establishment in New York, and valued at a hundred thousand dollars. Slack allowed himself to be talked into selling his share of the putative mine—whose whereabouts were still kept secret—for just that amount, to San Francisco banker William Ralston. Arnold did not sell out until later, when the speculative frenzy hit its peak; he received half a million dollars for his share (Wilkins, Clarence 171-182).

In July of 1872, Ralston filed incorporation papers for the San Francisco and New York Mining and Commercial Company, which was promptly capitalized at ten million dollars. To verify the mine's authenticity, Arnold and Slack allowed a visit by company officials and the expert Henry Janin, who was regarded as one the most competent and incorruptible mining engineers in the country. Janin liked what he saw. "I consider this a wonderful discovery," he wrote in a report which appeared August 10, "and one that will prove extremely profitable. . . . I do not doubt that further prospecting will result in finding diamonds over a greater area than is yet proved to be diamondiferous" ("Diamond" 379). Elsewhere he speculated that, if worked by just twenty miners, the diamond fields could yield as much as a million dollars worth of gems per month—setting off widespread speculation that the mine might severely depress the international diamond market and even shift the center of the gemstone industry from Amsterdam to San Francisco. Janin's pronouncements circulated widely in the papers, and by the end of the summer, investors had formed at least twenty-five "wildcat" companies, capitalized at more than
two hundred million dollars in total, in hopes of cashing in on the boom as soon as the location of the fields should be made public (Wilkins, Clarence 173, 182-183).

Everything was in place for a major rush, which undoubtedly would have taken place had it not been for the intervention of Clarence King. Whenever their survey work brought them into contact with civilization, King and his coworkers had brought themselves up to date on the latest diamond news, and by the end of the summer they had pieced together enough clues to locate the purported diamond field in a remote, potentially diamondiferous region of eastern Utah, within the confines of King's survey. Clearly such a major find in his own bailiwick could not be ignored, and when the summer's fieldwork was completed, King set out quietly to inspect the claim himself, arriving at the site in November. There he found footprints; following them to where they converged with other tracks, he found mining notices posted on trees. A quick search of the area turned up several rubies and a few diamonds, and at first he was as much a believer as Janin. Further inspection, however, began to reveal disturbing evidence, and by the end of the second day he was convinced the ground had been salted and the claim was a fraud (Wilkins, Clarence 177-179). When Ralston and Janin were informed, they returned to the site with King, who had little trouble convincing them they'd been deceived. The story went public, and King was lauded not only for saving investors millions of dollars, but for preserving the reputation of California's fledgling financial establishment. He was the toast of the nation,
and his name graced front pages from San Francisco to London. Not coincidentally, sales of his recently released book surged forward (Wilkins, Mountaineering vi).

The entire episode can be read as a linguistic parable, in which the swindlers’ clever manipulation of the investors and the media engendered an intertext made up of newspaper stories, investment prospectuses, the report of the mining engineer, and, of course, the carefully inscribed "realistic" landscape of the diamond field. Such a text was not without precedent, its linguistic underpinnings being in fact typical of the "El Dorado" narratives so common in the literature of the Americas. A similar situation—Walter Ralegh’s claims in his 1596 Discoverie of Guiana concerning a fabulous South American gold mine—has been analyzed in an instructive way by Mary Fuller and is worth examining briefly here for the parallels it offers to the Diamond Swindle.

In the apologia worked up by King James’s court to justify Ralegh's execution, the latter’s claims concerning the existence of what he variously called Manoa or El Dorado are subjected to a close analysis:

James’s accusations amount to an intensely skeptical critique of Ralegh’s language. He claims that Ralegh's writing is a screen not for things but for palpable intentions; that the things of which he writes are imaginary, and that their objective properties . . . are constructs responsive to the wish and will of the writer.

To defend his text in the face of such skepticism, Ralegh had resorted to physical evidence in the form of gold ore, a "handfull of the mine" which he hoped would ground his claim.
somewhere safely beyond the unstable realm of language. Though he doubtless did not think of it in quite these terms, he hoped to demonstrate that at the end of the chain of signifiers making up the legend of Manoa there was something incontrovertible, that is, not another signifier but a material object which was not itself the product of any linguistic operation. In so doing, Fuller notes, he was attempting to make use of "resources not available to the mere poet: speaking of gold, he puts a piece of ore in the refiner's hand" (44).

But material reality—in Ralegh's case, a "handfull of the mine"—proves insufficient to validate such claims. How, for one thing—assuming that El Dorado exists in the first place—was the reader in London to know that the ore had actually come from there? The supposedly "mute" testimony of objects turns out to be not univocal but ambiguous, and hence to require corroboration; instead of providing the hoped-for escape from words, the material routes the reader back into the circuit of language. In the case of the discovery narrative, as with other attempts to ground the sign in "nature," not even things turn out to be free of the influences which engender the figurative drift of language. As Fuller notes, the objects Ralegh produced as underpinnings for representations . . . were always and everywhere fully implicated with rhetorical procedures: substitutions of parts for whole, transportations, ellipses. . . . [I]n the particular case of Ralegh, the part-for-whole synecdoche of handfull for mine masks a previous figure of metonymy—in fact, a congerie of previous figures. (45)

Ralegh's critics had good reason to question the validity of
his synecdoche, of his rhetorical substitution of a handful of ore—which might have come to London from anywhere—for an actual gold mine in Guiana. Clearly, the synecdoche cannot be valid unless the felicity of the underlying metonymy, the "naturalness" of the association of the transported ore with a specific mine, can be established. This Ralegh could not do with certainty, since, as he admitted, he had never personally been to El Dorado; he claimed only to have come near it (54).

In the end, the material Ralegh had hoped would serve as irrefutable testimony turned out to be vulnerable to the same sort of skeptical analysis to which his words had been subjected. In a final effort to validate his claim, he returned to Guiana in search of the mine itself, an expedition which became "literally a search for the referent, a place to which [could] be attached the proper names Manoa and El Dorado," and which, unfortunately for the soon-to-be-executed Ralegh, proved fruitless (51).

The text engendered by the Diamond Swindle has much in common with other El Dorado stories. There was, for example, a great deal of money at stake—as dozens of nervous investors were all too aware—and the remote, still-secret location of the mine precluded the usual means of verification. It thus shared what Fuller called the "peculiar constraints" of the discovery narrative, of "a writing situation . . . in which the issue of truth, veracity, was particularly at stake and also particularly difficult to check" (45). More important, its authority rested ultimately on an appeal to the material—"in this
case, to the gems displayed in San Francisco by Arnold and Slack, and the stones turned up by Janin in situ in the field.

King was not a linguist but a geologist, and his on-site investigation of the swindlers' text focused not on its words but on the material representations underpinning them. His procedure, which recalls the virtuoso tracking activities of the heroes in Chapter 21 of The Last of the Mohicans, amounts to a "close reading" of the material:

[W]e . . . lay down upon our faces, and got out our magnifying-glasses and went to work, systematically examining the position of the stones and their relation to the natural gravels. The first point which excited my suspicion was the finding of a diamond on a small point, or knob of rock . . . in a position from which one heavy wind, or the storms of a single winter, must inevitably have dislodged it. (Deposition)

The questions which King must answer—How did this object come to be here? Is its occurrence natural or the result of human intervention? Are these formations such as would naturally be associated with a diamond field?—are essentially questions about rhetorical procedures, about the transportations and substitutions undergone by the objects produced to bolster the swindlers' truth-claims.

His suspicion having been aroused by what appears to be an unnatural transportation, one which left a diamond sitting where the elements would not have allowed it to remain for long, King continues the investigation, embarking upon a plan of testing the whole question, which consisted of a system of outside prospects conducted over the whole mesa, carried out by digging a bushel or two of earth, averaging it, sifting it in sieves, and then washing both the saved gravel and the refuse dirt at the stream; of
an examination of the trails and tracks of all the party; a following of their work from beginning to end; . . . a scrutiny of the rock itself, and of the so-called Ruby Gulch. . . . The result . . . was that we found no single ruby or diamond anywhere off the neighbourhood of the rock or off the line of the original Arnold survey.

At issue here is the appropriateness of a metonymy. The swindlers' claims rely heavily on the purportedly natural association of the gemstones to the gravels in which they are found, but King's investigation demonstrates that the gems are actually more closely associated with the hoaxers themselves:

I fixed upon the trail of Arnold and Janin, recognizing Mr. Janin by his slender foot. . . . Along the line of their outward march, here and there in the vicinity of survey stakes, we found an occasional ruby, but 10 ft. off their line of travel never one.

The final touch in King's analysis of the swindlers' text is his examination of the ant mounds found at the site. Because ants systematically bring small stones from lower levels of the earth up to the surface, prospectors use anthills the way a psychoanalyst uses a slip of the tongue, to gain information about a formation's underlying structure. King's examination reveals

artificial holes broken horizontally with some stick or small implement through the natural crust of the mound, holes easily distinguished from the natural avenues made by the insects themselves; when traced to the end each artificial hole held one or two rubies.

The purported association of the stones in the anthills with the underlying levels of the putative mine, another metonymical underpinning for the part-for-whole synecdoche of the gems displayed in San Francisco, is again shown to be
invalid: not only are the holes made by men clearly distinguishable from those made by ants but, as King so tellingly adds near the end of his deposition, in every case "about the salted ant-hills were the old storm-worn footprints of a man" (Deposition).

Later it would be discovered that Arnold and Slack had actually purchased the gems in Amsterdam and London (Wilkins, Mountaineering 184). If we agree with Fuller that a thing "carried from a place in which it is proper to one in which it is not proper" has already "undergone the process which makes words figurative or metaphorical" (49), then King's deposition amounts to a demonstration that what was claimed to be natural was all along rhetorical, the result of human agency, a product of the human will—a construct, to recall Fuller's words, "responsive to the wish and will of the writer." The swindlers' salted landscape-text is comparable to the "lying trail" written by that other troublesome figure, Magua, the one destabilizing the "grounds" of an expanding corporate capitalism just as the other destabilized the grounds of a European colonialism.

Self-Made Myths

King's exposure of the Diamond Swindle demonstrates how intentions insinuate their way into seemingly "natural" or "realistic" representation. It foregrounds the persistence of rhetorical mediation between language and the things it claims to represent, of the suspect character of King's own mimetic esthetic. Yet he seems never to have applied the lesson to his own texts; if anything, his trust in the authority and objectivity of his language grew stronger
following the incident. He seems to have seen in his analysis of the swindler's text not a warning about the subtlety and persistence of mediation, but a vindication of science as a way of discovering and outwitting it.

This heightened confidence in his own language is demonstrated clearly in a long passage, describing his 1873 ascent of Mount Whitney, that was added to the 1874 edition of *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada*. Following the climb, viewing the peak from below, King reflects on the persistence of "mythologizing" in our appreciation of landscape—a mode he feels has typified descriptions of mountains ranging from the Aryan myth of the "white elephant" Dhavalagiri to Ruskin's "Mountain Gloom" and "Mountain Glory" chapters in *Modern Painters* (252). Contrast with this mode is the scientific approach, as exemplified by the Alpine writings of the geologist John Tyndall. "To follow a chapter of Ruskin's," King writes, "with one of Tyndall's is to bridge forty centuries and realize the full contrast of archaic and modern thought" (253).

King acknowledges the power and attraction of the Ruskinian mode, but leaves no doubt as to which of the two is to be privileged. As he muses on "the geologic history and hard, materialistic reality" of the mountain, his reverie is interrupted by an archaic figure, a Paiute Indian elder who tells him that

the peak was an old, old man who watched this valley and cared for the Indians, but who shook the country with earthquakes to punish the whites for injustice to his tribe. . . . I watched the spare, bronzed face, upon which was written the
burden of a hundred dark and gloomy superstitions; and as he trudged away across the sands, I could but feel the liberating power of modern culture which unfetters us from the more than iron bands of self-made myths. . . . I saw the great peak only as it really is, a splendid mass of granite, 14,887 feet high, ice-chiselled and storm-tinted, a great monolith left standing amid the ruins of a bygone geological empire. (253)

The familiar dichotomy between "myth" and "reality" is here widened by King, who demotes myth to mere "superstition" as he imputes a "liberating power" to modern culture—which for him, as for so many others of his post-Darwinian generation, is exemplified by science. His alignment of science with "reality" implies the replacement of the Indian's myth with a projection of his own, but King does not make obvious what is really at stake here: the displacement of one ideology by another. The Indian's myth, his interpretation of the meaning of natural phenomena, is openly political, for it attempts to legitimate the restoration of his people's fast-dwindling power. But whereas the content of the Indian's myth is explicit, the politics with which King replaces it is disguised; couched in the language of science, it appears natural and objective to any reader who valorizes such language. This movement is very deft. The appearance is not of two ideologies in contention, but of an obvious "myth"—clearly a construct, openly political—being replaced by an innocent description, a mimetic, "unmediated" representation of just that sort of hard reality which, as Trilling reminded us, was well calculated to instill trust in the minds of King's American readers. King promises he will show us the mountain "as it really
is," and indeed the facts he proceeds to give us are reasonably accurate. But by offering them as a replacement for the Indian's myth—which is not a fact but a truth, a statement about the meaning of fact—he collapses a crucial distinction. According to Max Westbrook, this sort of conflation is common in "objective" or "realistic" discourse; in such usage, "fact and truth are the same, fact and meaning of fact are the same. All you have to do is invoke the magic word, reality" (13). King uses the word "really" here in just this way: as the magic word that allows him to pass off mere facts as their own meanings, to mythologize under the cover of simply reproducing the "real" in language. But to say that a mountain is 14,887 feet high is not merely to state a fact; it is also—if only in the implication that the fact is worth foregrounding for the reader—to suggest an interpretation. Of what value, after all, is it to know and to present this particular fact? To the Paiute elder—who might not dispute its accuracy—such a precise figure as "14,887 feet" has no meaning, for it has no relation to his ideology, to his culture or its prospects. But it is meaningful to King precisely because it establishes a datum in the immense grid he is imposing on the landscape, a mapping whose primary purpose is to allow the region to be more efficiently controlled and exploited. That this is the context in which this particular detail begins to have meaning is made clear by the metaphorical passage immediately following it, in which the mountain, now a perdurable symbol of American hegemony, towers above the "ruins" of the Indian's culture, whose time has passed just
as surely as a former geological epoch. By identifying the Paiute's culture with inevitable geological processes, the passage naturalizes that culture's disappearance; the text legitimates power by representing as natural what is really the result of human agency.

To write that the mountain is "ice-chiselled and storm-tinted" is to report a fact of geology, that the peak underwent glacial erosion and weathering. But to do so using metaphors grafted onto nature from the realms of sculpture and painting is to assign a meaning for this fact, to suggest that there is a shaping hand, a conscious design, at work in nature. For King that design could be no other than the belief that the nation's westward expansion, so greatly facilitated by his surveys, had divine sanction.

How I Loved Cotter: Mystifying the Frontier

The mountains of our great vacant interior are not barren, but full of wealth; the deserts are not all desert; the vast plains will produce something better than buffalo, namely beef; there is water for irrigation, and land fit to receive it. All that is needed is to explore and declare the nature of the national domain.

--Clarence King (qtd. in Raymond 631)

To be moved from national resource to commodity to profit, the West's holdings clearly had to be transformed by an investment of capital and labor. This was the elemental fact obscured by the myths and romances.

--Patricia Limerick (97)

King's description of "the nature of the national domain" is typical of a certain kind of travel writing. He knows the land is not "vacant" at all; if the tales in Mountaineering are any indication, virtually everywhere he
turned in it he found Indians, Mexicans, and newly arrived whites already in possession. But the rhetoric of discovery habitually effaces such human presences, producing an "attenuated" prose in which agency resides not with human beings but with the land itself (Pratt 123). Thus for King it is neither labor nor investment but the land itself that will produce wealth in the West, just as it is the land that legitimates its own appropriation. Such writing bespeaks the confidence of a maturing capitalism that sees no particular obstacles between the discovery of raw resources and their transformation into wealth: "all that is needed" is to know what is there and to proclaim it one's own. The ideological effect of such writing, as Limerick suggests, is to obscure the realities of western transformation, to write out of existence the unequal social structures organizing frontier economies. The West appears as edenic not only in its absence of previous human occupants, but in the absence of fixed social classes.10

That King founded his aesthetic, as he thought, in a "realistic" rejection of mythmaking is ironic, given that today Mountaineering reads so patently as part of the nation's myth of this "classless frontier." If this seems so in its descriptions of landscape, it is even more so in its narrative chapters, particularly in the two chapters detailing the ascent of Mount Tyndall. King's official report on this exploit is prosaic enough (Wilkins, Clarence 68), but the account in Mountaineering is full of bravado and hair-breadth escapes and has obviously benefitted
considerably in the retelling. This embellishment aims, of course, to thrill the reader; it also embodies the idea, popularized twenty years later by Frederick Jackson Turner, of the democratizing effects of the frontier. This myth creeps up on the reader gradually in those passages, scattered throughout *Mountaineering*, where the raw exigencies of western life bring members of disparate races and classes into intimate contact—the backwoods settlement where all eat together in the only inn, or the mountain storm which brings everyone together in the warmth of the same campfire. It is precisely the sort of interclass conviviality Olmsted hoped to induce with Central Park.

Like Olmsted, King moved in the highest society. In New York he frequented William Cullen Bryant's Century Club; in Washington he was close friend with the likes of Henry Adams and John Hay. On the high mountains of the Sierra, in contrast, King frequently finds himself teaming up with the only other member of the survey crew willing to take the risks of extreme mountaineering: the mule Skinner, Dick Cotter. These two men presumably would never have crossed paths back east, but as they pass through one alpine adventure after another, the social barriers between them appear to fall away. This process reaches its climax on the perilous ascent of Mount Tyndall, just when their shared hardships become most extreme—when night overtakes the climbers on a narrow shelf of rock, forcing them to bivouac with neither fuel nor shelter in temperatures fast falling toward zero. Such extreme circumstances produce a degree of
intimacy and cooperation impossible within the strictures of the metropolitan class structure. "How I loved Cotter," King wrote of the long, freezing night in which they nearly perished. "How I hugged him and got warm, while our backs gradually petrified, till we whirled over and thawed them out together!" (51). This is the natural exigency of frontier existence keyed to its highest pitch; survival both allows and dictates interclass contact that elsewhere would be proscribed.12

For the remainder of the climb, King and Cotter appear to work together as equals. Cotter more and more frequently takes the lead when King is at a loss as to how to proceed, and when the terrain steepens, they rope themselves together so that, should the worst happen, they will "share a common fate" (58). At one point, King is forced to tie his silk handkerchiefs around a spike of rock as an anchor (57); the fine cloth signifies King's superior status, but also serves as an aid to their mutual survival. Suggestively, this class marker is left behind early in the journey.

Cotter and King reach the top of the peak two days later. The apparent class integration which has developed during the climb will resume during their long trek homeward, but for a moment on the summit, we are reminded that it is only a myth after all. "I rang my hammer upon the topmost rock," King writes of this moment of triumph. "We grasped hands, and I reverently named the grand peak MOUNT TYNDALL" (64). The pronouns here are noteworthy: the two men share equally in the event by shaking hands, but to
King alone is reserved the right of naming the peak. This Adamic prerogative is his, of course, by virtue of his rank in the survey hierarchy, in the class structure which, despite the narrative's nearly ubiquitous assertions to the contrary, he has transplanted intact into the heart of the "democratizing" wilderness.

This brief slip is for King what the unnaturally placed diamond was for Arnold and Slack: an unintentional revelation that the "realistic" text is not a faithful reproduction of some objective "reality," but instead a construct, "responsive to the wish and will of the writer." The social function of this construct becomes clearer when we realize that it appeared just as King's detailed surveys were making the West less democratic--when, by facilitating the orderly development of the region by absentee corporate financiers, they were precluding the sort of individualistic entrepreneurship of the democratic myth. To see the myth in this way is to see its similarity to that of the old Indian, for whom mythologizing was a means of perpetuating a vision in spite of disturbing evidence that it would never again be a reality. It is also, perhaps, to see what may well be the only consistent thread running through the widely varied activities of King's career: his reading and writing of the West in ways that served an ideology of capitalist expansion. When that ideology called for accurate maps which would facilitate development, King was there to provide them with his transit and barometer. When it called for a secure and predictable investment climate, King was
there again—this time to deconstruct a swindle which threatened to panic the market. Finally, as the influx of capital began the long-running economic reorganization that would replace the mythic frontier hero—the lone prospector, the resourceful Forty-Niner, even the death-defying, mountain-climbing geologist—with the likes of Kennecott Copper and Peabody Coal, King was there again, not to deconstruct this time, but to construct a landscape that seemed the very embodiment of boundless opportunity, that maintained in image the illusion of what was even then being foreclosed in reality.

Notes to Chapter Four

1 For detailed treatments of the Mariposa War, see Solnit 268-354 and Annie Mitchell, "Major James D. Savage and the Tulareños."

2 The accepted white historiography of Yosemite Valley implies that Indians ceased to live in Yosemite after the Mariposa War.

Solnit points out, however, that considerable numbers of native people continued to live either in or immediately adjacent to the valley, and that those people were evicted on a recurring basis—by military forces in 1851 and 1906, and by the National Park Service in 1929 and 1969 (288). For details, see the discussion of Savage Dreams in Chapter Five.

3 See Bunnell 297-299. Bunnell claims elsewhere that "Ten-ie-ya was the last chief of his people" (80), but in fact there remained several other leaders of the Yosemite tribe, and resistance continued after Tenaya's death (Solnit 281-282).

4 Though created by federal legislation, Yosemite was not strictly speaking the first national park, because immediately after its creation the federal government ceded the site to the State of California for management. Yosemite would not become a national park until 1890, eighteen years after the creation of Yellowstone National Park, which remained under federal control from the beginning (Nash 106). See also Huth 65-68.
Rotundo, "Mount Auburn" 258; Sloane 45. In addition to these two sources, I have drawn in this section on Rotundo's "The Rural Cemetery Movement"; James J. Farrell's "Inventing the American Way of Death"; Stanley French's "The Cemetery as Cultural Institution"; Thomas Bender's "The 'Rural' Cemetery Movement"; and David Schuyler's "The Evolution of the Anglo-American Rural Cemetery." Hans Huth has preceded me in discussing the movement's relation to environmentalism (60-62).

The American Association of Cemetery Superintendents, which preceded by twelve years the creation of the American Society of Landscape Architects, was in many ways the latter group's direct antecedent.

In 1895, when the AACS changed the title of its official journal from Modern Cemetery to Park and Cemetery, the journal's editor noted that "the superintendents of our leading cemeteries" had long "recognized the fact that the requirements of the cemetery, apart from the burial of the dead, are very largely those of the park" (qtd. in Farrell 117).

Olmsted 13, Todd 145. Apparently because he feared that the funding requested by Olmsted for the new Yosemite park might be taken from the funds earmarked for his own California Geological Survey, Josiah Dwight Whitney helped to suppress this report, which never reached the California legislature and remained lost until it was recovered in 1952 (Roper 13).

Wilkins, Clarence 57; see also Roper 233-234.

As Patricia Limerick has pointed out, mining operations such as those at the Mariposa Grant provide a particularly clear window into this period of western history because they recapitulate the region's frenetic economic and social transformations in a sort of fast-forward:

Mining placed settlements of white people where none had been before. It provoked major conflicts with Indians. It called territories and states into being and forced them to an early maturity. It drew merchandising and farming into its wake. As it changed from individual enterprise to a consolidated, industrialized business, mining threw the West into the forefront of industrialized life. (99-100)

In reality King was highly class conscious, a fact that manifests itself when he writes in modes other than
that of the discovery narrative. Like Lafayette Bunnell, to
give one example, King tries to dissociate himself from what
he considers Yosemite's more vulgar visitors. Here he has
just passed near the famous Inspiration Point, which has
provided generations of visitors their first view of the
valley:

I always go by this famous point of view now,
feeling somehow that I don't belong to that army
of literary travellers who have here planted
themselves and burst into rhetoric. Here all who
make California books, down to the last and most
sentimental specimen who so much as meditates a
letter to his or her local paper, dismount and
inflate. (127)

On another occasion King writes of the "vulgar gold-dirt"
(154) of the mining districts in which he worked.
This contempt for Mammon strikes me as a hollow pose,
however, considering how assiduously King strove for wealth
later in his life. But at least in his belles-lettres
writings he evidently felt compelled to mimic the sort of
disinterested air which his wealthy friends could genuinely
afford.

11 In this scene and elsewhere, the sexual undercurrent
of King's adventures with Cotter is unmistakable. In
addition to a genuine homosexual desire it may mark a
certain gendering of King's class anxieties.

The two men's socially proscribed class relationship,
that is, may be conflated here with an equally "trans-
gressive" gender relationship. Any attempt at a queer
analysis of King would have to take into account his common-
law marriage to a poor black woman, Ada Todd--a heterosexual
but otherwise socially transgressive relationship crossing
boundaries of both race and class. William Howarth termed
this secret marriage "King's supreme fiction, the novel he
never wrote" (xi), and contends that while
King detested this secrecy . . . he lacked the
courage to defy prevailing social taboos. He also
had a lifelong preference for women of color, an
appetite that conveniently preserved his own
prestige and power. (xii)

The marriage may thus have functioned more generally to
compensate King for the feelings of social inadequacy he
presumably felt while circulating in the high society of
Washington and Manhattan. Todd was more than twenty years
younger than King (Wilkins, Clarence 359)--a factor which
also would have worked to bolster King's sense of power and
prestige.

Wilkins notes that while King was attracted toward
women of color, whom he seems to have viewed as embodying
"the archaic" he so much admired, "his role of voluptuary of
the primitive and exotic . . . could swing to that of bitter misogynist" when it came to white women "of his own class" (Clarence 359).

For details, see Mountaineering xi-xii and Wilkins, Clarence 362-364 and 408-411.
"We live," writes Bill McKibben, "in a postnatural world" (60). What might it mean to be postnatural? More specifically, how might notions of the postnatural help or hinder us in revising the myth we have come to call the environment? I have tried throughout this project to show how early constructions of the environment enabled and naturalized a position from which to misunderstand our relationships to the land and to each other, allowing literary environmentalism to serve not only a progressive ecological thinking but also a conservative social agenda. The question that interests me here is whether those constructions must continue to serve that agenda. In this final section I want briefly to examine the idea of postnaturality as it has been deployed in McKibben's The End of Nature and Rebecca Solnit's Savage Dreams, texts that seem to me to demonstrate both the danger and the promise of a postnatural environmental writing.

Nightmare in Eden

The danger is that a new environmental writing will simply reinscribe the old myths, and this is precisely what happens in Bill McKibben's oddly reactionary notion of postnaturality. Despite the postmodern ring of his book's
title, nature for McKibben remains an idea grounded in an ideal: wilderness, nature untouched by "man," the mythical scene of our origin and the physical scene to which we could always return to remind ourselves of who we are. But, says McKibben, genuine wilderness no longer exists, because such contemporary phenomena as ozone depletion and acid rain have altered the earth's entire ecosystem, leaving "every spot on earth man-made and artificial" (58). The ecological moorings of the idea of nature have disappeared, and this for McKibben is the crux of postnaturality.

Now that our wilderness paradise has been lost, one must work to imagine the pristine nature that was once so easily experienced. McKibben insists that we should continue to perform this work, and he tells us just how to go about it: first by suppressing any disturbing evidences of the social within the natural, and second by appealing to an imagined purity. The first of these steps requires a sort of willed blindness or psychological repression—what McKibben calls "[o]ur ability to shut the destroyed areas from our minds, to see beauty around man's degradation" (57). The second involves accessing an original wilderness of which one's own surroundings may be imagined as a copy.

If the ground is dusty and trodden, we look at the sky; if the sky is smoggy, we travel someplace where it's clear; if we can't travel to someplace where it's clear, we imagine ourselves in Alaska or Australia or some place where it is, and that works nearly as well. (58)

To illustrate how these processes work in the fallen world of the postnatural, McKibben describes an Adirondack lake in
which he and his wife like to swim. "A few summer homes
cluster at one end" of this lake, "but mostly it is
surrounded by wild state land" (49).

During the week we swim across and back, a trip of
maybe forty minutes—plenty of time to forget
everything but the feel of the water around your
body and the rippling, muscular joy of a hard kick
and the pull of your arms.

But on the weekends, more and more often,
someone will bring a boat out for waterskiing, and
make pass after pass up and down the lake. And
then the whole experience changes, changes
entirely. (49)

Clearly this utter change is as much psychological as it is
ecological; as important as any disruption of the lake's
ecology is the motorboat's intrusion into a carefully
-guarded psychic territory:

Instead of being able to forget everything but
yourself, and even yourself except for the muscles
and the skin, you must be alert, looking up every
dozen strokes to see where the boat is, thinking
about what you will do if it comes near. It is
not so much the danger. . . . It's not even so
much the blue smoke that hangs low over the water.
It's that the motorboat gets in your mind. You're
forced to think, not feel—to think of human
society and of people. (49)

To be forced to think rather than feel is to be forced out
of the aesthetic mode which permits McKibben to experience
this impure setting as wild, which allows him to blind
himself to the presence "of human society and of people."
For McKibben, the increasing difficulty of repressing this
ubiquitous "smoke" is the tragedy of the postnatural world.

The other task of the postnatural wilderness-seeker is
to appeal to an originary landscape. Since genuinely
pristine country is not available in the present, it must be
called up from the past, accessed from the literary
tradition of nature writing. Out "of a thousand examples,"
McKibben chooses to quote "his favorite," an exemplary
passage from George Catlin's journal, a description of a
valley "'far more beautiful than could be imagined by mortal
man,'" one of those increasingly rare "visions of the world
as it existed outside human history." McKibben makes no
bones about this passage's mythic function: it is "a
baseline, a reminder of where we began"; if it "had a little
number at the start of each sentence, it could be Genesis"
(52).

Of course, McKibben can imagine Catlin's valley as Eden
only if he can imagine Catlin as Adam, and Catlin can only
be Adam if he is the first man on the scene. This will take
some effort, for, in a passage elided by McKibben, Catlin
writes of this valley that

\[
\text{[t]he Indians, also, I found, had loved it once,}
\text{and left it; for here and there were their}
\text{solitary and deserted graves, which told, though}
\text{briefly, of former chants and sports; and perhaps,}
\text{of wars and deaths, that have once rung and echoed}
\text{through this silent vale. (105)}
\]

By excising this crucial sentence, McKibben makes an
inhabited valley into a wilderness via precisely the same
process he used to make a wilderness of his Adirondack lake.
But this valley, of course, was not supposed to be such a
performance; it was supposed to be the original.

Catlin himself fantasized this valley as Eden, but for
him it was not so easy to efface the presence of native
people. Indians, after all, were precisely what he had gone
out West to see. He nonetheless strives to minimize their presence—by relegating it to a mythified past—and this too is an act of narratorial and psychological repression. But in Catlin's case the repressed is still perilously close to the surface; the Indian grave yet "speaks" to him, and the sound of those chants and wars—of all that evidence of "human society and of people"—has clearly gotten into his mind, as McKibben might say. We are not surprised, then, to find Catlin prefacing his description with the following strange tale. He is camping out in the beautiful vale, sleeping peacefully, as it seemed, under the stars, when in the middle of the night I waked, whilst I was lying on my back, and on half opening my eyes, I was instantly shocked to the soul, by the huge figure (as I thought) of an Indian, standing over me, and in the very instant of taking my scalp!

"Paralysed" for a moment by a "chill of horror," Catlin soon realizes he is looking up at his horse. One does not need to be Freud to see here the return of what must always be repressed in constructing the wilderness Eden, in making of any previously occupied territory a scene of origin.

If Catlin, too, makes his wilderness via the same sort of willful repression by which McKibben makes a wilderness of his Adirondack lake, how can one say that today "all is changed"? What is clear is that these "originals" are as constructed as their postnatural simulacra. McKibben completely misses the crux of postnaturality: it is not that pure nature has been irreparably sullied, but that there was never any such purity to begin with.
Reading the Environment Responsibly

Unlike McKibben, Rebecca Solnit does not sidestep the implications of postnaturality. She engages the social dimensions of the environment forthrightly and, as I will argue below, responsibly. What might it mean to read and write the environment responsibly? To answer this I want to return briefly to the problem posed by Lafayette Bunnell's description of the genocidal "prospect" of Yosemite Valley. In *The Discovery of the Yosemite*, as we have seen, Bunnell aestheticized the Mariposa Battallion's genocidal activities, inviting his readers to understand the rightness of those actions through an appeal to the valley's natural beauty. "[R]efashioning the human subject from the inside," to recall Terry Eagleton's phrase, he interpellated his readers in a way that encouraged them to feel aesthetic beauty rather than think about political reality.

The situation is analogous to that analyzed by Myra Jehlen in a recent essay on the horrors depicted in Gustave Flaubert's *Salammbô*, and I would like to reframe her argument here, asking, "What would constitute a 'responsibility' of the reader of a text whose aesthetics seems to be grounded in such manifest evil?" Reading, Jehlen suggests, "ought to engage the imagination not only aesthetically but ethically as well" (10)—but what is the reader to do when when the ethical and the aesthetic are opposed? Bunnell is no Flaubert, and *The Discovery of the Yosemite* is no *Salammbô*, in terms of either literary sophistication or of the extremity of the depicted
atrocities. Nonetheless it seems fair to characterize it, as Jehlen does Salammô, as "a text that seems to have issued from a nightmare rather than a dream and seems to advance at each step in defiance of all duties save one," the "hardly moral" allegiance to beauty (10). More particularly, the extravagantly depicted violence of Salammô produces something very like the effect Bunnell achieves in his own depiction of Yosemite's ethnic cleansing,

something that less repulsive accounts might not achieve, namely, a separation of exquisite form from hideous content and the subsequent triumph of form over content. The separation occurs when readers are repelled by the content and attracted by the form; it occurs when a content, by its repulsiveness, forces the reader to become conscious of the difference between it and an attractive form. . . . Flaubert has created a tension between the repellent unpleasantness of the scene described and the aesthetic attraction of the description as art [and] this tension works to enhance the aesthetic experience by making it stand apart, distinctively valuable and moreover ultimately redemptive of the repugnance engendered by the disgusting content. (11)

In Bunnell's case, this "separation" is structured a bit differently; it is the scene we find attractive and the narration that is repugnant. Nonetheless, Bunnell's abstraction of form from content produces the same tension Jehlen describes above.

I am not suggesting that we are doomed to read The Discovery of the Yosemite with the same racist sensibility that Bunnell's contemporaries presumably brought to the text; clearly we are capable of maintaining a certain
critical distance. But what of our reading of its intertext, the Yosemite landscape "itself," which Bunnell has also written for us, via precisely the same strategy of aesthetic abstraction? I am not so sure we can completely divorce our appreciation of this text from the violence of its initial inscription; little has happened in the intervening century to suggest that Euro-Americans have rejected the sense that Yosemite's beauty is "ultimately redemptive" of its repugnant history. Our aesthetic responses, as Eagleton said, cannot be so easily controverted. Jehlen puts it a bit differently: "When the beauty of the literary expression triumphs over the ugliness" it expresses, "it also triumphs over the reader's ethical impulse to condemn" (11). Furthermore, the reader is even "brought to actually value" the ugliness, "since it permits such beautiful writing." Confronted with "an art that nourishes itself from the contemplation of suffering" (12), the reader "abjures her or his moral responsibility in order to enjoy [the] dream" (11).

What, then, may the reader do to "be responsible toward" a text such as Salammbô or Yosemite Valley? Jehlen suggests that the contradictions enabling such aestheticism are "permanent" and "can only grow further apart"; she doubts "whether there is anything beyond recognition to be done." She considers this a "weak conclusion" (13), and indeed mere recognition may not seem like much. But when the root of the problem is precisely repression—as it is in traditional literary environmentalism—then recognition
seems a crucial part of the solution. If we think of Yosemite not as a fixed natural inscription but as continually reconstituted social text, then recognition may become re-cognition, a rethinking of the landscape's uses and meanings. And if that rethinking is performed in response to the region's genuine history and politics—as opposed to some mythic essence of the landscape "itself"—it will constitute a responsible recognition. For a concrete example of what I have in mind, I turn now to Savage Dreams.

Landscapes in History

Rebecca Solnit does not use the term "postnatural"—the coinage appears to be McKibben's—but her Savage Dreams nonetheless strikes me as a genuinely postnatural text. It is not primarily concerned with changes in the biological configuration of life on the planet; it is not rooted in ecology, or nature, or even "reality." Unlike The End of Nature, Savage Dreams is not about escaping to some mythic origin, but about the here and now, "about trying to come to terms with what it means to be living in the American West." Where McKibben longs to "forget human society," Solnit strives to recover a full political and historical consciousness, and her writing is explicitly concerned with "how what we believe blinds us to what is going on," in particular to "how the nuclear war that was supposed to be our future and the Indian wars of our past are being waged simultaneously" in the present (xi).

Savage Dreams categorically rejects the "problematic idea" of virgin wilderness (24). It does not cling to the
idea of nature as eternal and separate, nor does it privilege particular landscapes on the basis of traditional aesthetic criteria. Rather it juxtaposes two landscapes that at first seem utterly unassimilable: the highly canonical Yosemite National Park in California, and the decidedly noncanonical Nevada Test Site northwest of Las Vegas. What relates the two is not nature but political struggle, the fact that both are flash points in the "hidden wars of the American West." Each is a fiercely contested site, and each has witnessed the unspeakable—genocide on the one hand, and some nine hundred nuclear explosions on the other. Each deepens the author's conviction that "political engagement [is] a normal and permanent state" (14).

For the writer of the postnatural environmental narrative, landscape must highlight rather than obscure the complexities of politics, and the Nevada Test Site does this well. It is a central target of the international antinuclear movement, useful for its ability to give concreteness to "[t]hat utter abstraction the Arms Race" (14). It is also part of a 43,000-square-mile tract of land that the Western Shoshone people consider their nation, land they have never ceded and are still actively trying to claim (30). The first half of Savage Dreams details Solnit's participation in Native American land struggles and in the American Peace Test of the late nineteen-eighties and early nineties. The narrative focuses not on the lyric portrayal of landscape—though there is some of that—but on her
conversations with the various people contesting the landscape: her fellow nuclear protestors; government officials from the county, the military, and the Department of Energy; and Western Shoshone tribespeople, such as the ranchers Mary and Carrie Dann.

The Danns' story is particularly instructive because of the way it complicates environmental politics, implicating traditional environmentalism in the larger structures of power that organize the West. In particular, the Danns' narrative shows how Bureau of Land Management policies designed to protect the ecology of rangelands prove inseparable from unresolved questions of sovereignty and the ongoing oppression of the Shoshone. Says Mary Dann of her first encounter with a BLM official:

> [H]e was waiting for me in the house, and we talked, and he says, "Do you know you're trespassing?" I told him I wasn't. I told him that the only time I'd consider myself trespassing is when I went over on the Paiute land. Then I would be trespassing, I says. I'm in our own territory, our own treaty. I told him about the treaty and showed him the map and he told me, "Well that's a big territory." And I told him, Yes." (159).

The tone is gentle, but challenging, and there is no promise of any easy resolution. When the BLM threatens to confiscate the Danns' cows, the antinuclear protestors join forces with the two women. Since many of the protestors are themselves environmentalists with traditional views of ecological purity—including a distaste for cattle grazing on public rangeland—the incident becomes a complex parable of environmental revisionism.
Savage Dreams makes no effort to reduce the complexities of environmental politics to a simple visual image of a picture-postcard wilderness. Solnit's desert and mountain environments are free to exist and evolve within human history. They are not perpetually available for the nature writer's mythic reinscription; they are places that have always been inhabited, places that have already been invested with a multitude of stories. Savage Dreams is "responsible" precisely in its response to these stories: rejecting the traditional habits of repression and mystic appeal, Solnit insists that competing stories be restored and heard; that they be evaluated from an ethical rather than an aesthetic standpoint; and finally that their conflicting claims be negotiated.

This is a complicated and often messy process, and not necessarily conducive to the elegiac style of traditional nature writing. Solnit's landscape descriptions are often poetic, but she is wary of investing scenery with transcendent meanings. It is instructive to compare McKibben's traditional (and traditionally masculine) treatment of his Adirondack lake to Solnit's postnatural description of a swim in the Yosemite Sierra:

I finally got to Lake Tenaya, on a warm day in August. The water was marvelously clear. . . . Skeins of golden light slipped over the lake floor, and rounded boulders rose out of the water or hovered just below its surface. . . . It was an uncanny place. It was hard to trust that this cold, clear substance would bear me up if I immersed myself in it, or that I would emerge the same as I went in. In the gravelly shallows, eddies of fool's gold rose around me at every
With its domestic imagery ("skeins") and its references to roundedness and immersion, this is a decidedly feminine landscape. But it is not the typical scene (as analyzed by Annette Kolodny and epitomized by writers from Cooper to McKibben) of the masculine subject's escape from the suffocating domestic order of civilization, nor is it an attempt to imagine a stable, transcendent ground of identity and meaning. It is, rather, a landscape "hard to trust," sparkling with "fool's gold"—a perfect figure for the unreliability of the "natural" significations swirling around the subject. It is literally a fluid rather than a fixed scene, not a secure ground in which to affirm one's identity. The author suspects that the water will not "bear her up," and she fears uncertain changes should she enter it. Where McKibben might have found solidity and assurances, Solnit offers a cautionary tale of fluidity and transformation.

In the second half of *Savage Dreams*, Solnit approaches Yosemite's mountain landscape with a political consciousness awakened in the politics of the Nevada desert. She finds Yosemite, too, a fiercely contested site, an intersection of struggles over both land and the meaning of land. She acknowledges the work of traditional environmentalists trying to change the more destructive policies of the Park Service, but she problematizes what is merely an ecological agenda by situating it within human history. Citing the
insights of postmodern ecologists like Daniel Botkin, she points out that attempts to "restore" Yosemite to a "pre-contact" state are both incoherent and politically obnoxious: the valley as it was "discovered" by Savage and Bunnell was not a wilderness, but a garden that had been tended for thousands of years by native people. Efforts to "restore" Yosemite to a "wilderness" state provide a point of continuity with earlier white attempts to naturalize the valley--attempts stretching back to the days of Mariposa War.

Such a purely ecological approach to managing the park reinscribes a colonialist mythology under the guise of "protecting" the land. It naturalizes a racist historiography predicated on the idea that Yosemite's Ahwahneechee Indians "became extinct" in the nineteenth century. Writing across this official grain, Solnit reveals that in fact large numbers of native people have continued to live either in or immediately adjacent to the park, and that the federal government has seen fit to evict them on a recurring basis--not just in 1851 but also in 1906, 1929, and 1969. This is a decidedly different "prospect" than the traditional view still privileged by the National Park Service's own interpretations (288).

Such hegemonic interpretations are challenged most effectively, of course, by the Ahwahneechee people themselves. Particularly instructive is a story related by Jay Johnson, a Park Service employee and an Ahwahneechee, "part of the leadership of the Mariposa Indian Council
attempting to get federal recognition for the 2,000 Southern Miwok still in the area" (290). In 1980, Johnson and four other Yosemite Indians visited the Smithsonian Institution, where they found an exhibit about their tribe. A caption offered the information that the Yosemites had ceased to exist, and Johnson tried to alert a Smithsonian employee to the error. The ensuing exchange is a telling parable about the social construction of the environment. As Solnit retells the story, Johnson informs a curator that the exhibit "is nice, but there's an error in the statement,"

and she says, "Oh no, there can't be. Every little word goes through channels and committees and whatnot," and I says, "It's OK, but," I says, "It tells me that there are no more Yosemite Indians today." She says, "Well that's true, it's very sad but whatever's out there is true." So I say, "Well I hate to disturb you, but I'm a Yosemite Indian, and we're here on business for our tribe." And she caught her breath and said, "Ohhh, uh, let me call somebody," and she called somebody who was in charge of exhibits, and I went and told her the same thing. If there's a statement saying that there are descendants of the Ahwahneechees living there today, all of us natives would be satisfied. But it hasn't been changed. (292-293)

It should not be thought odd that the Ahwahneechees, discursively effaced and literally dispossessed, would be satisfied with such a seemingly minor concession as simply revising this caption—nor that the Smithsonian should be so reluctant to revise it. Each side recognizes in this epistemological standoff the key to both the interpretation and the ownership of the nation's most canonical landscape. By foregrounding this linkage between interpretation and
ownership, *Savage Dreams* departs radically from what I referred to in Chapter One as the "Great Books" tradition of literary environmentalism. In that tradition, the national parks function as an environmental canon, a collection of reverently preserved texts with seemingly transparent and unchallengeable meanings. Through the interlocking interpretive activities of institutions such as the National Park Service and the Smithsonian, those meanings are generated and disseminated as part of the larger formation of "cultural literacy," the highly selective complex of knowledge that, as E. D. Hirsch quite correctly claimed, helped to "create" and serves still to "perpetuate" the nation (ix). The postnatural environmental writing of *Savage Dreams*, by contrast, works not to perpetuate but to destabilize the fictional narrative of "nation," not least by restoring the voices traditionally excised from it. Where the purely natural environment has functioned as a myth facilitating the landscape's appropriation and commodification, the postnatural environment may serve as a revisionist history, a new and more inclusive myth enabling the landscape's democratization. If that is what it means to live, as McKibben insists we do, "in a postnatural world," I see no need to mourn nature's demise.
WORKS CITED


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VITA

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