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Back to Nature:
Location, Identity, and 'Naturalization'

Ellen M. Evans

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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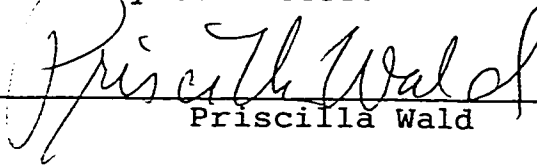
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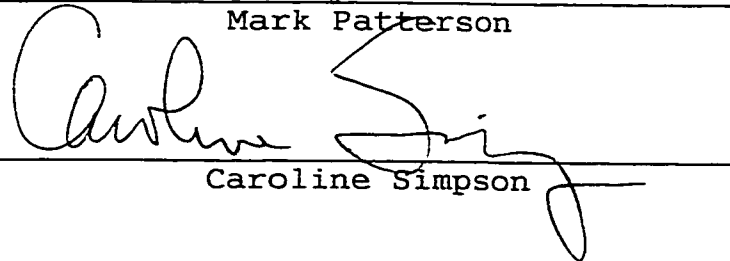
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Abstract

Back to Nature: Location, Identity, and 'Naturalization'

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As with other ideological representations, particular cultural constructions of landscape, environment, wild(er)ness, and Nature perform the work of empowering some members of human society while simultaneously disempowering others. Similarly, representations of specific geographic locations --even those that would be portrayed as "wild" or "natural"-- like representations of race, gender, and class, are never neutral; they themselves create and perpetuate particular meanings. By examining the enduring and persistent, but nevertheless unstable, conception of Nature as the site in U.S. popular culture for (re)invention of the self, this thesis interrogates the representational relationship between Nature and social identities.

Ideas of who and what is "natural" rely on a foundational conception of Nature. If the differences between human beings are seen to be "natural," then they are beyond question, permanent and fixed. It is the object of this thesis to elucidate the ways in which both social identities and ideas about Nature are, in fact,

never "natural," but ideologically-constructed products whose representations reflect and attempt to contain particular structures of values and interests. Because the concept of Nature is itself contingent, subject to change, it is the work of representation to "fix" its meaning as well as the would-be "natural" identities of certain subjects. Thus, the two sets of representations are mutually constitutive: each requires the other to effect its signifiatory power.

Through close readings of a number of modern and contemporary U.S. popular texts, this thesis shows how issues of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and their intersections shape and are shaped by cultural perceptions of Nature. Part One revisits the well-known convention of Nature as proving ground for hegemonic manhood. Part Two explores the consequences that this overdetermination of Nature as the domain of hegemonic masculinity has had for those socially situated as Other in U.S. society.

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INTRODUCTION:
"NATURAL" HISTORY

I. The Problem

In his introduction to "Ideas of Nature," Raymond Williams remarked that,

... the idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history.... I've previously attempted to analyse some comparable ideas, critically and historically. Among them were culture, society, individual, class, art, tragedy. But I'd better say at the outset that, difficult as all those ideas are, the idea of nature makes them seem comparatively simple.¹

Teasing out the strands that together constitute a particular cultural construction of nature is indeed a daunting prospect. It is not my goal in this project to theorize much about how or even why such constructions have had and continue to exert such a tenacious grip on the U.S. American cultural imagination. Suffice it to say

that they do. Rather, the intent of my dissertation is to show, by means of a variety of examples, the ways in which constructions of non-human nature and/or wild(er)ness, and constructions of certain U.S. American social identities are mutually constitutive.

Before going further, I wish to make a distinction between what I mean by nature, that is, the entire realm of the actual living world, and western cultural conceptions of (a mostly non-human) Nature. In my use of the lower- and upper-case, I follow philosopher Neil Evernden's lead:

... I have adopted the convention of speaking of "nature" when referring to the great amorphous mass of otherness that encloaks the planet, and [of] speak[ing] of "Nature" when referring specifically to the system or model of nature which arose in the West several centuries ago.²

Let me say, too, along with Evernden, that "[a]lthough this distinction may initially be confusing, I believe the need for it will become apparent" (xi).

For the very starting point of my dissertation is the recognition that, as with other ideological representations, particular cultural constructions of landscape, environment, wild(er)ness, and Nature do the work of empowering some members of human society while simultaneously disempowering others. Similarly,

representations of specific geographic spaces --even those that would be portrayed as "wild" or "natural"-- like representations of race, gender, and class, are never neutral; they themselves create and perpetuate particular meanings. Raymond Williams deftly explored the correlation between the two sets of representations in England in The Country and The City. More recently, U.S. geographer Don Mitchell, in The Lie of the Land - Migrant Workers and the California Landscape, has foregrounded the direct connection between "the material production of landscape and the production of landscape representations" in the "Golden State."³

The lack of interrogation of such terms as "nature" and "wilderness" is perhaps nowhere as conspicuous as in present-day discourses of "environmentalism" and "ecology," though contemporary U.S. American "nature writing" runs a close second. It is my object in this dissertation to better elucidate the ways in which both social identities and ideas about wild(er)ness or Nature are, in fact, never "natural," but altogether ideologically constructed, products whose representations reflect and attempt to contain particular structures of values and interests.⁴

Following a discursive logic reminiscent of Judith Butler's in Gender Trouble and Bodies that Matter, Heidi Nast and Steve Pile assert that "sex, gender, race, skin,

blood are indeterminate and unstable signifiers of the differences and similarities between bodies. This understanding provokes questions, not about the real make-up of bodies, but about how bodies are really made-up."⁵ Nast and Pile argue for what might be understood as an embodied geography or an emplaced understanding of identity:

Bit by bit, bodies become relational, territorialized in specific ways. Indeed, places themselves might be said to be exactly the same: they, too, are made-up out of relationships between, within and beyond them; territorialized through scales, borders, geography, geopolitics. Bodies and places, then, are made-up through the production of their spatial registers, through relations of power. Bodies and places are woven together through intricate webs of social and spatial relations that are made by, and make, embodied subjects. (4)

It is precisely these relationships between identities and locations that I wish to explore. I have chosen to focus on the enduring and persistent, but unstable, conception of wild(er)ness or Nature in American popular culture as a site for (re)invention of the self. How do constructions of "wild" or Natural locations

influence constructions of subjects and how, in turn, do representations of particular social identities influence representations of places, and vice versa? What is it that mediates between our natural environments and our (un-natural?) selves? How do language and literature construct or inform our experience of the world? When Lawrence Buell asks, "By what social processes is Place constructed?"⁶ I want to insist also on the corollary to that question: By what geographic and metaphoric influences of Place are social identities constructed and/or contained? Locating oneself, or being located, in Nature or wilderness is a thoroughly cultural activity. When subjects set forth to experience Nature or "the call of the wild," they are accompanied by cultural expectations that the encounter may change their social identity in some meaningful way. Similarly, ideas about nature or wild(er)ness have never fallen outside of human history; Nature, as much as Identity, is a product of culture.

As Williams reminds us in his cogent essay, we understand the "nature" of a thing to refer to its inherent, innate, essential, "true," and immutable qualities (68). I am interested to see how it is that representations of Nature work to naturalize that which occurs within their province and how it is that Nature becomes a central component in the construction of so-

called natural identities. What is the significance, for example, of the use of the term "naturalization" in reference to the attainment of citizenship?

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall has discussed the "logic" of "naturalizing" ideologies in the representation of identity and subjectivity. If the differences between people "are 'cultural,'" he says, "then they are open to modification and change. But if they are 'natural'... then they are beyond history, permanent and fixed."⁷ I want at this point to indicate two crucial components of this "naturalization" process. First, before anything can be fixed as "natural," it is necessary to have an ideology of Nature. There is nothing "natural" about such ideologies. As Andrew Ross observes, "ideas that draw upon the authority of nature nearly always have their origin in ideas about society."⁸ Then, because the concept of Nature is itself contingent, subject to change, it is the work of representation to "fix" its meaning as well as the would-be "natural" identities of subjects. Thus, the two sets of representations are mutually constitutive; each requires the other in order for either one to succeed in its representational work.

My dissertation explores the ways in which representations of geographic locations and representations of identities are deployed side-by-side in

a broad range of modern and contemporary U.S. literary (and some cinematic) texts in order to suggest ideas about a particular subject's "place" (as determined primarily by race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality) in the national landscape and to consolidate conceptions of what Nature and/or wild(er)ness are. All of the texts I discuss contain at least one rhetorical instance of what I have come to think of as a "back-to-nature" gesture or move. Through careful analysis of these textual moments, I hope to illuminate the ways in which representations of locations and representations of identities work to create, reinforce, and perpetuate one another.

II. Methods

For some suggestive ideas about how identities and "naturalness" intersect, I turn again to Hall, who comments: "Identities are... constituted within, not outside representations."⁹ As he elaborates, the challenge of achieving a seemingly stable representational identity, which is never "natural," is to make it appear as if it were:

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices....

Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity.... [emphasis added] (4)

Citing Bhabha, Hall concludes, "So the 'unities' which identities proclaim are, in fact, constructed within the play of power and exclusion, and are the result, not of a natural and inevitable or primordial totality but of the naturalized, overdetermined process of 'closure'" [emphasis added] (5).

It is my contention that invocations of Nature, or strategic deployments of representations of the "natural" or the "wild," often perform this very function of "naturalizing" social identities. In turn, because some social identities have over time become so inextricably associated with these representations of Nature, the presence of these particular subjects serves to inscribe or re-inscribe the "natural"-ness of the location.

I treat it as a given that no one representation or set of representations is static or monolithic; perhaps by revealing the ways in which representations of both Nature and human identity are already unstable, we can better understand how they influence each other. Ultimately my hope for this project is that it may contribute in some

small way to create visions and representations that prove liberatory for both human and non-human nature. In Hall's words:

Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being... [H]ow we have been represented bears on how we might represent ourselves. (4)

Specifically, then, I seek to understand how issues of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and their intersections shape U.S. cultural perceptions of nature and the "wild" and how, in turn, conceptions of the non-human or the "more-than-human" (Evernden's "great amorphous mass of otherness that encloaks the planet") inform the ways in which human beings interact with one another. To once again quote Williams:

Out of the ways in which we have interacted with the physical world we have made not only human nature and an altered natural order; we have also made societies. It is very significant that most of the terms we have used in this relationship -- the conquest of nature, the exploitation of nature-- are derived from real

human practices: relations between men and men
(sic). (84)

The ways in which we regard and relate to one another in human society are inevitably linked to the ways in which we perceive and conduct ourselves with respect to the larger realm of Life as well. Again, representations are neither neutral nor "natural," but always inflected by the interest in power --whether power over other (human and non-human) lives and land forms or by the interest in empowering oneself and others in resistance to hegemonic practices of domination. Surely the better we understand how this works, the better our chances of improving our relations with each other as well as with the "environment." As Williams says, "We need different ideas because we need different relationships" (85).

III. Organization

By way of analysis of the intersection between physical location and subject position in a variety of U.S. narratives, my dissertation first revisits the motif embedded in American literature of men going out into Nature or wilderness in order to achieve --usually through acts of violence-- their masculinity. Although this dynamic is well-rehearsed, I seek to show how it "naturalizes" Nature as well as "men." I then demonstrate how various counter-hegemonic representations interrogate

or contest this better-known and culturally dominant representation of "Man and Nature." I draw attention to the ways in which these literary representations reflect concerns about one's "natural" place in the world and the difficulties that arise for a variety of "Other" subjects when they try to "locate" themselves in Nature. The question for me is not so much how canonical texts would represent our relationship to each other and to the larger world, but how less well-known representations challenge these inscriptions and therefore offer interesting potential for reconfiguring many kinds of relationships.

Part One, "Back to Nature," reviews in two chapters the traditional readings of wilderness narratives with respect to subject and location, focusing especially on the well-known convention of Nature as a proving ground for hegemonic (i.e. white, heterosexual) manhood. As mentioned, what is not much noticed in these readings is the way in which these Nature-bound inscriptions of normative masculinity simultaneously inscribe nature as Nature --or Nature as "natural," if you will. That is, I argue that cultural constructions of white heterosexual masculinity and representations of Nature are mutually constitutive. Through a series of readings of popular texts, I show how their representations of both white heterosexual masculinity as the "natural" category of humanity (i.e. "Man" or "mankind") and their constructions

of Nature are both inherently unstable and dependent upon one another for coherence.

In Part Two, "Location, Identity, and 'Naturalization'," I explore the ways in which constructions of "difference" affect the production and practice of representing Nature and wild(er)ness and vice versa. These chapters examine the material consequences that the overdetermination of Nature as a site "belonging to" or equated with white heterosexist masculinity has had for women, gays and lesbians, and people of color, respectively.

Thus, Chapter Three, "Against Nature?" looks at representations of those gendered and sexualized as "different" from normative white male heterosexuals by reading narratives by and/or about gay men, women, and lesbians that problematize and challenge the kinds of representations of both location and identity that were discussed in the first two chapters. What strategies do such narratives employ to contest these hegemonic representations? Are they successful? Much contemporary nature writing by women deliberately conflates the concepts of "nature" and "woman" in attempts to unsettle what bell hooks calls "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy."¹⁰ What does this rhetorical move enable? What does it foreclose? Do representations of gay and lesbian identity complicate constructions of Nature? Do

representations of Nature consolidate or unsettle representations of sexualized Others?

The fourth chapter, "Black Bodies, Green Subjects," adds to these discussions of gender and sexuality considerations of 'race' and ethnicity as I focus on six narratives by and/or about black subjects in "wilderness" (Evelyn White's "Black Women and Wilderness," David Bradley's The Chaneyville Incident, Eddy Harris's Mississippi Solo, Barry Lopez's "The Negro in the Kitchen," June Jordan's "Report from the Bahamas," and Percival Everett's Watershed). Representations of the 'raced' subject offer a sharp contrast to the embedded cultural assumptions surrounding both constructions of "natural" places and the identities of those who inhabit or frequent these locations.

The final chapter of my dissertation, "'Nature's Nation' Revisited" asks how national identities are configured and represented with respect to constructions of Nature and vice versa. I interrogate the construction of a U.S. national identity which was historically predicated on a notion of a salvific encounter with "wilderness." In this chapter I read Hisaye Yamamoto's "Life Among the Oil Fields - A Memoir" against F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby as a way to frame the discussion of Asian American-ization which follows. This chapter concludes with readings of two narratives that

contest the notion of state-imposed borders which seek to prohibit citizens from accessing the Nature thus enclosed.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature" in Problems in Materialism and Culture (New York: Verso, 1980) 67.
2. Neil Evernden, The Social Creation of Nature (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) xi.
3. Don Mitchell, The Lie of the Land - Migrant Workers and the California Landscape (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1996) 1.
4. W.J.T. Mitchell, in Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology, defined ideology broadly as "the structure of values and interests that informs any representation of reality." (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1986) 4.
5. Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile, Introduction, Places Through the Body, eds. Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (New York: Routledge, 1998) 4.
6. Lawrence Buell, public talk, University of Washington, Nov. 3, 1998.
7. Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the 'Other'" in Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, ed. Stuart Hall. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1997) 245.
8. Andrew Ross, Introduction, The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life - Nature's Debt to Society (New York: Verso, 1994) 15. Raymond Williams writes, "What is often being argued, it seems to me, in the idea of nature is the idea of man; and this not only generally, or in ultimate ways, but the idea of man in society, indeed the ideas of kinds of societies." ("Ideas of Nature" 70-71.) See also Neil Evernden, The Social Creation of Nature.
9. Stuart Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?" in Questions of Cultural Identity eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1996) 4.
10. bell hooks, Outlaw Culture - Resisting Representations (NY: Routledge, 1994).

PART ONE:

BACK TO NATURE

CHAPTER ONE:
MAN AND NATURE

I. Ideas of Nature, Ideas of Man

The significance of ideas of nature to the development of modern Western culture has been widely addressed. Such studies invariably focus on the central importance of Wild Nature as a foundational concept against which the development of culture or "civilization" stands in opposition.¹

The notion of Wild Nature has also been considered integral to the formation and construction of the U.S. national character, as evidenced by some of the most influential traditional scholarship in American Studies: Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier" writings, Errand into the Wilderness and Nature's Nation by Perry Miller, Roderick Nash's Wilderness and the American Mind, Leo Marx's The Machine in the Garden, and Henry Nash Smith's

Virgin Land, to name just a few.

The theme of emigration to that place which would become known as America was from the beginning freighted with the promise of starting over in a "New" or "virgin" Land --an idea that by definition requires an underlying concept of terra incognita, of a state of Wild Nature into which man (sic) might penetrate and create an identity for himself while simultaneously shaping the identity of the land.² The formation of national character, then, can be understood as having had at least two components: the constitution of the identity of geographic locations (e.g. "the west," "the south," "the heartland" and so on) and the constitution of the identities of those who frequent or inhabit these locations.

Any ideology of new beginnings, of course, requires a tabula rasa upon which its burgeoning history may be inscribed. If you are operating with an ideology of "taming wilderness," you must first of all render the place "wild" before you can tame it. In the case of much of what would become the United States, this of course meant the destruction and/or forced relocation of its indigenous inhabitants --along with all evidence of their considerable influence on the environment itself, that is, their culture.³ Thus, the importation of the European ideological precept of "starting over" in a "new world" practically guaranteed the extinction and/or "removal" of

native peoples. Only then could the place itself be reconstituted as "new," "vacant," "wild," and its former inhabitants (re)presented by the colonizing culture as "savage" or "primitive" or "vanished," thus setting the stage for the historically unprecedented social experiment to be known as "America."

It is well to remember that the idea and meaning of Nature or wild(er)ness in the cultural history of the U.S. has always been unstable, subject to change. Contrasting contemporary U.S. understandings of the meaning of "wilderness," William Cronon points out that,

[a]s late as the eighteenth century, the most common usage of the word 'wilderness' in the English language referred to landscapes that generally carried adjectives far different from the ones they attract today. To be a wilderness then was to be 'deserted,' 'savage,' 'desolate,' 'barren,' --in short, a 'waste,' the word's nearest synonym. Its connotations were anything but positive, and the emotion one was most likely to feel in its presence was 'bewilderment' --or terror.⁴

Cronon reminds us that the notion of wilderness then was of a place one went to against one's will: "Whatever value it might have arose solely from the possibility that it might be... turned toward human ends" (70). One need only

think of Hawthorne's representation of wilderness in The Scarlet Letter to get the picture.

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the idea of Wild Nature was enjoying better press. As Cronon comments,

That Thoreau in 1862 could declare wildness to be the preservation of the world suggests the sea of change.... Wilderness had once been the antithesis of all that was orderly and good --it had been the darkness, one might say, on the far side of the garden wall-- and yet now it was frequently likened to Eden itself.... For [John] Muir and the growing numbers of Americans who shared his views [on the desirability of preserving America's most scenic places], Satan's home had become God's own temple. (71-72)

As far as modern and contemporary U.S. American ideas about Nature, Cronon and others have traced the two main influences of Enlightenment aesthetics (the romantic "sublime" and, later, "primitivism") that, in Cronon's words, "converged to remake wilderness in their own image, freighting it with moral values and cultural symbols that it carries to this day" (72).

"Seen in this way," Cronon writes, "wild country became a place not just of religious redemption but of

national renewal, the quintessential location for experiencing what it meant to be an American.... To protect wilderness was in a very real sense to protect the nation's most sacred myth of origin" (76-77).

As many critics have shown, the hegemonic American identity (that is: white, heterosexual, male) has traditionally been inscribed in the national cultural imagination by means of representations of vivid and violent encounters with Nature. Richard Slotkin calls it "regeneration through violence" and comments that:

The literary efforts to create an image of the American character... had since 1785 emphasized the idea that Americans were a new race of people, independent of the sin-darkened heritage of man, seeking a totally new and original relationship to pure nature as hunters, explorers, pioneers, and seekers.⁵

These are not new ideas. However, that which seems not to have been much noticed is the way in which inscriptions of normative masculinity (i.e. as the natural category of humanity: "Man" or "mankind") in turn simultaneously inscribe certain physical locations or phenomena as "natural" or "wild." In this chapter and the next I argue that cultural constructions of white heterosexual U.S. masculinity and representations of Natural places, and/or Nature itself, are mutually

constitutive.

I contend that invocations of Nature, or strategic deployments of representations of the "natural" or the "wild," are often used to perform the function of "naturalizing" hegemonic identity. In turn, because certain U.S. "natural" or "wild" locations have over time been overdetermined as the province of heterosexual white U.S. masculinity, the representation of hegemonic subjects in these locations serves to inscribe or re-inscribe Nature as "natural."

Thus, for example, when Leo Marx in The Machine in the Garden comments on Huck Finn's "naturalness" on and alongside the Mississippi river, rather than interrogating representations of either the boy or Nature, he is asserting as "true" an equivalency between the two that is purely ideological.⁶ (An association between the two that Mark Twain/Samuel Clemens has merely suggested is reified by the "authority's" reading of it.) In this way, a particular representation of maleness as "natural" and of a particular representation of Nature as "naturally" a "man's world" becomes enfolded into an ongoing hegemonic cultural project. That is, as I will demonstrate in the following analysis, cultural representations of both masculinity and Nature such as those in Huckleberry Finn, while appearing to "report" the association between Nature and manhood as incontrovertible fact, are rather producing

identities for Nature and for Man that promote hegemonic interests.

Marx sets up his argument for Huck's "naturalness" non pareil by observing the two rhetorical poles of Clemens's previous descriptions of the Mississippi: "To the trained pilot," wrote Clemens, "the river is a book that delivers its most guarded secrets; but to ignorant passengers it is only a pretty picture" (321). Marx asserts that for Clemens, neither approach to the river's representation is wholly satisfying: "In learning the matters of fact necessary to his vocation the pilot loses, or so [Clemens] thinks, the capacity to enjoy the beauty of the landscape" (321). On the other hand, more "poetic" descriptions of the river merely mimic "established literary convention" of the time: "As a writer of comic travel books, Clemens recognized that the stock language of landscape appreciation was easily deflated by exposure to simple, everyday facts" (322). Clemens's challenge then, according to Marx, was to convey what Marx calls a "genuine feeling for scenery" (322).

We might notice here that although he stops short of calling it that, Marx is commenting on Clemens's dissatisfaction in the face of what Clemens considers "unnatural" representations of the river:

The sunset in "Old Times" is a dramatization of this literary problem. Before "learning the

river," [Clemens] says, the pilot had enjoyed the stock response. Seeing boughs that "glowed like a flame" and trails on the water that "shone like silver," he had stood "like one bewitched," drinking it in, "in a speechless rapture." The calculated triteness of the language, a literary equivalent to the painter's picturesque, matches a trite view of nature. But that was the pilot's feeling before his initiation. Afterwards, [Clemens writes],

... if that sunset scene had been repeated, I should have looked upon it without rapture, and should have commented upon it, inwardly, after this fashion: "This sun means that we are going to have wind to-morrow; that floating log means that the river is rising, small thanks to it; that slanting mark on the water refers to a bluff reef that is going to kill somebody's steamboat one of these nights...." (322-323)

Commenting on Clemens's dilemma, Marx writes, "The beautiful view, it seems is for those who see only the surface of nature. Behind every appearance of the beautiful there is a fact of another sort. 'No,' says the initiated pilot, 'the romance and the beauty were all gone from the river'" (323). What is at stake for the writer, according to Marx, is nothing less than the achievement of a natural representation of Nature: "There are many differences between these two points of view, but the most important is the relation to nature each implies" (324).

Marx goes so far as to suggest an equation here to

the problem of the representation of Nature that beset both Thoreau in his construction of Walden and Melville in his crafting of Moby-Dick, asserting that the "dilemma" is "omnipresent in nineteenth-century culture":

Like Melville's Ishmael, Clemens's narrator is confronted with an impossible choice between two modes of perception: one is aesthetically and emotionally satisfying, yet illusive; the other is analytically and practically effective, copes with harsh realities, yet is devoid of all but utilitarian value and meaning. The choice is between the mawkish sentiments of the passengers and the bleak matter-of-factness of the pilot. For Samuel Clemens, to be sure, this was not an abstract issue. Yet neither was it simply another theme that he could manipulate as a cool, professional craftsman. For him the problem had an immediate, practical urgency: it was a problem of language, of style. If Huckleberry Finn is any indication, what Clemens wanted was to affirm the values embodied in the landscape in its actuality. (324-325, author's emphasis.)

Might we not question what this phrase implies? What is a particular landscape's "actuality" if not some idea of its inherent nature, its "naturalness"? Marx concludes the

argument he has framed for the literary and aesthetic importance of Huckleberry Finn to the representation of Nature in American literature by noting, "Clemens's solution ... is implicit in the choice of Huckleberry Finn as narrator..." (325). The sentence intrigues me for its suggestion of a kind of equivalency between a place and a person, or between Nature and a particular human subject.

And indeed, Marx goes on to rhapsodize at length about Huck's virtues as the narrator par excellence of the river. He mentions "the boy's movement from society toward nature" (326) and talks of the "delights" that Huck and Jim enjoy in their early life upon the raft: "above all a sense of the bounty, beauty, and harmony made possible by an accommodation to nature" (327). Marx comments on the novel's re-enactment of the tradition of Nature's liberatory promise as configured over and over again in American culture: "[Huck and Jim's freedom aboard the raft] embraces all of the extravagant possibilities of sufficiency, spontaneity, and joy that had been projected upon the American landscape since the age of discovery" (330).

Marx's assertion of Huck's primacy to the scene -- that is, to the "natural" setting of the river-- culminates in his citation of "Huck's incantatory description" of sunrise on the Mississippi at the beginning of Chapter Nineteen. Marx declares of this

narration, "In all our literature, indeed, there is nothing to compare with [it]" (331):

There are countless descriptions of the dawn in literature, yet no substitute exists for this one: it is unique in thought and feeling, in diction, in rhythm, and tone of voice. And, above all, it is unique in point of view. Unlike the passengers in "Old Times," or, for that matter, most traditional observers of landscape, this narrator is part of the scene he describes. (At the outset Huck and Jim are sitting in the river with water up to their waists.) He brings to his account no abstract, a priori idea of beauty. (332)

Again, although he never uses the word, Marx is everywhere emphasizing an idea of how "natural" Huck is to the scene he's describing: he's literally immersed in it, that is to say, physically part of it; and his response is a "natural" one, unencumbered by ideas or training. Tellingly, I think, Marx has singled out Huck's subject position, the passage's "unique" point of view, as key to its verisimilitude, its ability to descriptively capture the landscape "in its actuality." By asserting Huck's 'belonging'ness or 'natural'ness to the setting --as he will do momentarily-- Marx asserts Huck's unparalleled qualifications for narrating it-- that is, Nature. In

this way, the two sets of representations are set up to mutually inscribe one another as "natural."

Marx next comments on Huck's diction, arguing that it "adds to the feeling of immediacy" in the description: "[Huck] seems to recall the events at the very instant of perception, and nature, too, is captured in process..." (333). Marx argues that Huck and the river are essentially one and the same: "Everything is alive, everything is changing; the locus of reality is neither the boy nor the river, neither language nor nature, neither the subject nor the object, but the unending interplay between them" (333).

Marx next argues that because "his language is native to it," Huck Finn "'belongs' to the terrain":

This fact, probably more than any other, accounts for the astonishing freshness of the writing. Sunrises have not changed much since Homer sang of the rosy-fingered dawn, but here, no doubt, is the first one ever described in this idiom. Its distinctive quality resides in the historical distinctiveness of the narrator, his speech, and the culture from which both derive. (333)

Marx hereby claims that "the method of vernacular narration" provided Clemens with "an alternative to the rhetoric of both passengers and pilots" (334):

Huck is neither the innocent traveler nor the initiated pilot. He sees the snags but they do not interfere with his pleasure. In his mind the two rivers are one. His willingness to accept the world as he finds it, without anxiously forcing meanings upon it (his language is lacking in abstractions), lends substance to the magical sense of peace the passage evokes.... By adopting the point of view of the boy ... Clemens achieves a unified a mode of perception. (334-335)

Again and again in this reading Marx emphasizes Huck's "naturalness." He proclaims that in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, "for the first time, the [pastoral] mode is wholly assimilated to a native idiom.... By committing himself to a vernacular narrator, Samuel Clemens lends the sense of place a freshness and lyricism unmatched in American writing" (319). According to Marx, the polarized "relation to nature" implied by the differences in point of view embodied by steamship passengers and steamship pilots is unified in the person of an American original, Huck Finn. In asserting Huck's "naturalness" as equal to that of Clemens's representations of the Mississippi, Marx falls prey to the very conflation that he would purport to critique: the notion of an equivalency between a purely American "nature" and a "pure" American. Again, the

production of identities --in this case, those of Man and Nature-- are reported as if they were matters of fact rather than the fictional representations they actually are.

II. Westward Ho(mo)

Masculinity is not something given to you, something you're born with, but something you gain.... And you gain it by winning small battles with honor.

-Norman Mailer, Cannibals and Christians

The idea of the American West as the unparalleled site of proto-wildness in the U.S. is a persistent one in American letters. In "Walking," Henry David Thoreau ruminates on this notion and makes a number of unabashed assertions concerning the supposed properties of "west" and "east."⁷ In general, he attributes certain qualities of "wildness," which he determines to be lacking in the eastern U.S., to "the west": "The future lies that way to me," he writes, "and the earth seems more unexhausted and richer on that side.... Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free" (603). He continues:

It is hard for me to believe that I shall find fair landscapes or sufficient wildness and freedom behind the eastern horizon. I am not

excited by the prospect of a walk thither; but I believe that the forest which I see in the western horizon stretches uninterruptedly toward the setting sun.... (603)

Comparing the untried promise of the western U.S. to the already known (and, as he sees it, used up) "east" (which he sees as but an extension of the "Old World"), Thoreau advances an Emersonian argument for the development of a culture superior to any yet known on earth, deriving from the promise of this "wildness." He quotes the geographer Guyot thus: "America is made for the man of the Old World Each of his steps is marked by a new civilization superior to the preceding..." (606).

Further conflating "the West" with "the Wild," Thoreau elaborates the unparalleled potentialities of both:

The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the world. Every tree sends its fibers forth in search of the Wild. The cities import it at any price. Men plow and sail for it.... It was because the children of the Empire were not suckled by the wolf that they were conquered and displaced by the children of the northern forests who were.... Life consists

with wildness. The most alive is the wildest.

(609-611)

By Thoreauvian reckoning, then, he (sic) who would "consist[] with wildness" must needs head west. This idea, which was hardly new in the nineteenth century, persists in the contemporary U.S. cultural imagination and the West so ideologically represented inscribes and is in turn (re)inscribed as a "masculine" site by virtue of representations of white heterosexual masculinity. In these would-be representational equivalencies, that is, (as demonstrated by the preceding example of Huck Finn and the Mississippi), by virtue of his presence in a location inscribed as "natural," (white heterosexual) "Man" acquires his "natural" masculinity; the "wild" place, in return, becomes "naturalized" as a location in which it is "natural" for (white heterosexual) men to be.

The following discussion, which will be extended in Chapter Two, focuses on modern and contemporary narratives set in the American west in which there is a rigid correspondence between representations of straight white man-hood and representations of what might be considered uniquely "western" landscapes. My readings of these texts demonstrate how the two sets of representations are mutually constitutive, inscribing the identities of both persons and place as "natural."

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Delineating the way in which identities are formed, Stuart Hall writes of "the politics of exclusion which all subjectification appears to entail":⁸

... identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal.... And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries.... It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process. (2-3)

Following Derrida, Laclau, and Butler, Hall elaborates the importance of oppositonality to the construction and consolidation of identity:

Above all, and directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks... [that] 'identity' can be constructed. (4-5)

True to form, the narratives that follow construct white heterosexual masculinity in opposition to a host of Others: women, black men, Indians, gays and Wild(er)ness

or Nature.

Insofar as the following narratives portray the American West as the site in which these representations of hegemonic masculinity are enacted, I think it is well to point out that the representational work of western locations is already well established in U.S. cultural history. That is to say that the idea of the place (i.e. the equation of the west with "real men") is already "in place." Indeed, it is probably impossible to overemphasize the signifying capacity of this well-established equivalency.

Furthermore, because representations of "wild(er)ness" and Nature are implicitly set in opposition to Culture and/or Civilization and/or "the domestic," I will also be at pains to remind us constantly of their masculinist signification throughout these readings.

I have chosen a short story by Wallace Stegner as representative of embodying the kinds of Nature/Culture oppositions on which much of the popular cultural constructions of the U.S. west rely for their dramatic tension. Having analyzed the Stegner text, I will then discuss a variety of narratives from the vantage point offered by this story: that is, the west as a locale inscribed by and equated with a rigid ideology of white heterosexual manhood --an ideology which in turn

reinscribes "masculinized" representations of the place as "wild" or "natural."

An author who enjoyed both great popular and critical acclaim in his lifetime, Stegner continues to be widely regarded as one of U.S. America's pre-eminent writers of the West.⁹ Stegner's fiction is noteworthy for its gendered representations of men's and women's "places" with regard to "western" space, in particular. This apportionment of space and the supposed qualities that attend a western geographic locale is aptly illustrated in his short story "In the Twilight."¹⁰

A coming-of-age story, the narrative focuses on the events of a single fall day, describing the interactions of a family involved in the killing and butchering of a female pig. "In the Twilight" examines a boy's initiation into a very particular ideology of masculinity, an induction that relies on his perceiving himself as "male" in opposition to "female."

As Hall describes and as the story depicts, formation of identity is "a process [that] operates across difference.... It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process" (3). Stegner's narrative focuses first on preparations for killing the sow, an animal which it has been the boy's job to feed. He has perceived her as a "frantic beast":

The sow fascinated him, though he disliked

her intensely.

... he hated the pig's lumbering, greedy rush when he appeared with the pail, he hated her pig eyes sunk in fat.... her vast bestial pleasure in the hunching of her spine and the deep, smacking grunts that rumbled out of her.

(137-138)

Bruce observes that "[i]n a sense she was his personal enemy" (138) because he finds feeding her so unpleasant and because, although too young to realize it, he resents her for her impending death. As Bruce sees her, she is a creature of disgusting appetites whose very existence becomes an affront. As we shall see, manliness in this story is defined precisely by the degree of success with which the male distances himself from and asserts domination over the feminine. (Quoting Laclau, Hall emphasizes the importance of the oppositional to the achievement of identity: "Derrida has shown how an identity's constitution is always based on excluding something and establishing a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles -- man/woman, etc." (5).)

In the kitchen on the morning of the butchering, Bruce and his older brother eagerly anticipate the killing of the sow, while their mother and father contest the boys' participation in the event. Representing the male realm, the father, who will kill the animal, teases his

sons about and encourages their bloodlust. Representing the female realm, their mother, on the other hand, doesn't want the boys to participate at all, not even to watch. When Chet and Bruce exult aloud about the sausages and pork chops that the sow will provide, their father approvingly calls them a "[c]ouple of cannibals" (139) and when the mother still protests, "I don't think they should see things like that," he accuses her of wanting to make them "siss[ies]" (140). When she infantilizes or emasculates her youngest, calling him "Brucie" and urging him not to go outside with his father and older brother, we see that the boy's incipient manliness is threatened. He deliberately disobeys her.

What is at stake for the son is his father's, his older brother's, and his own sense of himself as "a tough guy" (144, 145). The killing of the sow represents his passage into the manhood prescribed within the culture of his family and community. When he becomes nauseous and almost passes out at the pig's death, he is at risk of having failed a test, the terms of which have been established in his cultural milieu for attainment of manhood/masculinity. Feminine power is portrayed in the story not only as embodied in first the living and then lifeless body of the pig, but in the mother, whose activities are bounded to some degree by the walls of the house. Masculinity is embodied here in the father, the

figure who has the power to put this female life to death: Bruce's eyes "were still full of the picture of his father standing over the dead sow, towering, triumphant, the bloody knife in his hand, his back huge and broad and monstrous with power" (142).

There are several dualisms at work here: Nature (Female, the sow) vs. Culture (Male) as well as a feminized domesticity represented as emasculating but life-preserving vs. a death-delivering ritual of violence that confers masculinity. The dualisms, while unstable, are nevertheless represented in the figures of the mother and the father. As Barbara Ehrenreich has commented, "within my own, working-class, Western, extended family [,] masculinity has meant freedom, motion, and adventure, while women stood for entrapment, stasis, and 'civilization'."¹¹

When Bruce becomes incapacitated, his father summons the boy's mother to take him into the house, the female/domestic realm, separating him from the domain of the butchering, the realm of "wildness" (the outdoors), which is represented as the men's world. Bruce lies on the sofa with his eyes closed:

Shame made him turn over and lie face down.

What he had done was sissy. Chet hadn't got sick, and the other kids out there watching now weren't sick, or they wouldn't be yelling that

way.

... Everybody was helping but him, and he lay inside like a baby because he couldn't stand the sight of blood.

... he had to go out there and show them that he was as capable of watching a butchering as any of them. (143)

The boy wants, badly, not to experience this shameful "weakness," but he's still too sick to rise from the sofa. When he musters a "queer, violent hatred for the old sow" (143), however, he recovers enough to go back outside.

Reappearing, Bruce once again earns his father's approval, but when his father plunges his hands down into the galvanized tub containing the sow's entrails, the boy "felt his stomach go weak" (145). The father pulls out the pig's bladder, washes it in fresh water, and puts it to his lips. Bruce summons all of his inner reserves to stave off the nausea that rises in his throat and the dizziness that blackens his vision. He feels that if he were to display "sissy" qualities a second time he would be stigmatized for good as unmanly. Instead, when the father inflates the sow's bladder and ties it off, making a ball, and then tosses it onto the ground, Bruce, "[h]is lips tight on his nausea, the blackness almost covering his sight, ... [t]he vomit in his very throat," is the first boy of all to kick the bladder-ball "as hard as he

could" (146).

When he focused on his contempt for the animal, "[h]is nausea was gone, his whole mind centered on that ritual act of kicking the sow's insides around, dirtying them in the dust of the field, taking out on them his own shame and his own fear and hatred and disbelief" (146). The story ends with Bruce's recognition that he has triumphed over the peril posed to him, and perhaps to the family structure and even the community, by the male's failure to be "masculine" and to act in "manly" ways: "And when they finally broke the bladder, far down the coulee toward school, he stood over it panting, triumphant, so full of life that he could have jumped the barn or carried the woodshed on his back" (146).

By the end of the butchering, Bruce has understood and accepted the terms of membership in this white, heterosexist, patriarchal world, a world apportioned into prescribed "masculine" and "feminine" spaces and codes of conduct. He has further learned that if he is to negotiate successfully the gendered social arena of this world, it may prove useful to lavish contempt upon that which is seen as weak or repugnant or scary; he has discovered the importance of representing himself in opposition to the "female."

The theme of bloodletting as the young, heterosexual,

white male's point of entry into manhood in modern U.S. culture is of course not exclusive to the writing of Wallace Stegner. Indeed, it seems almost ubiquitous. Faulkner's Ike McCaslin enacted an initiation via hunting, as did Hemingway's Nick Adams. And then, of course, there are the countless cultural narratives of young men who go to war and return, for better or worse, as men.

It would appear, in fact, that in much of the hegemonic U.S. cultural imagination, a young man's coming of age or entry into manhood is represented through an act or acts of violence. Moreover, as in the Stegner story just discussed, the canonical literature is replete with figures of the father who would "make a man" of his son by taking him hunting.

Norman Mailer's Why Are We in Vietnam? is just such an account.¹² This novel follows the trajectory launched by Stegner's and similar narratives as it explores the cost of maintaining white heterosexual supremacy and its legacy of violence. Nominated for the National Book Award in 1967, Mailer is concerned here, as Hemingway was, with the idea of "men without women."¹³ The narrative, spun out by "D.J.", an eighteen-year-old white heterosexual Texan on the eve of his induction into the army, recounts the grizzly bear hunt he (and his best friend, Tex) had undertaken with D.J.'s father and several other men into the Brooks Range of Alaska two years previously.

By virtue of choosing a wilderness setting, I argue, Mailer is seeking to "naturalize" the young men's achievement of (white, heterosexual) masculinity. By situating the narrative in Alaska, evidently intended to represent the Super West, the "last frontier" (as Alaskan license plates proclaimed until a few years ago), the narrative struggles to stabilize the "meaning" of Alaskan wild(er)ness. It is as if the wild(er)ness that "Alaska" represents is too wild to serve unproblematically as a representation of a "naturalizing" Nature and therefore requires some explanatory interpretation before it can do its job of naturalizing masculinity. Thus, there are a number of moments in the narrative where reassurances are offered that "it's not that wild, man, it's not jungle, icicles, glaciers, mountain peaks, abysses, no, man, this patch right by to them here is nearly like Switzerland" (129), and "you might just as well be in Yosemite" (129), and "could be Colorado, not Alaska in September" (135), and "could be the Colorado Rockies it's so sweet right in the middle of the beginning of all that snow" (198).

Because it is not the more conventional western setting (i.e. the Rockies), whose representational role in conferring white heterosexual masculinity is well established, the narrative has got to do some extra work to make "Alaska" (re)presentable. What's wanted, that is, is metaphorical "wildness," and Nature, but recognizably

so. On the other hand, by choosing a representation of Super Wild(er)ness, Mailer can better argue for his characters' hyperbolic masculinity.

D.J.'s stream-of-consciousness riff is rife with misogyny, racism, and anti-Semitism, not to say species-ism --evidently invoked to establish an analogue between U.S. hegemonic culture (white, heterosexist, macho) and the U.S. military campaign in southeast Asia. One is asked to accept that the novel's venomous ethnic slurs and misogynist asides are not incidental, that is, but integral to a narrative which postulates the innate superiority of a particular creature (a white, heterosexual, U.S. male) over all other denizens of the planet and the consequences of that valuation.

Women are not invited on this hunting trip, but their presence is constantly invoked as an aid to securing the men's (hetero)sexual insecurities in a womanless space. Similarly, the figure of the Jew and the racialized Other flickers everywhere within and without this text. Both D.J.'s best friend, Tex, and the assistant hunting guide are described as being at least part Indian. Even D.J.'s daddy, Rusty, wants to lay claim to some indigenous identity: "don't forget ah got a drop of the fucking redskin elixir too" (75). The darkest racial shadow, though, is cast on this narrative by the (absent but nevertheless threatening) black male in dozens of

references to "spades" and "niggers." Primarily, the black male's presence is evoked by the rhetorical rhythms of the text, which D.J. constantly challenges the reader to try to discern. Is this account really being narrated by me, he asks, a young white Texan stud, or by "a black-ass cripple Spade... sending from Harlem." (224)? At the heart of this narrative, in short, is a masculinity that would define itself in opposition to "femininity", a white identity that would define itself in opposition to "blackness," and a heterosexuality that would define itself in opposition to homosexuality, as I will show.

Intent on "bagging" himself a "griz," D.J.'s daddy, Rusty, will stop at nothing. The bigger the trophy, in the group's eyes, the manlier the man, and as the highest-ranking CEO of his company present here, Rusty feels he has no choice but to bring down the biggest bear. When he fails to be the first in the party to kill something, the narrator remarks, "if he don't get a bear now, he can transfer to Japan" (126). In his ensuing singleminded obsession, the father violates the trust and respect of his son forever, as will be discussed shortly.

Mailer is explicit about the correlation in the novel between sexual prowess and manhood. Chapter Five is entirely devoted to a discussion of the hunting party's guns: the number and kind that each man possesses and, principally, whose is better looking, bigger, more

powerful, and so on. Indeed, when Rusty fails to kill the first bear that the hunting party encounters, he regards it as a failure to perform sexually: "Rusty was sick. He had to get it up" (112).

From the moment of their arrival in the Alaskan wilderness, the men respond to the wildlife they encounter by shooting it. Given the weaponry they pack, in some cases shooting the animal is tantamount to decimating the carcass to the point where nothing is salvageable -- neither hide, nor meat, nor head for trophy mounting. As D.J. explains, "it was a haul of big-ass game getting, for among the five of us safari payers we had a limit of twenty-five assorted grizzly, moose, ram, goat, and caribou" (105). The boy describes one photographic tableau of their group: "Five sets of horns held in the arms of five shit-eating grins standing in semicircle..." (111).

Not despite, but because the word Vietnam is not even mentioned until the book's last page, Mailer evidently intends this big game massacre to stand as an allegory for white heterosexual American males' need to conquer. As argued here, the national construction of white manhood/masculinity is predicated on the assertion of dominance over ... everything. The exigencies of maintaining this gender identity, he seems to say, begets a nation of would-be warriors who must above all have

armed conflicts --wars-- in which to demonstrate and constantly renew their prowess.

When Rusty claims credit for killing an enormous bear that D.J. has, in fact, shot first, the boy feels so betrayed --so emasculated-- by his father that he persuades his friend, Tex, to head away from the hunting camp with him in the middle of the night.

Although the book's entire hunting trip would seem situated as a "back to nature" narrative, when D.J. and Tex head into the mountains they go into a deeper, wilder Nature, as it were. If, as I've already pointed out, the representational value of Alaska is to signify Super Wild(er)ness, then this move is clearly designed to leave no doubt that the crucible of their emergence as men is an environment that is the essence of the Natural. As it turns out, this is indeed the realm in which their identities as U.S. American men get "naturalized".

Seeking to exorcise the bad feelings incurred from the hunting group's unbridled shooting spree, hoping to purge themselves of being "half-fouled with the emanated nauseas of medium assholes and Rusty's high-grade asshole, disillusioned... and just in a general state of mixed shit..." (186), the two boys head off alone. What afflicts them is a combination of the shame provoked by their hunting party's wanton wastefulness ("toilet plunger holes seen in caribou, and shattered guts and strewn-out

souls of slaughtered game meats all over" (186)) and the dishonorable and conflict-ridden representations of masculinity embodied by D.J.'s father and the other men in the party. It is as well, no doubt, the shadows of women, Jews, Indians, and blacks that play around the edges of the entire hunting expedition. At that moment, Tex

gets the purification ceremony straight in his head and announces to D.J. that they gonna wrap their weapons and lash them in a tree, and then they going to walk through the forest and up to the peak... nothing to protect themselves with ... cause they going to live off the land. (188)

Ah, this sounds familiar: back to nature in search of purification. The gesture is as old as the idea of "America". And what is it that greets the boys there in the mountains? Well, it's whiteness and virility, that's what.

The first encounter with whiteness is the snow, whose "dazzle is like sunlight on the water" (190). Next comes a wolf. Not any ordinary wolf, but a "white wolf and he weigh in at one hundred and plus and plus, just a long big high beast of a white police dog" (192). Then it's (not ewes, mind you, but) "twelve Dall ram on an outcropping of snow... and through the binocs they are so white" (197). They see a fox and a bear and "see a white hare... looking like white Benny bump tail on a caribou" (204) and "up in

snow country again" a herd of caribou and finally, "a flight of cranes went over, one hundred, two hundred, so now there were hundreds and hundreds" (209). Blinded by all this whiteness, the boys feel better, reassured in their racial identity. And at the end of this day of white marvels, the two young men will have yet one more animal visitation, namely from a bull moose, "that King Moose with antlers near to eight feet wide across" (211) as if to reinstate unequivocally their threatened manhood and represent it as something hyperbolic and unassailable.

The two boys feel all but scoured clean of the "mixed shit" with which the day began, which paves the way for the climax of their vision quest. D.J. presents this turning point as the true moment of his coming of age: "D.J. could have wept for a secret was near, some mystery in the secret of things" (211). The narration continues:

... they were wired up by the mixture of fatigue, cold, and the first good rest they'd got, and by the life of the day they had just passed, and by the clean in them free of mixed shit.... So they breathing hard with all of this, lying next to each other like two rods getting charged with magnetism in electric coils.... God was here, and He was real and no man was He, but a beast, some beast of a giant jaw and cavernous mouth with a full cave's

breath and fangs, and secret call: come to me.
They could almost have got up and walked across
the pond and into the north without their
boots.... (217)

This, I take it, is meant to be their Call of the Wild.
What it would seem to convey is that the boys have
succeeded in gathering together the sundered parts of
their identities and becoming purified by virtue of
immersing themselves in Nature and being washed clean by
all its whiteness and reassuring virility. There is yet
one aspect of identity that must be consolidated in these
young men, and before the night is out, sleeping side by
side under a sky pulsating with northern lights, that
challenge, too, they will have met. For next comes
perhaps the most perilous test of true U.S. manhood:

In the field of all such desire D.J. raised his
hand to put it square on Tex's cock and
squeeze.... temptation made him weak at the
root of his balls ... and vibrations coming off
Tex tonight like he giving up the secret of why
he never tried to bugger old D.J... it came out
in the night some tension of waves of unspoken
confession from Tex to D.J. that Tex ... was
finally afraid to prong D.J., because D.J. once
become a bitch would kill him... and they hung
there each of them on the knife of the divide in

all conflict of lust to own the other yet in fear of being killed by the other, and as the hour went by and the lights shifted, something in the radiance of the North went into them, and owned their fear, some communion of telepathies and new powers, and they were twins, never to be near as lovers again, but killer brothers, owned by something, prince of darkness, lord of light, they did not know; they just knew telepathy was on them, they had been touched forever by the North and each bit a drop of blood from his own finger and touched them across and met, blood to blood... and the deep beast whispering Fulfill my will, go forth and kill.... (219-220)

This, then, is the final requirement for real manhood: the repression of homosexual desire. Having experienced Nature firsthand in one of earth's wildest places, undefended, Tex and D.J. are now "naturalized" as white heterosexual men. They get up off the ground and return to camp; two years later, they are on their way as "killer brothers" to Vietnam.

What the Stegner short story sets up and the Mailer novel elaborates is this: Never mind that Bruce is never under any actual threat from the sow, nor the big-game hunters from the wildlife they encounter, by representing Nature as oppositional to (white heterosexual) men, Nature

itself is made to seem more "natural" (i.e. not-human) while at the same time "naturalizing" white heterosexual masculinity as the most "natural" category of humankind. Representations of hegemonic masculinity assume and require a "naturalizing" Nature. The idea of Nature, likewise, assumes and requires the "naturalizing" presence of hegemonic masculinism in order to enable its representational work. Neither white heterosexual masculinity nor the idea of a Nature that can "naturalize" social identities is, in fact, the least bit "natural," but the ideological equation works to make them both seem indisputably "true," placed beyond question.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. See, for example, Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in his Problems of Materialism and Culture (New York: Verso, 1980) 67-85; Lynn White, Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" Science 155-3767 (10 March 1967): 1203-7; Neil Evernden, The Social Creation of Nature (Baltimore: John Hopkins U.P., 1992); Max Oelschlaeger, The Idea of Wilderness - From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1991); Carolyn Merchant, The Death of Nature - Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980); Clarence J. Glacken, Traces on the Rhodian Shore - Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century (Berkeley: U. of Ca. Press, 1967); Keith Thomas, Man and the Natural World - A History of the Modern Sensibility (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983); Richard Tarnas, The Passion of the Western Mind (New York: Ballantine, 1993); William Leiss, The Domination of Nature (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974).

2. See especially the work of Annette Kolodny: The Lay of the Land - Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975) and The Land Before Her - Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860 (Chapel Hill: Univ. of N. Carolina Press, 1984)

3. See, for example, Frederick W. Turner, Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit Against the Wilderness (New Brunswick: Rutgers U.P., 1983); Patricia Nelson Limerick, The Legacy of Conquest - The Unbroken Past of the American West (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987); Lucy Maddox, Removals - Nineteenth Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs (New York: Oxford U.P., 1991); William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); William M. Denevan, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492" in The Great New Wilderness Debate, eds. J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson (Athens: Univ. of Ga. Press, 1998) 414-442.

4. William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in Uncommon Ground - Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1996) 70.

5. Richard Slotkin, Regeneration Through Violence - The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860 (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan U.P., 1973) 557. See also Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land - The American West as Symbol and Myth 1950 (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1978)

6. Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden - Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America. (New York: Oxford U. P., 1964) 319- 341. I have picked Marx somewhat arbitrarily for purposes of this illustration. However, Marx's influence continues to be considerable. Lawrence Buell, for example, names The Machine in the Garden as "the best book ever written about the place of nature in American literary thought" and calls Marx "unquestionably the most influential formulator of the ideology of American naturism," (while also noting the limitations of some of Marx's formulations). The Environmental Imagination (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1995) 11; note 7, p.440.

7. Henry David Thoreau, "Walking" in The Portable Thoreau, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Penguin, 1974) 592-630.

8. Stuart Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?" in Questions of Cultural Identity, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1996) 2.

9. The author of twelve novels and seven nonfiction works, Stegner was acknowledged in his lifetime with public recognitions ranging from the Pulitzer Prize to an NEH Senior Fellowship. Himself regarded as an accomplished "western" writer, Rick Bass (a heterosexual white Montanan) credits Wallace Stegner for his own inheritance as a writer and as a "Westernner":

As a team of oxen pulls in a double-yoke, he used his talents as an artist and as an activist, all his life, to help give us what we have now: what we have as a community of artists and what we have as a community of those who love the landscape of the West. (Rick Bass, "On Wilderness and Wallace Stegner," The Amicus Journal, Spring 1997) 24.

On the other hand, while similarly crediting Stegner for having successfully purveyed a stubbornly persistent hegemonic representation of the west that erases its pre-White, indigenous inhabitants, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, a Crow Creek Sioux scholar and the author of Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner and Other Essays - A Tribal Voice (Madison: U. of Wisconsin P., 1996) criticizes and condemns him for abdicating his ethical responsibility:

There is, perhaps, no American fiction writer who has been more successful in serving the interests of a nation's fantasy about itself than Wallace Stegner.... though it is possible for those of us who read his works

to wonder whether or not he grasped the final immorality of such a position. ("Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner") 29-30.

10. Wallace Stegner, Collected Stories of Wallace Stegner (New York: Random House, 1990) 137-146.
11. Barbara Ehrenreich, "The Decline of Patriarchy," in Constructing Masculinity, eds. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson (N.Y.: Routledge, 1995) 286.
12. Norman Mailer, Why Are We in Vietnam? (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1967)
13. Barbara Ehrenreich comments: "It was Leslie Fiedler, the literary critic, who first commented on this theme in the early 1960s, saying that the classics of American literature bespeak a flight from "mature heterosexuality" on the part of men. And, by this, he meant the flight from women. In American literature, men do anything --chase white whales, float down the Mississippi on rafts-- anything to get away from women." ("The Decline of Patriarchy," 286.) See also Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel 1960 (New York: Stein and Day, 1982).

CHAPTER TWO:
THE CALL OF THE WILD

I. Real Men Run With the Bears

Andrew Ross has argued recently that the emergence of figures of "the great white dude" in contemporary U.S. American culture is simply a variation on a theme of white heterosexual male paternalism.¹ He notes that,

men who are born free and with a historical sense of full constitutional entitlement... men whose self-sufficiency positions them beyond class and race[,] it is such men who[se].... fierce individualism alludes to a culture of free association identified with the Western states.... So, too, their libertarian form of environmentalism is geared toward direct, untrammelled encounters with 'wilderness'...(170)

Observing that "masculinity, whatever it is, is not individual, it is cultural" (171), Ross continues:

the ecology movement has been the only one of the new social movements where straight white males... have felt at home in their voice or their bodies.... [A]ngry white men have found an accommodating haven under the big tent of environmentalist science, where they are not automatically required to address questions about race, class, gender, and sexuality.... Here, then, is one place on the map of progressive politics where the Great White Dude can hang his hat, while indulging in varying degrees in the wilderness cults traditionally associated with the making of heroic, white, male identities.... (174)

Doug Peacock's Grizzly Years might be read as the very literary embodiment of Ross's diagnosis of the "great white dude." Subtitled In Search of the American Wilderness, the text is dense with constructions of both U.S. American ideas of manhood and various, sometimes contradictory, ideologies of "wildness" and "nature."² For all of its attempts to position its author as a counter-cultural figure, an enlightened champion of grizzly bear habitat and preservation, Doug Peacock's memoir would nevertheless seem but a variation on the reinscription of white heterosexual masculinity described by Ross. The entire narrative may be read as an extended

variation on the same kind of back-to-Nature moves enacted by D.J. and Tex in Mailer's novel.

Peacock, a green beret medic in Vietnam, returns to "the world" suffering from the post-traumatic stress disorder that rendered so many Vietnam war veterans recluses from society. Like many of his combat brethren, Peacock seeks refuge in non-human nature. Over time, most of it spent as far from human society as he can attain in the contiguous forty-eight states (namely within Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks) he becomes an observer and a familiar of grizzly bears, a practitioner of eco-sabotage (or "ecotage"), and a champion of the cause of "grizzers."

Describing a personal history where "solitary expeditions into the woods became the focus of my early life" (18), while in Vietnam he carries with him always a small road map of Wyoming and Montana:

I stared at it, especially at the blank spaces, for several hours of every day for over a year as I pulled duty on different military bases scattered over the deep South....

With this map, I would travel in my mind over the ridges and peaks into hidden basins and high cirques of the Wind River Range and the Yellowstone Plateau, or explore the emptiness of the Bob Marshall wilderness up north. (13)

He is especially drawn to the "blank" or "empty" spaces on his maps. (The notion of such "empty spaces" as representing proto- or super-wilderness seems to be a persistent one in our culture. When Chris McCandless, a young white American, met his death beside the Stampede Trail in Alaska in 1992, he was looking for just such blank spaces.)³

Peacock describes a night in Thuong Duc when a mortar attack erupts while he is studying this map. Several people die while Peacock is attending them. Afterward,

I poured myself half a milk glass of bourbon and spread out the beat-up road map in front of me. I looked at Wyoming and found the drainage on the Yellowstone Plateau that I had been following before the attack. The smell of blood clung to my clothes.... It was hard getting back into the Yellowstone country....

Finally ... I managed to ease myself back into the landscape again. I smelled the sage and could see around the corner of the timber into the next meadow.... I had a year left to go in Vietnam. I would be needing the map. (16)

By consciously invoking representations of the western U.S. while on his tour of duty, Peacock is able to derive comfort and maintain a semblance of sanity in the midst of combat. Because of the representational equation of "the

west" with white American manhood, he is able to interpellate himself into these locations and thus stabilize his sense of his own identity while inhabiting a place and a situation which constantly threatens to undermine his sense of who he is. It is perhaps not too much to say that these maps function like photographs, as representational extensions of himself. Tellingly, he and the other men engaged in the ground war in Vietnam refer to the jungle terrains they find themselves in as "Indian country," thus invoking the traditional U.S. cultural script of cowboys (or settlers) vs. Indians. By this logic, their North Vietnamese adversaries are the "redskins" and the U.S. military become the nineteenth century cavalry. These oppositional identities offer comfort; after all, in the hegemonic cultural history the cavalry always wins the day.

While in Vietnam, then, he dreams of the western U.S. Conversely and ironically, however, unsolicited memories of events that occurred in Vietnam haunt both his days and his nights once he has physically left Vietnam and returned to the U.S. to inhabit those selfsame "empty spaces" on the map.

Having concluded his tour of duty in Vietnam, Peacock describes his need

to encounter something --a spectacle on the magnitude of a sky blackened by a single flock

of passenger pigeons flying over, or the sight of sixty million buffalo stomping through the High Plains; no chance for that. The best I could get might be a scene strong enough to pull me away from all that had been my world for the past year and a half. (23)

Unable to locate a home for himself among human society, Peacock finds that he feels most comfortable in places that he (and the culture at large) considers "wild." Returning from Vietnam, he is initially disoriented and shortly leaves his parents' home in the midwest in search of a location offering "wildness." The direction he chooses, of course, is west.

Significantly and ironically, he heads first to what he names "Indian Country," in the southwest. He chooses to camp in a place he knows, "where ancient Anasazi, the prehistoric ancestors of the Pueblo Indians, had pecked the dark patina to produce stippled figures of deer, antelope, and sheep" (18). He is eager to explore a cliff dwelling he had spotted on a trip he had made to the same place before he left for Vietnam: "I had thought of exploring the ruins a hundred times during the past eighteen months" (21). Importantly, then, Peacock inaugurates his "back to nature" move with a conscious encounter with what Marianna Torgovnick and others have labeled "the primitive."

Torgovnick writes: "The metaphor of finding a home or being at home recurs over and over as a structuring pattern within Western primitivism":⁴

Going primitive is trying to "go home" to a place that feels comfortable and balanced, where full acceptance comes freely and easily....

Whatever form the primitive's hominess takes, its strangeness salves our estrangement from ourselves and our culture. (185)

Is this, in fact, the impulse that Peacock is enacting? He finds a three-story Anasazi cliff dwelling strewn with pottery shards and human bones. He is disappointed to learn, by means of various kinds of evidence, that "I wasn't the first." Not the first white man, is what he means, of course. The realization that this is not virgin land seems to spoil the experience for him: "Still, the fact that large, nearly whole pieces of pottery lay around meant not many white men had been there..." (22).

Other references to "the primitive" are scattered throughout Peacock's narrative: petroglyphs, spear points, dead and living Indians and their cultural practices. There is certainly much to suggest that his process of representing himself included many gestures in the direction of "the primitive." Torgovnick writes,

... the desire that the primitive show us a state before there arose troubling differences

-- of sexuality, of economic life, of religious beliefs, of humans from nature-- has been remarkably consistent.

The primitive's magical ability to dissolve differences depends on an illusion of time and sense in which the primitive is both eternally past and eternally present. (186)

In this regard of collapsing differences, Peacock's journey follows the outline described by Andrew Ross for the constitution of "the great white dude." I submit that Peacock is using invocations of the primitive in much the same way as he has used maps: as representational aids to bolster his destabilized identity as he embarks on his quest to "find" himself after Vietnam. But that's not all he's doing. The importance of "the primitive" to the consolidation of white manhood is a point to which I will return at the end of this chapter.

In essence, then, Peacock "goes native," finding his true home among the grizzly bears of North America and proceeding to live in their habitats with them under "primitive" conditions:

The bears provided a calendar for me when I got back from Vietnam, when one year would fade into the next and I would lose great hunks of time to memory with no events or people to recall their passing. I had trouble with a world whose idea

of vitality was anything other than the naked authenticity of living or dying. The world paled, as did all that my life had been before, and I found myself estranged from my own time. Wild places and grizzly bears solved this problem. (5)

Indeed, so important is Peacock's need for his notion of what constitutes wildness that it becomes the very theme of his quest "in search of the American wilderness."

One rhetorical device he relies on is hyperbole. He refers in this way to his encounter with a black bear ("the biggest black bear I had ever seen" (17)), a deer ("Thirty meters below was the biggest deer I had ever seen" (29)), a snake in Vietnam ("This viper was fully three times longer than any snake I had ever seen" (42)), a herd of elk ("thirty bulls, among them ten of the largest I had ever seen" (68)), and a grizzly ("I ... stared down at the biggest grizzly I had ever seen"(93), among others. In a similar way, he refers to particular locales as being among "the wildest" into which he had ever set foot.

Why does Peacock have such a great investment in "larger-than-life" encounters with places and animals? It seems to me that it is precisely because his identity is in considerable need of shoring up. As an American male who has rejected the normativizing badge of his military

service (and the consolidation of masculine identity which it intrinsically confers) and as one who as veteran is an object of scorn to a significant portion of the U.S. population, he must find another way to represent himself as manly.

Thus, whereas in Mailer the narrative was at pains not to represent wild(er)ness as too wild lest it push its representations of white men too far, into "savagery," Peacock's account relies on a Nature that is as "wild" as possible in order to reinscribe his lost or lapsed masculinity.

Peacock continually underscores his dissatisfaction with the human world, and constantly privileges the realm of the non-human. It may appear that, by his very (human) presence, he is undermining the "wildness" of his Wild locations, but I think what he wants to say is that he himself represents or embodies Nature's wildness and that his presence, therefore, underscores the "naturalness" of the location.

The emblematic encounter, the one at the heart of the story that Peacock tells about his own life, is succinctly captured here:

The big bear stopped thirty feet in front of me.... The giant bear flicked his ears and looked off to the side. I took a step backward and turned my head toward the trees. I felt

something pass between us. The grizzly slowly turned away from me with grace and dignity and swung into the timber at the end of the meadow. I caught myself breathing heavily again, the flush of blood hot on my face. I felt my life had been touched by enormous power and mystery. I did not know that the force of that encounter would shape my life for decades to come.

Tracking griz would become full-time work for six months of many years, and it lingers yet at the heart of any annual story I tell of my life. I have never questioned the route this journey took: it seems a single trip, the sole option, driven by that same potency that drew me into grizzly country in the beginning. (61-62)

As well as encounters with bears, in the course of the narrative, a variety of places become charged for Peacock, even transcendent, by the possibility of their "wildness" --according to his criteria of both the locale's ability to sustain the lives of wild creatures and by its complete absence of human presence (excepting, of course, his own). On patrol in Vietnam, his squadron comes across a fresh tiger track. Peacock writes: "The air became charged with some kind of energy; the entire country was suddenly imbued with fresh potential" (30). Similarly, he writes of Waterton, in Canada:

In the mud where the tiny stream washed across the trail, there was the eight-inch track of the rear paw of a bear. Suddenly this not-so-wild part of the park area came alive with possibilities.... (126)

Both of these passages echo the rhetoric of the bear encounter cited earlier. Indeed, most of what is considered canonical "nature writing" in U.S. American literature is replete with this kind of discourse, not surprising when one considers how dominated the genre is by straight white men. It is not too much to say that the national idea of "wild(er)ness" contains at its core this notion of purity, of places and things "far from man" that have restorative powers for those who would seek them out. Peacock seems to argue that it is possible for some men, men of his ilk, those who more or less "go native," likewise to confer upon wilderness a "naturalness" by virtue of their identities as "natural" men who "know" how to be in such locations.

Peacock concludes one chapter by writing: "My journey had ended here in grizzly country, the empty space on the map I thought I'd never find. I was a traveler in an older, more complete world" (64). Isn't this the same sentiment that accompanies D.J. and Tex as they head for the hills, and Huck Finn as he lights out for the Territory? Predicated on the equivalency that has been

well-established in hegemonic U.S. cultural production, the conceit is that, "natural" men that they are, their very presence will in turn confer upon Nature a certain "naturalness" that it otherwise lacks.

Peacock's back-to-Nature gestures culminate in the following passage wherein he himself becomes a bear, but interestingly, a female bear or "sow."

I dreamed of a wild valley, the swelter of the Rocky Mountain sun and the moon of ripe berries. My daughter and I are crawling along on all fours through the huckleberry brush. I nuzzle her side protectively because there are other grizzly bears around. My little girl reaches with her mouth and strips the blueberries from a branch overhead. I scent the air and snort, shaking my head at the smell of another bear on the mountain hillside. (284)

This, I would say, is the ultimate back-to-Nature move: complete transformation in the face of wildness. In such a vision Peacock can finally and unproblematically shed his human identity in favor of a non-human one that is utterly free of the constraints imposed by human society. (And a man's world it is; again, women are only incidental to this narrative.) In so doing, he in turn through his bear-presence signifies Nature as "wild."

I see Peacock's memoir, then, as squarely situated in

hegemonic U.S. American masculinist cultural constructions for all its author's attempts to represent himself and his experience as countercultural. Because he turns his back on the war and disavows his own government, Peacock maintains a self-identity as a fighter, a warrior. His cause shifts from that of defending his country to that of defending its wildlife, to be sure, but the core persona of an adversarial identity does not change. And, just as Andrew Ross so astutely indicates, nothing provokes self-examination of the entitlements he enjoys as a straight, white U.S. American male. In fact, by fulfilling a normative cultural script for masculinity that includes military service, despite the U.S. "failure" in Vietnam and his discomfort with the role he played there, his heterosexual masculine positionality is nevertheless firmly fixed. By inserting himself into certain landscapes, he in turn (re)inscribes their representational value as "wild" according to the well-rehearsed cultural script that equates (normative) masculinity with the "natural." Of course Doug Peacock feels at home in the "wild." As this dissertation will show, his is one of the few social identities which is entitled to feel at home there.

In the last year, there has been a surge of cultural production evidently intended to restore the fading

reputation of the aging white male. This is the year that saw not one, but two major box office movies focusing on World War II (Steven Spielberg's Saving Private Ryan and Terrence Malick's A Thin Red Line), the publication of Tom Brokaw's bestselling The Greatest Generation, and John Glenn Redux.

I end this section with a brief look at Lee Tamahori's direction of the David Mamet screenplay, The Edge, in which the aging white male is reinstated as a powerful social figure by means of a life-and-death encounter or contest with Nature.

Framed as a competition between two white men (portrayed by Anthony Hopkins and Alec Baldwin), for the love (and/or sexual favors) of a (white) woman, the film enacts representations of straight white masculinity that consolidate those representations already described but which inscribe "nature" by means of a different binary from what we've yet seen.⁵

Stranded along with a black man when their bush plane crashes into a lake in the Alaskan wilderness, the two rivals are forced to "match wits" with Nature. Representations are crudely drawn here. Aging billionaire Charles Morse (Hopkins) is depicted as a decent, "thoughtful" man --accepted and revered by his employees despite his enormous wealth. He's also portrayed as alienated and friendless, the stereotypical man of great

wealth who can never be loved for himself alone because people always want something from him. (The life of the super-wealthy is lonely and difficult.) Charles's masculinity comes in the form of two of his prize possessions: his passenger jet and his fashion-model wife, both of which are referred to as "her." Less secure in his male identity, evidently, no doubt because he has less wealth and because although he sleeps with her he nevertheless doesn't "own" Mickey the way Charles does (i.e. via marriage), Bob, the fashion photographer, is given to moments of homophobic anxiety. He has a propensity, under stress, for impersonating "gay" men, as if to reassure himself and others of who he really is -- that is, a manly man.

As in the Mailer narrative, in addition to gay men and women, blacks and Indians lurk on the edges of The Edge as well. In one double-inscription, the fashion-model wife poses in an Indian costume complete with head-dress and fringed, faux-leather garment. But as shall be seen, the marginal presence of women and racialized and homosexualized men is made to serve, gratuitously, the reinstatement of the front and center importance of the two straight white man.

Real nature poses a problem for the film's makers. The wilderness setting is so visually spectacular that shots of snow-covered mountains threaten to hijack the

film from its intended course, inviting a viewer response not of repugnance or distaste, but of appreciative awe. Since the story is predicated on (white) men matching their wits with the Wild and emerging victorious, the filmmakers are challenged to find a representation of Nature that sufficiently conveys its threat to their masculinity. But movie audiences these days are steeped in postmodern values of Nature as something to be preserved and restored; they're a generation of moviegoers raised on the Discovery channel, National Geographic television specials, Nature, Nova, Walt Disney and the like. How, then, to render Nature as overwhelmingly perilous, a thing or place in which human beings stand not merely in awe, but in fear for their lives?

The solution the film chooses is to embody Wildness in one metaphorical construct: a man-eating grizzly bear (performed by Bart, the trained bear). In addition, the role of "Alaska" is performed by Canada, presumably because of the logistical challenges the real Alaska poses to movie-making.

The black man, Steven, predictably proves to be nothing more than a foil for the staging of contests of bravery for the white competitors. Having courageously saved Steven's life at the time of the plane crash, Charles treats the young man's subsequent fear in an altogether patronizing manner. Lest his presence subvert

their contest for most masculine, Steven is pretty quickly dispatched by the bear, saving the white men the dilemma of how to get rid of him themselves, I suppose. Which leaves just two "real" men to hash it out with Wild(er)ness and its attendant perils. Who wins the contest with the Wild, wins the woman.

Relying on his considerable intellectual resourcefulness and innate bravery, Charles upstages Bob at every turn. He is represented as the paragon of Culture: smart, sophisticated, well-read, rich. When the bear, alias Nature, stalks them, Charles devises a plan to kill it. The two white men, city slickers both, inscribe Nature as wild by means of their representational opposition to it.

Proving more manly than Bob, Charles is able to kill the bear singlehandedly. Culture proves superior to Nature. Back to Nature they now victoriously go, lords of the realm once more. (After the bear has been slain, the two men are shown wearing the its fur over their by-now tattered clothing, bear claw pendants slung around their necks. "Brothers under the skin"?)

Charles is shown repeatedly to be the superior man -- even going so far as to try to save Bob's life despite the fact that Bob has just tried to murder him. Not only does Charles alone survive the ordeal, to emerge victorious at the end of the film, but he does so with the forbearance

and largesse that only the truly morally superior exhibit. (Having saved both Steven's and Bob's lives at least once, having done his utmost to lead them --level-headedly, paternalistically, benevolently-- out of the wilderness, he nevertheless states at the end of the film that they died saving his life.) What a guy! It's a damn good thing that men like Charles are at the helm of our country. He may be getting old, but hey, just like John Glenn, he's still got plenty of the right stuff.

In short, then, it would appear that cultural narratives of the sort discussed above inscribe a reciprocal relationship between representations of straight white men and representations of wild(er)ness or Nature. It is arguable that white heterosexual men have done a good job of creating "the west" in their own image. For them, Nature is not only a refuge, but a proving ground. It has been the site, par excellence, for naturalizing hegemonic representations of masculinity. In return, because this category of masculinity represents a universalized or "natural" category, Man or Mankind, representations of particular geographic locales (those that suit this purpose) are themselves "naturalized" by virtue of their representational capacity to confer this "natural" subject position onto straight white men. U.S. hegemonic cultural production trades on a well-established

notion of the "natural" equivalency between Man and Nature. I conclude this consideration of variations on its themes with an examination of how this ideological equation gets put to the use of promoting the interests of global capitalism.

IV. Unnaturally Natural

Those who were uncertain, as I was, whether Terrence Malick's The Thin Red Line is a "nature" movie or a war movie, should be reassured to know that it's intended as both.⁶ For in this narrative, the "thin line" proves to be none other than that between Man and Nature. Mind you, "Man" in this context is quite literally a referent to heterosexual white U.S. manhood. The ambition, and the conceit, of Malick's movie is to make pronouncement on what constitutes the "natural" in the late twentieth century. The Thin Red Line thus provides another variation on the themes of Man and Nature discussed above, but this time the variation is a distinctly postmodern one.

Far removed from the American west, the setting is the South Pacific. The time --in terms of its representations of both masculinity and the "natural" -- would seem to be simultaneously that of World War II and the late 1990s world economic order, that is,

transnational capitalist patriarchy.

Unlike representations of the American west, this less-familiar tropical landscape carries no particular pre-established representational value as an environment equated with normative hegemonic masculinity, but insofar as its representations bear the (heavy-handed) stamp of Nature, it serves the by-now familiar purpose of "naturalizing" white heterosexual masculine identity.

The film opens with unmistakable "readings" of Nature as benign, the residence of "purity" and "innocence." Even before the first image appears on the screen, the soundtrack echoes with the rhythmical lap of waves on a beach, the vibrato of tropical birdsong. The first on-screen image is that of a crocodile slipping into brackish water --not to eat anything or even to pose a threat to anything or anyone (by which I mean that this is no grizzly bear), but just, presumably, to represent Nature in its Natural, indolent state.

As the screen fills with scenes of tropical trees and forest canopy, we hear the character named Witt intone in his midwestern drawl: "What's this war at the heart of Nature? Why does Nature vie with itself, the land contend with the sea? Is there an avenging power in Nature, not one power but two?"

We are shown dark-skinned Pacific Islanders gathered contentedly on a stony beach; we are shown naked dark-

skinned male bodies swimming underwater. Here are human beings in their Natural state, the film seems to say. The soundtrack swells with Baroque choral music, as if to suggest the conflation of (Western) Culture with Nature, and indeed, the film proceeds to reverse the familiar dualism in which Culture is privileged over Nature. In The Thin Red Line, as I shall show, Nature is portrayed as the desired state. In contrast to "innocent" Nature, it is "civilized" Man (and his problematic Culture) which are "wild" and uncivilized: "Through a process of reversing signs and valencies of beliefs, the modern conception of nature as other, is progressively replaced by the conception of culture as other."⁷

Clad only in shorts, Witt and his buddy, two soldiers gone AWOL on this island, are portrayed as not-naked, but nearly so -- nearly "natural," that is. As if to attest to this, a wild parrot perches on the buddy's wrist. Witt paddles a dugout canoe in clear blue ocean water, a beatific expression on his face. The two are attempting to enact a return to a state of grace, to recover the innocent, "primitive" state from which they (as white men, and especially as soldiers) have fallen. That is, they wish to insert themselves into the physical location and consort with its indigenous, "natural" inhabitants by way of recovering (by osmosis, presumably) some redemptive Naturalness for themselves. In short, they enact what

Torgovnick observes as "the desire that the primitive show us a state before there arose troubling differences --of sexuality, of economic life, of religious beliefs, of humans from nature..." (186). Torgovnick elaborates:

That a rhetoric of control and domination exists in Western discourse on the primitive is beyond question. And it exists in at least two senses: control and domination of primitives (and those thought of as like primitives) abroad; and a parallel control of the lower classes, minorities, and women at home, who are linked, via a network of tropes, to the primitive. But the rhetoric of control and domination over others often exists alongside (behind) a rhetoric of more obscure desires: of sexual desires or fears, of class, of religious, or national, or racial anxieties, of confusion or outright self-loathing. Not just outer-directed, Western discourse on the primitive is also inner-directed --salving secret wounds, masking the controller's fear of losing control and power. (192)

If Torgovnick is right, then perhaps it is not merely coincidence that all of the men portrayed in The Thin Red Line are white, are American, and are heterosexual, their class differences collapsed under the leveling influence

of military service.

Standing beside a lagoon wherein the native people are going about their placid, untroubled business, Witt, still in voiceover, remembers his mother's death, and in the film's first flashback we are transported to middle America. A bedridden white woman is attended by her daughter, blond, virginal in a white dress, who leans her head against her mother's bosom. It's an iconic moment. As this narrative works to construct white heterosexual masculinity, the figures of white women hover just off-screen: the other series of flashbacks belong to one Private Bell, whose visualized recollections are of his (white, blonde) wife and their "perfect" love for each other. Construction of (white, heterosexual) masculinity here would seem to be dependent on these flickering representations of (the right kind of) womanhood --that is, also white and also heterosexual.

Here on the island, however, the sign of the "primitive" all around them, Witt seeks affirmation of his own acceptance as a Natural being. Soliciting the trust of the native people, he seeks out a woman clasping a baby to her hip, (tellingly, he chooses a mother to validate him), but she says that she's afraid of him because he "look[s] Army." The implication of this judgment or verdict would seem to be that, were he (only) not a soldier, he could re-enter a Natural state.

This, then, is the conflict that the film would attempt to problematize, but in doing so it skips wholesale over a host of other issues embedded in constructions of hegemonic U.S. masculinity and its legacy of human and ecological imperialism.

The two soldiers' idyll ends when a Navy patrol boat comes looking for them. The ship, gray and metallic and belching black smoke into the pristine tropical sky is a direct incarnation of Leo Marx's "machine in the garden," a representation of the contaminating influence of Western industrialization on the Natural paradise. And it's an apt symbol for the film's ambition to use the World War II "moment" as an analogy for the consequences globally of Western civilization's technologizing impulses on the eve of the twenty-first century. For one of the points in the film is that, in making war against each other, men also make war against Nature, the environment.

Like The Edge, and John Glenn's second sojourn in space, Terrence Malick's The Thin Red Line is designed to recover the prowess of an aging generation of (straight, white) men. Both Spielberg's and Malick's versions of costly World War II engagements (Normandy and Guadalcanal, respectively) emphasize the youthfulness of the men who fought and perished in these locations. Both films represent these boys as innocents, lambs led to the slaughter. Both films are replete with violence, thus

reinforcing the notion argued in this chapter and elsewhere that proof of U.S. manhood is attained through blood-letting. Neither film demonizes the historic enemy (the Germans and the Japanese, respectively) so much as it attempts to collapse differences between individual soldiers (all of whom are white) and gather them together into one amorphous normative mass of white heterosexual masculinity, all equally victims of the unavoidable hell that is war. While appearing to condemn modern warfare as an evil, both films nevertheless manage to say something about the ultimate ennobling sacrifice of the men who fought and, in too many cases, died.

But Malick's narrative is ambivalent about granting that valorization. As noted, the film begins (and ends) with lingering shots of the island "paradise" of the South Pacific, and unleashes a plethora of Nature shots along the way: tropical birds, fruit bats, plants and foliage, a lizard clasping a tree trunk, island streams, palm trees swaying in the breeze, colorful sunrises and sunsets. What is perhaps most striking in all this panoply of Nature, however, is that not a single image is that of Nature "red in tooth and claw," as Tennyson once memorably penned. Not once in this film is Nature portrayed as either predator or prey. On the contrary, there are exactly two images of Nature as victim, and then only as victim of Man, not of Nature: a fledgling bird shown to

have fallen out of its nest during the battle for the island, an innocent victim caught in the gunfire; and, significantly, a green fern that recoils at the touch of an American soldier. The alligator, which we saw at the film's opening, is later shown trussed in rope, held hostage in the back of a truck while American soldiers prod it with their rifles.

Thus, when the colonel tells one of his subordinates, "Look at this jungle. Look at those vines.... Nature is cruel," the irony makes the audience snicker. Nature is so patently benign and passive in its portrayal here as to seem, well, unnatural. At the same time, it is in the film an unavoidable truth that cruelty resides with ("civilized," not "primitive") men, or Mankind, who are preoccupied in this movie with blowing each other and the earth itself to bits.

Following Susan Jeffords, then, I would argue that films like Saving Private Ryan and The Thin Red Line, are "remasculinization" projects:⁸

...the overarching characteristics of [remasculinization] enable individual men to reassert their participation in masculinity. By reaffirming masculinity and thereby the relations of dominance it embodies, other relations of dominance are reinforced as well

and the system of patriarchy as a whole is supported. (xiii)

In the recuperation of U.S. hegemonic masculinity, Nature and, specifically, the "primitive," are invoked as the oppositional foils against which white heterosexual manhood can assert its superiority. The film at once suggests the liberatory potential of casting Man as "unnatural," but it fails to follow that representation to a progressively different outcome. The film seems to flirt with concepts well-articulated by Torgovnick: "the intuition that social classes or gender relations have doomed us to structures of mastery rather than mutuality; a reaching out to the natural world as our home and mother, not the exploitation of that world for profit" (246-7), but she also correctly anticipates that these ideas are "in each case, variously turned aside or undeveloped, often under the pressure of our culture's dominant ideas of selfhood or masculinity" (247).

Peter van Wyck has written: "The move to construct the world as a system is paralleled by a move to simultaneously mystify nature in such a way that humans come to occupy a position of natural opposition to nature" (73). The film's assertion of the "unnaturally natural" global supremacy of white heterosexual masculinity enables and justifies the continuing exploitation not only of other human beings but of the entire realm of the living

world. Under the guise of interrogating and critiquing U.S. masculinist hegemony, the movie in fact reinscribes that hegemony as a "natural" identity that can't help itself for being destructive. It says that white heterosexual men are, after all, just a part of a Natural order dictating who shall live and who shall die, who shall prosper and who shall struggle to survive. Through no fault of their own, this representation and others like it assert, straight white men are merely fulfilling their destiny as "good soldiers" in the world economic order.

In this representational equation, the whole realm of the living world is robbed of any agency it might have left on the eve of the twenty-first century. Rendered the passive object of hegemonic man's "natural" unnaturalness --not to mention the object of manipulation for cultural representations-- nature is deprived of subjective identity, as it were. Having achieved the status of most "natural" creature in all the world, by dint of his own well-oiled apparatus of cultural construction, hegemonic mankind has now leapt the constrictive barricade of his own ideological equivalency with Nature in favor of asserting his "natural" dominion over it.

Interpreted in this light, who can really sympathize with him when in the film Witt attempts to return to the island's native village, only to have its inhabitants flee

from him? He says mournfully, in voiceover, "We were a family... Now we're turned against each other. How did we lose the good that was given to us?"

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. Andrew Ross, "The Great White Dude," Constructing Masculinity, Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson, eds. (N.Y.: Routledge, 1995) 167-175.
2. Doug Peacock, Grizzly Years - In Search of the American Wilderness (New York: Henry Holt and Co., Inc., 1990)
3. Jon Krakauer notes of Chris McCandless's quest that:
[i]n coming to Alaska, McCandless yearned to wander uncharted country, to find a blank spot on the map. In 1992, however, there were no more blank spots on the map --not in Alaska, not anywhere. But Chris, with his idiosyncratic logic, came up with an elegant solution to this dilemma: He simply got rid of the map. In his own mind, if nowhere else, the terra would thereby remain incognita. (Jon Krakauer, Into the Wild (New York: Doubleday, 1997) 174.
4. Marianna Torgovnick, Gone Primitive - Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1990) 185.
5. The Edge, dir. Lee Tamahori, perf. Anthony Hopkins, Alec Baldwin, Twentieth Century Fox, 1997.
6. The Thin Red Line, dir. Terrence Malick, Twentieth Century Fox, 1998. Performed by Nick Nolte, Sean Penn, Jim Caveziel.
7. Peter C. van Wyck, Primitives in the Wilderness - Deep Ecology and the Missing Human Subject (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1997) 77.
8. Susan Jeffords, The Remasculinization of America - Gender and the Vietnam War (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1989).

PART TWO:

LOCATION, IDENTITY, AND 'NATURALIZATION'

Part Two Prologue

In Chapter One, I argued that ideological constructions of U.S. Manhood and ideological constructions of what is "natural" --i.e. of or belonging to what is thought of as Nature-- are mutually constitutive: Just as "real" men achieve their "natural" masculinity through (oftentimes violent) encounters with Nature, so, too, nature itself becomes "naturalized" in this exchange as a location or property belonging to, or "naturally" equated with white hegemonic masculinity. This symbiotic inscription (of both social identity and actual place) thereby serves two primary functions: it preserves the sense of any and all other social identities as "un-natural," and it sanctifies U.S. sites of "wildness" or Nature as the almost-exclusive domain of straight white men. There is thus a tendency to view those who have been socially constructed by this dominant

hegemony as "different" or Other, as intruders when they venture into or attempt to inhabit Nature or wilderness. According to the ideological logic, they are un-natural in Nature; they don't "belong."

What's at stake when Nature or "naturalness" is overdetermined as the province of hegemonic masculinity? What's at stake for those human beings who have been socially constructed not "white," not heterosexual, and/or not male? What's at stake for the more-than-human world?

How can those Others, both human and non-human, against whom or which heterosexual Eurocentric masculinity has constructed itself as ideologically "natural," claim or reclaim entitlement to their own "naturalness", to autonomous inhabitation of the natural world? What kinds of discursive strategies might such reclamation or recuperation use?

In the chapters that follow, I examine these questions by interrogating representations of those sexualized, gendered, and/or 'race'd Others, respectively, who seek to engage with U.S. American Nature or Wild(er)ness. Elizabeth Grosz writes:

The marginalized position is both perilous and enabling, providing a locatable target for systems of oppression and social domination...; and at the same time, it may provide a site for the positive production of strategies and

resources for survival and struggle, tools of resistance which can be utilized to insinuate a flaw, rift, or crack in dominant systems to help facilitate social transformations. All social marginals, all exiles, are splayed between these two poles or extremes --one a tendency towards death, the other a positive movement towards self-production, critical resistance, and transformative struggle.¹

This powerful statement suggests that narratives by Others might provide valuable perspectives and strategies for how Nature or Wild(er)ness may be reclaimed for the greater good of all life forms, rather than just for dominant elites.

I seek now to examine the consequences the overdetermined association of "wild" or "natural" locations with straight white men has had for those constructed as "Other." Masculinism has cast women, by virtue of their procreative biology, as more closely linked to Nature than men, and therefore in need of taming or domestication by patriarchal Culture; under the terms of the previously described equation, women are too "natural." Heterosexism has cast gay and lesbian sexuality as "un-natural," contrary to or opposed to Nature. And racism has cast people of color -- particularly black people-- as more closely related to

animals than "white" people, thereby justifying slavery and other practices of institutionalized oppression. Might not narratives by and/or about these Others' experiences of U.S. Nature therefore demonstrate liberatory perspectives on the human-nature relationship?

I argue in the following chapters that U.S. Nature or Wild(er)ness is a "space" which has been foreclosed to women, gays and lesbians, and people of color, respectively, and that this foreclosure has had material consequences for individuals and groups belonging to these several social identities. By reading closely these subjects' accounts of the ways in which they have insisted on reclaiming their right to inhabit U.S. Nature, I examine how they achieve representation of themselves (as Others) in this theoretical and actual terrain, and how in turn they may represent Nature in ways which can contest and/or subvert the dominant cultural paradigm of Nature and Wild(er)ness as "naturally" the precinct of hegemonic masculinity.

I seek in these chapters, as well, to better understand the consequences that this overdetermination of "wild" or "natural" locations as the domain of hegemonic masculinity has had for U.S. geographic locations deemed "natural" or "wild," and, generally, for the realm of non-human or more-than-human nature not only in the United States, but worldwide.

Nature --that is, the entire realm of earthly life-- is of course not a creation or invention of western hegemony, but ideas of what is "natural," "wild," in need of taming or domestication, and so on, most decidedly are. Western European ideas of Nature, imported into the "New World," have proven particularly useful for preserving hegemonic entitlements for more than half a millenium. Ideas of Nature --which include the exploitation of both human beings and the natural world-- have been and remain ideological vehicles by which western hegemony promotes itself worldwide. Although ideas of nature have gone through many changes and adaptations, the idea of the Natural has remained a most effective instrument of social and ecological imperialism, both at home and abroad.

NOTES TO PART II PROLOGUE

1. Elizabeth Grosz, "Judaism and Exile: The Ethics of Otherness," in Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location, eds. Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993) 57.

Chapter Three:
Against Nature?

When it is said that women are "by nature" maternal, or that it is "unnatural" for people of the same gender to be sexually attracted to one another, what role is being assigned to Nature? What is the work of Culture (i.e. of human-constructed relations) that Nature is being asked to fulfill?

In this chapter I will examine some examples of the ways in which popular narratives by and/or about gendered and/or sexualized Others interrogate --or fail to interrogate--the representationally overdetermined association of "wild" or "natural" locations with heterosexual masculinity. As Chapter One demonstrated the persistent conflation of hegemonic manhood with U.S. Nature, I want now to look at narratives that might counter this prevalent cultural production.

I begin by analyzing several literary narratives that

show the consequences this overdetermination has had for those who are neither heterosexual nor "manly" men. What is at stake for gay men in hegemonic cultural constructions of Man and Nature? What is at stake for Nature? Do or can these kinds of narratives successfully counter constructions of hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic masculinity's appropriation of "wild" or "natural" U.S. geographic locations?

I. "Unnatural"

... weirdly enough, it's more okay to be queer than it is to be a sissy.

-Mark Doty, Heaven's Coast

Significantly entitled Becoming a Man, the memoir of the late gay activist, Paul Monette, recounts his at times excruciating struggle throughout boyhood and adolescence to achieve congruence between his emerging sense of his homosexuality and the heterosexual middle-class "male" identity his family and the greater New England society would have had him inhabit and enact.¹

Following Monette's suggestion that one needs an actual geographic location or place that corresponds to one's sense of self and one's sense of one's "place" in the world, the following discussion seeks to analyze a number of narratives that foreground the tensions --and

violence-- that greet gay white males who would experience or inhabit "wild" or "natural" locations as gay men. What do these narratives say about the place of gay men in "wilderness" or "nature"? Are these spaces as open to them as they are to heterosexual or "real" men, as demonstrated in my first chapter?

Like Monette's autobiography, Dale Peck's Martin and John complicates would-be "normative" constructions of U.S. American masculinity, particularly with respect to the way those constructions intersect with representations of geographic locations.²

John, the gay white male protagonist of this novel, says of his own problematic quest to belong to a particular physical location:

Everything tells me that if I want to survive I have to find a middle ground, a place where I can stand and not feel as if on one side a sea rages to consume me and on the other side a vast open prairie waits deceptively to engulf me in immense emptiness. I don't know what the place is I'm looking for, I only know what it's not, and it's not that, it's not all or nothing.

It's something, but it's not that. (228)

The novel's interlocking story-chapters function to foreground John's problematic "place" as a gay man trying to inhabit a range of U.S. locations, both rural and urban

--none of which, ultimately, provides him enough protection to constitute a true home. What paths do lie open to a young man who rejects the prevailing cultural definition of masculinity or manliness? What and where is a gay white man's place in the hierarchy of U.S. social positions that not only valorizes heterosexuality, but expects it? Does he ever have the agency to determine a home for himself in "nature"?

The second chapter captures an adolescent boy's first sense of himself as "different" from both his father and other heterosexual men. It captures as well the anxiety that his indeterminacy --that is, his refusal to embrace the terms of normative masculinity-- sets up for the other males in his acquaintance.

John describes an after-work party that his father, a building contractor, hosts for the work crew of a house-building project:

[H]e usually barbecued, and when he did he wore an old, old apron whose yellow ruffles, darkened by dust trapped in their creases, trailed around his knees. The men building our house teased me about this. "Your old man wears the pants in the family, huh?" they'd say while my father was busy flipping burgers. I'd just look at them until they'd finished. "And the dress!" they'd guffaw, and slap each other on the back. When

they saw I wasn't laughing, they'd relent and say, "Aw, but you're okay, John, anybody can see that." (16)

What they mean when they say that he's "okay," of course, is that he's "masculine," heterosexual, a "manly" man. At this juncture in his life, John perceives that masculinity is achieved and maintained by the assertion of dominance over those, such as women, who are less powerful. He describes his father's rejoinder to the men's taunting and the misogyny embedded in his response:

"I was working construction when you were still sucking your mother's tit." [My father] said these words as if they lacked a literal meaning, as if their only purpose was to show the workers who was boss. His yells earned him a grudging respect, but the beers he'd hand out at the end of the day served him better. "Just a couple to start you on your way," he'd say. At first I thought he meant on their way home, but soon I realized that he meant on their way to being drunk, and later I came to see another meaning lurking behind his words: the men who worked for my father were young, all newly married or about to be married, and those beers he handed out, and the bawdy stories he told them as I hid and listened --stories that were sometimes about my

mother-- were sending them all on their way to the place in which he'd lived for years, a place in which men sometimes got blind drunk, and did things, and in the morning felt only their own pain, and not the pain they'd caused. (17)

John rejects this version of masculinity, but until he can accept his burgeoning homosexuality, this rejection leaves him "out of place" in the world. This sense of being without a place --an actual physical location-- seems in subsequent chapters to destine him to a life of placelessness and wandering, a life in which none of the locations in which he seeks "home" can, finally, offer him sanctuary. In the end, it is not "wild" or "natural" locations in the U.S. that afford an opportunity to "naturalize" his identity as a queer, but the "built" environment of a metropolis with a large enough community of gay men to insulate John and his lovers against some, but by no means all, gay-bashing.

In the story "Three Night Watchmen," John and his first live-in lover try in vain to live openly as a gay couple in a small town on the prairie. Treated as pariahs, their isolation extracts a heavy toll from both young men. To alleviate their misery, they attempt to save enough money to move to New York City, but it becomes apparent, when Martin is threatened with the loss of his job because he is gay, that they may never manage to

accumulate the funds necessary to effect such a long-distance move. Initially a form of entertainment, they play an increasingly desperate "game" of imagining aloud what their lives would be like in New York.

Indeed, the tension of the entire novel springs from the sense of threat that inevitably attends John's attempts to inhabit any location, including New York. The book's most powerful irony, perhaps, lies in the way it demonstrates that for gay men, the "wide, open" prairie may in fact be more entrapping than the congested spaces of one of the world's largest cities.

Curiously, Annie Proulx's 1997 short story, "Brokeback Mountain," concerning two gay white cowboys, proved to be something of her own "coming out" story.³ A Pulitzer prize-winning author, Proulx began her writing career as a contributor to a men's magazine whose editor "thought he couldn't publish a contributor called Annie," so she adopted the nom de plume "E. A. Proulx." Her widely-acclaimed novel, The Shipping News, was published under the name E. Annie Proulx. Twenty years after her first publication, "Brokeback Mountain" was the first piece to which she attached her name as "Annie Proulx."⁴ I find it interesting that her reclamation of her preferred name (an act, presumably, of self-assertion) has corresponded with the shift in setting of her recent

writing. A writer whose work until recently has been situated in New England and Newfoundland, Proulx currently writes fiction with a western U.S. setting. It is as if she were achieving her true or "natural" identity by virtue of a naturalizing geographic alchemy wherein one becomes actualized or more truly oneself in the U.S. west. Can it be that, having arrived as a literary artist, she is now "one of the guys"?

Unfortunately, the same "naturalization" fails to occur for her two gay white cowboys. Set in Wyoming, "Brokeback Mountain" is the story of two young men, Ennis and Jack, who meet as fellow sheep-herders on Brokeback Mountain one summer and fall in love. However, their bond is so much a case of "the love that dare not speak its name," that each man denies or minimizes his love for the other. At the end of the magical summer, they go their separate ways, both eventually marrying and having children.

Their feelings prove impossible to outdistance, however, and four years later they resume what proves to be an unsatisfactory and ill-fated relationship. Even when it is clear to each of them that this relationship is primary, that the sexual passion it fuels eclipses all other couplings, the two are hamstrung by what Ennis, especially, feels to be the impossibility of anything resembling a "normal" relationship with Jack.

Alluding to their unbridled, public display of affection after the initial separation of four years, he says, "You and me can't hardly be decent together if what happened back there ... grabs on us like that. We do that in the wrong place we'll be dead" (79). When Jack persists in suggesting ways in which they might live and ranch together, Ennis replies:

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. It ain't goin a be that way. We can't.... I don't want to be like them guys you see around sometimes. And I don't want a be dead. There was these two old guys ranched together down home, Earl and Rich --Dad would pass a remark when he seen them. They was a joke even though they was pretty tough old birds. I was what, nine years old, and they found Earl dead in a irrigation ditch. They'd took a tire iron to him, spurred him up, drug him around by his dick until it pulled off, just bloody pulp.... Dad made sure I seen it. Took me to see it.... Dad laughed about it. Hell, for all I know he done the job." (79)

Ennis concludes, "Two guys livin together? No. All I can see is we get together once in a while way the hell out in the back a nowhere--" (79).

The years pass and Ennis and Jack continue to get together when they can, under the guise of hunting and

fishing trips "way the hell out in the back of nowhere," which is, the narrative suggests, the only safe place for such a relationship:

Years on years they worked their way through the high meadows and mountain drainages, horse-packing into the Big Horns, the Medicine Bows, the south end of the Gallatins, the Absarokas, the Granites, the Owl Creeks, the Bridger-Teton Range, the Freezeouts and the Shirleys, the Ferrises and the Rattlesnakes, the Salt River range, into the Wind Rivers over and again, the Sierra Madres, the Gros Ventres, the Washakies, the Laramies, but never returning to Brokeback.

(82)

Indeed, Brokeback Mountain becomes emblematic of something idyllic: a time and a place where they loved each other unselfconsciously.

Ennis, more stoic than his lover, or perhaps more terrified of the consequences of their union, consistently rejects Jack's imprecations to spend more time together or even to establish a shared household. He lives by the adage, "If you can't fix it, you've got to stand it" (79, 85). Jack, on the other hand, desiring more from his life, insists on unthrottling his passion with other men. In Mexico he finds a locale where he can indulge his attraction to other men. Ennis is shocked and angered

and, no doubt, jealous, when Jack divulges his dalliances with other men, to which Jack replies, "I'm not you. I can't make it on a couple a high-altitude fucks once or twice a year" (83):

What Jack remembered and craved in a way he could neither help nor understand was the time that distant summer up on Brokeback when Ennis had come up behind him and pulled him close, the silent embrace satisfying some shared and sexless hunger.

... Later, that dozy embrace solidified in his memory as the single moment of artless, charmed happiness in their separate and difficult lives. (83)

Brokeback looms in his memory, a nagging representation of what might have been. In the end, when Jack, only thirty-nine, dies an untimely death, Ennis doesn't know at first if the death was caused by "the tire iron or a real accident" (84), and learning from Jack's widow that Jack had wished his ashes scattered on Brokeback Mountain, he sets out to fulfill his lover's wish.

Traveling to Jack's parents' ranch and learning there that Jack had formed an attachment with another man and was planning to live with him crystallizes Ennis's suspicion about his lover's death: "now he knew it had been the tire iron" (84). In Jack's old bedroom Ennis

finds two shirts hanging from a single hanger:

the sleeves [of the inner shirt] carefully worked down inside Jack's sleeves. It was his own plaid shirt, lost, he'd thought, long ago in some damn laundry, his dirty shirt, the pocket ripped, buttons missing, stolen by Jack and hidden here inside Jack's own shirt, the pair like two skins, one inside the other, two in one. He pressed his face into the fabric and breathed in slowly through his mouth and nose, hoping for the faintest smoke and mountain sage and salty sweet stink of Jack, but there was no real scent, only the memory of it, the imagined power of Brokeback Mountain of which nothing was left but what he held in his hands. (85)

Jack's death is proof to Ennis of the untenability of trying to live publicly the relationship he and Jack shared. He constructs a shrine in his trailer: the two nested shirts suspended on a wire hanger hung from a nail on the wall, over which he has tacked a postcard of Brokeback Mountain. The emblematic and evocative power of Brokeback Mountain --their place-- has been reduced to a miniature, two-dimensional image. Ennis's longings now can find expression only in his dreams. In the end, he acknowledges the central gap in his life: "There was some open space between what he knew and what he tried to

believe, but nothing could be done about it..." (85). In other words, his fatalism is justified by the fact of how things "are": gay men who enact their sexuality get punished for the "unnaturalness" of that "crime."

Although it may obliquely contest the symbiotic inscription of Nature onto and by "natural" men, Proulx's story capitalizes on an exploitation of the hegemonic equation (heterosexual men = Nature) for its maximum (melo?)dramatic tragic effects. Her calculatedly unsophisticated characters and the rhetorical strategy of the story don't disrupt or unsettle the hegemonic overdetermination so much as they capitulate to its "logic." The realm of the "natural" --for both Man (sic) and Nature-- remains uninterrogated, a surface which opens momentarily to swallow Ennis and Jack into its maw and then closes again, erasing them. The discursive strategy of the story itself leaves no room for subversion, but only for Ennis's and the reader's submission to its apparent incontrovertible Truth: same-sex love between men is Unnatural.

In the same way as Proulx's story, William Haywood Henderson's novel Native is founded on the premise that gay men in Wyoming risk serious harm and possible death should they insist on exercising their sexual desire there.⁵ But unlike Proulx's representation, Native

struggles to find alternative outcomes to this storyline.

Like Proulx's Ennis, ranch manager Blue Parker finds himself torn between his love for the Wyoming wilderness and his desire to pursue the mutual attraction he experiences with his new ranch-hand, Sam. The novel's tension consists of Blue's realization that to deny either passion is to deny who he is, for this man's crisis is not so much about his desire for a sexual relationship with Sam as his realization that he "can't live anywhere" if he pursues that desire (185).

As if to underscore our reading of Blue as "native" to this place, Native opens with a kind of extended epigraph in which an antelope is described as the lord of all he surveys. A page and a half of italicized typeface describes the creature in his mountain domain, the vulnerable but elusive quarry of human hunters, and ends with the following passage:

The antelope watched until the truck's fire
had burned away around a curve of the valley,
and then held his head high and cried --a sharp
whistle that reclaimed the valley below and
echoed as he sprang away to join his mates.

By gendering the animal as male and by ending his book with a similar, italicized epilogue (i.e. by "bracketing" the novel with these two passages) Henderson seems, initially at least, to want to conflate Blue with a

"natural" or "wild" creature. Like the book's later descriptions of Blue's minute familiarity with his community's human inhabitants, their habits, and the details of the surrounding physical environment, it is another way of emphasizing Blue's incontrovertible belonging-ness: he is of this place. Additionally, perhaps, both he and the antelope are revealed to be vulnerable, no match for the "manly" heterosexual men who would destroy them. (Indeed, it is the character Derek, a man who has hunted and destroyed a cougar --a creature which has represented to Blue something mythical and precious because of its implied wildness-- who later beats Blue's lover Sam to within an inch of his life.)⁶

Blue miscalculates the social capital that he has accumulated by virtue of his "native"-ness to this small community in which he has lived since boyhood, believing that his popularity and reputation for hard work will buy acceptance of his homosexuality. He learns just how badly he has misjudged his neighbors and the unnegotiability of compulsory normative heterosexual masculinity when he is summarily fired from his job and ostracized by the town.

The terms he seems to have been offered --to have a sexual relationship with Sam at the cost of losing membership in the community-- is as unacceptable to him as remaining in his beloved location without the license to love another man. Having gambled and lost everything,

then, Blue heads for the hills. His instinct to enact a back-to-nature sojourn at this critical moment in his life suggests that getting lost for a few days in the mountains will ultimately help him to re-orient his life. This move, curious at face value, apparently serves to re-naturalize him to himself as both male and "native," insofar as he is able to be "at home" in the Wyoming wilderness and to find his way out of it again by virtue of his lifetime accumulation of knowledge about the place. It's as if he sets up for himself and passes his own test of "manhood," thus recovering at least some sense of his now-beleaguered identity.

Another rhetorical possibility that Henderson explores is the figure of the Native American berdache. In the novel, Gilbert, an effeminate Indian man, emblemizes the anxiety and antagonism that a man of indeterminate gender and sexuality provokes in a small, all-white rural western community. Henderson's exploration of the relationship, although inconclusive, suggests a history of indeterminate male sexuality that was culturally sanctioned and supported... at least, that is (in Gilbert's words), until "berdache became faggot" (53). The degree to which Gilbert is "out" initially threatens Blue, too, but he discovers in Gilbert, another "native," a sympathetic alter ego. Henderson seems as well to want to suggest parallels between the enforced

dislocation of indigenous peoples and Blue's own ostracism. The conflation feels dicey to me, but the point is taken that both homosexual white men and those raced as "other" may be shown to be the victims of normative sexuality and/or normative whiteness, at times under very real threat to their well-being. But Henderson's use of Gilbert risks subverting his intention to garner readers' sympathy for Blue insofar as the enormity of the crimes committed by white hegemony against Native people collectively may eclipse the reader's sense of Blue's very individual loss. Where Blue is shown to be the target of homophobia, Gilbert is the demonstrated victim of both racism and homophobia -- the greater victim, as it were.

In the end, like both Martin and John and "Brokeback Mountain" the sanctuary that wilderness or Nature provides is not enough to guarantee the male lovers' well-being in Native. Indeed, Nature is part of the problem insofar as Blue is unwilling to give up his love for wild places, and, by virtue of his subject position as a white male, his entitlement to them. By heading into the mountains when he's fired from his job, he apparently is able to recover some sense of who he is (i.e. a white male); thus re-membered, it remains for him to integrate his non-hegemonic sexuality into his otherwise normative, "natural" identity.

Reviewer Chip Rawlins has noted that "the hardcore western uses its landscape to advance. Henderson's best scenes all take place indoors. Though wonderfully described, his landscape seldom develops as firm ground for narrative."⁷ What Rawlins fails to note is that the "hardcore western" inevitably features a heterosexual protagonist. I would argue that insofar as Nature and wilderness are already gendered as male, it remains for Henderson's lovers to infiltrate indoor, domestic space, which has always been gendered as female --thus the indoor scenes. In addition, Blue's instinctive turn to the mountains when he is in crisis is both a quest to reconsolidate his contested male identity in male (i.e. "natural") space and to visit his homosexual self upon a site which is overdetermined as heterosexual in vaguely-sensed hope, perhaps, of beginning to carve out space there for gay men like himself and Sam. As geographer Nancy Duncan has noted, "Social relations, including, importantly, gender relations, are constructed and negotiated spatially and are embedded in the spatial organization of places."⁸ Wild places in the U.S. are so coded as heterosexual that it would seem there's literally no room for gay men in "Nature." This is exactly the literal and figurative territory that Henderson seeks to explore in Native.

There seems within the structure of the book's

realism to be no way that Blue Parker can both inhabit this particular place and still be fully who he is, but Henderson is clearly unwilling to reach such a conclusion. Instead, we find Blue at the end of the book seeking refuge in a tourist cabin in Yellowstone National Park, badly in need of recuperating his losses and with no particular guarantee that he will find his way "home," but with as-yet unimagined alternatives waiting beyond the end of the narrative. We understand that this young man, whom we have seen to be utterly "at home" in his chosen locale (participant, "native") is now inappropriately and ironically "out of place" as a tourist. Significantly, however, Blue's journey to Yellowstone is perhaps similar to his turn to the local mountains earlier, the suggestion being that a national park (bearing the stamp of quintessential, nationalized Nature) may be able to confer some kind of citizenship or "naturalization" to Blue that the less-celebrated wild locale lacked the "authority" to lend him.

Unlike Proulx, Henderson is reluctant to write off the seeming mutual-exclusivity of Blue's desire for both a life in rural Wyoming and his desire for Sam. His novel's conclusion is deliberately inconclusive, leaving open the possibility that Blue will find his way "home."

In these narratives, Wyoming's "natural" allure is reserved only for "manly" white men; these gay men, in

spite of their hegemonic whiteness, are shown to be at risk for their very lives. In October 1998, that probability was demonstrated to the nation-at-large when Matthew Shepard, a young white gay college student, was brutally beaten and left to die on a deserted stretch of road in Lander, Wyoming. In some matters, regrettably, fiction would seem powerless to do more than to imitate life. As I have argued in Chapter One, U.S. males are socialized to perform and enact heterosexual masculinity through acts of dominance and aggression particularly in "natural" space. Thus, because rural or "natural" environments are overdetermined in the U.S. as the province of heterosexual masculinity, it follows that straight men's violent attacks on gays in these spaces are both a performance and a would-be confirmation of the attackers' normative heterosexuality.

Mark Doty's work offers yet another possibility for countering constructions of "natural" men in "natural" places. A poet of recognized stature, Doty has also written an affecting account of his life with his late lover, who died of AIDS in 1993. In this memoir, Heaven's Coast, Doty expresses what Nature represents to him:⁹

Take, for instance, the salt marsh where I walk near Wood End Light.... That marsh is perhaps my favorite place in the world; it feels

inexhaustible to me, in all the contradictions which it yokes so gracefully within its own being. It is both austere and lush, wet and dry, constant and ceaselessly changing, secretive and open. I have never, in years of walks, grown weary of looking at it, perhaps because there is no single thing which constitutes "it"; the marsh is a whole shifting confluence of aspects. At low tide it's entirely dry, a Sahara of patterned sand and the tough green knots of sea lavender, beach grass around the edges of the beds of the tidal rivers gleaming as it bends and catches light along the straps of its leaves. As the tide mounts, twice a day, this desert disappears beneath the flood. It is a continuous apocalypse; Sahara becomes sea becomes sand again, in a theater of furious mutability. (8)

This passage might serve as a statement of purpose for Doty's entire body of writing, which insists on acknowledging the way in which all living things are bound together, inseparable. At the heart of this holistic vision of life, he identifies the two essences that western civilization has traditionally insisted on splitting apart: Nature and Culture. As in the passage already cited, Doty's writing everywhere insists on

rejoining the two and refusing their presumed oppositionality.

A gay man from a working-class background, Doty seems particularly sensitized to society's tendency to diminish those human beings who are represented as "different" or Other by the hegemonic culture.

A later passage in the memoir explicitly addresses his disinclination to accept the Nature-Culture binary. Describing his home in Provincetown, Massachusetts, a place that contains for him both stunning physical beauty and liberatory social promise (as a haven for gay men, especially), Doty writes:

We're face to face with a raft of contradictions, both natural and cultural. Here, at land's end, in the superb setting of this landscape, our gems are the rich possibilities of human love, human pleasures, the splendid diversity and sameness of our longings. It is a place worthy of pilgrimage, where the elements arrange, as they conjoin, small tableaux of miracle and reversal. (184)

The poems that together constitute his collection, Atlantis, are nothing if not testament to this belief in "tableaux of miracle and reversal."¹⁰ The poem "A Letter from the Coast" neatly juxtaposes elements of "man" and of

"nature," conjoining the two beyond society's would-be dualistic separation of them.

Describing the town's preparation for a storm, Doty writes of men hauling small boats high on the shore, above the waterline. Then he writes, "There's another storm/ in town, too, a veritable cyclone/ of gowns and wigs: men in dresses here for a week/ of living the dream of crossing over." Deliberately fusing the two "storms," Doty insists on merging them still further: "...in that raw weather I loved/ the flash of red excess, the cocktail dress/ and fur hat, the sheer pleasure/ of stockings and gloves." And again: "... this storm-rinsed morning,/ which has gone brilliant and uncomplicated/ as silk, that same watery sheen...". By the end of the poem, images of the cross-dressing men and of the weather are all swirled together, indistinguishable.

Similarly, in the long poem, "Atlantis" he conflates a wild bird with a cultivated flower when he describes the head of a loon as a "sleek tulip." What is "natural," he seems to ask repeatedly in this volume, and what "unnatural"? Whose interests are served by such a contrived division, and what is the cost to those of us whom society would construe as "unnatural"? Doty challenges the reader to define what "belongs" in this setting at the tip of Cape Cod, and to say what, if anything, is "out of place."

Throughout this work, therefore, Doty steadfastly refuses the would-be opposition of Nature and Culture. His discursive approach is perhaps nowhere as powerful as in the poem "Grosse Fuge." Named for Beethoven's quartet, the poet juxtaposes his own cultural production (the poem itself) against a work of musical genius, a complicated and elegant composition, while at the same time including in the poem direct references to Nature. That is, while foregrounding the fugue's sheer artistry and sophisticated design, Doty nevertheless embeds his own efforts to fabricate a work of "culture" with images and instances of the "natural," going so far as to graft these images onto Beethoven's creation.

The poem opens with a description of unseasonal weather, "wildly off schedule." Telling of frost in the late summer, "real autumn" instead brought a "rash, breathtakingly sudden bloom." All of this is considered "unnatural," the poet says, but then wants to know what that means: "This month the new comes/ so dizzyingly quick it coexists/ with all autumn's evidence.... How are we to read this nameless season --renewal, promise/ confusion? Should we be glad or terrified/ at how quickly things are replaced?"

Interspersed with the litany of unseasonal, supposedly "unnatural" events in the poem is evidence of the fact that the poet is surrounded by gay men with AIDS,

some dying, some in remission. Their presence in the poem requires us to re-examine the meaning of the words: "How are we to read this nameless season --renewal, promise/confusion?"

The poet immerses himself in the study of Beethoven's late quartets, as if by comprehending the intricacy of the music, he could understand the design of life and death in which he is so squarely immersed and recover a sense of order for himself in the face of epidemic loss. In describing the attempt to understand the music, he again conflates "nature" with "culture:" "Like trying to familiarize yourself,/ exactly, with the side of a mountain:/ this birch, this rock-pool, this square mosaic/ yard of tesserated leaves, autumnal,/ a jeweled reliquary."

He explicitly confesses: "I am trying to understand/ the Grosse Fuge, though I'm not sure what/ it might mean to 'understand' this stream/ of theme and reiteration, statement/ and return. What does it mean, chaos/ gathered into a sudden bronze sweetness,/ an October flourish, and then that moment/ denied, turned acid, disassembling,/ questioned, rephrased?" How can anything that occurs in nature ever be considered un-natural? What use is there in viewing the world as that which is "of Nature" and that which is not? Is Culture then un-natural? Doty insists on the inextricability of everything: a piece of music,

the weather, an unseasonal bloom, men dying of AIDS. He accords to everything its naturalness simply because it exists: misbegotten blossoms and men who love one another must be understood as being as "natural" as the anomaly of Beethoven's genius.

"I bring home, from each walk to town, pockets/ full of chestnuts, and fill a porcelain/ bowl with their ruddy, seducing music/ something like cellos, something that banks deep/ inside the body." He's not saying that the chestnuts are the color of cellos, but that they embody music. Again, the idea of "nature" and the idea of "culture" are held up to each other, both constructs: burnished spheres in a porcelain bowl, each containing some quality of the other, inextricable.

That which is most deeply alive, Doty argues, whether the product of humankind or the product of what we call Nature, refuses separation: "All my work of listening,/ and have I only learned that Beethoven/ could see the forest and the trees?" The suggestion is that it is the work of Art (of Culture) to dismantle and refuse the dualism, not to perpetuate it.

He continues in this vein of nature and culture merged, as one: "The music/ is like lying down in that light which gleams/ out of chestnuts, the glow of oiled and rubbed/ mahogany, of burlled walnut, bird's eye/ maple polished into incandescence...". Again in this poem as

with his others, images of Nature and images of Culture merge and overlap until they become indistinguishable from each other.

The poem ends with an assertion of that which is irrepressible, insistent on its own aliveness, not to be denied: "What can I do but echo/ myself, vary and repeat? Where can the poem end?/ What can you expect, in a world that blooms/ and freezes all at once?/ There is no resolution in the fugue."

II. Against Nature?

What is at stake for U.S. women when Nature and the "natural" are overdetermined as a property or quality "naturally" belonging to white heterosexual men? According to this hegemonic ideological construction, women are aligned more closely with Nature than men by virtue of their procreative biology, but both Nature and women are thereby seen as too natural, in need of taming or domestication by men.

Ecofeminism is a theory and praxis that deliberately conflates "Woman" and "Nature" in what Spivak would call a 'strategy of essentialism' in order to subvert exploitative systems of paternal dominance in both social relations and the predominantly exploitative relationship

of human beings to the 'more-than-human' realm. In An Unspoken Hunger, Terry Tempest Williams states the premise as follows:

As women wedded to wilderness, we must realize that we do carry the wild card, that our individual voices matter and our collective voice can shatter the status quo that for too long has legislated on behalf of power and far too little on behalf of life. We can flood Congress with our wild cards (imagine hundreds of thousands of brightly colored cards covering the desks of our representatives), demanding that women's issues be recognized as health issues, as environmental issues, as issues centered around a quality of life that touches all of us deeply.¹¹

Following Butler and others, however, this essentializing conflation may risk more than it gains.¹² What other strategies might then be successfully deployed to unsettle the symbiotic inscription of hegemonic man with that which is both literally and figuratively represented as "natural"?

The publication of contemporary anthologies of writing by women with titles such as Another Wilderness and Uncommon Waters¹³ infer that there is, on the one hand, Nature as it is experienced by (hegemonic) men, and

on the other, Nature as experienced by women.

Gretchen Legler, one such practitioner, uses this approach effectively in her essay "Border Water,"¹⁴ which contains lines reminiscent of those spoken by the gay protagonist in Martin and John. Speaking of her discomfort in the "men's world" of fishing and hunting, Legler writes: "...there has to be a space for me; space for me as a woman out here. There has to be a middle ground" (14). The sentiment echoes, as well, that expressed by Blue Parker in Native: the need to belong, to feel in, not out of, place.

Recounting a fishing trip she takes with her husband to the Canadian border of Minnesota, Legler observes the dominance of men in this locale: "There are no other women on the water. Only men with other men" (7). Her husband comments, "All these guys are out here to get away from their wives" (7). Fishing in this locale is thus constructed as fulfilling the hegemonic script of men going "back to nature" to attain or recover their normative masculinity, as I have discussed.

Legler describes her mounting sense of discomfort, of being out of place not in spite of the fact that but because she is a woman. Attempting to use one of the public outhouses at the crowded campsite, she beats a hasty retreat when she discovers that its walls have been marked, evidently by men, with crude drawings of women's

vulvas, with scribbled messages that alarm her with their implicit violence:

"I want to fill your pussy with a load of hot come," the writing above this picture says... "I want to fuck your wet pussy. Let's meet." is scrawled next to it.

I am suddenly terrified and sickened. I hear a threat: I want to rape you... As I walk back to our camp I look over my shoulder and left and right into the woods. I wonder if it was that man, or that one, or that one, who wrote this violence on the wall. (6)

Thus, Legler is made to feel not only unwelcome but endangered in this location. The men, while never openly hostile to her, nevertheless effectively exclude her from entering the fish-cleaning shed, while at the same time allowing in one of their male buddies.

Legler links the unwelcoming atmosphere to her lack of confidence in outdoor locales, but her husband reminds her that he, too, feels scrutinized:

He believes he is being watched and judged. But, unlike me, he is protected from ridicule. When we bought the van it came with a bumper sticker, left there by its previous owner. It says "Vietnam Veterans of America." Craig believes this sticker gives him certain

privileges and encourages respect.... I often think he wishes he had earned this bumper sticker rather than bought it. He was training to be a Navy pilot when the war ended and he was sent home. Sometimes when he meets a man his age and picks up a hint or a clue, he asks them, shyly, "Were you in Nam?" Sometimes they say yes and ask him if he was, and he says, almost apologetically, "No. Almost." (11)

Legler intuits here the script for normative masculinity that includes military service and "naturalizing" enactments of male-ness in Nature. By foregrounding in this essay her subject position as a woman, she illuminates the overbearing gendering of natural space that so often excludes women from its province. "'I should give up and stay home,'" she tells her husband. "'The worse it gets the more I see I don't have a place out here'" (14).

In her poem "Against Nature," Judith McCombs constructs a representation of the wilderness that is rendered virtually meaningless without the socially-constructed scaffolding by means of which we are accustomed to seeing Nature framed.¹⁵ Removed from its cultural context, the speaker asserts, Nature is unrecognizable: "There's a wilderness behind me, I know, I

paid/ to get out here & its chock full of dirt" (2).

The presumably female speaker continues, addressing a presumably male "you": "My habits won't work, out here, & yours/ won't either (see, the fishing hook squirms/ into your clever opposable thumb)". The poet suggests that Nature is an invention or contrivance of, not just human beings but, specifically, men --men with hegemonic interests to protect: "In a place without gates how can you open/ Without windows what do you see" and "Where you pace has no walls & no corners (how/ do you stop)".

She posits male "forebears" whose task it was to tame the wilderness, past and present legions of beleaguered men who feel compelled to protect themselves against "wildness" in all its forms:

Think of their counting, alone in the winters,
 how many windows, how many acres
 imposed on the land, how many cupfuls
 of flour, of salt, how many times
 this sorting & counting: the last defense
 against nature (2)

Another poem from the same collection, "A Clean, Well-lighted Place," with its title's invocation of Ernest Hemingway (who published a short story by the same title), offers a contrasting view of the Culture that white patriarchy has worked so hard to achieve --perhaps the ideal world of "men without women" that Hemingway so

studiously sought to portray. McCombs here asserts that this world is the result of men's having "tamed" wild(er)ness or Nature:

... as for us, the inhabitants,
 we are all white & healthy all over
 (even the bus boys have blue eyes & tans)
 & every table is headed by father
 husband or brother or bachelor man
 No one is missing a limb or his senses
 no one's incontinent or grievously lonely
 or poor or otherwise different

"A Clean, Well-lighted Place" proves to be a place sterile and antiseptic, where diversity has been replaced by a cloned sameness. It is, in short, an all-too-recognizable near-totalitarian world --the result of the hegemonic masculing rage for "defense against Nature."

In her collection Crime Against Nature, the Lamont Poetry Selection for 1989, Minnie Bruce Pratt contests the U.S. patriarchal social and judicial system that declared her "unfit" as a mother to her two sons for the "crime against nature" of declaring herself a lesbian.¹⁶ The poems are written to her sons, now grown, in hopes that, just as she is no longer the subordinate and subordinating woman who birthed them, so too may they become "true" -- not "real"-- men. She wishes for them, in part, "that

you'll choose memory, not anesthesia; that you'll have work you love, hindering no one, a path crossing at boundary markers where you question power; that your loves will match you thought for thought..." In this inaugural poem, she suggests somewhat obliquely that the true crime against nature is hegemonic mankind's need to dominate; she concludes her wish for her sons with the words:

I can only pray:

That you'll never ask for the weather, earth,
angels, women, or other lives to obey you...

("Poem for My Sons," 14).

A testament to her own will to remember and bear witness to the most painful experience of her life -- losing her sons in a custody battle to her husband and being declared "unfit"-- Pratt reconstructs this scarred past in a resolute determination to tell the truth about her experience as both a woman-loving woman and a mother who loves her sons.

When she lost her boys, Pratt discovered that she lost her "fit" or belonging-ness, literally and figuratively, to a southern U.S. society that refused to recognize her as maternal despite her lesbianism, and to a family in which even her own mother disowned her as "unnatural." Cast out of the role assigned her by heterosexual hegemony, she had literally nowhere to go.

In "No Place," she addresses this literal and figural

liminality: "There was no place to be/ simultaneous, or between." This is the first of many poems in the volume in which Pratt places herself and her two boys "in nature." Here, she has dreamed that the three of them were wading a creek, a "natural" (and naturalizing) fantasized place that stands in vivid contrast to their actual placelessness: "There is milkweed, purple-bronze/ wild hydrangea, and an unfamiliar huge openness./ It is the place, promised, that has not yet been,/ the place where everything is changed..."

As I argued in my discussion of Henderson's Native, outdoor space in U.S. cultural construction has been gendered as male, while the indoor sphere, the "domestic realm," has been gendered female. According to this logic, it makes sense that Pratt and her sons, during this liminal time in their lives, would significantly relate to one another in the realm of "nature." In so doing, they reclaim for themselves a space held hostage by hegemonic masculinity and "naturalize" their "new" relationship.

In general, I see Pratt's project as one of reclamation. Her poems comment on what Duncan has named the "hegemonic heterosexuality of most environments":

Such normalization makes lesbians either invisible or --if they choose to signal their sexuality-- they must be constantly under the exhausting pressure and responsibility of

political struggle over the definition of space. As long as lesbians ... remain invisible, radical geographical explanations of oppression will remain unnecessarily homogeneous and insensitive to differences among those who are marginalized and oppressed.¹⁷

As if to corroborate this claim, in a later poem, describing a visit to her sons after she has moved away from them, she and the boys again find a place in Nature: "They show me everything,/ saying, with no words, they have thought of me here,/ and here I am with them in the in-between places." ("The Place Lost and Gone, the Place Found," 38).

Having been declared unfit, having "lost" her sons, Pratt muses on the words that describe her physical, corporeal reality: "body of a woman, a mother, a lesbian./ And here,/ perhaps, you say: That last word doesn't belong. Woman, mother: those can stay. Lesbian: no." ("The Child Taken from the Mother," 25). In "Declared Not Fit," she reflects that her hands, when they were "smeared often enough with [her babies'] shit, vomit,/ blackness of dirt and new blood" were considered "fit," but when those same hands caress the body of another woman, then they "became not fit to touch." Her sons, she says, were too young to understand why she had to leave them. "Neither did I," she writes.

In "Two Small-Sized Girls," Pratt visits a childhood friend, who, for the "crime" of "Wanting to have her small garden the way she wanted it, and wanting to go her own way," is now threatened with the loss of her children just as Pratt was a decade earlier for her "crime" of loving another woman. The poet observes ironically:

So much for the power of my ideas about
oppression and her disinterest in them. In fact
we've ended in the same place. Made wrong,
knowing we've done nothing wrong....

Despite our raw hearts,
guilt from men who used our going to take our
children,
we know we've done nothing wrong....

The real crime against nature, Pratt's poems assert, is not women who behave "unnaturally," but a hegemonic masculinity that relies on dominance for its demonstration of prowess. As her oldest son reaches draft age, she recalls that she was pregnant with him when her then-husband was summoned before the draft board. She remembers that on that occasion her husband

... offers me as a piece of evidence.

Clear to see: My flesh is the field, spread,
plowed, and now the fruit, the root crop.

Here is the land that needs its farmer.

Here is the country that needs its ruler.

Here is the child that needs its father.

Let him stay at home and not go to war.

("In the Waiting Room at the Draft Board," 77)

Refusing to lose her son, again, this time to war, Pratt writes in "At the Vietnam Memorial" of the 50,000 names, all "sons of some mother." What is a "crime against nature," her anti-war poems seem to say, but this monstrous, interminable slaughter sanctioned by a nationalism everywhere infused with assertions of male dominance?

In the final poem, "Crime Against Nature," Pratt contests the label:

No one says crime against nature when a man
 shotguns one or two or three or four or five
 or more of his children, and usually his wife,
 and maybe her visiting sister.

She says of her own "crime," "Some fear I've crossed over into capable power/ and I'm taking my children with me":

... And what are the implications for the political system of boy children who watched me like a magic trick, like I had a key to the locked-room mystery? (Will they lose all respect for national boundaries, their father, science, or private property?)

Although the question is posed tongue-in-cheek, this collection's range interrogates constructions of "normative" heterosexual hegemony by which her love for

another woman is seen to be a "crime against nature." The title poem gestures to the ways in which constructions of the "natural" have been and continue to be put to the uses of white heterosexual masculinist hegemony in constructing widespread representations of nationalism.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Paul Monette, Becoming a Man - Half a Life-story (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1992)
2. Dale Peck, Martin and John - A Novel, (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1993).
3. Annie Proulx, "Brokeback Mountain," The New Yorker, October 13, 1997, pp. 74-85.
4. The New Yorker, October 13, 1997, p.75.
5. William Haywood Henderson, Native (New York: Dutton, 1993).
6. In "Walking," Thoreau invokes an iconic antelope in the same way that I am suggesting Henderson does here: "I would have every man so much like a wild antelope, so much a part and parcel of nature, that his very person should thus sweetly advertise our senses in his presence, and remind us of those parts of nature which he most haunts." See Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," in The Portable Thoreau ed. Carl Bode (New York: Penguin, 1982) 610-611.
7. Chip Rawlins, review of Native (The Bloomsbury Review, May/June 1994).
8. Nancy Duncan, Introduction, BodySpace ed. Nancy Duncan (New York; Routledge, 1996) 4-5.
9. Mark Doty, Heaven's Coast (New York: HarperCollins, 1996).
10. Mark Doty, Atlantis (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).
11. Terry Tempest Williams, An Unspoken Hunger
12. See Noël Sturgeon, Ecofeminist Natures - Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action (New York: Routledge, 1997) for an excellent discussion of this.
13. See Susan Fox Rogers ed., Another Wilderness - New Outdoor Writing By Women (Seattle, Wa.: Seal Press, 1994) and Holly Morris, ed. Uncommon Waters: Women Write About Fishing (Seattle, Wa.: Seal Press, 1993).

14. Gretchen Legler, "Border Water," in All the Powerful Invisible Things (Seattle, Wa.: Seal Press, 1995) 3-14.
15. Judith McCombs, Against Nature - Wilderness Poems (Paradise, Calif.: Dustbooks, 1979) 2.
16. Minnie Bruce Pratt, Crime Against Nature (Ithaca, New York: Firebrand Books, 1990).
17. Nancy Duncan, Introduction to BodySpace ed. Nancy Duncan (New York: Routledge, 1996) 9.

Chapter Four:
Black Bodies, Green Identities

I.

Just as the last chapter focused on narratives by and/or about those represented as gendered and sexualized Others in the construction of hegemonic U.S. manhood, in this chapter I examine narratives by and/or about those U.S. subjects 'raced' as black with respect to their interactions with Nature. In the U.S. racial binary, blacks are perceived to occupy a racialized subject position that is widely perceived as being the most extremely opposed to that of hegemonic white subjects. What might this subject position enable with respect to narratives about Nature? What does it foreclose?

I argue here, again, that narratives that contradict hegemonic constructions of both "Man" and "Nature" have subversive potential. They can and are used to interrogate and counter popular cultural assumptions about

Nature or Wild(er)ness as sites "belonging" to or disproportionately associated with white heterosexual masculinist hegemony. In the case of narratives that foreground black subjects' engagement with Nature, consideration is brought to bear, first of all, on why it is even necessary for blacks to (re)claim a right to inhabit the non-human environment and, secondly, what is at stake for them in doing so. In addition, such a perspectival shift in representations of Nature may illuminate the consequences this hegemonic overdetermination has had and continues to have for "wild" or "natural" locations.

As Minnie Bruce Pratt's Crime Against Nature, discussed in the last chapter, contests the unexamined Western cultural conflation of "woman" with "nature" --a conflation which nevertheless safeguards the hegemonic sovereignty of straight white men-- simply by sexualizing the female subject as lesbian, Evelyn White's "Black Women and the Wilderness" interrogates the same conflation by gendering and racializing that subject.¹ By representing "wilderness" as the site of both personal and group loss and recuperation, White contests as well the mainstream U.S. cultural ideology of "wilderness" as a site available to all citizens equally.

White achieves this by immediately foregrounding how

historically blacks have been excluded (by white hegemony) from unproblematic recreational enjoyment of Nature. By emphasizing her own positionality as an African American woman, White brings to bear on the enjoyment of wilderness by blacks in general, and black women in particular, the historical legacy of institutionalized racial oppression. Although gender is an implicit consideration, it is primarily by emphasizing her racial heritage that White contextualizes her argument. She opens her essay with the acknowledgment that she had never felt at ease in, let alone enjoyed, the experience of being "in nature." A native of San Francisco, she writes of her participation in a women's writing workshop "held each summer on the McKenzie River in the foothills of Oregon's Cascade Mountains" (377). White prefaces her essay with the following epigraph:

I wanted to sit outside and listen to the roar of the ocean, but I was afraid.

I wanted to walk through the redwoods, but I was afraid.

I wanted to glide in a kayak and feel the cool water splash in my face, but I was afraid. (377)

Describing her apprehensiveness about wilderness, White writes, "For me, the fear is like a heartbeat, always present, while at the same time, intangible, elusive, and difficult to define. So pervasive, so much a part of me,

that I hardly knew it was there" (377). She discusses her desire to move from the city to the country; however, "[e]ach house-hunting trip I've made to the countryside has been fraught with two emotions: elation at the prospect of living closer to nature and a sense of absolute doom about what might befall me in the backwoods" (378).

What does "living closer to nature" signify to her? Juxtaposing her desire against her fear, enjoyment of the wilderness thus comes to represent both that which, as a black woman, she feels she has been deprived of and (therefore) that which can liberate her from that internalized oppression. She feels compelled to reimagine herself in relationship to the physical environment she temporarily inhabits each summer in Oregon, describing her initial experience at the writing workshop:

When I wasn't teaching, eating in the dining hall, or attending our evening readings, I stayed holed up in my riverfront cabin with all doors locked and windowshades drawn. While the river's roar gave me a certain comfort and my heart warmed when I gazed at the sun-dappled trees out of a classroom window, I didn't want to get closer. I was certain that if I ventured outside to admire a meadow or to feel the cool ripples in a stream, I'd be taunted, attacked,

raped, maybe even murdered because of the color of my skin. (378)

The realization of the lengths to which she has gone to avoid Nature leads White to question her actions and to offer the following rationale: "I believe the fear I experience in the outdoors is shared by many African-American women and that it limits the way we move through the world..." (378). Foregrounding her race and her gender, then, she goes on to link her own fear of outdoor experience directly to various "memories" of racial violence. Invoking a "genetic memory of ancestors hunted down and preyed upon in rural settings" (378), White in this way contests the prevailing cultural view of an uncomplicated enjoyment of U.S. American "wilderness" as something which is available to all citizens equally. Her construction of a race-based representation of people in Nature contradicts hegemonic representations: "... I imagine myself in the country as my forebears were -- exposed, vulnerable, and unprotected-- a target of cruelty and hate" (378).

Recalling particularly the 1963 bombing of a Birmingham church that resulted in the deaths of four young black girls and the 1955 lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in rural Mississippi, White concludes, "I'm certain that the terror I felt in my Oregon cabin is directly linked to my memories" (378). She adds later:

"In [Emmett's murder] I saw a reflection of myself and the blood-chilling violence that would greet me if I even dared to venture into the wilderness" (380). After he died, Till's body, noose still cinched around his neck, was thrown into the Tallahatchie river.

Surprisingly, White never comments on the fact that the Oregon Territory in 1849 passed an exclusionary act making it illegal for "negroes and mulattoes" to live there, an act which was among the most restrictive of such laws then in existence in the United States and one which stayed in the Oregon Constitution until 1926.² James Byrd, Jr.'s recent death in Jasper, Texas, where he was chained and then dragged behind a truck until dismembered, would seem but the most recent of countless acts of violence committed against persons whose only "crime" is that their skin is black. At any rate, White has well-documented cause for feeling personally endangered in non-urban space in the U.S. She remains for a time incapacitated by her fear. "For several Oregon summers," she writes, "I concealed my pained feelings about the outdoors until I could no longer reconcile my silence with my mandate to my students to face their fears" (381). She then decides that it is precisely through direct personal experience of the "wilderness" that she can liberate herself. But circumstances conspire to foil her first attempt when she accompanies a group of white women (from

the writers' workshop) to rent a rowboat at a nearby lake, only to be refused by the "boathouse man." As it appears that there are in fact many available boats, White is disquieted by the possibility that they have been denied one because of the color of her skin. (It seems at least as likely, however, given the politics of rural Oregon, that the women may have been refused for reasons of misogyny and/or homophobia, other "unnatural" identities which I've already discussed in the previous chapter.) At any rate, when this initial attempt to confront her fear directly is thwarted, White reaches for more "memories":

In an effort to contain my fears, I forced myself to revisit the encounter and to reexamine my childhood wounds from the Birmingham bombing and the lynching of Emmett Till. I touched the terror of my Ibo and Ashanti ancestors as they were dragged from Africa and enslaved on southern plantations. I conjured bloodhounds, burning crosses, and white-robed Klansmen hunting down people who looked just like me. I imagined myself being captured in a swampy backwater, my back ripped open and bloodied by the whip's lash. I cradled an ancestral mother, broken and keening as her baby was snatched from her arms and sold down the river. (382)

From this vantage point of "ancestral" identification,

White feels emboldened to try once more to confront her fear. In so doing, she deploys a tactic that Gayatri Spivak has named a "strateg[y] of essentialism." Thus, mobilizing another "ancestral memory," White writes that she was "[d]etermined to reconnect myself to the comfort my African ancestors felt in the rift valleys of Kenya and on the shores of Sierra Leone" (382). She now resolves to participate in a raft trip down the McKenzie river:

As we pushed off into the current, I felt myself make an unsure but authentic shift from my painful past.

... About an hour into the trip, in a magnificently still moment, I looked up into the heavens and heard the voice of black poet Langston Hughes:

"I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins. I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young. I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep. I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids about it. My soul has grown deep like the rivers."

Soaking wet and shivering with emotion, I felt tears welling my eyes as I stepped out of the raft onto solid ground. Like my African forebears who survived the Middle Passage, I was

stronger at journey's end. (10)

The passage evokes an image of Emmett Till's noosed body floating down another river in another time. By reaching into a would-be collective cultural memory, White feels empowered to reclaim her "ancestral" right to feel at home in Nature. Determined to recover her birthright, that is, by invoking a supposed "genetic" memory "in an effort to find peace in the outdoors" (383), White succeeds in conquering her own fears. Her essay concludes:

"[C]omforted by our tribal ancestors --herders, gatherers, and fishers all-- I am less fearful, ready to come home" (383). The essay gestures triumphantly toward a recuperated wilderness, a Nature in which blacks as well as whites, women as well as men, can "come home."

The essay implicitly acknowledges the historic foreclosure of "natural" or wilderness locations in the U.S. to blacks, while explicitly insisting on the right of blacks to claim, or as White would have it, to reclaim such spaces as those to which blacks as well as whites have inalienable rights. White suggests that it is important for blacks, especially black women, to be able to situate themselves "naturally" (freely, joyously) in the extra-urban world of "wilderness" or "nature" in order to realize full liberation from racial and gender-based oppression. Although her essay ultimately reinscribes the traditional hegemonic U.S. American literary convention of

a personal wilderness experience as one offering salvation, by framing her narrative in the context of both race and gender she disrupts the conventional, conquest-based white-male recitation of redemptive outdoor experience.

White never explains why it is that she associates the ability to feel safe in the outdoors --in a "wilderness" vs. an urban setting-- with her achievement of personal freedom: What is the promise, exactly, that feeling more comfortable in the "natural" as opposed to the man-made world affords a black woman who would be free of race- and gender-based oppression? Is it not that, as argued in my first chapter, Natural or "wild" locations in the U.S. are overwhelmingly represented as the rightful province of heterosexual white men and that, therefore, for those occupying subject positions which have been constructed as oppositional to white patriarchy, attainment of full freedom must be won on the "grounds" of the non-human landscape as well as within urban environments?

Granted that, as White herself acknowledges in another context, she is "a Black woman with few contemporary models on this front --to write my 'wilderness self' into existence,"³ what strikes me most about her representation of black women in the wilderness is the way in which it excludes any mention whatsoever of

black Americans experiencing autonomy in "wilderness." She instead leapfrogs over the documented history of those African Americans who did experience some degree of autonomy in U.S. wilderness in favor of a "genetic" memory of ancient African ancestors. Her view of an utterly absent freely-chosen black presence in U.S. "nature" therefore seems to risk a-historicism.⁴

In direct contrast to White's method, David Bradley's The Chaneyville Incident is at pains to record the continuous presence, over centuries, of blacks in a particular rural U.S. location --despite the dominant white culture's best efforts to restrict their movements, to eradicate them, and to erase their existence.⁵ Indeed, narrator John Washington, an academic historian residing in Philadelphia, eschews exercises of the imagination in favor of "facts." "I study history," he says, "because I want to know where the lies are."

He is called back to his childhood home in western Pennsylvania, a site located "nineteen miles and 290 perches north of Mason and Dixon's line" (11)-- a place where blacks and whites have coexisted in uneasy proximity to one another for several generations, and one haunted for him by its legends of fugitive slaves who met their deaths there on their flight to freedom in "the North."

Seeking to understand what motivated his father,

Moses Washington, in his life and in his death (by his own hand, while John was still young), John is concerned, he says, with the historic facts of this geographic location. In the course of coming to terms with his father, he comes to understand, as well, that it is exactly this enlarged understanding that has been Moses's legacy to him: that the son one day succeed in contextualizing the father's life and death in the historical framework of the black people who have inhabited or tried to inhabit as free persons this particular geographic location. As John comes to learn, the landscape around his childhood home, in addition to housing the tales and the "ghosts" of blacks, contains their physical remains as well.

The narrative particularly foregrounds the terms of the achievement of (black) masculinity in the context of John's life. And that achievement, like that of white masculinity discussed in Chapter One, is inextricably bound for black men with the ability to claim a "home" in Nature. His father Moses had achieved a legendary stature for his skill in negotiating the "natural" realm. As a close friend of Moses's describes him to John:

You'd see him in town ... an' you'd start to think maybe he wasn't so much, nothin' moren any other man. But you see him in the woods, movin' along over dry leaves without makin' a sound, movin' in big long strides that done to distance

what a flame does to wax, you'd jest about want to head for town an' streetlights an' sidewalks 'cause you'd know you never had no more business in the woods than a catfish in a foot race. (90)

Among these black men, the ability to be at home --that is, to be "natural"-- in Nature establishes their prowess, a defining superiority to other men, both black and white. Indeed, it is Moses's skillful negotiation of the woods that helps him to save the life of a black man who is on the verge of being lynched by the KKK. Moses frees him and keeps him safely hidden from the Klansmen in the surrounding forest. Moses, as well, was a man who made a small fortune by illegally distilling corn whiskey at a number of secret sites in the mountains.

In the time following his father's death, John has two main occupations. One is being tutored in woodlore by his father's best friend, Old Jack, until he learns to track intuitively. The other is his pursuit of the written record his father had left behind --a quest initially doomed to failure because he hasn't yet acquired the historian's "tracking" skills.

The two pursuits become entwined one night in a vivid dream:

I saw tracks then, the spoor of a big buck, bigger than any I had ever seen, and so I picked up the shotgun and set off, tracking through the

snow.

... [S]uddenly I knew I had found him. I could not see him, but I could hear a hollow silent space in the woods, a little dead spot.... I brought the shotgun to my shoulder and fired... and heard a sudden, dreadfully human cry of anguish and anger... I ran forward and found the buck lying on the ground, blood dripping into the snow, and a set of prints leading away again into the snow.

I followed the prints, moving quickly because they were clear. In a few minutes I came to the edge of a clearing and saw a man in the center of it, naked to the waist... I knew that it was Moses Washington. (148)

In this dream sequence his father becomes conflated with the animal, a "natural" creature, and the analogy of tracking acquires a double meaning, a motif which recurs in John's adult life when he returns to his boyhood home.

John's "back-to-nature" move occurs after the death of Old Jack, the last of his father's cohort, thus moving John into the generational forefront of black men. While seeking to "track" his family history through a diligent accumulation of facts, he moves into Old Jack's secluded cabin and begins to live there under "primitive" conditions. This lifestyle gives rise to a literal

tracking when he illegally stalks a male deer he wants to shoot for meat. The analogy is plain: the work of an historian is that of a skilled and patient tracker. As John himself says, "... [I]t is patience, not impulse, that follows tracks; it is knowledge, not haste, that saves time" (244).

Having been left behind by John's "back-to-nature" move, his lover Judith angrily accuses him of playing "Davy Crockett" and living by "the Code of the West" (253) -- analogies more accurately befitting white men under similar circumstances, as argued in Part I of this dissertation. She accuses him of "going native" (258), describing the hillside where he has taken up residence as "naturally" beautiful, like "something out of 'Walt Disney'" (271).

In the course of reconstructing his forebears' history in this place, John corrects her inaccurate view of "The Hill" as a realm of "wild," undisturbed Nature by telling her how it was once home to a whole community of blacks, almost all of whom eventually fell victim to epidemics of typhus and smallpox --both diseases introduced by the adjacent white population. John remarks as well the history of slavery in this part of Pennsylvania, at least since 1763. He explains that a nearby town, Chaneyville, was on the route of the Underground Railroad and provided a location where slave

catchers would wait to capture slaves fleeing the South. When Judith protests that the site is north of the Mason-Dixon line, he explains the Fugitive Slave acts which provided for the legal capture of escaped slaves in the North, and informs her that, in fact, "there was no safety south of Canada" (414). He reminds her, as well, of the Jim Crow laws which until relatively recently had legalized discrimination against blacks on the basis of their racial ancestry.

As John uncovers more about his family's past, he discovers that his great-grandfather, an escaped slave, was --like Moses-- an unusually adept hunter and tracker, having acquired his skills from the Cherokee, from whom he was descended:

C.K. lived with them, learning how to be an Indian, how to hunt and how to fish, how to find shelter, all the elements of woodcraft that no slave knew or was permitted to know, simply because it would have made running away so much easier. The things he learned were to him as important as reading and writing. (333)

This passage suggests the reason for the value the black men in the novel place on woodlore, and it suggests the ways in which white hegemony sought to prevent blacks from participation in either Nature (survival skills) or Culture

(reading and writing) by denying them access to both.

But even C.K. Washington's skill in the woods is unequal, years later, to the task of leading a band of fleeing slaves to freedom. John learns that his great-grandfather and all of the slaves were killed there, on the spot, their bodies subsequently buried on a ridge above the town.

My brief analysis of its portrayal of black men's relationship to Nature does not begin to do justice to the complexity of this book, but I include its mention here because it complicates the representation of that relationship as seemingly de-historicized in Evelyn White's essay and provides an important juxtaposition to the narratives of white masculinity already discussed.

When Evelyn White writes of her desire to recover feelings of comfort and pleasure in being in "wilderness," she is acknowledging that this has been an arena historically foreclosed to black persons in the United States. And although Bradley's novel comprehensively describes the historical movement of blacks in at least one "natural" location, it can nevertheless only show that their movements were always circumscribed, restricted, and otherwise determined by white hegemony, resulting often in surreptitious and "illegal" activity (making moonshine, poaching deer, fleeing slavery). These black subjects' movements in Nature, that is, were almost entirely lacking

in the exercise of free agency. The a-historicism of which I have accused White, therefore, would seem justified by Bradley's narrative. Certainly blacks have historically been present in wild or natural U.S. landscapes, but it remains to be demonstrated that their movements were either freely chosen and/or freely enacted. And Bradley concerns himself almost exclusively with the relationship of black men to Nature, thus reinforcing White's assertion that as a black woman who would experience wilderness, she feels doubly vulnerable.

Like Evelyn White, Eddy Harris is an African American who undertook to fulfill a personal quest in nature --a quest, like hers, involving a journey down a river. Unlike White's afternoon adventure, however, Harris decides that he will canoe, solo, the length of the Mississippi --this despite the fact that he's only been canoeing a few times previously and that he lacks a canoe.

Mississippi Solo - A River Quest⁶ begs comparison with Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn if for no other reason than the fact that both narratives concern the journeys of black men on the pre-eminent river in the U.S. One way to contextualize Harris's memoir is to note that, a century after the publication of Huckleberry Finn, "Jim" finally achieves a narrative voice. The causes of

the pronounced time lag should be understood as the same that made Harris's journey most challenging: the history of institutionalized racism in the U.S. Because Harris lacks representational models of black men freely venturing forth in U.S. "nature," he is challenged not only to narrate his experience on the Mississippi, but to achieve suitable ground-breaking representations for himself as he does so.

Unlike Twain's version of the river trip --wherein Huck endlessly performs a variety of roles (such as, at one point, masquerading as a girl) but Jim's identity remains stable (always and only a fugitive slave)-- Harris's self-identity is subject to much indeterminacy. As we shall see, despite the passage of a century, Harris --like Jim-- is never entirely free of the restraints imposed on his mobility by virtue of geopolitical boundaries. His narrative may be read, in fact, as a chronicle of one frustrated by the restrictions imposed upon him by white hegemony's racialized inscription of his identity as Other. Where he would prefer to be perceived simply as a "human being" or a "man," he is aware of being regarded as "black." Lacking precedents, in literature or in life, Harris struggles throughout his memoir to find the appropriate forms of representation for a contemporary U.S. American black man canoeing the Mississippi alone. Were he a "fugitive from

justice," his narrative might provide a contemporary spin on fugitive slave narratives, for example; as it is, as Evelyn White observed, there have been few if any cultural scripts for those black persons who would go forth freely in recreational enjoyment of U. S. Nature.

Unlike White, who is ready, willing, and able to foreground the role of race in her experience of the out of doors, Harris is initially reluctant to do so:

I promised myself early on that I would not make race an issue out here. I would try to live my life on the river as I so far have lived my real life; I would not make my being black a part of my success or failure or too great a factor in how I perceive things. After all, I have never considered being black my most significant feature; when I think of myself, black is not the first descriptive term that comes to mind. ... I didn't allow people to deal with me on the basis of my race. I am more than black and my attitude says so. (67-68)

Despite his resistance at the outset to acknowledging the role that race might play in others' perceptions of him as he canoed down the river, Harris nevertheless observes when he arrives at the river's headwaters in Minnesota:

It is perhaps startling to realize that there are places blacks don't much go to.

... Blacks aren't often found cruising the bazaars in Bangkok, or sliding down the ski slopes. Finances could be a problem, but the travel magazines seem not to want blacks to travel, or think that blacks don't travel, or maybe just don't care. The advertisement photos rarely --extremely rarely-- show blacks enjoying exotic holiday destinations. Why?

And why aren't there very many blacks in Minnesota? Too cold in winter? Safety in numbers? Small town conservatism and bigotry? More jobs in the major industrialized urban centers? Or are there some more subtle rules being worked?

... You don't find many blacks canoeing solo down the Mississippi River and camping out every night. Why not? (14)

One senses that Harris is merely being rhetorical when he asks if there are "some more subtle rules being worked." I would argue that the "rules" are, in fact, not subtle at all. They devolve around the overdetermined association of constructions of white heterosexul masculinity with constructions of Nature that I have delineated. So effective has this mutually reinforcing ideological construction been in U.S. cultural production that those occupying the subject position of oppositional Others must

successfully contest and subvert its paradigm before they can achieve representation of either themselves or Nature.

As discussed in my first chapter, Leo Marx observed of Twain's Huck that he "'belongs' to the terrain," that "this narrator is part of the scene that he describes."⁷ Implicit in this assessment is the idea that, in contrast, Jim does not belong --that he, unlike Huck, could never be considered "natural" to either this literary or geographic terrain. No wonder Harris must work so hard to find appropriate forms for his self- representation as he journeys down the river.

Harris, then, seems at the outset not to have considered much if at all the significance that his racial identity holds either for others or for himself. For the most part, he embarks on his quest with minimal attention to the role race plays in it, attempting even to deny the significance of race to his venture. In a curious way, these gestures to minimize racial identity serve instead to heighten our awareness of its signification.

Walking through a Minnesota town at the beginning of his journey, Harris acknowledges that people may be staring at him because he's "the first black man this town has ever seen" (43), but then dismisses the possibility by deciding: "These men are not staring at a freak, just a

stranger..." (44). Then, while admitting that "people will see I'm black only moments after they see that my canoe is green...", Harris expresses the wish that "[i]t's not, I hope, what they'll remember later, and long after I'm gone...." He would prefer to think that:

they will pick up on some other aspect of me and will choose to remember what I'm doing out here, what a sweet smile and happy soul I have, and how I let them treat me kindly. People in this country only need a chance and an excuse to be kind, and they respond. (68)

Only a page later, Harris adds, "Racism --sure it exists, I know that. But its effect and effectiveness depend as much on the reaction as on the action" (69). If he doesn't let race be an issue, he seems to be saying, then it won't be. Again, one suspects that as a heterosexual U.S. American male, Harris would like to slip unproblematically into the ample cultural space allotted "men in nature."

The previously cited passages invite the question, "What is he doing out here?" and is this thing he's doing --canoeing solo down the Mississippi-- as independent of racial overtones as Harris would have us, and himself, believe? It seems to me that it requires a real act of will to erase the fact of Harris's skin color in the historical context of this very particular odyssey.

As he ventures further down the river, his consciousness of race assumes more prominence; he finds it less easy to push the thoughts away. But still, despite conceding some of the material realities attaching to race in the U.S., Harris wants to remain steadfast in his view that these matters don't affect him. Approaching what he calls "the South," he encounters a marker indicating a site where Abraham Lincoln debated Stephen Douglas, which invites the following reverie:

Should I break (Lincoln's) heart and tell him
... his plea for emancipation turned first to
confused jubilation and then became muffled
cries beaten silent and hung out to dry and
evolved into quiet anguish and self-destructive
frustration...

And still the work started is not finished
completely, not done to perfection or even to
satisfaction. Are there no blacks in the frozen
north because they still need to huddle
together? There is relative safety and strength
in numbers.... (104)

It is interesting to note that this heightened awareness and/or admission of the importance of race correlates to his latitude on the river. While in "the North," he downplays any significance others might attach to his skin color, but once he enters "the South," he confronts its

resonance more directly:

When I was a kid ... I hardly knew I was black. Through innocence I missed the turmoil.... An attitude was forged that the outcome of my life would be my doing alone. How wonderful for me, but so shallow to think even for a moment that such is the case for all. (104)

And indeed, once he enters the South, Harris's determination to complete his journey to New Orleans becomes motivated by something that was distinctly lacking at the outset: "I could feel myself growing itchy and anxious for the journey into the South and I hurried to it" (104). Almost unconsciously now, the concerns for safety presented by his racial identity in this geographic locale fire his determination to complete his quest successfully.

When Harris goes ashore at one point in Kentucky, he finds a parked van painted with a Confederate flag, to which he responds viscerally: "Uh-oh!" (159). And then, in Mississippi, he has a terrifying encounter with two "rednecks" carrying shotguns who approach him at his campsite and start calling him "boy":

The one poked the other in the ribs with an elbow and they read each other's minds. They were grinning but those grins spoke more of alcohol and of mischief than of merriment. This

was certainly not going to be merry for me.

(207)

When they cock their rifles at him, Harris feels sufficiently threatened to flee, breaking a tooth in the process. His determined enjoyment of his river adventure has been seriously undermined by the encounter and now he just wants "to get out of there and far away and off this damnable river and out of this idiot adventure" (210).

What began for him as something quite innocent and uncomplicated --an enactment of masculine endeavor in the out of doors-- has in "the South" become inflected with racial overtones that may be life-threatening.

Later, Harris reflects that "there was much reason for anger and rage. I didn't need to look especially hard to know it, only to cut through the curtain of naivete" (221). His studious denial of the prominence others attach to his skin color has been penetrated and broken down.

Throughout this narrative we see Harris struggle to position himself discursively in ways that won't be eclipsed by his racial identity alone. "Nature," finally, offers a refuge from such trials; he relishes the ability it presents him just to be "himself," free of socially-inscribed associations. Having escaped his gun-wielding adversaries, Harris retreats into Nature:

... close around me there in the envelope of

damp night, there was peace.

... All senses alive, all senses and emotions calm....

Then I finally saw what it was all about, what it was all for.

To drive the senses alive and then to calm them. To be able to see with the eye that is the heart's eye, to see life. To become one with the river, but more to become one with life. The river, the trees, the animals, the men and women, the wind. To feel it all rushing through my veins and to love it. To know that they are me and I am them.... There is no color that separates us, no race, no issue deeper than humanity to bind us. (221)

This view of himself as an "ecological" being and of Nature as a blank slate onto which he can write himself offers respite from the almost-endless negotiations Harris is confronted with as a black man in the public outdoors: in this space he can consider himself "naturalized," yet another creature in Nature, neither more nor less than his fellow creatures, an experience of multiple-species democracy. He finds solace in adapting this subject position in this geographic space.

In the ideological construction of hegemonic identity in Nature, subjects are cast in opposition to a host of

both human and non-human Others. Harris, in contrast, resists any move that would construct his own autonomous identity at the expense of anyone or anything else. The problem, as he has discovered, is that what constitutes Nature is largely determined and inflected by white hegemony and as such is not a "space" easily entered by a black man, no matter how "sweet," "happy," or "kind" one is. It would seem here that Harris's only chance to recuperate his rights to that space is to do so not from the subject position of a black man, but from the location of a colorless, genderless ecological self.

That is, Harris attributes his epiphany to the space and spaciousness afforded him by being alone in "nature." When he is able to see himself "at one" with all life, the frustrating restrictions imposed by and upon his racialized identity evaporate. Harris wants to insist that he is "just a human being," one in love with Nature, and seems to think that if he can only maintain this attitude, others will fall in line. Is this then, the purpose for the quest: to discover a "space" for himself where race doesn't intrude? Is this at-one-ness with all life what Evelyn White sought in overcoming her fear of "wilderness"? There would seem to be a great deal at stake for them not just as individuals, but very specifically as black persons, in their respective enactments of "getting back to nature." By insisting on

their rights to full agency in what is literally "natural" space, they are pushing hard against what is shown to be an arena in which full rights and freedoms for blacks remain to be won.

Much like the narratives already discussed, Barry Lopez's "The Negro in the Kitchen,"⁸ seeks to disrupt stereotyped assumptions about the relationship between a subject's place in society and the Place, or geographic locale, that body may inhabit. But Lopez's tale describes these intersections from the perspective of a hegemonic U.S. American male.

The narrator of the piece quickly reveals himself to be fastidious to the point of fussiness and almost totally lacking in awareness of the results his actions and attitudes have on other people. As a result of his considerable material success as a financial consultant, he lives apart from other people and prides himself for his self-discipline in all things. Precisely because it is unremarked upon, we know that he is white.

"On the morning I wish to speak of," this unreliable narrator tells us, "I entered the kitchen at a little after six and saw a large Negro standing there, a man dressed in baggy khaki shorts and a plain but rather threadbare long-sleeved shirt" (76). The 'Negro' invites himself to breakfast, and the narrator notes that he

"looked robustly healthy, even refined" (77). The narrative goes on to foreground the narrator's stereotyped assumptions about black men ("His table manners were good," (77) he notes with surprise; "He moved his hands beautifully. I wondered if he had been successful in sports" (81).) "I'd never had such a long conversation with a Negro before" (87), the narrator states with satisfaction at the end of their encounter. When the 'Negro' chides the homeowner for thinking that his uninvited guest might steal the television, the narrator protests self-righteously that the man's skin color is itself proof of such suspicions: "Who are you, anyway? A stranger who shows up in my kitchen --large-- and let's be frank-- black" (79). Indeed, the narrator concludes with wonder, "[W]hoever heard of coming into the kitchen one morning and finding a huge black man standing there, someone who just ran out of the woods and wanted breakfast and then ran off again, like an Indian?" (87). As shall be seen, the reference to Indians is not insignificant.

Lopez in this way deliberately contests stereotyped representations of racialized figures, but he pushes his rhetorical strategy yet further by caricaturing not only the white narrator but the black man as well. That is, the writer doesn't just serve us up any run-of-the-mill 'Negro,' but one whose father was a lawyer, who is himself a successful financial consultant educated at the Wharton

School of Business and the Sorbonne, and who hails from Greenwich, Connecticut, that WASP bastion of the Northeast. He is, in short, a dark-skinned alter ego of our narrator. The narrative thus foregrounds the role that class privilege plays in the enjoyment of Nature. That this man, this "let's be frank" black man --albeit a very wealthy one-- has chosen to walk across the continent intrigues the narrator, who immediately and ironically insists on giving the 'Negro' money for the "admirable" trait of seeming "determined to make something of yourself" (81).

Lopez constructs a black man who, like Evelyn White and Eddy Harris, is seeking to locate himself in the "natural" environment of the United States. Describing time he spent in Africa, the 'Negro' explains:

... whatever it was I was after in Africa --the famous roots, a sense of identity-- I never found it. I went home. I decided this African direction was unprofitable for me. The place I loved, the place I was truly part of, was so obviously the Connecticut River Valley.
(81)

Like the reference to Greenwich, this mention of the Connecticut River Valley squarely situates him in the heart of New England --a locale, one senses, that the narrator (and perhaps the reader as well) is not

accustomed to associating with black people, a locale more likely to evoke Henry David Thoreau than any black personage, living or dead.

The 'Negro' goes on to describe his decision to pursue his long-held fascination with Indians. Five years earlier, he says, he had read Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, The Man Who Killed the Deer, and Black Elk Speaks: "...the more I read the more I got caught up in something. I don't know how to describe what happened. I felt exhilaration. Transcendence. I felt suddenly reconnected" (80). So much so, he says, that he decided "I wanted to become an African-American indigene" -- which he describes as

[a] black man who identifies with the American landscape, who fractures the immorality of his heritage in this country so completely that he finally gains a consoling intimacy with the place, the very place that for so long had been unapproachable. I had always imagined the hills, the rivers, the sky regarding us the way the whites did, as interlopers. Because I thought whites owned the land, that they were the same. We were strangers, whose inquiries, whose desires for companionship, were not welcome. (81)

The 'Negro' testifies here to the under-examined

conflation of "whites" with "the land," but rather than contesting or interrogating that conflation, he seeks instead to take his place alongside the hegemonic order, by virtue of his class and educational attainments.

Hence the so far seven-month, two-thousand mile journey on foot that has brought him into this kitchen. While his statement succinctly addresses the way landscape becomes conflated with those who "settle" it --whether or not they can lay claim to indigeneity-- it also unavoidably evokes those other indigenes, now "vanished" from this same landscape. Can his grandiloquence completely gloss his appropriation of Native American "traditions" in his own quest? "I could, right now," the 'Negro' continues with pride, "take one of those stones there by the river, cut a shaft, harden it, and put venison on your table before noon" (82).

Does not the presumed worthiness of his aspiration to "indigeneity," his desire for and enactment of "going native," cause us to wonder about the very figure who is absent from this black and white tableau --an absence that neither he nor the narrator comments upon?

"My desire," the 'Negro' continues, "took this focus: to travel intimately across the country, to flow beautifully over the land, making very little disturbance..." (83). His recitation of the ways in which he has succeeded in his quest includes traveling "as fast

in the dark as I can in daylight ... without being seen" and without alerting dogs to his presence (83). A black man traveling undetected at night invites historical comparison to the perilous journeys of those fleeing slavery, and although he doesn't remark on the association, this feat more than any other seems to represent for the black man how completely he has been able to (re)claim inhabitation of this landscape --the very landscape that he has for so long perceived as "belonging" to white people. He tells the narrator that, when his son is older, he intends "to send him to live with the Crow" (83).

This last statement has the effect of causing the narrator to declare: "We had Indians in my family. My mother was one-eighth Comanche. I'm one-sixteenth" (83). Curiously, the narrator now seems to consider himself related to the black man by means of the figure(s) of absent Indians. It's as though he would now embrace the 'Negro' as a "brother," welcome him into the fold of hegemonic masculinity, by virtue of their shared "ancestry." Indeed, as mentioned, the narrator wants to give his unexpected visitor money: "I admire what you're doing. I want to support it" (84).

What, finally, are we to make of the black man's enterprise and the white man's eager and instant complicity with it? What is it, exactly, about the black

man's journey that the (white) narrator approves, applauds, and wants to subsidize? Why is he so delighted that the black man is acting, in the white man's own words, "like an Indian"? Lopez's representation of a black man in nature interrogates by its very black/white juxtaposition the notion of the "naturalness" of white heterosexual masculinity as holding dominion in U.S. Nature. Because the black man is willing to be complicit with these constructions, the white man need not feel threatened, but rather endorse, his enterprise. By not insisting on the discrepancies in this ideological distribution of space, the black man in essence becomes white. This would seem to be the position with which Eddy Harris began his solo journey down the Mississippi, a position he eventually found it necessary to discard. This "Negro," in contrast, has perhaps come close to purchasing the keys to the hegemonic Natural kingdom.

II.

Feminists have long argued positionality or situatedness as an effective strategy for decentering hegemonic discourse and representations.⁹ In "Feminist Theory and Social Science," Linda Martín Alcoff writes:

... the collection of assumptions and values any given individual works with is not happenstance

but can be connected in interesting ways to that person's social, cultural and political identity or location.... [M]ost of the operative assumptions and values in enquiry are therefore group-related.¹⁰

I turn now to two contemporary African American narratives in which multiple positionalities are deployed to work out one's place in the world and, especially, where considerations of the "ecological self"¹¹ become crucial to understanding one's locatedness.

Not about wilderness per se, June Jordan's "Report from the Bahamas" nevertheless situates its subject in a landscape ripe for parsing.¹² In this meditation Jordan seeks to locate herself with respect to her own race, class, and gender, in the context of those who happen to occupy the same moments in time and the same particular "locations" --both geographic and socio-political-- as she. In this case, initially, the time and the place are a three-day vacation she takes in the Bahamas in the early 1980s.

At the outset, Jordan foregrounds her own identity as a middle-class African American woman of West Indian ancestry by contrasting herself to specific staff members of the hotel in which she is staying. She remarks about this hotel that it:

... calls itself The Sheraton British Colonial.

One of the photographs advertising the place displays a middle-aged Black man in a waiter's tuxedo, smiling. What intrigues me most about the picture is just this: while the Black man bears a tray full of "colorful" drinks above his left shoulder, both of his feet, shoes and trouserlegs, up to ten inches above his ankles, stand in the also "colorful" Caribbean salt water. He is so delighted to serve you he will wade into the water, fully clothed, oblivious to the ruin to his shoes, his trousers, his health, and he will do it with a smile. (39)¹³

She goes on to locate the Bahamas as they have been commodified by The Sheraton British Colonial and the Ministry of Tourism in the form of the literature placed in her hotel room -- literature which states that the beginning of Bahamian history coincides with the arrival on its shores of Christopher Columbus. Commenting on the historic omissions of this particular representation, Jordan notes that "[s]omething proclaims itself a legitimate history and ... nobody [says] one word about the Bahamian people, the Black peoples, to whom the only thing new in their island world was this weird succession of crude white intruders and its colonial consequences" (40).¹⁴ "This," she says, "is my consciousness of race as I unpack my bathing suit in the Sheraton British

Colonial" (40), foregrounding her resistance to modes of representation that would gloss persistent material realities of race-based inequities.

Jordan next observes her own contradictory positionality as an educated, middle-class academic occupying a hotel room kept clean by a black maid:

"Olive" is the name of the Black woman who cleans my hotel room.

... My "rights" and my "freedom" and my "desire" and a slew of other New World values; what would they sound like to this Black woman described on the card atop my hotel bureau as "Olive the Maid"? ... Whose rights? Whose freedom? Whose desire?

And why should she give a shit about mine unless I do something, for real, about hers? (41)

Later, packing to leave the hotel, Jordan notices a card on the dresser that solicits her to rate the maid's performance. Turning this request back on itself, Jordan asks, "How would 'Olive' rate me? What would it mean for us to seem 'good' to each other? What would that rating require?" (46). Indeed, Jordan goes so far as to conclude, "Even though both 'Olive' and 'I' live inside a conflict neither one of us created, and even though both of us therefore hurt inside that conflict, I may be one of the monsters she needs to eliminate from her universe and,

in a sense, she may be one of the monsters in mine" (47).

Jordan's deployment of her own multiple and shifting subject positions in quest of commonality only leads her deeper into the maze of missing connections. Rhetorically exiting the dead-end of the realization quoted above, she comments ironically, "This is my consciousness of race and class and gender identity as I collect wet towels, sunglasses, wristwatch, and head towards a shower" (42).¹⁵

Although entitled "Report from the Bahamas," Jordan's rumination from this site leads her to interrogate relationships "back home." Throughout the essay she self-reflexively gropes toward some or any paradigm within which individuals may "give a shit" about each other's "rights and freedom and desire."

While reading Anzia Yezierska's The Bread Givers on the beach under a palm tree(!), Jordan reflects about the

... boy who loaned this novel to me. He's white and he's Jewish and he's pursuing an independent study project with me, at the State University where I teach whether or not I feel like it, where I teach without stint because, like the waiter, I am no fool. It's my job and either I work or I do without everything you need money to buy. (42)

She explains that the boy loaned her the book "because he

wanted to create another connection between us on the basis of language, between his knowledge/his love of Yiddish and my knowledge/my love of Black English" (42). Indeed, she affirms, "we had grown closer on this account" (43).

But then ... I had learned that this student does not care one way or the other about currently jeopardized Federal Student Loan Programs because, as he explained it to me, they do not affect him. He does not need financial help outside his family. My own son, however, is Black. And I am the only family help available to him.... For these reasons of difference, the student and I had moved away from each other.... (43)

Once again, Jordan realizes that the connection she shares with him proves too fragile to withstand a conflict such as that described above. Like her musing on 'Olive the Maid', here is another would-be connection that proves untenable.

This reminiscence gives way to thoughts of another student, a white woman this time, who confesses that she envies Jordan for her subject position:

"What do you mean by that?"

"You have a cause. You have a purpose to your life."

I looked carefully at this white woman;
what was she really saying to me?

"What do you mean?" I repeated.

"Poverty. Police violence. Discrimination
in general."

(Jesus Christ, I thought: Is that her idea
of lucky?) (43)

"[S]peaking of race and class and gender in one breath,"
Jordan reflects, "what she said meant that those lucky
preoccupations of mine, from police violence to nuclear
wipe-out, were not shared. They were mine and not hers"
(43). For the first time, Jordan introduces a global
ecological threat, that of nuclear proliferation, and
seems incredulous that the woman sitting before her fails
to recognize the all-encompassing danger it poses -- a
threat to human life on earth, regardless of what subject
position one happens to occupy.

The recollection is unsettling. "[O]ur link was
strictly female," Jordan realizes. "Nevertheless, how
should that woman and I, another female, connect beyond
this bizarre exchange?" (44). Again, connection solely on
the basis of essentialized identities proves unfulfilling
and unenduring. Jordan understands her own "rights" and
"freedoms" as a U.S. American (or "First World") Black
woman to be integrally connected to those of Bahamian (or
"Third World") Black women; she wants to ally herself in

solidarity with women worldwide. She is forced to problematize the assumptions with which she had arrived in the Bahamas a few days previously:

So far as I can see, the usual race and class concepts of connection, or gender assumptions of unity, do not apply very well. I doubt that they ever did. Otherwise, why would Black folks forever bemoan our lack of solidarity when the deal turns real? And if unity on the basis of sexual oppression is something natural, then why do we women, the majority people on the planet, still have a problem? (46)

"[W]hen these factors of race and class and gender absolutely collapse," she writes, "is whenever you try to use them as automatic concepts of connection. They may serve well as indicators of commonly felt conflict, but as elements of connection they seem ... [un]reliable..." (46).

She continues to reach through her experience to try to find an example of relationality that might possibly suggest a transcendence of self-interest and remembers a connection that she helped foster between a white Irish American woman who had grown up with an abusive, alcoholic father, and a black South African woman, whose alcoholic husband was beating her:

I walked behind them, the young Irish woman and

the young South African, and I saw them walking as sisters walk, hugging each other, and whispering and sure of each other and I felt how it was not who they were but what they both know and what they were both preparing to do about what they know that was going to make them free at last. (49)

"I am reaching for the words to describe the difference between a common identity that has been imposed," Jordan states, "and the individual identity any one of us will choose, once she gains that chance" (47). She concludes:

I am saying that the ultimate connection cannot be the enemy. The ultimate connection must be the need that we find between us. It is not only who you are, in other words, but what we can do for each other that will determine the connection. (47)

Like Eddy Harris, Jordan reaches for that "space" large enough to contain seemingly oppositional subject positions. Unlike Harris, her space is largely metaphorical, but her sense of herself within it, like Harris's sense of himself, is achieved by casting herself "ecologically" as merely one creature among a living firmament of creatures. Gazing out the airplane window on her flight back to the U.S., Jordan muses about the clouds. "I know that someday soon other clouds may erupt

to kill us all," she says. "I look about the cabin at the hundred strangers drinking as they fly and I think even here and even now I must make the connection real between me and these strangers everywhere before those other clouds unify this ragged bunch of us, too late" (49).

By regarding herself from an "ecological" perspective in which nuclear proliferation threatens all earthly life equally, Jordan is finally able to identify the common connection to existence that all human beings, regardless of their subject position, share. She posits this "bottom line" as that which, theoretically at least, might serve to forge connections that can transcend the differences inherent in Difference, under which Other-ness collapses into sameness, or shared concerns.

Her essay, then, concludes with the premise and the resolve that are borne out in Percival Everett's novel, Watershed¹⁶, to which I now turn.

Like Barry Lopez's Negro in "The Negro in the Kitchen," the African American protagonist of Watershed repeatedly unsettles others' expectations of him. To the characters with whom he comes in contact in the rural and mountainous Colorado setting in which the book opens, the color of Robert Hawks's skin would suggest that he is out of place in both his profession (hydrology) and his avocation (flyfishing).

Both protagonist and narrator, Robert immediately problematizes the accuracy of representations:

There is no one else in whom I place sufficient trust to attempt a fair representation of the events --not that the events related would be anything less than factual, but that those chosen for exhibition would not cover the canvas with the stain or underpainting of truth --and of course truth necessarily exists only as perception.... (2)

The narrative further complicates the supposed difference between fact and fiction by interspersing in the body of the text italicized passages of legal and scientific discourse. Are these intended to be read as quotations? (They're not cited). Are they placed here by the narrator, that is, Robert, or by the author? Conspicuous not only for their typeface, but for the dissonance of their passive-voice rhetoric in the otherwise idiomatic discourse of the narrative, this device invites comparison with Susan Griffin's narrative technique in Woman and Nature, where the detached, objective, scientific "male" voice is juxtaposed against the relational, emotional, "female" voice.¹⁷ To whom do we grant narrative authority, Everett seems to be asking, and under what circumstances? Watershed deliberately juxtaposes notions of identity and locatedness against those of geographic

location. As well as challenging readerly expectations regarding who inhabits which spatial locations, it challenges as well ideas about who can speak from those locations.

Robert quickly establishes himself in "his" narration as someone who doesn't particularly see himself as invested in any particular geographic or sociopolitical "place." Having grown up in a black community in Atlanta, he now lives in Denver, but spends his free time flyfishing in the mountain streams adjoining the Plata Indian reservation. He situates himself, like historian John Washington in The Chaneyville Incident, as one who is most comfortable with that which is quantifiable and qualifiable: "I don't get involved in political stuff," Robert declares. "I'm just a scientist" (56):

I considered how I had done so much to remove all things political from my life. Even in my work as a hydrologist ... I saw myself as an objective, hired gun. If the state wanted me to study an area for Fish and Game, then I would do it just as quickly as I would respond to the Naturalists' Conservancy[.].... Terrace formation and sediment evaluation were simple, observable things and meant only what they meant. I didn't talk about politics, didn't respond to talk about politics, didn't care

about what I read in the papers, and didn't feel any guilt about my lack of participation in those issues of social importance. I did not know or associate with many black people. As it was, I didn't associate with many people at all, trying at most turns to avoid humans, having in some way taken my grandfather's missing step -- complete removal. I didn't need Christianity to dismiss people and I didn't need them to be white. I simply dismissed them all, quietly, without judgment, equally. I didn't believe in god, I didn't believe in race, and I especially didn't believe in America. (152-153)

Robert's pronouncement problematizes considerations of nationhood, among other things. Rather than representing himself, then, by means of more conventional coordinates on the geo-political map, Robert would have us perceive him as a kind of uncomplicated Thoreauvian hermit. A lifelong hunter and fisher, it emerges that nothing holds more value for him than his experiences out of doors. In fact, he has chosen his profession, hydrology, on this basis, as a childhood conversation with his grandfather shows:

"What are you going to be when you're done with school?" he asked me....

... "I want to do something outside...."

maybe geology or something like that."

... He smiled at me. Then his smile faded and he said, "Just do something you love. That's really the only thing that matters. Do something you have to do. Find it and do it. Life is too short." (162)

Despite his grandfather's exhortations, however, we see Robert as largely misanthropic, disenchanted with and alienated from much of the life he has experienced to date. Like Eddy Harris, he seems initially incapable of or unwilling to connect his sense of himself and his lifelong stance of detachment to his racial heritage.

The story that he braids together is composed of three strands: Robert's childhood and youth in Atlanta, the most significant emblem of which is his relationship to his grandfather; his immediate past, emblemized by an unhealthy and destructive sexual relationship with a Jewish American woman; and the present, in which he finds himself drawn into, resisting, but finally joining in solidarity with what the book calls the "American Indian Revolution."

Robert maintains that his position is a-political, but his actions soon belie this declaration. Driven crazy not so much by his neurotic girlfriend as by his own repeated failure to extricate himself from the relationship, Robert wants nothing more at the opening of

this tale than the precious solitude afforded him by his mountain cabin. Thus, having located himself as a man with no human allegiances, Robert finds himself in the ironic position of narrating the sequence of events that lead him to, in fact, embrace both personal and political, as well as ecological, commitments. The one thing that he clings to above all else is his love for the natural world. Indeed, we see Robert as a man who gets lost in the city of Denver, but as one who can negotiate the mountainous terrain of the Plata Indian reservation with ease. Indeed, he has a familiarity with that landscape that the Indians themselves say they lack and on the basis of which they appeal to him for help when they suspect that their water has been poisoned.

As much as countering what might be the reader's expectations for this protagonist, Everett challenges Robert's expectations for himself. The political events into which Robert finds himself drawn, largely against his will, prove to be the arena for awakening self-knowledge and reclaiming his identity as an African American man. The long passage quoted above ends with Robert's understanding that he has become involved with the American Indians' liberation struggle "by a longstanding, unanswered, personal quest to understand my grandfather" (153).

Understanding his grandfather, a black physician who

had his license revoked for tending to a wounded Black Panther (a man who was a felon in the eyes of the government) and who eventually committed suicide, means coming to terms with the political history of being a black male in contemporary America. Robert, then, is not motivated so much by a desire to align himself with the Indians, per se, as he is driven to come to terms with his own past and to see the linkage between the conditions that gave rise to and the political aims of the Black Panther movement and those of the novel's fictitious American Indian movement. The dramatic denouement of Watershed occurs when the apathetic, ultimately disenfranchised Robert chooses at significant personal risk to help the Indians defend their watershed against the federal government's illegal storage of anthrax at its headwaters. However, what motivates this decision and its subsequent courageous actions is not a theoretical understanding of political solidarity so much as it is Robert's awareness of the "ecological web" that binds him to this place and its human community. In fact, Robert observes about the American Indian woman who is his direct personal connection to the AIR cause, "I didn't much like Louise and it was clear she didn't give a fuck about me" (38). Later, when a leader of the movement tells him that the government is illegally storing anthrax, a biochemical agent, on their reservation, Robert says:

I didn't believe what he was telling me, but I didn't know why I didn't believe him. The government was doing secret experiments, like the Tuskegee thing, all the time, and I realized that that was the scariest thing of all, that in spite of knowledge of past transgressions, I still resisted belief in a new one, somehow believing that my country was somehow me, maybe. But it wasn't my country. (139)

Again, he sees the theoretical connection between the government's treatment of blacks and its treatment of Indians, but he is not sufficiently moved by that connection to act on behalf of it. That is, Robert remains non-committal; he continues to resist the invitation, the request to form common cause.

So, what does it take? When Robert hikes up into the mountains to investigate the Indians' claims for himself, he discovers that everything they have told him is true. What's more, he stumbles upon something in the fresh snow, something immediately beside the area cleared for the burial of a storage tank: "... a dead elk. It was a big bull and its face, the glassy eyes hollow and still alive-looking, startled me a little and disturbed me greatly. I fell back a couple of steps, then turned away from the sight" (179). The elk's death is linked to the presence there of the biochemical agents. That night, Robert is

troubled by a dream:

In it, a rust-brown bull elk staggered across a pristine mountain meadow surrounded by graceful aspens, with knot eyes all gazing outward. The meadow was striking, covered with penstemon and mariposa tulips sticking their yellow faces toward the sun, and with spurred lupines. The hooves of the elk fell heavily among the flowers and I walked toward it, but it didn't notice me, it couldn't notice me. I recognized the glassy empty eyes and I realized that the eyes stuck into the bark of the aspens seemed more alive than the elk's eyes. I was crying in the dream, following the zig-zagging path of the elk. I looked at the clear blue sky and thought what a beautiful day it was, how warm and glorious, and I found my feet falling effortlessly into the tracks of the elk. I staggered with him, my shoulders slumping, my breathing beginning to race. I felt my heart hot in my chest. And then I was outside of myself and looking into my own big, glassy elk eyes. (181)

The passage is reminiscent of John Washington's dream of his father as a male deer in The Chaneyville Incident.

In both cases, this rhetorical move of consciously

conflating a black man's identity with an animal works to contradict the historical equation of blacks to animals (i.e. black male slaves who were referred to as "bucks")¹⁸. It is a move, ultimately, that reclaims the integrity of both human "of color" and animal from a hegemonic worldview in which both are seen as "too natural" (and therefore inferior to domesticated "white" Man).

This experience and this experience alone provides the impetus for Robert finally to take a stand with the Indians. Although he has for some time perceived the necessity to resist the government's oppression and suppression of people of color, he has been reluctant before now to commit himself to the Indians' cause. He does so now at considerable risk to himself because he has intuited a rationale that is for him even more powerful than his presumed political connection with the Indians: the violation not only of the Plata people but of the entire watershed and its realm of the more-than-human that has always been his sanctuary and his solace.

In Robert's case, unlike that of Lopez's 'Negro,' there has been no temptation to "go native," or in any other way to conflate his own ethnic identity with that of Native Americans. At the same time, he acknowledges the historic and political parallels of their respective oppressions and ensuing liberation struggles. Again, as

June Jordan says of this kind of enactment:

I am saying that the ultimate connection cannot be the enemy. The ultimate connection must be the need that we find between us. It is not only who you are, in other words, but what we can do for each other that will determine the connection.¹⁹

Just as Jordan locates the threat in the nuclear cloud, so Robert locates it in the deadly contamination that imperils all of the life-forms that rely on this watershed for their well-being. Refusing the hegemonic appropriation of this landscape and its flora and fauna means refusing co-optation of one's identity. Standing for the place, in the end, is tantamount to aligning oneself with the cause of the oppressed Other; the two actions are inextricably entwined and Robert learns that it is not necessary for him to separate one from the other. By forming common cause (with both the natural world and its indigenous inhabitants) he reclaims the humanity he has set aside. In so doing, he becomes more truly himself, occupying from a stance of power the subject position hegemony would deprive of agency.

It is, finally, the recognition of the ecological self in the more-than-human realm that would seem to enable the hegemonically-constructed subject to cross the barriers that continue to be imposed by and upon that

identity. Such an ecologically-constructed subject position may, as well, prove the salvation of the more-than-human realm.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. Evelyn C. White, "Black Women and the Wilderness," The Stories that Shape Us - Contemporary Women Write About the West, Theresa Jordan and James Hepworth, eds. (New York: Norton, 1995) 376-383.
2. In fact, Oregon was the last state on the West coast to adopt legislation outlawing discrimination in hotels and restaurants (in 1953). See "A Blemish in Oregon History Recalled," (AP) Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 18 Feb. 1999: B2
3. Evelyn White, Preface, "Black Women and the Wilderness," Hedgebrook News, February, 1998. Langley, Wa.: Hedgebrook, 20.
4. See, for example, Quintard Taylor, whose In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West 1528-1990 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998) comprehensively chronicles the history of African American activity in both the rural and the urban U.S. American West.
5. David Bradley, The Chaneyville Incident (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).
6. Eddy L. Harris, Mississippi Solo - A River Quest (New York: Nick Lyons Books, 1988).
7. Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964) 332-333.
8. Barry Holstun Lopez, "The Negro in the Kitchen," in his Field Notes - The Grace Note of the Canyon Wren (New York: Knopf, 1994) 75-88.
9. Too numerous to mention them all, I am thinking in particular here of Adrienne Rich, "Notes Toward a Politics of Location," in her Blood, Bread, and Poetry - Selected Prose, 1979-1985 (New York: Norton, (1984) 1986) 210-232; Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987); Marilyn Frye, The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1983); Chela Sandoval, "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," Genders 10 (Spring 1991) 1-24; and

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (New York: Methuen, 1987).

10. Linda Martín Alcoff, "Feminist Theory and Social Science - New Knowledges, New Epistemologies," BodySpace, ed. Nancy Duncan (New York: Routledge, 1996) 23.

11. See Joanna Macy, World as Lover, World as Self (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991):

What ... Gregory Bateson referred to as "the epistemological error of Occidental civilization" ... is being replaced by wider constructs of identity and self-interest ... by what you might call the ecological self ... co-extensive with other beings and the life of our planet. (183)

12. June Jordan, "Report from the Bahamas" in her On Call - Political Essays (Boston: South End, 1985) 39-49.

13. Lawrence Buell comments on the ironies of a ten-page advertisement featured in Audubon magazine, "Preserving Paradise: Natural Attractions of the Caribbean" as:

designed to appeal to the desire for unspoiled (but accessible) environments and the ancient Eurocentric dream of undeveloped lands as edens. As such it is an entirely typical manipulation of new world pastoral imagery in which the interests of indigene and settler are made to mirror each other.

Lawrence Buell, The Environmental Imagination - Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture (Cambridge: Harvard U. P., 1995) 76.

14. Jamaica Kincaid similarly contests these kinds of representations of Antigua as (only) a tourist destination, that is, a commodification, in A Small Place (New York: Penguin, 1988).

15. About this discursive impasse Susan Stanford Friedman has commented: "The legitimate insight of binary narratives is blind to many other stories that cannot be fully contained within them. Most especially, binary narratives are too blunt an instrument to capture the liminality of contradictory subject positions..." (7). See Susan Stanford Friedman, "Beyond White and Other: Relationality and Narratives of Race in Feminist Discourse," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 1995, 21:1, 1-49.

16. Percival Everett, Watershed (St. Paul, Minn.: Graywolf, 1996).

17. Susan Griffin, Woman and Nature - The Roaring Inside Her (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

18. See Alice Walker, "Am I Blue?" in Living By the Word (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1988) 3-8; and Marjorie Spiegel, The Dreaded Comparison - Human and Animal Slavery (Mirror Books, 1988).

19. June Jordan, "Report from the Bahamas," On Call - Political Essays (Boston: South End Press, 1985) 47.

Chapter Five:
'Nature's Nation' Revisited

I. Whose Nature? Whose Nation?

Nature has long been reckoned a crucial ingredient of the American national ego.

-Lawrence Buell, The Environmental Imagination

As U.S. historian Perry Miller noted, the Puritans bound for what would become the Massachusetts Colony began to conceive of America as "Nature's Nation" before their ship had even landed. According to Miller, John Winthrop's famous "Citty upon a Hill" shipboard sermon to the "proto-Americans" proposed that their attempts to create new homes for themselves in America's wilderness would be endorsed and/or opposed by the Almighty in direct proportion to the virtuousness with which they performed the task:¹ "According to Winthrop's reasoning, the communities could not accept [crop failure, floods, plagues, and the like] as the normal hazards of settling a

wilderness...; they had to see in every reverse an intentional punishment for their sins" (8). By its system of checks and balances, Winthrop preached, Nature would see to it that the new Americans would remain uncorrupt; Nature would protect them against sin.²

By the nineteenth century, Miller notes, representations of this conceptualization had proliferated; in 1835, The Knickerbocker published an essay by James Brooks that Miller cites as an emblematic expression of a by-then pervasive sentiment:

God has promised us a renowned existence, if we will but deserve it. He speaks this promise in the sublimity of Nature. It resounds all along the crags of the Alleghanies. It is uttered in the thunder of Niagara. It is heard in the roar of two oceans, from the great Pacific to the rocky ramparts of the Bay of Fundy. His finger has written it in the broad expanse of our Inland Seas, and traced it out by the mighty Father of Waters! The august TEMPLE in which we dwell was built for lofty purposes. Oh! that we may consecrate it to LIBERTY and CONCORD, and be found fit worshippers within its holy wall! (210)

A century later, at the end of F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, narrator Nick Carraway gives voice to an

expression of regret for innocence lost --a not uncommon sentiment in U.S. American literature-- but one whose rhetoric may be considered remarkably akin to that of Mr. Brooks:

And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes --a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of the continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.³

As noted, expressions of loss are hardly unique in U.S. American literature, but what can be said to distinguish Nick's lament here is the inference that this particular loss amounts to perfidy, and, more than merely personal, a perfidy national in scope. Nick is at pains to locate the diminution in a very specific betrayal: that of the failure of America, the "New Land," to live up to "her" supposedly originary promise of providing for those who

came to harvest "her" natural resources.⁴

Louise Westling has helpfully pointed out the "subtle rhetoric of blame" that pervades this passage when she writes: "Fitzgerald suggests that this voluptuous landscape was purposive; it flowered and its rustling leaves 'pandered in whispers' to seduce the Dutch sailors."⁵ I wish, however, to draw attention to the way that we understand from Fitzgerald's narrative that this promise of Nature was not meant to extend to all of the nation's inhabitants equally, but only to those who might be considered true 'Americans.' For the text is full of references to those who apparently do not qualify as "real" Americans in Fitzgerald's mind. He refers variously to those who "looked out at us with the tragic eyes and short upper lips of southeastern Europe" (69), "three modish negroes, two bucks and a girl" (69), "the Finn... [with] the Finnish tread that shook the kitchen floor" (85), "the young Greek" (137) and so on --all apparently undeserving of inclusion in the group whose identity as Americans has been placed beyond question, the group to which Nick, Tom, Daisy, and Jordan Baker, among others, belong by birth, and into which Jay Gatz or Gatsby has purchased membership.

Implicit in such descriptions, of course, is the assumption that, on the one hand, there are those who are considered "natural" Americans, their national identity

placed beyond question while, on the other hand, there are those whose identity as Americans is contingent on a host of factors. "American"-ness is not a given for those in the latter category; they must be "naturalized" before they can attain citizenship.

Nick Carraway's melancholy suggests that he is acknowledging the dissipation of the very foundational premise of the American Dream: the promise of inexhaustible resources. Juxtaposed against the image of "a fresh, green breast" is the book's earlier and equally vivid description of the "valley of ashes":

a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. (23)

Nick sees in this bleak landscape the ruin and depleted promise of the cornucopia that was supposed to have been U.S. America, while almost studiously denying a connection between the Valley of Ashes and what it enables: namely the enormous mansions at the end of Long Island and the lives of their inhabitants, whose decadent debaucheries sometimes go on for days.

As we know, this novel is not much concerned with those who inhabit such locations as the Valley of Ashes,

only insofar as they serve as the foils for and fuel the commerce of those who enjoy considerable material prosperity, those like Gatsby, the Buchanans, and Jordan Baker; those like "... Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor" (150).

Set in a time contemporaneous to that of the events described in The Great Gatsby, Hisaye Yamamoto's deceptively understated short story, "Life Among the Oil Fields - A Memoir," neatly problematizes the relative ease with which a Jay Gatz is able to reach for and grasp the American Dream and thus fashion a life for himself as Gatsby, where others may find themselves more constrained in their social and geographic mobility by virtue of an ethnic or racial or cultural identity that disqualifies them from consideration as "natural" Americans.⁶ Indeed, Yamamoto prefaces her memoir with an epigraph from F. Scott Fitzgerald:

They rode through those five years in an open car with the sun on their foreheads and their hair flying. They waved to people they knew, but seldom stopped to ask a direction or check on the fuel, for every morning there was a gorgeous new horizon.... They missed collisions by inches, wavered on the edge of precipices, and skidded across tracks to the sound of a warning bell. (86)

This is a description of those who, by virtue of wealth and self-absorption and hegemonic entitlement careen through life heedless to the circumstances of those less privileged than they. The pair in the roadster enjoy limitless mobility, both social and geographic, awakening each morning to "a gorgeous new horizon."

In contrast, the family in Yamamoto's memoir is restricted by poverty and immigration laws from anything like the seemingly limitless mobility of Fitzgerald's golden couple. Recorded here is a story from what Mary Louise Pratt would call a "contact zone:" an encounter "where disparate cultures meet... often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination...."⁷ In Yamamoto's tale the denizens of the Valley of Ashes meet the inhabitants of the capacious mansions with the magnificent "blue" lawns.

Yamamoto's parents were issei, first-generation Japanese who lived and worked in the U.S., but who were barred from citizenship ("naturalization") and land-ownership by various exclusionary legislation. The issei (and Asians generally) were considered "aliens ineligible for citizenship," based on the Naturalization Act of 1790 --an act which limited those who could become U.S. citizens, or the "worthy part of mankind," in its own words.⁸ Strawberry farmers who worked land they could never legally own, Yamamoto's family inhabited the

"wastelands" of the oil fields surrounding Redondo Beach during the Great Depression, and were, Yamamoto recalls, "never distant from poverty" (86).

In describing the human community of the oil fields, she portrays a culturally diverse neighborhood that includes Italians, Mexicans, another Japanese family, and a couple of white families. What unites the inhabitants of this locale is not race or ethnicity, but poverty. Her description of the physical landscape these families inhabit is memorable. The otherwise flat countryside is punctuated by a proliferation of oil derricks:

Constructed of rough lumber, tar-smearred and weathered, they were ungainly prominences.... They reared skyward in narrow pyramids from corrugated tin huts and raised platforms whose planks accommodated large wooden horse heads nodding deliberately and incessantly to a regular rhythm. Each derrick had its rectangular sump hole, about the size of an olympic swimming pool. The reservoir of rich dark goop, kept in check by sturdy, built-up dirt walls, might be a few inches deep or nearing the top. Occasionally a derrick caught fire.... (88)

Here is a real-life Valley of Ashes that Fitzgerald's privileged Americans may gaze upon and even pass through

but only dimly register, a locale that such citizens are reluctant to acknowledge as connected in any way to their own entitlements. Far from the enormous material wealth of Gatsby's and the Buchanans' Long Island, this site nevertheless is someone's home.

Thus relegated to the social and environmental margins, Yamamoto's family made do the best they could with their labor and resourcefulness. Yamamoto, though, remembers her childhood there as in many ways idyllic: "our years there come back to me blue and limpid and filled with sunlight" (89). She elaborates:

... living alongside derricks and sump holes did not interfere with our daily routine. If we could not ignore their considerable presence, we accepted them, worked and played around them, and made respectful allowances for the peril connected with them. (93)

For all its limited aesthetic appeal and the dangers it posed, this location was Yamamoto's home and she enjoyed there a kind of innocence --an innocence bred of her insulation, by virtue of economic and geographic marginalization-- from the harsher realities of her family's socio-economic status in American society. "Only once," she writes, "did we come face-to-face with oil field danger," and describes a time when her baby brother fell into one of the sump holes (93).

But the narrative goes on to recount a defining moment of her childhood, a moment that is for her an end to innocence as surely as the events described in The Great Gatsby signal an end to innocence for Nick Carraway:

One evening my two brothers and I race home from the neighbors. We have about reached the far end of our stable when we hear a car coming up the road.... The car speeds by and all of a sudden, there is Jemo lying over there on the shoulder of the road.

He does not move. His eyes are closed. His still face is abraded by dirt and gravel.

(94)

Although he suffered a concussion and contusions, her baby brother survived the accident. Afterward, the family seeks redress from the occupants of the open car, but the couple denies any responsibility. Yamamoto writes: "Mama and Papa were indignant.... The couple had not even the decency to come and inquire after Jemo's condition. Were we Japanese in a category with animals then, to be run over and left beside the road to die?" (94-95). The ideological ranking that accords "natural" American status to the couple in the roadster renders people like the Yamamotos as "naturally" belonging to a lower order of being, less human, "in a category with animals," and thus less deserving of the privileges of citizenship than those

who are wealthy and white.

The writer concludes her memoir with the following observation, which recalls the epigraph she has chosen from F. Scott Fitzgerald:

When I look back on that episode, the helpless anger of my father and my mother is my inheritance. But my anger is more intricate than theirs, warped by all that has transpired in between. For instance, I sometimes see the arrogant couple ... as young and beautiful, their speeding open roadster as definitely and stunningly red. They roar by; their tinkling laughter, like a long silken scarf, is borne back by the wind. I gaze after them from the side of the road, where I have darted to dodge the swirling dust and spitting gravel. And I know that their names are Scott and Zelda. (95)

Yamamoto's observation is damning. When the writer alludes to "all that has transpired in between" the time in which the story is set (the Depression) and the time of its writing (1979), she is undoubtedly referring to the exclusionary legislation to which I referred earlier. But beyond that, she is almost certainly making reference as well to the forced relocation of 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry during World War II. It is not too much to say that this story stands as an allegory of

relocation, a parable in which those systematically denied citizenship have no rights with which to defend themselves from the sometimes capricious actions of those "naturalized" to enjoy greater legal and social entitlements.

Surely, too, Yamamoto's outrage in hindsight is more "intricate" than her parents' for the reason that, born in the United States, she in fact has the U.S. citizenship that was denied to them. As a citizen to whom justice is supposed to be a constitutional guarantee, she no doubt finds it more difficult than her parents may have to accept the injustices her family was forced to experience as Americans of Japanese descent.

Jeanne Wakatsuki and James D. Houston's Farewell to Manzanar recounts the Wakatsuki family's experiences at Manzanar War Relocation Camp in the Owens valley of California.⁹ Initially housed in a hastily converted horse stable, the internees were dismayed to find themselves living "like animals," but I would suggest that the government's logic in imposing this condition is not incongruent with my comments regarding hierarchies of "naturalization" with respect to Yamamoto's memoir. A nisei daughter like Yamamoto, Houston's narrative emphasizes her issei father's demise in the face of relocation and internment. She describes her father

before President Roosevelt's issuance of Executive Order 9066 in 1942 as, prevented by law from owning land in the U.S., having turned instead to the sea to seek his family's livelihood: "... by December of 1941 he had... two boats..., a lease on that beach house in Ocean Park, and a nearly new Studebaker he had made a down payment on two weeks before Pearl Harbor was attacked" (48). She describes her father after relocation as a man with "no rights, no home, no control over his own life. This kind of emasculation was suffered, in one form or another, by all the men interned at Manzanar" (62). She sums up her father's displacement rather succinctly when she writes: "He had become a man without a country. The land of his birth was at war with America; yet after thirty-five years here he was still prevented by law from becoming an American citizen" (7).

When her family is forced out of their California home by the U.S. government in 1942, then seven year-old Jeanne Wakatsuki found herself in the initial stages of relocation surrounded by Japanese people for the first time in her life. "I was terrified all the time," she writes without conscious irony (10). But Houston herself seems to fall prey to the "natural" appearance of things when she describes the locale of the relocation camp: "In Spanish, Manzanar means 'apple orchard.' Great stretches of Owens Valley were once green with orchards and alfalfa

fields. It has been a desert ever since its water started flowing south into Los Angeles..." (81). To hear her tell it, one would think that the valley's waterways one day just up and changed direction of their own accord. This point is significant because it illustrates so well the naturalizing work of ideologies that effectively render events and situations and relationships "natural" or beyond question. A once-fertile valley was left dessicated when people made decisions to divert its water to Los Angeles and human beings then imposed physical alterations to its topography.

What then of an ideology that would strive to make the coerced internment of human beings seem "natural"?

Invited to photograph Manzanar by camp director Ralph Merritt (a Sierra Club friend), Ansel Adams in 1944 produced Born Free and Equal, a collection of photographs accompanied by his own commentary that purported to represent the experience of the "loyal Japanese-Americans" in the camp.¹⁰ From the very first image --a profile of a nisei man gazing across stalks of corn and beyond the expansive Owens valley floor to the distant range of the Sierra Nevada-- what we see in operation is a rhetoric of "nature" in which human subjects are "naturalized" by the environment without any reference to their incarceration. The visual language of this photo resonates with the verses of Katherine Lee Bates's "America the Beautiful"

whose "purple mountains' majesty" rise "above the fruited plain," thus fusing nationalism with naturalism in yet another incarnation of "nature's nation."

Adams's book is a paradigmatic example of how constructions and representations of Nature have been deployed in the creation and propagation of U.S. nationalism. The National Park Service today describes Manzanar Relocation Camp as having contained "10,000 people within 500 acres surrounded by barbed wire and guard towers."¹¹ And yet, to view Adams's photographs you would never know that the smiling nisei he photographed were there against their will. As historian Gary Okihiro has noted, "Confinement and rejection and the emotions they engendered were epitomized by the fence that encircled the camp..."¹²

In contrast to Adams's photographs in which not a single image contains a single visible strand of the barbed wire fencing that surrounded the entire camp, or for that matter, any other evidence that people were held here against their will, interned photographer Toyo Miyatake's images were at pains to remind the viewer constantly of this fact.¹³ As Okihiro elaborates, "Besides its meaning as a symbol, the fence also was a deadly border that demarcated the free from the unfree," noting the death of James Wakasa, who was shot and killed by a sentry at one of the camps (203). Thus, Adams's

caption for one of his trademark photographs of the snow-covered Sierra Nevada as viewed from Manzanar reads, "In the presence of the ancient mountains the people of Manzanar await their destiny" (106). The passive construction of this sentence, like that of Houston's to which I took exception earlier, suggests an agentless state of suspension in time, a circumstance in which Americans of Japanese ancestry somehow just happened to find themselves. In contrast, for example, Miyatake's also very "scenic" portrait of a moonrise over the same mountains nevertheless positions one of the camp's guard towers prominently in the center of the composition.

Adams makes much of the fact in this set of photographic representations that "the camera never lies," emphasizing in his foreword "the clear statement of the lens" (7) and again in his afterword, that he strove to use "natural" light, the implication being that the photographs are as accurate and undistorted as technically possible, with nothing "unnatural" about their composition.¹⁴

The great irony of Adams's Born Free and Equal is that, despite his protestations to the contrary, the great photographer plainly couldn't or wouldn't see what was patently obvious to others: that the Americans of Japanese ancestry held at Manzanar were prisoners; there was nothing "free" about their condition in the camp. For

although some of Adams's photos gaze outward upon the surrounding "natural" environment with no explicit evidence of human artifice and the rest are portraits of internal camp life, none of these published images represent the demarcation between these two zones, the "borderland" where forced containment meets what we might call unfettered Nature. They seem to me therefore to stand as a willful mis-representation of the facts of relocation.

Adams's portraits of life within the camp are noteworthy as well, focusing as they do on studies of those whom Judith Fryer Davidov calls the "accommodationist Nisei:"

those who demonstrated their submission to captivity by working to make the spaces in which they were imprisoned more comfortable and attractive, or their patriotism by enlisting in the armed forces --fit perfectly with the official presentation of the internment as humane, orderly, and even beneficial to the internees.¹⁵

How was it possible to represent internment as "beneficial" to the internees? Here is Adams on the subject, again invoking the rhetoric of 'Nature': "I believe that the acrid splendor of the desert, ringed with towering mountains, has strengthened the spirit of the

people of Manzanar." So sure is he of the curative power of Nature, that he goes on to assert:

I do not say all are conscious of this influence, but I am sure most have responded, in one way or another, to the resonances of their environment.... Out of the jostling, dusty confusion of the first bleak days in raw barracks they have modulated to a democratic internal society and a praiseworthy personal adjustment to conditions beyond their control. The huge vistas and the stern realities of sun and wind and space symbolize the immensity and opportunity of America.... (9)

Is this not but a reissue of the Puritan and Emersonian belief that if U.S. Americans will but submit themselves to the crucible of "Nature," it will guarantee their moral correctness and, not merely their survival, but their flourishing by means of a godly prosperity? Adams seems to use this rationale of Nature's redemptive properties both to assuage his guilt as a white American who cannot help but be complicit with what may be a grave injustice and infringement on the rights of others as well as to offer it as both justification and solace to the internees, as if they should consider themselves lucky to live in a region of such "natural" splendor. According to this logic, no matter how misguided relocation may have

been, those interned can nevertheless only benefit from the direct contact with Nature in all its glory. Adams sums up the phenomenon of relocation with the phrase: "Manzanar is only a detour on the road of American citizenship."

The collective effect of Adams's images combined with his 'Nature' rhetoric culminates on the last page of his text with the quotation of several lines from Walt Whitman, the deployment of whose poetry works in much the same way as the deployment of visual "nature" images in seeking to "Americanize" and place beyond interrogation the fact of internment.

But the fact remains that the relocation camps were non-places: hastily erected in 1942 in sites that were by then so desolate that no westerner had sought to develop them, the shoddily-constructed barracks were quickly dismantled upon the release of their Japanese American internees in 1945. Within a remarkably short period of time, that is, it was as if the camps had never existed. With little record of them even now in the popular history of the U.S., it must have seemed (and perhaps continues to seem) to those forcibly interned that they themselves had somehow failed to exist, lacking as they did and do any physical evidence of the reality of their imprisonment.

Forcibly relocated from their homes to poorly-constructed quarters offering little to no privacy and

from which they were forbidden to leave for three years, as well as the disorientation of geography or space, internees suffered upon release from the camps disorientation in terms of time. As Houston describes it, "we seemed to have passed through a time machine, as if, in March of 1942 one had lifted his foot to take a step, had set it down in October of 1945, and was expected to just keep on walking, with all intervening time erased" (132). For many, the particular circumstances of their material lives implied time warps of more than a few years. The specific circumstances that greeted the Wakatsukis upon their release from Manzanar included the total loss of possessions left in a warehouse that was "unaccountably 'robbed'" (133). As for those things that her father had worked so hard to attain:

Papa already knew the car he'd put money on before Pearl Harbor had been repossessed. And, as he suspected, no record of his fishing boats remained. This put him right back where he'd been in 1904, arriving in a new land and starting over from economic zero. (133)

Displacement continued even upon release from the camps. Many families no longer had places to "go home" to. Okihiro notes the arson, for example, that attended the radio announcements of the release of the internees and which was responsible in more than one case for burning

Japanese Americans' homes beyond repair. In Hood River, Oregon, the mayor announced, "Ninety percent are against the Japs! ... We must let the Japanese know they're not welcome here."¹⁶

In her chapter entitled "Manzanar, U.S.A.", Houston writes, "As the months at Manzanar turned to years, it became a world unto itself...." She adds that in most ways Manzanar "was a totally equipped American small town, complete with schools, churches, Boy Scouts... softball leagues, Abbott and Costello movies, tennis courts, and traveling shows" (86). She remarks that her older brother, Bill, performing with a camp band, sang "Don't Fence Me In":

He didn't sing [it] out of protest, as if trying quietly to mock the authorities. It just happened to be a hit song one year, and they all wanted to be an up-to-date American swing band.
(87)

However, when she next quotes the song's lyrics, the irony is unavoidable: "Oh, give me land, lots of land/ Under starry skies above,/ Don't fence me in./ Let me ride through the wide/ Open country that I love..." (87). So, too, when Houston describes the pictures in the 1943-1944 Manzanar high school yearbook, the images become laden with irony for their emulation of an "American" way of

life that had in fact historically been forbidden to many of the internees. When Ansel Adams presents these kinds of representations --a camp baseball game, for example-- they deny the reality of their subjects' incarceration; when Houston describes the internees' aspirations to "American"-ness, there is something both poignant and pathetic about the attempts to fit into a dominant culture that has long treated this group as second-class when they were treated as having rights as citizens at all.

In The Climate of the Country, a memoir of her family's life as white social workers who lived at the Tule Lake relocation camp, Marnie Mueller describes how clearly her father saw what someone like Ansel Adams couldn't or wouldn't see, a comprehension that caused the elderly Quaker to cry as he recollected it:

... he started to describe a Fourth of July there and watching nisei children in Boy Scout uniforms standing on the parade ground and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag. And behind the flag, he could see the barbed wire.¹⁷

To this day, few traces of the ten euphemistically-named "relocation" camps exist, although the National Park Service has proposed a monument on the site of Manzanar.¹⁸ As Houston notes, many internees chose to move to the east coast upon their release from the

relocation camps, which despite the fact that it was three thousand miles from their former homes, had "no history of anti-Orientalism, in fact no Oriental history at all. So few people of Asian ancestry had settled there, it was like heading for a neutral territory" (113).

II. Beyond Boundaries

In Farewell to Manzanar, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston contrasts her own experience of internment as a nisei daughter to that of her issei father. Left impoverished by internment, too old to start over, her father "didn't die there, but things finished for him there, whereas for me it was like a birthplace" (41). At the end of the narrative she remarks again that what signaled her father's demise was for her a beginning: "Papa's life ended at Manzanar, though he lived for twelve more years after getting out. ...I had not been able to admit that my own life really began there" (169). Although never explicit, she suggests that as a young woman of Japanese ancestry, she was released by the circumstances of relocation from some of the restrictions attending females in more traditional Japanese society. Whereas incarceration proved "emasculating" for the men, it seems that it may have had a liberatory effect for women, offering them a greater degree of agency and empowerment

within the family structure than they had previously enjoyed.

Amidst the privations of camp life, the author's recollections of her imprisonment --like Yamamoto's sense of her own impoverished childhood-- are not without their share of pleasant and, indeed, even happy moments. Describing one such aspect of camp life, Houston tells of the rock gardens some of the issei men crafted at Manzanar:

Sometimes in the evenings we could walk down the raked gravel path. You could face away from the barracks, look ... toward the darkening mountains, and for a while not be a prisoner at all. You could hang suspended in some odd, almost lovely land you could not escape from yet almost didn't want to leave. (86)

The metaphor of hanging suspended is one she repeats at the end of this chapter when she describes the last photograph in the 1943-1944 Manzanar yearbook:

[It is] a two-page endsheet showing a wide path that curves among rows of elm trees. White stones border the path. Two dogs are following an old woman in gardening clothes as she strolls along. She is in the middle distance, small beneath the trees, beneath the snowy peaks. It is winter. All the elms are bare. The scene is

both stark and comforting. This path leads toward one edge of camp, but the wire is out of sight, or out of focus. The tiny woman seems very much at ease. She and her tiny dogs seem almost swallowed by the landscape, or floating in it. (88)

The notion of rootlessness and floating is an apt one for those "relocated" against their will and then released to begin over again, struggling to resume their lives with even less than they had had before the war. (The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco calculated \$400,000,000 in property losses --of which the U.S. government later paid about ten per cent in claims.)¹⁹

The metaphor of "floating" suffuses Cynthia Kadohata's coming-of-age novel, The Floating World, as well.²⁰ Describing the lives of a Japanese American family in the aftermath of the relocation camps, the child-narrator, Olivia, attributes the expression to her grandmother's use of the Japanese term, ukiyo: "In old Japan, ukiyo meant the districts full of brothels, teahouses, and public baths, but it also referred to change and the pleasures and loneliness change brings" (2-3). In appropriating the term for the title of her novel, Kadohata offers it as a commentary on the experience of Japanese Americans in the aftermath of internment.

Like the young Jeanne Wakatsuki in Farewell to

Manzanar, Olivia in The Floating World experiences freedom and happiness in the same environments and circumstances that prove restrictive to her parents. In contrast to her grandmother's sense of their post-camp lives as a "floating world [of] gas station attendants, restaurants, and jobs we depended on, the motel towns floating in the middle of fields and mountains" (2), Olivia says, "For a long time, I never exactly thought of us as part of any of that.... We were stable, traveling through an unstable world while my father looked for jobs" (3). Olivia uses this inversion of what might more commonly be construed of as a position of disadvantage and disempowerment to her advantage. What to the adults represents a life of uncertainty and unsettledness to the child represents a kind of liberatory mobility, not unlike Fitzgerald's couple in the roadster, who awaken each day to a new horizon. Kadohata's narrator writes, with remarkable equanimity: "My own earliest memories were of pictures from a car window --telephone wires illuminated by streetlamps, factories outlined against a still, sunless sky-- pictures of one world fading as another took its place" (55). Olivia seems to have found security in the face of constant change; for her, home is constituted not in a particular geographic locale, but in the collective presence of her nuclear family, no matter where they might be. It's as if the child were taking the position that if

they are already mobile (i.e. placeless), then no one or no thing can uproot them; it's more secure to stay on the move.

Emplacement is an aspiration for her parents, however. In time, the family comes to settle in Arkansas, choosing their community with care: "We had thought of moving to a town called Ashland, but no Japanese lived there, and we didn't want to be the first" (60). Olivia notes how her father distinguishes amongst the social position that they occupy within the small Japanese American society they come to inhabit in the south and the place itself:

My father said that the fourteen Japanese, including the six of us, who lived in Gibson all came from families who owned small businesses, and the twenty or thirty Japanese in the next town over ... all came from families in which someone worked as a chicken sexer. But no chicken sexers lived in Gibson, and no business-owner Japanese lived in Lee. I don't know why it was divided that way. (60)

In this way, the question of who in U.S. America "belongs" to which geographic locations is revived: Who gains membership to which aspects of national identity, and under what circumstances?

In the uncertainty of their own "floating" lives,

Olivia's parents raise her with the "obligation to leave Arkansas someday and have a happier life than [they] had" (95). As a young woman, in fulfillment of this obligation, Olivia leaves her family behind in Arkansas and returns to the west coast of her childhood. Her future stability remains indeterminate, particularly when she accepts a job maintaining vending machines that are spread over an area of many square miles and is constantly on the road tending to them. The novel suggests that the destiny of those subjected to forced relocation is not to know their place in society and to be destined instead to a life of ceaseless wandering. To the extent that Olivia accepts these restrictions on her social mobility, she seems to compensate for them by excessive geographic mobility. She does not seem unhappy, but one wonders if such scaled-back expectations are not the legacy of her people's historic denial of citizenship rights and internment during the war.

Although gender would seem as critical a consideration as ethnicity in both Houston's and Kadohata's narratives of locatedness, gender is never explicitly addressed. In contrast, Terry Tempest Williams foregrounds its prominence when she contests the ways in which a particular geographic space has been defiled and controlled by the government. In her memoir Refuge - An

Unnatural History of Family and Place, Terry Tempest

Williams seeks like Kadohata's Olivia to find refuge in change, but her narrative reverses the trajectory of those who seek home far away from their roots.²¹ Instead, Williams would assert the rights of "Americans" to claim ancestral rights to place.

Refuge is a narrative that ultimately contests the notion of "Nature's Nation" as one granting entitlement to "nature" to any one group of the national body politic over another. The memoir chronicles two concurrent events: the unprecedented historic rise of the water level of the Great Salt Lake and her mother's diagnosis of and eventual death from breast cancer. It is also an example of what Susan Stanford Friedman has called a "cultural narrative[] of relational positionality," in which, by employing a number of fluid, interchanging subject positions, Williams fashions a text that would subvert hegemonic control of the Nevada Test Site.²² This rhetorical deployment of situatedness is similar to June Jordan's in "A Report from the Bahamas," discussed in the last chapter, and is an effective narrative strategy for those disempowered by the hegemonic structures of white capitalist patriarchy.

As usual in her writing, Williams here deploys a predominantly ecofeminist challenge to the question of to whom U.S. "nature" belongs. As in other narratives

discussed in these chapters, Nature is for Williams the site of both loss and recuperation. She stresses continually the historic engagement of her Mormon forebears with the landscape surrounding Salt Lake City and the Great Salt Lake. The epilogue to Refuge, entitled "The Clan of One-Breasted Women," particularly foregrounds issues of gender and ethnicity in its representation of a would-be revision of the U.S. human/Nature relationship.

Williams opens with the following words: "I belong to a Clan of One-Breasted Women. My mother, my grandmothers, and six aunts have all had mastectomies. Seven are dead. The two who survive have just completed rounds of chemotherapy and radiation" (281). With most of the women in her family dead or dying of cancer, thirty-four-year-old Terry Tempest Williams became the matriarch of her family.

Williams then discloses her own status as a woman at higher-than-normal risk for developing breast cancer. Foregrounding her identity as a member of "a Mormon family with roots in Utah since 1847" (281) is a discursive strategy, like that of Evelyn White in "Black Women and Wilderness," intended to invoke a notion of ancestral rights, setting the stage for her reclamation of lands that she initially argues belong to her by virtue of her Mormon lineage. (Williams would have us know that the "Joshua" trees growing in the desert around the Nevada

test site were named by "... my ancestors, who believed they looked like prophets pointing west to the Promised Land" (290). What she fails to remark is that the Western Shoshone preceded her Mormon ancestors as inhabitants of this place and that they no doubt had their own names for these trees. I will have more to say about this elision in a moment.)

The incidences of breast cancer in her family, Williams says, define her history:

Most statistics tell us breast cancer is genetic, hereditary, with rising percentages attached to fatty diets, childlessness, or becoming pregnant after thirty. What they don't say is that living in Utah may be the greatest hazard of all. (281)

She goes on to contextualize her own childhood within the eleven-and-a-half year history of the U.S. government's above-ground atomic testing in Nevada in the 1950s and early 1960s --testing to which she and her family were "down-winders." She describes her sense of betrayal:

Again and again, the American public was told by its government, in spite of burns, blisters, and nausea, "It has been found that the tests may be conducted with adequate assurance of safety under conditions prevailing at the bombing reservations." Assuaging public fears was

simply a matter of public relations. "Your best action," an Atomic Energy Commission booklet read, "is not to be worried about fallout." A news release typical of the times stated, "We find no basis for concluding that harm to any individual has resulted from radioactive fallout." (284)

She cites the class-action suit filed in 1979, representing the by-then "nearly twelve hundred plaintiffs seeking compensation from the United States government for cancers caused by nuclear testing in Nevada" (284).

Although a federal judge found in favor of ten of the plaintiffs in 1984, the ruling was overturned in 1987, "on the ground that the United States was protected from suit by the doctrine of sovereign immunity, a centuries' old idea from England in the day of absolute monarchs" (285).

Williams links the legal belief in patriarchal infallibility to the paternalistic practices of her own cultural tradition: "In Mormon culture, authority is respected, obedience is revered, and independent thinking is not. I was taught as a young girl not to 'make waves' or 'rock the boat'" (285). The growing evidence of what amounts to an epidemic of breast cancer in her family poses a conflict for Williams because it puts her at odds with her Mormon upbringing:

For many years, I have... listened, observed,

and quietly formed my own opinions, in a culture that rarely asks questions because it has all the answers. But one by one, I have watched the women in my family die common, heroic deaths. We sat in waiting rooms hoping for good news, but always receiving the bad. I cared for them, bathed their scarred bodies, and kept their secrets. I watched beautiful women become bald as Cytosan, cisplatin and Adriamycin were injected into their veins. I held their foreheads as they vomited green-black bile, and I shot them with morphine when the pain became inhuman. In the end, I witnessed their last peaceful breaths, becoming a midwife to the rebirth of their souls.

The price of obedience has become too high.

(285-286)

Finally, Williams's allegiance to both her country and her religion are superseded by her loyalty to other women, "the clan of one-breasted women," although she ultimately roots the contestation of her spiritual tradition within that very tradition: "What I do know ... is that as a Mormon woman of the fifth generation of Latter Day Saints, I must question everything, even if it means losing my faith.... Tolerating blind obedience in the name of patriotism or religion ultimately takes our lives" (286).

sets out with a small group of like-minded women symbolically to reclaim, by entering illegally, a town declared off-limits by the government. She notes that in describing this general area as "virtually uninhabited," the government has designated her family as "virtual uninhabitants" (287). This symbolic act of civil disobedience, a deliberate transgression of government-imposed boundaries, is intended to refute the imposition of such borders everywhere by insisting that the land belongs to all the people of the nation equally, as well as to all the other denizens of the desert. The action, she states, declared that the women "would reclaim the desert for the sake of their children, for the sake of the land" (287). In the deliberately essentializing strategy of ecofeminism, Williams writes:

The women couldn't bear it any longer. They were mothers. They had suffered labor pains but always under the promise of birth. The red-hot pains beneath the desert promised death only, as each bomb became a stillborn. A contract had been made and broken between human beings and the land. A new contract was being drawn by the women, who understood the fate of the earth as their own. (288)

By virtue of their procreative biology, Williams insists, women have the authority and the obligation to resist,

oppose, and subvert patriarchal law: "'We are mothers and we have come to reclaim the desert for our children'" (289). In their action, significantly, the women cross a geographic boundary in order to lay claim to its enclosed space, reclaiming that space which the government has first contaminated and then attempted to designate as forbidden to the citizenry. Their allegiance to the earth and their alliance to one another, as well as to all women everywhere, transcends the boundary of nationality as well.

However, there is of course yet another layer to these considerations of "Whose Nation?" As Rebecca Solnit has indicated:

legally the Nevada Test Site is part of a much larger expanse that never really became part of the United States. U.S. claim to the the land is based on the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.... What was then called Utah Territory was of little concern to either side at the time. Utah was named after the Utes, a linguistic and cultural subgroup of one of the continent's major indigenous groups, the Shoshonean people [who inhabited this land] for centuries before the first Mormons and mountain men wandered in....²³

While not negating her Mormon "rights" to place, perhaps,

Williams would seem to leave out considerations of, if not foreclose, the earlier rights of the Western Shoshone.

Solnit continues:

... Much of Nevada still belongs to the Western Shoshone. The Western Shoshone do not believe that land can be sold, and they have never sold their land. Nor have they given it away, or leased it, or been conquered as a nation by the nation of the United States; for all intents and purposes, they have never ceded their land.... [T]hey are still fighting for their right to it today. (30)

Like Williams, Linda Hogan mobilizes issues of identity in the interest of contesting national boundaries, and like Williams she foregrounds issues of both gender and ethnicity in her novel, Solar Storms.²⁴

The narrative is situated in a borderless fictional world of shifting boundaries and floating islands. Despite actual topographic correlation with what some would call the Boundary Waters area that lies between the U.S. and Canada, and with specific reference to Hydro-Quebec's construction of the James Bay dams in the 1970s and 1980s (and the resulting detrimental environmental and health consequences to the region and its mostly indigenous people), the people in Hogan's novel never

refer to the place by that name. The world of Solar Storms is both an actual and a metaphoric realm of earth and water, where people of many tribes (including those of European ancestry) gather and interact, and where, importantly, all are defined by their relationship to the place itself. As Hogan describes it in an interview:

They call this region the Boundary Waters, and it is. It's the place where one country joins another, where bodies of land and water are broken by each other. The skeletal gray branches of trees define a terrain that is at the outermost limits of our knowledge and it is a shadowy world, one our bones say is the dangerous borderland between humans and wilderness.²⁵

The representation of a particular site as a "borderland" --neither one specific location nor another, but, at the same time somehow incorporating elements of both-- enables the writer to describe the meetings or "contact zone" encounters that take place between a number of different life-forms and to describe the influence that they (and the location itself) exert on one another.

Solar Storm's motif is that of a quest for identity in promulgation of a plot that centers on issues of environmental justice. Tortured and then abandoned as a young child, Angel Jensen succeeds as a teenager in

tracing her heritage to a small village in northern Minnesota. Although biologically a mixed-blood Cree-Inuit, Angel has been raised by Osage Indians in Oklahoma; she is unfamiliar with the lifeways of her "own" people. In Adam's Rib, Angel is reinstated with her surviving blood-family members. Then, in the company of her great- and her great-great-grandmother and her step-grandmother, she undertakes the quest to find her biological mother. It is an epic journey in which the few tattered remnants of an old map the women carry are not able to guide them.

Despite her own Osage tribal affiliation, Hogan is at pains never to speak on behalf of other Indians. She refuses the rhetorical move of gathering Cree, Inuit, and Anishnabeg voices into one essentialized identity (that of generic "Indian") in favor of scrupulously observing the often very subtle differences between tribes.

Instead, the narrator of her tale, Angel, couches everything always in terms of her own acculturation as Osage, foregrounding the fact that her understanding is necessarily limited by that subject position. Constructing Angel as a border figure (both as a mixed-blood and as one who has physically inhabited numerous geographies in her search for her "roots") is strategically similar to situating the action of the story itself in a border-country. What results is far from a limited perspective, however, but one which is

acknowledged simply to be a significant part of a larger whole. This narrative device of "limited" point-of-view is especially effective for Hogan's purposes as she argues in this novel for a restorative or reparative world-view in which human beings are merely one constituent in a "more-than-human" world that contains multitudes of lives. Her narrative emphasis, that is, does not focus on its protagonist as a singular ("heroic") individual so much as it tries to show Angel's interrelatedness with a variety of lives --both human and non-human:

Cell by cell, all of us were taken in by water and by land, swallowed a little at a time. What we'd thought of as our lives and being on earth was gone, and now the world was made up of pathways of its own invention. We were only one of the many dreams of earth. And I knew that we were just a small dream. (170)

In this way, the novel comments not only on the arbitrariness of human-imposed borders, but on their presumptuousness as well: Humans can never "contain" the land, this novel asserts, but the land will always contain us. Both Williams's and Hogan's narratives proclaim a Nature that transcends the borders of any nation, a Nature beyond nationalism. They suggest a role for and meaning of nature that directly refutes any claims U.S. America would lay to being "Nature's Nation," when that

equation bars so many of its citizens from its "natural" spaces.

III. The Nation's "Nature"

The rhetoric of "Nature's Nation" would argue that "America" represents opportunity for all, a boundless province wherein the "natural" generosity of the land itself guarantees a particularly prosperous and morally-integrated life.

But rather than the coherent vision suggested by the term "nature's nation," the notion has proven and continues to prove exclusionary. The National Park Service, by way of literal example, reports that "a disproportionately large number of visitors are white." Surveys conducted by the NPS found that, although the national percentage of whites is 73%, more than 90% of national parks visitors are white.²⁶

Ideas of Nature in the ideological construction of "nature's nation" clearly extend to ideas of the nation's human inhabitants as well when it comes to defining what and who constitute its "natural" citizens. Ideas of "naturalness" continue to do the work of keeping those constructed as Other out of more arenas than simply the nation's parks.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. See Perry Miller, "The Shaping of the American Character" in Nature's Nation (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967) 1-13.
2. Perry Miller, "Nature and the National Ego," in Errand into the Wilderness 1956 (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1984) 204-216.
3. F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby 1925 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953) 182.
4. See Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden - Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964) 354-365.
5. Louise Westling, The Green Breast of the New World - Landscape, Gender and American Fiction (Athens, Ga.: U. of Ga. Press, 1996) 4. The passage continues:
The desire that Fitzgerald actually portrays in The Great Gatsby is not for the aesthetic contemplation that Nick claims the Dutch sailors felt.... Men like the brutal, careless Tom Buchanan are the real culprits whose drive for power denuded the landscape and produced the valley of ashes. Fitzgerald makes Tom's wife Daisy, whose name suggests the deceptive appearance of natural freshness, the literal cause of the novel's tragedy, displacing the guilt of the rapacious industrialists in a parallel to the way his final description of Long Island displaces the blame for the landscape's ruin upon the victim "her"self.
6. Hisaye Yamamoto, "Life Among the Oil Fields - A Memoir," in Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories (Latham, New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1988) 86-95.
7. Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes - Travel Writing and Transculturation (New York: Routledge, 1992) 4.
8. In 1870 the U.S. Congress granted naturalization rights to free whites and persons of African descent, but the bill omitted mention of those of Asian ancestry. In 1911 the U.S. Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization ordered that only whites and people of African descent could file declarations of intent for citizenship, thus continuing to exclude immigrant Asians from naturalization. In 1913, the Alien Land

Bill prevented Asian aliens from owning land. (It was not until 1952 that Public Law 414 at last permitted those Asians not born in the U.S. the right to become naturalized citizens.)

9. Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, Farewell to Manzanar (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1973).

10. Ansel Adams, Born Free and Equal (New York: U.S. Camera, 1944).

11. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Manzanar informational literature, 1999. Let us not forget that barbed wire was originally invented for the containment of animals.

12. Gary Okihiro, Whispered Silences - Japanese Americans and World War II (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1996) 202.

13. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, History of Manzanar Relocation Center, Vols. 1 & 2, (U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1998).

14. Adams wrote in "[a note on the photography]": Those individuals who are associated with outdoor activities were photographed in direct sunlight --no screens or reflectors were used. The people who are associated with indoor activities were photographed mostly with flash --one diffused flash reflected from ceiling or wall, and one directional flash close to the subject. In all cases "tricky" lighting was avoided.... Reality and conviction are absolutely essential in any photo-documentation; and the natural cooperation of the subjects must be secured from the start. (Ansel Adams, Born Free and Equal 112)

Can those interned against their will be said to be "naturally" cooperative? Judith Freyer Davidov (cited below) quotes John Tagg, author of The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1988; p. 150) when she critiques photographic documentation's insistence on its "accuracy":

... the camera is never merely an instrument. It [has] authority to arrest, picture and transform daily life... [because] the local state... deploys it and guarantees the authority of its images to stand as evidence or to register a truth. (227)

15. Judith Fryer Davidov, "'The Color of My Skin, the Shape of My Eyes': Photographs of the Japanese-American Internment by Dorothea Lange, Ansel Adams, and Toyo Miyatake." The Yale Journal of Criticism 9.2 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996) 223-244. I am indebted to Caroline Chung Simpson for this reference.

16. Okihiro 217, 218.
17. Marnie Mueller, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Saturday 6 March, 1999, C-2.
18. In light of my comments concerning the "rhetoric of nature" embedded in Ansel Adams's photographs and text of Born Free and Equal, it is interesting to wonder whether, alone of the ten former camp sites, Manzanar has been chosen for restoration for reasons of its "scenic" qualities.
19. Davidof, 225.
20. Cynthia Kadohata, The Floating World (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989).
21. Terry Tempest Williams, Refuge - An Unnatural History of Family and Place (New York: Random House, 1991).
22. Susan Stanford Friedman, "Beyond White and Other: Relationality and Narratives of Race in Feminist Discourse," Signs Vol. 21, No. 1 (1995): 1-49
23. Rebecca Solnit, Savage Dreams - A Journey Into the Hidden Wars of the American West (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1994) 29.
24. Linda Hogan, Solar Storms (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).
25. Linda Hogan, Dwellings . 63.
26. "Goal for Summer is Diversity," Seattle Times 2 May 1999.

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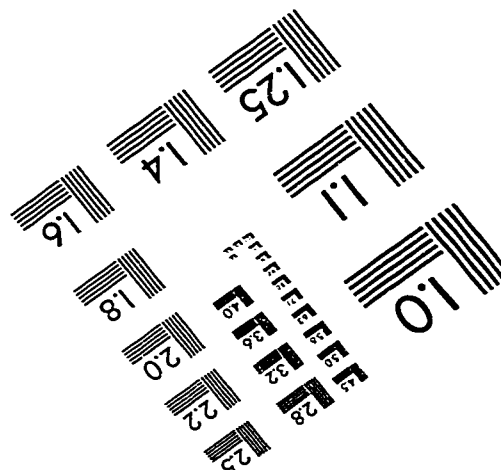
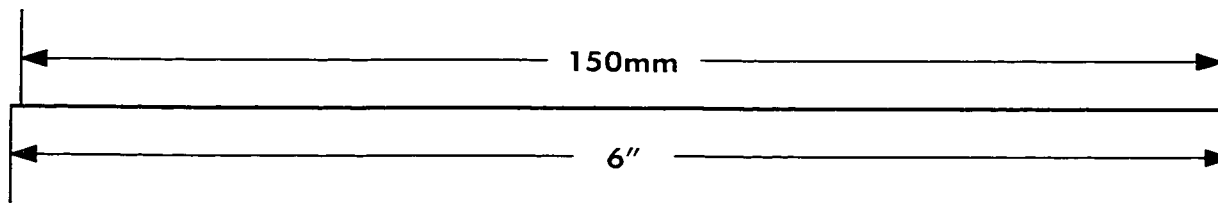
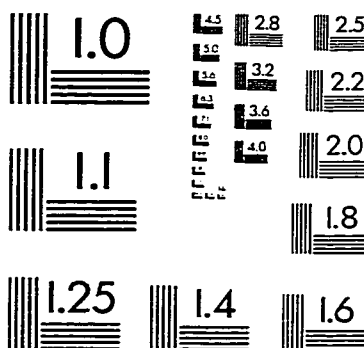
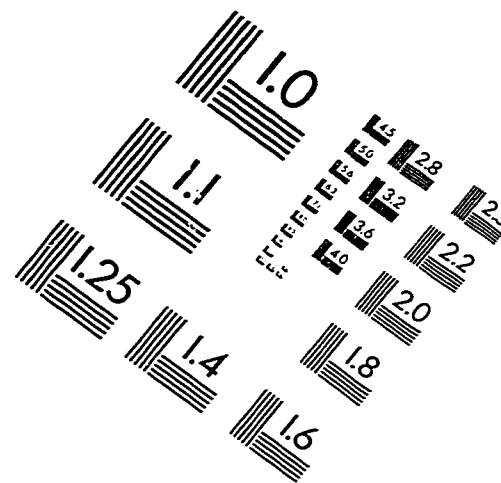
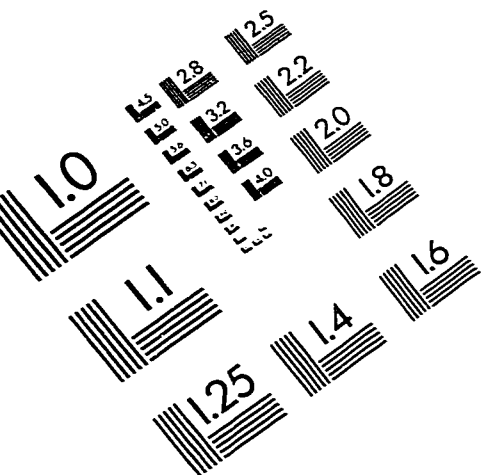
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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Ellen M. Evans earned her M.F.A. in Writing from Vermont College, Montpelier, Vermont. She has published short stories in such anthologies as The Forbidden Stitch, Season of Dead Water, and Imagining America.

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