

Participatory Reading: Nature Writing and Response in the Wake of John Burroughs

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Abstract

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Participatory Reading: Nature Writing and Response in the Wake of John Burroughs tracks an alternative, reader-focused history of nature writing to describe and retrieve an interactive relationship between readers and their environments—where reading encouraged readers’ outdoorism and nature observation inspired reading. This intertwined history of professional and amateur readers redirects previous ecocritical definitions of nature writing based on its content, which lost sight of readers’ interactions with texts’ key ideas, and thus recovers dynamic and diverse literary pasts. Nature writing, I argue, does not merely seek to instill care for the environment but organizes a history of writers and readers committed to integrating ideas about nature with outdoor experience. My chapters pair reception histories of John Burroughs and Herman Melville, Celia Thaxter and Sarah Orne Jewett, John Muir and Henry James, and Louis Agassiz Fuertes and Alexander Posey and thereby resuscitate forgotten cultures of reading with renewed relevance in the face of popular climate inaction.

Acknowledgements

Even intellectual work happens in specific times and places. For that reason, I start these acknowledgements by recognizing that the land I grew up near, returned to, and have known as Seattle actually is land of the Coast Salish Peoples that touches the shared waters of all tribes and bands within the Suquamish, Tulalip and Muckleshoot nations. It is a great privilege to be somewhere so resplendent with beauty. This has been no less true at this historical juncture. I began my doctoral studies in the year of President Obama's re-election, and over the course of these studies have seen the election of a president who endangers ideals about democracy and the environment that I hold and that shape this study. While this dissertation is doubtless shaped in ways I cannot fully see by its moment in historical space and time, it is also in more and less direct ways the result of many peoples' influence.

I want to begin then by acknowledging my grandmother, Irmgard, who studied literature herself and who pushed into my hands *The Illiad* and *Dorian Gray*, but also *Tom Sawyer* and Jack London (and Agatha Christie). Now, as her eyesight wanes, she remembers and recites German poetry she studied in school. She is a model for me of a life lived with books, and I was so excited she was able to be present at my graduation ceremony.

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The lives of my grandmother and immediate family have been revolutionized by Valdi, of whom too many pictures are probably taken.

I also pause in remembrance of my father, Dominique, without whose planning I would have had very different educational opportunities. He, too, did advanced studies in the United States, and in the background of all this somewhere is his love of Simon & Garfunkel, whose songs were some of the first poems I considered at length.

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I had all these fabulous mentors before I even entered the doctoral program in English at the University of Washington, where I quickly became thankful for Gary Handwerk. Gary is an unfailing advocate, and it’s hard to pick where to start in thanking him. He, above all, has read the chapters of this dissertation in their various iterations. His support is unflagging, and I am grateful that my dissertating experience was with someone whose approach was to say “This is smart; keep going.” His gestures of generosity when we met, especially outside his office, made him less of a “chair” and more of a sounding board. Not every chair would have let me include my form of humor in these pages, either. I am lucky to have been under the direction of someone who so actively seeks to promote my work.

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Introduction

In Richard Harding Davis's 1910 short story "The Nature Faker," a righteous and wealthy nature lover named Richard Herrick feels a need to purchase three Russian-trained dancing bears from their owner so that he may release them from their vaudeville captivity into his wooded estate; his associates, Jackson and Kelly, disagree with Herrick's assessment of the situation, and part of their debate hinges on whether animals, once domesticated, can be successfully reintroduced into wild conditions. On this subject, when Kelly asserts that it cannot be done, the conversation proceeds:

"Can't it?" jeered Herrick. "Did you ever read 'The Call of the Wild'?"
 "Did you ever read," retorted Kelly, "What happened at the siege of Ladysmith when the oats ran low and they drove the artillery horses out to grass? They starved, that's all. And if you don't feed your bears on milk out of a bottle they'll starve too."
 "That's what will happen," cried Jackson; "those bears have forgotten what a pine forest smells like. Maybe it's a pity, but it's the fact. I'll bet if you could ask 'em whether they'd rather sleep in a cave on your farm or be head-liners in vaudeville, they'd tell you they were 'devoted to their art.'" (349-350)

The short story offers something of a satiric post-mortem on the "nature faker" controversy that drew several prominent nature writers into a heated debate over their genre and the stakes of accuracy in their work. But if Davis's story presents mostly some lighthearted gags at nature faker debaters' expense, this brief exchange of dialogue from within it nonetheless raises questions that environmental humanists, historically downriver from the nature faker controversy even if they have never heard of it, should take seriously. Within this excerpt, characters resort to what they have read—first a fiction by Jack London, then nonfiction accounts of events in the Second Boer War—to adjudicate what remains an open question to wildlife rehabilitators today:¹

¹See Lutts's Afterword: "Although talk of nature fakers has all but vanished, the issues at the root of the controversy remain" (189). On the subject of current distortions of animal behavior, see especially 194-204.

what is the likely success of reintroducing domesticated animals to the wild? The relation of reading to “fact” remains suspended after Herrick and Kelly’s question marks, and Jackson doesn’t simplify matters by bringing in his flippant remark that gestures to various kinds of high and low artistry. Readers might also note the irony of this debate itself being staged in a fictional short story that may or may not count as part of the nature writing genre upon which it indirectly comments. My project walks into the headwinds of this confusion, illuminating at least part of its history and arguing that literary studies’ insights have relevance for popular interfacing with matters of scientific concern.

In doing so, I return to nineteenth-century American nature writing, which to some may sound like raising the dead. Specifically, Daniel Philippon, writing in 2014 by the time the genre had become mired in critical skepticism, suggests that “the generic label ‘nature writing’ may now be more trouble than it’s worth” and, with resignation, that “While ‘nature writing’ may well be dead, in other words, its spirit unquestionably lives on” (“Is Nature Writing Dead?” 392).² Philippon’s point is true enough—I am not arguing that rumors of nature writing’s death have been greatly exaggerated³—but his concession too quickly smoothens a variegated history that this introduction synthesizes and that my chapters elaborate. Now that critical projects have drawn attention to the co-constitution of “nature” and “culture,” it is understandable that the value of ‘nature writing’ as a term would deflate. Yet critical projects would benefit from

² Philippon is not the only one to consider the demise of the genre in deathly terms. See also Farr.

³ That is, I am not arguing this, but it may be true. A number of publications in recent years have brought up the term of “the New Nature Writing” to refer to more contemporary writers in Britain and Ireland. These are sadly outside my scope, but they are the most recent iteration of what I will suggest has been a transatlantic story from its early stages. On the New Nature Writing, see David Farrier’s “J.A. Baker’s *The Peregrine* and Its Readers,” Jason Cowley’s editorial letter from *Granta*, and Jos Smith, *The New Nature Writing: Rethinking the Literature of Place*.

stepping back and, instead of treating nature writing as a generality that can be attached to examples fitting its ambiguous criteria, pivoting to ask when ‘nature writing’ may have been useful and why.

I became interested in nature writing as I reflected on the term and its common origin story. The truism that Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* was the first work of nature writing stuck out of the ground, you might say, and I tripped on it. Even granting scholarship that identified precursors to *Walden* in America and elsewhere (and granting also the infinite regression that can overwhelm any hunt for the origin of an idea), the truism bothered me because it seemed self-evident that Thoreau, the renowned iconoclast, would never have characterized his work that way himself. It had to have come after. What began as a reference question—something I expected would be a point of fact: where and by whom was “nature writing” coined?—led to much more digging than I anticipated, and the obtuse truism led me to unearth a story.

That story had to do with readers. There were, of course, writers involved—and obviously the two categories are not exclusive and have often salient overlap. Authors reading each other, book reviewers surveying authors, booksellers and librarians organizing titles, and academics consolidating conversations all appear as reading characters in the story. But there were other readers, usually even more indirectly documented, who caught my attention: the members of the public who made nature writing a popular genre in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth and who complemented this reading by going outdoors in myriad ways from hiking and hunting to gardening and birdwatching. Intuitive as the links between their reading and activities might seem, it was also a kind of “bookish” behavior quite different from the

typical associations that cluster around bookishness—usually, seated isolation indoors.⁴ As the title of a book by John Burroughs puts it, they connected *Field and Study*. That Burroughs should have encapsulated these behaviors is not accidental; as Eric Lupfer has already partly traced,⁵ Burroughs’s influence on the shape of the genre has been obscured by the prominence of Thoreau, and the mixed ramifications of this is what the last part of my title plays on using a pun of sorts on “wake.” That is, one could look at how interpretation of nature writing was shaped by his example (as in a boat’s wake), or one could think about what changes resulted from his having been largely bumped off in critical memory (as in the funerary ceremony).

Developing ways to discuss the bookishness that connects reading and experience—what I will call “participatory reading”—has far-reaching implications, but it presents a materially urgent knowledge-problem within environmental discourse. Expert commentators of various stripes note scientists’ frustration with popular and political inaction in response to published consensus. For example, as climate-change scientist Mike Hulme writes in a chapter on the communication-related issues complicating policy and action, “The traditional ‘deficit model’ of science communication is no longer tenable; it is not sufficient to argue that more or clearer information about climate change from scientists will lead to greater public engagement with the issue” (215). Even granting the ambiguities inherent to different media, most people know some

⁴ My use of “bookishness” draws from a small set of exploratory essays by various scholars, most of which were convened by Jonathan Freedman and published as a set in the *Michigan Quarterly Review*, thinking about the “theoretical and the practical implications of the imaginary of bookishness” (Freedman “Bookishness: An Introduction” 463). As N. Katherine Hayles has pointed out in her musing on the term, “Traditional reader-response theory generally does not take the embodied reader into account”; my use of bookishness is meant to at once recognize the seated-indoors-alone stereotype’s “connotations [that] have swung from mildly negative to largely positive as the cultural role of the book has moved from center to margin” and to push against that stereotype by recognizing a context where books were associated with bodied movement (Hayles 231; Freedman “Helen Tartar” 159). Like Freedman and his contributors, I am both interested in material books but not excluding digital and alternative material forms.

⁵ I discuss Lupfer’s work at greater length in chapters 1 and 2.

version of “the story of climate change”; thus, Hulme suggests, “The full story of climate change is the unfolding story of an idea and how this idea is changing the way we think, feel and act” (xxviii). The question seems to be: can those changes for processing and reacting to the “story” be brought about before the worst scientific projections materialize?⁶ Others agree that the conversations need to shift from asking whether climate patterns are changing and instead toward how people on individual and collective scales will adapt to changes many of them experience indirectly but perhaps, at most, read about. In *Climate-Challenged Society*, John Dryzek, Richard Norgaard, and David Schlosberg caution against waiting until the worst arrives, writing, “Climate change is an altogether different kind of problem. Climate change seems to demand a degree of large-scale, collective, multi-faceted, coordinated, persistent, public-spirited, self-sacrificing, and—crucially—anticipatory response of a kind never really seen before in human affairs” (15). Entire books have even foregrounded this language, such as Peter Read’s *Responding to Global Warming: The Technology, Economics, and Politics of Sustainable Energy* (1994). As some stakeholders maintain a blithe and expedient skepticism regarding whether climate change’s causes are anthropogenic, the echo of “response” across these and other formulations stresses that reactions, at least, will need to be human regardless. To cultivate proactive and not merely costly reactive strategies for response, developing approaches that help readers draw from previous experiences and deepen their comprehension of new ones presents a

⁶ There is a tendency to use “story” in these cases as a synonym for simply a sequence of events, which may or may not a story make. But Hulme is also drawing from studies that evoke story and narrative in ways narratologists will recognize. E.g., “Communications experts Craig Trumbo and James Shanahan have researched the ways in which the public understand the ideas surrounding climate change. They observe: ‘If public understanding of [climate change] is built on a narrative construct – one subject to a potential fickle storytelling process that can easily be driven in any direction – then politically based policy and regulatory strategies that rely on [such] an authority located in public opinion could be seriously misinformed’” (216). Hulme is thus at least alive to the complexities of narrative shaping.

pressing area for research.

Even as articulations of response insist on the practical exigency of a collective, my study remains aware that participants' responses have been differentially expected and valued. At multiple points in this dissertation, I draw on Wai Chee Dimock's phrasing of "uneven velocities" to try and capture how these differences weave in and out of reception histories. In reception history's documentation—too scarce as it is—associations, omissions, and valuations become visible in ways that render the weave visible. Donald S. Moore, Anand Pandian, and Jake Kosek have written that, "*Working together*, race and nature legitimate particular forms of political representation, reproduce social hierarchies, and authorize violent exclusions," and these dynamics have operated in nature writing's production and reception from its earliest days into the present moment (3). As English words arising from complex European contexts, nature and wilderness have a history in the United States and elsewhere of underwriting dispossession of Indigenous Peoples in particular; my project seeks to recognize facts from this history while not slipping backward into a metanarrative of victimization that would in turn erase ongoing contemporary forms of Indigenous decolonial resistance and sometimes alliance with environmentalism. Reception history allows for this by putting Indigenous writers and readers into my story as active participants. As a settler colonist scholar myself—the son of French immigrants who settled at the end of the twentieth century in lands traditionally occupied by the Coast Salish Sammamish Peoples, preparing this dissertation at a university occupying unceded Duwamish lands—I am not outside this history. That being the case, I have endeavored to think restoratively in the ways I incorporate Indigenous thinkers into the project.

“Outdoor Lit.”⁷: Ecocriticism and Reading

Cheryll Glotfelty begins her widely cited Introduction to the 1996 *Ecocriticism Reader* by noting the dearth of literary scholarship then addressing already salient environmental issues, noting that environmentalism lagged behind other major movements of the 1960s and ’70s in this regard. But the ecocritical vanguard was industrious, and their work opened veritable floodgates for scholarly questions that have dispersed to reach most other subfields of literary study in one way or another. Studies proliferated in the subsequent two decades to Glotfelty’s defining essay of the field as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii); indeed, if ecocriticism can be construed as encompassing work that ranges from posthuman animal studies, to analyses of the Anthropocene, to environmental justice critique, it is understandable to doubt whether ‘ecocriticism’ names something to any practical degree. But while this may seem undermining, the resistance to orthodoxy is also the enduring value of Glotfelty’s statement; particularly because the matters of concern facing ecocritics require interdisciplinary approaches, its remaining capacious has strategic value.

To specify my interest, then, I want to attend briefly to the first four paragraphs of Glotfelty’s essay—which do not receive the attention of the more quotable one-liner—and connect those paragraphs to a few other statements by ecocritics orienting my study. Glotfelty opens her essay by holding up for scrutiny whether literary studies, as Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn put it in the introduction to their 1992 *Redrawing the Boundaries* guide in particular, “‘responded to contemporary pressures’” (qtd. in Glotfelty xv-xvi). She draws a litany of environmental problems from news periodicals as a basis for assessment, and by her third

⁷ This term comes from a personal anecdote while I lived in Reno, Nevada, wherein I jokingly explained literature-and-the-environment emphases as a distinction between “indoor literature” and “outdoor literature.” I apologize for the obnoxious in-joke.

paragraph she puts forward that “In view of the discrepancy between current events and the preoccupations of the literary profession, the claim that literary scholarship has responded to contemporary pressures becomes difficult to defend”—difficult, but not impossible: the fourth paragraph notes some scattered studies were already “inventing an environmental approach to literature in isolation” (xvi, xvii). In making the phrase from *Redrawing the Boundaries* her fulcrum, Glotfelty unwittingly resonates with the language of the environmental experts I survey above. For one thing, not responding *is* a response, of sorts, and literary studies are perhaps a place helpful for characterizing it and its alternatives.

Reading, of course, is the enabling action for response, and for that reason it is noteworthy that Glotfelty makes the move of contrasting available literary scholarship to what someone might glean from even casual reading of newspapers. She does not discuss reading directly, but she models indirectly an associative reading process that guides further action. Like Glotfelty, few ecocritics have devoted direct attention to reading as a process, but what I consider ecocritical about my project follows upon the suggestions of at least a few who have. For example, Mark Long has stipulated that, to move beyond commonplaces and think about “what reading might do, the work it might do in the world” (and the idea of reading doing work “in the world” is one I will return to throughout this Introduction), “ecocriticism defined as a practice of reading would examine, first and foremost, its assumptions about the relationship between thought and action” (16, 13). Although perhaps not an immediately astonishing thing to say, Long’s directive marks a difference between my ecocritical project and many others, which is that I am less concerned about whether the texts I examine present virtuous content than I am interested in the reading practices applied by readers to content (or that arise as content is engaged; they are, unsurprisingly, difficult to dissociate). Deliberating among potential responses

to a literary work, I argue, is useful practice for assessing possible responses to environmental challenges because it brings into focus certain habits of thought. In a short-format argument, Jonathan Levin hazarded something similar:

Literary ecologists should be poised to challenge their audience to recognize that reading texts and participating, as human beings, in natural ecologies are structurally similar processes: both involve interpretive postures that precede any specific experience, yet both unfold as primary experiences that themselves refine and recast interpretive postures. To say that nature and culture are subtly and intricately interconnected is to open human imaginations to the many diverse and often competing ways in which the natural world can be read and experienced, both in what has here been styled the literatures of the environment and in what might be called, more broadly, an environmental hermeneutics. (Arnold, et al., 1098)

Levin's point here is not merely to reiterate the trope of nature as a book; it is more simply to point out that people come to nothing blank, and thus it should not be discounted offhand that our backgrounds as readers inform our approach of nature—and, I would add though he doesn't stress it—*visa versa*.

Those dual directions, along with another word Levin uses, are at the core of what this project explores. Although "participating," in Levin's sentence, names the action the grammatical object of which is "natural ecologies," a strand of this project considers ways texts, too, situate readers as participators, especially as they have led to engagement with the content of a book outside the book itself. These dynamics, which I am calling participatory reading, inform my focus on nature writing and its contrasts with works of literary fiction I note and interrogate. As the next section and later chapters will explain, the idea of nature writing as a genre was partly possible because the various texts it designated shared participatory qualities. So, before going on to elaborate where fictionality comes into the project or how this project fits into other work on the history of reading in nineteenth-century American studies, it will be useful to recount a critical history that underpins various aspects of my argument.

Nature Writing: A Term. A Genre?

In this section, I want to unpack the genre designation of nature writing and, more specifically, its formative origins in literary criticism. I trace this arc for a few reasons. First and foremost, I want to dislodge nature writing from its pigeonhole by pointing to how criticism winnowed the variety of the genre into the set of formal associations critics are now likely to take for granted. As this section and later chapters elaborate, the benefit of bringing this history into view is that it becomes possible to observe and then question some of the values that influenced the process, especially judgments about the literary as detached from the practical or the popular. Finally, this history shows readers at work—despite there not always being a connect-the-dots history to be drawn from one critic to the next, I put forward that this survey displays genre expectations taking shape more through influential readers than any other factor.

Nature writing—the genre and the term—underwent a supernova trajectory in criticism during recent decades. If some early ecocritical work was able to renew attention to “the previously undervalued genre of nature writing,” further work redressed this neglect with a vengeance (Glotfelty xxxi). Taken by some as a shorthand for the canon of works that were to legitimate ecocriticism’s *raison d’être* (in many formulations, the teaching of environmental values as/or elucidating the terms and possibilities of environmentally-informed critique), nature writing expanded as critics deconstructed the nature-culture binary to widen the kinds of environments that counted with particular attention to more diverse voices in the United States and then globally. Ecocritics habitually refer to these expansions as components of ecocriticism’s first three “waves,” and the voices carried by these waves have indisputably enriched ecocriticism’s conversations. At the same time, the breadth of these expansions in a relatively

quick period of scholarship put noticeable pressure on a definition of ecocriticism like Scott Slovic's that ecocriticism might mean "either the study of nature writing by way of any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any literary text, even texts that seem (at first glance) oblivious of the nonhuman world"; the distinction becomes one without a difference because it is unclear what delimits 'nature writing' when defined as capaciously as it has come to be (27). General critical unease with the word 'nature' in preference for other terms such as 'environment' has led to its disuse in much scholarship, and thus attention to nature writing, both the term and many of its representative works, has exploded back into the dark from which it had just appeared to flash.

Much of this expansion relied on a yoking of the term 'nature writing' to subject matter rather than formal characteristics—to works with significant treatment of setting or environment and especially those deemed as having an environmentalist orientation.⁸ In fact, a number of scholars worked hard to found such link, as the titles of key early studies alongside their operative definitions of the genre helps to see. In 1950, Joseph Wood Krutch wrote that "much nature writing of today springs from impulses almost as old as Western culture," though he concedes that "there is a recognizable genre of belles-lettres whose remote history seems hardly to go back beyond the end of the seventeenth century, and much of the writing does define attitudes to some extent novel—in their emphases at least. There is in it some feeling for nature which is not quite that of the ancients nor that of the Romantics" (4). This historical swath has been re-codified more recently in Bridget Keegan and James C. McKusick's 2001 anthology, *Literature and Nature: Four Centuries of Nature Writing*, the first section of which is called "The Seventeenth Century: Encompassing New Worlds." Krutch's "feeling for nature" found

⁸ See Phillips's "Ecocriticism's Hard Problems" and Easterlin.

different but related phrasing in Thomas J. Lyon's *This Incomparable Land: A Book of American Nature Writing*, where Lyon writes that "the crucial point about nature writing" is "the awakening of reception to an ecological way of seeing" (xiv). Using a term like "literature of nature" interchangeably with "nature writing," the collection also stretches its historical scope back to the 1600s. Lyon in turn inspired further work such as the anthology *Reading the Roots: American Nature Writing Before Walden*, which likewise focuses on American writing from North American colonial contact forward. *Reading the Roots* came about, though, to counterbalance impressions like Frank Stewart's in *A Natural History of Nature Writing* that effectively took Thoreau's distinctiveness in the tradition as cause to position him as its unique inaugurator.

Lawrence Buell's 1995 book-length study of Thoreau, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* cemented Thoreau's monumentality in the field. The next year, Don Scheese synthesized the Tables of Contents of previous volumes into the generic definition that would largely inform debates from thereon by writing, in *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America*:

Modern nature writing—the primary focus of this study—emerged in response to the industrial revolution of the late 18th century and has become without question the most popular form of pastoralism. The typical form of nature writing is a first-person, nonfiction account of an exploration, both physical (outward) and mental (inward), of a predominantly nonhuman environment, as the protagonist follows the spatial movement of pastoralism from civilization to nature. In its key emphases, nature writing is a descendant of other forms of written discourse: natural history, for its scientific bent (the attempt to explain the workings of the physical universe over time); spiritual autobiography, for its account of the growth and maturation of the self in interaction with the forces of the world; and travel writing (including the literature of exploration and discovery), for its tracing of a physical moment from place to place and recording observations of both new and familiar phenomena. (6)

Such a definition functionally describes many go-to exemplars of the genre, though there

remains an ill-defined relationship between the initial “typical form” and the “key emphases” that are themselves tied to “other forms.” Though it oversimplifies ecocriticism’s origins to suggest nature writing thus defined was its sole focus (Joseph Meeker’s *Comedy of Survival* being just one of the most enduringly cited exceptions), the elevation to visibility of Thoreau specifically and writers like Mary Austin, Edward Abbey, and Annie Dillard generally directed the field’s gaze. Meanwhile, Buell—who provides a brief history largely corroborating Scheese’s of the discursive genres that informed *Walden* and “environmental nonfiction” broadly in his Appendix on “Nature’s Genres”—guided many ecocritics by presenting the “ecocentric” as an encapsulating rationale to judge works in these interlocking genres on the basis of their deprivileging of human values, which kept first-person wilderness rambles front-and-center because of their free-floating tendency to proceed without person-focused plot.

Cracks showed as soon as 1999, when *PMLA* published a “Forum on Literatures of the Environment,” with Simon Estok, for example, opening his contribution by writing, “The bulk of the ‘ecocriticism’ being done restricts itself to American nature writing” and Ursula Heise likewise observing that ecocriticism “often seems defined as a subfield of American literature: a narrow canon of nature writing, mostly in prose, from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” and going on to put pressure on “American,” “nature,” and “writing” (Arnold, et al. 1095-6). Through “restricts” and “narrow,” both critics make spatial gestures of diminution that would also underpin the title of the volume that most obviously signaled ecocriticism’s changing directions, Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace’s *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*. “While a concentration on [nature writing and literature of wilderness] makes perfect sense as a starting point for a critical school that takes the natural environment and human relations to that environment as its special focus,” Armbruster and

Wallace concede, “we believe that one of ecocriticism’s most important tasks at this time is expanding its boundaries beyond these topics to address a wider spectrum of texts” (2). In hindsight, this move seems obvious—ecocriticism wasn’t just preaching to the choir; its focus gave off the impression that it was doing so based on survey data from the choir itself. Though it may seem trivial, then, to renew attention to this term and genre after so much scholarship has sought to move past it, my project contends that doing so has multiple benefits.

In at least one way, these previous studies share an important oversight in carrying unproblematically forward the term ‘nature writing’ loosely without addressing the history of its origin and usage. Nelson Goodman is famous for distinguishing the questions “What is art?” and “When is art?” Many of the studies surveyed above *were* interested to some degree in the “When is nature writing?” question; the reason their lists, dates, and key figures differ, though, has to do with their approaching this query with the answer to the “What is nature writing?” query predetermined. So, even Krutch, whose inquiry is driven by looking into “historical conditions of possibility” (which I share as an interest), puts cart before horse by seeking out a broad idea or cultural attitude that, unsurprisingly, ends up acting like a point of infinite regression. I propose a more modest version of the question that starts by reconsidering the origins of the genre term itself, the historical conditions of possibility not of an idea but of language for one. While the studies and anthologies above announce themselves as accounts of the genre’s history, their interests lie more in lining up examples that predate designated historical events than in unraveling the historiography of the event that yields equally profound insights into its understanding.

The exceptions to this rule lurk in endnotes. Scheese, for example, directs readers to a previous book review essay of his, “Nature Writing: A Wilderness of Books,” noting that it

“discusses the emergence of modern nature writing in the 19th century” (191). Buell’s endnotes are more useful in providing key names, but the notes that provide these directions studiously avoid claiming where the term originates or how, explicitly, any sources had particular gravitational pull on critical understanding of the genre. Preceding both of these book-length studies (but published the same year as Scheese’s book review essay) is Peter A. Fritzell’s *Nature Writing and America: Essays on a Cultural Type*. This study, a monument of research on the topic, not only goes through scholarly treatments of nature in American literature but also pays especially close attention to the ways Krutch’s text set precedents further scholarship would not effectively address or revise. Thus, for Fritzell, studies of nature writing have offered little in the way of substantive addition to Krutch’s pioneering work: “In short, while broad cultural history of nature writing and related matters has continued to develop, the history and criticism of nature writing as form and style have remained essentially static—reassuring, perhaps, but superannuated—and this despite the increasing popularity and sophistication of nature writing that have grown out of the heightened ‘ecological’ and ‘environmental’ awareness” (40). No doubt ironically, Fritzell’s study has had something of a similar effect, though this is possibly largely related to the trajectory of nature writing in ecocriticism I discuss above.

Even while Fritzell’s intellectual history of nature writing emerging as a uniquely American negotiation of Aristotle and Augustine gives the genre profound roots, his study nonetheless goes on to deploy many moves shared by the other studies. This is most evident in his repeated use of the phrase “the best nature writing,” which hints from early on toward the fact that his argument rests on pre-selected keystones. Although it is circuitous in making the point, then, Fritzell’s metanarrative eventually discloses its prioritizing dependence on Thoreau—indeed, it does so more self-consciously than most, though in a move that belies the interest of

many of the surrounding claims:

Like Krutch and most others who have written on the subject, I have begun by positing *Walden* (and, coincidentally, a good deal of the rest of Thoreau's writing, including the largest part of the journals) as my paradigm text for nature writing, my test case both for any reasonable definition of the genre and for any sensible account of its history. It seems to me, as it has obviously seemed in different ways to others, that any discussion of the history of what we have come to call "nature writing" (however loosely)—and, hence, any attempt to characterize nature writing as a genre—must be able to account for the several stylistic modes of *Walden*, for its philosophy as well as its science, for the idiosyncrasies as well as the conventionalities of its often highly personal narrative and exposition, for its wit as well as its sentiment and its discipline. For if a historical and critical theory of nature writing cannot account for *Walden*, it cannot stand the test of the text most commonly associated with the term. (70)

Fine, but wrong. As I see it, this paragraph replicates a logical problem mentioned above by at once adopting a text as a "paradigm" and yet not suspecting the common associations it mentions have played a role in solidifying that sense of paradigm. So, Fritzell posits these associations as the *measure* of the text without pausing to ask to what degree they are a cause—and it seems a strain to assign them both roles. Fritzell's own impressive, voluminous endnotes clarify the breakdown in his thinking that prevented more research along this line; he claims, "It is difficult and finally no doubt unimportant to indicate when the concern with nature writing as a particular ideational, stylistic, and substantive type began" (315). Granted, Fritzell did not have available to him the digitized records available twenty-five years later, so the prospect surely was "difficult"; further, I concede that even these further tools may not have led me to the definitive first use of the term in print (not to mention any possibly more ephemeral uses in speech). Still, Fritzell's dismissal deserves contention—not least, as I will argue, because he struck so close to the payload in his very next sentence. By turning now to late nineteenth and early twentieth century popular critical commentary on the genre and tracing its carryover into the earliest academic studies that preceded Krutch's, I aim to challenge the conception of history that has underlain

previous understanding of the genre's origin. The value of doing so, I argue, is better understanding of dynamic relationships that open ecocriticism to issues of reading.

While full-text searching can spot some one-off uses with no sense of indicating a larger or recognizable pattern, the first occurrence of 'nature writing' to imply a genre appears two years prior to the Francis Whiting Halsey essay Scheese found had "coined the term 'nature writing,'" in unsigned "Comments" published in *East & West* from 1895 ("Nature Writing," 205). They begin:

One of the most interesting developments of the last two or three years has been the increase in number and change of character in books about nature—the rise and spread of books like Mrs. Dana's now famous *How to Know the Wild-Flowers*, which volume itself gave the suggestion for a whole out-of-doors library of popular works on birds, bugs, trees and flowers. It is not that books about nature were previously unknown, for such is not the case. It is rather the character of this recent literature that is novel, as it is the unprecedented popularity of this particular phase of nature study that makes it noteworthy. (329)

Thereafter, the piece launches into a polemic against aesthete culture, with which "nature writing" is in one sense complicit. The comments trace a declension in British literature from Izaak Walton and Gilbert White through Wordsworth, Keats, and then Shelley before arriving at Ruskin, where, it alleges, "When the interest in nature had reached the Ruskin stage and had come to be largely aesthetic, the literary aspect became confused with that of pictorial art" (330). By contrast, "Nature books like Mrs. Dana's work on the wild-flowers represent a reaction against the aesthetic and mystical nature interest that has been more or less common since Richard Jeffries [sic]." In these "Comments," then, "nature writing" designates the "child of pictorial art," as distinct from "the new nature literature [that] begins at the beginning, and, ignoring for the most part sentimental associations and aesthetic traditions, it simply seeks to familiarize the children of the cities with the names and faces of the living world that surrounds them in their brief incursions into the country" (331). This usage separates the literary from the

practical, with aesthetically-inclined “nature writing” cast as a derivative of artistic legacy whereas “nature books” equip children for primary experiences of “incursions.” The words “literature” and “literary” are used in ways that are either self-contradictory or that mean to further emphasize a difference between what’s read and what’s appreciated. If the comments are cranky, though, the editors may have had more of a sense of humor. In the face of the comments’ blatant lament of “that general decay of poetry which has so obviously set in at the end of this century,” the publication frames them with two nature poems, David Munroe Cory’s “An Autumn Day” and Arthur Ketchum’s “Tansy.” Cory’s sonnet about a sunset scene, full of personified flowers and autumn colors, seems a particularly ironic juxtaposition. More ambiguously than a straightforward counterargument, this publishing layout suggests an ongoing conversation among readers to be had about the purpose and value of aesthetics in literature about nature.

What is less ambiguous is that these books continued to “increase in number” and attracted further comment. Published in the more high-profile *American Monthly Review of Reviews* by a critic who authored a book the same year titled *Our Literary Deluge and Some of its Deeper Waters*, “The Rise of the Nature Writers” by Francis Whiting Halsey surveys “the increase in the production of Nature-books, both in numbers and sales” (567). Although the bulk of this essay surveys the “nature writers” taken to participate in the trend, these authors—and even the genre itself—are perhaps not even Halsey’s main interest. The first and last few paragraphs reveal the main word of interest in the title is, instead, “rise.” Given the litany of now-forgotten authors Halsey mentions, though, one feature of the essay Americanist ecocritics are likely to find striking is that, although the piece does gesture back in time toward figures like John James Audubon and Gilbert White, it makes no mention at all of Thoreau. Neither Scheese,

nor Buell, nor Fritzell mention this when they note Halsey's essay as a pivotal contemporary assessment of the genre's rise and recognition. The reason Halsey likely omits Thoreau, of course, is that his books did not sell particularly well. As my later paragraphs argue, Thoreau was just as much a beneficiary as he was an instigator of the boom.⁹ A second perhaps surprising move Halsey makes (but one consonant with his interest in trends) is introducing nature writing's popularity alongside—and not obviously in competition with—popular fiction sales. In fact, Halsey doesn't foreclose nature writing as a category to fiction, giving James Lane Allen particular prominence. I also take this point up again below because, while also not mentioned in the cases where critics cited Halsey, it has critical bearing on the criticism that followed.

Interested more in book sales than histories of ideas, Halsey locates the more proximate cause to be a reaction against city life. "Were we to seek for the causes of this change in taste among readers," he writes, "we should find the most potent one to be the strong tide of population that has turned toward cities." Describing more or less a back-to-Eden impulse, he continues, "The reading of Nature-books is part of the consequences of the impulse which each year drives more and more city people to spend longer seasons in the country." Essentially, Halsey understands the boom thoroughly within a market as a complementary good to bicycles and golf; publishers are reacting to demands, and he even writes of "lines on which activity in the production of nature books has proceeded" (571). Still, the essay closes by noting that nature books are part of a "revolutionary" turn in production of "all books intended for popular reading" that features "Larger type, better paper, more numerous illustrations, specifically designed covers, and a general improvement in the art side." In this sense, then, of popular writing entangled with the culture of industrial America, it also makes sense that Halsey's central figure

⁹ Again, see also Lupfer.

is not Thoreau, but John Burroughs, who commentators often acknowledge was tangled in strange relationships with industrial figures including Jay Gould, Thomas Edison, and Henry Ford.

Halsey lionizes, “Mr. Burroughs has come rightfully into his rich inheritance of fame,” from the point where “Most readers can recall a time when the early writings of John Burroughs stood almost alone among Nature-books which, at the same time, could have been called scientific as well as popular,” thus characterizing him as the most direct forefather of nature writers who follow as his “intellectual children” because they learned from him not to be “mere observers” (567). Those hiers involve men and women writing on a variety of topics including birds, flowers, and animals. As in the “Comments” from *East & West*, Halsey mentions Mrs. William Starr Dana’s book on wildflowers, along with other writers like Mabel Osgood Wright, John Muir, and Ernest Thompson Seton. Relying often on the descriptor “interesting,” Halsey praises writers for their literal and figurative abilities to illustrate what they have learned to observe and who, as he writes of Muir, “discloses his knowledge [...] but [also] writes with distinction, charm, and affection” (570). Given, as Halsey notes, that nature writing books were probably most consumed by those seeking retreat from industrialized cities, it would perhaps seem counterintuitive to consider the books themselves as products of that industrial production. But ecocriticism has often noted a similar paradox regarding environmentalism broadly, that it emerges as a need when there are environmental losses to oppose. Yet origins do not necessarily determine outcomes, and readers are not simple consumers; just as the “Comments” from *East & West* connected nature books to “incursions,” it does not escape Halsey that these books accompany certain kinds of experience.

Writing the next year in *Scribner’s Magazine*, Henry Childs Merwin (author of

biographies of Thomas Jefferson and Bret Harte, among other works) speculates about different influences and impulses responsible for raising the “crop of books.” Merwin writes that “Even the skeptical and critical spirit, which scientific studies have bred, does not count for so much in the history of the nineteenth century as the literary and religious spirit” (430). Parallel to this religious undercurrent, for Merwin, are a strong “feeling of human brotherhood” and “a sympathetic interest in the lower animals” that inform the interest in nature books. But Merwin does not validate just any expansion of moral feeling; as befits a Protestant work ethic, he prizes those nature writers who do not observe their subject matter from a position of “dilettanteism [sic]”:

Writers about nature have, however, one great difficulty to contend with, namely, that nature cannot bear to be looked at too directly, to be brought to book and interrogated in an up-and-down fashion. To learn the secrets of nature—the poetic as well as the practical secrets—a man must first put himself in sympathy with nature—he must become a part of the scene himself, and that he can do only by going about some labor; then, in a moment of rest, in a chance look, a stolen glance, he may obtain a sight of nature’s secrets. (430)

While Merwin clearly posits the impossibility of directly observing nature, he goes on to advocate the purposeful means through which to enter nature that will afford writers a meaningful sidelong glance, the occupations of farmer, sportsman, backwoodsman, fisher, etc. For Merwin, the “best writers about nature,” are Thoreau and Richard Jefferies, but he allows that, “Next to Thoreau and Jefferies, it seems to me that our own John Burroughs is the best modern writer upon this subject” (434). The working scientist, however, is still too removed; by working toward a vision in contradistinction to “the more prosaic view taken by the man of science,” the nature writer can find that perhaps “there is something besides carbon in the wilderness”—a phrase the echo of which resonates differently now than in Merwin’s condescending usage (437). While Merwin’s critical stance differs from that of the other critics

here, his insistence that writers and readers “become a part of the scene” actually differs only in emphasis from other calls to direct observation that permeate discussions of nature writing.

Of course, 1903 was an important year in the congealing of the term ‘nature writing’ for reasons beyond Merwin’s essay; it was the year John Burroughs published his essay “Real and Sham Natural History,” which in turn set off what *The New York Times* called the “War of the Naturalists” and what—after Teddy Roosevelt’s controversial involvement—became known more enduringly as the Nature Fakers Controversy. As I will return to this controversy in other parts of this study, I can be briefer here. Suffice it temporarily to say that Burroughs’s response to praise that Reverend William J. Long’s 1902 *School of the Woods: Some Life Studies of Animal Instinct and Animal Training* received placed various, sometimes competing, and often fuzzy conceptions of truth and fact at the forefront of how nature writing was defined and reviewed. This came to draw in a variety of commentators from Mabel Osgood Wright to Jack London, and its effect was to dislocate fiction from the body of nature writing proper. Though nature poetry remained a loosely affiliated genre, and though studies of American literature would focus on nature as setting and theme in canonized authors in decades to come, other fiction writers who might have otherwise fit into the capacious category Halsey described—such as conservationist novelist Jonathan Oliver Curwood and pulp powerhouse/creator of Tarzan Edgar Rice Burroughs—would not figure in future discussions of the genre. Partly, this also had to do with a conscious effort to describe nature writing as not merely a popular genre but as one with literary value.

With the context of the relatively fresh Nature Faker Controversy in mind, it is easier to understand how, by the time Dallas Lore Sharp wrote his 1910 essay “The Nature Writer,” the crop had apparently turned into a glut. Complaining that his title’s term had become “anathema,”

he writes that “We shy at the *word* nature. Good honest term, it has suffered a sea-change with us; it has become literary. Piety suffers the same change when it becomes professional” (994). The stand-out word here is “honest” (Sharp’s perhaps resolution of terms from controversy); it captures the variety of disparate statements he makes trying to define the genre of the “distinct, although undescribed literary species.” Sharp also takes his shots at science, reminiscent of Merwin, writing among other points that “For the nature writer, while he may be more or less of a scientist, is never mere scientist” (994). Sharp attributes many of the ideas that ecocriticism has described as part of the nature writer’s work, including love of the earth, attention to the local, treating place as home and domesticating it in the process, and attention to the material realm. Sharp mentions Gilbert White and Thoreau on his way to saying that “In none of our writers, however, is this love for the earth more manifest than in John Burroughs,” where Burroughs is essentially the culmination of that three-point trajectory (996). Sharp’s own honesty-polemic against professionalized nature writing culminates in a modification of Merwin that elaborates on direct observation:

Good nature-literature, like all good literature, is more lived than written. Its immortal part hath elsewhere than the ink-pot for its beginning. The soul that rises with it, its life’s star, first went down behind a horizon of real experience, then rose from a human heart, the source of all true feeling, of all sincere form. Good nature-writing particularly must have a pre-literary existence as lived reality; its writing must be only the necessary accident of its being lived again in thought. (1000)

Notably, in this formulation, “more lived than written” references the author; readers of nature writing seem best served by being forgotten altogether—indeed, earlier in the piece, he links writing for readers to putting the market before the honest truth and likens it to an act of infidelity: “Unfortunately, nature writing has become an art, which means some one looking on, and hence it means self-consciousness and adaptation, the writer forced to play the difficult part

of loving his theme not less, but loving his reader more” (397). In effect, Sharp bemoans that nature writing here becomes a genre even as he actively seeks to define it. So, while Halsey and Merwin maintained an eye on readers by inquiring what cultural factors could account for nature writing’s popularity among them, Sharp’s taking the genre’s popularity for granted at a point when the readerly market was well established leads him to place the writer and the text above the reader. His implication that readers benefit from “honest” writing that has “pre-literary existence as lived reality” begs the question of what the alternative would be.

An odd but indicative culmination of the various lines can be found in a final essay from *The Yale Review* that precedes the earliest book-length studies. In “Back to Nature,” Henry Seidel Canby (later an influential biographer of Thoreau) nationalizes the back-to-nature impulse, insisting it “*is* an American trait” (757).¹⁰ In an ironic twist, he “do[es] not limit [himself] to the professed ‘nature writers’ of whom we have bred far more than any race with which I am familiar” (756). In fact, he lists names including John Burroughs and John Muir as “lesser [...] leaves in the forest” and is considerably more interested in “the greatest American writers” who display a favorable attitude toward woodsy-ness, meaning “Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Cooper, Lowell, and Whitman.” Canby credits Thoreau unequivocally with “this American tendency[,] the touch of genius and the depth of real thought” by which American literature “becomes more and more aware of an American background” and thus “Nature literature becomes a category” (764). Regarding that category, though, Canby shows himself

¹⁰ Drawing from the reviews quoted earlier about nature writing serving urban readers coming to the country for a visit, we can observe a provincialism attaching to nature writing that Burroughs himself, tucked away in upstate New York, would have represented. Rhapsodies over the (recently depopulated) American landscape did magnify quite localized perspectives, and it’s not surprising that Heise would find, as I note above, that this provincialism would find its way into later criticism. At the same time, a major gap in my project is the extent to which these literary conversations circulated transatlantically. After all, even the title of Richard Jefferies’s 1883 *Nature Near London* suggests parallels and intersections.

both uninformed of its reception history and yet also its product:

No one has yet catalogued—so far as I am aware—the vast collection of back-to-nature books that followed Thoreau. No one has ever seriously criticised it, except Mr. Roosevelt, who with characteristic vigor of phrase, stamped “nature-faking” on its worser half. But everyone reads in it. Indeed, the popularity of such writing has been so great as to make us distrust its serious literary value. And yet, viewed internationally, there are few achievements in American literature so original. I will not say that John Muir and John Burroughs, upon whom Thoreau’s mantle fell, have written great books. Probably not. Certainly it is too soon to say. But when you have gathered the names of Gilbert White, Fabre, Maeterlinck, and in slightly different *genres*, Izaak Walton, Hudson, and Kipling, from various literatures you will find few others abroad to list with ours. Nor do our men owe one jot or tittle of their inspiration to individuals on the other side of the water. (764-5)

Had Canby read the essays that “catalogued” the genre, he might have noted a progression of attaching literary status as its ascendancy led critics to designate its “best” examples and influential figures, but here in the pages of an Ivy-League publication the genre’s popularity comes back as its source of literary dis-interest. Even, then, as Canby would efface nature-writing books as unworthy of Thoreau’s mantle, he forgets that the genre’s popularity makes possible his own re-alignment of the literary tradition via the back-to-nature rubric. What is so instructive about this error—a move fitting for a time-travel adventure—is its confusion of chronology with causation, a presumption that, though seemingly logical on its surface, the progression of these essays undoes somewhat. For in each, trajectories and influences emerge as products of commentators’ later reconstructions. Even the figure of “Thoreau’s mantle,” in fact, proves anachronistic because one has to read through the later authors to suspect a lineage. In Canby’s nationalist rhetoric,¹¹ it became an interest for a certain vision of the literary

¹¹ I am glossing here a variety of arguments about the United States of America as “nature’s nation” with a series of interrelated critiques. Canby’s rhetoric has precedents in American exceptionalist rhetoric that position the “nature” of the continent emptied of its Indigenous peoples as the self-definition space for Eurocentric and usually male identity politics. For more, see Perry Miller’s *Nature’s Nation* and Richard T. Hughes’s *Myths America Lives By*.

(essentially, from his list of American authors, the belletristic genres of philosophy, poetry, and the historical romance) to decouple Thoreau from nature writing if the genre were to designate merely a popular trend in the output of a moment. But Canby himself seems unable to reconcile this popularity with its aesthetic impact, casting it doubly as a source of “distrust” yet also as an “original” achievement.

Between Canby and Krutch, three books on the subject were released that would make their ways into later critics’ bibliographies. All three continue the increasingly nationalist American framing of the genre even when they recognize the influence of British figures like Wordsworth or White. Norman Foerster’s 1923 *Nature in American Literature* is, like Canby’s essay, less invested in nature writing as a genre than a “naturalistic movement in American literature,” and John Burroughs is his endpoint. His list resembles the lists of the American canon from that decade more than the contents of a standard nature-writing anthology. Philip Marshall Hicks’s dissertation from the next year, *The Development of the Natural History Essay in American Literature*, which distinguishes between “The general theme of the treatment of nature in literature” and the genre of the natural history essay, also shares John Burroughs as its endpoint (though he does recognize that Burroughs is “at once the predecessor and the contemporary” to the genre’s practitioners at the time (124). Hicks avoids the term “nature writing,” likely in order to specify that, whatever the parameters of the popular term, his interest remains a specific form of literary essay. Lastly, Henry Chester Tracy’s *American Naturalists* (1930) makes another effort to understand nature writing (though not invested in that term and using as often terms like “nature literature,” “nature prose,” or “nature essays”). Unlike Canby, though, Tracy would argue that the nature literature itself is precisely the distinctive contribution that Americans can claim. Along with that move, Tracy makes another that has a lasting effect

on later studies, such as Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind*, when he writes that, referring mostly to central male figures but also more women than in almost all the commentary I've discussed with the exception of Halsey, "The story of their lives is the story of American nature, or rather of nature in America, as seen by discerning eyes; seen, that is to say, as an intimate interest and concern of persons; seen as daily and familiar experience in their conscious lives" (22-23). By this point, nature writing is less the product of other metanarratives and more itself a creative force in another metanarrative of American nature.

Now, an irony has probably become manifest in my own argumentation that needs clarification. Although chronology makes for a legible organization of the above critical commentaries, I do not in turn imply a *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* development. Because, among other reasons, many of these essays appeared in formats without strict bibliographic norms, there is often no telling whether these writers were informed about one another—Canby is only the most obvious example of the reverse suggestion. However, without assuming causation among them, their correlations stand out all the more remarkably. Perhaps in spite of himself, Canby captures one recurring emphasis of the criticism taken as a whole:

How curiously complete and effective is the service of these nature books, when all is considered. There is no better instance, I imagine, of how literature and life act and react upon one another. The plain American takes to the woods because he wants to, he does not know why. The writing American puts the woods into his books, also because he wants to, although I suspect that sometimes he knows very well why. Nevertheless, the same general tendency, the same impulse, lie behind both. But reading nature books makes us crave more nature, and every gratification of curiosity marks itself upon the sub-consciousness. Thus the clear, vigorous tradition of the soil passes through us to our books, and from our books to us. It is the soundest, the sweetest, if not the greatest and deepest inspiration of American literature. In the confusion that attends the meeting here of all the races it is something to cling to; it is our own. (767)

If the figure of the pluralist nation's common ground draws this essay to a triumphant close, the final lines belie the complexity of what precedes them. For, simple as it may seem, the

observation that “literature and life act and react upon one another” distills a variable feature across commentary on the genre—it is inspired by and inspires action. Like others, Canby perhaps understands this most clearly through the relationship of author and reader—as seen in his formulation of soil passing “through us to our books, and from our books to us”—but the thought could capture equally well the recursive “marks” texts and experiences can make on one another through the reader who unites them. This is perhaps the great under-discussed theoretical potential of the works critics group as nature writing. In ways that could open onto other kinds of texts, they occasion questions about how readers link not simply the material referents of what they read to what they do but also methods of observation and understanding—as Mark Long concisely put it, “the relationship between thought and action.”

One unanswered question is that of what, then, ‘nature writing’ names. Is the term useful for talking about a genre? Not necessarily. In this study, I use ‘nature writing’ to stand in for something a little clumsy: works that come to be understood as nature writing (with the messy critical history therein entangled). While it was often applied to writers I discuss after the fact, one effect of its critical consolidation following Krutch is that it became possible for later writers to consider or shape their authorship in terms of a presumed genre (even if some including Edward Abbey deliberately demurred). Thus—by the time of Don Scheese’s “Wilderness of Books” review essay and the roundtable on “The Rise of Nature Writing: America’s Next Great Genre” (which uncannily echoes the critical history told here in its opening observation that nature writing “has steadily grown in stature and popularity, attracting more and more of the best writers and larger and larger portions of the reading public until, in 1992, it is arguably *the* major genre in American literature”)—the hodgepodge term may have taken on a more unified life of its own (Bass et al. 73). While my study predominantly focuses on the genre as it was understood

to take shape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, my final coda includes some reflections bearing on the term's later manifestations.

The conclusion I draw from this history of criticism through which nature writing has come to the present is that the term had a far more heterogeneous past than a formulation such as “a first-person, nonfictional account” of nature experience leaves room for. Based instead on the history of nature writing's readers in the nineteenth century, I propose to think of nature writing as texts that cultivate participatory relationships between readers and the natural world. As I see it, projects attempting to conceptualize nature writing through formal features or by sketching the horizons of its content overlook important contexts of its readership. Namely, what has interested me about the late nineteenth-century growth of this genre—especially in light of present questions about how to move members of the public in terms of their scientific understanding of climate change issues and advocating for policy change alongside shifts in personal behavior—was the genre's wide appeal and the consequent boom in recreation, education, and political advocacy for nature writing's readers. Historical looks at American environmentalism have of course made related observations. Stephen Fox made John Muir's invigoration of an “amateur tradition” within environmentalism a key part of his history, and Daniel Philippon's *Conserving Words* uses several key writers as case studies for the way nature writers promoted conservation groups through their work. Other studies like Evan Berry's link early environmentalism to popular religious movements. Finally, Lutts and Kevin Armitage help draw attention to ways this boom was directed toward children in particular through their surveys of education movements and the rise of recreational camping through summer camps and organizations such as Ernest Thompson Seton's Woodcraft Indians. What my project adds to these histories is a more sustained focus on the role of reading itself within these movements. Beyond reiterating that

nature writing simply became abundantly available, my chapters combine close readings with reception history to shed light on the interpretive practices that fostered the participatory reading these texts enjoyed. I also try to explain factors in reception history that have worked against the participatory dynamic.

The term participatory reading is my own, and it eludes precise definition because the works I discuss are so disparate. But a key point from early on has been evidence of reading that did not look at books as self-contained objects—the insufficiency of the printed page as a means to understanding. The writing of Burroughs, Thaxter, and Muir—and the illustrations of Fuyentes, we could say—identifiably prompt readers to implement their reading with experience, and they also often model how experience can come back to inform aesthetic judgment and interpretation. Reading of course is notoriously ephemeral, and it is seldom clear what one is supposed to “do” after finishing a book; nature writing’s correlation with the boom in outdoor culture, however, provides a fortuitous sense of coextension, of echoes between reading and doing, and it is to those echoes I have sought to listen. Perhaps a more direct phrasing would be “interaction and interplay”: bioregionalist Michael Vincent McGinnis, in a short speculative piece for the online journal *Resilience*, uses those terms as the implied definition for “participatory” when he writes, “The cultivation of love and compassion in our daily lives and in our respective places is a foundation to forging an ecology of participatory resilience.” McGinnis’s borderline mystical tone does not beget clarity, but his linking of participatory adaptation to “a new path that can spark a brilliant response to our crisis of earth and spirit” shares a vector, from what I can tell, with my line of argument.¹²

¹² So perhaps does promising work in philosophy looking into participation’s benefits for environmental deliberation, particularly by Matt Ferkany and Kyle Powys Whyte (see Goralnik et al. and Ferkany and Whyte, “The Importance of Participatory Virtues in the Future of

Fictionality Beyond Faking

In perhaps the most notorious instance of his career, Burroughs demonstrated unease about the susceptibility of amateur readers to the texts they read. In *Ways of Nature* and elsewhere, he would insist that his problem was not fiction itself, so long as it was announced as obviously as, for example, Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, but the "mixture of fact and fiction" that came unannounced: "My sole objection to the nature books that are the outcome of [inventing facts to suit fancy] is that they are put forth as veritable natural history, and thus mislead their readers" (202). Perhaps unsurprisingly, he suggested making the judgment call based on common observation: "Your facts are sufficiently humanized the moment they become interesting, and they become interesting the moment you relate them in any way to our lives, or make them suggestive of what we know to be true in other fields and in our own experience" (195). The all-or-nothing stakes of the "line between fact and fiction" that emerged in the debate drew a fierce reaction, and it is tempting to dismiss the debate now for the furious swirl of concepts that were bandied among debaters about truth, readers, literary value, and the ethics of authorship, as one risks getting mired in the conceptual imprecisions of the controversy.

My project, though, takes the controversy, or the concerns that can be discerned from it, seriously throughout its chapters because it has had afterlives in the realist emphasis that has registered among some ecocritics—spooks about fictionality as "sham" that ecocritics have had difficulty shaking off and that feed into denialism via books such as Jim Inhofe's on climate

Environmental Education"). However, the use of "participatory" in these arguments seems largely substitutable "hands-on" (for example, "Virtues of personal environmental concern probably overlap to some extent with what we would like to call participatory virtues, i.e., those important to a person's readiness to participate well in collective decision making," 426), and thus it captures less directly for me the sense of *inter-* or *co-* that McGinnis's piece does.

change as a hoax. It was during the Nature Faker debate more than at any other point that the genre simplified from the inside to mean the Burroughs-like essay and thus when the variety of books encompassed in a definition like Halsey's fell away—fiction in particular—only to be slowly but partially recuperated by critics revisiting the genre under the aegis of ecocriticism. One effect of these partings of ways was the implication that fiction was, at best, irrelevant to nature study or, at worst, distracting and misleading.

Yet, as my examples throughout my chapters will show, a line of fictionality was neither consistent nor necessary. Critics have made various exceptions, various works were marketed together regardless of their fictionality, and some texts such as *Citizen Bird* (which I discuss in Chapter 4) blurred such lines altogether by combining, in that case, the field guide and the novel. Still, in the Nature Fakers Controversy, critics shared opprobrium almost equally among fictions and nonfictions alike that portrayed animals with anything other than verifiable facticity; Harding Davis's story I used to open this introduction recalls this point in the equal weight the conversationalists give to Jack London's work and news reporting from the Boer Wars. The concern, if it seems overblown, is also a watermark of the expectation writers and editors had of nature writing's participatory readership—inaccuracies, speculation, and forms of personification drew fire for potentially leading readers to expect certain animal behaviors, even as the critics rested on their experiences as the basis for criticizing the validity of what they'd read.

These questions of definition and response have found more contemporary discussion in the field of narrative theory. Various books including Dorrit Cohn's *The Distinction of Fiction* made it clear that the interest grew partly out of post-structuralist arguments that destabilized the lines between fact and fiction. Richard Walsh's *The Rhetoric of Fictionality: Narrative Theory and the Idea of Fiction* stirred the waters of narrative theory by contesting several prominent

explanations of fictional meaning. Walsh followed up his book by teaming up with two other influential scholars in narrative theory, and together Henrik Skov Nielsen, James Phelan, and he (hereafter “NPW”) advanced their “Ten Theses about Fictionality” in order to continue the conversations going on at the conferences. To literalize that sense of conversation, they invited Paul Dawson to present a counterargument with his characteristic wry bombast, to which the three gave an abbreviated rebuttal.

The one point everyone seems to agree on is the rejection of hard positivism—or that the fiction/nonfiction line is sufficiently made by the ontological binary of true and false. Yet no doubt because narrative theory generally skews toward studies of novels, most studies of the concept of fictionality focus primarily on works of fiction. Whatever fiction’s distinction might be, narrative theorists would be well served to remember that the term ‘fiction’ preceded its supposed opposite, ‘nonfiction,’ and thus that fiction developed, at least initially, without the sense of a polar opposite. The magnitude of this omission is a bit staggering, as there has yet to be a study explaining how the term nonfiction entered such wide use after its first documented one by Justin Winsor for the 1867 Boston Public Library Annual Report.¹³ Given Winsor’s influence as a librarian, much can be inferred, but how a term used to distinguish the circulation of novels and other stories from the rest of libraries’ books rose to such credence as a classification merits a collaborative study by library historians and print culture scholars.

With the historical contingency of these categories relative to one another in mind, it becomes more intuitive why Dawson’s third thesis contradicting NPW most raises questions of sufficiency for their approach: “Fictionality is a signifier without a referent.” Without a single referent, I would add. Like Dawson, I would cite Nicholas Paige’s work as part of the essential

¹³ The attribution to Winsor is from the OED; on Winsor, see Carpenter.

challenge to Walsh's concept of fictionality carried from his book into the Ten Theses. Walsh had, from the beginning, sought to disentangle fiction as a classification of texts and some quality or characteristic available to other kinds of discourse: "Fictionality, I want to suggest, functions within a communicative framework: it resides in a way of using a language, and its distinctiveness consists in the recognizably distinctly rhetorical set invoked by that use" (Walsh 15). The "Ten Theses" carry this forward as a central interest in "fictionality outside fiction" (NPW 70) and the definition NPW offer of "intentional use of invent[ion]" (62—see also 101).

Intentionally or otherwise, Walsh created a dehistoricized abstraction, and the breadth of that abstraction is what the theory has gotten caught by various snags trying to explain. Dawson cites the work of Nicholas Paige, who I agree makes a point that problematizes NPW's "Ten Theses." A history of the French novel, Paige's book *Before Fiction* troubles easy histories of the novelistic form by pointing to three "regimes" of fiction with different stipulations that have gone unacknowledged or too quickly packaged into a stage-based progress narrative. He works through influential citations of fictionality's presumed critical lineage (Aristotle, Frege, and others) to demonstrate that what has come to be understood as fiction is "historically peculiar,"¹⁴ and that if theorists have been able to create a smooth lineage that enfolds the difference of other earlier regimes, it is because they "read it through [their] knowledge of what is to come, which is to say, fiction"—where "fiction" is a particular kind of suspended disbelief different from, say, the "pseudofactual" (ix, x). Paige (and I) concede that historians always to some degree read through their temporal belatedness, but his point is one about the distortions that take place when works are converted to data in service of a progress narrative. Reinforcing Paige's point, J. Alexander Bareis observes, "What societies hold to be fiction is changing over time just as what

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societies believe to be reality” (158). Bareis’s note about “societies” adds to Paige’s point about historical peculiarity that the fiction/nonfiction distinction itself is not only new but also linguistically or culturally limited, as an article exploring how various contemporary writers observe the distinction reports by comparing the English words to their inexact matches in Bosnian, Gikuyu, Arabic, Chinese, and German points out (Lea).

The dehistoricized abstraction of fictionality as a box for the invocation of imagination in communicative contexts can still be useful—I continue to think the rhetorical approach taken by Walsh and then NPW is generally right to focus on rhetorical understanding—but it complicates a wholesale account of how fictionality affects the response to content or how it is recognized. Turning to the work of one further rhetorical narrative theorist more nimbly accounts, though, for how different readers might encounter different senses of fictionality and determine what sorts of response they invoke. I continue to be generally persuaded—and thus heavily influenced—by Peter J. Rabinowitz’s *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation*. In this book, Rabinowitz presents a tripartite model of narrative audiences, the authorial, narrative, and actual audiences. Rather than designate different kinds of imaginary people, these audiences refer to positions readers move between while interpreting a narrative. He further lays out how moving between these audiences, especially as one reads more and more widely, allows reader to recognize and deploy with increasing savvy various kinds of “rules” to make sense of narratives: rules of notice, rules of signification, rules of configuration, and rules of coherence. Though not “in” the texts themselves, these rules get carried by readers from text to text because they pay off rationally or in terms of satisfactory results. In the final section of his book, Rabinowitz adds that readers’ tendency to apply some rules and not others reveal various reader habits with political consequences.

Rabinowitz's is a rhetorical theory of how narrative interpretation takes place, and as such it frustrates other critics and theorists who counter that it proliferates largely untestable positions. Because it often relies in particular on readers' attempts to join the authorial audience (using their prior knowledge and anything they discern to be likely about authorial intention), certain narrative theorists who discount authorial meaning take exception to it. In brief, my answer to these criticisms is that Rabinowitz's apparatus, though extrapolated from narratives and thus not inherent to them, nonetheless affords substantial explanatory power for the act of interpreting narrative; in particular, I appreciate that it provides a vocabulary for deliberating among misreadings and its account of how reading widely serves more nuanced interpretation.

I propose a fifth set of rules, perhaps closest to those of configuration, though not about plot expectations: rules of fictionality. To do so combines NPW's theses 3 and 5 by deploying the concept of authorial reading. More elegantly perhaps than ten theses, I simply stipulate that readers deploy rules of fictionality as they notice the authorial and narrative audience diverge, and in the stance readers determine those positions have toward one another. Once the narrative audience is asked to accept an element the reader discerns the authorial audience should treat as other-than-actual, actual readers begin to measure the type of fictionality at play against their previous experiences. Thus, by reading authorially, as Paige does, we can determine, for example, what sort of fictionality might be active within a "regime" and the differential kinds of relation to the actual it entails. As actual audiences, however, we might differentiate our habits from those documented by seventeenth-century readers, in part because we have a wider backdrop to judge against. In these cases, the additional payoff of Rabinowitz's audience-and-rule descriptive method is that it explains something other models at best imply but usually skip over, namely that readers can come to understand that fictionality in Charles Brockden Brown's

Edgar Huntly works differently than in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Or perhaps more to my point, in *Citizen Bird* and *The Golden Bowl*, or in *Deephaven* and *The Story of Khalid*.

Put another way for the sake of clarity, my use of Rabinowitz adds flexibility to statements that NPW, I think, make too rigidly based on too narrow of a sense of fiction informing fictionality: that recognizing fictionality “entails an attitude toward the communicated information that is different from attitudes toward nonfictive discourse” and that “Fictionality often provides for a double exposure of imagined and real” (67-8). By looking at nonfiction nature writing next to works of fiction, I will argue in successive chapters that these theses 7 and 8 presume a telos for fictionality that may often be the case but is not necessarily so. As part of those arguments, I will draw from Rabinowitz's politics of interpretation work ecocritically to explain the negative consequence of applying these theses consistently as rules for fictionality.

The revised understanding of fiction I propose should furthermore provide ecocritics with much more nuanced rationales for why fictions matter for their critical goals. Although the recent emergence of climate fiction or “cli-fi” may be stirring some new thinking among ecocritics about fiction as a genre, the field's existing defense of fiction remains, essentially, within sight of Patrick Murphy's argument in *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature*. Some ecocritics had been working with fiction prior to Murphy's book, but his argument made an influential push within “second-wave ecocriticism” to look beyond nature writing (defined essentially as the nature essay), which it eventually relegates as one genre within the larger category of “nature-oriented literature.”

Like Murphy, “I see no lasting benefit from [ecocriticism] continuing to slight the modern novel,” but I maintain a healthy suspicion of what immediately follows, “particularly in

its contemporary forms” (15). Murphy’s argument is not ultimately interested in developing a sound account of fiction (or The Novel) as an intellectual resource for better thinking about living on Earth; by admission, he is narrowly “interested in novels that reveal and develop themes around and about the environments of their fictions” (14). He wants to locate novels that can be the honey for swallowing the pill of environmentalist ethics, and he celebrates this didactic (less generously: coercive and violent) conceptualization of reading: “a reader is often less likely to resist a novel’s themes than those of a nonfictional work” (25). Relatedly, this entails fiction as a potential vehicle for the delivery or teaching of facts (24, 41). But such a position is inconsistent within Murphy’s Foucauldian argument regarding the “fiction of nonfictionality,” which aligns any degree of narrative construction as some degree of fictionality and, by extension, would have to express skepticism about assertions of facticity (50).¹⁵ Not all ecocritical work on fiction traces (explicitly) back to Murphy, but ecocriticism has largely followed his lead, gravitating mostly toward pieces of fiction with explicit connections to environmental interests on the levels of content, theme, or discourse, and the result has been a poor and often untheorized account of the values of fiction and nonfiction within these projects. And, as my chapters and the following section should establish, I think even older fictions that do not perhaps model virtuous environmental ethics still have much to teach us.

Nineteenth-Century American Histories of Reading

No doubt, part of what makes Rabinowitz’s work interesting to me is that, while the reader inhabiting the three positions of his schema either stay hypothetical or else are himself, the approach nonetheless allows for “groundtruthing” of sorts by comparing its logic to whatever

¹⁵ Cohn and Walsh both reason clearly through the untenability of such arguments conflating construction with fictionality full-stop.

records can be formed of “actual audience” in the archives. And here then, I acknowledge up front, as Michael Cohen points out almost all histories of reading do, “the archive problem”: “As historical acts and actors, readings and readers do not leave behind the kinds of evidence and archives familiar to histories of literacy or the book [...] Readers are hard to find, and when found, it is hard to know what to do with them” (409, 408). In fact, a number of studies under the rubric of “histories of reading” have been produced by nineteenth-century Americanists in the past few years to better understand the social lives of texts, and I contribute to this trend by looking into responses to nature-related texts especially that weren’t immediately connected to environmental views or politics, which has typically occupied nineteenth-century Americanist ecocritics. I also move back and forth between individual or idiosyncratic readers and larger trends, such as the education materials on nature study. As James Machor’s most recent work points out, some individual readers are institutional—in *Reading Fiction in Antebellum America*, he goes to great lengths and archival depths to reinforce that editors and reviewers of nineteenth-century periodicals influenced their audiences’ reception of fiction. Matthew Garrett writes that “The literary historian [...] considers when and under what conditions various meanings are found,” and my project undertakes this to ask how reading print materials created conditions for new activities in American wilderness and how those activities and experiences created conditions for reading (148).

Yet this project does not simply study the past for the past’s sake, and Leah Price makes a similar point in closing her essay “Reading: The State of the Discipline”: “For all its interest in marginalia and marginalized persons, the history of books is centrally about ourselves. It asks how past readers have made meaning (and therefore, by extension, how others have read differently from us), but it also asks where conditions of possibility for our own reading come

from” (318). The echo of the word “conditions” across what Garrett and Price discuss is of fundamental interest to me. Following the example of a nineteenth-century Americanist who continually inspires me, Wai Chee Dimock, this study uses literary history to get at the “through” among historical conditions and recognizes that passage between them is not always best rendered in straight lines (3). As my account of the term ‘nature writing’ has already shown, my work aims to collate moments within histories of reading not to lock texts and terms into positions but to lay out open possibilities where closure has been thought to set in.

This dissertation deviates from other nineteenth-centuryist projects because it is not primarily aimed at either finding historical antecedents to contemporary politics or uncovering the politics of histories once thought to be neutral or even salutary. Like Dimock, I respect such projects but find they have the tendency to lock texts into temporal synchrony with their contexts, which is limited in the questions it can answer because: first, texts travel across temporal contexts; second, texts have many contexts operating in different temporalities, and thirdly and perhaps most importantly, it downgrades the agency of texts themselves again across temporalities or at different velocities. To this point she writes in *Through Other Continents* that certain contextualist practices take the “short duration [as] assumed to be adequate, to capture both cause and consequence: both the web of relations leading to the making of the text and the web of relations flowing from its presence in the world” (124).¹⁶

Instead, I am interested in texts and their histories because I am also interested in their futures—meaning I write about texts that I want to have futures. Critique has the potential side-effect of disincentivizing reading the works it discusses. If texts are the purveyors of pernicious politics, then the best inoculation would seem to be not reading them at all. Or if these politics

¹⁶ On the latter point especially, see my discussion of her essay “Feminism, New Historicism, and the Reader” in my Chapter 1.

permeate everything, why not at least save the time of reading a thick nineteenth-century novel and just suffer to watch a more exciting film instead (for the same amount of academic credits)? Critique has tremendous diagnostic value, but its drive is most often toward certainty, not deliberation—toward closure, not ambiguity. These are fine qualities, but they serve some situations better than others.

For me, any critical approach linked to the practice of teaching should be founded on the premise that the texts are worth reading in the first place. One role model for me in this regard is Stephen Tatum's book *In the Remington Moment*. In it, he takes up the work of the writer and painter Frederic Remington whose depictions of the American West are iconically resonant—but also politically problematic—and writes beautiful mediations based on “a larger question: whether looking into Remington's art—a century after his death—arguably can represent an endeavor that's ‘good for’ something more than antiquarian interest or nostalgic recollection” (4). To my mind, too few historical projects keep this question in view. In keeping with this line of texts being more than the sum of their authors' faults, Philip Davis has written: “what literature does, which formal philosophy for example commonly does not—and what literature can hardly help doing—is yield more than its writers know”; this “excess” available to readers is often undervalued or discounted altogether by critique that assumes a position of mastery over its subject matter (4).

Critique has come under some high-profile fire recently at the hands of Rita Felski and then her respondents in *PMLA*, but I see critique as just one of my disciplinary tools that needs to be complemented, and I want to further delineate what I am proposing by turning to a final example from one of those responses. The shortest of these, by Diana Fuss, makes an excellent point by reminding Felski that even the thinkers typically associated with the essence of critique

can be found to advocate practices akin to what Felski offers as postcritique. Fuss clinches her case by recalling Louis Althusser and finding friendly forms of interpellation in the same essay that has offered generations of critics the policeman's hailing as a parable of the interpellative process (354). To my mind, that's a happy rereading. But bringing Rabinowitz into the equation, I would be less interested finally in the question of whether Althusser is a healthy critical role-model than exploring why it was, then, that the policeman example was what stuck for so many academic readers, what "worked" or satisfied them by carrying that into their reading and not the friend-at-the-door example. What or who was served by that reading, but also crucially what are the possibilities opened by recognizing its alternatives? And, ecocritically, I would ask what various readings of Althusser allow people to do or imagine. This line of questioning underscores the value of reading by asking how the text seems to want to be read, and then what other readings are possible, and how making these decisions is a kind of work that brings texts into the present rather than locked into a position at any "point" in history.

In closing one of his essays, influential book historian Robert Darnton has written that, "By unearthing those circuits [of communication], historians can show that books do not merely recount history; they make it" (206). The ecocritic in me is incapable of holding back the bad pun: looking at the history of the texts I take up here does inform how they and their readers have already made history, but these histories can also backlight the question of what it might mean to re-earth them, or asking what value reading them with awareness of their previous readings might have in the contemporary context of climate change and other environmental challenges. Books and readers make history together, and the tools I combine from ecocriticism, narrative theory, and book history help me talk about how they have and how they might still.

What Follows

My first chapter “The Rise and Risk of the Amateur Reader: Burroughs, Melville, and Authorial Confidence” explores the differentiated agency of texts across reception history by using John Burroughs and Herman Melville—the former a formative author for the designation of nature writing that criticism largely forgot, the latter an author ecocritics made exceptions to remember. To corroborate the “participatory reader” of Burroughs’s works, especially *Field and Study*, I bring into relief his references to his readers as correspondents alongside his documented popularity. Burroughs’s popularity partly started waning after the Nature Faker Controversy, where he and others balked at wildlife representations they deemed fictitious; dubbed a “War of the Naturalists” by the *New York Times*, this heated debate publicly codified conventions for the genre and its reading. To unsettle those conventions, I turn to Herman Melville’s metafictional final novel *The Confidence-Man*, as its central conceit of “confidence” exposes fault lines in the Nature Faker Controversy’s imprecise terms.

My second chapter, “Thaxter, Jewett, the Beach, and Beyond: Down East Regionalism and Nature Writing’s Diegesis” studies a perhaps more intuitive pairing. From their initial marketing on booklists to their role as targets of scholars like Richard Brodhead and Amy Kaplan’s critiques of the regional tourism industry, popular poet and nature writer Celia Thaxter and prominent regionalist writer Sarah Orne Jewett have shared fates in literary criticism. While the mutual invocations of nature writing’s conventions in Thaxter’s nonfiction text *Among the Isles of Shoals* and Jewett’s fictional *Deephaven* substantiate this link, their related successes despite the difference in readers’ diegetic relationship to what they narrate (that is, whether readers exist in the same world as the one being narrated) has gone unnoticed. Basing a history of reading on Jewett’s prefaces, reminiscences by Thaxter’s Appledore Island guests, and book

reviews, I invert the derisive connotation of “beach reading” to propose that Jewett and Thaxter’s tourist readers model the interactive potential of taking various books to the beach.

In “Upending Muir and James: Reading and Cultish Rigor” I bring together two disparate contemporaries. I survey their dissociation using evidence from press coverage to anthology headnotes that perpetuated a distinction between political efficacy for one writer and literary merit for the other. With reference to widely-cited accounts by Roderick Nash and Maxwell Geismar, I trace each writer’s uptake by “cults” whose reading practices reinforced a gulf between them. While contrasting Muir’s and James’s readings of British scientist John Tyndall initially supports such a split, Tyndall’s mutual appeal helps appreciate what separating Muir and James obscures. Thus, I challenge the tendency to read Muir for environmental sound bites by demonstrating how *The Mountains of California* reads as a complex aesthetic whole, and I build on Wai Chee Dimock’s work to situate James’s *The Golden Bowl* unexpectedly in a literary prehistory to climate change via an aerial motif appearing in the novel and its criticism.

My fourth chapter, “Recovering Relationships: Fuertes, Posey, and New Old Nature Writing” tackles literary historiography’s production of nature writing and its readership’s presumed whiteness. First, I situate Muskogee Creek humorist Alexander Posey as one reader whose appreciation of nature writing provides a complicated instance of Phil Deloria “Indians in unexpected places”: if his participation in the genre is unexpected (not least because the genre has been effectual in perpetuating Indigenous peoples’ erasure from their lands), such expectations expose their own formation. By contrast, the shared interests of Posey’s nature journals and *Fus Fixico Letters* suggest overlapping political ground, and I argue his agency as a reader de-essentializes the possibilities of bookishness in past and present. As a complementary caution, I survey attempts to recuperate Louis Agassiz Fuertes, a prominent bird illustrator of the

period, on the basis of his heritage. Through this, I examine illustrations' role in the hemispheric "fictions" Kirsten Silva Gruesz has argued print brings into being, drawing from original archival research and the novelized birding guide Fuertes illustrated, *Citizen-Bird*.

Chapter 1 - The Rise and Risk of the Amateur Reader: Burroughs, Melville, and Authorial
Confidence

The October issue of *Current Opinion* from 1921 contains many things, among them a plug for Raymond Weaver's then upcoming biography of Herman Melville followed by a piece discussing Hamlin Garland's remembrance of John Burroughs published in the *Century*. The first piece rallies against "the strange neglect fallen on one of the glories of our literature," notes Melville's mounting reputation as "the greatest of sea writers" with *Moby-Dick* as "speak[ing] the whole secret of the sea," and features a portrait with a caption to make the point clear even for any skimming readers: "A Neglected American Genius" (Wheeler 502). It's the Melville Revival in full upswing. How striking, then, next to this vigorous account of Melville's belated literary recognition, that the digest of Garland's piece begins:

"There was very little of literary pretension in Burroughs," says Hamlin Garland in a charming article in the *Century* celebrating his thirty-year friendship with the man who did more than any other American, living or dead, to acquaint the masses with nature. John Burroughs, Garland continues, was much more interested in showing a hidden bird's nest or in calling attention to a delicate fern than he was in making a literary impression. He looked like a farmer and he acted like one. "His discourse was homely, mellow with rustic common sense." (Wheeler 503)

Garland's remembrance is, in fact, an appreciation of Burroughs's intellect, but the tone of this digest markedly differs in its delineation of the literary than the one immediately prior, even though both Melville's and Burroughs's reputations are explained with reference to their insight into the natural world. As such, this volume of *Current Opinion* could hardly better capture the dynamics of reception that have divided these writers in literary memory and influenced the reasons literary historiography valued their respective works. Melville offers a "secret" to be decoded; Burroughs "dispenses rustic common sense."

This chapter develops two lines from my Introduction. The first is the importance of John Burroughs to thinking about nature writing—and especially the reading practices or what I am positing as the practices of bookishness attending nature writing as a category. While critics in the past three decades have most frequently asked whether Burroughs and his texts offer directly serviceable ideas to contemporary environmentalist goals, I underscore the abundant records of his popularity and readership as a way of substantiating a reader-oriented study of the nature writing through its historical keystone writer. Finding one explanation for his popularity in his essays themselves, I claim that his value to ecocritics should be based on how he encouraged readers to link their reading and actions.

The second line I pick up from the Introduction has to do with the relation of works of fiction to nature writing. This too stems from Burroughs, whose comments inciting the Nature Faker Controversy arguably veered the otherwise open grouping away from fiction. My project, though, takes the controversy, or the concerns that can be discerned from it, seriously throughout its chapters because of its afterlives in a realist emphasis maintained by ecocritics. It was during this debate more than at any other point that nature writing simplified from the inside to mean the genre of the Burroughs-like essay and thus when the variety of books encompassed in a definition like Halsey's fell away—fiction in particular—only to be slowly but partially recuperated under the aegis of ecocriticism. One effect of these parted of ways was the implication that fiction was, at best, irrelevant to nature study or, at worst, distracting and misleading. To build on my argument against the line of thinking typified by Patrick Murphy's call for more ecocritical study of novels, I take up the work of Herman Melville. Despite the gravitation toward *Moby-Dick* (1851) in ecocritical studies operating within the Murphy line, I

pivot to *The Confidence Man* (1857) since its metafictional content offers a different and capacious way that fiction can be brought into the fold of nature bookishness.

Although most of the writers in my chapters have demonstrable connections to Burroughs personally or as readers (even Henry James, for example, reviewed Burroughs's *Winter Sunshine*), Herman Melville is curiously one figure for whom no such connection is known. Instead of any such direct link, then, my basis for pairing these two writers is more about their being ships passing each other in the literary historical night, as the juxtaposed pieces from *Current Opinion* evince. Their (and, crucially, their readers') being out of sync in literary memory—with the popular and critical esteem waning for Burroughs just as Melville's resurged—has perhaps not been causally constitutive for nature writing but offers a vantage from which to survey nature writing's reach in ways my other chapters will discuss in more detail.

John O' Bird-Books

The John Burroughs Association maintains the property of Burroughs's final house, Slabsides, as the 200-acre John Burroughs Nature Sanctuary, and it continues to confer the most prestigious award for nature writing as a genre, the John Burroughs Medal (John Burroughs Association). The award's list of winners includes many of the most celebrated writers who have come to be associated with the genre since inception of the prize in 1921, from Joseph Wood Krutch to Robin Wall Kimmerer and Rachel Carson to John McPhee. Though Burroughs's own work saw some renewed critical attention with a stretch of literary criticism mostly in the 1990s and early 2000s, for the most part James Perrin Warren's words hold true: "Burroughs's essays are so rarely read and taught as to be virtually unknown to the academic audience in the twenty-first century" (11). That's a departure from Burroughs's tremendous popularity in his lifetime. The mismatch between Burroughs's legacy on one hand and the near obscurity of his actual

essays bespeaks a historical shift in attitude that warrants investigation for those interested in historical dimensions to the shape of the category, the arc of which I suggested in my Introduction.

Born on a farm in the Catskills in 1837, Burroughs eventually left home to pursue more education than his father deemed necessary. He taught in rural schools to support that education and also began dabbling in writing. Emerson was an early influence, and a commonly repeated note in Burroughs biography is that his first big break, an essay titled “Expression” for the *Atlantic Monthly*, was thought by readers and by its editor, James Russell Lowell, to be written by Emerson himself or plagiarized from him.¹⁷ Once Burroughs was married and in need of more money than the itinerant teacher lifestyle afforded, he and his wife moved to Washington, D.C., where he came to know his other significant literary influence, Walt Whitman. The two were lifelong friends; Burroughs’s *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person* is credited as the earliest substantial work of criticism supporting Whitman, and they both contributed to each other’s work occasionally—Whitman suggesting the title for Burroughs’s *Wake-Robin*¹⁸ and Burroughs suggesting the hermit thrush for Whitman’s “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d.” Burroughs’s first few books were positively reviewed, and his moving back to the Catskill countryside continued to furnish him with material for his essays based on his walks and his farming. His success garnered introductions to various literary and non-literary luminaries, and Burroughs was often in the news as a celebrity for his friendships with figures like Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, Thomas Edison, and Theodore Roosevelt. Yet Burroughs was no elitist

¹⁷ For example, both *Poole’s Index* and *Hill’s Rhetoric* both attributed the piece to Emerson. It’s helpful here to remember that at this time the *Atlantic Monthly* did not publish bylines with pieces, so authorship often had to be assumed.

¹⁸ Contrary to expectation, this title names the plant that acts as harbinger for the activity of the robin, not a bird.

gadfly, and he was known for welcoming to his residence fans of all kinds—from reporters to Vassar students—and his work was especially popular with children who encountered his work in school. In his later years, Burroughs worked to reconcile his ideas with scientific and theological developments of the time, but he remained mostly associated with ornithology and rural observation by audiences until his death in 1921.

Burroughs did not garner substantial literary criticism after his death except for studies (such as those surveyed in my Introduction) that focused on the nature essay. Partly, this has to do with the general favor for fiction and poetry as the major forms of the properly literary canon.¹⁹ It also has to do with Burroughs's incongruity with the more convenient temporal narratives of nationalized American literary study.²⁰ He began, like other known nature writers, to receive renewed attention when environmentalists and ecocritics took an interest in looking backward for an intellectual genealogy, but the verdict on him was mixed. For example, Bill McKibben advocates for Burroughs's value as a "mild, amiable" figure who, if not expressly political, harbors an "unrivaled talent for the familiar" that environmentalists should cultivate in order to achieve more than sublime landscape conservation (14). Frank Bergon contradicts McKibben's characterization explicitly, however, pointing out that the apolitical Burroughs is a perpetuated "quarter-truth" cherrypicked from the larger range of John Burroughs's writing (20). Still, the subtitle of Bergon's essay is telling: "The Environmentalism of John Burroughs." While ecocritics were able to rehabilitate Burroughs to varying measures, tying his wagon to the star of

¹⁹ Mercier gives a more detailed account of Burroughs criticism in "John Burroughs and the Nineteenth Century," his introductory essay to a two-part special issue on John Burroughs in *ATQ*. He breaks the reception into three phases and cites the 1970s as the beginning of a more appreciative uptick in attention to Burroughs, attributed to interest in "literature that aims toward consciousness raising toward political action" (156).

²⁰ That is, he comes after the main Transcendentalists, he overlaps with the Realists but does not have the social and urban emphasis they do, he might be a regionalist but works outside the short story, and he lives into the period associated with Modernism.

environmental politics did not speak to the wider Americanist field in a significant way, nor did a claim such as Warren's that Burroughs was "an exemplary figure of the imagination that combines science, natural history, philosophy, and literature"—even with a superlative such as "exemplary"—sufficiently distinguish Burroughs among his contemporaries to later scholars (3).

But if Burroughs's appreciators have a habit of lamenting that Burroughs is more "unfashionable" than unworthy, it's notable that even Americanist ecocritics like Lawrence Buell have played a role in Burroughs's relative obscurity. In *The Environmental Imagination*, Burroughs was discussed or mentioned on 45 pages. In *Writing for an Endangered World*, that number was down to 3. The story behind this drop is that Buell, whose studies' formative impacts on ecocriticism continue to be felt, writes of Burroughs as a noteworthy name within "an incipient ecocentric ethics," but one who by the same dint (that is, the implicit surpassing within the descriptor "incipient") has been superseded (*Environmental Imagination* 199). In both studies, his reading of Burroughs is a narrative of defeat, as a figure whose enchanted garden was largely mucked up by Darwin (*Environmental Imagination* 190-192; *Writing* 145-46). Given the influence Buell's work has exerted on ecocriticism and literary history of nature writing, it is unsurprising that his preference for other nineteenth-century figures like Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Mary Austin would have guided syllabi and scholarship away from Burroughs.

What makes this ironic, it turns out, is that Burroughs was integral to the assembling of nature writing as a genre. Across two articles based in archival research of Houghton, Mifflin and Company papers and a thorough survey of major nineteenth-century American periodicals, Eric Lupfer documents Burroughs's centrality in the way Houghton, Mifflin essentially constituted nature writing from their booklists. The inversion here is that, in the face of

ecocriticism like Lawrence Buell's that had pointed to Thoreau as the major ethical pivot in environmental thinking and thus lauded him the originary nature writer, Lupfer can trace that "it was Burroughs, not Thoreau, around whose work the outdoor list was built" or, with more detail, that "Burroughs's success helped form the foundation upon which nature writing—and Thoreau's reputation, more specifically—was built by writers, publishers, and critics in the final decades of the [nineteenth] century" ("Before Nature Writing," 190; "Becoming America's 'Prophet of Outdoordom,'" 403). To benefit from Burroughs's popularity, promotion efforts made him the exemplar of an emerging category, and earlier writers were then made legible as "nature writers" as his influences—a move facilitated by Burroughs's own frequent references to his reading.

Building on Lupfer's work, my inclination is to view Burroughs's popularity as more than merely incidental biographical context for his work; I consider that popularity's relationship to constitutive features of his work, with the idea that Burroughs's success at generating engaged responses from readers has much to tell literary scholars about reading the "genre" his books helped define. In positing reader response to Burroughs as itself more worthy of critical interest, I follow upon Stephen Mercier's "Ornithological Testimonies: Letters to John O'Birds," which has laid a valuable foundation by drawing patterns from a different, complementary set of archival materials than Lupfer's and tracking Burroughs's wide-ranging reader correspondence. He sorts the letters into five main patterns: "1) a feeling of intimacy with the author himself; 2) thanks for Burroughs's help toward cultivating stronger powers of attentiveness to the natural world; 3) the resulting joy in newfound beauty; 4) gratitude over Burroughs's ability to put into words what readers are feeling, but find difficult to express; 5) the wish to protect birds in jeopardy" (274 -75). Describing the value of this archival record, Mercier writes, "actual readers'

responses—add credence to the rather ‘political’ claim that Burroughs had an enormous influence upon the nation's love of birds, which led to their protection” (273). In other words, Burroughs’s popularity allows for something more than assumptions about the influence of a text; his texts and their readers generated an archive correlating with the cues articulated in those texts. Rather than locating the value of Burroughs’s work in what sort of environmentalist arguments scholarly readers detect there, it becomes possible to talk about a form of value that emerges from the observed responses to that writing. Having not yet enjoyed the archival access that facilitated Lupfer’s and Mercier’s projects, I take my inspiration from Wai Chee Dimock’s essay “Feminism, New Historicism, and the Reader”—which offers an example of drawing out a text’s reader using Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper”—in order to highlight cues in Burroughs’s texts. John Burroughs’s essays differ greatly from Gilman’s story, of course, but my gambit is that this method produces intriguing revelations when applied to early and later works by Burroughs. Both early- and late-Burroughs call upon an amateur reader, I argue, but there is an observable change in what those amateur readers are called *to*. Whereas the early Burroughs invites amateurs to broad appreciation of the unnoticed-within-the-seen, the later Burroughs maintains a space for amateurism in what has by then become a more contentious terrain of professionalizing science and consolidated literary expectations.

My argument locates the hinge between these positions within what has been dubbed the Nature Faker Controversy. So effective was Burroughs’s writing at inspiring others, it seems, that he began to worry about the possibility of his readers’ deception; his longstanding attention to naturalists’ accuracy culminated in his piece on “Real and Sham Natural History” and its follow-up volume *Ways of Nature*. Burroughs perhaps understood the power of the booklists that were clustering around his name, and the essay offers a countermeasure to its abuse. That

countermeasure somewhat backfired publicly when the essay snowballed, with Roosevelt's involvement, into what the *New York Times* called "The War of the Naturalists." Participants in the debate were embroiled in questions of fact and fiction with important long-term influence on nature writing's reception, but I draw new emphasis to this debate for its implications about the particular expertise of readers in making judgments of fictionality. In light of that emphasis, I close my assessment of Burroughs with an extended reading of one of his last books to survey the debate's implications for Burroughs's amateur readers at the end of his career.

John Burroughs, *Wake-Reader*

A review in *Scribner's Monthly* of John Burroughs's first book of essays, *Wake-Robin*, closes with the following:

There are other beauties, other portions of "Wake-Robin" which we had meant to notice: but we must leave them to speak for themselves to the fortunate finders of the book. All lovers of woods will be sure to find it sooner or later; and to all those poor souls, spiritually halt and maimed, who do not love woods, we recommend it as heavily as we would recommend crutches for cripples, or glasses for eyes blinded by shortness of sight. ("Wake-Robin" 446)

Although confidence is a common posture for a positive book reviewer, several features of the confidence here are more interesting than they seem, including the unfortunate ableist metaphor. For example, the anonymous reviewer's casual confidence that the book and outdoorsy people will find one another belies a reasonable doubt. Why *would* "All lovers of the woods" find such a book—or seek it? Might they not be supposed to already have what Burroughs's pages offer? And if they were not already lovers of the woods, what about this book would be the prosthesis that helps them get outside? At these logical pressure points, this review inadvertently raises massive but often unasked questions about why readers read—and implicitly why they might read nature writing in particular. Given that the answer to such an intractable question depends

upon any number of variables, it is useful that the review draws attention in this situation to a wider trend, if possibly still somewhat emergent in the 1870s: an assumed reciprocity between outdoors activity and reading—a culture of bookishness and the outdoors that my project explores, where reading about Nature reinforced outdoor experience or inspired it. But another interesting component of this review’s confidence about the book’s “fortunate finders” is the assurance that they “will be sure to find it sooner or later”; though again a casual posture, it inadvertently raises the intriguing point that readers emerge in time—the “sooner or later” part of this review’s assessment in particular ruffling a typical historicist assumption that texts and readers meet contemporaneously, joined by calendric coincidence. This is a point that Wai Chee Dimock has herself underscored, recalling the irregularity she observes of readers across “history.” “There are readers and readers, it would seem,” Dimock points out, “and when we think about their uneven genesis, conflicting identities, and multiple points of reception, ‘history’ itself will have to be reconceived as something less than homogenous, something less than synchronized” (95). Taking this question seriously alongside Burroughs’s varied historical reception that I outline above, I take this review’s “sooner or later” as a legitimate provocation to consider what readers Burroughs invited in his historical context as well as since. As a literary historian, I am interested in filling out a description of what it meant to read Burroughs; as a teacher and scholar writing at a historical remove, I am further curious about what it means or might mean to read Burroughs now. I take up the problems of nature writing’s “conflicting identities” more explicitly in later chapters—the “uneven” ways nature called upon readers as a nonhomogeneous category. Here, I want to focus in closer to where I started this chapter, thinking about the potential for nature writing texts to suggest insights into kinds of response that bridge reading to actions outside a text’s pages.

The final essay of *Wake-Robin* is conducive for this thinking since its title, “The Invitation,” so clearly addresses a reader, but noticing this alone does not clarify who is being invited to the bird-watching party. Furthermore, its title echoes Burroughs’s Preface to the book’s first edition, which he begins by stating outright, “This is mainly a book about the Birds, or more properly an invitation to the study of Ornithology, and the purpose of the author will be carried out in proportion as it awakens and stimulates the interest of the reader in this branch of Natural History” (v). By the time his collected works were republished in the Riverside Edition, he evidently had cause to believe it had been successful, since he asks, “what can I say to my reader at this stage of our acquaintance that will lead to a better understanding between us? Probably nothing. We understand each other very well already” (xi). Burroughs had reason to think so; critics frequently remark that he “had broad appeal,” inspiring clubs and readers of all ages across the country, particularly after the Civil War while the nation was doing some soul-searching (Goodman 82). The fact that Burroughs has been popularly forgotten despite his once booming popular success is one reason to reach for Dimock’s thinking about differentiated readers across time in conjunction with Burroughs’s mention of “the reader” who otherwise appears constant across the span of the two prefaces (95).

“The Invitation” has a somewhat clearer structure than many of Burroughs’s essays, though it still incorporates within its sections what John Tallmadge has rightly, I think, called Burroughs’s “peripatetic” essayistic style (168). It begins with a revelatory childhood anecdote that leads into Burroughs making his pitch for ornithology’s appeals. It then moves to a section weighing the value of books by considering what can be learned from observation of common birds; this section, the longest, considers at times the contributions of ornithologists ranging from Audubon to one of Burroughs’s correspondents. Burroughs considers when and where birds are

found, leading to another anecdote in closing about Burroughs himself being called upon to identify the remains of a bird that was “a stranger to all who had seen it,” which turns out to be a sea bird that found its way to (and its end in) inland New York (242).

Burroughs’s opening anecdote recalls a childhood “revelation” in the woods, the sighting of a then-unfamiliar bird that led to his reflection that “the woods we knew so well held birds we know not at all” (217). This and the “surprise that awaits every student of ornithology” is what he credits for finding himself “ticketed for the whole voyage,” or hooked to birding for life (218). There is a subtle logical tension between the chaotic instantaneity of a “surprise” and the standardization of these such that one “awaits every student of ornithology,” and that tension bifurcates the piece’s rhetorical appeal to both kinds of readers mentioned in the book’s review I cite above: some readers will be surprised by the possibility Burroughs is narrating, and thus the piece can function as a collaborating ticketing agent (to continue Burroughs’s metaphor). Alternatively, those who are already Burroughs’s fellow passengers can situate their experience within wider iterative patterns when they recognize themselves as one of the “every” students in this phrase.

That duality differentiates Burroughs’s essay from a text such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Dimock starts her historicizing reading of that story by remarking on nineteenth-century cultures of professionalism and their ties to reading: “Given the centrality of reading in a culture of professionalism, one obvious way to historicize the literary reader is to ask whether this figure inhabits a structure of authority comparable to that inhabited by its nonfictive counterparts, by the professionals who also happen to be expert readers” (88). Professionalization and specialization are pivotal tools for how she locates the particularities of readers at “multiple points of reception.” Burroughs’s essay, though, through its appeal to the

attraction of surprise to “every [actual and potential] student of ornithology,” raises another possibility—professionalization’s shadow, the amateur. This category allows for a gradient of experience from the total neophyte to the practiced recreationist also implicit in the notion of a “student,” though the etymology of ‘amateur’ imbues the position with perhaps more affinity and a different telos of acquisition. Support for reading the essay as inviting an amateur comes from its calling the reader to develop expertise that while “precious” may “have no commercial value” (219).

The next and longest section of the essay plays out similar dynamics precisely by exploring the merits of differing kinds of expertise. While Burroughs maintains that books require and develop expertise, he also deliberately appeals to field experience’s value. The balance he strikes then is that, on one hand, “Ornithology cannot be satisfactorily learned from books. The satisfaction is in learning it from nature. One must have an original experience with the birds. The books are only the guide, the invitation”; then, on the other hand, he insists, “But let me say, in the same breath, that the books can by no manner of means be dispensed with” and that “the chief value of books” is their being “charts to sail by” (221). Burroughs acknowledges how scientific methods of classification “are apt to confuse and discourage the reader,” so the bulk of this section involves his going through the “warblers, vireos, flycatchers, thrushes, or finches” making up “By far the greatest number of our land birds” (222). In doing so, he assures the amateur reader that professionalized categories for birds can be derived from direct visual and auditory observations accessible to any birder. His correcting Audubon’s errors and lauding his (presumably non-professional) correspondent’s observations destabilizes expectations of expertise in ways that create accessibility for the amateur reader.

As the piece winds down, the discussion of particular birds gives way to a few pages discussing seasonal habits and habitats that prepare for the final anecdote. Among other things, he makes the surprising observation that “civilization is on the whole favorable” to birds because humans bring along species on which birds can prey (the relationship whose disruption Rachel Carson would later spell out in *Silent Spring*) (241). His attention to seasonal patterns and location prepares for the final anecdote by suggesting the localized dimensions of developing expertise. This final story dually excites the reader through the prospect of even more to learn about “the seashore and its treasures” and bookends the initial story by figuring Burroughs himself, the amateur reader’s erstwhile expert guide, as continually engaged in learning new things, as he did after his childhood “revelation.” Approached by a “stranger” while on vacation, Burroughs is given an invitation of sorts himself that introduces him to this bird in a box, the aforementioned “stranger to all who had seen it.” The repetition of “stranger” for both man and bird keeps open to possibility who could be involved while maintaining the mystery and secrecy mentioned since the outset of the essay. Burroughs speculates that the bird is a sooty tern misled inland by its strength. The allusion to classical myth by calling the bird “Another Icarus” fits within the overall themes of the essay by cautioning that readers not become careless going too far too fast; Icarus is an overconfident amateur. As the guide who still needs to look up things outside his local expertise, Burroughs to some measure disclaims undue authority, which consequently checks his reader too.

The success of Burroughs’s appeal to non-experts correlates with the school-age readers who were an important part of his success, particularly in terms of shaping his reputation as a nature writer first and foremost (as opposed to any of the other topics he wrote on). Perry Westbrook recounts that getting into the schools was a big break for Burroughs, and it started

when Mary E. Burt in Chicago decided to assign pieces of his work, buying “three dozen copies of *Pepacton* for her sixth-grade reading classes” (74). “So successful was the experiment,” Westbrook continues, “that Mr. Houghton of Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, which had published most of Burroughs’s books to this time, traveled to Chicago; sensed the potential profit that might accrue from Miss Burt’s novel ideas; and engaged her to edit a text specifically for classroom use” (74). This decision fit within an emerging trend known as the nature study movement, which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter. Burroughs and the nature study movement continued to shape one another reciprocally as book after book of reprinted material was put together for instruction. Certainly, Burroughs was read by other nature writers too; Frances Theodora Parsons, who published the *How to Know the Wild Flowers* volume as Mrs. William Starr Dana, has two epigraphs from Burroughs. Then, too, there were his reader-correspondents, whose accounts and responses he begins to intersperse in his essays as early as *Wake-Robin*, and these are what Mercier has helpfully documented as evidence of Burroughs’s writing having encouraged an active response, supplementing other evidence about the clubs and curricular lessons that formed around Burroughs’s work.

Because of this success based in part on printing and reprinting—even if it would have surprised John Burroughs himself to say so—Burroughs can be described as an influential popularizer of a kind of bookishness as well as a popularizer of ornithology. The volume of his output as a writer (publishing roughly thirty books in his lifetime) and his substantial public profile (his friendships with magnates, presidents, and writers garnering front-page notice) generated attention to peers and predecessors who could then be constituted as a more coherent tradition. The particularity of the bookishness of this tradition is that it reinforced the importance of going outdoors while exemplifying how intertwined indoor and outdoor forms of study were.

One example of Burroughs's reframing earlier writers is his solicitation to write an Introduction for a new edition of Gilbert White's *A Natural History of Selborne*, where his name and thoughts become paratext to a version of White's.²¹ The choice of Burroughs as its paratextual mediator offers a context for new readers to understand the relevance of the older work, especially in America where the likelihood of readers actually visiting Selborne was less likely. That is, when the edition was released in the U.S. by Appleton & Co. in 1895, a review still called White's book "the only species of its genus" (Thompson 18). Yet Burroughs more or less acknowledges White's *Natural History* as a predecessor to his work by saying he rereads it every six or seven years—and thereby naturalizes the formerly oddball book into trends of mainstream literary production even as he holds White above the boom more generally:

When one reads the writers of our own day upon rural England and the wildlife there, he finds that they have not the charm of the Selborne naturalist; mainly, I think, because they go out with deliberate intent to write up nature. They choose their theme; the theme does not choose them. They love the birds and the flowers for the literary effects they can produce out of them. It requires no great talent to go out in the fields or woods and describe in graceful sentences what one sees there—birds, trees, flowers, clouds, streams, etc.; but to give the atmosphere of these things, to seize the significant and interesting features and to put the reader into sympathetic communication with them, that is another matter. (ix-xi)

This passage offers another example of how Burroughs's prominence—indeed, near omnipresence—in discussions around the capacious miscellany of outdoor books positioned him to canonize his taste and define the lineage of his own writing. It also offers a way into thinking about what kinds of bookishness Burroughs promotes, expressed here through his contrast between writing for "literary effects" versus writing to put readers into "sympathetic communication" with "the atmosphere" of outdoor places. Although it seems a little like a sleight of hand—"sympathetic communication" sure sounds like a literary effect—the emphasis

²¹ Later republished as "Gilbert White Again" in *Literary Values*

makes most sense if taken as opposing “literary” to the “atmosphere” described. Implicitly, the literary only goes outdoors to come back indoors. Not so for Burroughs. He may have published his first widely-circulated nature pieces in the *Atlantic Monthly*, but arguing as Warren does that his and others’ nature writing constitutes “a core literary tradition of nature writing in postbellum American literature” requires extra specificity in defining the “literary.”

As with his dismissal of the literary, John Burroughs shared the negative view of bookishness familiar to its meaning today. In the essay “Literature” that opens the “Study” portion of *Field and Study*, an essay in poetry criticism like those in many of his other collections, he contrasts a set of “older poets”²² with newer poets—unnamed and en masse. While the young poets using free verse get some criticism, Burroughs lands a more pronounced blow to those “who adhere to the old conventional form of verse,” who he laments as “a by-product of a bookish and artificial age” (223). He grants they may be “skilled craftsmen, but not poets,” explaining them as “what is left for the making of poets after the first-hand grit and energy of the race has been drawn off by the demands of a great practical industrial age.”²³ The oppositions in his language are well-known to scholars of industrial expansion in the nineteenth century, though they are not perhaps here as nostalgic as they often are, for the logical expectation of the nostalgic critic to celebrate returns to “the old conventional form.” The more specific loss here results from a devaluation of common outdoor experiences that attends industrialism, usually through the move to urbanization. He repeats the sentiment later that Americans are increasingly too sheltered in explaining why more readers fail to appreciate Walt Whitman’s poetry: “We may not like him—not everybody can endure a plunge in the surf,—but

²² Bryant, Emerson, Burns, Wordsworth, Whitman, Trowbridge and Thaxter.

²³ Race grammatically refers here to poets, and is otherwise unspecified, but stands more implicitly for American. See also earlier footnote.

we should recognize his power, and the genuineness of his inspiration, and that our dislike of him comes more from our indoor and bookish habits, our over-refinements, our artificial standards, our anemic blood, then from any want of the truly poetic in his ‘Leaves’” (232). Again here, the contrast of indoor bookishness and the vigorous plunge into the surf appears to reaffirm the sequestration of “bookish habits” and laudable nature poetry.

But Burroughs perhaps doth protest too much here, as the presence of these criticisms in an essay on poetics might suggest. Images of a more bookish Burroughs did circulate, both in the frontispieces to his books as well as in the popular press, such as in the full-page announcement of his death in *The New York Times*:

This interest in animal life led the boy to the library at the United States Military Academy at West Point, where he studied the first publication of John James Audubon on “Birds of America,” and made up his mind to become a naturalist. Although he was never able to meet this great naturalist, who later lived on his estate in this city, he read all of his publications on birds and mammals and gained from them a great part of his ‘book knowledge’ of life. He learned the rest largely by observation. (Associated Press 9)

It is this final sentence in combination with the one that immediately follows it, that “Confronted with the necessity of making a living, Burroughs turned to teaching in country schools and between he studied Emerson, Thoreau, Walt Whitman and other great writers of the day,” that distorts Burroughs’s reading—making it incidental in a way that clashes with accounts he elsewhere gives of himself. While the opening of his first book, *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person* continues to downplay reading in favor of first-hand experience, it already suggests a more active relationship to books; “Born and raised near the headwaters of the Delaware, in New York, the world of my practical experience was confined to that healthy but rather wild and bleak region, till I had become a well-grown country youth, curious about books—fond even then of the Emersonian essays and poems, and all of that ilk; but my life mainly occupied in farm

work in the summer, and with a little study, offset by much hunting and trapping wild animals, in winter” (9). While shoring up a masculine ethos, Burroughs here presents a few tensions that express his mixed view of books. That is, on one hand books and study are the opposite here of summer and vigorous farm experience, but on the other his curiosity and attraction to that Emersonian “ilk” supplements a lack of experience resulting from the tensely-phrased healthy confinement. In order to judge poetry (or, in his other books, appear sufficiently intellectual), he cannot appear a mere rube, yet his hardy rural ethos is also his qualification. The “fond even then,” though, gives away the wry humor of “all of that ilk.”

If Emerson and Whitman (who, ironically considering Burroughs’s repeated case for them as direct and lively writers, have by the twenty-first century become by-and-large the provenance of intensely bookish scholars and antiquarians) were Burroughs’s chief inspirations and most common subjects, it bears remembering that his career got significant mileage from his reading of other writers as well. In volumes including *Winter Sunshine* and *Fresh Fields*, the mileage is literal as he explicitly takes up English writers, such as Thomas Carlyle, who he met in-person while traveling. More commonly, though, he references a slew of poets and naturalists throughout his books, either creating essays where natural history and literary criticism are fully intermixed, like in *Birds and Poets* or the “A Spray of Pine” essay on Emerson in *Signs and Seasons*, or making literary criticism the direct focus as in *Literary Values* and other essays—sometimes with titles like “Literature and Science.”

The apotheosis of these persistent citations might be the volume of nature poetry he edited and introduced, *Songs of Nature*. His introduction to that book characteristically downplays his reading even as he reveals it; he explains that “according to the publishers, who desired that the collection should be mine in a real sense,” he put together the collection “guided

entirely by [his] own taste” (v). And even though such a statement mainly acts as a disclaimer, as if taste were purely accidental, he also writes that the compiler’s “own individual taste and judgment, clarified and disciplined, of course, by wide reading and reflection are his only guides” (v-vi). Given that this volume is of *nature* poetry specifically, it reinforces Burroughs’s role in helping herd a tradition that contextualized his own work, and his preparation of such an anthology as well as a volume like White’s *Selbourne* displays his work as a guide to bookishness as well as birds, helping readers who either lacked his experiences (prosthesis) or just agreed with his sentiments (supplement) to find their way.

Unease and/of Expertise

Toward the end of Burroughs’s life and after his death, however, “lovers of woods” found their way to him less and less frequently. As Burroughs criticism has noted, this dropping off has been re-inscribed by critical attention, which largely kept the focus on the early works. Even when critics have accounted for the later Burroughs’s relative unpopularity, the case made for the distinction has been rather weakly attributed either to Burroughs’s widening focus in his later volumes (such as the cosmological in *Accepting the Universe*) or to arguments about his contentions with Charles Darwin harming his reputation. The former does not account for the later volumes that do in fact follow in the early vein (such as *Field and Study*), and the latter understates its warrants, since engaging Darwin’s ideas has not traditionally been known to hurt book sales. What biographies and criticism have curiously understated as a fulcrum within Burroughs’s reception is probably the most notorious moment in his career, the Nature Faker Controversy.

In it, Burroughs demonstrated unease about the susceptibility of amateur readers to the

texts they read; he shied away from the bookishness he had modeled and wrought. Burroughs had actually long chided other naturalists for inaccurate observations and rendering of animal behavior, but in 1903 he published his essay “Real and Sham Natural History,” which as its title suggests came down harder than the occasional correction. The language of “Real and Sham” of the title morphs in the essay as Burroughs goes on to police an all-or-nothing “line between fact and fiction”—a hard line in Burroughs’s eyes that governed the instructional admissibility of a text for natural history purposes. Rather than question this premise, the writers he criticized saw fiction the same way and mounted various defenses, drawing sundry authorities into the debate to adjudicate between the facts and fictions. Teddy Roosevelt stepped into the fray strongly on Burroughs’s side and unwittingly gave the squabble its name: the “nature fakers” controversy. It is tempting to dismiss the debate now for the furious swirl of concepts that were bandied among debaters about truth, literary value, and the ethics of authorship, as one risks getting mired in the controversy’s conceptual imprecisions. Yet the debate’s timing just as the texts at its center were coming to be thought of as a genre warrants attention. Beyond how it fits into Burroughs’s work, it suggests how fiction got partitioned from the rest of nature writing.

Although it’s true that Burroughs’s strident notes in the debate presented a departure from his amiable public ethos, his argument seems less anomalous if recognized as an extension of his relationship with amateur readers. Situated in contexts such as “The growing demand for nature-books within the past few years has called forth a very large crop of these books, good, bad, and indifferent,” “Real and Sham Natural History” attempts to govern somewhat the genre Burroughs realized his work had done much to shape, a genre and attendant kind of reading that had particular ramifications for his young and amateur readers, on whose behalf the essay intervenes (298). The debate quickly settled on the credentials of the writers themselves,

invoking differentiated claims of expertise; Sue Walsh mentions this aspect almost by-the-way as one of the several factors she surveys from the controversy, “It is also worth noting in the documents of the controversy a shift of focus from the ‘real’ animal to the ‘real’ naturalist” (139). So, though the debate would effectively consolidate nature writing as predominantly nonfiction (thanks to the common association of nonfiction as true and fiction as falsehood, or respectively real and sham),²⁴ the concern motivating Burroughs was in most cases less fictionality itself than its discernment by the readers who, as Burroughs knew from the letters he received, took texts to heart and acted upon them as non-expert readers.

As an example of Burroughs’s criticisms of other writers by name, the following is representative:

But in Mr. Thompson Seton’s *Wild Animals I Have Known*, and in the recent work of his awkward imitator, the Rev. William J. Long, I am bound to say that the line between fact and fiction is repeatedly crossed, and that a deliberate attempt is made to induce the reader to cross, too, and to work such a spell upon him that he shall not know that he has crossed and is in the land of make-believe. Mr. Thompson Seton says in capital letters that his stories are true, and it is this emphatic assertion that makes the judicious grieve. True as romance, true in their artistic effects, true in their power to entertain the young reader, they certainly are; but true as natural history they as certainly are not. (300)

In response, the accused focused on defending their reputations against the first part of the Burroughs judgment, insisting that indeed they had not “crossed the line between fact and fiction.” As Lutts recounts, Long in particular went to great lengths to support that what he had written was possible. Lutts also elaborates that the substance of the debate was not even any particular animal act itself but the attribution of human intention, emotion, or reasoning vs. a

²⁴ Though even these were not absolute: About Charles Dudley Warner’s *A-Hunting of the Deer*: “The story of the hunt is given from the standpoint of the deer, and is, I think, the most beautiful and effective animal story yet written in this country. It is true in the real sense of the word. The line between fact and fiction is never crossed.” (300)

sense of animals as instinct-driven beings. But a reading of the whole sentence that at least momentarily suspends focusing on the provocative “line” might notice what commentators on the debate have largely left out, the apparent “attempt [...] to induce the reader to cross, too.” Indeed this note reappears within the essay, such as Burroughs’s statement that “Fact and fiction are so deftly blended in his work that only a real woodsman can separate them” (301). The “real woodsman” (including presumably Burroughs himself) is not at risk from these works. He reads with the capacity to determine easily what is fact and fiction. So Burroughs turns out to be advocating on behalf of the amateur reader whom he knows full well is a large part of the consumer base for this book “crop.” As he repeats these terms once more later in the essay, he points more directly to the contrast between the real woodsman and amateur children mentioned more directly as “the young readers”: “There should be nothing equivocal about sketches of this kind; even a child should know when the writer is giving him facts and when he is giving him fiction, as he does when Mr. Thompson Seton makes his animals talk; but in many of the narrations only a real woodsman can separate the true from the false” (303). Even though he is no longer a total amateur himself, he anticipates such readers and their reading practices. In *Ways of Nature* and elsewhere, he would insist that his problem was not fiction itself, so long as it was announced as obviously as, for example, Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book*, but the “mixture of fact and fiction” that came unannounced: “My sole objection to the nature books that are the outcome of [inventing facts to suit fancy] is that they are put forth as veritable natural history, and thus mislead their readers” (202). That is, “mislead” readers whose reading across such “nature books” would expect the replicable observations that help found “sympathetic communication” like Burroughs’s.

However concerned about readers Burroughs might have been when he wrote the first essay, the debate went in the direction of animal cognition and the credentials to debate about it, and Burroughs's ongoing arguments about animal instinct likely worked to his detriment.²⁵ His adherence to criticizing other writers, many of whom were popular, made him easy to cast as a bully, and perhaps also as jealous of competition in book sales. Ernest Thompson Seton's parable "The Fate of Little Mucky" in his "Fable & Woodmyths" series has been read as taking this latter tack; in it, a jealous and lesser accomplished person seeks to draw attention to himself by "climbing a hill called Big Periodic" and throwing muck at a hard worker who earned his size (500). It backfires, and Little Mucky falls into his own muckhole. Another scathing rejoinder came from Jack London, who was named as a nature faker but who waited to respond, apparently, until things had blown over a little. His 1908 essay "The Other Animals" declares "that the storm is over" and presents a double defense against Roosevelt and Burroughs's tag-team offense. The punchy piece jabs at Roosevelt, with whom London claims mostly a difference of opinion; significantly, though, London also dismisses Roosevelt as an "amateur"—signifying the pivot around that position in a debate that depended on various forms of scientific authority. When he balks "that [Roosevelt] should be able, as an individual observer, to analyze all animal life and to synthesize and develop all that is known [...] would require a vaster credulity for you or me to believe," he attacks not only Roosevelt's ethos appeals but the wider validity of the capacity for individual observation to generate reliable insight, which had been the cornerstone of works by Burroughs and others like him. But London wallops Burroughs more directly (and at greater lengths) than such an implicit criticism. He deliberately presents

²⁵ Essentially, Burroughs maintained that animal behavior was strictly instinctual, and he denied animals' use of reasoning, with a few concessions. With some species more than others, scientific studies of animal behavior have largely debunked this oversimplification.

Burroughs as an old man, “presuming upon the wisdom that is very often erroneously associated with old age,” and he presents a takedown of Burroughs’s instinct theory that has several parts but significantly collapses reason as the distinguishing capacity between humans and animals. He calls both Roosevelt’s and Burroughs’s view of animals “medieval” and Burroughs’s in particular as unscientific (made more egregious for him by Burroughs’s invocation of scientific theory, thus repeating Burroughs’s own distaste for fictions that seemed to include science). Whether London’s or any other particular counterargument dealt the essential blow is hard to tell, but Burroughs’s sales of schoolbook volumes apparently trailed off after 1906. As it turns out, young readers may not have been the ones needing protection from the accused nature fakers.

The Insistent Sage

As Renehan notes, the Nature Faker Controversy and Burroughs’s association with Roosevelt led to new levels of fame for Burroughs, but fame where “People began to know him who did not first know his books” (256). He was also entering his seventies in 1907 and soon to be a grandfather, and yet he still produced eight books that would be published in his lifetime. It’s certainly possible to lump Burroughs’s late works together, as Renehan does with the ones after 1903: “As the season progressed, the piles of hay in the mows built up around the man who labored every morning with pen and paper, creating many of the essays that would go to make up *The Summit of the Years* (1913), *The Breath of Life* (1915), *Under the Apple Trees* (1916), and *Field and Study* (1919)” (281). Yet Bergon has rightfully pushed back on this tendency, observing that the tendency to focus on the early works skewed the image of Burroughs toward

the mild-mannered and apolitical. One gem he picks out and that Ralph Black also cites from

Leaf and Tendril (1908) is Burroughs's image of a world exhausted by industrialized economics:

[O]ne cannot but reflect what a sucked orange the earth will be in the course of a few more centuries. Our civilization is terribly expensive to all its natural resources; one hundred years of modern life doubtless exhausts its stores more than a millennium of the life of antiquity. Its coal and oil will be about used up, all its mineral wealth greatly depleted, the fertility of its soil will have been washed into the sea..., its wild game will be nearly extinct, its primitive forests gone, and soon how nearly bankrupt the planet will be! (Burroughs qtd. in Black 48)

Following Bergon's lead, I want to turn to a more in-depth reading of last of the Renahan list,

Field and Study (though it was not Burroughs's final book, which was *Accepting the Universe*).

Although *Field and Study* finds Burroughs retreading familiar ground literally and figuratively,

this familiarity is itself noteworthy in the context of the fallout from the Nature Faker

Controversy and the later, more vocal critic of the "sucked orange."

As *Field and Study*'s compound title suggests, it holds together Burroughs's grounding in field observations and his conceptual, more bookish thinking. The title page reveals that the split between the sections "Afield" and "Study Notes" is not one of equal halves—there are far more listed under "Afield." Yet neither is the distinction an impermeable one, since references to readings enter in to many of the "Afield" pieces, and various nature observations still root many of the "Study Notes." The main distinction is the titles of the pieces themselves, with the "Afield" pieces bearing more traditional, creative essay titles ("Fuss and Feathers," "A Clever Beastie") and the "Study Notes" tending toward one-word branches of knowledge ("Literature," "Evolution"). All the more reason, perhaps, to lay stress not on any one position from its component essays and more on how the book's parts relate portions of the same lifetime spent walking the woods and thumbing through books.

Field and Study opens with “The Spring Bird Procession,” an essay in four parts; as in his earlier volumes, Burroughs here opens the eyes of readers to nearby nature, but the stakes of appreciation are greater than before. Mercier, for his part, has also focused on this essay, connecting its initial publication timing to the success of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (293). This is indeed a compelling link, and Mercier’s connection of Burroughs’s writing to, among others, the mostly female membership of Audubon Societies already speaks to a different reader than the casual Rambler. I argue it’s possible to say even more, though, about the wider and transnational connections Burroughs makes in the essay, as these signal new dimensions of his later work that resonate at other points of *Field and Study*. The readers to be drawn from “The Spring Bird Procession,” unlike those of “The Invitation,” are called to notice things that connect them to dynamics on wider scales. In this way, the reader is partially called into being by historical contexts (recalling Dimock’s historicizable emergent reader) but is by the same dint called to act in history (recalling also Dimock’s non-homogenous history). So although the essay can read simply as tracking what its title suggests, the themes and continuity across the four sections combine with this simpler task, and consequently activate more than amateur appreciation for its own sake.

The first of the four sections sets the themes into motion, including linking personal observation to hemispheric flows and establishing Burroughs as a perpetual learner. Its first paragraph consists of one sentence: “One of the new pleasures of country life when one has made the acquaintance of the birds is to witness the northward bird procession as it passes or tarries with us in the spring—a procession which lasts from April till June and has some new feature daily” (3). The embedded phrase here “when one has made acquaintance of the birds” in relation to the “new” speculates a position perhaps shared by Burroughs and his reader, that of

the longtime resident (and not total neophyte, since he or she is acquainted with the birds) but perpetual learner. This is still perhaps an amateur in the sense of a recreationist, just perhaps not one who needs the invitation of the first books. The idea of a perpetual learner also emerges from the temporality of what is witnessed, since the procession's yearly occurrence creates regularity even as the presence of "some new feature daily" creates variety. Finally, the use of "witness" as the central verb of the described activity is suggestive, since witnessing in its theological and criminal registers carries the suggestion that what is witnessed is consequential.

The consequences turn out to have to do with geographical scope, as the reader learns moving into the second paragraph. Burroughs there again insists on an act of watching when he observes that "The migrating wild creatures, whether birds or beasts, always arrest attention" because "They seem to link up animal life with the great currents of the globe" (3). His uses of "seem" reinforce the attention as itself having an effect; the act of watching is a means of the observer's creating a "link" between local happenings and global forces. He elevates the rhetoric with two uses of anaphora; the first—"It is moving day on a continental scale. It is the call of the primal instinct to increase and multiply, suddenly setting in motion whole tribes and races"—almost re-naturalizes the link via parallel structure, but the second—which repeats mentions of "the first" of several birds as being "like the first ripple of the rising tide on the shore"—couches the movements back in simile and their observational perspective. Even in these first two paragraphs, then, Burroughs has tied accessible and relatable observation for amateurs to larger "currents" implying a kind of attention with wider outcomes than personal appreciation.

In the next two paragraphs, Burroughs becomes more direct in creating links between individuals and larger scales by touching upon a common concern for nineteenth-century naturalists, the extinction of the passenger pigeon. The passenger pigeon used to be a steady

early arrival in the season, he begins. The common trope of their filling the sky is followed immediately by reflection on their disappearance: “But that spectacle was never repeated as it had been for generations before. The pigeons never came back. Death and destruction, is the shape of the greed and cupidity of man, were on their trail” (4). This is already a testament of ecological grief and criticism related to Burroughs’s comments on the “sucked orange.” His further addition of a memory about his complicity in the extinction, “I killed it, little dreaming that, so far as I was concerned, I was killing the last pigeon,” fits with the first two paragraphs’ initial moves to connect individual agency and global or continental scale. In the second paragraph, Burroughs uses the passenger pigeon as a reflective inspiration to take up the observations proposed in the first paragraphs, asking “What man now in his old age who witnessed in youth that spring or fall festival and migration of the passenger pigeons would not hail it one of the gladdest hours of his life if he could be permitted to witness it once more?” (4-5). The link back to the initial paragraph is the repetition of the central verb “witness.” The framing of the question around “man now in his old age” has nostalgic rhetorical appeal, perhaps, for his long-time readers, but it also lays out positions for himself and his potentially younger amateur reader. Testifying to regret, Burroughs subtly amps up the incentive to cultivate observation skills. The moment furthermore proliferates potential readers’ positions in history even as it has at its center a recognition of readers’ actions’ capacity to make environmental history in the way his own generation brought an end to “such a spectacle of bounty of joyous, copious animal life, of fertility in the air and in the wilderness, as to make the heart glad” (5). Burroughs leaves unstated how the act of witnessing would counter the forces of “Death and destructions,” but the contrast of his younger and older selves suggests that awareness would have conditioned different behavior.

The second section of the essay advances the possibilities of observation established in the first by widening beyond the scope of one person's observational space. Beginning with the sentence "That birds of a feather flock together, even in migration, is evident enough every spring," it underscores that Burroughs is not merely talking about single birds at a time noticed by the expert birder: "When, in early May, I see one Myrtle warbler, I presently see dozens of them in the trees" (11). But gestures toward the widespread observability of these phenomena suggest the possibility of more than birds "flock[ing] together"; they suggest the networked interconnectivity of those living along routes of migration. This is best seen in two longer quotations that emphasize both neighborliness (geographical proximity) along with continental geographical spread. In the first, he notes the rarity of Canada warblers outside his kitchen window only to counter it:

How choice and rare they looked on the dull surface! In my neighbor's garden or dooryard I should probably have seen more of them, and in his trees and shrubbery as many magnolia and bay-breasted and black-throated blue warblers as in my own; and about his neighbor's place, and his, and his, throughout the township, and on west throughout the country, and throughout the State, and the adjoining State, on west to the Mississippi and beyond, I should have found in every bushy tangle and roadside and orchard and grove and wood and brookside, the same advancing line of migration birds—warblers, flycatchers, finches, thrushes, sparrows, and so on—that I found here. (12)

The scope expands piecemeal over the course of the long sentence from one neighbor to another and piled from these into wider and wider jurisdictions and territories, mirrored in the second list by the polysyndeton of places to look for the birds. The brevity of the final "that I found here" stands out after so expansive a sentence, and this emphasis at the conclusion lands the speculative hot air balloon of the preceding two "I should" clauses. In doing so, Burroughs can underscore the "here" of his own observation beyond a simple deictic toward a wider "and beyond" not associated with nineteenth-century nature rambles. Lest readers miss the point, he

places a similar sentence at the opening of the next paragraph (perhaps a more traditional location for attention and emphasis): “One sees the passing bird procession in his own grounds and neighborhood without pausing to think that in every man’s grounds and in every neighborhood throughout the State, and throughout a long, broad belt of States, about several millions of homes, and over several millions of farms, the same flood-tide of bird-life is creeping and eddying or sweeping over the land” (12-13). Using a similar repetition of “throughout” and adding here the repetition of numbered millions, Burroughs’s prose mimics the “flood-tide” of his content. Beyond this form and content parallel, what emerges as significant about the repetition of the preposition “throughout” in these two sentences is the accumulated sense of pervasion it yields; because these elongated sentences create an elongated moment for the reader to “paus[e] to think” the way Burroughs suspects they have not, the wide and interconnected scope of the migration nearby and across the continent can be appreciated.

The trope of the flood closes this section of the essay in a paragraph that is more explicit than the earlier “Mississippi and beyond” about the migration’s origins in Latin America. The paragraph substantiates the geographical source of these birds, and in doing so it cements the field of geographical interconnection:

Considering the enormous number of birds of all species that flood the continent at this season, as if some dike or barrier south of us had suddenly given way, one wonders where they could all have been pent up during the winter. Mexico and Central and South America have their own bird populations the season through; and with the addition of the hosts from this country, it seems as if those lands must have literally swarmed with birds, and that the food question (as with us) must have been pressing. Of course, a great many of our birds—such as sparrows, robins, blackbirds, meadowlarks, jays, and chewinks—spend the winter in the Southern States, but many more—warblers, swallows, swifts, hummers, orioles, tanagers, cuckoos, flycatchers, vireos, and others—seek out the equatorial regions. (14)

Some measure of nationalism comes through in the possessive forms (“their own bird populations”; “our birds”), but the broader note remains one of interconnection through the seasonal sharing of the “enormous number.”

If these first two sections remain largely within Burroughs’s expected purview, albeit more international, the rhetorical consequence and more direct departure comes in the third section. The potential impacts of a global ecology manifest when this section begins “The ever-memorable war spring of 1917 was very backward,--about two weeks later than the average,--very cold, and very wet” (14). Salient events of human history are recast in terms of their contemporary environmental history. The “unseasonable season,” as he calls it, delays the hatching of the insects that spur the coming of the birds (17). The resulting disorientation becomes an “unusual spectacle” as the birds Burroughs is used to observing are transformed with “these delicate and many-colored spirits of the air and of the tree-tops hopping about amid the clods and the rubbish, searching for something they could eat. They were like jewels in the gutter, or flowers on the sidewalk” (15). A different metaphor later is more war related, as he explains the impact of the low food supply on “the death of a large number of warblers”: “These adventurous little aviators had come all the way from South and Central America; the fuel-supply of their tiny engines was very low, and they suffered accordingly” (17). This section of the essay goes on to observe unusual aspects of the migration that season and the various signs of birds’ atypical behavior.

The final section of the essay follows the ebb of the procession toward Canada and “beyond the Arctic Circle,” linking in the rest of the hemisphere. Burroughs lingers on the observable signs of this movement bringing in different species and also carrying forward observations about sound with more onomatopoeic renderings than other sections. In the interest

of helping readers observe the material of its content, it discusses mostly typical habits, but the final paragraph closes—or rather opens out—on further possibility of change:

It occasionally happens that a familiar bird develops an unfamiliar trait. The purple finch is one of our sweetest songsters and best-behaved birds, but one that escapes the attention of most country people. But the past season he made himself conspicuous with us by covering the ground beneath the cherry-trees with cherry-blossoms. Being hard put to it for food, a flock of the birds must have discovered that every cherry-blossom held a tidbit in the shape of its ovary. At once the birds began to cut out these ovaries, soon making the ground white beneath the trees. I grew alarmed for the safety of my crop of Windsors, and tried to “shoo” the birds away. They looked down upon me as if they considered it a good joke. Even when we shot one, to make sure of the identity of the bird, the flock only flew to the next tree and went on with the snipping. Beneath two cherry-trees that stood beside the highway the blossoms drifted into the wagon tracks like snowflakes. I concluded that the birds had taken very heavy toll of my cherries, but it turned out that they had only done a little of the much-needed thinning. Out of a cluster of six or eight blossoms they seldom took more than two or three, as if they knew precisely what they were about, and were intent on rendering me a service. When the robins and the cedar-birds come for the cherries they are not so considerate, but make a clean sweep. The finches could teach them manners—and morals. (25-26)

As a conclusion, this ties the essay together in various ways. The focus on “what escapes the attention of most country people” is typical Burroughs and recalls the first section. But the fact that this bird is “hard put to it for food” reconnects to the third section’s account of the unusual spring of 1917. More subtly, the “unseasonable season” of that third section and the third section’s use of figurative language reappears in the image of seasonal clash, where the cherry blossoms of spring “drifted into the wagon tracks like snowflakes.” Insofar as the birds indicate wider transnational flows and ecologies, then—and in a time of conflict—there seems to be something parable-like in this moral conclusion that pivots on Burroughs’s misunderstanding. One comparison to make, though not directly indicated and relying on a reader intent to bring the sections together, would be to close the essay’s loop overlap the morality of birds’ cherrypicking or clean-sweeping in conjunction with the essay’s initial story about man’s greedy and

thoughtless eradication of the passenger pigeon. Such a reading would advance Mercier's argument about bird conservation.

The bird-conservation reading has the advantage of already pushing out on who Burroughs's essay calls into being (the vast distribution of interconnected neighbors who "witness"), and treating the essay as a call to "manners—and morals" shifts the reader from a wandering appreciator to an agent in the environmental history being observed. But the essay includes no more direct call to action than to take a further step back and think about relation to environmental history broadly speaking. If, as Burroughs claims at the outset, migrating birds "arrest the attention" because "They seem to link up animal life with the great currents of the globe," it bears returning to such an assertion and asking whose attention is arrested and to what ends. The varyingly reliable sequences of the "Procession" the title names offer an alternative way of being attuned to "Spring" as a phenomenon than does the calendar designation of "from April to June." The calendar is how "the great currents of the globe" are organized, but the birds offer a means of syncing or decoupling from its motion; natural history operates more heterogeneously than the calendar, and across nested scales that run from (indeed, overflow) Burroughs's yard to the "continental," hemispheric, and planetary.

For this reason, Burroughs's uncharacteristic choice to incorporate World War I in his essay is so intriguing. Burroughs doesn't trace any direct links to connect either human agency to the birds' "unseasonable season" during "The ever-memorable war spring of 1917" or bird migration as agential in human events, but the subtle adoption of war-related metaphor calling birds "greatly fatigued" or "aviators" asserts the two currents' potential synchronicity as achievable via the practice of observation. Rather than merely happen at the same time, their simultaneity registers through attentive observation. This might add an incentive in either

direction: nature rambling no longer stays a form of disengaged localism because it can become a means of witnessing history, but also those interested in history can learn to see it reflected in their immediate surroundings rather than depend on distant accounts.

Is the reader of *Field and Study* a different reader than that of *Wake-Robin*? The books came out 34 years apart—the intervening history of such a span almost necessitates that the answer be yes. For one thing, Burroughs’s literal readers would have likely changed somewhat; whether he recognized it or not, many of the school-aged boys who might have cheered and waved at his train around 1903 might have sent off to the war effort in Europe by 1917, and birding was likely far back in their minds. But Dimock’s approach isn’t necessarily or exclusively asking such a literal question, for which there may or may not be archival answers. If instead we ask the twinned questions of what kinds of readers Burroughs’s essays make possible or what kinds of readers would make the essays possible or relevant, a simpler but nonetheless immensely telling dialogue arises between these early and later works. “The Invitation” called out to readers as if for the first time—readers who had been outside in a literal sense but who felt no curiosity about what they saw. “The Spring Bird Procession” by a similar dint calls to readers from its earliest pages who have been outside but who have perhaps not known the benefit of going out again, who have missed out on the patterns and significance to be had from repetition. Any differences between these may be subtle but nonetheless indicative.

For one, there is the suggestion that nature writing has already taken root in this interval—that Burroughs can trust his readers to have been moved by his own work or the work of others to appreciate the outdoors. With nature study in particular, the suggestion from historians has been that the nature push was motivated by an anxiety that industrialization had detached especially kids from land and wildlife, but this no longer seems the primary condition

of possibility for Burroughs's later work, even though the overall essay of "The Spring Bird Procession" does, by tracking the season through natural phenomena instead of depending on calendric time, presumes a related disconnection and presents an alternative to a rigidly standardized account of time and daily experience.

Something else suggested by the pattern would be an implied need to recognize the patterns and significance of what the essay describes. Mercier's connection of the essay to bird conservation would fit neatly here, and indeed the essay could have continued relevance as a habitat conservation argument long after its composition, since international migration of species endures as a logistical and policy challenge. Moreover, while it is difficult to derive a single, clear message about WWI from the latter essay, the essay is clearly both incited by and promotes an awareness of a transnational ecological awareness.

From these strands, the condition for readers most internal to "The Spring Bird Procession" itself as an original and later republished essay can be more persuasively located in concerns about shared knowledge. It would be too much to read the essay exclusively as a response to the Nature Faker Controversy, but its concerns are clearly germane. Burroughs continued to be interested in the high-profile scientific debates of this time around speciation and geology (broadly construed: natural history), and the essays in *Field and Study* persist in speaking to these conversations through amateur observation despite the skepticism the erstwhile nature faker voiced about Burroughs's certainty. Although the debaters within the Nature Faker Controversy were not all professional scientists, many were speaking from some position of professional association, and scientific authority held particular caché for the logical reason that science (if not always in practice) operates through replication. Amateur observation could be cast as singular, and thus unreliable because unconfirmed. On the other hand, not all scientists

necessarily agreed on the issues at hand. So if the ethos of the earlier Burroughs was perhaps too local and too personal and therefore available to undercut, the gestures of this later essay toward the global and corroborated observation/witnessing present one response that moves toward those professionalized standards. By extension, reading becomes less about individual discovery and more about joining into a shared body of existing knowledge.

Because it is Burroughs's habit to observe the familiar, one could close one's eyes and flip to any page of *Field and Study* to find him likely exhorting attention to the common living and lively features of the world around the reader; to expand a reading of the volume beyond the first essay and to somewhere midway through the collection, the essay "The Pleasures of Science" presents a notable extension of the dynamic. It's an essay about the commensurability of science and the things it is seen as threatening ("There is a widespread feeling that it kills poetry and romance, and to the enemy of religion") (174). There is plenty of wonder, Burroughs insists, to be found in science. And the essay makes early moves to countermand the expectation that science is exclusively the provenance of the specialist, such as "Without laying claim to being in any strict sense a man of science, I yet take great pleasure in the world of new truths which science offers us" and "My science is as unprofessional as my religion" (175). Another encapsulation later in the essay says, "I turn to chemistry, not for technical knowledge of substances and compounds, but for new proof of Nature's wonder and mysteries"; the opposition with the "technical" disavows the difficulty of the subject to emphasize its value to the amateur. Rather than being opposed to the average person, science becomes the means and not the end of deepened knowledge or appreciation (184).

This latter point crosses with bookishness through metaphor, in the trope of nature as book critics acknowledge Burroughs picks up from Emerson. What makes the passage stand out

amid uses of the trope is Burroughs's foregrounding of the text's partial state and again the claim that scientific knowledge is not the content to be extracted from the pages but a means to read a narrative that the pages archive:

What I get out of botany would hardly be available for the classroom; what I get out of biology would not go into a textbook. I love geology because it tells me much of the past of my own landscape; it throws light on the methods of Nature; it gives my imagination room to work; the ground underfoot becomes historic; it is like the story of one's own family written large in the valleys and on the mountains. (176-7)

Locating what he reads outside of formal education contexts, the "classroom" and "textbook," Burroughs again insists on the informal availability of scientific thought. It is likewise telling of Burroughs's characteristic relatability that he couches the history to be read with geology as not simply grandiose but intimate and familiar: he hears of "my own landscape" and likens what he finds to "the story of one's own family." Like the neighborhood observations of "The Spring Bird Procession," the point is that knowledge combined with observations allows the curious person to scale up, as "The rocks that cumber your field are couriers from the geologic ages." As much as Burroughs can eschew the literary, it's clear that the "tale" available through the "relic" that any curious walker might pick up is rendered legible through the bookish intertexts with which he places the history in conversation, and the product of these side-by-side readings still "gives my imagination room to work." As the essay meanders from stories connected to Georgia, California, and Pennsylvania, it is implied that the material stories he can uncover are widely available.

What Burroughs's fans were likely to appreciate was that, while he does make more authoritative statements than his earlier essays perhaps made and though his work has clearly felt the impact of scientific developments (Darwinian thought looms often in the background, but is explicitly felt in essays such as "The Insect Mind" and "Evolution"), Burroughs maintains the

amateur spirit through his perennial ability to find novelty in the nearby. This is evident throughout the book also, though “The Familiar Birds,” “Nature in Little,” and the whole subsection “New Gleanings in Old Fields” make it clearest. The ending thought of “Nature in Little” summarizes the idea, again in the bookish register: “One need never expect to exhaust the natural history of even his own farm. Every year sees a new and enlarged edition of the book of nature, and we may never hope to turn the final leaf” (128). Compared to the exhaustion of the planet as sucked orange, it’s a significant vision of a sustainable resource.

Burroughs’s own re-reading in this genre is made explicit in the first essay of “New Gleanings in Old Fields,” titled “Live Natural History,” where he opens with a common self-distinguishing gesture, recounting that “Recently while reading Thoreau’s Journal, I wondered why his natural history notes, with which the Journal abounds, interested me so little,” elaborating that “There is a great deal of bald, dry, natural history of this kind in his Journal which he never wove together into a living texture” (193). He goes on: “When he simply tells me, ‘I see a downy woodpecker tapping on an apple-tree and hear when I have passed his sharp, metallic note,’ he has not interested me in the woodpecker. He must string the bird on his thoughts in some way; he must relate him to my life or experience. The facts of natural history become interesting the moment they become facts of human history” (193). This essay is a telling distinction of Burroughs’s work since Burroughs goes on to essentially “one-up” the writer with whom he had by this point long been compared, often diminishingly. He follows the criticism of Thoreau nonchalantly with a bird observation of his own that occurs “As I write,” an observation where he interacts with the birds he watches and relates to their activities (“I am familiar with her problem, as we all are”). Thus, Burroughs’s perpetual freshness in approaching his topic is not merely a quirk but a conscious feature, whereby his efforts to remain accessible

or to present observations his readers can also participate in are part of his books' distinctive design since "The novel, the extraordinary, the characteristic, the significant, always interest us. The human bore is a person who has no conception of what constitutes the interesting" (196). Such windows into his strategic appeals to readers are one way of interweaving his nature observations with literary criticism.

By 1919 and the publication of *Field and Study*, statements from Burroughs about shaping content would have likely recalled the Nature Faker Controversy for readers. But the fire had largely gone out of the debate. As Ralph Lutts has written in his book on the controversy, Burroughs's most focused pieces on the issue appeared in *Ways of Nature* and, though he weighed in a few more times, "By 1913, John Burroughs was weary of the controversy," during which he had sometimes been editorialized as a bully (187). Lutts also notes that "Despite all the noise and bluster, few changed their positions" (177). As a result, Burroughs has mostly cooled off in *Field and Study*, and only in a few spots can a reader see his subtle insistence he maintained throughout, that animals were guided by instinct. The essay on "The Song of Birds," for example, reasons through why bird song is not used as song in the human sense, and the "Study Notes" essay on "Nature and Natural History" makes some reminiscent, if qualified, statements such as "The bird at such times is a mere automaton, impelled by its inherited memory" that recall his earlier position. Rather than continue to call out writers behaving badly, he reverts to a more trusting position, as in "Nature Lore," where he assures parents and educators that children will learn and pursue facts if they are first let loose to experience: "It is time enough to answer children's questions when they are interested enough to ask them" (28). Seton even makes a brief appearance, but it is not a contentious one and fits alongside other examples of things other naturalists have observed that seem unlikely but bear out (31). Instead,

the mark of the controversy on *Field and Study* is the attention to repeated observation as a form of confirmation; maybe Burroughs couldn't disprove every astonishing account, but he could bolster his own writing through the virtue of repetition across instances and observers.

One of the exciting things about the way Dimock “restores to the text the possibility of agency in the world,” leading to her claim that “Any reading that tries to lock the text into a single posture—to impute to it a center and a teleology—can do so only through an act of historical repression, only by turning a temporal relation of multiple sedimentation into a spatial relation of either opposition or containment,” is her recognition of Gilman's story's “process of bringing into being [...] a figure constituted by a deliberate and enabling gap” (94-6).

Burroughs's essays may have found readers to fill that gap in his lifetime—the evidence is there to suggest that they did—but perhaps they can also bring into being these amateur readers anew, or model the process for new writers who read him, at a time when professionalization appears to draw a line between what we read and the more-than-human world we walk among. In an ironic turn, John Tallmadge's “Rediscovering John Burroughs” suggests that the ongoing development of the genre presents a different sort of expert reader that poses a problem for Burroughs: the expert reader of nature writing and, by extension, the professionalized reader of the ecocritic. Echoing McKibben and others who stress that a strong preference for sublimity has sidelined Burroughs in the taste of more recent readers in history, Tallmadge writes that: “Every reader brings a subjective background of experience and expectations to the encounter with any new text. If that background is shaped by wilderness writing, Burroughs is not likely to appeal. For starters, his *subject matter* is very different.” (167). The point of Tallmadge's essay is to advocate for Burroughs's rediscovery for exactly this reason; by returning to this writer for whom nature is more “comfort and refreshment” than spectacle, readers might find themselves

amateurs again in the genre they supposed they knew. Although he doesn't cite "The Invitation" specifically, such an argument echoes nicely Burroughs's own initiating unfamiliar-bird-in-familiar-woods moment and speaks to the continued enabling gaps that arise as readers themselves develop.

Confidence in Confidence Alone: Melville's Metafiction

"Metaphors? I hate metaphors. That's why my favorite book is Moby-Dick. No froufrou symbolism: just a good, simple tale about a man who hates an animal."

"Does the white whale actually symbolize the unknowability and meaningless of human existence? No, it's just a shitty fish."

- Ron Swanson (played by Nick Offerman) *Parks & Recreation*, "Flouride"

When Nick Offerman delivers the lines in my epigraph as the cantankerous Ron Swanson on the sitcom *Parks and Recreation*, the joke lands because almost any viewer of the show could be counted on to recognize how preposterous they are. As one of the perennial contenders for "The Great American Novel," *Moby-Dick* is nothing if not infamous for its status as a deeply (unfathomably) metaphoric novel allegorizing themes about Man and metaphysics not unlike "the unknowability and meaninglessness of human existence." The literary mantle conferred by the reclamation of *Moby-Dick* in the early decades of the twentieth century has created the expectation that this masterpiece is anything but "a good, simple tale." Ron Swanson misreads, and the bathetic conclusion that the White Whale is "just a shitty fish," conveyed by Offerman's characteristic deadpan acting, drives a humorous harpoon home into expectations about literary meaning.

The expectations wrapped up in the Swansonism have recently been explored in a special issue of *Representations* co-edited and introduced by Elaine Freedgood and Cannon Schmitt,

who write that “For literary readers, the categories of the denotative, literal, and technical do not, cannot, or should not exist” (1). Pointing out that much literary training assumes in one way that “language, above all literary language, never means what it says,” they explore the productive potential for denotative, literal, and technical reading to slow critical habits that have the effect of “leaving language unread” (3). Of course, Freedgood and Schmitt do not solely advocate these reading gestures—they write that part of the project would necessitate “a methodology for putting the literary, denotative, or technical in connection with other (figural, narrative, structural, ideological) elements of the text”—but their case for attending to “unread” elements of a text is a compelling one. Suddenly, Swanson seems more spot-on than silly.

Although Freedgood and Schmitt point out that “We do not use *Heart of Darkness* as a sailing manual or a handbook for the extraction of natural resources from colonized places, and we have no doubt that those who treat Thomas Hardy’s novels as travel guides to southwestern England are missing the point,” the opposite was expected for readers of so many of the “nature books,” from the flower manuals to the regionalist fiction that encouraged an emergent tourist economy (1).²⁶ In fact, Freedgood and Schmitt largely sidestep fictionality in their introduction, or else silently conflate with the literary (not as synonymous terms but perhaps unconsciously by way of the wider preference for the literary novel to nonfiction), as demonstrated when discussing Émile Zola’s *Germinal* and how “the fictional quality of the novel colonizes, overwrites the very part of it that Zola labored so hard to render what would later be called ‘naturalistic’” (2). Fiction *can* be naturalistic, so what they actually seem to mean here reverts to their contention with professional literary training more than fictionality itself. As such, the relationship between the literal and the fictional remains unexplained.

²⁶ I go into the topic of regionalist fiction in Chapter 2

To a surprising degree, ecocritics writing on *Moby-Dick* have offered examples of a literalizing move since before Freedgood and Schmitt's essay. Ecocritics who turned to Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* were, on one hand, making a corrective move, or perhaps a couple of related moves at once. As a scrappy bunch trying to attain disciplinary legitimacy in the early 2000s, ecocritics understood the legitimacy to be conferred from dealing capably with such an established novel. When Elizabeth Schultz complains, for example, that "Unlike his contemporaries, Ralph Waldo Emerson and, to a great degree, Henry David Thoreau, Melville has not been canonized by the Environmental Movement, by ecologists, or by nature writers of the late twentieth century," she lists collaborators in the production of literary historiography that my broader project is also exploring and questioning how those agents have determined Melville should not be read with the same literal relevance to environment as Emerson or Thoreau (97). Building partially off of Schultz, Lawrence Buell points out that this deficient status was the product of criticism that had tended, by and large, to treat nature in *Moby-Dick* (and, we might extrapolate, Melville's other works) figuratively, calling out that "Professional Melvillians are taught to suppose that to the extent this highly ornate, stylized, self-consciously metaliterary book has historical-material reference it must be to the management-labor dynamics of emerging industrial capitalism or to contemporary debates over slavery and expansionism; and that as for the whale-watching dimension of *Moby-Dick*, its engagement is with whales as symbols rather than with whaleness as such" (207).²⁷ In the call for attention to "whaleness as such" over more abstruse "historical-materialist reference," Buell sounds like an only slightly distorted echo here of Swanson's "froufrou symbolism" complaint and the call to read a little more literally. And so

²⁷ Buell does revise some of his ideas on *Moby-Dick* from *The Environmental Imagination in Writing for an Endangered World*.

successful have ecocritical correctives been that, barely two decades later, further work has made *not* considering *Moby Dick* as a whale now seem equally unthinkable.²⁸

Broader work on *Moby-Dick* also shares another move that both Schultz and Buell make. While Schultz's very first paragraph actually recognizes "a diversity of political and commercial ends to which Melville's novel is being put" in criticism, her own essay essentially forecloses that diversity in its effort to derive "an environmental position whereby nature and culture might co-exist" (98). The search for a "position" here (and "Vision" in her title) echoes Buell's *The Environmental Imagination*, where *Moby-Dick* is usually only referenced in passing but is marked early on as being exceptional yet still "too homocentric" (5). Buell writes on *Moby-Dick* again more substantially in his later *Writing for an Endangered World* where, after having read Schultz, he comes to a more generous assessment, examining Melville's treatment of various themes more than distilling a single reading or ideological stance (though at the chapter's end he does use a characteristic phrase like "Melville's imagination of excess"). Taking the whale literally, for these turn-of-the-millennium studies, meant reading *Moby-Dick* for a compelling lesson in environmental ethics (differently or broadly construed).

For similar reasons, *Moby-Dick* was also an exception made by John Elder and Robert Finch while putting together *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*. In their revised 2002 Introduction for the anthology, they draw an uneasy line between fiction and nonfiction in the genre, finding that "nature writing fulfills the essay's purpose of *connection*" against the abstraction of contemporary fiction and literary theory. Although they seem to recognize the distinction is tenuous, they write that "Still, the purposes of fiction differ sufficiently from those of nonfiction that, with a few unabashed exceptions, we have chosen to exclude excerpts from

²⁸ In ecocriticism, articles make this move across areas such as animal studies, food studies, energy humanities, materialisms, and others.

novels” (27). Their willingness to include *Moby-Dick* nonetheless reinforces the trend of reading this specific novel literally with this purpose of connection to oceans, whales, or both. To be sure, there were decades of precedent associating this novel with nature writing. Archibald MacMechan, an essential early advocate of Melville’s²⁹ who paved the way for the larger revival, ends his famous essay on it as follows:

This book is at once the epic and the encyclopaedia of whaling. It is a monument to the honour of an extinct race of daring seamen; but it is a monument overgrown with the lichen of neglect. Those who will care to scrape away the moss may be few, but they will have their reward. To the class of gentleman-adventurer, to those who love both books and free life under the wide and open sky, it must always appeal. Melville takes rank with Borrow, and Jefferies, and Thoreau, and Sir Richard Burton; and his place in this brotherhood of notables is not the lowest. Those who feel the salt in their blood that draws them time and again out of the city to the wharves and the ships, almost without their knowledge or their will; those who feel the irresistible lure of the spring, away from the cramped and noisy town, up the long road to the peaceful companionship of the awaking earth and the untainted sky; all those—and they are many—will find in Melville’s great book an ever fresh and constant charm. (MacMechan 197)

Reading Melville to appreciate a walk by the sea? MacMechan must clearly have been unhip to the ocean’s obvious stand-in for the continental space of Manifest Destiny or the randomness of life. Sarcasm aside, it is refreshing to see a work like *Moby-Dick* written about as if it might move, or here “lure,” readers anywhere, and MacMechan’s imagined lover of “both books and free life under the wide and open sky” expresses the possibility of a bookishness that holds both together, which later literal treatments of the novel don’t necessarily carry forward.

Instead, the tendencies involved in recent academic literal readings of *Moby-Dick* more or less codified the argument by Patrick Murphy’s *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature*, a study that was highly influential in the critical field and that remains the

²⁹ For an account of MacMechan’s role, see Kennedy and Kennedy. Fascinatingly, but also perhaps unsurprisingly for my larger argument, MacMechan also wrote the chapter on Henry David Thoreau for the *Cambridge History of American Literature*.

ecocritical study that most explicitly thinks about fictionality. The reason this book wrestles with fictionality is largely because one of its main efforts was to expand ecocriticism's then-focus on nonfiction works by making a case for novels; Murphy advocates for novels on the basis that doing so will open the field of inquiry to more diverse voices than grow out of the natural-history-to-nature-writing trajectory. To his credit, Murphy is explicit about what he is doing and what he means when he articulates why ecocritics should study more novels. Picking up on a Kenneth-Burkean line, for example, he writes that "Fiction, particularly in the extended form of the novel, can generate a story that provides intellectual equipment for living and display the effect that such information can have on human lives as represented by fictional characters" (25). To this, he adds, "Literature also answers the question by constructing narratives of how various individuals have learned, or failed to learn, how to live in ecologically sensitive ways," and the full interest in his rhetorical conception of fiction becomes clear in a further statement like "But a reader is often less likely to resist a novel's themes than those of a nonfictional work that is more overtly didactic than a novel" (25-26). His argument, in other words, concerns novels with explicitly environmental themes that can be read literally for "ecologically sensitive" lessons while bypassing the critical scruples of readers. As I argue in this chapter, Murphy's is a misguided argument.³⁰ It is also, within the category of nature writing, exactly what disturbed John Burroughs and eventually set off the Nature Faker Controversy; if *Moby-Dick* incorporates a significant amount of natural history, that makes it worse, not better, for readers might not successfully discern what in the work is fact and not fiction—or to return to MacMechan's words, what is "encyclopedia" and what is "the epic." To the extent that, as I argued earlier, the

³⁰ And, I would add though it is not my main claim here, an argument that has reaped its karmic sowing in the general scientific illiteracy of the public. The race for the pill that swallows easiest is a race to the bottom. There is also something smarmy about circumventing resistance this way.

Nature Fakers Controversy was about readers and reading, it wanted, like Elder and Finch, to delimit purposes for fiction and nonfiction and warn against literal reading in fiction. Burroughs objected to the description of birds teaching their young to fly not because it was a bad metaphor but because he worried only expert readers could distinguish the actual from the anthropomorphizing devices of writers seeking to entertain.

The reception history of *Moby-Dick* has much to offer a study of the relationship between the literal and fictional, and it makes sense that ecocritics have been drawn to *Moby-Dick*, since it had already received attention as a canonical work for the relations of American culture and Nature in such studies as Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*, but I turn now to a different work of Melville's, *The Confidence-Man, His Masquerade* (1857), for several reasons. From the standpoint of fictionality broadly, *The Confidence-Man* makes for a compelling text to think about in part because the Nature Faker Controversy invoked at times precisely the language that writers were trying to con their readers, producing content that was more appealing than true in order to sell more books. Of the sham natural histories, Burroughs wrote, "I discredit them as I do any other glaring counterfeit, or any poor imitation of an original, or as I would discredit a story of my friend that was not in keeping with what I knew of his character," and—asking why these writers insisted on publishing as nonfiction instead of marking their invention, asks, "Why should any one palm off such stuff on an unsuspecting public as veritable natural history?" (308). Because *The Confidence-Man* consists of instances of conning members of the "unsuspecting public" and reflections on fictionality itself, it presents a less-traveled and perhaps more sustained case for working through these questions.

The Confidence-Man is also amenable to thinking about the literal since its difficulty as a text has led many of its critical readers to engage it in non-literal terms. By presenting a literal

alternative to some of the more allegorical strains of its criticism while simultaneously not honing in on explicit environmental themes, I present an alternative example of what it looks like to read parts of a text literally toward ecocritical ends that differs from the model of Murphy's "environmental writing" dependent upon content to extract a theme. My rationale for doing so comes partly from the fact that thematic and allegorical readings, while perfectly permissible in their own right, mark specific kinds of readers: professional, critical readers. As Freedgood and Schmitt note, their call is specifically to redress habituated forms of "literary" reading that leave other content "unread." *The Confidence-Man's* metafictional passages in particular lead me to understand Melville as guarded toward such readers. As I provide my own readings of these metafictional passages, I offer critics past and present as points of contrast.

The outcome of my reading of this long and complex novel is an argument for reading fiction that answers some of the concerns raised during the Nature Fakers Controversy. I side with Melville critics who argue that, despite a long critical tradition that treats Melville as having a contentious relationship with the marketplace that slid into deep cynicism, Melville retained some optimism that his works would meet with appreciative readers. Melville may have been largely disappointed in his time, but the reader of fiction who emerges from his final work seems well poised, I argue, to negotiate questions about truth, fiction, and nature that promote readers' capacity to reason toward wider public good. The kinds of reasoning and reading involved in interpreting this difficult novel is what makes it useful for ecocriticism; whether this use value is greater than the value of a thematic study surely depends on the individual work, but my argument is that existing ecocriticism's predominant reliance on, for lack of a better term, "environmental content" has inherited the Nature Fakers Controversy's discomfort with

fictionality. Consequently, my study of Melville's novel intends to open up ecocritical rationales and methods for reading fiction.

The Confidence-Man now enjoys an as-good or better status within Melville's corpus than it ever has, thanks to the changing fates of critical preference. A long tradition of Melville biography, which Brian Yothers has helpfully surveyed, has seen the bulk of Melville's composition after *Moby-Dick* and the disappointment of *Pierre* as less important, disgruntled, or inferior. As reading through nineteenth-century reviews of *The Confidence-Man* reveals, this is just a little off from the criticism of Melville's contemporaries, which actually tended to see everything after his Pacific Island-focused books *Typee* and *Omoo* as drifting toward obscurity. Yet James Machor notes in his survey of Melville's novels' reception that "Despite the steady decline in his status, however, Melville was not ready to admit defeat by either giving up on fiction or relinquishing his desire to reach a diverse and democratically broad audience," and even the baffling *Confidence-Man* eventually found its uptick in readership a century later in the 1960s and '70s, as John Bryant notes (Machor 193; Bryant 334). Bryant credits Richard Chase's "Melville's *The Confidence Man*" as chiefly responsible for the perceptual shift from unruly final failure to "Melville's 'second best book' and the subject of over one hundred articles and monographs" (Bryant 334). Melville criticism that's not on *Moby-Dick* has actually been increasingly occupied with the shorter works—"Benito Cereno," "Bartleby the Scrivener," *Billy Budd*—but *The Confidence-Man* is probably more widely read now than *White-Jacket* or *Mardi*.

Bryant's state-of-the-field essay on *The Confidence-Man* as Melville's "Problem Novel" also points out that, "so complex is this work that it is even difficult to render a reasonable plot summary without in some sense betraying one's interpretive biases" (316). His own approach is to give a chapter-by-chapter summary that is useful but too long to reproduce here. Thus, a

provisional summary I would offer of the work (which some critics have resisted calling a novel from the beginning³¹) is that it follows a series of conversations that take place on a Mississippi steamboat over the course of a day, and that their conversations all include one or another of figures listed by a “grotesque negro cripple” that feature issues of truth and charity introduced in the first chapters.

The plot of *The Confidence-Man* takes place from sunrise to sundown. And not just any day, but April Fool’s Day. But who is a fool can be an ambiguous thing to define, and while most readers are likely to recognize that the “first of April” is a significant detail, there are at least three candidates to consider, though readings of the novel seldom seem to take all three equally seriously. Most immediately, the fool might actually be the “man in cream-colors” himself, since he is the subject of this setting-establishing sentence. The other possibility, of course, as the first chapter moves on from there, is that the fools are the crowds who immediately take to noticing this perhaps out-of-place figure: “From the shrugged shoulders, titters, whispers, wonderings of the crowd, it was plain that he was, in the extremest sense of the word, a stranger” to them (841). Finally, since the detail’s narration makes it noticeable to readers of the narrative what is not apparent to characters within it, the third option is that this detail functions as a warning to readers themselves, who are at risk of being duped in some way. That all three are in play to some degree is borne out by the rest of the first chapter, which continues to foreground reading itself by introducing a set of three texts: the “wanted” placard, the Mute’s slate, and the barber’s sign. While various readings of the novel tend to focus on one of these more than the others or zip past this chapter on their way to the third, I argue that attending to this chapter provides a crucial orientation to the overall novel.

³¹ See, for example, the Troy *Budget*: “It is not a novel. It wants the connection, the regular plot and great part of the machinery that is found in the regular novel” (Higgins and Parker 497).

The first of these texts, the notice of “a reward for the capture of a mysterious impostor,” promotes skepticism through ambiguity and association. Despite being posted near the captain’s office, which might seem like a position of authority, the notice unreliably indicates only that the impostor’s origins are “supposed,” his actual methods of deception are “not clearly given,” and it ends with only “what purported to be a careful description” (841). For many critics, the notice provides the prompting to discover the elusive criminal within the cast of characters. The apparent singularity of the Mute is perhaps enough—for some readers, has been—to suppose the Mute and the impostor are the same. This inference derives further support later in the chapter from description of the Mute as, “Though neither soiled nor slovenly, [wearing a suit with] a tossed look, almost linty, as if, traveling night and day from some far country beyond the prairies, he had long been without the solace of a bed,” which aligns implicitly with the description of the impostor’s “supposed” hailing from the East (844). Further, descriptions of the Mute as “lamb-like” may also tip off readers who, from the title onward, have been on the lookout for wolves in sheep’s clothing. Yet, infamously, the novel has frustrated efforts on this point. The most common reading is that the Mute is only the first of several iterations of the titular confidence man who, as per the second part of the novel’s title, “His Masquerade,” is supposed to take on many faces. However logical this inference may seem, it also necessitates an extra-logical concession, because there is at least one detail to controvert it, which is that the Mute comes aboard the steamer having “neither trunk, valise, carpet-bag, nor parcel” and no porters or friends (841). If the Mute is one and the same with the other figures, then he either produces his other costumes by magic or by other unexplained means. The initial description of his appearance as “suddenly as Manco Capac at the lake Titicaca” seems to support the suggestion that something mystical is going on, but it also supports the Mute-as-imposter theory,

as Melville might be referencing Joel Barlow's accounts of the Inca narratives, in which Manco "is treated as a man only pretending to be a descendant of the sun" (Parker and Niemeyer 9 n.2). As this simile is the only support for finding anything magical at work in the first chapter, these interpretations rely on reading forward into the book to make sense.

What to make of these details seems clarified for me, at least, by the crowd's reaction to the reward poster. The crowd does not seem concerned with the vagueness of the poster that the narration mentions: "As if it had been a theatre-bill, [the] crowds were gathered about the announcement, and among them certain chevaliers, whose eyes, it was plain, were on the capitals, or at least, earnestly seeking sight of them from behind intervening coats" (841). Amid the crowd is a bookseller:

still another versatile chevalier, hawked, in the thick of the throng, the lives of Meason, the bandit of Ohio, Murrel, the pirate of the Mississippi, and the brothers Harpe, the Thugs of the Green River country, in Kentucky—creatures, with others of the sort, one and all exterminated at the time, and for the most part, like the hunted generations of wolves in the same regions, leaving comparatively few successors; which would seem cause for unalloyed gratulation, and is such to all except those who think that in new countries, where the wolves are killed off, the foxes increase. (841-2)

This simile will recall for some Aldo Leopold's famous anecdote of wolf hunting and the dying green fire in a wolf's eye; like that more famous ecological lesson, the point here is a false sense of what constitutes public benefit. The eradication of certain famously dangerous outlaws of the West has only given way to a variety of small-time hucksters and con-artists, or in this case sly foxes, so the expected "cause for unalloyed gratulation" only gives way to a worse problem through the interconnection of species within a region (or, to flip back to Melville's metaphor, economic opportunists). The narrator doesn't say whether this bookseller is having success, though clearly the "throng" loves these flashy stories. Critics of the novel have passed over this simile, but I see it as indicative not simply because it discusses a missed threat but because it

indicates a plural, distributed danger instead of a singular one. It fits well with Hershel Parker's assessment that "*The Confidence-Man* was a dazzlingly comprehensive indictment of American confidence on a national scale" (Parker "The Confidence Man's Masquerade" 299). In my interpretation, the confidence-man of the title is the wolf on the poster, whose singularity and absence allows for all of the narrative's foxes, so the exploration of "confidence" in the novel becomes "comprehensive" by dint of the mixed and spread ways confidence is invoked rather than clustering in one shape-shifting figure.

My own reading of the deaf mute depends on the crowd's response to the wanted notice, but it is helpful to account for the other two initial texts the chapter presents. The Mute stands next to the notice with a slate upon which he writes a series of moral maxims, for example, "Charity thinketh no evil" (842). The crowd has no patience with this interference in reading the notice, so they literally "jostle" and later "thrust [the Mute] aside" (842). The Mute's message delivered next to the reward notice where "they who read the one might read the other" conflicts with or even contradicts the appeal of the reward notice, asking readers to give where they've come attracted to an opportunity for taking. I am arguing critics have likewise been taken in by the appeal of the reward notice, missing the fine print by focusing on the capitals (and the title page).

The narration makes the irony of this dismissiveness even more explicit with the contrast to the third text of the barber's sign that reads "No Trust." It means "cash only," but its position near the end of this chapter also has some weight given the context of a con man potentially on the loose. Those who remember the imperative in *Moby-Dick* to strike through the pasteboard mask will likely notice that this sign is described as "a gaudy sort of illuminated pasteboard" (483), but the comment following the introduction of this sign put up "for the public benefit"

muses that, “though in a sense not less intrusive than the ones of the stranger, did not, as it seemed, provoke any corresponding derision or surprise, much less indignation; and still less, to all appearances, did [the sign] gain for the inscriber the repute of being a simpleton” (844). The contrast in the crowd’s reaction to the Mute’s slate and the barber’s sign—one found to be irritating versus the other barely worth notice—puts the question of the “public benefit” up for the reader’s consideration indeed, as the implication is that even these ironically dubbed “chevaliers” find generosity burdensome whereas they view the merchant’s distrust an acceptable social norm. These three embedded texts and the crowd’s reactions to them present an early warning about the need for readers to make independent judgments that consider such things as detail, motivation, and context. The crowd’s moves to “thrust aside” dissidence and misjudge one sign relative to another presents the paradox that the popular and the “public benefit” do not necessarily align.

This reading of the novel’s social dynamics differs with Matt Seybold’s, with which I otherwise share starting premises and criticisms of other unsatisfactory readings of the novel. Seybold’s own reader-focused analysis of the novel is persuasive for the way it attends to how many existing readings of the novel, out of an “anxiety of identification” that emerges from the “risk of ‘misreading’” such an ambiguous text, have succumbed to an emphatic drive to decode that produces elaborate allegories and roman-à-clef conspiracy theories (77). Seybold and I also agree fundamentally that “To no small degree, embedded within the novel is a theory of its own reception” (82). Where he and I somewhat differ begins with his statement that “The potential that each character in the novel is a confidence man has often been remarked upon, yet the implicit logic of that construction, that it is equally possible that no character is the confidence man because there is no confidence-man, is often overlooked and cannot be overstated” (80). In

Seybold's account, readers have taken the title's bait and been fooled into a mode of suspicion that, as he points out, is modeled by characters in the novel and "generally revealed to be indicative of naïveté, solipsism, and delusion" (82). For Seybold, a guarded stance toward the text amounts to a "paranoia" readers mistakenly come to share with the characters, and this paranoia's antisocial implications are the novel's target—the joke is that readers fall for it.

I am arguing along with Seybold that there is no *single* confidence man, and that attempts to jerry-rig (only) one arise from habits that expect a specific kind of coherence from long-form narrative, but I see his reading as self-defeating. A phrase such as "*The Confidence-Man* creates conflict between the illusion of authorial intention and the elusion of critical interpretation" is clever and appealing, but Seybold has to contort into an odd position to argue that Melville is consciously exposing the intentional fallacy; by his argument's end, Seybold's otherwise thoughtful reader-oriented approach then goes further than am willing to (74-75, 88). That is, his own mostly excellent reading suggests that better readings of the novel *are* possible, and such readings still remain tethered to the text and its design. One factor in the direction of his reading is his characterization of Melville as "increasingly misanthropic," which I noted above is not the consensus of Melville scholars including Machor and Yothers, the latter of whom points out, "Melville's works were never without perceptive and appreciative reviewers" (Yothers 7).

While I agree with Seybold that a singular confidence man is evacuated from the central position announced by the title, my reading of the wolves and foxes metaphor suggests that every character is a crook but that readers need to be judicious about consequences. As various critics trying to make the novel cohere have noted with perplexity, not every prevailing on characters' confidence in the novel is good or bad—this is the surprising ambivalence of the word 'confidence.' This provides the basis for my reading of the three metafictional interludes in the

novel, which extend the conversations to reading fiction itself. As Melville does take jabs at criticisms made of his previous novels, I want to close my analysis of those chapters by countering these professional critic readers with, if not an amateur per se, an open and independent-minded reader very like an amateur. Seybold was on the right track, I think, with the point he makes briefly that the text “asks every reader to be his or her own protagonist”; rather than count on the authority of groups, of truisms, or of critics, the reader needs to have confidence in his or her own judgment. To write such a novel, Melville himself must have had at least *some* confidence (87).

Melville’s attitude toward these readers can be gleaned by reading even the titles of these three chapters, which in their tautologies articulate the value of reading difficult things. In order the titles of Chapters 14, 33, and 44 are “Worth the Consideration of Those to Whom it May Prove Worth Considering,” “Which May Pass for Whatever It May Prove to Be Worth,” and then “In Which the Last Three Words of the Last Chapter Are Made the Text of Discourse, Which Will Be Sure of Receiving More or Less Attention from Those Readers Who Do Not Skip It” (913, 1037, 1097). All three feature circular reasoning, and unwinding them slows the reader down. In each case, the message establishes the value of books from their actual reading. Of course, chapter titles often don’t need to be read at all—if readers are reading the main text and skip over the titles, it’s no problem. The more interesting case is whether these intertitles, because they announce the worth of the chapters’ content, manage to stop readers who do *not* read the whole text. That these titles would be among the core content that even such a reader would get from the text suggests how important they are to the overall design of the novel and also Melville’s supposition that readers who take time to get the jokes would stop, read, and understand.

By Chapter 14, the first of the metafictional interludes, readers have encountered various passengers of the *Fidèle*, one of whom was designated by the “grotesque negro cripple” of Chapter 3 as “a ge'mman wid a big book”—that is, a merchant with a ledger. In the chapter immediately before it, the merchant exhibits an unexplained turn in mood, and this is what Chapter 14 pauses to remark upon. Specifically, it anticipates a criticism from readers regarding the merchant's previous actions as contradicting prior expectations; the author, these critics could complain, would show weak control of his characters by their being so inconsistent. The narrator, speaking for/as “the author,” makes the case that his fiction is not to be “blamed” on these counts because, as a realistic fiction, it actually does a better job representing the oddity and inconsistencies of readers' reality—objecting readers would be making inconsistent claims about what they want, thus de facto proving the point. Put differently, readers cannot both espouse that “fiction based on fact should never be contradictory to it” and then demand that characters always behave like consistent and predictable people. At this logjam, readers must negotiate their critical principles.

By asking, “is it not a fact, that, in real life, a consistent character is a *rara avis*?” (a rare bird³²), the narrator sets up a series of references to unlikely natural history, from flying squirrels to butterfly metamorphosis, that many analyses of the novel leave, to return to Freedgood and Schmitt, “unread”—despite the fact that almost all arguments about the novel deal with these

³² This Latinism presents an interesting aperture for the metafictional play occurring here, especially alongside the other natural history examples that follow. In such a satirical novel, we might guess this raises an allusion to Juvenal's *Satires* (6.165): “*rara avis in terriis nigroque simillium cycno,*” or “a bird as rare upon the earth as a black swan” (Wiktionary.org). The irony here, fitting with his argument, is that what Juvenal didn't know in the second century C.E. is that black swans do in fact exist in Australia—a wider view of global natural history had brought this to light. If it weren't for the platypus passage also raising the challenges of Australian fauna, such a connection would seem farfetched. As it stands, my sense is that this deepens the commentary on realistic fiction but does not invalidate the point about criticism.

metafictional chapters. Understanding these references at the literal level is a prerequisite for understanding their figurative significance. For example, there is a passage that discusses, without naming, that oddity of oddities—the platypus:

If reason be judge, no writer has produced such inconsistent characters as nature herself has. It must call for no small sagacity in a reader unerringly to discriminate in a novel between the inconsistencies of conception and those of life. As elsewhere, experience is the only guide here; but as no one man's experience can be coextensive with what is, it may be unwise in every case to rest upon it. When the duck-billed beaver of Australia was first brought stuffed to England, the naturalists, appealing to their classification, maintained that there was, in reality, no such creature; the bill in the specimen must needs be, in some way, artificially stuck on. (914)

It's easy to read right past this paragraph, especially if one understands its basic idea: the idea here summed up in the modern phrase, attributed to Lord Byron, that truth is sometimes stranger than fiction. But the more slowly one breaks down the passage, the more the commentaries on reading take on. In fact, the second sentence's use of litotes, "no small sagacity," ties to another in the chapter on reading too quickly: "But if the acutest sage be often at his wits' ends to understand living character, shall those who are not sages expect to run and read character in those mere phantoms which flit along a page, like shadows on a wall?" (913). The sages this particular paragraph are the English naturalists, who found themselves at "wits' end" when presented with the curious marsupial, since it defied "their classification." Even in professional science, it seems, there are suspicions of being tricked (presumably by taxidermists, though the passive construction of "needs be, in some way, artificially stuck on" leaves open the destabilization of nature introduced in the first sentence as "herself" doing creative work). On a literal level, then, the passage calls out the fallibility of experts.

But the naturalists are of course here stand-in sages for readers. They perform the overhasty judgment laid out in the second sentence between differentiating bad art

(“inconsistencies of conception”) and truth that is difficult to accept because it is foreign to experience (“those of life”)—in the case of the platypus, treating the latter as the former.

Particularly complex then is the third sentence, where experience is conceded as “the only guide” and yet found unreliable. It’s fitting that Melville invokes the generic language of the “novel,” here, because what this situation describes is the encounter of novelty—which novels as a form might seem on one hand to promise even as they have become standardized or classifiable. If a novel is true to life, or “nature,” then it will challenge and surprise its readers with a perspective unlike their own. As this parsing of this single paragraph from a three-page chapter shows, the chapter is, as its tautological title announces, “Worth the consideration of those to whom it may prove worth considering”—that is, it rewards careful reading.

Matt Laufer, also writing on Melville’s relationship to his reader, likewise highlights the running and reading phrase, finding it also in Melville’s *Piazza Tales* and tracing it to the Bible. His thought about this phrase, like mine, is that Melville wants to curtail readings “that pretend, out of hasty, presumptuous, or overly active reading (reading that overwrites what is actually there)” (22). Yet Laufer, like Seybold, extends this to conclude that Melville “did not trust his readers with the difficult and heterodox material he presented to them” (17). It’s true that, as passages that make some jokes at authorities’ expense, Melville’s metafictional interludes demonstrate that he fully expected not all critics *will* be what Laufer calls “a discerning reader.” And, of course, what Melville actually thought is inaccessible to scholars today directly. But Laufer’s conclusion strikes me as begging the question. If Melville didn’t trust his readers, why write this massive novel and “present[it] to them”? It seems like a pretty elaborate and costly way to be resentful.

Melville follows up Chapter 14 with Chapter 33, “Which May Pass for Whatever it May Prove to be Worth.” This chapter echoes its predecessor and even directly refers readers to it as it closes. Like that chapter, too, it pauses the larger narrative’s progress, but this time considers fiction’s telos. Here, the interlude follows a sequence of chapters where the cosmopolitan solicits another passenger, Charlie, for some money and has just feigned to practice a necromancy ceremony to recover Charlie’s friendship after Charlie rebuffs the request for money. Chapter 33 anticipates “a certain voice which methinks I hear” objecting to these strange “antics” that the interlude offers to address. “Unreal,” critics might say. Chapter 33 answers by pointing out the strangeness that “this severe fidelity to real life should be exacted by any one, who, by taking up such a work, sufficiently shows that he is not unwilling to drop real life, and turn, for a time, to something different” or put differently “that any one should clamor for the thing he is weary of” (1037). This paradox further opens out a new and complex paragraph:

There is another class, and with this class we side, who sit down to a work of amusement tolerantly as they sit at a play, and with much the same expectations and feelings. They look that fancy shall evoke scenes different from those of the same old crowd round the custom-house counter, and same old dishes on the boarding-house table, with characters unlike those of the same old acquaintances they meet in the same old way every day in the same old street. And as, in real life, the proprieties will not allow people to act out themselves with that unreserved permitted to the stage; so, in books of fiction, they look not only for more entertainment, but, at bottom, even for more reality, than real life itself can show. Thus, though they want novelty, they want nature, too; but nature unfettered, exhilarated, in effect transformed. In this way of thinking, the people in a fiction, like the people in a play, must dress as nobody exactly dresses, talk as nobody exactly talks, act as nobody exactly acts. It is with fiction as with religion: it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie. (1037)

On the simplest level, this paragraph is about the suspension of disbelief, though the association of religion with fiction and theater at the paragraph’s close adds a little bite to the point—perhaps since the readers most likely to object to the preceding necromantic episode would be Christians upset by any sort of magic. But if Chapter 14 presented the reminder of truths stranger than

fiction, this chapter adds that fiction has the capacity to evoke truth precisely through its capacity for departure from the actual, or what it allows to be acted out. This is of most value to the reader whose life is characterized by sameness.

The critical judgment targeted here corresponds with criticism Melville had received since his earliest books, *Typee* and *Omoo*, about the “dualism registered (especially in his early career) as a tension between fact and fancy” (Blum 16). Certainly, that interpretation rings truer than Carolyn Lury Karcher’s take on this chapter, on which she bases her interpretation of the whole novel. One of the allegorist critics of *The Confidence-Man*, Karcher argues that the interludes “identify the fictional representation of human reality with the mystical representation of divine reality; they define the representation of reality as the truest kind of reality; they ultimately redefine every detail in the book” (75). Her argument proceeds to read the chapter after this interlude as a complex commentary on reality infused with Christian allegory—a reading only a professional literary scholar might derive. I reject this reading on more than one basis, but not least among them is that this chapter does not suggest “the representation of reality as the truest reality”; that claim misreads Melville’s point that fiction lets readers imagine more than they can usually know. To say that something affords special access to truths does not mean that it is the truest. Melville does not confuse the stage and “the same old street”—he is clear that the reader relates them through the felt “tie.”

In keeping with the previous two discursive metafictional chapters, Chapter 44 engages errors of judgment prevalent in the evaluation of fiction. The challenge of this final metafictional chapter comes at the expense of the fiction-reader’s expectation of originality—it’s an argument that proponents of Melville as a Byronic Romantic and as the creator of Captain Ahab as one of literature’s most memorable characters might find bewildering. Yet the argument about creativity

being leveled here is not that there is no such thing but that “originality” is a misnomer for it and thus a misleading focus in criticism; rather, the distinction or memorability of most fiction, this interlude argues, comes from how it pulls from and evokes the author’s observations from life. Originality, it notes, identifies the reader more than the writer: “‘Quite an original!’ A phrase, we fancy, rather oftener used by the young, or the unlearned, or the untraveled, than by the old, or the well-read, or the man who has made the grand tour. Certainly, the sense of originality exists at its highest in an infant, and probably at its lowest in him who has completed the circle of the sciences” (1097). The amateur here, variously “young,” “unlearned,” or “untraveled”—as was the risk with nature faking—is more vulnerable for having less experience. With more experience, one realizes how rare, if indeed possible at all, originality is: “As for original characters in fiction, a grateful reader will, on meeting one, keep the anniversary of the day. Even the examples of original characters, Hamlet, Don Quixote, and Milton’s Satan, are not, in a thorough sense, original at all. They are novel, or singular, or striking, or captivating, or all four at once” (1097). This might seem like mere semantic parsing, but the point is that these terms carry fewer implications of springing fully formed from the writer’s mind; “striking” and “captivating,” for example, typically have the reader and not the writer as their grammatical object, thus marking the critic in the criticism.

Going on to say instead that authors come up with their characters based on who they encounter “in town,” Melville continues to deflate the concept of originality by making a metaphoric joke about cattle followed by serious points about history. “Every great town is a kind of man-show,” Melville starts, “where the novelist goes for his stock, just as the agriculturist goes to the cattle-show for his. But in the one fair, new species of quadrupeds are hardly more rare, than in the other are new species of characters—that is, original ones.” Now,

surely, the characters of great fiction are more than bovine. But it's not the only species reference here. Invoking biology even more directly, he adds, "There would seem but one point in common between [original characters] in fiction and all other sorts: it cannot be borne in the author's imagination—it being true in literature as in zoology, that all life is from the egg" (1098). Besides having its possible roots in Melville's awareness of Darwin,³³ this invocation of zoological speciation alongside the cattle metaphor works to demystify originality by invoking science, such that representation comes to have something of a genealogy. According to this interlude, truly original characters require "original instincts," or wholly new ways of thinking by an author, and that's hard to come by.

This third interlude is an interesting one for criticism of the novel in that those who have interpreted all its various characters as one shape-shifting and even devilish figure would credit Melville with having produced an original character, indeed. For example, the *Springfield Republican*, which found that "Under various disguises [Melville] introduces the same character who, in some form or other, is engaged evermore in cheating," judged the book "the oddest, most unique, and the most ingenious thing he has yet done" (501). On the other hand, criticism from the time it was published has expressed interest in Melville's invocation of the confidence man as an American type, making it (taking the idea of a type press literally) the opposite of original. The *Troy Daily Whig*, despite also treating the string of major characters as "varying forms of the confidence man," begins with appreciating that Melville has captured the elusive and wide-ranged species of the confidence man for observation, and its praise falls less on Melville's creativity and instead writes that Melville has valuably "put him in a book" (Hayes 91).

³³ For more on Melville's early awareness of Darwin, see *America's Darwin*, edited by Tina Gianquitto and Lydia Fisher.

More recently, another character from the novel has attracted attention beyond the possible iterations of the titular confidence man; that is, the Indian Hater Colonel Moredock had already drawn critical attention since the work of Elizabeth S. Foster putting together the Constable Edition of Melville's works, who identified Chapters twenty-six and twenty-seven as "the turning-point of the novel at its symbolical level and the apex of the whole argument" (472). Later, the influential Melvillian scholar and biographer Hershel Parker (Choctaw/Cherokee) would concur with the allegorical reading Foster began, and he further argued that, although the Indians were the treacherous villains of the allegory, the episode was not Indian hating on Melville's part.³⁴ This line of argument is eyebrow-raising by itself but made more so by Parker's headnote to a section of the Norton Edition of the novel he prepared, in which he identifies as part Choctaw and Cherokee. Although he acknowledges that "Melville had not intuited the possibility that real American Indians might ever be among his readers," he defends Melville's allegory partly on the basis of Melville's transformation of existing subject material and partly by suggesting that Parker himself "had grown up knowing about worse wrongs than using race allegorically" (470). More recently, the writer Leslie Marmon Silko, addressing the Melville Society Conference, also took up *The Confidence-Man*, crediting Melville's Colonel Moredock, who she reads as representative of Andrew Jackson, for inspiring the character

³⁴ This paragraph of this chapter remains confessedly incomplete and promissory. I have spent more than one afternoon staring at these sources and not being quite sure what I make of them, though they are fascinating documents of Melville's reception and marked by the particularities of both Parker and Silko as responders. I welcome questions to provoke my thinking further or that question whether they seem like too great a stretch to fit here. Parker's response is problematic to me in that he invokes his heritage only to disavow its importance: "I was being paid to go to school, and my duty as I saw it was to understand Melville, not to intrude my personal history into *The Confidence-Man*" (470). Meanwhile, Silko gestures toward Parker's interpretation, but her link to Jackson departs from strict interpretation of the novel to riff on other matters—actually reversing what Parker stipulates and speculating that Melville's novel may have intruded into her personal history.

Menardo in her *Almanac of the Dead* (Silko). Although there is much to say about these paired responses, I note them here as following partly from the point in the third metafictional interlude that readers' experience plays into critical evaluation such as originality. Although neither Parker nor Silko sees Moredock as wholly original, Parker as a professional critic reduces Moredock to a type while Silko as a member of the producing side of the literary profession sees a more original in the character that lends itself to the genealogy of one of her own characters.

If what the novel's three metafictional interludes propose is valid, then an unlikely extrapolation may present itself: reading more fiction is a more likely route to help readers better negotiate their awareness of the fictional and the actual. Chapters 14 and 33 especially, in their clarifications that true life is more inconsistent than most fiction and that fiction's access to truth stems from imagination's capacity to fill in gaps in understanding that experience cannot, are commentaries on how readers can understand their "tie" to their "world" better. This works best, Melville writes, if the expectations of realistic narrative were to bend more to the ways of the inconsistent world readers find off-page:

it may be considered that, after poring over the best novels professing to portray human nature, the studious youth will still run risk of being too often at fault upon actually entering the world; whereas, had he been furnished with a true delineation, it ought to fare with him something as with a stranger entering, map in hand, Boston town; the streets may be very crooked, he may often pause; but, thanks to his true map, he does not hopelessly lose his way. (915)

Key here is the irony of "professing." Melville here is continuing his argument that most fictions, in conforming to unities of character, are actually more fictitious, whatever the professed realism, than a "true delineation" where characters display inconsistencies. In the navigational idiom: showing the crooked map may confuse the wanderer a little for the actual complexity, but this is ultimately preferable to the confusion of seeing straight representations of a crooked world. Murphy's "environmental writing" has also professed to portray environmental concerns

the best because of the direct connection it has, but my counterclaim is that a “crooked” novel like *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* may have as much or more to offer. Drawing again from these interludes, fiction’s advantage derives from its capacity to present novelty. Melville’s point that “experience is the only guide” means that presenting readers with the exercise of deliberating over content that falls outside their experience, or “discriminate in a novel between the inconsistencies of conception and those of life,” builds a muscle that nonfiction usually does not.

By contrast, Murphy’s criticism of “the fiction of nonfictionality,” not only does not help the impasse faced by the nature faker critics but would exacerbate it. “The fiction of nonfictionality consists,” he writes, “not so much of the belief that information can be presented in some unmediated way, but rather of the treatment of works that are labeled nonfiction as if they contain no fabrications and the pretense that objective facts when personally experienced have greater validity than speculations or fictive events in representing natural processes or generating truth” (50). Setting aside momentarily that this argument actually implodes Murphy’s preference for fiction since, if both fiction and nonfiction are constructed and bound within particular points of view, fiction would not have any advantage for delivering creative stories, this argument perniciously reinforces the doubts John Burroughs worried about regarding experience becoming disconnected from the evaluation of truth. It is possible to appreciate the constructions of nonfiction without equating its “fabrications” and “pretense” to fiction outright.

Or it should be—and here we see how Murphy inherits unresolved issues raised in the Nature Fakers Controversy. The ability to make such distinctions depends upon having built up the muscle. Melville’s metaphors acknowledge that readers won’t be right every time. Platypuses will come along. Reading, like any other skill, develops over time. Burroughs, Roosevelt, and

others who were worried about nature faking essentially worried that the amateur audience of nature writing did not share their skill-level, and the critical back-and-forth was an attempt to stand-in for that perceived deficit. Melville's novel, by contrast, urges readers not to outsource their interpretation to critics—or any other authority than their own judgment. To write this novel, he needed confidence in their self-confidence.

Ecocritics should read more novels like *The Confidence-Man*—not because the novel has central environmental lessons to impart but because its difficulties promote careful reasoning, and that finally is more important “equipment for living” that readers facing climate challenges need. Reading for better environmentalist thinking, counter to Murphy's intuition and assertion, does not explicitly mean reading environmentalist books; it can mean engaging in reading that practices the dilemmas and challenges that environmentalists face—if those readings have environmental bents, only then so much the better.

Conclusions from Literary History's Lost and Found

The Boston *Evening Transcript's* review of *The Confidence-Man* wrote, “Mr. Melville's writings have a peculiar character, and he has become so widely known, that any work from his pen is sure to find a host of readers” (Higgins and Parker 487). Another from the New York *Dispatch*, perhaps representative of even more reviews though bolder in its degree of optimism, wrote that “The book will sell, of course, because Melville wrote it; but this exceedingly talented author must beware or he will tire out the patience of his readers” (488). Both of these confident reviews raise similar questions about how, when, and why readers and books “find” one another. In doing so, they recall the *Scribner's* review of Burroughs's book, too, cited earlier—though in that review it was readers who found the book. The prospective verb tenses of all these reviews

offers a vantage onto the open futures of books and their networks of relation—the unexpected ways they are taken up and their surprising readers, too. That these reviews locate the agency at turns with readers and at others with the books themselves conveys the dual movement I identify in my Introduction.

Alongside the difference in the direction of agency, these reviews also differ in that Burroughs's book reviews seem to stress their content as the appeal whereas Melville's more consistently predict his books' future are largely linked to the expectations about its author—even when, as the pieces from *Current Opinion* at the beginning of this chapter show, the content of both might be nature-related and both authors share some degree of recognition as literary luminaries. The suggestion from this that I continue to explore in my other chapters—and a key rationale for my chapters' structured pairings—is that literary reputation comes to overshadow both content and fictionality when it comes to predicting which writers ecocritics are most likely to turn to and why. Literary and reception history are the tools by which these reputation-making processes can be more clearly understood. Once matters of reputation are cleared away, readers can decide whether the book they read has bearing on the problems they face, and consequently they may find themselves truly farther afield (and study).

Chapter 2 - Thaxter, Jewett, the Beach, and Beyond: Down East Regionalism and Nature

Writing's Diegesis

Within early criticism that set the contours of nature writing as a genre, the stretch between Francis Whiting Halsey's review essay (1902) and Henry Chester Tracy's book (1930) presents a period of critical silence about the work of women writers within nature writing and nature study that belies their significant contributions. By contrast, another early review piece, "Books About Nature" by Sara A. Hubbard, offers an occasion for revisiting nature writing's trajectory, its reading, its readers, and what Wai Chee Dimock draws attention to as these categories' "uneven development." Published in *The Dial's* June 1, 1894, issue, Hubbard's essay reviews five books: Celia Thaxter's *An Island Garden*, Olive Thorne Miller's *A Bird Lover in the West*, two books by Englishmen Francis A. Knight and Aubyn Trevor-Battye, and one by American Charles Conrad Abbott. Without explicitly positing a genre, Hubbard's opening rationale for grouping the books connects the books' related subjects to similar relationships between experience and reading:

There is nothing like contact with Nature to keep the heart warm and young. It is the true elixir of life, preserving the freshness, the simplicity, and the sweetness of childhood to the farthest limits of old age. A love for the flowers, the birds, the clouds and the stars, the hills and the seas, for any form of wild thing or wild life, is the gift of all others to be desired. Who has it can in no case be quite destitute or joyless. To him there will be possibilities of comfort and happiness opening up everywhere around. A glimpse of the dancing sunshine, a walk in the open fields, a handful of blossoms, a snatch of untutored song from the hedgerow or tree-top, suffices to flood his being with an ecstasy such as only they with kindred souls can understand. Abundant proof of this truth is offered in a series of experiences just now happily published for the conviction of mankind. (333)

The first and last sentences bear reading together. Although Hubbard intriguingly refers to these books about nature as published "experiences," the first claim is precisely that "There is nothing

like contact with Nature.” So, the purpose of reading is not to replace outdoor experience by simile (“*like* contact”) but to verify, through the accounts of others, the ecstatic truth (here, “elixir”) that first-hand contact imbibes.

Even though, as Hubbard’s own defaulting to a masculine pronoun suggests, Hubbard’s essay was not explicitly feminist and makes no direct claims for the special importance of women’s nature writing, this chapter situates two women writers within the history of nature writing and response begun in my Introduction. I begin with one of the writers Hubbard reviewed, Celia Thaxter, and consider her works alongside those of Sarah Orne Jewett. These women knew one another, but they also make for a compelling pair because they have often, until perhaps recently, been marketed similarly and shared related fates in American literary history. Indeed, their current availability in print owes much to a generation of feminist scholars whose advocacy for reclaiming regionalism as a major platform for nineteenth-century female authorship has encouraged these works’ re-reading as more than footnotes to metanarratives of American Realism.

Women regionalists have appealed to a variety of feminist critics, but Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryce have offered the most extensive account, defense, or rationale for their configuration of these texts as a genre in *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture*. The book produces a genealogy for regionalist writing and interrogates the potential for its political efficacy from various standpoints. Overall, Fetterley and Pryce make an emphatic case for taking the works they study as a group and for the gains to be made from approaching that group with a feminist lens. For my purposes, the specific chapter of interest from their project is “The Poetics of Empathetic Narration.” In it, they draw from their understanding of Aristotle’s *Poetics* (especially the cathartic process) to characterize “the poetics

of regionalism as a series of narrative effects” (106). Though the regionalist authors they study did not pen explicit systematized theories of their oeuvres, Fetterley and Pryse survey a number of works, including some by Thaxter and Jewett, to claim that regionalism models empathetic understanding to direct the empathy it also elicits as its primary narrative effect. They conclude that “Regionalism requires an active reader, one who is willing to get ‘close to the heart of these things’; its poetics can show readers what empathetic response looks like and how it works, but it cannot guarantee that readers will believe it” (134). The specific task of this “active reader” is left unspecified but generally involves a rejection of dominant sense-making frames and practices; in another chapter, Fetterley and Pryse elaborate upon empathy and sentiment as the basis of a feminist epistemology.

While the rubric of regionalism has already advanced Thaxter and Jewett’s scholarly recuperation, I argue considering them as nature writers likewise has value, partly because their publication history and context suggest the connection. Also, the division between the categories has not been a strict one; as Lawrence Buell notes, marketing at Houghton, Mifflin built associations through name-dropping, a policy that “proved especially effective given the firm’s investment in the overlapping categories of ‘local color’ and ‘out-of-doors’ literature of different kinds” (347). Eric Lupfer elaborates this point in “Before Nature Writing: Houghton, Mifflin and Company and the Invention of the Outdoor Book, 1800-1900,” which gives a valuable archival account of the publishing industry’s role in creating and shaping nature writing, by opening his article with an advertisement for “Out-Door Books” that also speaks to the crossover where, “Literary essays join poetry, natural history, and collections of sketches and short fiction”

(177).³⁵ Jewett and Thaxter in fact appear next to one another in Houghton, Mifflin's ad from an Olive Thorne Miller volume, which Lupfer reproduces in an appendix. But even as the grouped works cross various series and bindings, the publishing house was nonetheless making invisible distinctions; for instance, the list included Jewett's short-story collection *Country By-Ways*, but not *Deephaven* (179). Remembering Thaxter and Jewett as both regionalist and as nature writing, then, contributes to a feminist project because it reclaims how these works spanned traditional spheres, attesting to how these authors bucked related genre and gender conventions.

Connecting these and potentially other women regionalists to nature writing also illuminates a similar contemporaneous gendered erasure: that of nature study pedagogy. Broadly speaking, nature study grew out of a reformist impulse among educators to impassion students in the natural world through direct contact with it. Its critics effected the move away from nature study and toward the theory and rigor of lab science by devaluing the kinds of learning promoted by the scores of female schoolteachers administering the curriculum and influential women within the nature study movement like Anna Botsford Comstock. Perhaps the best known of Jewett's works today, the short story "A White Heron" dramatizes some of nature study's goals for creating attachment, as the heroine Sylvy's curiosity and observations lead to the conservation of the eponymous bird instead of its falling into the hands of the hunter ornithologist. Some nature study advocates and nature writers, as Kevin Armitage explains, were ardent in getting boys to change their attitudes toward shooting birds; this included Thaxter, who

³⁵ The recent conception of bioregionalism by Peter Berg and others presents a logical consolidation of these close relations and associations. In their Introduction to *The Bioregional Imagination*, editors Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster draw on several sources to define the concept but specify that the idea "mov[es] away from existing but for the most part arbitrary political boundaries (nations, states, counties, cities, etc.) in favor of those that emerged from a biotically determined framework, primarily based on natural communities and watersheds" (3).

wrote an editorial on the subject of feathers in women's hats.³⁶ Jewett's Sylvy is described through free indirect discourse that channels her grandmother Mrs. Tilley, who thinks, "there never was such a child for straying out-of-doors since the world was made!"—this resonates suggestively with Buell's observation about "the overlapping categories of 'local color' and 'out-of-doors' literature of different kinds" (Jewett 670; Buell 347). Despite the effectiveness of this advocacy effort and the kinds of experiential attachments to nature Sylvy enacts, these movements in science education and literary culture were brushed aside.

Both dismissals were largely underwritten by gendered criteria for the seriousness and significance of work. Within literary study, for example, the popularity and sentimentality of many women authors was taken as the negative composite to the more austere discourse of criticism and theory. Fetterley has argued since prior to *Writing Out of Place* that women regionalists like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Thaxter cautiously avoided drafting systematized explanations of their work, unlike male writers of the same period ("Theorizing Regionalism" 39; Fetterley and Pryse 43). Consequently, canon-building projects rationalized passing over women writers' works³⁷ in favor of the male writers whose critical writings were taken as sufficient representations of available ideas. Anthologies for teaching literature surveys are exemplary canonical apparatuses, with their suggestion that reading representative selections offers comprehensive understanding; within the set of regionalist or local color writers, the problem is simply more blatant since Fetterley traces habits that allowed women to be read through their male contemporaries. Meanwhile, historians of science have observed similar

³⁶ For more, see Kilcup.

³⁷ In suggesting why anthologies of nature writing include so few women, Karen Kilcup suggests that "many nature writings by nineteenth-century women remain inaccessible" (44). This inaccessibility is part of a feedback loop of erasing women's contributions, not just a happenstance cause.

trends with the demotion of nature study; for instance, Sally Gregory Kohlstedt writes: “The challengers [of nature study] would raise issues of feminization, of vocational orientation, of lack of rigor, of a narrow definition of nature, of failing to present an objective outlook, and, ultimately, of a failure to teach basic science. By the 1930s, a much more closely prescribed course of elementary science would become standard in schools” (352). Although the listed items are separated to denote the variety of rhetorical moves deployed, it is implicit through their listing that many were taken to be largely synonymous.

This chapter maintains an interest in the parallel between the literary and science education trends above; in so doing, I hope to amplify or contribute to Fetterley and Pryse’s feminist project even as I continue to make claims that are not exclusively feminist. I take Celia Thaxter’s *Among the Isles of Shoals* and Sarah Orne Jewett’s *Deeplhaven* as works representing a moment where ‘nature writing’ had not yet been consolidated to refer primarily or exclusively to nonfiction essays. As such, Thaxter and Jewett were able to tap into similar appeals to tourist readers—appeals for which both have since been criticized. Based on the parallel I develop between regionalism’s “active reading” and nature-study’s field science emphasis, I conclude by suggesting how my arguments about Thaxter and Jewett’s texts can help scholars rethink a particular kind of reading “in the field”—beach reading—in the context of compound social-natural disasters like sea level rise. By complicating the Maine Coast’s image as, say, a space solely for pleasure yachting through their looks at locals’ lives (in Thaxter’s case, the shipwrecked women, and in Jewett’s the re-evaluation of country folk), both authors create diegetic spaces that invite readers into relation with their subjects and offer mutually beneficial acquaintance.

Tourism and its Readers

Large swaths of rural New England were in bad shape ecologically after the Civil War. Dona Brown writes that, by the end of the 1860s, “Scores of declining New England towns and villages had reason to welcome tourism: Farming had become unprofitable, lumbering was exhausted, the whale fisheries had been destroyed, harbors were silting in” (8). While economic decline and natural resource depletion may not provide intuitive draws for travellers, they set the stage for the rapid expansion of the tourism industry in the region. Whether fortunately or not, “Tourism helped to forge a new landscape out of the economic and social crisis that loomed over much of the Northeast,” and literary authors including Thaxter and Jewett played their part in the boom by often depicting the region in alluring ways, which proved conducive to middle-class consumption.

Of course, Thaxter and Jewett were not solely responsible for Down East tourism, nor were they even its only representatives who circulated in print. Benjamin Franklin de Costa published *Sketches of the Coast of Maine and Isles of Shoals, with Historical Notes* in 1869, the same year Thaxter began publishing her sketches in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Like her eventual preface, and perhaps its model, de Costa claims to bring the book to market—construed as a literary “field”—in response to market demand since “the field was unoccupied, no one having attempted to bring out a work of the character relating to what is universally conceded to be the most romantic and interesting position of the New England Coast.” Of course, this last superlative language reinforces the supposed demand as an advertisement through appeal to the ethos of universal agreement. The preface also declaims, “This work is not offered as a guide, though the Author hopes that it may not prove unacceptable as a companion.” Certainly, de Costa’s book reads more like a typical guide that groups points of interest by area. In the first sketch, for example,

de Costa surveys Maine's coast cartographically from "Bird's-eye Views" and recounts waves of European arrivals. Also, each sketch opens with what Gérard Genette might call synoptic intertitles (309), effectively identifying points of interest and facilitating skimming on readers' parts. Even though de Costa introduces it as a complete "work," its "companion" dimension suggests that, unlike a conventional "work," it does not rely on reading the whole for interpretation of the parts, and thus readers can use paratexts to seek out individual points of interest, or otherwise skim material that less pertains to their travel interests.

When Amy Kaplan writes of a literary tourist mindset connected to the regionalist literary tradition, she perhaps has something close to the kind of reading de Costa's *Sketches* invite—and this something differs from the "tourist reader" I posit for these works. Kaplan writes that "Regionalists share with tourists and anthropologists the perspective of the modern urban outsider who projects onto the native a pristine authentic space immune to historical changes shaping their own lives" (252). Kaplan's "literary tourism" expresses a recognizable kind of derision toward tourism that John Frow characterizes as "the first, and least interesting," of three common "moves" in discourse on tourism: "criticism of tourism as inauthentic activity" (127). That is, even as Kaplan calls out one inauthentic practice, she implies a more authentic one—an unspecified practice of representation and reading that (presumably) aligns with her own. Kaplan implicitly critiques both authors and readers for a condescending distance from the communities represented in these narratives. The author is aligned with the anthropologist, and the prurient reader need never actually visit the dismal backwaters that entertain them in story. The "agenda" she ascribes to these works further assumes a continuity between author and reader. Tourism, for Kaplan, is opportunistic from top to bottom.

The tendency of regionalist writers to register economies in collapse led early literary

historians to characterize the works wholesale within a declensionist artistic arc where women presented a tired and emasculated version of realism. But if early accounts of nineteenth-century literary history saw women regionalists as out-of-step-with or sentimentally chronicling the negative after-effects of modernity, more recent scholarship with a historicist orientation has countered that the genre instead was not only in line with modernity but, through the publishing and tourism industries, one of advancing modernity's very engines. As Richard Brodhead puts it, "such fiction and nonfiction literally co-operated, in the realm of reading, to produce the unmodernized picturesque," and that "nineteenth-century regionalist fiction—the form of rural history operative in its time—did not simply record contemporary reality but helped compose a certain version of modern history" (133, 121). Within Brodhead's larger argument that "the history of American literature needs to be understood not as the history of literary works only but also as the history of literature's working conditions—the history of the diverse and changing worlds that have been constructed around writing in American social life," regionalism reads as high culture's reconsideration and appropriation of poverty, especially rural poverty, and to these ends serves "the vacationing habits of an urban upper class" (8, 145). For Brodhead, "vacation practices [...] created Jewett's literary audience," and Jewett in turn follows a concerted plan to use "the literary medium to produce meaning for [the pre-existing body of vacationing thought] beyond what it possesses in existing social usage" (149).³⁸ He eventually folds Thaxter's work briefly into the conversation too:

Celia Thaxter's 1873 serial *Among the Isles of Shoals* similarly memorializes the death of shipping activity in these islands off the coast of New Hampshire but then produces a second life for them through its prose, in which they are notable for their wind and light conditions, their austere landscape, and their superb birds and flowers. The fact that there was a tourist hotel on the Isles of Shoals founded

³⁸ This reading has been largely corroborated by William W. Stowe, in "Doing History on Vacation: "Ktaadn" and *The Country of the Pointed Firs*.

by Thaxter's father and now largely run by her, and that in "naturalizing" the islands she has been covertly creating touristic desire to visit, is concealed until Thaxter's last page. (151)

As with his reading of Jewett, Brodhead's sense of Thaxter projects the author as conniving—or at least opportunistic—luring readers to a picturesque ruin of a landscape only to spring a vacation package upon them at the "last page."

Kaplan and Brodhead's arguments have challenged the feminist recuperation of regionalist writers and texts in ways following studies could not ignore without seeming uninformed. Fetterley and Pryse have themselves responded, resisting Brodhead's argument with particular rigor for the silencing effect of his study's realigning regionalist fiction with dominant culture, which suggests that any degree of complicity in dominant culture might constitute wholesale collusion or approval. Several scholars, including Sandra Zagarell, Stephanie C. Palmer, and Mark Storey, have offered in their subsequent studies on regionalist works intelligent summaries of this debate, its stakes, and possible workarounds, but June Howard's "Unraveling Regions, Unsettling Periods: Sarah Orne Jewett and American Literary History" responds most thoroughly to underlying problems in the larger debate. Howard's essay clarifies and qualifies my approach to regionalism's readers.

Howard illuminates that both feminist critics and historicists carried forward a fallacious element of the literary histories to which they responded: namely, the idea of a consolidated genre of regionalism as a box into which certain American writers should be sorted (and what it meant once they were). This fallacy, she reasons cogently, has predetermined their finding in a move she calls "interpretation by classification: our object of study is what it is because that's what we consider important and that's what we look at, and therefore that's what we find" (371). While Howard does not deny that some form of classification is inevitable in the work of writing

literary history, she urges “Attention to the nature of the boundaries we draw, and to how we are using them” because “One of the things at stake in this contest of interpretation is, then, how the scholar draws himself or herself into the map projected by literary-historical narrative” (379, 380). Fetterley and Pryse’s omission of this essay from their Works Cited is eyebrow-raising because Howard is rightfully drawing attention to the fungible status of the genre that they claim, as a genre, has sympathetic political effects. It is likely because of Howard’s argument that studies like Palmer’s and Storey’s have demurred from positing a sturdy genre and focused instead on a plot “motif” and “narrative preoccupations,” respectively (Palmer 11; Storey 20). By a similar token, Howard’s argument cautions my own classification of works as nature writing as likewise shaping what I find; one difference, perhaps, is that my study considers as nature writing works that have a history of being designated as such rather than fitting works into a definition I have also delimited. This passes the buck to a certain extent but stresses the history of a conversation rather than circumscribing a genre in the strict sense.

I also am explicitly reversing the direction of genre dictating reading practices and thinking about reading practices and generic grouping being co-constituting. It’s not simply *because* I can slap the label ‘nature writing’ onto these books that I argue for reading them differently; rather, observing the imbrication of these works in tourism history convinces me that the appeal of these works to active amateur tourist readers *is* the basis for talking about them together, and that in this light their contemporaneous promotion as nature writing reveals more than existing terms like ‘local color’ or ‘regionalism’ have afforded their critics. I am encouraged in this direction by Wai Chee Dimock, whose own reconciliation of feminist and new historicist scholarship echoes Howard’s caution against “interpretation by classification,” only pointing out that history and gender have themselves become classifications at risk of becoming inert in some academic

studies. Dimock's resolution of the antagonism involves historicizing gender and gendering history such that gender does not become an empty transhistorical category and history, in turn, is recognized as inflected and multi-rhythmic. If we think about what Dimock terms the "uneven velocities" of history, then one of Kaplan and Brodhead's biggest mistakes in addition to working with an odd category of "regionalism" turns out to be—to use one of Brodhead's terms—suggesting that it had a singular "social life." We can also then suggest that Fetterley and Pryse's feminist readers would benefit from thinking about their "active reader" across different historical moments and whether, as Howard's stakes might suggest, scholarship can recover literary-historical narratives that tell different stories about the varying feminist possibilities "regionalist" texts make available to today's feminisms and to different women in the nineteenth century. I attempt such work here by attending to the shifting category of "beach reading" which grows in part from the sales history in which my two central texts participate.

Before moving onto Thaxter and Jewett's texts, though, I want to briefly suggest a further benefit to the approach to regionalism I have just indicated in terms of works that have not conventionally enjoyed the attention of the anthologized regionalist sub-canon—and that thus have the potential to continue upsetting reductions of the category. Critics who have worked to align regionalism wholesale with the dominance of a white, economically dominant class offer no account of another Maine text, Joseph Nicolai's 1893 *The Life and Traditions of the Red Man*. Yet this Penobscot-authored origin story and auto-ethnographic history deserves considerable attention in this context, since—as Annette Kolodny has contextualized it in introducing its 2007 reprinting—railroads "spurred both tourism and increased industrial development in the Northeast, at once opening employment opportunities for many members of the Maine tribes and, at the same time, offering incentives for emigration away from the

reservations” (38). Whether Nicolour’s book was sold, or was intended to be sold, to tourists itself is made hard to know by the fire that destroyed most of the first editions and his death shortly after publication, but it is known that “he often accompanied his wife and three daughters to the fashionable seaside resorts in Kennebunkport where they set up camp and, together, sold the beautiful ash and sweet-grass baskets woven through the winter months by the women” (39). While Kolodny received some criticism for her introductory materials from Penobscot critic Maria Girouard, and while I agree with Girouard that Kolodny’s extensive interpretive introduction clashes with Kolodny’s own assertion that “only a true descendent, steeped in the ways of his people, possessed both the knowledge and the right to control the interpretive process through which Indian cultures were invested with meaning,” the Nicolour family’s economic activity is worth noting because it pushes out on the assumption shared by Kolodny and her critic that the text’s appeal is mostly directed at other Penobscot readers (Kolodny 36). Reading Nicolour’s text suggests Nicolour’s view was much more open to non-Penobscot readers than this statement conveys—as does his grandson Charles Norman Shay’s admission in an interview of his wide distribution of the book (Carroll 112). That is, neither Kolodny nor Girouard attend, as perhaps Shay does, to the very opening words that they skip over in their quotations: “In offering this work which will give *the public* the full account of all the pure traditions which have been handed down from the beginning of the red man’s world to the present time, I deem it proper to state that there have been no historical works of the white man, nor any other written history from any source quoted” (95; emphasis added).³⁹ He even repeats that there is something he “wish[es] to say to the public,” and he is unambiguous in establishing

³⁹ In a longer treatment of this text, I would tease out the overlapping appeal made here with de Costa’s work cited above and develop the sovereignty implications of Kolodny’s language about “the right to control” reception.

the benefit of all readers in consulting his account: “a close observer cannot fail to see that some of these prophecies are very significant and important, not only to the red man himself, but nations of all other races as well” (95). I thus bring this text into view to note Nicolai’s “public,” which may well overlap with the readers of the regionalist writing produced by de Costa, Thaxter, and Jewett. By compact implication, however, I also propose that Nicolai’s text is evidence that regional literary markets were more diverse, complex, and multi-layered than the cultural-materialist sneer at tourism has let Americanists appreciate. Attention to reading as one activity within a potential matrix of related behaviors can disrupt a variety of literary-historical over-simplifications.

More Than a Sales Pitch: Celia Thaxter and Hardship at the Shoals

As I have already begun to lay out, my perspective on nineteenth-century tourism differs from the conception of smooth extraction familiar now to criticism of texts identified in this frame. To elaborate in more detail what the consideration of certain works as nature books adds, I begin with Celia Thaxter’s *Among the Isles of Shoals*. Far from just a cleverly veiled advertisement, this text progresses by casually transitioning between scenic allures and stories of social hardship. By these means, the text does not facilitate the careless and acquisitive distance of the tourist-as-consumer but instead invites a form of reciprocal contact between place and reader that offers the tourist a role in the resilience of the local.

In her prefatory pretext to *Among the Isles of Shoals*, Celia Thaxter writes that she overcame her reluctance to publish the “fragmentary and inadequate sketches” since “some account of the place, however slight, is so incessantly called for by people who throng these islands in summer” (5). Thaxter, perhaps best known for her poems about the sea and coastal

life, published the prose “sketches” in five installments of the *Atlantic Monthly*—four between 1869 and 1870, and a fifth in 1873 preceding the book’s publication. The book was published both in hardcover and “in a fifty-cent guidebook edition which was sold in railway stations,” a fact that provides material confirmation of its rhetorical appeal (back cover). Though Celia Loughton stopped permanently living on the island when her young marriage to her tutor, Harvard graduate and Transcendental disciple Levi Thaxter, took her away from home,⁴⁰ she returned repeatedly to the Isles in the summer seasons and became part of the draw herself, hosting a small salon of writers, painters, and musicians. In addition to her own modest output as a painter, Celia Thaxter was known for her splendid gardening, which became the subject of her final book, reviewed by Sara Hubbard above.

In *Among the Isles of Shoals*’s first paragraph, Thaxter invokes Herman Melville’s *The Encantadas* (1854), a work that, like her own, defies easy classification. Even as she creates this parity, though, she nonetheless stops short of claiming that the Isles of Shoals are quite as forsaken as Melville’s Galapagos Islands, writing instead that the Galapagos’s “dark volcanic crags and melancholy beaches can hardly seem more desolate than do the low bleached rocks of the Isles of Shoals to the eyes that behold them for the first time” (7). The last phrase is the operative one, for Thaxter goes on in other pages to consider first time visitors’ impressions: “At first sight nothing can be more rough and inhospitable than they appear” and “Landing for the first time, the stranger is struck only by the sadness of the place,—the vast loneliness; for there are not even trees to whisper with familiar voices,—nothing but sky and sea and rocks” (13-4). The word “first” in these sentences works doubly to establish her version of nature writing’s

⁴⁰ The marriage was, in most accounts, a hard one. But others have noted that Levi played a key role in securing copyright for much of Celia’s work, and he was also himself a naturalist. As such, further interest in Thaxter may uncover some degree of collaboration between them that clarifies their relationship as a pair.

amateur reader and qualify her persona as an intimate and knowledgeable observer of the Isles' terrain. That is, a "first" implies subsequent visits and distinguishes Thaxter as a seasonal and seasoned voyager to the Shoals with a depth of impressions complicating the "first." The duration or repetition of contact with a place changes one's relationship to it, a fact that humbles the tourist a little relative to the local.

Thaxter develops her authoritative ethos through her familiarity with the Isles' iterative phenomena, such as the sky's colors playing on the bleached granite sea walls or the special vividness of the soil's blossoms, and her researched knowledge of the Shoals' intersecting ecological and human histories. That she has lived on the islands and observed them attentively comes across, for example, when she divines the likelihood of past trees where there are none: "It is very probable that the islands were wooded many years ago with spruce and pine perhaps" and adds, "I am certain that cedars grew there" based on an aged piece of cedar root she found deep in the island rocks (24). The continued impacts she observes of humans on the Shoals are not simply displaced onto extractive predecessors, as even the lighthouse that brought Thaxter's family to the islands in her youth, though "so beneficent to mankind, is the destroyer of birds,— of land birds particularly, though in thick weather sea-birds are occasionally bewildered into breaking their heads against the glass" (110). As she details having to pick up hundreds of birds' bodies at the lighthouse's base on some mornings, readers can only guess the structure's long-term impact. But if some impacts are in the past and others seem without clear blame, other changes she mentions are ongoing and noticeably products of industrial modernization. She writes, for instance, that "For the last ten years fish have been caught about the Shoals by trawl and seine in such quantities that they are thinning fast, and the trade bids fair to be much less lucrative before many years have elapsed" (84). These are the patterns of Brown's history, where

Thaxter's prose would enter to market the scenery that remained available for sentimentalizing in industrialization's wake.

Brown might likewise suggest a reading for Thaxter's penultimate paragraph. In it, Thaxter reports that the town of Gosport on the islands has been so depopulated, "nearly all the inhabitants having been bought out, that the place might be converted into a summer resort," referring to without naming her family's competition, the Oceanic Hotel, the construction of which was completed the year Thaxter's book was published, 1873 (184). Then, she adds the revelation Brodhead condemns her for: "Upon Appledore a large house of entertainment has been extending its capabilities for many years, and the future of the Shoals as a famous watering-place may be considered certain." This reference to her family's hotel on Appledore, for Brown and Brodhead both, serves along with reference to the competition as smoking guns. The Loughton Appledore Hotel does not rescue the Shoals from economic disempowerment; it hastens it. Though a seemingly more tasteful and benign industry, it simply replaces one enterprise with another. In this account, the Loughtons' success brings on the competition that, more directly than the decline of fishing, removes island inhabitants to make way for the consumption of upwardly mobile urbanites exhausted by the world that the industry has wrought in the cities. But while Thaxter's construction of her authorship partakes in general trends whereby an aesthetic and leisure economy supplanted a labor and commodity-based economy, she was both more self-conscious about the economic dynamics than Brown and Brodhead allow and cared about more than the family business. If Brown and Brodhead are pushing to complicate the image of Celia Thaxter that one might draw from Childe Hassam's impressionist vision and that biographers more or less endorse—of a passive, decorative figure—some concession is warranted: Thaxter *did* have a talent for promotion. But neither is Brown's and

Brodhead's filthy-lucre-based corrective portraiture sufficient. Rather than a mere buoy in the larger currents historicist critics have charted behind tourism, I want to think, following Dimock, about the agency of *Among the Isles of Shoals* as inflecting the category of the tourist reader because its author finds and shares poetry and beauty in a desolate landscape.

Reading *Among the Isles of Shoals* this way can begin, I think, with one of its most distinctive traits: its apparent formlessness or fluidity. As individual periodical installments and again in book form, the text proceeds in a leisurely way. Paragraphs drift from one subject to another with loose continuity. Readers are told at the outset that the land and sea of and around the islands has such an effect: "The eternal sound of the sea on every side has a tendency to wear away the edge of human thought and perception; sharp outlines become blurred and softened like a sketch in charcoal; nothing appeals to the mind with the same distinction as on the mainland" (8). The smooth transitions are a formal echo of this quality. Indeed, divisions are so inconspicuous that even the "edge[s]" of the original magazine installments are "w[orn] away" in the book version. In presenting the Isles' attractions to her tourist readers, Thaxter's text lulls them as it wanders from one subject to another rather than acting like a carnival barker. The calm and pleasant pace of this technique, one might concede to Thaxter's critics, seems as though it would encourage a shallow relationship to the settings it wanders through.

Another effect of the text's meandering style is to imbue the Isles and their history with a transitoriness that, at its worst, could evacuate passers-through of responsibility. The impermanence conveyed by natural successive rhythm, suggested everywhere around the islands by waves on the shore, does at times seem to naturalize social dynamics as Thaxter's histories recount waves of people inhabiting the islands, of which the "rill" of Scandinavian immigrants coming to the Isles mentioned in the book version's final paragraph are only the most recent

installment. In keeping with common attitudes of whites at the time, this includes some gestures portraying the Isles' Indigenous people as vanished, as when Thaxter documents that "Indian arrowheads of jasper and flint have been found" on the beaches, rendering those people as artifacts. Because wave rhythms are cyclical, however, it's worth noting Thaxter does not altogether foreclose the possibility of their return; Thaxter relates that if local tribes no longer come, it's a matter of *else-where* rather than *else-when*. She pokes some fun at seventeenth-century Shoalers for their white flight away from Duck Island, calling their fears "perplexing" and noting, "Probably the savages camped on Duck to carry on their craft of porpoise-fishing, which to this day they still pursue among the islands on the eastern coast of Maine" (46). This arm's-length awareness of Indians as elsewhere fits with the pre-assimilation reservation system of these decades. Thaxter's critics can be granted that the fluidity of her text permits social history to pass by readers without structuring their obligation to it.

That said, Thaxter does nonetheless make observations on a more immediate, sensory scale—and the kinds of contact at that scale are capable of being mutually affecting even if they are not abrasively frictional. This is the case in one of the sketches' most striking passages, which stages the interactive kinds of potential experience awaiting the tourists it invites while figuring their presence as transitory:

Walking abroad in these pleasant evenings, many a little sparrow's nest one finds low down in the bayberry-bushes,—smooth, brown cups of woven grass, wherein lie the five speckled eggs, each full of silent music, each dumb miracle waiting for the finger of God to wake, to be alive, to drink the sunshine and the breeze, to fill the air with blissful sound. At the water's edge one finds the long ledges covered with barnacles, and from each rough shell a tiny, brown, filmy hand is thrust out, opening and shutting in the gladness beneath the coming tide, feeling the freshness of the flowing water. The shore teems with life in manifold forms. As the darkness gathers, the ripples begin to break in pale flame against the rocks; if the tide is low enough, it is charming to steal down in the shadow, and, drawing aside the curtain of coarse sea-weed that drapes the face of some smooth rock, to write on the surface beneath: the strange fire follows your finger; and there is your name in weird flame, all alive, quivering and trembling, and finally fading

and disappearing. In a still pool you drop a stone or touch the water with your hand: instantly a thousand stars break out and burn and vanish in a moment! It used to be a pleasant thing to bring a piece of drift-wood, water-soaked, and shaggy with fine seaweed, up from the shore, and from some dark corner suddenly sweep my hand across it: a sheet of white flame followed, startling the beholder. (165-6)

On the shore, the tourist addressed through the second-person pronoun can be empowered to imitate the life-giving power of God, making life flower forth from barnacles at the touch of a finger as “the finger of God” awakens the music of the songbird that remains a “dumb miracle” in its egg. And yet, the repeated imagery of the flame also implies burning out—“fading and disappearing.” But the tourist is only playing at God as a “pleasant thing”; at the scales of the barnacle, the bird, and life-cycle of a star, the passage affirms God’s greater, cosmic power to create things capable of cycling through time. The vanishing signature animated by living organisms reinforces themes of transitory presence. It also recalls a hotel’s guestbook, where visitors sign to confirm—ironically, for posterity—their stay’s finite duration. Thaxter’s shift to the first person in the final sentence closes this appeal to the tourist reader by suddenly positioning them outside the main acting role; after the interactive haptic potential of the larger passage, Thaxter restores her own authority from experience, making the reader at best a beholder who must visit the islands in person to confirm the impression. In doing so, the “beholder” coming to walk “abroad in these pleasant evenings” may also bring life to the area, but in a way that is understood to be minor considered in a broader scale.

If transitory flows can give life, though, they can also bring—or follow—death. For all its picturesque descriptions, Thaxter’s book incorporates several accounts of disasters at sea and their grim results for the island community; though they are spread throughout the book, they also appear discordant with the natural history and regional tourist appeal. It is true that sensational violence did play a surprising role in the islands’ tourism around this time. So,

although most grim passages were original to the installments published from 1869 to 1870 in the *Atlantic*, a shocking and brutal double murder took place on the islands in the March of 1873, before Thaxter's book was published. This murder, about which Thaxter would write a true-crime account published again in *The Atlantic* in 1875, ironically did draw some tourists to the islands. By including a passage like the following, then, Thaxter may well play to sensationalist appetites: "Last winter some of the Shoalers were drawing a trawl between the Shoals and Boone Island, fifteen miles to the eastward. As they drew in the line and relieved each hook of its burden, lo! a horror was lifted half above the surface—part of a human body, which dropped off the hooks and was gone, while they shuddered, and stared at each other, aghast at the hideous sight" (89). Even the suspension of halting punctuation in the paragraph plays into the sordid surprise, and the paragraph is brief like the incident it describes. As such, it bridges two sections on whales and porpoises found at sea and becomes seamlessly just another point of fact about knowing the local waters. While the "Memorable Murder" was exceptional, and while Thaxter may offer anecdotes with some sensational flair, these surprising signs of violence and death function as part of natural and human cycles in a bounded place that, considered over time, cannot but accumulate death, such as the burial of two residents "mingled in the thin earth that scarce can cover the multitude of the dead on Star Island" (*Among* 77). The rocky islands have less soil than people, as shown by a young couple moving into the older couple's house, and so the dead are just literally close to the surface here. This stratigraphy is not merely morbid; it expresses a "mingled" relationship between people and place. The place becomes literally composed of the people who have lived and died there, and the people adopt hardscrabble characteristics of the rocky islands in return. The effects of Thaxter's grimmest passages vary from rousing to cautionary, but their accumulation both gives depth to the Isles' history and

communicates the resilience of Shoalers across that history.

Because there isn't much Thaxter criticism and because most of what there is tends to interpret biography more than text, no attention seems to have been paid to Thaxter's other, more substantial additions to the text of *Among the Isles of Shoals* as she compiled the book form. That there are so few changes, in fact, makes the two major additions all the more noteworthy. In reading these changes here, I want to argue for how the book version of *Among the Isles of Shoals*'s insertion of two women's stories links the concerns about reading, tourism, violence, and resilience I have already intimated. These passages noticeably arrest the reader's otherwise fluid movement through the text, and in that way draw attention to the theme of responsibility they share. The takeaway I underscore from these—and that I want to use to circle back to Brodhead's specific calling out of Thaxter cited above—is that *Among the Isles of Shoals* conveys an attitude to place squarely at odds with the idea of tourists coming out of Thorstein Veblen's foundational characterization as the blank and undifferentiated emissaries of capital.

Thaxter's book overall abounds with quoted lines of poetry, especially from Thaxter's favorite poet—Alfred, Lord Tennyson. In the book form, though, she added a full-length poem of her own, “A Woman of Star Island. Isles of Shoals, 1844” and extended the preceding paragraph for framing. One observation from that framing, “I never saw such wrecks of humanity as some of the old women of Star Island, who had long since gone to their rest,” presages one of the poem's key stanzas; the poem is about one such woman, a woman worn by life on the Isles, and the first five stanzas describe her toughened, beleaguered person. Yet these are interrupted by the apostrophe: “O wreck in woman's shape!/Were you ever precious and sweet?/Did youth's enchantment drape/ This horror, from head to feet?” (67) The remaining four stanzas go on to answer these questions—“Yes, once”—but also to redeem the condemned figure

through an inner religious faith, rhyming “hope” and “a grope” for “a Touch/ That never yet failed the soul” (68). The poem ends, though, with this salvation held out in a rhetorical question; “Is not God tender to such? Hath he not seen the whole?” (68). The religious call-and-response mechanism of such questions makes the poem an interactive read. But not all is quite formulaic, since this reverential moment is followed without any other transition by Thaxter’s discussion of Shoalers’ artful profanity, jolting the reader out of extended sentimentalism. Calling the woman a “wreck” connects her with the shipwrecks throughout the text but with key differences. Rather than an offsite disaster capable of evoking romance and misery, the woman is a metonym for the disaster—the sailor’s widow and the hard, lonely life that follows a sailor’s wife after his death at sea. The appeal to religious redemption does not necessarily reinstate that leisure but does have a message of endurance: the hardships the woman bears and has borne will be validated.

A second woman is the subject of a “weird, romantic legend” Thaxter added before the final two paragraphs of her book. The ghost story begins with Thaxter sharing a found text, “a time-stained, battered newspaper of forty years ago” (177). She quotes its writer, a convalescent, several times, including his introduction that he had long been “haunted” by a fear of “dissolution,” but that his time on the island has helped him get over anxieties about death. He recounts meeting a fair-haired, blue-eyed woman on the shore who awaits a man, and whose only message is “he will come again.” After deducing the woman is a ghost, since “the shells never crashed beneath her footsteps, nor did her garments rustle,” he learns her backstory from another local man. She is presumed to be the lover of a pirate who left her with a treasure at the Shoals and subsequently disappeared at sea so that now she “guard[s] it from the search of all mortals” (182). Rather than leave off on this enticing possibility of treasure, Thaxter then adds her own indirect encounter with this ghost while out with a party of friends. One of Thaxter’s

party tells of seeing a woman in an abandoned house who “looked as if [she] had been watching and waiting for me since the beginning of time” but who disappears. Hearing this, the yachting party makes a swift retreat—and this story is immediately followed by the paragraphs about summer resorts and remaining inhabitants.

Given how few substantial changes Thaxter made in preparing the *Atlantic* pieces for book form, it hardly seems accidental that she adds both the poem about a Shoaler woman and the closing “legend,” where the ghost is a pirate’s lover also awaiting her shipwrecked man. Indeed, though one is old and haggard and the other eternally fair, the paired figures present essentially two versions of the same problem. The connection makes additional sense if we consider the first poem quoted in the book—both surreptitiously on the title page below a frontispiece illustration and then explicitly as Thaxter transitions from her comparison with Melville’s Galapagos—Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s “The Lotos-Eaters.” If Thaxter plays to the lotos state of mind in describing the hazy “influence of the atmosphere” (8), and if the volume caters to this impression formally in the way it moves from subject to subject without definite paratextual boundaries, then the shipwrecks and wrecks of women challenge the fantasy. The Shoals are not the vacationer’s “land where all things always seemed the same!”; they are also the site of the sailors’ “wedded lives” they left behind (Tennyson l. 24, 114). Odysseus’s crew relinquishing their lives to their inheriting sons is, of course, a monumental check to the vacationing spirit. Through this allusion, then, leisure and hardship collide. Especially because the ghost story comes right before the ending, which Brodhead confidently identifies as disclosure that Thaxter “has been covertly creating touristic desire to visit,” it bears asking how invocations of responsibility attached to these shipwrecked women fit within an overall a rhetorical design for the book. Moreover, these women are an opportunity to think about Fetterley and Pryse’s active

reader and directed empathy. Although the ghost understandably elicits fear from the storyteller in the newspaper clipping and from Thaxter's yachting party, the similarity of her situation to this woman from the added poem invites both pity and respect—pity for the tragedy of their circumstance but respect for their resolute endurance. Thaxter herself, at least, seems more interested than repelled: "Would I had met this lily-fair ghost!" (182). The active reader moving from the strange legend to news of a summer resort, perhaps, understands a transition: these resorts, too, are the embodied endurance of a place where hardship has been faced and endured—indeed, they are a mark of resilience through endurance.

Thaxter's text draws clear parallels between the Isles' resilience in a harsh environment and the resilience of the Shoalers themselves. Sarah Orne Jewett would later close this loop when preparing posthumous volumes of Thaxter's works. One, essentially a dedication for *Stories and Poems for Children*, suggests the volume "will help those who cannot well remember her to know something of her beautiful generous kindness and delightful gayety, her gift of teaching young eyes to see the flowers and birds; to know her island of Appledore and its sea and sky" (iii). The other, a Preface to *The Poems of Celia Thaxter*, describes the volume as "something like a journal of her daily life and thought, and to mark the constantly increasing power of observation which was so marked a trait in her character" (v). It also communicates the closeness of the writers since it relates that Jewett was among a group of close friends who accompanied Thaxter on her last visit to the islands, at which time Thaxter is said to have found a white wildflower growing she had never seen before. Whether or not the story is apocryphal, Jewett is clearly figuring Thaxter as the flower—the unexpected beautiful and original "find" in her environment.

Jewett's account also has the effect of reinforcing a relationship between Thaxter and

nature writing. Thaxter has received some ecocritical attention from Lawrence Buell for structuring her text in a way that did not depend on a narrative through-line.⁴¹ But there is more to be made of Thaxter's relationship to figures like Burroughs—who was her contemporary and who lauded her nature poetry—based on her “power of observation” and her “gift of teaching young eyes to see.” Given that *Among the Isles of Shoals* is clearly more geared toward adult readers, it is possible to push out even beyond just children. Her ability to write a text that invites vacationing readers to partake in the beauty of the Isles and that brings life and income to the local community demonstrates additional social ends for the uses of nature writing.

Jewett and Fiction in the Field

Like Thaxter, Sarah Orne Jewett acknowledges a popular demand for visiting the locale her book describes. Unlike Thaxter, Jewett is writing fiction. Precisely what form of fiction has been a repeated matter of debate—critics have often waffled over whether to call Jewett's atypical approach to narrative form in *Deephaven* and *The Country of the Pointed Firs* that of the novel or linked sketches—and ecocritics including Catriona Sandilands and Sarah Ensor have jumped into the game by making cases for ways her narratives imagine forms of community for women not centered on heteronormative bioproductivity.⁴² Jewett herself, like Thaxter, often used the

⁴¹ Mostly in *The Environmental Imagination*—Buell's interest is in the text's seasonal organization. Buell approaches Thaxter through comparison as I do, but with Annie Dillard.

⁴² Stances within this debate are thus often linked to the recognition of the rhetoric of “major” and “minor” writers that tends to belittle women in particular. It also depends on the critical status of the novel itself as a form. Thus, since the novel has enjoyed its status as the major form of critical theory in the twentieth century, critics have argued that reticence to credit Jewett's works as novels and to call them sketches instead codifies a patriarchal bias. In turn, some critics have also resisted the term ‘novel’ for contrary reasons—that the form's ideological freight makes Jewett's generic noncompliance all the more praiseworthy. I appreciate Jewett's work and also imagine the novel perhaps more capaciously than some of these critiques, so I will call *Deephaven* a novel. For more on this dynamic, see Renza.

term sketch to describe the individual parts of her works, but not in a way that foreclosed their collection amounting to a novel. *The Country of the Pointed Firs* has been particularly indicative since Jewett published other stories set in the fictional town of Dunnet Landing after publishing the book, yet the consensus is that these other stories are separate since they are set at a different time. *Deephaven* does not have that advantage, but I argue that its first preface, by describing the volume as “a story of out-of-door life and country people,” provides a basis for treating it as a long-form narrative (“a story”) in the singular.

Because *Deephaven* is the story of two young women who spend a summer together at a small town in Maine, I read this “story of out-of-door life and country people” as bringing together nature writing’s promotion of outdoor experience and regionalism’s tourist appeal. As I noted at the outset of this chapter, Jewett’s marketing substantiates that she was legible both in the contexts of “Outdoor Books” and *Atlantic*-caliber literary fiction. This combination became far more rare because of the troubled relationship between nature writing as it consolidated and fictionality as a quality associated with falsehood, as I explained in my previous chapter. Here, I want to supplement my account of fiction’s disappearance from nature writing with another argument about changing conceptions of reading novels—reading practices that overlap with the changes in nature study that discounted women working in that arena. Jewett’s fading from the category—the reason she is not more commonly remembered as an “out-of-doors” writer—follows the twinned trajectory of nature writing and nature study.

To track these shifting tides requires something of a transatlantic detour—a detour not often taken because the attention to Jewett as “regional” has often slipped into the trope of the regional as parochial, thus overlooking how her work fits into a wider sea-change in fiction, and also because there is generally less francophone ecocriticism and thus few scholarly projects

likely to dedicate space to linking French fiction and America's nature book-buying readers. But the fact is that Jewett criticism does often invoke one or the other (and only occasionally both) of the quotations from Gustave Flaubert that Jewett transcribed and kept "pinned on her secretary [desk] in the upper hall [...] 'Écrire la vie ordinaire comme on écrit l'histoire,' and 'C'est ne pas de faire rire, ni de faire pleurer, ne de vous mettre à fureur, mais d'agir à la façon de la nature, c'est à dire de faire rêver'" (Matthiessen 67). The first is an injunction to write the ordinary as one writes history, and the other describes a method: "It is not to make laugh nor to make cry, nor to make you furious, but to stir as nature would, which is to say to make you dream."⁴³ In light of these statements, a curious crossing becomes apparent in Jewett criticism. Her critics and advocates both, because they stress her fiction's capacity for suasion (whether crassly material or virtuously feminist) have shared an Aristotelian orientation that Jemeljian Hankemulder has traced as underpinning the conception of the novel as "moral laboratory" officially coined by German Modernist Robert Musil but drawn from Émile Zola's *Le roman expérimentale*.

Although sometimes translated as "The Experimental Novel," the title of Zola's manifesto might be more clearly thought of as "The Novel of Experimental Method" because—while even Zola's preface signals that he *does* see his work as situated at an avant-garde that not everyone is ready to appreciate—the piece is less about the "experimental" than it is interested in proposing that literature take its cues from the scientific methods of experimental medicine as represented by the thought and work of Claude Bernard. Zola observes that Bernard's *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (*Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*) turned the study of medicine from a mystic art to a science. What Bernard did for studies of man's exterior, Zola aims to do for man's interior. The process means shifting from the observational to the

⁴³ All translations from the French here are my own.

experimental; for the novelist, this means less recording life as found in the world (as Flaubert's notion of the novelist as historian would suggest) and instead simulating that life with control over its variables in fiction. In making this shift, Zola aspires to the esteem of scientific rigor: "Puisque la médecine, qui était un art, devient une science, pourquoi la littérature elle-même ne deviendrait-elle pas une science, grâce à la méthode expérimentale?" ("Since medicine, which was an art, is becoming a science, why wouldn't literature itself become a science by dint of the experimental method?") (1191). By extension of the medical analogue, though, Zola's author-centered view of the process positions the reader as essentially the viewer of medical theater, watching in the balcony seating as one doctor vivisects a body: "En un mot, nous devons opérer sur les caractères, sur les passions, sur les faits humaines et sociaux, comme le physiologiste opère sur les corps vivants" ("In a word, we must operate upon the characters, on the passions, on human and social facts, like physiologists operate on live bodies") (1183). So, although Zola devotes no explicit attention to reading, Michel Butor comes to the same conclusion as I do in his introduction to the text in Zola's complete works:

C'est pourquoi Zola peut nous dire: "*La Cousine Bette* est le procès-verbal de l'expérience, que le romancier répète sous les yeux du public."

Le lecteur n'a pas besoin de recommencer après sa lecture l'expérience qui lui a été décrite, ce qui serait nécessaire, au moins idéalement, s'il s'agissait d'un ouvrage de physique ou de chimie; l'expérience a déjà été répétée. A la fin du livre, le lecteur a-t-il cru ou non? S'il est arrivé jusqu'à la fin, en général, c'est qu'il a cru. Et si le romancier a bien mené cette expérience qu'il n'a pas seulement décrite mais répétée sous nos yeux, alors, dans un certain domaine, le lecteur ne peut plus penser de certain façons. (1147)

That's why Zola can say: "*La Cousine Bette* is the report of an experiment, which the novelist repeats for the eyes of the public.

The reader does not need to reproduce, after reading, the experiment described, as would be necessary, at least ideally, if the matter were one of physics or chemistry; the experiment is the repetition. By the end of the book, has the reader been persuaded? If the reader saw the book through to the end, generally, it means the experiment was persuasive. And if the novelist has carried out the experiment well, having not just described an experiment but enacted its repetition before our

eyes, then, to a certain extent, the reader could no longer think any other way.

Consciously or otherwise, modern literary criticism has often followed from many of the premises Zola stipulates, and largely for the same reason: to legitimize itself in universities where scientific research prevails as the model for rigorous and consensus-based inquiry.

With this contrast of Flaubertian and Zola-esque credos, the apparent plotlessness of Jewett's books takes on a new aspect, more as the conscious rejection of overly constructed fiction than lack of novelistic talent. What appears to be a self-deprecation in her letters such as "I have no dramatic talent" may turn out to be less about being "accurately aware of her own abilities and limitations" and more a disarmingly demure insistence on what kind of fiction she is interested in writing (Jewett to Horace Scudder 1873 qtd. in Thorp 23). Likewise, Jewett's avowed "story of out-of-door life" might now be re-examined for its continuities and what relationship with its reader it invites.

Though the "country people" are the main subjects of most of the Deephaven sketches, a reader could be forgiven for wondering why Jewett would describe the book as "a story of out-of-door life"—at least in the first sketches. As the girls make their plans in the first chapter, the narrator Helen "Nelly" Denis even says "there was every probability of our spending many days in doors" (10). This declared expectation, especially since it follows so soon after the preface, is noteworthy. If, as I laid out in the Introduction, we think of narrative as the means of understanding change, then the oddity of this statement alongside the priming from the preface signals that a meaningful change within the narrative comes from the disruption of the young ladies' expectations as they prepare. Readers' attention to this detail will be rewarded with a more coherent story if they consider how the 'history' told by this narrative bridges 'before' and 'after' from an indoor focus to an outdoor one.

The “Cunner-Fishing” chapter (the ninth of thirteen) marks that bridge not only through a moment where Helen and Kate find themselves in a liminal space but also through an explicit conversation about “out-of-door life.” In “Cunner-Fishing,” Helen and Kate are driven by necessity to go fishing for their dinner and are invited by one of the old town captains to go farther out into the water by boat. After catching some fish, they are driven back to shore by an oncoming storm, at which point the girls find themselves seeking shelter and “ran up to the fish house and waited awhile though we stood in the doorway watching the lightning, and there were so many holes in the roof that we might almost as well have been out of doors” (93). This position, simultaneously indoors and outdoors, is an apt one for the two characters who, through their conversation at the chapter’s end, show themselves to be on the cusp of their learning about the rural Maine town’s inhabitants’ inner lives.

While in the fish house, Captain Sands brings up his interest in spiritualism, which the pair of girls have heard of and find amusing. At day’s end, Helen wonders out loud to Kate ““why it is that one hears so much more of such things from simple country people”” (103). Though she goes on to propose that their simplicity and proximity to nature might be the same—“In their simple life they take their instincts for truth, and perhaps they are not always so far wrong as we imagine”—this suggestion is as condescending as it is a compliment. Kate’s response is indirect, neither accepting nor refuting Helen’s thesis outright but offering another explanation:

“I think,” said Kate, “that the more one lives out of doors the more personality there seems to be in what we call inanimate things. The strength of the hills and the voice of the waves are no longer only grand poetical sentences, but an expression of something real, and more and more one finds God himself in the world, and believes that we may read the thoughts that He writes for us in the book of Nature.” (104)

Rather than characterize supernatural explanations as an “absurdity” as Helen does, Kate’s use of the ‘livre naturae’ metaphor appreciates rural residents’ experience as a kind of alternative

literacy. Her suggestion that nature appear as more than “only grand poetical sentences” furthermore turns the critical edge back toward the cosmopolitan aesthete, for whom poetry may be appreciated apart from “something real.” This conversation informs how readers should appreciate the first sentence of the next chapter beginning almost immediately thereafter: “I am sure that Kate Lancaster and I must have spent by far the greater part of the summer out of doors” (105). Sure enough, the following sketches relate more outdoor experiences than many of the preceding ones, though still interspersed with interaction with local characters.

Extending this contrast a little further, it is worth being skeptical of the common critical tendency to treat the narrator, Helen Denis, as a stand-in for Jewett herself, a supposition both in *Deephaven* and *Country of the Pointed Firs* based mostly on these narrators’ being white women of a similar class position as Jewett. If Jewett is casting herself as Helen, it’s not a wholly flattering move. Those quick to critique the two characters for their naiveté and privilege certainly have a case; at the same time, they usually underplay the distinction between the two and the way Helen as the narrator subtly deploys those differences to communicate, through her surprised expectations, her own growth and self-criticism. In the statements just quoted, for example, Helen’s phrase “I am sure” is curiously impressionistic, emphasizing certainty where there may be none, and other phrases like “must have spent” and “by far the greater part” are likewise emphatic while imprecise. Meanwhile, Kate’s “I think,” which Jewett has even underscored by interrupting the reported dialogue with the narrated marker “Kate said,” comes across as more confident and based on clearer premises.

Matters related to reading are underscored by another set of unmet expectations, which have to do with Helen and Kate’s summer reading. In the last chapter, “Last Days in Deephaven,” Helen explains that the girls did not fulfill an educational program they had laid out

for themselves: “We are fond of reading, and we meant to do a great deal of it, as every one does who goes away for the summer; but I must confess that our grand plans were not well carried out.” Indeed, the girls hide away their German dictionaries “to avoid their silent reproach” (138). She says further, “I do not remember that we ever carried out that course of study which we had planned with so much interest. We were out of doors so much that there was often little time for anything else.” This statement is a bit disingenuous, as the next paragraph lists the re-reading the girls did do, a list that rivals or exceeds what most Americans now read in a year; among the list of mostly sentimental works, they also read “Mr. Emerson’s essays, together, out of doors” and add that “we had some cherished volumes of poetry, [...] we used to read them aloud to each other when we sat in our favorite corner of the rocks at the shore, or were in the pine woods of an afternoon” (138, 139). If the initial opposition between reading and being outdoors doesn’t quite stick, the point may instead be to think about the kinds of reading set up in opposition. For, by putting aside their “course of study” for time “out of doors,” the two essentially take Agassiz’s advice to “Study Nature, not books.” Intriguingly, that Emerson and poetry bridge the two options reveals they are not contradictory, as does Kate’s metaphor of nature itself as legibly poetic. Coming at the narrative’s close, this reflection on reading is part of an account of how the girls spent their summer, which informs wider reflections on what they leave behind and what they take away. As such, it undercuts the idea of the book as a sufficient means of learning and reiterates the significance of outdoor experience alongside reading to the whole narrative arc and the change in the characters.

That Jewett’s characters require “out-of-door” experiences as well as books to learn fits with Flaubert’s stipulation for the book to stir one as nature would (“d’agir à la façon de la nature”). For Jewett, at least, there was rigor in the experience of getting to know people and

places off the page and away from the controlled conditions of the familiar. In the 1893 preface written for the republication of *Deephaven*, Jewett mentions another of her guiding principles, a “noble saying of Plato that the best thing that can be done for the people of a state is to make them acquainted with one another” (n.p.). *Deephaven*’s chronicle of the shift in two urban women’s expectations about rural life through its episodes does not directly effect such understanding but occasions for its readers one story to prompt their own speculations and further action. And this, as I have previously explained, is a shared tenet of nature study and nature writing—making it logical that Jewett’s fiction could be thought of in this context. But the usurpation of nature study in early childhood science curricula was contrived precisely by undermining this approach’s rigor on gendered grounds, a move from observational science to laboratory science that tracks the overshadowing of Jewett’s more Flaubertian and less coercive approach by models of reading fiction informed by the Zola approach that succeeded it.

In an essay titled “The Rise and Fall of Natural History,” Robert Michael Pyle considers the factors that led from field observation’s prominence in the natural sciences to its marginalization and disappearance from the university curriculum. The essay echoes Wilcove and Eisner’s widely circulated warning that the loss of natural history as a discipline was a monumental mistake. Pyle enumerates several factors including twentieth-century wars and demographic shifts across geography, but a major factor he discusses with universities in particular is “the rise of highly quantitative, experimental, and specialized scholarship—the so-called ‘hard sciences.’” Echoes of the very move Zola celebrates are audible in his discussion, though Pyle’s tone is not so optimistic:

As mathematics penetrated deeper into every province of science, the descriptive and empirical nature of natural history began to look subjective to its critics. The fact that Mrs. Comstock and her followers admitted poetry and, horror of horrors, emotion, into their range of responses to the natural world planted them firmly

beyond the pale of objectivity. The catchword that arose was “rigor” (and more recently, “robust”). How could an observation be robust, possess rigor, if it was merely “anecdotal” (the final condemnation) instead of experimental and statistically significant? In the end, what doomed the naturalists was exactly what Anna Comstock celebrated in her work: in her long experience as a nature-study teacher, she wrote, she had “never been able to give a lesson twice alike on a certain topic or secure exactly the same results twice in succession.” Since repeatability is the fundamental canon of the modern scientific process, this admission is anathema. “Natural history” became not only unfashionable, but derogatory; “naturalist” came to be a pejorative, or at best a quaint condescension. (238)

The valorization of rigor and repetition over the personal and descriptive goes hand-in-hand with distaste for the variability and indeterminacy of, in this passage, poetry (such as Helen and Kate integrate into their out-of-door summer). Without citing Zola or Bernard, Pyle confirms that “Medicine and genetics helped to drive research away from the whole organism and into the cell and the molecule, thus out of the field and into the lab,” and, as “specialization ruled,” “The objective of a nature-literate citizenry was quietly forgotten” (243). Pyle’s “forgotten” crucially doubles the loss, insisting not only on the dwindled profession but also on its disappearance from disciplinary memory. Armitage’s history of the nature-study movement corroborates Pyle’s narrative: “As society more frequently turned to the scientific establishment for the final verdict on intellectual matters, broad-based amateur knowledge gave way to the results produced by highly educated specialists. These professionals shaped the production and distribution of knowledge and thus much of the political context of intellectual life” (109).

Turning texts into moral laboratories risks a similar effect, creating a professionalized academic set of readers, here elevating the academic (and usually theory-laden) reader over, as in Kaplan’s dismissal, the mere amateur cast as literary tourist or something else. This is consequently why Fetterley and Pryce’s idea of an “active reader” is so promising; it recovers the text’s agency to inspire reverie or reflection that can be taken “in the field,” thus promoting

“acquaintance” among urban and rural folk even outside the specific sketches within Jewett’s text. Returning to the point that opened this section, though—the distinction between Thaxter’s nonfiction and Jewett’s fiction—one might still ask: what is the relationship of fiction to the field?

Diegesis, Fictionality, and the Expected Boundaries of Tourist Readers

Jewett, like Thaxter, records the region’s economic troubles—her later preface to *Deephaven* frames the region’s tourism in those terms more explicitly than the novel itself. Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that Helen and Kate have a leisure-class experience in the face of them. Indeed, they reflect on how the things they have and know make possible their liberty and pleasure, often after encountering rural poverty (106). But tourism’s presence on the scene precedes them, as an early passage conveys:

Almost all the coasters came in sight of Deephaven, and the sea outside the light[house] was their grand highway. Twice from the lighthouse we saw a yacht squadron like a flock of great white birds. As for the sunsets, it used to seem often as if we were near the heart of them, for the sea all around us caught the color of the clouds, and though the glory was wonderful, I remember best one still evening when there was a bank of heavy gray clouds in the west shutting down like a curtain, and the sea was silver-colored. You could look under and beyond the curtain of clouds into the palest, clearest yellow sky. There was a little black boat in the distance drifting slowly, climbing one white wave after another, as if it were bound out into that other world beyond. But presently the sun came from behind the clouds, and the dazzling golden light changed the look of everything, and it was the time then to say one thought it a beautiful sunset; while before one could only keep very still, and watch the boat, and wonder if heaven would not be somehow like that far, faint color, which was neither sea nor sky. (23)

In addition to the “squadron” of yachts already having “their grand highway,” the passage suggests familiarity with the nineteenth-century guidebooks that aimed to stage iteratively the specific aesthetic experiences tourists should have through the phrase “it was time then to say one thought it a beautiful sunset,” a clause that alludes to a conventional response further

depersonalized through the pronoun “one.”

Yet if tourism as an industry depended on the replication of experiences, it’s notable that Jewett deliberately and repeatedly obscured the possibility of exactly replicating Helen and Kate’s experience. Jewett seems to have been aware of readers’ desire to live out the stories for themselves even from the initial response to the *Deephaven* sketches. For that reason, her Preface to the first edition moves to “prevent any misunderstanding”: “It has so often been asked if *Deephaven* may not be found on the map of New England under another name,” Jewett writes, but “while there is a likeness to be traced, few of the sketches are drawn from that town itself, and the characters will in almost every case be looked for there in vain” (3). It would appear that readers kept looking anyway. Her 1893 Preface addressed the topic again at greater length after explicit reference to this key statement from the first Preface:

In the Preface to the first edition of *Deephaven* it was explained that *Deephaven* was not to be found on the map of New England under another name, and that the characters were seldom drawn from life. It was often asserted to the contrary, while the separate chapters were being published from time to time in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and made certain where the town really was, and the true names of its citizens and pew-holders. Therefore it appeared there were already many “places in America” not “few,” that were “touched with the hue of decay.” Portsmouth and York and Wells, which were known to the author, Fairhaven and other seacoast towns, which were unknown, were spoken of as the originals of this fictitious village which still exists only in the mind. Strangely enough, the Atlantic Ocean always seems to lie to the west of it rather than to the east, and the landscape generally takes its own way and furnishes impossible landmarks and impressions to the one person who can see it clearly and in large. Some early knowledge of the secret found later in the delightful story of *Peter Ibbetson* appears to have been foreseen, but a lack of experience and a limited knowledge of the wide world outside forced the imaginer of *Deephaven* to build her dear town of such restricted material as lay within her grasp. The landscape itself is always familiar to her thought, and far more real than many others which have been seen since with preoccupied or tired eyes.

Whereas the first preface denies correspondence with any single town while leaving the door ajar between the actual and fictional through her subtle “almost,” the second preface is more

emphatic in its denial of a single basis for the town of Deephaven even as it proposes that the “landscape” constructed from her sense of the ordinary is “far more real than many others.”

The response of these readers to locate Deephaven in actual towns accounts for an under-acknowledged oddity of criticism that lumps Thaxter and Jewett together without attention to the active reading contexts that unite them. It is all well and good for Thaxter’s book to draw readers to her family’s “house of entertainment” on Appledore Island, but the fictionality of Jewett’s Deephaven thwarts such a linear consequentialism. What, then, of Jewett’s readers? Were they tricked? Were they simply bad readers? And what about the Houghton, Mifflin editors who marketed her books as nature writing—did they fail to distinguish fiction from nonfiction too? What about William Dean Howells, who reviewed *Deephaven* in just this way, writing that “No doubt some particular sea-port sat for Deephaven” even as he notes that “the picture is true to a whole class of old shore towns” (25)? Rather than assume these readers have been completely naïve, I want to continue thinking about the kind of fictionality involved in reading these works in the vacation context in which they have both been promoted.

Though most studies of fictionality focus primarily on works of fiction, Daniel Lehman’s *Matters of Fact: Reading Nonfiction Over the Edge* offers one argument about nonfiction salient for thinking through not just the fictionality problem but also the ethical impact of determining an answer. Drawing from his background as a journalist, Lehman discusses cases he covered and why their nonfictionality mattered. Simply put, he determines that the consequences of responding to nonfiction differ from those of fiction. The “Edge” of Lehman’s title sits between the worlds of “text and experience”; crucially, nonfiction’s defining trait for him is that its subject-matter crosses that edge. Lehman posits this as a question of “availability,” thereby trying to circumvent a foundation in empirical reference: “What counts is not so much whether

those phenomena can be empirically known but that they are also available to and experienced by the reader outside the written artifact” (4). This “over the edge” continuity is the basis for Lehman’s key distinction, which has less to do finally with even content than with its stakes. Nonfiction for him has “a social and material effect different from fiction” (2). That effect is “implicated reading,” whereby nonfiction “draws in its writers and readers as both historical agents and producers and consumers of texts” (6, 7). Once readers know of the subject matter’s proximity to their experience, they are implicated no matter what their response. To differentiate the particular power of nonfiction, Lehman says, you can ask a two-part question: “If you ask if the story is true, and if the answer matters, then you’ve got [an] answer” (39).

The journal *Narrative* provided a platform where Lehman’s argument could be cross-examined by another scholar of literary nonfiction, Eric Heyne. Heyne’s response usefully pushes on the weaker points of Lehman’s approach, which I will demur from rehearsing here fully. But one of the most salient is that “much of Lehman’s effort is spent trying to convince me that I *should* read in a particular way. It often feels like Lehman’s argument is closer to ethical criticism than rhetorical criticism” (325). Lehman essentially concedes in his rebuttal: “I am asking each reader to bring everything she can to the sorts of texts that we associate with historical assertion and events and to read those texts both inside and out for the way they create the world in the text and interact with the world outside the text” (341). Though Lehman disavows being invested finally in categorizing texts, even the phrase “the sorts of texts” in the response betrays that such categorizations continue to pre-structure his ethical claim. As such, this very response evinces a set of expectations that I argue have come to divide categories like nature writing and literary fiction. Lehman would get no pushback on this claim from me regarding nonfiction nature writing. But why not also have a reader “bring everything she can” to

fiction as well? Heyne's point in his closing remark that fictional characters can sometimes evoke more care from readers than the characters of nonfiction speaks to this point (344). This oversight on Lehman's part evinces a set of generic expectations about nonfiction and fiction that I argue has rigidified, not loosened, since Thaxter's and Jewett's times.

Fortuitously, Heyne and Lehman's discussion hinges on a metaphor of natural history, but neither directly ruminates on why that material example maybe "matters." Heyne subtitled his initial response "Mapping a Rough Terrain," which reflects his analysis of Lehman's spatial "edge" metaphor. To signal that his interest is not about drawing out the features and borders of the terrain, Lehman titles his rebuttal "Mining a Rough Terrain," and perhaps with mining in mind follows this up by opening his piece with an anecdote about picking up rocks with a friend while hiking the Shenandoah Valley as a child. While his childhood friend liked to take rocks home to classify them, Lehman confesses to being more interested in what he could do with rocks and the questions he would ask of them ("Did they form the outer ring of some long-ago campfire?"). He continues that he "always treated narrative that way, too" and that genre is a matter he only takes up by necessity (334). Heyne's response comes equally out of nature writing, which he has also studied:

Like Lehman, I love to cart home rocks that simply look or feel interesting, without any knowledge of geology or any need to sort them when I get home. But when someone teaches me the name of a particular kind of rock, or of a particular tree or bug, it makes me happy. I may or may not remember that name or how to distinguish it from other, similar rocks (or trees or bugs), but for the moment I am happy. There is some intrinsic joy for me in hearing the names of things, in learning how to distinguish among the many different kinds of things in this world. I feel the same joy when someone identifies for me a new literary subgenre in such a way that I can see it more clearly, understand it as not merely a unique instance but a type of literary production that shares crucial features with others of its type. I have the same sense of having learned something solid and useful, a pattern that helps me make sense of this complex and fascinating world. Some might argue that no learning is possible without classification: without going that far, I have to say that sorting things out makes me happy. (343)

This back-and-forth is a gracious and poetic way for one scholar to accuse the other of being a trivialist academician and the other to respond that particularities matter for those happy enough to trade in more than generalities. But the larger irony is twofold. First, the example shows a major gap in Lehman's argument that results from Lehman's persistent interest in the bodies of people as the ethical keystone for his rationale of "implicated reading." Does it matter if the rocks these critics discuss existed? The "edge" applies dubiously to the materials and settings of narratives. A setting such as the Shenandoah Valley is available to both writers and readers of fiction and nonfiction: does this change the classifying frames readers should use, or dictate their responses? Second, despite Lehman's interest in bodies and people, the characters of these anecdotes could function equally well for the critics' rhetorical purposes if they were hypothetical or invented. This troubles Lehman's two questions because it limits the value of "implicated reading" in his argument not just to people generally but also a limited set of situations (most often, dying, though also other crimes upon bodies). At the very least, Lehman would have to admit that implication works by degrees, and this concession would detract substantially from the power of the model he offers.

For all its problems, though, Lehman's study and the dialogue it initiated do offer at least one open direction, especially alongside Dorrit Cohn's *The Distinction of Fiction*, though these studies do not cite one another. In making his forceful argument that nonfiction implicates its readers, Lehman writes "Nonfiction is literature whose historical assertions and representational intentions are by definition an effort to fix our identity within the world around us" (37). Put differently: nonfiction depends for its rhetorical efficacy on readers' recognition at the authorial and narrative audience levels that they are homodiegetic to the narrative—in and of the world it narrates. Dorrit Cohn, meanwhile, uses a similar language of narrative worlds and asserts that

“textual markers can be shown to stamp fictional characters as citizens of an artfully created word, a world that, no matter how close the resemblances in other respects, is never identical to the one inhabited by the author who has invented it or by his readers” and that the difference between fiction and history is that historians are homodiegetic to the events they narrative, being without the option fiction has to toggle to a heterodiegetic perspective where more is known than is within the world available to historians and their events (122). In short, both of these scholars identify that, in nonfiction, readers share a world with tellers and told; fictions can elicit similar responses but reveal themselves as fictions when their narration knows more than people could (using phrases like “Little did they know...”).

Jewett’s Flaubertian inspiration is intriguing in the context of this division of history and fiction, and also because her comments about Deephaven’s fictionality provide another test for the question of setting I have already posed using the Shenandoah: the fictionality of Deephaven (and *Deephaven*) can further be explained along lines of diegesis precisely because the issue is one of location. As the preface indicates, the town of Deephaven is fictional in the sense that it doesn’t have a spot on the map, but the flip side of this fact is that it instead points outward to many actual towns. The power of Deephaven’s fictionality for tourist readers is actually, then, that it diffuses their ethical “implication” not to one locality but to a wider set across a regional scale. That diegetic continuity is possible gets conveyed in the relationship of the two women to Deephaven, for instance projected return in the last few sentences of the book:

The thought of Deephaven will always bring to us our long quiet summer days, and reading aloud on the rocks by the sea, the fresh salt air, and the glory of the sunsets; the wail of the Sunday psalm-singing at church, the yellow lichen that grew over the trees, the houses, and the stone walls; our boating and wanderings ashore; our importance as members of society, and how kind every one was to us both. By and by the Deephaven warehouses will fall and be used for firewood by the fisher-people, and the wharves will be worn away by the tides. The few old gentlefolks who still linger will be dead then; and I wonder if some day Kate

Lancaster and I will go down to Deephaven for the sake of old times, and read the epitaphs in the burying-ground, look out to sea, and talk quietly about the girls who were so happy there one summer long before. I should like to walk along the beach at sunset, and watch the color of the marshes and the sea change as the light of the sky goes out. It would make the old days come back vividly. We should see the roofs and chimneys of the village, and the great Chantrey elms look black against our hands and face; when we looked up there would be a star; the crickets would chirp loudly; perhaps some late sea-birds would fly inland. Turning, we should see the lighthouse lamp shine out over the water, and the great sea would move and speak to us lazily in its idle, high-tide sleep. (141)

Jewett's use here of a conditional future tense stresses the possibility of visiting that is just as open, for example, to many readers of the *Atlantic* or her book as it is to her characters. Clearly, a significant number of readers have ignored her prefaces in insisting the town of Deephaven is homodiegetic to them by another name. But even if readers are not strictly homodiegetic to Deephaven, Jewett's self-aware situation of the narrative in the context of readers who are likely to travel somewhere and her hope of acquainting urban and rural populations suggests that crossing the diegetic division to act on the realizations occasioned by the narrative is not wholly inappropriate. This is in keeping with her own ambition as a kind of historian, since a common rhetorical purpose of histories is to situate their readers ethically in the wake of their events.⁴⁴

By extension, I want to conclude on a point implicit in the above discussion of location and especially the location of narratives as they interface with the locations of their readers—an issue raised by the context of tourism from the beginning but largely absent from critical argument. Andrew Piper has linked spaces of reading to reading practices in free-floating ways, such as in the “Among the Trees” chapter of *Book Was There* when he writes: “The history of reading is indebted to the spaces where we read and the types of reading these spaces promote. But our

⁴⁴ Further thinking along these lines might fruitfully put Jewett's work alongside literary tourism in William Faulkner's similarly almost fictional Yoknapatawpha County or, less directly, tourism like that discussed by Goh that brought fans of *The Lord of the Rings* film franchise to New Zealand.

reading *tools* have also played an important role in establishing a connection between individuals and a sense of place. Reading material isn't just there. It helps structure our relationship to space and thus the space of thought" (Piper 113). If this is true, then there may be perhaps few relationships between place and reading material that need as much redefinition as the pairing suggested by the term 'beach reading,' to which I now turn.

'Beach reading' refers to an act and, more vaguely, to a categorizing heuristic for books that is broader than a formal genre. It comes to us from the nineteenth century,⁴⁵ no doubt as an extension of tourism's growth in popularity during that period and the way markets both catered to and created travelers' demands. Academic definitions for the term 'beach reading' are elusive because the category attracts little critical attention, so popular sources are more informative. As one comment from an online discussion board explains, beach reading has developed the connotation of being "trashy" in more than one sense; it defines beach reading as "throw-away novels, frequently of the romance genre, that people could take to the beach in paperback format. If it got a little sand in it or a little ocean water... no problem." Indeed, definitions repeatedly equate the materiality of the book with value judgments of its content, as in Erin Collazo Miller's from *About.com*, that "Beach reading, by definition, is not very heavy" and that "A good beach book is engaging and a quick enough read that you can finish most of it before your sunscreen wears off. Beach reading isn't necessarily literature, but it will entertain." Lists of recommended beach reads nowadays quickly break into sublists of more familiar generic categories—mystery, romance, etc.—and many invocations of the category are ironic or in name only, such as Andrew

⁴⁵ There is at least one record of a women's "Beach Reading Club" in California in 1895, though the social listing regrettably does not list any of the readings.

Cunningham's recommended "Beach reading for Gulf Bankers."⁴⁶ We can learn from George F. Will's piece in *Newsweek* that the term connotes guilt, even if exceptions can be found: "Neither Dostoevsky nor Danielle Steel, here are some worthy books you can spill Coppertone on." And there is also a confessional genre of commentaries on beach reading like a "Letter from the Editor" at *Bookmarks*, which assures readers that it is, in fact, permissible to read something English teachers have not prescribed—in his case as way to get the mind out of daily-life mode and prepare for reading "more serious" books (Jon).

These associations differ substantially from what counted as beach reads during the nineteenth century. At that time, it encompassed books such as Sarah Orne Jewett's *Deephaven* and Celia Thaxter's *Among the Isles of Shoals*.⁴⁷ Both books were reviewed as the pleasant kinds of books readers might take on vacation—again, likely even to the coastal locales about which they were written. Here is an 1873 review of *Among the Isles of Shoals* from the *Literary World*:

This is not a history of the Isles of Shoals; it is rather an essay, a study of their past and present, their animal and vegetable life, their winds and waves and skies, and the glamour that broods over them, touching the poetic soul to tender and eloquent issues. It is not rich in learning, or striking in theory; but it is exquisitely beautiful in thought and style—a summer reverie [sic] that the refined reader will be grateful for the privilege of sharing.

And here is a review of Jewett's *Deephaven*, also from the *Literary World* but in 1877:

⁴⁶ "Those of us who work in financial services have spent the last two years trying to keep our balance (and our balance sheets) as markets swung out of control and we stared into the face of the biggest financial crisis in 75 years. Don't we deserve a break? Not really. We have to learn the lessons of the recent crisis, and incorporate those lessons without delay into a new and stronger financial system. So what reading material should bankers take with them on vacation this summer?" The article goes on to recommend various readings from the sphere of finance and that, instead of actually taking the time to read *The Big Short*, busy bankers read a summary from *Vanity Fair*.

⁴⁷ Today, Jewett is an explicitly literary author contrasted to beach reading, as in a tourist promotion article "Good Bookstores Line Maine's Coastal Road; Tourists Looking for a Rare Find or Just Fun Beach Reading Head to One of Several Shops." Jewett is definitely a local "Rare Find" that William Davis uses to promote "Antiquarian Bookstores." Her appeal is set apart distinctly, say, from readers dropping in to pick up a Nicholas Sparks novel.

The book is a dreamily pleasant one, overhung by a kind of glowing haze, which softens every outline; full of well-drawn pictures of common things, without more of humor than there is in everyday life, and with touches of pathos which relate to some of the deeper things of human experience. Those who like the sea, and the atmosphere of seaside towns, will enjoy it; and we should describe it as a choice book of its class. (“Recent Fiction” 9)

The language of dreaminess in both reviews and the explicit distinction of Thaxter as “not rich in learning, or striking in theory” resonate with contemporary language about the beach reads’ not being “heavy.” The designation of *Deephaven* as “a choice book of its class” is also, if vaguely, dismissive and diminutive. Before readers took smut, spies, and sunscreen to the beach, they took books that “touch[ed] the poetic soul to tender and eloquent issues” and that had “touches of pathos which relate to some of the deeper things of human experience.”⁴⁸

Following the haptic language of these reviews, we can return to the question of what these books might put us in “touch” with—particularly since, as I discuss above, the critical legacy of these two books has loaded their beach bags with such ethical freight. Appledore and the Maine Coast are different now, so is there any case left to be made for taking Thaxter and Jewett on vacation now? For one thing, there is the value of registering that estrangement. Existential estrangement at the beach has already been discussed briefly by environmentalist and writer David Orr in a short essay surveying poems about beaches. As he notes, such estrangement is often a curious point of disjunction from what writers and their readers expect.

Like Orr, I am interested on playing with the idea of beach reading in ways that contradict the common usage’s trivializing connotation. The meaning of the term ‘beach reading’ is predicated upon a metonymy associating beaches with recreation and implicitly dissociating

⁴⁸ Especially via Piper’s presentation of reading contextualized by place, a whole set of interesting questions could open up about haptic connection and the significance of bringing print books vs. e-readers. The irony here is that the latter actually makes reading nineteenth-century works easier since they usually come in free editions through the public domain.

seaboard spaces from quotidian responsibility. The suspension of responsibility at beaches depends on a particular (and particularly detached) relationship to place that is underwritten by transience as well as an imagining of the spaces of beaches themselves. One articulation of the consequences spatial orientation may have for interpretation comes from Peter Rabinowitz, who phrases his driving premise as follows: “Readers need to stand somewhere before they pick up a book, and the nature of that ‘somewhere’ [...] significantly influences the ways in which they interpret (and consequently evaluate) texts” (2). Though he is using location and “nature” here figuratively, his point is that readers’ attitudes substantially shape, for example, what gets labeled ‘beach reading,’ what kinds of interpretive decisions such a label inspires, and how seriously readers take a book thus labeled overall; in thinking about “beach reading,” I simply literalize the “nature of that ‘somewhere.’”

With increasing frequency, assorted catastrophes (from the BP Gulf oil spill to the Fukushima tsunami-reactor compound disaster) impinge on the carefree imagination of beach spaces that made relationships informing current uses of ‘beach reading’ seem available, but countries all over the world have also been making predictions about a silent and slower problem—sea level rise—for a number of years. Indeed, prediction conversations have moved from the possibility of the phenomenon to its extents and costs.⁴⁹ The need for bringing a better sense of the issues of narrative and response I discuss above—to think of reading also “in the field” and as a form of contact—comes across in the ways experts frame the need for strategic action:

That story is about change—the possibility that the climatic patterns of the world are in a transition to warmer weather that could lead to a rise in the sea level. You may not have thought much about the sea level previously; it was something we took for granted. But since we have taken it as a given for so long, the

⁴⁹ For an accessible popular summary of the situation, see Gillis.

adjustments we may have to make will be profound. When you stop to think about all the areas of our lives that could be affected by climatic change, you will be amazed [...] And even that is not the end of the story. Just as the potential effects of sea level rise will be societal, so the decisions whether to anticipate and how to respond to the new conditions will need to be made in large part by our governmental institutions. While the magnitude of the challenge is much greater than most faced by governments in the past, it is perhaps representative of many that we will face in the future. The question is, do we have the will to begin to face these questions today?" (Ruckelshaus ix)

The answer was no, because this note was written in 1984. This study's authors consider a number of different scenarios and possible responses. But the situation is notably different thirty years later; Chad McGuire's study "focuses on sea-level rise as a given and discusses policy planning issues that arise when focusing solely on *adaptation* strategies to sea level rise" (2). In these thirty years, the conversation moved from prevention to adaptation. And though McGuire also studies public policy responses, the details of different strategies' benefits and drawbacks highlight just how many challenges face action at institutional levels. How to run up political "will" is something else altogether, but the very organization of his book—moving from science, to policy, to law—reinforces the recognized need to "establish a foundation of the science behind sea level rise as a means of better understanding the connections between those scientific principles and the options we come up with as humans to respond to the impacts and effects of sea-level rise" (7).

Nature study advanced such understanding of scientific principles by getting students to make observations in the field and connect those observations to their reading; its "in the field" principles ran counter to attitudes such as the moral laboratory that regularize distance between readers and stories. Recovering the nature writing aspect of regionalist works such as those I have discussed here makes their proximity to these modes of reading more visible. That both writers could be folded into the emerging category of nature writing, then, makes sense because

of how, rather than proposing outdoor experience's value as self-evident, their texts' agency comes from opening a space for encouraged amateurism whereby readers could improve (to use a favorite word of Jewett's) their "acquaintance" with their ideas through active travel and empathy. Indeed, this realignment also suggests that texts and readers be studied together to think through how their various forms of agency interact.

Returning to regionalist writing is not only appropriate because the records of tide-gauging in the United States go back to the nineteenth century but (Douglas 40), as I have been tracing, because its promotion of readers who act upon their reading and who read based on where they are or are going offers a wider set of options for thinking about ethical responses to texts. Thaxter and Jewett's texts already have histories of drawing readers to distant locales. As such, their works, among others, may be useful for public-facing programming that aims to foster attachment between readers and place as a precondition to mobilizing action on problems like sea level rise. If, as Ruckelshaus put it, some of the difficulty for policy advocates has been getting the public to act on "the possibility that the climatic patterns of the world are in a transition to warmer weather that could lead to a rise in the sea level," then regionalist fiction such as Jewett's seems perhaps especially applicable because of the opportunity it affords for crossing from the diegesis of possibility to that of reality (as in my example of the potential return to Deephaven). Read at the beach, moreover, these works and the ways they promote being acted upon may prove auspicious for exercising how readers bridge imagination and reality, or even the theory of climate science and on-the-ground conditions. This would be a different conception of beach reading indeed, though one perhaps playful enough so as not to be antithetical to leisure.

Chapter 3 - Upending Muir and James: Reading and Cultish Rigor

Genre. Critical acclaim. Popularity. Geography. Subject. There are just a few of the arena in which John Muir and Henry James, Jr., could be opposed, and as heuristics for many critical studies, they account for why these two figures do not appear together in literary criticism despite their rough contemporaneity (Muir, 1838–1914; James, 1843–1916). The leads for discovering a link between the two are several and tantalizing,⁵⁰ but what the two share that most interests me is their division—a disparity of roles in literary history so pronounced that John Muir’s works can be shelved in entirely different parts of the library than those of Henry James. John Muir is remembered for his historical agency, whereas Henry James is remembered for his consummate role as appreciator of the aesthetic. In this chapter, I bring these acts of remembering into relief such that they appear less as inevitabilities and more as the product of accumulated readers’ inertia. By deviating from these well-worn trajectories with unconventional readings of both writers, I suggest it becomes possible to think more creatively about the futures of their works specifically and the future of nature writing more broadly.

Ecocritics, of course, have long aspired to cultivating practices that would yield political fruit, and in that regard Corey Lee Lewis’s *Reading the Trail: Exploring the Literature and Natural History of the California Crest* represents much of ecocriticism’s promise as well as its pitfalls in terms of critical and pedagogical directives for literature scholars. Put broadly, Lewis’s book takes up the work of three writers with known associations to the land areas traversed by

⁵⁰ James had a gardener named “Miss Muir McKenzie,” but I have not done any genealogical work to unveil a basis for this figure to operate as a transatlantic conduit between the writers (Caws 93). Nor have I discovered that James’s trip to California resulted in the kind of personal tour that Theodore Roosevelt, Howard Taft, and Ralph Waldo Emerson all enjoyed with Muir: “California ‘has completely bowled me over’, he said. ‘(I speak of course all of nature and climate, fruits and flowers; for there is absolutely nothing else, and the sense of the shining social and human inane is utter.)’ (Horne HJL IV 356-7.) He lectured in San Francisco, called in Portland and Seattle, then regretfully took the train back East in time to lecture ...” (411)

the Pacific Crest Trail—Mary Austin, John Muir, and Gary Snyder—and makes a case for the paired study of texts and places as beneficial means for promoting or advancing ecological literacy on the one hand and fostering new kinds of observations within literary study on the other. As my prior chapters bear out, I am roundly sympathetic to Lewis’s statement that “in the process of unifying the tale and the trail, by connecting the reading with the walking, we are able to use the book as the guide on the trail and our experience on the trail as a guide through the book” (33). Lewis’s book contains valuable, specific tools and advice for the kinds of pedagogical experiences he promotes, making the book overall a refreshing departure from studies that focus entirely on analytical arguments.

But while the suggestion to read writers like Austin, Muir, and Snyder in connection with the places their prose and poetry represent makes intuitive sense, the proposal has unclear implications as a method of study for works featuring fictive settings (as I discuss in the previous chapter) as well as works more generally where the setting, even if specific, seems like a less obvious “field” for fieldwork; this was a criticism animating critics of ecocriticism from within and from without. As an approach, ecocriticism based on works of nature writing and dependent on a represented place was bound to encounter problems of definition and accessibility.

In what “field,” for example, should we read Henry James? It’s less of a random question than it seems. James actually plays a pivotal role in the Introduction to the volume of ecocritical essays that announced—more brashly even than the title of Patrick Murphy’s earlier *Farther Afield*, which might still presume that there was a field to serve as the “there” there—the move *Beyond Nature Writing*. Editors of the collection and coauthors of the Introduction Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace shared stories from the job market where Henry James figured at their interviews as a challenge to the scope of their ecocritical approaches. “In our

experience,” they write, “the most common question such scholars have about ecocriticism is whether it can usefully be applied to texts outside of nature writing—to the novels, say, of Henry James or other authors who seem less concerned with nature than with culture” (3). In a section too long to quote here entitled “A Tale of Two Questions,” Armbruster and Wallace proceed to recount the interview questions and their responses. They note that “While debriefing after our interviews, we discovered we each had been asked a question that struck at the core of our work, both then and now”—a statement worth highlighting just to indicate Henry James’s reach in haunting ecocriticism (particularly since that “and now” has been extended by *Beyond Nature Writing* remaining a common citation in accounts of ecocriticism’s development). To some extent, their answer *is* a “farther afield” one, and a step worth making: “In 1995, Kathy answered the question by pointing to the built and natural Chicago landscapes outside the hotel windows, arguing that if ecocriticism is to have any real force as a theoretical and pedagogical approach, ecocritics need to attend to the landscapes in which most people live—cities, suburbs, and rural areas” (6). However, I want to push past perhaps even the pointing-out-the-window move, and to do so I will pick up on a suggestion they make, almost by the way, in closing the section:

Additional scholarly work might consider why Henry James has been so valorized by the literary establishment, while most nature and environmentally focused writing has been more or less marginalized. Are standards for ‘great literature’ biased toward representations of the disembodied mind and of various cultural and aesthetic issues and away from representations that clearly speak to human relationships with nature? (8)

This undeveloped suspicion aligns with several questions this project draws from nature writing’s larger reception history. “Standards for ‘great literature’” themselves change over time, so a bias such as Armbruster and Wallace propose would be tricky to establish definitively; but reviewing the reception histories for Muir and James does lay out how influential responses to both writers’ work explain their having been cordoned off from one another. As I argue in the

following pages, reading biographies and criticism of both figures makes it possible to tease out how iterative critical judgments bring about the unfortunate and finally fallacious dichotomy that Armbruster and Wallace share here with their interviewers and a study such as Lewis's, even as their larger project adamantly hopes to move beyond it: the separation of "cultural and aesthetic issues" as "away from" works that are "clearly" dealing with "nature." Breaking up such a dichotomy may spawn newer questions in debates over "naturecultures," but I am more consciously pursuing faster and looser fish—more self-awareness about how reading practices contribute to such labeling as well as grafting across previously separated literate practices toward more imaginative ends.

For all their differences, Muir and James have shared in the histories of their reading the tendency to attract devoted followings or, as influential critics have put it, "cults." The designation of these cult followings (so characterized by skeptics) labels a recognizable level of readerly participation—a differentiation between the body of, say, "Muir readers" and "James readers," but also, in the case of these two specific groups, marks their non-overlap (that is, I speculate—in a way my chapter will go on to explain—that a Venn diagram of "Muir readers" and "James readers" has had, so far, a lonely area of overlap—and that within that overlap finding devotees cultish to both would be rarer still). Granted, authorship typically tends toward cults of personality.⁵¹ But fervent readers don't necessary make the most attentive ones. Consequently, I present readings that diverge from received images of these authors, finding in John Muir something of an art critic and advocate of an aesthetic method, and in Henry James's *The Golden Bowl* an unlikely ethicist for the Anthropocene. I close with further reflections on the importance of revisiting the shape of literary history and the associations between authors it risks

⁵¹ Or has since at least the Romantic period; see Nicola J. Watson's *Literary Tourism and Nineteenth-Century Culture*.

teaching us to overlook.

An Amateur at Altitude

Even by his own admission when he called himself a “poetico-trampo-geologist-bot. and ornith-natural, etc!–!–!” John Muir is a difficult person to label (qtd. in Nash 122), but some consistencies among responses to him and his work help clarify why his work is classified under the Library of Congress catalogue designation QH for natural history rather than PS for American Literature⁵² and perhaps by extension why he eludes inclusion in print anthologies of American Literature, whereas Henry James appears in each one.⁵³ This chapter first explains this outcome of literary history and then discomforts it. If the shape of Muir’s reputation seems deserved and completely unsurprising, it is all the more important to see it take shape in biography, publication history, and reception such that the “poetico-” at the front of Muir’s own list should, more than any other part, fade from view. The case I mount is that this reputation has lost sight of the aesthetic basis of the imagination that underpins Muir’s natural thinking, with the effect of narrowing how and why Muir gets read.

Muir’s biography looms large, and several people have taken their turn writing it, in each case adjusting the undertones of Muir’s record as nature lover, mystic, mountaineer, glaciologist, philosopher, hype-man, theologian, family-man, activist, proto-ecologist, and writer like so many dials on a mixing board. Because most of Muir’s writing is autobiographical anyway, a few of

⁵² For context, I would point out that Burroughs and Thaxter both appear in American Literature like James, divided from him instead only by the alphabet.

⁵³ By my search, which admittedly has not been exhaustive, the one exception is the 1949 anthology *The Rise of Realism: American Literature from 1860-1900*, edited by Louis Wann, where Muir appears in a section titled “The Advance of Science” and James has his own section. Such a division is indicative since it positions James value as standing alone while positioning Muir as chiefly a science writer with perhaps a literary bent or reflecting larger representative and discursive practices. As such, this anthology is the exception that proves the rule.

these biographies amount to third-person rehashes with extra details sprinkled in. But to the extent that work on John Muir considers him as an author at all, one indicative factor for which version of Muir sounds most clearly is the critic's attention to the convoluted order of his work's publication.⁵⁴ For example, although the journaling that informed *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf* (1916) precedes almost all of Muir's published writing chronologically, it was only published posthumously by Muir's literary executor William Frederic Badè to fill the chronological gap between the events of *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (1913) and *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911) (both published in Muir's lifetime). However, the content of other posthumously published books such as *Travels in Alaska* (1915) and *Steep Trails* (1918) wasn't all that posthumous; like most of the books Muir managed to publish while alive, these books drew substantially from the periodical publications of prior decades. The (a)synchronicities of biography, composition, and publication can shape (perhaps to the level of distortion) images of Muir's authorship, particularly as they superimpose Muir's later public advocacy and activism upon his reflections from earlier experiences.

Thinking about John Muir as a writer for periodicals versus as an author of books is relevant insofar as the durability of material books lets them carry more weight for shaping literary authorship and legacy than periodicals, which are often treated as ephemera. Yet Muir published in book form mostly during the time of his life when he was most engaged with the politics of land conservation. The invaluable resource for untangling Muir's life and writing is William and Maymie Kimes's *John Muir, a Reading Bibliography*, which tracks the various printings, reprintings, and publications of Muir's writing. Thanks to its cross-references and annotated entries, Muir scholars can follow iterations of his thoughts to examine how and when

⁵⁴ On the far end of this is a biography like Frederick Turner's that barely discusses the writing as such.

Muir the “impassioned crusader” emerges from Muir “reveling in the pure wilderness” (Kimes and Kimes xi). To date, few scholars have undertaken this work of parsing this transformation, with three exceptions. One, Nicolas Witschi, dedicates one chapter in his monograph on how western writers consolidated values formative to American realism to a hyper-focused look at the gradual disappearance of the traces of derelict gold rush mining in Muir’s work. A second, Jean-Daniel Collomb’s “Ecological Awareness and Democratic Consensus: John Muir *Post-Mortem* Radicalism,” argues that appreciation of Muir’s ecologically-inspired challenges to American culture arose from posthumous readings of his more complete works than were available in Muir’s lifetime, thus going even beyond the periodical-to-book lag. And, finally, Corey Lee Lewis performs adept close readings of differences between notes and published book versions of *My First Summer in the Sierra* and *The Mountains of California* to establish Muir’s under-acknowledged care and savvy as a rhetorician—traits that commonly quoted anxieties about his writing from personal letters, such as “Book-making frightens me,” belie (qtd. in Lewis 93). An eye strictly to print history, then, starts to clarify something about Muir’s reception. Because the revision of his pieces into books made them easier to keep in print than early periodical pieces, and no doubt partly because many of the immediate keepers of his legacy had ties to environmental organizations like the Sierra Club (including Badè and the Kimeses), it makes sense that his texts live on in paratextual forms that stress his environmental associations rather than foregrounding his appearance in print alongside other luminaries of American literary history in mixed-genre periodicals including the San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin*, *The Overland Monthly*, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, *Scribner’s Monthly*, *The Century Magazine*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Habitual associations reinforce the reception of Muir’s authorial legacy that tricky

timelines and paratexts create. In his lifetime, Muir invited a wide field of associations as commentators struggled to define him, such that one wrote, “He is an Agassiz, a Thoreau, a John Burroughs, with something of a Henry Drummond⁵⁵ all commingled” (“The Agassiz of the Pacific Slope” 40). Associations to John Burroughs were particularly popular, not only because the two met through Robert Underwood Johnson and traveled together in the Harriman Expedition, but because framing the two Johns together helped consolidate what, as Walter Prichard Eaton put it in writing for *The Bookman* in 1919, “for want of a better term, we call ‘nature writings’”—especially as a coast-to-coast, nationalized genre with plural exemplars (628). In addition to Francis Whiting Halsey’s essay that I discuss at length in my introduction, influential instances of this pairing include Theodore Roosevelt’s obituary “Appreciation” of Muir (“Our greatest nature lover and nature writer, the man who has done most in securing for the American people the incalculable benefit of appreciation of wild nature in his own land, is John Burroughs. Second only to John Burroughs, and in some respect ahead even of John Burroughs, was John Muir.”), Clara Barrus’s “With John o’ Birds and John o’ Mountains in the Southwest” (which is probably the most-cited documentation of their relationship because Muir scholars love to relate Burroughs’s quip about tossing Muir into the Grand Cañon), and—much later but influentially—Houghton Mifflin Editor-in-Chief Paul Brooks’s *Speaking for Nature* (1980), which makes “The Two Johns” the first chapter of his reflection on the genre after years of working for its biggest consolidating publisher. Despite the strength of this association, one can see even from book indexes that it falls away the later the biography’s publication date. Linnie Marsh Wolfe writes about each of the Johns’ meetings in her Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Muir, *Son of the Wilderness* (1967), but later tellers like Michael Cohen and

⁵⁵ Scottish evangelist.

Frederick Turner do little more than note that the two writers met—though each makes much greater mention of Thoreau. This pattern reflects what I detailed elsewhere in this project—that consolidations of nature writing as a genre came to displace Burroughs for Thoreau, which has encouraged critics to see various philosophical or historical continuities—between Thoreau and Muir especially, usually followed by Aldo Leopold—that have subsequently minimized not only a host of writers but possible literary continuities of genre and its attendant history of reading.

The prevailing and enduring impression of Muir as environmental activist is hardly a misreading, of course—it will remain an integral part of his legacy as a writer; I trace its contours here so that its current strength can be put into greater relief. So influential have been the interpretations of Muir as “popularizer” or activist, (the Muir of Roderick Nash widely circulated through *Wilderness and the American Mind*) and as a prophetic “biocentric” philosopher (epitomized in Max Oelschlaeger’s also widely-cited take on Muir) that they have all but crowded out the characterization of Muir as “one of the most important nature writers of his time” (Oeschlaeger 173; Kimes and Kimes xi). As John Muir’s reputation demonstrates, then, the “nature” half of “nature writing” came to overshadow the “writing”—leading to the awkward situation where Lewis’s book from 2005 actually stands out for reminding scholars, and scholar-educators in particular, that Muir was a skilled writer and rhetorician, at which point Lewis was actually updating a similar point made as far back as 1965 by Herbert Smith in what remains one of just a few book-length studies of Muir as a writer: “All the studies of Muir have been perceptive and telling in their relation of Muir as a man; none has adequately shown how he managed to achieve *literature*—ten volumes of it, in the Sierra Edition—out of the most unlikely material” (7). Smith’s reference to Muir’s mountaineering experience as “the most unlikely material” for “literature” reinforces the wedge between the parts of Muir for which he is

otherwise course-correcting. There is a seriousness that attaches to “*literature*,” but also often a remove. Readers who looked to Muir for imaginative access to landscapes or who acted upon their reading and visited places like the Sierras show no evidence of such a remove. But in doing so, they gave literary critics license, perhaps, to overlook the seriousness of texts with such popular appeal.

It is because (not despite) Muir continues to play an influential role in shaping environmental ethics that I argue for widening the reading practices readers apply to him beyond tapping him as a wellspring of environmental ideas. To clarify, this is not simply a claim that this erstwhile science writer might be incorporated into a category called literature (since a slew of extant arguments about the arbitrariness of ‘the literary’ as a category would make such a claim lackluster), but a retrieval of Muir (and others) into a status and set of relationships available from their beginnings but obscured by the collaborating memories of publishers and scholars. Historian and Muir collections-archivist Ronald Limbaugh, for example, outlined six takeaways from Muir to environmental educators, emphasizing partly the need for personal learning, partly storytelling technique, and partly the need to secularize Muir’s appeals. Limbaugh’s case for the blend of reading, firsthand experience, and storytelling echoes, of course, the nature study movement’s emphases as discussed in my previous chapter. Lissy Goralnik and Michael P. Nelson writing for *The Journal of Environmental Education*, however, worry that Muir “demonstrates a consequentialist ethic” that is less helpful, in their view, than Aldo Leopold’s ethical thought (182). They especially question the necessity of consequence entailed in “the assumption that the positive emotional reactions that enable people to act will be prompted merely by exposure to and knowledge of the environment,” which they see as central to Muir’s writing (and that Limbaugh finds effective), pointing out that some forms of exposure contribute

to environmental degradation at certain scales. By contrast, philosopher Jeffrey Wattles makes a different turn—to environmental aesthetics. Though Wattles is not responding to Goralnik and Nelson explicitly, an implicit response his article offers to theirs is that experience involving the perception of beauty may effect changed attitudes because beauty in nature has intrinsic value with motivational potential. Though I echo Wattles's interest in aesthetics, I remain skeptical of some of the distinctions he tries to make, and I also think it is important to maintain that aesthetic judgment can result in more assessments than beauty. Tracing the sequence from Limbaugh to Wattles limns different receptions of the descriptions in Muir's prose (described by Muir's friend John Swett as combining "scientific accuracy of statement with a poetic expression which lends a singular charm to his writings" (123)): Muir's descriptions can be seen either as the dressing to the "moral" point (as in Limbaugh) or as the potential focus of attention (as for Wattles).

To substantiate my interest in the latter, it is helpful to associate Muir with a final figure, an association carried forward from Muir's lifetime by Donald Wesling, Norman Foerster, and especially Terry Gifford—that informs Muir's ethics and aesthetics; it is yet another John: Ruskin. An 1895 review of *The Mountains of California* otherwise mostly invested in how the natural marvels that Muir describes "stirs our patriotic blood" drops into its penultimate sentence a comparison that others have since taken up: "There are many pages which, in the splendor of their style, remind us of John Ruskin" ("The Book of Nature" 4). Biographies of Muir such as Cohen's have presented Muir's critical comments about Ruskin (particularly to a friend, J.B. McChesney of Oakland) to shore up a distinction between Muir and Britain's best-known Victorian art critic, who also wrote about mountains, mountaineered, and was influential in British conservation. Cohen writes that Muir "suffered through Ruskin's aesthetics" (referring mostly to Muir's reading from *Modern Painters*) on his way to establishing Muir's rejection of

Ruskin's form of "aesthetic distance" (38, 40).⁵⁶ Through an attentive review of Muir's marginal notes and penciled index on the endpapers to his copies of Ruskin's works, Terry Gifford argues against Cohen that Muir's response is "not a reading of Ruskin at all; it is a reaction to certain words, impressionistically remembered, in order to develop his own thinking" (139-40); elsewhere, on the same subject, Gifford is even more direct in calling Muir's take on Ruskin a "(mis)reading," albeit one that Muir still used to "hone" his ideas (83). Gifford is finally too quick with his out-of-hand dismissal of the possibility that even Muir's misreading-based understanding of his difference from Ruskin might be genuinely considered, but the impulse to focus on Muir's reading of Ruskin usefully disrupts the "apostle of nature" image that seems divorced from engaging such contemporaries as *Modern Painters*, as though this scientist and environmental advocate could have no use for art. The critical effect of having held Muir apart from the predominant literary and artistic conversations of his day has been his dissociation from the circles that Henry James occupied.

To bring this critical reframing to bear on Muir's writing and thus re-examine his monotone legacy, I turn to *The Mountains of California*, which few scholars have treated as a whole. By reading across its essays, I argue for an understanding of the text that recognizes not only its structure's relationship to the geological theory it conveys but also how Muir's writing solicits readers to participate in practices of observation capable of generating new ideas. "The Sierra Nevada," which opens *The Mountains of California*, orients readers to a space and its history. Its first paragraph articulates a corrective about the apparent simplicity of California's Central Valley that turns out, thanks to Muir's consistent association with the landscape, to offer a meta-level reflection on potential flattening of Muir's own reputation:

⁵⁶ I would note here the assumed association of the seriously artistic and distance/remove.

Go where you may within the bounds of California, mountains are ever in sight, charming and glorifying every landscape. Yet so simple and massive is the topography of the State in general views, that the main central portion displays only one valley, and two chains of mountains which seem almost perfectly regular in trend and height: the Coast Range on the west side, the Sierra Nevada on the east. These two ranges coming together in curves on the north and south inclose [sic] a magnificent basin, with a level floor more than 400 miles long, and from 35 to 60 miles wide. This is the grand Central Valley of California, the waters of which have only one outlet to the sea through the Golden Gate. But with this general simplicity of features there is great complexity of hidden detail. The Coast Range, rising as a grand green barrier against the ocean, from 2000 to 8000 feet high, is composed of innumerable forest-crowned spurs, ridges, and rolling hill-waves which inclose a multitude of smaller valleys; some looking out through long, forest-lined vistas to the sea; others, with but few trees, to the Central Valley; while a thousand others yet smaller are embosomed and concealed in mild, round-browed hills, each with its own climate, soil, and productions. (315)

The mid-paragraph pivot at “But,” which insists that “with this general simplicity of features there is a great complexity of hidden detail,” I will argue, could productively be applied to Muir’s work as well as the Central Valley. Part of that detail is present in this very paragraph, and specifically has to do with what is unresolved between the first sentence and what follows; the mountains have a visual omnipresence acknowledged to add charm and glory to landscape, but something of a *trompe-l’œil* is at work, and they are perhaps not well understood when seen just in this way. The paragraph is further suggestive of the texture of Muir’s writing since the specificity of descriptions here—the numbers serving as a frame of reference and the nouns that populate the space for the reader’s mental picture—contribute to a vividness such that adjectives like “magnificent” and “grand” pass by almost unnoticed. The long final sentence characteristically conveys a sense of movement with words like “rising,” “inclose,” and “embosomed” that register previous geological movement in the otherwise apparently static loco-descriptive present. In the following paragraph, Muir adds his readers’ own movement to the scene, winding them “through the mazes” until “the grandest and most telling of all California landscapes is outspread” before them (315).

The sense of geologic movement in the first paragraph is indicative since *The Mountains of California* reads most cohesively as an extended presentation of the glaciological theory that garnered Muir's early writings their attention (differing from Josiah Whitney's accepted prior explanation for the Yosemite's formation in catastrophist geological terms). Throughout "The Sierra Nevada," Muir establishes his ethos as the reader's guide and interpreter, including when, in the penultimate sentences, Muir states as if to concede that "nothing that [he] can write can possibly exaggerate the grandeur and beauty" of the mountains and their formation, which insists that even his frequent superlative adjectives are not distortions but the product of "long and loving study." This first chapter, which Muir added for the book publication, gives a sort of overview for which the next six chapters serve as expansions, with each taking up a feature of the topographic landscape and deriving an explanation of its gradual glacial formation through observable features. The chapters from "The Forests" onward, if in title they do not quite seem involved with glacial landscapes, nonetheless contribute to the theory's validity by tying plant and animal life to the landscape's deep history. So, for example, shortly before closing his chapter on the "Douglas Squirrel" with the anecdote of his singing church tunes to squirrels gathered about him—doubtless, the kind of apostolic scene that has inspired some of Muir's monikers—Muir is able to conclude why Douglas squirrels are seldom found beyond a certain height above sea level: "Wherever the ancient glaciers have spread forest soil there you will find our wee hero, most abundant where depth of soil and genial climate have given rise to a corresponding luxuriance in the trees, but following every kind of growth up the curving moraines to the highest glacial fountains" (461-2). If noticing the link between squirrels and the tree line is not too remarkable, it's the culmination of Muir's accounting for the glacially-

directed extent of that tree line—in addition to his explanations for the water ouzel⁵⁷ all the way down to the bees in the valley⁵⁸—that shows off when the essays are read together the comprehensiveness of Muir’s theory and the explanatory power of his integrative thinking about the ecosystem as offering evidence of its own glacial formation. I agree with an assessment like Smith’s that “the total effect of *The Mountains of California* is certainly greater than the sum of its parts,” a statement that might for other authors go without saying but that reinforces the need for further close study of Muir’s print history (88).

While it is true that some of Muir’s changes to the text while editing to prepare for the book’s publication add distinctive political barbs to the book—as Lewis’s analysis of two changes to the “Range of Light” passage bears out—readings of the book such as Charles Norman’s that claim it “served a purpose that was close to [Muir’s] heart: it rallied the entire nation to the need for conserving its natural resources for all the people,” I would argue, confuse effect with purpose and mistakenly let biography and chronology of publication direct their overall assessment. That Lewis has so few changes to go off, and thus that such changes don’t amount to the book’s purpose even if they have played a role in the book’s popular and critical reception, aligns with Smith’s noting that Muir “had little writing to do” when he put the book together: “He did some pruning here, perhaps added a pertinent anecdote or additional description there, but the production of Muir’s first book was primarily a problem of selecting

⁵⁷ “Were the flights of all the ouzels in the Sierra traced on a chart, they would indicate the direction of the flow of the entire system of ancient glaciers, from about the period of the breaking up of the ice-sheet until near the close of the glacial winter; because the streams which the ouzels so rigidly follow are [...] all flowing in the channels eroded for them out of the solid flank of the range by the vanished glaciers.”

⁵⁸ “How long the various species of wild bees have lived in this honey garden, nobody knows; probably ever since the main body of the present flora gained possession of the land, toward the close of the glacial period.”

and arranging material already written” (Lewis 109; Smith 81-2).⁵⁹ The dangers of human incursion absolutely ring in the three final chapters, “The Wild Sheep” (“man is the most dangerous enemy,” 513), “In the Sierra Foothills” (“The hills have been cut and scalped, and every gorge and gulch and valley torn to pieces and disemboweled, expressing a fierce and desperate energy hard to understand,” 515), and “The Bee Pastures” (“But of late years plows and sheep have made sad havoc in these glorious pastures,” 523); these and other sound bytes certainly reflect concerns for Muir in the 1890s, when he was at odds with robber baron economics seeking to incur upon protected lands. Yet these moments are just as often decontextualized within the longer time scales of landscape formation, and in that way remain subordinated to the book’s geological exploration, rather than commandeering the earlier writings’ rhetorical purpose.

What feels like an odd contortion—recognizing Muir’s politics without necessarily placing them center-stage of interpretation—is worth making because Muir’s work has potential contributions for environmental education outside of specific directed criticisms or even broader ethical reorientations, even while acknowledging his powerful examples of both. If that were all there were to him, people might spare themselves the labor of reading and perform an internet search for “John Muir nature quotes”; indeed, the Sierra Club already has a “vault” of “favorite quotations.” I’m after something a little different. First, I take Stephen Fox’s point from his book situating Muir historically relative to the larger conservation movement that Muir’s story taps into and notably motivated “the tradition of the radical amateur in conservation” (352). Nature writing generally was an amateur-directed booklist; reading is an entry point for amateurs

⁵⁹ Cohen’s account, despite presenting an even more summary account of Muir’s process “There was little new to the book, except its structure” that exemplifies the kind of gloss Lewis is contrasting with his reading of Muir’s tactical edits, nonetheless significantly notes that some of Muir’s omissions in *Mountains* support a reading less focused on Muir’s activist goals (284-5).

generally; and Muir's reception gives ample evidence of having motivated amateur readers to the point of political participation.⁶⁰ How this became possible is the dynamic of interest to me. It might be explained by combining insights from Norman Foerster and Thomas Lyon. Foerster identifies as one explanation for Muir's descriptions the "degree of vividness" with which Muir makes "[t]he immobile and changeless face of nature" that his contemporaries saw instead "replete with fascinating alteration" (255, 256). He further notes that Muir's "very words become sentient and mimic the mood of the moment" (259). These insights help explain what I find to be a dead-on assessment by Thomas Lyon that "The quality which imbues [Muir's] writing is not observation, then, but participation. His life, like his writing which is conveying it, is characterized by engagement, by a dynamic awareness. This is why his prose is so much more effective than carefully wrought, 'set-piece' nature writing" (35). Places like the Yosemite were not protected simply because Muir wrote evocatively about them; they became national parks because Muir's readers came to believe passionately that they wanted to see them for themselves, and the close readings that follow aim to delineate aspects of how the prose engages this participatory work.

"Most people," Muir writes in "A Wind Storm in the Forest," "like to look at mountain rivers, and bear them in mind; but few care to look at the winds, though far more beautiful and sublime, and though they become at times about as visible as flowing water" (472). This statement, like the chapter it is in, offers one of many possible examples of a factor that differentiates Muir from even other nature writers of his time: his penchant for defending even the dangerous things in nature, often in situations where he himself experienced discernable risk. This chapter features the typical Muir who makes reckless and threatening decisions for the sake

⁶⁰ As reluctant first president of the Sierra Club, for example, Muir consciously produced writing to motivate the membership.

of observation that straddles the scientific (in its close observation of phenomena) and the artistic. He finds himself nearing a friend's house just as a windstorm kicks up, but he makes the counter-intuitive choice to "[push] out into the woods to enjoy it" (467). The page-long description of the "gestures of the various trees that made a delightful study" that ensues is too long to quote entirely, but Muir demonstrates his ability to note the particularity of each species while nonetheless offering an ecstatic synthesis that, "Nature was holding high festival, and every fiber of the most rigid giants thrilled with glad excitement" (468). Via such syntheses of uncommon observations, Muir derives his unexpected relations of cause and effect, a kind of interpretive skill he likens to reading in this chapter, writing, "Winds are advertisements of all they touch, however much or little we may be able to read them; telling their wanderings even by their scents alone" (471). When this literacy leads to new relations that reframe aesthetic evaluation of natural phenomena—such as the looking at the beauty and sublimity of wind that might drive others indoors—it allows him to further re-orient separations between the natural and the human, in this case ending in this somewhat surprising conclusion about the travels of trees and people. "We all travel the milky way together, trees and man; but it never occurred to me until this storm-day, while swinging in the wind, that trees are travelers, in the ordinary sense. They make many journeys, not extensive ones, it is true; but our own little journeys, away and back again, are only little more than tree-wavings—many of them not so much" (472-3). This makes for a nice quote because it re-contextualizes human behavior in an uncommon way. Yet the narrative that precedes it is at least as important insofar as it models how such a reflection emerges from engagement and observation. This tendency to extract quotes from Muir's writing while ignoring their emergence from the context of larger passages (institutionalized by the Sierra Club page I mention above, perhaps, but prevalent on all sort of materials from t-shirts to

posters) is the final part of my argument about Muir that I'll return to toward the end of this chapter because the ironic product of Muir's reception history has been to turn his quoted thoughts and words into entry points for mountaineers and members of what Nash calls the "wilderness cult," whereas Muir's intellectual procedure worked the other way around.

The book's perhaps best-known chapter helps make the case of participatory reading more extensively. "A Near View of the High Sierra" invites critical reading so readily for two reasons; the first is its framing story with the two painters who provide a kind of foil for Muir's thinking, and the second is Muir's harrowing experience on Mount Ritter, one of the most concentrated narratives within *The Mountains of California*. Michael Cohen, for example, treats this chapter as a major turning point for Muir more personally, and Ann Lundberg, reading largely through Cohen, calls the chapter a "structural climax" of the book despite its being the fourth of sixteen chapters. To be sure, the presence of added characters and the payoff of reading framed against frame make the chapter an engaging one for rhetorical reading. In revisiting these often-trod pages of Muir's, I add to existing commentary by demonstrating how a segment of the text that has been central to readings of Muir for his environmental thinking and his agency in history is likewise amenable to my own reading of Muir as a figure whose work builds knowledge and action from aesthetic experience.

There is, one could begin by noting, more to the opening frame than the introduction of the two painter figures; the first paragraph, for example, links suggestively to the chapter's very title, as Muir faces a season that will turn him indoors: "The time for this kind of work was nearly over for the year, and I began to look forward with delight to the approaching winter with its wondrous storms, when I would be warmly snow-bound in my Yosemite cabin with plenty of bread and books," and yet "a tinge of regret came on when I considered that possibly I might not

see this favorite region again until the next summer, excepting distant views from the heights about the Yosemite walls” (344). What Muir “regrets” about the limit of “distant views” is what they might occlude about the glaciological history he has been studying. Enjoy his Yosemite cabin and its books as he might, they turn out to be the secondary consolation for desired access to other “reading” that produces, instead of simply being produced by, perspective: “reading the records she has carved on the rocks” that helps the viewer “reconstruct” the landscape history (358).

When Muir pokes fun at the painters, then, the challenge to painting is not whether the Yosemite region has aesthetic merit—Muir can’t stop talking about that. The challenge is rather to a specific kind of aesthetic domestication by image capable of containing and pacifying the High Sierra’s dangers and geologically meaningful details when it’s underfoot. Thus, when he writes that “To artists, few portions of the High Sierra are, strictly speaking, picturesque,” the rebuff is not necessarily to artistic engagement altogether but to the tension across the final comma—of the “strictly speaking, picturesque” (344). What’s important about the High Sierra, Muir is writing, essentially cannot be encapsulated by the kinds of scenes Currier and Ives are best known for: “In general, the younger the mountain-landscapes,—younger, I mean, with reference to the time of their emergence from the ice of the glacial period,—the less separable are they into artistic bits capable of being made into warm, sympathetic, lovable pictures with appreciable humanity in them” (344). This is the initial mistake of the two painters Muir turns out to guide, who ask “whether in the course of [Muir’s] explorations in the adjacent mountains [he] had ever come upon a landscape suitable for a large painting” (346). Such a prospect is not impossible—indeed, scholars have noted that Muir’s appeal to some publications was precisely that the scenes he wrote about made for such attractive and engaging illustration. Rather, Muir

can confidently direct the painters to “something [they] will like.” And sure enough, he brings them to a point where “the Sierra Crown began to come into view” and “the whole picture stood revealed in the flush of the alpenglow” (346-7). “Here, at last, was a typical alpine landscape,” and the painters are so enamored that one starts “shouting and gesticulating and tossing his arms in the air like a madman” (347). In the adventure that follows after he leaves these painters at the camp to their work, it’s the value of a “typical” landscape and “warm, loveable, sympathetic pictures” that Muir will trouble. He does not contest that the landscape is “suitable” for painting as much as what the paintings themselves are suitable for. Critics have not always observed this distinction, which has partly to do with the fact that, with the exception perhaps of Gifford and others linking Muir to Ruskin, critics have not thought (as they readily do with Henry James, for instance) of Muir as having anything particularly to say within a history or discourse of art criticism. But “A Near View of the Sierra” is hardly a one-off in terms of Muir’s commentary on matters of aesthetic composition, and the painters are not an invented rhetorical device; one of them was William Keith, with whom Muir would have an ongoing friendship—a friendship where Muir continued to give advice on Keith’s remarkably realistic landscapes.

In contrast to the painters, Muir does get a “Near View,” coming literally face to (rock)face with the mountain in the oft-quoted passage that recounts the riskiest of several risky moments in the adventure: “I was suddenly brought to a dead stop, with arms outspread, clinging close to the face of the rock, unable to move hand or foot either up or down. My doom appeared fixed. I *must* fall” (355). If this is not a “warm, sympathetic, lovable” moment to depict, what is its value? Partly, it is of self-knowledge that the painter’s distanced form of engagement can hardly afford: “we little know until tried how much of the uncontrollable there is in us, urging across glaciers and torrents, and up dangerous heights, let the judgment forbid as it may” (354).

But this acquisition of self-knowledge gained from actively engaging the landscape rather than looking at its reproduction comes paired with an expanded perspective onto geological time, as a less-quoted passage late in the chapter conveys:

Lakes are seen gleaming in all sorts of places,—round, or oval, or square, like very mirrors; others narrow and sinuous, drawn close around the peaks like silver zones, the highest reflecting only rocks, snow, and the sky. But neither these nor the glaciers, nor the bits of brown meadow and moorland that occur here and there, are large enough to make any marked impression upon the mighty wilderness of mountains. The eye, rejoicing in its freedom, roves about the vast expanse, yet returns again and again to the fountain peaks. Perhaps some one of the multitude excites special attention, some gigantic castle with turret and battlement, or some Gothic cathedral more abundantly spired than Milan's. But, generally, when looking for the first time from an all-embracing standpoint like this, the inexperienced observer is oppressed by the incomprehensible grandeur, variety, and abundance of the mountains rising shoulder to shoulder beyond the reach of vision; and it is only after they have been studied one by one, long and lovingly, that their far-reaching harmonies become manifest. Then, penetrate the wilderness where you may, the main telling features, to which all the surrounding topography is subordinate, are quickly perceived, and the most complicated clusters of peaks stand revealed harmoniously correlated and fashioned like works of art—eloquent monuments of the ancient ice-rivers that brought them into relief from the general mass of the range. The cañons too, some of them a mile deep, mazing wildly through the might host of mountains, however lawless and ungovernable at first sight they appear, are at length recognized as the necessary effects of causes which followed each other in harmonious sequence—Nature's poems carved on tables of stone—the simplest and most emphatic of her glacial compositions." (357)

This is a remarkable passage. The first sentence makes an observation about where attention might commonly be drawn that is subsequently corrected by the announced shift of “But” at the beginning of the second sentence. Indeed, the whole paragraph guides the readers’ attention like an art critic explaining a masterpiece, as the third sentence continues by tracing (and thus directing for the reader who follows) how “the eye... roves.” Then, across another “But” connecting the fourth and fifth sentences, Muir brings the potential confusion of the described sublime expanses into harmonious unity. The dramatic peaks’ architectures are corralled into a more recognizably picturesque composition, as announced especially by that sure-fire calling-

card of the traditional picturesque: “variety.” The key to breaking past this confusion is to leave the neophyte’s “all-embracing standpoint” and to engage even as an amateur with the peaks “one by one.” Thus, Muir’s earlier point that the High Sierra is not “strictly speaking, picturesque.” The ability to draw the “lawless and ungovernable” into “harmonies” depends on first entering the frame. At the end of the passage, Muir explains why. To use words that aren’t Muir’s for just a moment, aesthetic experience here is not pursued for mere bourgeois consumption, as perhaps the “works of art” that the peaks are “like” might risk becoming. Rather, the careful aesthetic “stud[y]” here becomes the source of larger, and in this case even scientific, ideas: “necessary effects of causes” to be “recognized.” The elegance in the way each of the “telling features” combines to make “manifest” something “beyond the reach of vision” is perhaps why Muir shifts from the metaphor of visual art to that of poetry by the paragraph’s end. In any case, the passage offers an instance of my argument that Muir’s writing does not merely dress up untrained glaciology in poetic language on one hand or sugarcoat an activist agenda on the other; rather, it models a process of thinking whereby even scientific ideas can be derived from shifting aesthetic judgments of the landscape in which the thinker is a participant.⁶¹ The relational reconfigurations articulated in the larger passage contribute to Muir’s geological theory of the Sierra; as such, his mountaineering at Mount Ritter is more than death-defying antics, and it is why Muir can return to the painters at the paragraph of the closing frame with a tongue-in-cheek remark about “their precious sketches” (360).

If reading Muir this way seems unorthodox, it shouldn’t, because Muir basically explains that this is what he’s up to in a lesser-read chapter of the same book, “The Glacier Meadows,” a

⁶¹ In this way, I see Muir as a boots-on-the-ground descendent of German idealism, which Muir came to through his reading of Alexander von Humboldt and Ralph Waldo Emerson. For links between these figures, see Walls and Wulf. It’s a well-known story that young Muir aspired to emulate Humboldt long before his formal studies in natural history began.

chapter that also adds clarification to the mixed metaphor of the painting and poem. Countering the dismissal of aesthetic enjoyment, he writes:

The influences of pure nature seem to be so little known as yet, that it is generally supposed that complete pleasure of this kind, permeating one's very flesh and bones, unfits the student for scientific pursuits in which cool judgment and observation are required. But the effect is just the opposite. Instead of producing a dissipated condition, the mind is fertilized and stimulated and developed like sun-fed plants. All that we have seen here enables us to see with surer vision the fountains among the summit-peaks to the east whence flowed the glaciers that ground soil for the surrounding forest; and down at the foot of the meadow the moraine which formed the dam which gave rise to the lake that occupied this basin before the meadow was made; and around the margin the stones that were shoved back and piled up into a rude wall by the expansion of the lake ice during long bone winters; and along the sides of the streams the slight hollows of the meadow which mark those portions of the old lake that were the last to vanish. (396-7)

It was scientists like Whitney (as well as some painters) who came to the Sierra with a way of seeing all prepared, and as such missed the linked details Muir lists here, sweeping the reader's vision along like a stop-action film with his verbs and front-loaded prepositional phrases. As Foerster noted, these controlled choices capture a "mood" that is demonstrative of both "cool judgment" in its orderliness and "complete pleasure" through the flowing rhythm of language that mimics its subject. Nearly at the beginning of the chapter, Muir states that the meadows are a subject (surprisingly, more than the peaks) that he struggles to write about: "But, write as I may, I cannot give anything like an adequate idea of the exquisite beauty of these mountain carpets as they lie smoothly outspread in the savage wilderness. What words are fine enough to picture them? To what shall we liken them?" (393). Moving from the confession to the first question, Muir points to one of the primary means through which writers have relied on perennially to communicate "adequate idea[s]" or anything "like" them: imagery. Of course, visual description permeates Muir's work, and this chapter features Muir at his most Emersonian in this regard since he guides his reader to the point where "You are all eye, sifted through and through with

light and beauty” (Muir 395). Given the notable shift to second person here from Emerson’s formulation in *Nature*, “I become a transparent eyeball,” it is clear why Muir’s friend and relationship-broker Jeanne Carr (who in fact arranged the Yosemite meeting between Muir and Emerson) would write to Emerson that Muir was special for putting into practice what Emerson had postulated (Emerson 6). And though Muir was a reputed talker,⁶² the difference of second- and first-person in these versions of related thoughts is one sign of how he “know[s] well the difference between reading and seeing” that he mentions a short while later. Sentences such as “you suddenly emerge from the forest shadow upon a delightful purple lawn lying smooth and free in the light like a lake to the point of arrival” move readers towards a deeper understanding of the realization—how the awareness of the fact that “This is a glacier meadow” emerges in its truth only from its setting, its composition within nature—and the accessibility of his prose emboldens readers to cross from reading to seeing themselves.

Roderick Nash’s *Wilderness & the American Mind* has recognized the aesthetic strand of widening nature enthusiasm in the late 19th century, even as he mostly downplays the rigor of the books that spread it. “Wild country as a source of beauty and spiritual truth” is the “third major component of the wilderness cult” he describes in the chapter on this period. His framing of the contiguous forms of outdoorism emergent in these decades as a “cult” is mostly dismissive, as evidenced by his opening the chapter with the example of Joe Knowles, the white man who conned his large audience into believing that he lived as a “Nature Man” in the Maine woods. When he includes in this chapter then that “The reading as well as the recreational tastes of many Americans of the early twentieth century were inclined toward the wild and savage,” he is casting these books all together as more or less cut-rate fashion. And so, though Muir’s ideas are

⁶² Barrus’s choice of an image in her article is strategic in showing Muir clearly talking *at* Burroughs, which fits with her overall account of the trip.

on the virtuous side of Nash's overall history, Muir's treatment as a "popularizer" amounts in Nash to being a lesser Thoreau who simply benefitted from living in a more receptive time (160).

Muir may be historically downriver from the Concord set of Transcendentalists, but I have argued here that this does not mean, as Nash might have it, that he is a watered-down version. For one thing, unlike Thoreau (who did not live to see what would become of Walden Pond), Muir grew to be aware of the irony of his writings' case for personal contact with the California places he wrote about. Muir reflects more broadly on the dynamics of visiting places in one of his books that is otherwise most celebratory of the wilderness spaces he had a hand in shaping, *Our National Parks*. Commenting on the trends his writing supported, he opens that book with "The tendency nowadays to wander in the wilderness is delightful to see," and the opening paragraph is full of verbs in the present-progressive tense to describe the activity of the "tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people" making their way to the wilds, which Muir declares "full of promise" in part because it is accompanied by "the growing interest in the care and preservation of forests and wild places" (459). Notably, his "also" elides that these trends are united by his by-then-salient advocacy. But the end of the first paragraph also registers a different phenomenon: "Even the scenery habit in its most artificial forms, mixed with spectacles, silliness, and kodaks; its devotees arrayed more gorgeously than scarlet tanagers, frightening the wild game with red umbrellas—even this is encouraging, and may be regarded as a hopeful sign of the times" (459). The irony here is that the act of visiting wilderness spaces, even for benign photographic hobbyists, essentially contributes to the disruption and often pollution of the conservation areas. The railroads (and later highways) that made California so accessible to so many readers partly turned to Yosemite's detriment.

Muir had a similar awareness about Alaska. At least initially, Alaska stays safe from

despoliation by virtue of its distance: “The most extensive, least spoiled, and most unspoilable of the gardens of the continent are the vast tundras of Alaska,” he writes (661). But even “most unspoilable” is not absolute. Soon after, he reiterates the sense in which distance serves as its best protection, but he also sees the coming threat and tries to find a contradictory silver lining. That is, if “This is Nature’s own reservation, and every lover of wildness will rejoice with me that by kindly frost it is so well defended,” then it hardly seems reassuring, as he tries to say at the close of the same paragraph, that the incursions wrought by the coming mining boom “will lead many a lover of wildness into the heart of the reserve, who without [the roads] would never see it” (463). If anything, Muir is putting a brave face on a tragedy here.

Hal Crimmel has written most decisively for noticing a difference between Muir’s California books and his Alaska writing, many of which (with the exception of *Stickeen*) weren’t published in book form until after Muir’s death. Crimmel argues that the harsher landscapes of Alaska challenged Muir, and that Muir’s grappling with the Arctic can similarly complicate overly idealized attitudes toward Nature, attitudes such as the enthusiasm Muir’s writing about the Yosemite conveys. Seeing Muir as unable to impose his Yosemite ideals successfully onto Alaskan landscapes and the interactions there of indigenous peoples with their places, he claims that *Travels in Alaska* and *The Cruise of the Corwin* are evidence of a “failure” on Muir’s part, more specifically an “odd inability to accept” alternative orientations toward nature, and he concludes that Muir’s Alaskan writings can encourage us to treat wilderness for what it is instead of what we want it to be” (172, 179). Like Nash, Crimmel is suggesting here that Muir’s success essentially stems from being the ready-to-wear line of nature ideals, and thus Muir stumbles when, inevitably, one size does not fit all.

Although I agree with Crimmel that Muir’s Alaskan writings differ from the California

books, I would counter that Crimmel is hasty in describing the differences as a “failure” on Muir’s part. Crimmel’s formulation of “what it is” contrasted with “what we want it to be” is more complex than he acknowledges, and it folds questions of expectation into those of genre. It returns to the problem with which I opened this chapter, related to Lewis’s study and the challenge offered by far and different places for nature writing’s readers. The challenge that the Arctic posed to Muir as a typically galvanizing writer makes this case in point. The Arctic—despite continuing to reward his observations with corroborating evidence for his understanding of glaciation—stays at a physical remove that affects the response it received from Muir and consequently from his readers. Muir also had to stay within groups of people during his visits to Alaska, which has at least two effects. First, it limited his movement. John Muir of the Sierras gives the impression of having sought every angle, but in Alaska he was often confined by the movement of ships and the objectives of his shipmates. Secondly, then, Muir’s Alaska writing tends to recount more straightforward narratives in the past tense rather than the present-tense, second-person appeals that make a work like *The Mountains of California* or *My First Summer in the Sierra* relatively inviting. Crimmel is not wrong then in suggesting that the “inhospitableness” of the landscape factors in here⁶³—since a different landscape could have facilitated wider-ranging movements—but the remoteness, the distance that inhibits accessibility, plays just as large a role, if not larger.

Again, then, my disagreement with Crimmel as with Nash is that their assessments overlook a more rigorous element of Muir’s writing when they cast him as merely the (albeit politically efficacious) salesman of sublime travel packages. Muir isn’t just interested in getting

⁶³ His basis of his article on the “inhospitableness” of the landscape, though, does have an unfortunate Eurocentrism to it, a mindset Muir himself at times seems to push out on but that limits him nonetheless.

people places; he's concerned about their ways of looking when they are in contact with those places, as another passage from *Travels in Alaska* helps bear out. "Least spoiled" though it may be, Alaska is already receiving tourists by boat, and he witnessed some of that underwhelming participation: "The marvelous wealth of forests, islands, and waterfalls, the cloud-wreathed heights, the many avalanche slopes and slips, the pearl-gray tones of the sky, the brown of the woods, their purple flower edges and mist fringes, the endless combination of water and land and ever-shifting clouds—none of these greatly interest the tourists" (206-7). Instead, the tourists "rush on shore to buy curiosities and see totem poles," leading Muir to a telling reflection: "Most people who travel look only at what they are directed to look at. Great is the power of the guidebook-maker, however ignorant" (207). Presumably, Muir's list of what the comparatively impoverished tourists are missing would make him a better sort of guidebook-maker. But Muir is also distinguishing himself from guidebooks for reasons that harken to his criticism of the painters in the Sierra. The modifiers in his list—"many," "endless," "ever-shifting"—aren't accumulative in the sense of touristic acquisition; they constitute a "wealth" because they signify quantities that defy acquisition and invite instead sustained attentive observation of how each detail connects to the others, how they combine to create large-scale image that isn't simply a big picture. You can't take the pearl gray tones of the sky back in your luggage.

There has, no doubt, been something cultish about wilderness appeal, in which John Muir has figured and continues to figure in park gift shops. But the irony by which Muir himself has become absorbed in the saleable "curiosities" tourists seek should not erase the rigor of his intellectual work. More of Muir's readers would benefit from treating first-hand experience not as the end result of reading but also as the basis for forms of reflection such as Muir modeled. In

this sense, it might turn out that indie musician S. Carey,⁶⁴ whose ethereal album *Range of Light* acknowledges Muir's influence in its liner notes, offers a reading of Muir that is missing from more common circulations such as Andrea Hendrick's fancily printed *Northwest Passages from the Pen of John Muir in California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska*, which is a gorgeous reprinting of Muir extracts but otherwise mostly a feel-good decorative item for hiker-conservationists.⁶⁵

“A Crisis for Them All Was in the Air”: Reading *The Golden Bowl* in the Anthropocene

Henry James's reputation could scarcely differ more from Muir's, and the difference can be drawn out by comparing Muir's “wilderness cult” to another ostensible cult, the Jacobites in the crosshairs of the infamous James study by Maxwell Geismar, *Henry James and the Jacobites* or, as it was first titled, *The Cult of Henry James* (1963, 1962). Whereas, for the wilderness cult, reading as an action was secondary as a means of vicarious access or inspiration, the Jacobites as described by Geismar would appear to have done the opposite—fetishizing reading James instead of paying attention, he claims, to the lack of anything real at their foundation. “How these critics are taken in,” he mock-marvels, “willingly, consciously, devoutly—by the opaque varnish of the Jamesian personality, the Jamesian craft!” (408). The adoration of the craft's opacity here is the valuation of rigor at the surface level that ostensibly overlooks its fraudulent promise of meaningful content.

Geismar's book is a notorious bugbear in James studies, and indeed in Americanist criticism broadly—so uniquely vicious is this multi-pronged attack on a writer who is clearly

⁶⁴ Best known for his collaboration with musician Justin Vernon as part of popular crossover independent band Bon Iver.

⁶⁵ And, clearly, Muiriana-obsessed academics who have no self-restraint when they walk into the book section of park gift shops.

anathema to the critic. Its main line of attack follows a psychoanalytic Marxist route; Geismar sees James as psycho-sexually arrested and simultaneously the *ür*-novelist of Thorstein Veblen's leisure class. Intriguingly, James is the author of the leisure class of his day, to some extent, but also comes in Geismar's account to be revived in criticism by an academic leisure class in the 1940s and '50s—a generation irksome to Geismar for their blithe negligence of history (by which he means the radicalism of the 1930s, but war history specifically, as Geismar points out at various turns that James understood neither martial history in general nor WWI in particular). Indeed, Geismar accuses James of being “non-historical,” presenting life as quasi-medieval romances featuring modern nobility instead of anything like life as it *really* was at fin-de-siècle (9). To Geismar, James has us all fooled—and foremost the critics who, out of ineptitude but also crass careerism, have falsely “elevated” his work—but Geismar dares to cry boldly that the emperor has no clothes.

So many Jacobites since have defended the Master that Geismar's argument seems like a cheap place to start.⁶⁶ Yet, I take on Geismar's argument from an oblique angle that ventures something different than most Jamesian criticism. That is, though Geismar's argument is shot through with generalizations and a personal animus that stems from James's affront to his ideological preferences, he nonetheless has begun to raise an interesting point about James's reception history through this blanket accusation of the cult bent on elevating their darling author. For example, the following paragraph presents an intriguing counterbalance to the claim—bizarre from a Marxist of any stripe—that James's novels were “non-historical”:

If Henry James was the age, as our New Critic pronounced at the outset of the present study, he was certainly not *his* age, either in the America he scorned or the England he saw through the glass of his own legendary and antiquarian visions. In

⁶⁶ Ironically, nothing has proved as effective as fodder for publications on James as Geismar's diatribe.

this sense Henry James's work was 'ageless,' just as it was 'timeless' and 'placeless'—in the sense that it floated in the high, pure, weightless outer space of pure esthetics and pure fairy tale. But in an odd way Henry James did become the age of the mid-twentieth century United States literary environment and atmosphere; and the symbol of a curious kind of literary or critical imagination in the 1940's and '50's. [sic] (439)

What Geismar means by calling James non-historical is embedded here in the comparison to fairy tales, and elsewhere in descriptions of James writing the world as medieval romance. But whatever truth there is here would not throw James out-of-sync with his own age—it would actually be quite in keeping with the preferences of Aestheticism, notably the artworks of William Morris among others, toward the medieval prevalent in Britain since Tennyson and the pre-Raphaelites. In spite of itself, then, this passage does the reverse of casting James as non-historical; it links him to history at least twice (his life and the 1940s and '50s).

Another note about the historical relation Geismar is circumscribing is its altitude. It is curious that a study published in the same decade as the Apollo 11 mission would write of “float[ing] in the high, pure, weightless outer space of pure esthetics and pure fairy tale” as non-historical. But of course this fits within the book's overall characterization of James as “elevated” by his critics—here merely extended to stress that James has no idea what on Earth life is like. Geismar seems to continue the metaphor intentionally in the last sentence, when he writes of James's airborne aesthetics coming back down to Earth as “the age of the mid-twentieth century United States literary environment and atmosphere.” An ecocritic could not ask for a more appropriate written invitation, not least since Geismar's location of James in the '40s and '50s fits conveniently in the historical moment of mass acceleration that geologists and others are marking as the Anthropocene.

The Golden Bowl is among the most elevated of the elevated Henry James as part of the “late” or “major” phase. But it is also precisely the kind of seemingly exclusively socially-

interested novel implied in challenges to ecocriticism such as I dismissed with Armbruster and Wallace at the start of this chapter. Geismar himself expresses a bafflement that perhaps even Jacobites would share in thinking about *The Golden Bowl* in relation to environmental history: “*The Golden Bowl* is the climax and the epitome of the *Jamesian* literary world, which had nothing to do with the modern world (even of James’s own time); which had nothing to do, indeed, with any conceivable world of social reality which ever existed in the long chronicle of human history” (323). A standard historicist argument could likely countermand Geismar by demonstrating how the novel is, in fact, in step with “James’s own time,” but this would have the downside of consolidating only one historical relation. Instead, inspired partly by Martha Nussbaum and Wai Chee Dimock, I want to push James—and specifically *The Golden Bowl*—into an unexpected historical context using James’s own metaphors of aerial particulate in the novel. That James draws on this aerial language at moments where readers are prompted to configure the narrative’s trajectory—and that this language re-circulates in language that frames his reception, including Geismar’s “elevation” and “atmosphere”—leads me to argue for an alternative means of appreciating James that does not place all its chips on the rigor of deciphering his prose style. In an inversion of my reading of John Muir, whose aesthetics might need recovering from readers who have subordinated them to political relevance, my reading of James recovers multiply historical political relevance from the reception of James’s language as sealed from history’s insalubrious conditions.

Although I purposely am not reading the novel with extensive citation of its critics to try and circumvent reading under the influence of the Jacobite cult, I do draw on two scholars who have written on James. Martha Nussbaum is a well-known advocate of James’s prose. Her arguments about James (and *The Golden Bowl* in particular) draw welcome attention to the

ethical value of the work of reading Jamesian narrative and to closely following the workings of his plots. She argues that James's novels allow for extended examination of others' thoughts and that features of form and style call on specific reader abilities not activated by conventional philosophical argumentation. With *The Golden Bowl*, much of the value comes from following along with the characters as they attempt various configurations of their future to guide their ethical choices in the present. While this occurs throughout the novel, my reading underscores that James uses an aerial motif at key junctures of the plot, emphasizing not only their relation to each other but repeatedly suggesting a surprising association to the plot-heavy genre of detective fiction.

Wai Chee Dimock, meanwhile, substantiates how I read the Anthropocene context back into James's novel in her remarks titled "Three Wars: Henry James and Others," which locate James's use of semicolons and the temporal movements they often enjoin, the pluperfect and the subjunctive, to other lines of thought. "These two verb forms," she writes, "turn the known world into a wavering shadow, a fading in and out of what might have been and what might still be," and they open "pockets of time whose recesses cannot be precisely calibrated" (3). By virtue of the way these tenses and the durations they invoke can "amplif[y] a small-scale textual event into a large-scale historical commentary," Dimock turns them—and the subjunctive's "as if" dimension in particular—to muse on literary history itself more broadly, speculating about "a time-line that makes a subsequent event an important context for a text written prior to it" (5, 6). By treating the Anthropocene as "an important context for a text written prior to it," I claim that *The Golden Bowl* is not only relevant but salient for readers in the unfolding present because relating past and future is integral to the designation of the Anthropocene, itself a classification that encourages speculation backward to the Industrial Revolution and Great Acceleration as well

as forward into its own remainder. By treating the novel as a dramatic plot in which tracking air conditions amounts to a solving a murder mystery, I suggest its relevance to the work of situating one's ethical decisions in the Anthropocene. If reading drama and catastrophe into James's somewhat doily novels seems scoff-worthy, my reading asks that we think of his novels' revolving around quotidian social dilemmas as a strength, since the Anthropocene itself registers—if at all—as much in the accrual of many peoples' daily ethical awareness and choices as in the more spectacular emissions of nuclear detonations and billowing smokestacks.

To be sure, “air” is a common and versatile word in James's works as a whole—I wouldn't want to give the impression of reading such a moment in a vacuum, so to speak. Thomas Otten, for example, draws attention to air in James's writing on Balzac (though he departs from it just as quickly). Also, the 1972 collection *The Air of Reality*, despite not devoting attention to the word “air” in James's work, captures in its title one of the most common and figurative uses of the word in James's oeuvre: it works as a variant word choice for other favorite Jamesian words such as “sense” and “impression.” It would be interesting to ponder at greater length how James understands air as a sensory medium and how prose fiction can render such a medium legible. Pleading constraints of space (and perhaps, lest I become Jamesian in my own prolixity, attention), I focus my reading of the aerial motif explicitly on some of the moments referring literally to air in the novel and not those moments at which air seems a figurative synonym.

The Golden Bowl features characters who try reasoning their way to happiness. It opens with Prince Amerigo just as he is about to marry the American heiress Maggie Verver—a marriage that benefits him as an impoverished aristocrat. Maggie is charmed by the Prince, but she is also a daddy's girl who strives to please, and so the Prince's nobility appeals to her father's

collector instincts as well. This couple—already something of a trio, gets along well. But during a visit to Amerigo's friend and guru Fanny Assingham, he learns that Charlotte Stant is coming to town. Charlotte and Maggie have been friends for many years, but readers also learn that Amerigo and Charlotte had a passionate attraction previously, broken off since together they were too poor to meet each other's needs. Furthermore, Charlotte wants Amerigo to know that she still loves him. Unaware of this last intention, Fanny and Maggie instead see in Charlotte's arrival an opportunity to marry off the widowed Adam Verver, not because either of these two is especially attracted to the other at first but because the marriage would rescue Charlotte from her inconvenient poverty while helping fill the hole in Adam's life from his daughter's no longer being fully devoted to his needs. Thus are the four married for eminently sensible reasons.

This admittedly tenuous equilibrium is disrupted when the Prince and new Princess have a child, the main effect of which is the rapprochement of father and daughter. Charlotte uses this turn of the Ververs from their spouses to justify her and the Prince's renewed relationship. They have an affair. Its degree of consummation is unspecified; suffice it to say they have been untrue to their respective spouses in their hearts and at least one passionate kiss, so any further discrimination is largely of degree. Maggie finds out and determines to return things to their former equilibrium, but in a way that will not alert her father to the breaches in their happiness. Amerigo learns that she knows and repents. Charlotte is shut out, and she tells Maggie that she and Adam will return to America at her suggestion. Thus ends a five-hundred-page quadrille,⁶⁷ with the dancers all back to their original positions, though the repetition of these positions belies changes of emotional relation and the steps between them.

⁶⁷ The quadrille metaphor has also been used by Dupee for this novel (qtd. in Geismar 303).

Perhaps later contexts have a way of feeling relevant to *The Golden Bowl* because of James's own attention to its revision, which is the final major topic he takes up in its New York Edition preface to the novel. Anticipating criticism of his returning with the late style to complicate earlier novels or touse anything in the late novels that had so far remained straightforward, James takes a defensive position. James admits restraint is hard and, in some cases, beyond him, as "the act of seeing [a text] again, caused whatever I looked at on any page to flower before me as into the only terms that honorably expressed it" (443). Looking back, he is compelled to reinterpret as if by a force of nature such as flowering. And though he is not the scientist to look into this force of nature (or, stripping away the metaphor, we could say he is not the trained philologist), he muses that, "What it would be really interesting, and I dare say admirably difficult, to go into would be the very history of this effect of experience; the history, in other words, of the growth of the immense array of terms, perceptual and expressional, that after the fashion I have indicated, in sentence, passage and page, simply looked over the heads of the standing terms—or perhaps rather, like alert winged creatures, perched on those diminished summits and aspired to a clearer air." (443). This conceit is interesting not least since it expresses James's style (often taken in his reputation as Master novelist as the height of artifice) in naturalized terms. Indeed, this proposed study of ideas adapting their growth to the ideal elevation seems like it might call for someone like Muir, who can account for the location of alpine divisions and the tree line. Although the metaphor is most literally one of overgrowth, the centrality of air to it as the medium that fuels this history of experience establishes a link between history and air that the novel also deploys. James's metaphor describing his revisions directly posits air conditions as the record of historical events. Intentionally or otherwise, this

primes readers to a motif running throughout the novel, where the air does carry or characterize the actions of the narrative's characters.

History is a prominent concern for the characters of the novel from the first chapter onward. The chapter is paradigmatic in terms of what aggravates readers about James and his verbosity. Its ostensible action—the Prince walks down the suggestively named Bond Street shortly before his wedding to meet his friend and confidante Fanny Assingham—could be stated more or less plainly, and yet it is interrupted after the first paragraph and for roughly nine pages by backstory and the workings of his mind until the narration returns to the action with the Prince shutting out a memory like “the iron shutter of a shop,” the last word bringing plot and readers back street-side (467). The intervening matter of the nine pages, though, characterize the Prince as a figure tied up with and concerned about the force of history. History for the Prince is not simply written and kept in “so many of the volumes in [his] family library”; it is something he lives in, as comes across not only through his reported conscious thoughts about empire, globalization, and language but also in the narration of which he is unconscious: “He had an idea—which may amuse his historian—that where you were stupid enough to be mistaken about such a matter you did know it” (466). This statement does not formally avow that the novel is the Prince's official history, but it signals that novel and reader will follow events that will shape the historian's work, and it is suggestive of *The Golden Bowl's* place amid those volumes of family history. His fiancé, Maggie, may resolutely declare herself “not afraid of history,” insofar as, to that point, history has been contained in the objects she and her father have selectively acquired, but this (as much as a moral awakening) becomes part of her awful realization: even Americans live in history. Perhaps with this outcome in mind, the first chapter draws to a close with the Prince ruminating on another American figure who had the realization before her:

These things, the motives of such people, were obscure—a little alarmingly so; they contributed to that element of the impenetrable which alone slightly qualified his sense of his good fortune. He remembered to have read as a boy a wonderful tale by Allan Poe, his prospective wife's countryman—which was a thing to show, by the way, what imagination Americans *could* have: the story of the shipwrecked Gordon Pym, who, drifting in a small boat further toward the North Pole—or was it the South?—than any one had ever done, found at a given moment before him a thickness of white air that was like a dazzling curtain of light, concealing as darkness conceals, yet of the color of milk or of snow. There were moments when he felt his own boat move upon some such mystery. (470)

Implicitly, both Maggie and the Prince are adrift in the developing history of Amerigo's family volumes, and the allusion to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is hardly auspicious in that regard, though it is also the first indication of mystery in James's novel. That the Prince forgets which pole Pym drifts toward (it is, in fact, the South) recalls ironically the earlier quote about his "idea" in emphasizing his capacity to be mistaken (and here, even to misremember). Even as it sets the narrative into forward motion, the first chapter foreshadows the narrative's end since Amerigo does not see, in this recollection, the foreboding sense of seduction and oblivion it involves.

The first chapter arrives at the Assinghams', and these characters are indispensable to my reading of the novel despite not being part of the quadrille whose movement the novel mostly follows. This indispensability stems from my agreement with Blackmur, Carol Sklenicka, and others who treat them as interpretive foils to the novel's readers. Colonel Assingham is the stalwart straight-man to Fanny's voiced fretting over the possible eventualities of the other characters' actions and the ethical gymnastics of their decisions. Her sense of the conflicts of interest among the main four characters is at least initially clairvoyant, as when she poses the problem of the plot subjunctively for readers: "That anything of the past,' she brooded, 'should come back *now*? How will it do? How will it do?'" (502). The "should come" opens up the various narrative probabilities among which characters and readers will need to navigate. Like so

many of James's readers, the Colonel is at first at a loss to see what all the fuss is about. What are these events to him? Why meddle? But Fanny has an answer: "Our relation, all around, exists—it's a reality, and a very good one; we're mixed up, so to speak, and it's too late to change it. We must live *in* it and with it" (514). The emphasis on living "*in*" connects this already back to the Prince's acknowledged living in history and Maggie's forthcoming realization of the same; it's also a startlingly appropriate characterization of how scientists and other scholars feel about the Anthropocene. The Assinghams' banter being easily the most readable of the early chapters in terms of pacing, they are established thus early on as readers' interlocutors at one remove from the central events.

The motif my reading tracks begins in earnest later in Book First, preceding the Prince and Charlotte's fateful visit to an antiquary, where readers encounter the eponymous golden bowl. The two are debating the propriety of their errand, and Charlotte has explained that she wants the memory of this moment. Whereas Fanny Assingham could just stipulate her relation to reality and the Prince has already been declared to live amid history, here he and Charlotte are yoked to their surroundings more explicitly:

She paused as if her demonstration was complete—yet for the moment without moving; as if in fact, to give it a few minutes to sink in; into the listening air, into the watching space, into the conscious hospitality of nature, so far as nature was, all Londonised, all vulgarized, with them there; or even for that matter into her own open ears rather than into the attention of her passive and prudent friend. (522)

This moment indeed proves to resonate within the novel beyond the described point in time; as I argue, it initiates a motif of matter circulating in the air and across time throughout the plot's most pivotal points. The characters' words and actions from this initiating moment of ethical complication—as we will see, a moment Maggie and Fanny will spend much of the remainder of the novel working to reconstruct. It is hard for them that the "listening" and "watching"

witnesses cannot speak to them, but the “sink[ing] in” of this moment into the “Londonised” air functions, like today’s metaphor of the carbon footprint, as a nonetheless traceable anchor.

Salient here too is the “as if,” which like the subjunctive opens a counterfactual pocket, or a fork in interpretation. The possibility that this counterfactual could remain distinct—and that the most innocent interpretation of the events could continue apart from it indefinitely—is of course the hope of the elicited couple. Reading the novel with the backward context of the Anthropocene, we can see too how similar fantasies about airborne emissions staying (seemingly) harmlessly in the air indefinitely begin to track along with this plot. But one of the most basic lessons in physics should help readers configure the most likely outcome to both tracks here: what goes up, must come down.

Book Second has Adam Verver at its center; it sees the birth of the Principino and Maggie’s worry that her marriage has left her father lonely, prompting the line of thinking that concludes in his proposal of marriage to Charlotte. As many commentators note, Adam Verver remains the least defined of the four main characters, the most concealed, and that has partly to do with the economy of the section relative to others in the novel. Slowly, he builds up his determination to “speak,” or propose to Charlotte on their trip to Brighton, where they acquire a rare ceramic tile. Book Second’s most significant continuation of the motif occurs as Adam and Charlotte await the response from Maggie and the Prince to their engagement notice. Charlotte, understandably, is more doubtful of the approval but cannot honestly tell Adam why. As Adam presses to find out the source of her anxiety, she replies that the Prince might be too used to seeing Maggie devote her time to Adam, to which Adam responds, “what kind of warning will he have found in that? To what catastrophe will he have observed such a disposition in her to lead?” (614). “To *this* one,” she replies. Surprised by this conclusion, Adam asks, “Hadn’t we better

wait a while till we call it a catastrophe?” Still avoiding a direct answer, Charlotte returns Adam’s question by asking what to wait for. This last rejoinder “lingered between them in the air,” and “they exchanged for the time a look which might have made each of them seem to have been watching in the other the signs of its overt irony” (615). Many readers, as I will discuss, do not report experiencing significant suspense from the narrative, and it is true that even in the dialogue, “catastrophe” oscillates between the hyperbolically ironic and the sincere. This oscillation, however, repeats the movement across the two tracks from Charlotte’s conversation with the Prince, and that catastrophe is invoked this early on in the development of the events once again helps attentive readers prefigure the outcome of these possibilities “linger[ing] in the air.”

The accumulation of these statements ramps up and reaches a critical point in Book Third. Statements such as “The air, however, had suggestions enough” and that Charlotte “had, already accepted her consciousness, as we have already noted, that a crisis for them all was in the air” develop the motif more explicitly in the direction of signaling the narrative’s dramatic tension. But whereas the development of the motif has occurred to this point through the narration, the Assinghams as proxy readers comment upon the same language and thus bring it into the diegesis of the characters. Expressing her concerns about the continuing intimacies of the Prince and Charlotte in social settings without their more reclusive Verver spouses, she says to the Colonel:

“I felt to-day, as I tell you, that there’s so much in the air.”
 “Oh in the air—!” the Colonel dryly breathed.
 “Well, what’s in the air always *has*—hasn’t it?—to come down to the earth.”
 (708)

If the language of tension in the air is not original to James and thus might seem like an outsized emphasis in a novel of five-hundred pages, a moment of dialogue such as this one suffices to

underscore its preceding moments. As the foil readers, the Assinghams call out, as it were, a motif in the narrative so as to forecast the unfolding eventualities. Fanny's contradictory emphatic certainty (the italicized "*has*") and immediately following doubt, in short, represent the configurations that readers are likely deliberating among: will transgressors be discovered and punished? Is some other outcome possible? Fanny's suspicion here that "what's in the air" must make itself known finds an analog in Book Fourth when the Colonel stipulates, this time the voice of certainty, that "People are always traceable, in England, when tracings are required. Something sooner or later happens; somebody sooner or later breaks the holy calm. Murder will out" (824). Is the Colonel a reader of Conan Doyle? If there's cause here for a Sherlock Holmes kind of confidence about the identifiability and material trace of events that can bring about logical reconstruction of transgression, it surely harkens to the moment of Charlotte's words sinking into the London air; the circumstances of those words' rediscovery depends, as the Assinghams have guessed, from "what's in the air [coming] down to the earth," or the "evidence up and down London" (here not only cardinal but altitudinal) (813). And those circumstances—the *pièce de resistance* in terms of clues to this mystery—that will materialize the force of history is of course the eponymous golden bowl.

Volume 2 of *The Golden Bowl* (Books Fourth through Sixth) follows Maggie and her development as a character throughout her suspicion, investigation, discovery, reckoning, and resolution of what has transpired. Charlotte and the Prince have had a dalliance as guests at a country estate that has proved incautious. By now, enough has been sent into the air that the otherwise contentedly oblivious Maggie registers some game is afoot: "Something of this kind was the question that Maggie, while the absentees still delayed, asked of the appearance she was endeavoring to present; but with the result repeatedly again that it only went and lost itself in the

thin air that had begun more and more to hang, for our young woman, over her accumulation of the unanswered” (740). The “accumulation” here might read as the product of all the points in the narrative discussed so far, lingering or sinking into the air. As Maggie gets wise, she starts to prod her prime suspect Charlotte, who continues to double-speak. When, in one instance, Charlotte responds to Maggie that “I happen, love, to appreciate my husband—I happen perfectly to understand that his acquaintance should be cultivated and his company enjoyed,” the narration draws on Maggie’s earlier tie to the motif to signal here rising awareness of the duplicity: “Some such happily-provoked remarks as these from Charlotte at the other home had been in the air, but we have seen how there was also in the air, for our young woman, as an emanation from the same, a distilled difference of which the very principle was to keep down objections and retorts” (759). The doubling of “in the air” in this sentence marks a split in Maggie’s perception of her circumstance. Based on Maggie’s growing awareness of the air, Fanny’s remarking later that Maggie’s “natural perception” and the way she “irresistibly *knows* that there’s something between” Charlotte and Amerigo can read as perhaps more literally “natural” indeed (822).

To sort out what bothers her, Maggie makes what will be a pivotal visit to “an alcove of shelves charged with the gold-and-brown, gold-and-ivory, of old Italian bindings and consecrated to the records of the Prince’s race” to read the history she had declared herself unafraid of without having known (833). Little is directly said about Maggie’s archival visit, but readers are told that “the hour spent among the projected lights, the annals and illustrations, the parchments and portraits, the emblazoned volumes and the murmured commentary, had been for the Princess enlarging and inspiring” (834). Then, partly from the closeness of the archives and part whimsically, Maggie decides to “ramble” on her way home, a walk that will take her to the shop

of the vendor of the golden bowl. Maggie's finding the bowl and the shopman's identification of Amerigo and Charlotte as the previously interested (and interesting) couple are the narrative's delivery on the proposal that events can be traced and, as the Colonel put it, that "murder will out." Maggie even explains the bowl to Fanny as "the proof" and "witness" of her suspicions, adopting the lexicon of the mystery story herself to conceptualize the event she's attempting to untangle.

Maggie's finding the bowl is the novel's climax in that, having attained her "proof," the relationships cannot continue unchanged for her, though the more proper climax may well be when, upon her showing and explaining the bowl to Fanny, Fanny lifts and smashes it on the ground—it turns out with the Prince silently watching. She does this to protect Maggie from going down a jealous path that could antagonize Amerigo and cause them both unhappiness (which protects Fanny herself, since she worries about her own complicity in the events for setting up the initial marriage knowing that Amerigo and Charlotte had something of a history). After breaking the bowl, she explains: "Whatever you meant by it—and I don't want to know *now*—has ceased to exist" (854). Making his presence suddenly known to both women, the Prince asks, "And what in the world, my dear, did you mean by it?" The Prince and Fanny exchange meaningful glances, all the while his question "remained in the air" (855). Fanny walks out and refers the Prince to his wife. If the bowl is representative of what has most hung in the air in the novel, the object trace of the Prince and Charlotte's secret love for one another, then it really has come back down to earth as Fanny predicted—the narration that Fanny "dashed it boldly to the ground" is not a direct echo of "what's in the air [coming] down to the earth" but is a close grammatical and physical parallel. If not strictly a catastrophe, this act of smashing is nonetheless the most explicitly dramatic action any of the characters undertake.

After this, the air continues to serve as a medium of suspension that tracks the suspense of the plot—there are, after all, about a hundred pages of the novel remaining. In the commonly discussed scene at Fawns where all six chief characters are finally assembled (here, the meaning of James’s “scenic” method drawn from his time writing drama is in full force, and even indicated by the narration that notes the situation is “like a stage again awaiting a drama, it was a scene [Maggie] might people”), the air is charged with the tension of whether Maggie will cause irreparable rifts by making known what she has deduced, or whether things will come to some other resolution. Thus, like at other moments in the novel, attention to the air flags for readers’ configurations of the narrative the possibility of choosing among or configuring different futures. Maggie goes outside and watches for a minute the other five through the window: “The hour was moonless and starless and the air heavy and still—which was why, in her evening dress, she need fear no chill and could get away, in the outer darkness, from that provocation of opportunity which had assaulted her, within on her sofa, as a beast might have leaped at her throat” (891). There is of course no risk of a jaguar at Fawns, but Maggie is pursued in short order by Charlotte, who might herself be a beast for all the references to her as something caged. And when she has approached Maggie, she begins, as so many of us do when we don’t know how to start a conversation, with the weather:

“It’s too close indoors.”

“Very—but close even here.” Charlotte was still and grave—she had even uttered her remark about the temperature with an expressive weight that verged upon solemnity; so that Maggie, reduced to looking vaguely about at the sky, could only feel her not fail of her purpose. “The air’s heavy as if with thunder—I think there’ll be a storm.” (896)

Harkening back to Book Second, Maggie’s weather prediction revives Adam and Charlotte’s worry about a coming catastrophe. In the following pages, the two have a conversation bounding in polysemy and indirection that parses wrongdoing and fault, blame and guilt—as only

conversation where social constraints prevent directly saying what one means can foster. By conversation's end, Maggie feels "in the air, a chill that completed the coldness of their conscious perjury" (904). As Book Fifth goes on, it is decided that Adam and Charlotte will ship off to American City, something that pains Charlotte but that in her pride she will suggest is her own idea. (If there is a murder in *The Golden Bowl*, it might actually be this, since Maggie understands this outcome for Charlotte is "like a knife in her heart") (943). Book Sixth, in turn, sees the characters prepare for the send-off.

Carol J. Sklenicka provides a persuasive account for how the three final chapters of the novel hold out but also trouble possible endings. Sklenicka's argument is that the characters' wishes get thwarted by the "narrative voice," and thus "The moral questions of the novel are translated into new metaphors of art and value, but are not silenced or answered" (50). The difference is one between endings and closure. One instance Sklenicka's argument draws from is the narration's description of the awkwardness at the characters' final meeting: "To do such an hour justice would have been in some degree to question its grounds—which was why they remained in fine, the four of them, in the upper air, united through the firmest abstention from pressure" (977). As Sklenicka notes, this is a moment of evasion. This is since, contra Fanny, there is a resolve for what's in the "upper air" not to come down to its "grounds." This image of the four in the air fits as well with Michael Sprinkler's comments in a published panel response paper that James seems to raise but not resolve problems in critical theory and the caution from some critics that any reading oversimplifying the winners and losers of the plot is untenable. In seeking moral or ideological victors, some readings of the book have proved themselves exactly the kind of naively moral Americans which the Ververs were initially taken for ("They thought of everything but that I might think," Maggie muses at one point) (957). Actually, all four of the

central characters are simultaneously and paradoxically at fault and blameless—each has acted selfishly and altruistically, and nobody’s ending isn’t bittersweet. An earlier critic whose argument Sklenicka partly develops, Ruth Yeazell, described it this way:

But the apparent finality of *The Golden Bowl* is in one sense terribly deceptive. With the possible exception of *The Turn of the Screw*, no Jamesian novel has left its readers themselves more *en l'air*: Maggie's reconciliation with her husband arouses many more unanswered questions than Isabel [Archer]'s return to hers.⁶⁸ For Maggie Verver is the first Jamesian innocent who confronts painful knowledge by choosing neither renunciation nor death; determining rather to live and to fight, she implicitly chooses instead the ultimate loss of her own innocence. (101)

While the most colloquial translation of Yeazell’s phrase here, “*en l'air*,” amounts to something like “in disarray” or “open-ended,” both meanings follow straight lines from the literal translation: “in the air,” as if dispersed. The fact that Yeazell’s phrasing is casual to her argument here actually strengthens the resonance of thinking about readers, in addition to the four characters, as left *in the air* by this novel’s ending. It’s suggestive (and certainly fortuitous) for thinking about this novel’s motif as working into literary history as I have been gesturing toward.

To expand on this point and return explicitly to Dimock’s terms, we can turn to readers’ preparation for the polysemous ambiguity of the famous final lines via one last aerial moment that draws the motif to a close. That moment comes when the Principino is finally brought in to see the four adults:

The Principino’s presence by itself sufficiently broke the tension—the subsidence of which, in the great room, ten minutes later, gave the air something of the quality produced by the cessation of a sustained rattle. Stillness, when the Prince and Princess returned from attending the visitors to their carriage, might have been said to be not so much restored as created; so that whatever next took place in it was foredoomed to remarkable salience. (980)

⁶⁸ Referring to the infamous ending of *The Portrait of a Lady*, where Isabel Archer decides to stay with the deplorable, vain, and predatory Gilbert Osmond.

As I have argued throughout, instances of the novel's aerial motif occur in spots that draw attention to readers' configuration of the narrative. This final one also recalls the specific features of Dimock's proposal. The semicolon and the subjunctive and pluperfect temporalities on either side of it ("might have been said to be [...] created" and "was foredoomed") open the kinds of ambiguous planes of action and looped sequences that she uses to prop ajar conventions of literary history. James here signals quite explicitly that his ending does not achieve closure by returning to an earlier stasis but may arrive at some new equilibrium. But nor is that equilibrium quite closure in that it prepares for something "next," even if that preparation is determinative ("foredoomed") for what follows. That the status of the air registers the conditions of possibility for salient action is the means by which I see this moment (and the novel) moving out of the temporalities of its narrative and more obvious literary historical context into that of climate change. Precisely because the air carries all that is unresolved and because all of the characters, including the Assinghams as surrogate readers, are complicit in contributing to those conditions, I argue this novel and the kinds of reading and reasoning it exercises deserve attention from environmental humanists, who themselves have to contend with the uncertainty of what comes "next."

To the skeptical disinclined to grant that an air metaphor plausibly attaches the novel to an essential context that postdates it, I offer one final piece of evidence that would seem somewhat astonishing if it didn't follow so unsurprisingly from my argument. While already underway developing my reading of this motif in the novel, I rented the Merchant Ivory film adaptation of *The Golden Bowl* (2000). Although of course there were many changes, there was one that stood out to me in light of the budget pressures to cut the film down and despite the screenplay writer, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, not mentioning it once in an otherwise lengthy

interview with Philip Horne for *The Guardian*. To develop Adam Verver's character as a philanthropist collecting his art for deprived residents of American City, the filmmakers decided not only to specify (as the novel never did) the source of the Ververs' money as coming from the mining of "bituminous coal" but to insert at least a thirty-second montage of the coal coming out of the mines and into the dirty surroundings of American City. Thus, in the film, Adam's extensive fine art collection spanning European history is directed toward ameliorating the lives of fossil-fuel extraction workers. Such a coincidence by itself, of course, proves nothing. Yet it nonetheless seems indicative of something about airborne suspensions in the novel that expand suggestively into other contexts, and Adam's museum itself as a repository of aesthetic works financed by an extractive energy economy offers a more material case than in the novel of works being brought into new contexts.

To read *The Golden Bowl* for its plot defies most precedents in Jamesian criticism, especially those of the chief Jacobites (among others, R.P. Blackmur, Leon Edel, F. W. Dupee, and F.O. Matthiessen), who tried in some ways to be the readers implied in the New York Edition prefaces. Geismar holds this as constitutive of their chief sin (the sign of their having been taken in by James-as-confidence-man), but again I think Geismar misses that this points to such readers' actual emergence rather than their impossibility, tying the novel to history even if at a delay. As the implied readers of the New York prefaces, the particular group of readers Geismar identifies as the Jacobites, who rose to their positions as professional experts and gatekeepers from their ragtag amateur positions outside the academy, undeniably did capitalize on James's own accounts of his rigor as a legitimating factor. This includes their maintaining the image of James's artistic remove (take Matthiessen's distinction between James's aesthetic and social interests, for example) and downplaying features that could widen James's participatory

accessibility to more non-expert readers like themselves. R.P. Blackmur's work, given my focus on *The Golden Bowl*, can stand in as a brief and representative example.

Beginning by preparing the volume of Jamesian prefaces to the New York Edition of his novels under the new title *The Art of the Novel* (1934), Blackmur established himself as a bearer of James's overall legacy. He wasn't, as reading Geismar might lead one to suspect, entirely uncritical of James; he doesn't hesitate in fact to call many early and middle works failures for various reasons. Yet, he was consistently an advocate for the late novels. When he prepared *The Art of the Novel*, a collection he clearly saw as geared not only toward new readers of James generally but also to writers who might be amateur readers of James specifically, he would note that James "is difficult to read in his later works—among which the Prefaces are included—and his subjects, or rather the way in which he develops them, are occasionally difficult to coordinate with the reader's own experience" (20). But here (where he ascribes it partly to James's "excess of intelligence") and elsewhere, he spins this difficulty as a quality that readers can rise to appreciate. What's interesting about Blackmur's response to *The Golden Bowl* among James's other novels, though, is a change that manifests across two prefaces he wrote to it. The first of these (Grove Press, 1952) considers the three novels of the later phase, describing them as having a "fabulous air," (using fabulous in the sense of fable and thus developing a case that they act upon readers' consciences) (150). He reserves for *The Golden Bowl*, though, the designation of the "the most poetic," and the preface overall develops a reading that redeems the plot's "shabby adultery" through "poetic drama" (151, 152). The next time around, nearing the end of Blackmur's career, his take on the novel is much darker, as indicated by his opening move to suggest T.S. Eliot's phrase "the greater torment" as "an illuminating epigraph to a reading of James's novel" (221). In this rereading, he shifts from discussing poetic "shades" to seeing the

novel as one made up of concerns from “daily life,” with the latter signifying a darker reckoning with a sense of the banal. Instead of the novel inspiring its readers, Blackmur closes on the idea that it is readers’ charity that allows for a redemption of the “pity and dread” of the novel’s ending. But even as the second preface doesn’t repeat the focus on the novel’s poetry from the first, what carries forward is the critic’s certainty that James’s complexity, be it artistic or moral, substantiates the novelist’s work.

It becomes very easy then to see how this tradition of prizing James’s rigor has worked its way into the texts that are most likely to introduce him to generations of new amateur readers—a brief survey of teaching anthology headnotes aimed at students bears it out. Their approaches to noting James’s mixed reception range a gamut from terms indicating an outright lack (warning that “readers may feel [James’s stories] are deficient in vitality” or “incredibly difficult,” or characterizing James as “detached”), to letting James’s own words do the talking (“at the end of his life James himself was forced to acknowledge that his writing had become ‘insurmountably unsaleable’”), to somewhat backhanded compliments (“James forged a narrative method whose subtlety and intricacy often unsettled even his most devoted supporters”), to outright compliments that nonetheless place him out of reach (“exceptional,” “unsurpassed”). But there’s another adjective that appears among these and that is also applied to James’s most notoriously difficult novel from the “major phase”: “For many readers these late James novels constitute an ultimate in formal literary perfection, in the kind of art that shows supreme stylistic discrimination and structural control. For other readers they seem too rarefied and remote from life” and “A case can certainly be made out (and has been, for example, by R.P. Blackmur) that the felt thinness of the air in *The Golden Bowl* is a sign that James’s imagination had moved to more rarefied heights than it had reached even in *The Wings of the Dove*, levels at which

breathing is difficult.”⁶⁹ Although I have not found an instance of Blackmur using the word “rarefied,” his essay “The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James” does mention “deep-breathing economy” that may be the reference here; regardless, “rarefied” is a poetic word choice in this case for capturing both elevated status and technical difficulty.⁷⁰

One point that many critics will note readily is that James’s elevation and remove were of his own making. This has been unpacked by James scholars from Michael Anesko, whose “sociology of literature” reminded the field that James was indeed involved actively in the literary market of production, and Jonathan Freedman, who likewise turns a critical eye on James’s professionalism (Anesko vii; Freedman *Professions*). In particular, Freedman argues that “the function of aestheticism’s early, premodernist intervention in American culture was to train the middle-class reading public to expect its writers and artists to be alienated, self-satisfied, and flamboyant; to expect their discourse to be hermetic, privatized, and self-referential” while “instruct[ing] these writers and artists to walk the delicate line between insulting and indulging the middle-class audience who patronized their work with increasing avidity”; that James’s method of professionalization capitalized on essentially this dynamic while in large measure criticizing it means that the irony of his reception partly grows from James’s own actions (Freedman xxiv-xxv). Or, to take another example, Blackmur’s point that “the James novel uses device after device, not merely to invite the reader’s ordinary attention, but to command his

⁶⁹ In order: *America’s literature*, 714; Jones, Leisig, Ludwig 1406; Blair, Hornberger, Stuart 919; McMichael et al., 488; Stallman and Waldhorn 557; Dupee 138; Baym et al., 1498; Habegger 550; Brooks, Lewis, Warren 920.

⁷⁰ The full sentence from Blackmur reads: “Indeed, put beside *War and Peace*, *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl* are themselves ‘large loose baggy monsters’ precisely because an excess use was made of James’s particular development of executive form, and precisely because, too, of the consequent presence of James’s own brand of the accidental and the arbitrary, and because these together make access difficult to James’s own ‘deep-breathing economy and an organic form.’” (129)

extraordinary attention” corroborates James’s amanuensis Theodora Bosanquet’s characterization of James’s difficult design: “It was his theory that if readers didn’t keep up with him—as they admittedly didn’t always—the fault was entirely in their failure of attention” (Blackmur 121; Bosanquet 50-51). These critics all bear out in different ways that James cultivated difficulty as a means of distinguishing his best readers from a more tasteless, undeserving crowd.

That crowd apparently included Henry James’s own brother William, who bemoaned the intense attention required to read *The Golden Bowl* compared to the payoff:

You can’t skip a word if you are to get the effect, and 19 out of 20 worthy readers grow intolerant. The method seems perverse: “Say it out, for God’s Sake,” they cry, “and have done with it,” And so I say now, give us one thing in your older directer manner.... For gleams and innuendos and felicitous verbal insinuations you are unapproachable, but the *core* of literature is solid. (qtd. in Steele 73)

Henry’s response to this criticism was scathing, though also (I’m inclined to agree with critics who say the James brothers’ rivalry has been overemphasized by critics) ribbingly humorous in a brotherly way: “I shall greatly be humiliated if you *do* like it, and thereby lump it, in your affection, with things, of the current age, that I have heard you express admiration for and that I would sooner descend to a dishonored grave than have written. Still I *will* write you your book, on that two-and-two-make-four system on which all the awful truck that surrounds us is produced, and *then* descend to my dishonored grave” (“To William, Nov. 23, 1905” 382). Many of William’s essential points reappear in a much later review found on the online repository of reader responses *Goodreads*. A reader going by Nathaniel writes:

Good Lord, do I hate this book.
This is very, very late Henry James, when he was hopped up on painkillers and “writing” his novels via dictaphone. Consequently, the entire book reads like a very, very long, barely edited transcript of a dying Victorian intellectual rambling incoherently for hours in turn of the century English, because that’s exactly what it is. The narrative is simplistic, is buried underneath clouds of irrelevant and soporific detail, and frankly isn’t very interesting to begin with. The characters are wooden and uninteresting. The entire book is less about actual storytelling and

more about talking at great length about arcane Victorian traditions without actually getting to the point. For all the thousands of words in this book, very few of them actually have meaning. This book adds nothing to either literature in general or to James's reputation, and only came to be because he was delirious and lonely at the end of his life and wanted to write one last epic novel despite being physically incapable of doing so. Even so, he should have let it die when it became obvious couldn't do it properly. Actually publishing this turgid mess as a novel was a crime against humanity. Avoid this one at all costs unless you're a very, very, very, patient masochist, or you're too pretentious to realize how absolutely awful this book really is.

Here then is one of the William's 19, clearly. Yet hacking away at the vitriol and the overt gestures of distancing from the "arcane Victorian," there is something in Nathaniel's take that resembles, perhaps to his own chagrin, that of the author's late Victorian brother, who also draws the distinction of Henry's "older director manner." William too would have liked to skip some of the "thousands of words" to get the meaning of the "very few" that "have meaning" or, in his words, "the effect." The complaint of "irrelevant soporific detail" is Nathaniel's echo of the "Say it out." Of course, I am also interested in Nathaniel's summation that "The narrative is simplistic, is buried underneath clouds of irrelevant and soporific detail, and frankly isn't very interesting to begin with," because it puts into words some of the contradictions my reading tackles. The plot of James's novel *is* simple—no more or less "simplistic," anyway, than the average whodunit. If it buries banal circumstance "underneath clouds" of detail, then Nathaniel evinces that even far more amateur critics than those I have discussed here can register something atmospheric at work in the novel.

James was well aware by the time he wrote *The Golden Bowl* that many readers thought his later prose basically obscure and unreadable, making it no surprise that his New York Edition Preface presents a defense of his style. Somewhat wryly, then, it begins: "Among many matters thrown into relief by a refreshed acquaintance with 'The Golden Bowl' what perhaps most stands out for me is the still marked inveteracy of a certain indirect and oblique view of my presented

action; unless indeed I make up my mind to call this mode of treatment, on the contrary, any superficial appearances notwithstanding, the very straightest and closest possible” (433). This may be phrased as the debate of the author, but it is most “contrary” to readers who get flustered by “superficial” obstacles. Adroitly, this sentence replicates one of the novel’s main conflicts of superficial appeals and deeper qualities, of flaws and judgment and about clarity of hindsight. It also proves a problematic that runs throughout my chapters by suggesting that his fiction’s “indirect and oblique view” is simultaneously “the very straightest and closest possible.” The last word, “possible,” is operative here insofar as James concedes a sort of asymptotic relationship of fiction to “presented action[s]” and it gestures toward the point that the simple prose of some contemporaries is actually the more oblique perspective on human life and thought: if the way people process life’s conflicts and ethical issues is complex, so should the prose representing those endeavors be—and that’s essentially Nussbaum’s point too.

So just as I don’t mean to discount Muir’s environmentalism, I certainly don’t mean to assert here that James’s writing has secretly been lucid all this time and that the Jacobites’ arguments about Jamesian style tricked readers into seeing it otherwise by sleight of hand. Once again, tracing the contours of a well established literary reputation is only meant to help explain why other readings have remained untried. What is partly so powerful in this instance is that, far from providing an alternative, Geismar’s criticism actually corroborates many of the instrumental features of the cult worship he attempts to expose. In pointing this out, I have subtly made a case that, if indeed the content of novels could be “non-historical,” it is unlikely that their readers would be. In that light, doing an ecocritical reading of James is the most unexpected case in these chapters of taking a “reduce, reuse, recycle, rethink” mentality to bookishness in climate-challenged times because it concerns itself not with the “reality” Geismar was seeking

but the reality within which readers find themselves, which may turn out to be reflected in or anticipated by works from the past.

Alps Yet to Climb

My readings of both Muir and James have run counter to their conventional reception but not, I have argued, against the grain of their texts. This is because both of these writers have gained prominence among specific audiences who have valued particular kinds of rigor in each. In keeping with the other chapters of this project, however, rendering visible the inverted valuations of these two authors' work helps to understand how conventions—and particularly those of nature writing—take shape in context of one another. We can get a sense of other possible shapes by looking where critics have perhaps not devoted their attention.

For example, we might revisit something innocuous such as James's book review of John Tyndall's *Hours of Exercise in the Alps* he wrote early in his career for the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1871. It's an admiring review where he praises Tyndall's crossover capabilities as scientist and writer, leading James to write that "Science we imagine has few such useful friends in literature: it were much to be wished that literature had a few such friends in science" and that "literary topics would largely gain if writers would wander as far afield in search of a more rigorous method, as Professor Tyndall has travelled hitherward in search of a graceful one" (1357). The nod to "rigorous method" is characteristically Jamesian, but by now may also—especially if focus is placed on "wander[ing] far afield"—also seemingly invoke John Muir.

But James's review brings up a further interesting point that can be used to unite these disparate figures. Predictably, James reveals some skepticism about hiking that, despite his use of the third person, suggests it is not something he particularly enjoys: "That manner of rest from

overwork, which [Tyndall] comes to Switzerland to seek, will seem to many persons a rather arduous pastime” (1360). This leads into a chastisement of Tyndall’s egotism that makes more sense with added context from Michael Cohen, who explains that mountaineering was controversial among Victorians, with some in particular criticizing how some motivations and styles of climbing unduly inflated mountaineers’ vanity. While that controversy has largely passed by the wayside now, it is true that outdoor recreationists do persist in valorizing a certain degree of difficulty that’s constitutive of a sense of moral value. One example of this tied to aesthetic experience can be found in James McPhee’s *Encounter with the Archdruid*, where environmentalist David Brower appears as a mountaineer so staunch that, by the end, he goes to the surprising extent of arguing that views “ought to be properly earned,” even if such a policy involves not building infrastructure for the disabled to achieve comparable access to what, as he puts it earlier in the section “is known in [his] trade as a scenic climax” (74, 20). This all has an odd echo with comments about reading James’s late novels, an act that has itself been accused more than once of moral suspicion and vanity. Take, for example, Darshan Singh Maini’s statement regarding James that “In fact, it appears to me, one has to earn one’s way to him” (ix). This is perhaps just the most conveniently phrased of any number of comments about working through the difficulty of reading (especially Late) James, and it’s an impression that is reinforced in the metaphor of “rarified heights” I have highlighted—a metaphor that itself might presuppose a kind of reading-as-mountaineering basis.

My own readings of Muir and James above have drawn out how their texts both encourage extra forms of effort than assumptions about the “notable and quotable” version of Muir or the aloof aesthetic James might otherwise expect. These two writers meet, then, not from any particular personal connection or mutual allusion but through the ways that literary history

has obscured their commensurability for certain kinds of generative reflection. Muir is a powerful advocate for close and personal observations, while James's fictions prove worthy exercises for the environmentalist in part because of their indirection. In this way, both supplement each other—particularly in ways that are useful for environmental thinkers working on how to engage local and nonlocal publics in various issues.

These two critical strands take for a given the writers' place in their respective movements (the wilderness movement and the aesthetic movement), so I have brought these writers together to think about what critics have supposed these writers have moved readers to do. The "wilderness cult" got readers to appreciate aesthetics in first-hand experience of wilderness areas, and because of the strong association of nature writing with these successes, direct experience has continued to be its main available rhetorical appeal. The ejection of fiction from nature writing, which might entail thinking through more indirect representations as in James, has come back to haunt the genre as a limit when it comes to advocating to protect spaces readers perhaps shouldn't visit, from the Alaska of Muir's day to the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve (ANWR) of ours.

My point in drawing attention to James's review of Tyndall's mountaineering book in the same chapter that has discussed Muir's books is to re-emphasize that such a separation between the two genres was something that concretized in the nineteenth century between the point when both Muir and James were beginning their careers and the first decade of the 1900s when they were each publishing some of their best-known work. But to reopen ourselves to possible dialogues between them across existing distinctions of literary history may yield surprising finds, like the end of James's review of Tyndall:

Nature as a teacher, as a friend, as a companion, is, especially among ourselves, decidedly underestimated. But her claims in these respects are, to our mind, to be

received with a qualification. We are to remember that nature dwells within us as well as without, and that we have each of us a personal Alp to climb,—some formidable peak of character to dismantle of its frowning mystery and to decorate with the little flag-stick of mastery, before we can roam at our ease through the mysteries of matter. In other words, eternal Nature is less a pure refuge than the poets would have us believe. She is an excellent teacher for those whose education is fairly begun, a most effective comforter for those whom she finds half-comforted. (1362)

This is admittedly not the James of *The American Scene*, who will render urban and rural scenes into so many stage settings for potential American stories. But this earlier James seems like he might have quite the conversation with Muir indeed. Although it's almost certain they never had such a conversation in person, both Muir and James read works by Tyndall, and accounts of nature writing can be substantially questioned by further looking into this and other shared acts of reading.

Chapter 4 - Recovering Relationships: Fuertes, Posey, and New Old Nature Writing

Thus far, my chapters have primarily observed synergy that waxed and later waned between print culture and forms of outdoor experience. Reading and doing developed a complementarity for engaging the outdoors that fell away in the literary historical record. Left largely unanswered in these chapters, except occasionally by gestures toward individual sample readers sprinkled throughout the previous chapters, has been the question of to whom this participatory synergy was available. At least initially, it is hard not to agree with Alison Hawthorne Deming and Laura E. Savoy that “nature writing remains, for the most part, the precinct of the Euro-American privileged class” (*The Colors of Nature* 6). Deming and Savoy, having made this observation, proceed by writing that they “are convinced that the ‘lack’ of nature writing by people of color reflects the limited perspective of both the defining audience and the publishing community more than the lack of interest in the natural world by writers of color.” Also, they are careful to signal in both of these sentences that whatever dearth there is of this engagement may be more supposed than actual. Although their anthology does not go on to interrogate that supposed lack further back in history, projects such as Camille T. Dungy’s *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* read nature as an “interest” in minoritized traditions even back to their beginnings.

Yet the endurance of the perception Deming and Savoy attempt to intervene within is attested to by an article as recent as one published in the 2015 *Journal of Academic Librarianship*. In it, Maria Kochis produces a list of thirty “seminal works” of nature writing, not one of which is authored by a writer of color.⁷¹ In explaining her organizing principles, Kochis

⁷¹ That longer list includes as the only exception Luther Standing Bear’s *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933). In explaining why Standing Bear’s book did not make her shorter list of 30 books, Kochis writes: “Three books I struggled over because of their high literary value, but ultimately

stipulates: “To be considered seminal, a book had to reconceptualize society’s view of nature and influence the development and direction of the genre” (271). Such statements throughout the piece occlude how putatively objective standards can hinder building more diverse booklists when trying to account for “society’s view” (which, figured here as monolithic, itself gives cause to question Kochis’s familiarity with current Americanist scholarship broadly and nature writing scholarship more specifically). It is unclear, of course, how many academic librarians will read Kochis’s piece at all or act upon her suggestions without modifications; claims about its institutional impact would likely be unwarranted without clear records of actual exhibits citing the article. Still, her booklist marks a tendency that my previous chapters’ focus on standard nature writers such as Burroughs and Muir otherwise seem to rehearse: in redefining nature writing, do my chapters simply re-legitimize a white canon, or do they open more room for a diverse literary historical narrative?

Given my reading-focused definition of nature writing as a genre, I would observe that both a diversity-focused anthology such as Deming and Savoy’s and Kochis’s booklist are prone to certain historical narratives based not only on their definitions of the genre but also their intent on finding writers. The logical conundrums of such an approach are clear from an article such as Lee Schweninger’s “Writing Nature: Silko and Native Americans as Nature Writers.” Schweninger’s article convincingly makes the point that the novel *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo) welcomes ecocritical analysis. Beyond this, however, the argument is

decided not to include, were *Coming into the Country* (McPhee, 1991), *This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind* (Doig, 1978), and *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (Standing Bear, 1933). In each case, I felt as if the brunt of the author’s curiosity and emotional focus fell on the book’s human dramas, while the wider field of nature, though intricately and often sympathetically rendered, served mainly as a context for those dramas to play out.” Why “human dramas” should fall outside of nonfictional nature writing booklists is unwarranted, and indeed this explanation essentially forecloses any meaningful contribution based on diversity of perspective.

fraught with tensions this chapter of my project explores. The argument awkwardly tries to balance acknowledging that Silko (and Native Americans more broadly) “contribute to the genre of American nature writing” while making a case that Silko’s contribution is distinctive, that it provides “startling contrast” when compared to other works in the genre (47, 48). At times, genre as a concept itself gets more or less defenestrated, as in “Genre does not matter. Nature writing is writing about nature”; later, the important factor might not be the author at all but the reader: “*Read as nature writing*, the novel has as its climactic scene [the protagonist] Tayo’s discovery of the uranium mine” (48; 56, emphasis mine). This last formulation draws promising attention to reading, but it begs the question since what nature writing means at that point has been hollowed out. If nature writing is any “writing about nature,” do the uranium company’s own documents count? And what, at that point, are the ethics or benefits of bringing Silko into such a category? In other words, Schweninger leaves unconsidered how appropriate it is to claim Indigenous writers’ work for a generic tradition that, as I trace earlier in this project, was created and taxonomized by whites to describe, market, and canonize mostly white writers, all while participating in the wider cultural patterns of erasing Indigenous peoples from the landscape. Diversifying booklists commendably dispels false impressions that certain spaces are reserved for white achievement, but folding in all potential writers from historically underrepresented backgrounds whose works touch upon nature into a category like nature writing is not automatically warranted.

Shifting attention to readers of color, I argue, provides an opportunity to think about relationships between marginalized groups and the works of figures like Burroughs and Muir with fewer presuppositions. For, if ecocritics (and their critics) have largely assumed “lack of interest in the natural world by writers of color,” they, with or without good reason, have also

largely supposed a white readership for nature writing to go along with its authorship. Perhaps this has often been true. But also, perhaps, not necessarily. In the past twenty years or so, work by Americanists has started bringing to light information and stories about readers and reading groups that stand to reconfigure fundamentally knowledge about how, where, and by whom American literature has been read. Research attending to the history of reading may not finally recover extensive records of responses to nature writing by readers of color—either because those records never existed or because they were not maintained with the care afforded to the particular figures I discuss in this chapter—but I argue that any records are worth finding and thinking over as ecocritics make claims about the ongoing value of nature writing and participatory reading. Researching the history of nature writing’s readers will elucidate (to bring back a phrase from Wai Chee Dimock I used in a previous chapter) the “uneven” temporalities of nature writing’s texts and readers, bringing out which traits have stood out to which readers. This research stands to make text groupings less homogenous by holding up contrasting readings and priorities even as it allows positions characterized by difference to be turned toward mutual intelligibility that can facilitate projects held in common by various groups.

Put differently, I propose that approaching recovery through print culture and the history of reading offers a means for recovery work that focuses on listening and therefore on something more than what Louis Owens (Choctaw/Cherokee) called an “ethnographical salvage operation” (179). This phrase, though incidental within his larger essay, compactly expresses an element of the larger argument, namely a frustratingly lacking “symmetry of expectation” between scholars of various stripes and Indigenous intellectual production. Thus, Owens mounts a critique of “ignorance and erasure of Native American voices within the metropolitan center, and within what at times appears to be the loyal opposition to that center called postcolonial theory” (182).

The phrase “ethnographical salvage operation,” which he uses to describe the eventual retrieval of John Rollin Ridge’s (Cherokee) 1854 novel *Joaquín Murieta* from obscurity, fits into the wider criticism as a figuration of uneven relationships between scholars and Indigenous writers; the connotation of its component words are at turns distant, opportunistic, and tactical. *Joaquín Murieta* is an apt text to name-check in this regard, as the novel’s narration is so self-conscious and proleptic in recording the story’s tenuous history;⁷² it’s also a studied choice because even many Americanists likely still haven’t read it. In that way, John Rollin Ridge is a poster boy for finding writers for finding’s sake. By contrast, recovery that goes beyond salvage can aim to restore the “symmetry of expectation” between fields of inquiry and marginalized readers and writers.

Accordingly, this chapter studies two figures whose relations to familiar nature writing make them not only related to the genre—not only “there” to be “recovered” as the objects of an action for which I as a white scholar still serve as the subject—but reopens questions about the who, where, and why of nature writing that go along with this dissertation’s broad query of the paired what and when. The first figure I put forward is Louis Agassiz Fuertes, whose illustrations and personal letters are part and parcel of nature writing’s participatory bookishness. In arguing here for his recovery into that genre’s history, I wiggle the emphasis on the verbal in nature writing, and I posit that his illustrations of *Citizen Bird* in particular allow the New England-focused localist observations commonly associated with nineteenth-century nature writing to

⁷² To pick one passage somewhat at random but that also speaks to the memory of individual figures (in this case Joaquín Murieta) in historical narratives, notice this passage’s doubled use of the proleptic “would”: “It was the year which would close his short and tragical career with a crowning glory—a deed of daring and of power which would redeem with its refulgent light the darkness of his previous history and show him to aftertimes, not as a mere outlaw, committing petty depredations and robberies, but as a *hero* who has revenged his country’s wrongs and washed out her disgrace in the blood of her enemies” (Ridge 80).

enter into wider, more hemispheric relations. Secondly, I turn my attention to Alexander Posey (Muskogee/Creek), whose relationship to works of nature writing has given rise to disagreement among his critics. With the premise that this disagreement reveals expectations both about nature writing and about Indigenous readers, I argue for a coherent sense of Posey's work across his nature writing and better-known Fus Fixico letters. In Posey's relation to the genre, I see the genre's fostering of aesthetic appreciation as compatible with politics that considers a wider set of stakeholders than conventional land conservationists. Posey's voice can be heard as just one corrective to the wider erasure of Indigenous history that nature writers often fell into or performed deliberately in their imagination of Nature as a blank space for their own experience.

A Latino Illustrator Unnoticed: Louis Agassiz Fuertes and the Bird Book After Audubon

In their Introduction to the first volume of *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage* (1993), Ramón A. Gutiérrez and Genaro M. Padilla recount how Nicolás Kanellos tasked an initial assembly of scholars “to assess the known and, as yet, unknown aspects of this literary past, and to prioritize and propose strategies for its recovery, distribution and study” (17). The commas around the “as yet” in “known and, as yet, unknown” suspend the present as the product of interwoven reception histories, which in their telling attend to the disappearances that contribute to the contours of archives as they are found at any particular moment. This corresponds with the approach of Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez, whose reception-focused study of Chicano/a literature likewise pays close attention to moments of official consolidation while considering the implications for retroactive projects of recovery. In his fifth chapter in particular, he is wary of creating a new continuous chronology that simply slots in recovered writers. Drawing on figures including Hayden White and Hans Robert Jauss, Martín-Rodríguez

persuasively attends to “ways (literary) history is necessarily dependent on the interplay between past and present and between the chronicled and chronicler, rather than being predicated upon the existence of a more or less immutable past that the historian can record (or recover) without any further mediating intervention” (145). Stressing awareness of “the tensions between the past and the present, the narrated and the narrator,” he argues that scrambling the chronology of literary works to keep a clear eye on their critical reception history safeguards against the distortions that arise from scholarship that goes the other way around (143).

Louis Agassiz Fuertes merits the kind of attentive recovery these scholars propose, and I argue that his “as yet” mostly unknown work contributes both to thinking about the forms of bookishness nature writing evoked and might again evoke as well as to current scholarship on the Latino nineteenth century. My argument here focuses especially on an early illustration project of his, *Citizen Bird*, but my attention to his reception also takes up the biographical work of his daughter Mary Fuertes Boynton, *Louis Agassiz Fuertes: His Life Briefly Told and His Correspondence Edited* (1956). Her book interweaves passages of biography that she wrote with letters by and to Fuertes, telling its story in multiple voices. Boynton’s influence in shaping the text—and consequently her father’s reception—should not be underestimated, as her vision makes it a personal look at a figure whose painting and scientific work have value in a specific historical tradition of science illustration. Recovering Fuertes more broadly would mean looking at what Boynton’s perspective made visible and less visible about his work. Linking Fuertes’s own engagement with books to the way his illustrations fit within the narrative and book of *Citizen Bird*, I pursue the recovery by offering his life and work as touch points for rethinking nature bookishness and hemispheric discussions of nature writing.

Born February 7, 1874, and raised in Ithaca, New York, Louis Agassiz Fuertes was named after the recently deceased scientific luminary. He became an artist against the wishes of his father, a civil engineer and later college dean at Cornell University. Significantly, it was Liberty Hyde Bailey, leading figure in the nature study movement also based at Cornell, who advised the elder Fuertes to “Let him go.” Thanks in no small part to early mentorship from figures like leading ornithologist Elliott Coues and artist Abbott Thayer, Fuertes was able to get his start toward a profitable career as a bird illustrator. These connections helped foster travel opportunities for Fuertes that developed his talent in the field; though his best-known trip was with the Harriman Expedition to Alaska, he also traveled to the (North American) Southwest, Latin America and, shortly before his death, Abyssinia, collecting and painting birds along the way. Though he eventually branched out into depicting other kinds of animals, Fuertes’s specialty and preference was always what he called “bird portraiture,” and he would maintain a steady productive pace illustrating handbooks, government wildlife reports, expedition reports, and books by nature writers including John Burroughs, Olive Thorne Miller, and Mabel Osgood Wright. Even though Fuertes died young when a train collided with his automobile, he left a substantial legacy through his extensive work and through his generous and available mentorship to rising bird painters like George M. Sutton.

Because of his connection to Burroughs and Muir on the Harriman expedition⁷³ and his work appearing in books by writers who have garnered attention from ecocritics already,⁷⁴

⁷³ The archive of his papers at Cornell University includes some later correspondence with Clara Barrus and John Burroughs, though nothing with Muir. Fuertes, Burroughs, and Muir both served together, however, on the Harriman Expedition’s “Committee on Literature and Art” (Burroughs et al. xxxvii)

⁷⁴ Some of Fuertes’s paintings and drawings were used in the Riverside edition of Burroughs’s collected works, as well as other reprint volumes such as *Bird Studies from Burroughs*. He also illustrated *True Bird Stories from My Note-Books* by Olive Thorne Miller.

Fuertes's works can be said to have been hidden in plain sight. Another reason to consider his work as hidden in the open, though, is that concealment and visibility were central to his work in bird painting. Repeatedly, reviewers of his work suggested that he allow birds in his images to stand in greater contrast to their backgrounds. These repeated requests came to frustrate Fuertes, since he was a proponent of a mounting theory linking animal coloration and concealment. For much of his life, Fuertes was friends with the painter Abbott Thayer, whose ideas laid out most of these principles, now referred to as countershading. Countershading explains why many animals, including many birds, are white or light-colored from below and darker from above. In both cases, the coloration serves to conceal. Though relatively uncontroversial now, this idea ruffled, as it were, many feathers, not least because Thayer insisted it explained all animal coloration. Fuertes, who agreed with Thayer but was more moderate about its application, was called to review the book put together by Abbott's son Gerald that summarized the theory. Fuertes's review, published in *Science*, defends Thayer's work in terms of his observation skillsets:

An artist of the highest attainments, whose whole life is made up of studying the visual aspects of all objects, and with a mind singularly free from preconceived ideas acquired from the study of "cabinet natural history," he is the most authoritative exponent of this phase of nature that could be chosen. Indeed, it has been the lack of this training of the mind through the eye—rather than the reverse operation—that has proved the stumbling-block of such exhaustive students and observers as Wallace and Darwin. This it has remained for the painter-naturalist to discover the all-underlying truths of protective coloration. (466 – 67)

The logic of this defense of Thayer aligns with both this chapter's larger metahistoriographic point about diverse responses to nature writing generally (that ecocritics did not see Fuertes, Posey, and others because they were taught not to), but it is more useful as a prompt for a literary scholar to consider the role and relationship of visual work like illustration within nature writing, which has so long been shorthanded as the nature essay and thus stressed as a primarily verbal

medium.⁷⁵ If the print objects of the nature writing boom—in periodicals and in book form—incorporated visual elements to various degrees, this facet of the genre has received considerably less attention. In the spirit of the eye training the mind, I examine here how Fuertes's work joins illustration and participation.

Citizen Bird is representative of Fuertes's role in the books of nature writing that feature his illustrations in that he contributes images and not words. His review of Thayer and a few other pieces aside,⁷⁶ Fuertes wrote very little publicly. His private documentation of his participation in expeditions, however, was substantial, and the archive of his papers at Cornell University contains both notebooks—which document the trips from the more quantitative side: the conditions of the trip and the collection sites for various bird specimens—and his personal letters to family. Recovering these together in a facing-page variorum edition would provide a fascinating text even within nature writing more conventionally defined as combining scientific observation and aesthetic prose sensibility. Fuertes's letters in particular are a joy to read, as he occasionally illustrates these too with sketches of animals, people, and scenes. For the sake of space, however, I focus here on *Citizen Bird*, which is more representative of Fuertes's role in publicly available works of nature writing. Notwithstanding his verbal silence, his images apparently spoke (that is, sold) volumes, according to his collaborator and mentor Elliott Coues:

It is well that you are an alumnus—and A.B. or B.S., or whatever it is. But that is not a circumstance to your accomplishment in *Citizen Bird*, through which you have made, at a single bound, a reputation that most artists struggle painfully for

⁷⁵ The irony here being that, at least as far back as Ansel Adams and continuing today with a contemporary journal such as *Orion*, images have been a prominent part of conservationism's print strategies.

⁷⁶ Fuertes is credited as an author with William Osgood of *Artist and Naturalist in Ethiopia*, but this exception is partly due to Osgood's tribute to Fuertes upon his untimely decease shortly after this final expedition. The text compiles their journaling from the trip with illustrations. Fuertes wrote various lectures and talks, and beyond these his writing credits consist of a few short article-length pieces.

during many weary years of working and waiting for recognition and mere livelihood [sic]. The book was out on the 14th, and is a phenomenal success at the start, with a sale averaging 500 copies a day. We expect to do still better as trade revives in the fall. This great hit is mainly due to your pictures, which I consider the finest series of 108 bird portraits ever printed in black and white. The book sells on sight—almost everybody that sees it wants a copy, and it is sure to be immensely popular. (Coues, “July 22 1897”)

Whereas, then, illustrations may seem incidental, in this case they are recognized as integral to the nature book and its appeal. This praise from Coues also aligns with the proposal by Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surridge that “if we base our analysis on the experience of original readers, illustrations appear primary, in that they were seen first by every serial reader” (67). As this quotation suggests, what little work has been done to theorize the functional relationship between narrative texts and illustration has mostly focused on Victorian serial fiction.⁷⁷ In that way, my thinking about Fuertes and *Citizen Bird* extends the conversation both to American texts and genres outside serialized fiction.

Fuertes’s own history as a reader suggests he certainly appreciated how images could draw people to books. Though bookishness usually connotes the quality of having spent time with books’ words, records of Fuertes’s own bookishness, albeit few and likely incomplete,⁷⁸ document his particular absorption by the books, life, and work of John James Audubon, with whom he would later be compared and also often judged to have surpassed in technique. Gerald Thayer, for example, once wrote, “It shall come by slow degrees into the irregularly and

⁷⁷ See also Laura Daniel Buchholz, “Illustrations and Text: Storyworld Space and the Multimodality of Serialized Narrative.” For a study on the impact of an individual illustrator for the works of a specific author, see Adam Harrell Sonstegard, “Kemble’s Figures and Dunbar’s Folks: Picturing the Work of Graphic Illustration in Dunbar’s Short Fiction.” To clarify, various studies have of course taken up relationships between texts and illustrations on an individual basis, but studies have not paid extensive attention to what illustrations contribute to narrative broadly speaking.

⁷⁸ E.g., Missing from the box designated by the finding aid when I visited the Special Collections at Cornell University were Fuertes’s notes (presumably from school?) on German Literature.

imperfectly working and fashion-swayed mind of the populace, that you are not only the single living bird painter worthy of the name, but by long odds the greatest that has ever lived. For, unless I have been singularly misled by the few Audubon originals I have seen, that man could never approach the excellence of your pictures” (Boynton 78). Significantly, I will argue, his daughter all but starts her biography with the connection, recounting Louis’s good fortune at having access to Audubon’s *Birds of America* in the local library. On the affinity, she writes, “even when he was a child he understood that Audubon was inspired by the same love of the form and beauty of birds that he himself was feeling.” In addition to writing a school biographical report, “Incidents in the Life of John James Audubon,” Fuertes wrote about Audubon on a couple of occasions in personal letters. In one to his protégé George M. Sutton, he makes some concession for Audubon’s limits—“Say what you will of Audubon (much of what you did say is just, too,)”⁷⁹—but appreciates Audubon’s being “the first and only man whose bird drawing showed the faintest hint of anatomical study, or that the fresh bird was in hand when the work was done” as “immeasurably ahead of anything, up to his time or since, until the modern idea of drawing endlessly from life began to bear fruit” and thus “deserving all praise and honor, and its many weaknesses condonement [sic]” (199). In a later letter to Frank M. Chapman, who had sent him a new book on Audubon by Francis Hobart Herrick⁸⁰ for Christmas, he writes at more length and more fondly. This letter is a clear basis for his daughter’s biographical summary, even providing one of its metaphors: “This set was for ten years or more my daily bread; by it I was thrilled so that it melts me now to remember it, and many—so very many—of the plates are still as familiar to me as the wall-paper in the hall of the first house I remember living in! By those lovingly done things I was moved—and still am—in a way I would

⁷⁹ Sutton’s actual criticism of Audubon is unclear from the letter’s context.

⁸⁰ *Audubon the Naturalist: A History of His Life and Time* (1917).

find it hard to express” (225). Not only with the food metaphor then but also with the comparison to wall-paper, Fuertes gives expression to a kind of living in books that is surely bookishness of a kind, particularly as it leads not only to his own participation not just in bird painting (Chapman had inscribed the book “To the Audubon of his day”) but also evident lifelong reading such as the Herrick book.

Although praise of Fuertes as “The Audubon of his day” would not accrue until after *Citizen Bird* and after Fuertes became more established, the likeness is worth pausing over in conjunction with *Citizen Bird* because of its timing relative to participatory reading. Audubon was not simply a historical figure at that point; the Audubon Society, of which *Citizen Bird* coauthor Mabel Osgood Wright was the Connecticut chapter’s founder and president, was already active on bird conservation causes. In fact, Kevin Armitage makes brief mention of *Citizen Bird* as “the most widely read” Bird Day book, linking it to nature study reading practices discussed in my second chapter (103). Fuertes would give his time both to the Audubon Society and to nature-study-linked organizations, such as the Boy Scouts and Ernest Thompson Seton’s Woodcraft League of America at various times. In short, Fuertes understood that his print production, even from an early project like *Citizen Bird*, was linked to varied forms of participation with the birds outside the leaves of books’ pages.

Even without its rich contextual association to nature study (or perhaps as its internal registering), *Citizen Bird: Scenes from Bird-Life in Plain English for Beginners* invokes participatory reading at both the levels of its formal heterogeneity and its narrative arc. Readers open onto this narrative—which follows a group of young children as they explore common birds of North America during an extended stay at the new country house of a naturalist—after a few framing paratexts worth mentioning. After the title page and dedication to all boys and girls

who will “love” and “protect” the birds, for one, readers of the book encounter a page that lays out the setting and characters of the narrative, much like a play. The dramatic parallel literalizes participatory reading by suggesting young readers might act out the text, which would indeed effect the goal articulated by the dedication’s dual verbs. Although the book itself is not presented as a play, the relationship to drama is momentarily reinforced by the transition into the prose text itself, Chapter 1 and its intertitle—which, despite invoking chapters as a structuring unit of prose fiction, is “Overture by the Birds.” In this chapter, various local birds wonder about the new “House People” taking up residence in the orchard and wonder what the ramifications will be. They worry that House People might own a cat, for example, and they are also uneasy about the little boy, who is observed to own a “*shooter*.” Some of the birds have overheard (and understood) some conversations that suggest the two youngest city children will learn about the benefits of birds. After the Overture, the book proceeds as a hybrid novel and birding guide until the final chapter, called “Chorus by the birds,” where the device of the Bird People chorus celebrating the good fortune of this friendly family invokes the stage.

Between these bookends, the narrative consists of two city children, Dodo (Theodora) and Nat, learning about birds from their uncle, Dr. Roy Hunter, aided by his older daughter Olive. They are joined by a local boy they meet in the area, named Rap for the sound of the crutch he uses as an amputee. Dodo and Nat initially ask their naturalist uncle to write a book for them: “Couldn’t you write a *little* book for us, uncle—just a common little book, all in plain words?” (13). This echoes the full title of *Citizen Bird* (“*in Plain English*”), but Dr. Hunter instead gives the children their own field journals to take down notes and observations. They do not pursue birds organically but move through them in family groupings, allowing the book to remain organized like a birding reference guide. For each bird, a Fuertes illustration accompanies

a small table of key information, including size, coloration, dimorphic traits, range, and “guild” identification, referring to whatever contribution qualifies the species a useful citizen. The fictional plot largely serves to provide additional interesting commentary on habits or characteristics for each kind of bird, and its abrupt and somewhat anticlimactic end (without much having seemed to change, though the children have certainly done some learning and the Bird People are clearly appeased) attests to its main status as a vehicle for information.

The one exception to the narrative’s apparent lack of closure—a quality that might otherwise lead to questioning the effectiveness of its generic hybridity—involves books. When readers first encounter Rap, he is carrying a “tattered” partial copy of Thomas Nuttall’s *Manual of Birds*. The children actually surprise him birdwatching, and “they saw that he had a tattered piece of a book in one hand, which he slipped inside his jacket as carefully as if it were a great treasure” (19). In what follows, Dodo and Nat learn about Rap’s circumstances through how he acquired the book. He relates that he got the book from “The rag peddler that comes by every fall,” who lets Rap look through his bag, “‘cause sometimes there are paper books in them,” and that he gave the Nuttall for free since it was incomplete.⁸¹ As a disabled son of a single washerwoman, Rap is a sentimentalized figure, to be sure. But he is also more knowledgeable than the two other children to start with, so his development as a character differs from their move toward awakened appreciation. Instead, his is a trajectory of developing self-confidence through friendship and immersion into his passion, and the final chapter marks this with another book: Dodo tells Olive “that she, as well as Nat, [have been] saving money to by Rap a *whole*

⁸¹ This is actually an oddity that unsettles the time of the narrative setting since use of rags in American book printing had dwindled by the 1890s with the price for lumber bringing wood pulp to final competitive lows for printing (see Valente). So, if the rag peddler is not collecting rags for books, the contrived association marks book materiality here perhaps to signal progress on par with changes to the science of ornithology (Nuttall being already somewhat outdated).

bird book for Christmas” (410). The trope here of the partial physical object and the italicized emphatic whole, both of which can be understood as correlates for the supposed personhood of the disabled body, is a familiar one to scholars of disability’s representation, and the implication that the disabled body signals a deficient person has of course been debunked. The trope is noteworthy in *Citizen Bird*, though, since it marks Rap’s ongoing growth as a naturalist through reading as well as his experiences as a birdwatcher. And whereas representations of wilderness experience tend toward the abled or even super-abled figures, this narrative offers a figure to put alongside other exceptions to the general trend like John Wesley Powell.⁸² Furthermore, Rap’s disability and its connection to books, especially in light of Dr. Hunter’s study full of books and Nat and Dodo’s ability to save money to buy a book, participate thematically in broader questions of privilege and wilderness access *Citizen Bird* raises.

In addition to the way bookishness functions thematically within the narrative diegesis of *Citizen Bird*, it is integral to the book object itself via metaleptic suggestions, and the relation of illustrations and paratexts to the text of the narrative fiction play a significant role in this dynamic. In the first chapter featuring the human characters, Dr. Hunter gives the children “a little blank book” in which to make their own field observations (14). This is after they ask him: “‘Couldn’t you write a *little* book for us, uncle—just a common little book, all in plain words?’” (13). Because the information Hunter tasks them to write is also the information of the “Tables” of information accompanying each bird and because they are also told to draw the birds, one could hazard that *Citizen Bird* could reflect either child’s journal. But the language of their request echoing the longer title, as mentioned above, makes the early suggestion—supported by later references—that *Citizen Bird* is what Dr. Hunter produces as the culmination of the

⁸² The former Civil War general who went on to explore parts of the American West, despite having lost an arm, and to intuit an early version of the bioregional concept.

children's adventures. Another echo of the title page's language occurs at a point when Nat's enthusiasm is flagging from all he has to learn. Dr. Hunter ensures that, "[Y]ou do not need a big book—a little one will do for the present"; Nat needs only patience to observe better, and this patience will pay off because Hunter will "put in the book more than a hundred beautiful pictures for you and Dodo, drawn so naturally that you can tell every one of the birds by them, and that will make it easier for you to understand what you read" (83). The numerical reference and the method of illustration both recall Fuertes, since the book's title page boasts of its "one hundred and eleven illustrations."

Although inconsistently, Fuertes's illustrations indeed sometimes seem like very close matches to the birds observed in the narrative, and it is unclear to what extent Wright and Coues may have authored text to fit the drawings he provided them, or vice versa. At some moments, close parallels support the metaleptic dynamic found in the text. For example, the white-breasted nuthatch, which "goes upside down, in a way that woodpeckers never do" (120); another, and probably the closest, is the rock wren. The illustration appears on the page before its description, which matches it in posture and scene: "Presently we spied him, on the tip-top of a pile of stones, standing quite still, with his head thrown back and his bill pointing straight up. He looked gray, dusted over with pepper-and-salt dots on the back, and his bill was very straight and sharp—almost an inch long, it looked" (146). There are other moments, such as one where Dodo appears to reference an intertitle not obviously in her own journal, when *Citizen Bird* (201), essentially brings narrative audience and actual audience into moments of alignment. Of course, these suggestions that the text has metaleptically crossed from the diegetic level to the hands of actual readers are a device, since Dr. Roy Hunter is a fictive person. For one, that device serves as a reminder that not all books come with the words written; as such, participatory bookishness can

link reading and personal observation to producing new books. In this way, *Citizen Bird* negotiates the nature study text's tricky task of suggesting the value of readers' going outside the book itself without falling into the paradox of being a book that devalues book learning.

In the context of my larger project, then, the metaleptic quality of *Citizen Bird* and the way it disrupts common fiction/nonfiction distinctions of nature writing as a critically formalized genre would make it worth recovery in its own right as an innovative departure from the literary historical narrative with which ecocritics have become familiar. But if there is an opportunity to think about the text that puts this ecocritical narrative into conversation with Latino Studies more specifically, it has to do with what the participatory dynamic has to do with the most notable part of the title page I have so far not addressed, namely the main title of *Citizen Bird* itself. Dr. Hunter has Olive look up the definition in the dictionary to convince Nat and Dodo that birds are eligible for the designation: "Citizen – a member of a nation, especially of a republic; one who owes allegiance to a government and is entitled to protection from it" (31-2). The key of this definition is the echo of the protection from the book's dedication; if the bird people can be shown to belong by virtue of their labor as a form of allegiance, they will more obviously warrant the protection that comes from mutual benefit. Again here, the metaleptic crossing of the book object into readers' nonfictional world operates as a device to motivate protection not only in the narrative audience but in the actual as well.

As the book continues, though, this notion of membership has to account for the obvious fact that birds migrate with no attention to the lines or borders that mark nations and republics. One idea Dr. Hunter presents is that "love of country" determines the relationship more than travel or residence. Amid all of the birds whose accompanying information tables describe them as living part of the year in South America as in "the Southern States and beyond," but the book

comes to renegotiate even these initial ideas. Introducing the Woodland Warbler, Dr. Hunter calls them “among the greatest travellers”; in response, Nat asks, “Why do they travel so much, if they are only American birds? [...] I shouldn’t think they would have to go far if they always live in America” (153). Dr. Hunter’s reply opens a far more fluid articulation of nation than the earlier chapters implied: “America is a very large country, my boy, and you must not forget it includes South as well as North America—the Western Hemisphere of the whole globe” (153). He adds that many of these birds’ night travels are perilous, as the birds encounter unseen obstacles from telegraph wires to church steeples. In a cynical reading perhaps, the book’s injunction to readers that they protect these citizens amounts to an ecological equivalent of the Monroe Doctrine; yet such a cynical reading doesn’t really account for the birds themselves and the way their migrations do model a mobile hemispheric belonging.

Though Fuertes’s own travels throughout as far-flung locations in the hemisphere as Alaska and Colombia would not take place until after *Citizen Bird*, his name on the title page and his signed illustrations throughout the book invite connected reflections. Those subtle signatures alongside every drawing of such model hemispheric citizens appear as a reminder of the more conventional human citizens whose travels also cross lines and state borders. In that way *Citizen Bird* begins to be a valid departure point for thinking about the possibility of Latino nature writing or engagement with the genre. The literal layout of his illustrations on the page recall Gruesz’s arguments in *Ambassadors of Culture*, echoed elsewhere in nineteenth-century Latino Studies, that studying print transactions and translations reconfigures understandings of the United States literary tradition “in a way that recognizes the continuous life of Latinos within and around it” (211). Though well aware of “the impossible diversity of the term ‘Latino’—and its status as a fictive construct of the late twentieth century, given dubious authority by the

machinery of the state,” she experiments with “the possibility of a meaningful commonality of the idea of Latino expression, even before the term was invented” based in moments of print exchange (xi). Fuertes’s wider work—including the letters and notebooks from his travels—offer an uncommon occasion to consider such kinds of hemispheric experience and exchange in connection with the natural sciences.

If *Citizen Bird* is a useful text to recover into conceptions of “the Latino nineteenth century,” then it can be expected to influence that concept at the same time as it revises conventions of nature writing in ecocriticism as discussed above. Rodrigo Lazo and Jesse Alemán have recently compiled a volume that brings together most of the prominent scholars on nineteenth-century Latino works, and as such *The Latino Nineteenth Century* presents major current directions in the field. Alemán writes a Preface that condenses the volume’s contribution, which Lazo then elaborates in a longer introduction. Alemán emphasizes two chief interventions for the volume: language and geography. The volume “insists on reading Spanish-language texts,” he argues, because “No progressive project for nineteenth-century American literary studies can get around this issue of language” (viii). Only with Spanish can scholars unlock “a world of [...] print cultures, circuits, readerships, and routes” essential to the field. The second intervention “is one of geography,” whereby the literary circuits of the Latino nineteenth century defy the New England focus attendant with the typical Anglocentric accounts of the period (viii-ix).

Lazo’s longer introduction usefully supplements Alemán’s manifesto-like preface. To Alemán’s claim that the term Latino, rather than being applied to the nineteenth century as an anachronism, acts as a “marker of nineteenth-century transnationality,” Lazo adds a more detailed history of “la raza Latina.” Lazo explains that ‘Latino’ is not an anachronism, despite its

formal emergence in the late twentieth century, because even today it eludes a stable “denotative sense” (4). Perhaps more to the point, he adds that the problem of the simultaneously distributed and grouped sense of the term can be “approach[ed...] historically and in relation to the textual remains that are available” (4). Lazo addresses how language and nationalism in literary studies have functioned to separate Latino works from the nineteenth century out from the category of nineteenth-century Americanist work, and he also strengthens the case for how “the Latino nineteenth century calls for engagement with hemispheric geographies” that go beyond the “influential pull” of “Walden Pond and the Old Manse” (8). To a greater extent than the Preface, Lazo’s Introduction has the space to lay out the textual basis of the collection. He writes, “Archival encounters—their imperatives, possibilities, and limitations—are an important dimension of the Latino nineteenth century, a periodization that calls for a reconsideration of what counts as an archive,” and as part of this redefinition, “One of the goals of the collection is to consider the relationship of textual remains to the lived experiences of the people who make up the Latino nineteenth century” (10, 12).

The claims about language and geography made in Aléman and Lazo’s collection merit some reflection, and possibly revision, in light of Fuertes’s life and work. Aléman’s imperative that “No progressive project for nineteenth-century American literary studies can get around” Spanish seemed, from the beginning, under-warranted. In addition to omitting mention of Indigenous people of South America that intersect with the history of the term,⁸³ it does not

⁸³ Ralph Bauer reminds readers in his response: “Indeed, while the term *Latino* has come to distinguish an ethnic minority from an ethnic “Anglo” majority (as well as other ethnic minorities) in the United States, in the (post-) colonial Latin American context the identity category referencing a subject’s *Latinidad* has had very different social implications. In Latin America, the word *ladino* is generally used to distinguish *mestizos* and Indians who use or have adopted the Spanish language and culture [...] from “*indios*” or “*indígenas*” on the one hand and,

account for colonies in South America by other countries than Spain—and if from Lazo’s Introduction we might reason that English and German colonists were not referred to as part of “La raza Latina,” it remains unclear where lusophone and francophone South Americans fit into the framework. But in terms of Louis Agassiz Fuertes more specifically, I want to follow something Gruesz has articulated in summing the importance of print history to Latino/a studies. She writes that book history has “a broader vision of what counts as evidence about social and historical context, and that in turn prompts different research questions” (Gruesz “Authors, Readers, and the Mediations of Print Culture,” 497). The different kinds of evidence and questions opened by Fuertes, then, have to do with the whole collection’s focus on one language and its fluency. What then of Fuertes’s limited/“spiggoty” Spanish? Might not such a figure—born in the United States but with familial ties and personal travels to Central and South America—speak to increasing numbers of Latinos who struggle to retain a fluency comparable to their parents’ or who learn Spanish as their second language?⁸⁴ Through Fuertes and the work of illustration, as well as perhaps through Fuertes’s appreciation of Audubon’s paintings that bridged cultural difference, new questions about communication might arise that unsettle a focus on any singular language—not only English.

The mobile subjects of *Citizen Bird* also question the impulse for geographical recentering in Aléman and Lazo. My specific modification has to do not with where they draw attention to but where they seem to pull attention from—the orbit of Walden Pond and the Old Manse. I see their claim as valid that keeping these sites at the center of an American literary

on the other, from Spanish-descended and American-born creoles (*criollos*) as well as Spanish-born Spaniards (*peninsulares*.” (343)

⁸⁴ The implication that Latino identity depends on Spanish shows increasing signs of contestation as families’ presence extends across generations. For one recent perspective, see Kevin Garcia’s [Can You Lose a Language You Never Knew?](#) and the PEW statistics he cites. Insisting on Spanish becomes a form of authentication dependent on the power of a particular position.

narrative obscures other important locations, but calling for a new center strikes me as sitting uneasily with that same logic—particularly if, like the Fuertes family in Ithaca or (to take just one example from the collection) Raimundo Cabrera and his circles in Philadelphia and New York, the Latino nineteenth century spreads to unexpected cities outside where scholars find it concentrated.⁸⁵ Rather, as the multi-sited lives of citizen birds might suggest (or, if we want to take it there, a wider metaphor of hemispheric media ecology), there are relations to be narrated—relations that so far have been unnarrated or disnarrated—about Latino lives and experiences across these centers or locations. By understanding interfaces and movements among locations, such as Fuertes’s expeditions, we have an additional route to advance Aléman and Lazo’s goal of shedding light on the continuous productions of Latinos in the Americas by seeking occasions of mutual intelligibility amid the various traditions or genealogies in the hemisphere. In other words, not simply Boston *or* Havana, but the lives that bridge them or help understand geography as an organizing influence on cultural productions. I see this move to think of how Latino Studies connect to other forms of particularized knowledge rather than simply compete with them as echoing Vilma Santiago-Irizarry, who has argued for Latino Studies in connection with environmental studies in particular to marshal its specified knowledge to “participate in a dialogue that contributes to a generalized understanding of the current state of multiple communities in complex capitalist societies” (81).

Counterintuitively, Fuertes’s visibility for these contributions to ecocriticism or Latino Studies has been partly obscured by his daughter Mary Fuertes Boynton, whose biography of her

⁸⁵ For more on the significance of location, see Lazo, *Writing to Cuba*, and Julio Ramos “Migratories.” Ramos asks a series of questions that extend beyond my scope here but clearly related: “What does it mean to write in a different country, in a place different from the one that the individual claims as his or her own? Under which register, distant from the mother tongue, is the subject who departs constituted? How does one pass into another language? What are the borders of the community in which he or she enrolls? What remains outside?” (53)

father influentially curated his legacy; by way of extending my project's work to shed light on how influential readers direct reception, I turn briefly to her choices as a means of underscoring how Fuertes invites more work from both fields. Relative to the possible recovery of Fuertes as a Latino figure in particular, the book she produced alongside the materials she collected suggests that she curated Fuertes's connections to Hispanic heritage and its wider implications. Except for a few short moments in the book, there are no signs that Louis's father having been Puerto Rican left any delible trace. In one such moment, she indicates Louis's level of Spanish fluency, likely drawing from an evocative word of his own, since it's characteristic of his humor: "It should be noted that Louis' 'spigotty' Spanish, which he played by ear, had no basis in book study. His father's speech always retained a strong Spanish flavor; Louis' ear was excellent, and his Spanish sounded right, whether in English ('Yais, Ai go') or imitation español" (106). Much more revealing, if also passing, is how she opens the chapter "The Middle Years. The Studio." Fuertes had come back from Colombia, it was 1913, and Boynton uses the context of the looming WWI to explain that Fuertes spent seven years at home with his family and as "a citizen of his community." Perhaps then with the war a globalist kind of trigger, she remembers:

Our house, and the life that children take for granted, was full of—shall I say the aroma—of tropical America. Mother thought my father a considerate and imaginative shopper: in the coat closet under the front stairs there was a slowly diminishing hundred-pound sack of Bogotá coffee, and I was awakened for years by the morning sound of its grinding; we used green and white pottery breakfast dishes from Yucatán; ponchos were part of the family wardrobe and vocabulary; there were panama hats around; a morsel of exquisite Spanish lace and the bright embroidered edges of babies' dresses bought in 1910 still survive after trimming many garments.

Less tangible souvenirs were Spanish songs sung or rendered with style on the ocarina, Spanish talk, and names of people and places heard in the grown-ups' conversation. Much in my father's nature, and consequently in our family life, that was gentle, musical, whimsical, sympathetic, seems to me now to relate to his Spanish-American inheritance and travel. (187)

This reflection on Fuertes's "nature" particularly as an "inheritance" from "Spanish-America" is the only significant moment in the book to reveal a cultural connection carried on from his father that Boynton gives. And perhaps because the book was put together in the 1950s before the familiarization of 'Latino' as a formal demographic, she felt no need to bring forward that part of who he was.

Archival material suggests, however, that she might have said more. The most intriguing suggestions come from reminiscences written by her aunt (Louis's sister), though there is also a single letter of thanks from the Hispanic Society of America thanking Louis for having donated some books to their library, signed by E.C. Hills.⁸⁶ The reminiscences are in a folder with a note from Boynton, who acknowledges only their authorship and that "No part of this collection of anecdotes has been published." In the shorter piece, titled "Leopoldina Porro," the sister Mary Katherine ("Kippy") uses the titular "very foreign looking little doll" as an occasion to remember a few things from childhood. The children's way of pronouncing the doll's name with "trilled [...] rs" and other children's inability to replicate it leads to more direct statements about the family's experience with linguistic and ethnic difference:

We had early learned to pet [sic] our tongues around those latin sounds and like them but when we went first to public school the children began guying us because we weren't 'Americans'—our father couldn't even speak "plain English." That was quite true—he couldn't—he had a fluent command of the English language and forceful vocabulary, picturesque and lively to a degree, or stately and impressive as the situation demanded, and he spoke very fast indeed but never got rid of his accent. Finally we let on at home that our father was "just a dego" and he told us what to say "back" to the "ignorant little gamins" in public school. It was to the effect that we were better Americans than they were because our father had chosen to become one and they were just born that way—as dogs were born dogs—and they were just like puppies—born that way. We enlarged on that

⁸⁶ Fuertes donated two works by a monk, Fr. Pedro Beltran de Santa Rosa on language & religion in the Yucatan region and two more by Crescendio Carrillo on Yucatan geography and history.

theme to great effect but Louis just the same cheerfully went through school as “Deigo” Fuertes. (n.p.)

The significance of this document is that it suggests Boynton was only likely to include Louis’s heritage in a pleasant way, steering clear as she does throughout the biography from presenting much of anything negative or unsettling about his life. The narrative she creates is not one of overcoming obstacles; it’s one about the achievements of a talent whose work had wide significance before being cut short early (d. 22 Aug. 1927). It is also, as I suggested above, a biography that tries through its attention to Fuertes’s scientific and artistic connections to really celebrate him as a significant figure—if not indeed recipient of the mantle—in the Audubon line.

The pervasive influence of that vision can be traced in what few attempts to recuperate Fuertes have preceded my own work. Fuertes’s name has been included in three efforts aiming to celebrate his cultural affiliations: *Extraordinary Hispanic Americans* (1991), by Susan Sinnott, a series of biographical profiles; *Barrio Streets, Carnival Dreams: Three Generations of Latino Artistry* (1996), by Lori Marie Carlson, a short anthology; and a webpage as part of the Biodiversity Library Exhibition’s “Latino Natural History” site.⁸⁷ Much could be said on how all three render understandings of diversity and the meaning of recovery work. These various projects invoke Louis Agassiz Fuertes with pride and have laudable goals to celebrate achievement and model agency in cultural arenas where Hispanics or Latinos are often under-represented or under-recognized, and that diversity work comes across legibly. But the inclusion modeled in all three also may beg the question. The invocation of color in Sinnott’s “splashes of color” and Carlson’s “Technicolor visions” figures Hispanic or Latino achievements as essentially decorative interest. They liven up something else, presumably “our country” where

⁸⁷ That site places Fuertes alongside several others, including Ynés Mexía, José Zeledon, and Carlos de la Torre y Huerta.

even the plural possessive pronoun vaguely precludes them (Carlson xv). The Biodiversity Library Exhibition stays within more neutral territory and thereby avoids some of the implications of the other two. But the “broader public” served by the large sponsor institutions is only asked to be aware of the figures it displays. Consequently, and by featuring figures largely from the late nineteenth century onward, it misses the opportunity to illuminate natural history itself and the role of the transatlantic scientific networks (including eighteenth-century museums) underwriting and enabled by colonial circulations. Thus, these texts all finally obscure the historical factors that shape the need for the recoveries they attempt. I simply hope that this chapter has provided context and texture to supplement the work they have done to recall Fuertes and his work.⁸⁸

The other publications that have remembered Fuertes, though, have stayed more in line with Boynton’s narrative. Those two books on Fuertes are Frederick George Marcham’s *Louis Agassiz Fuertes and the Singular Beauty of Birds* (1971) and Robert McCracken Peck’s *A Celebration of Birds: The Life and Art of Louis Agassiz Fuertes* (1982). Both volumes are mostly reiterations of his biography (the latter being the companion volume to an exhibition of his paintings). Interested chiefly in art history, they focus on Fuertes’s technique and present color reproductions of various Fuertes paintings. The one exception to their overall focus on Fuertes’s talent comes in the introduction to Peck’s volume, written by Robert Torey Peterson, asking “We can easily conjure up the image of a bird in an Audubon print, but how many of us can recall what Audubon wrote about that same bird in his *Ornithological Biography*?” He goes on to make an observation that corresponds to my points above, however briefly: “Wildlife artists, like

⁸⁸ Here, I would just like to acknowledge Priscilla Solis Ybarra, who both in conversation at the 2017 ASLE conference and by example in her *Writing the Goodlife: Mexican American Literature and the Environment*, has modeled a kind of critical graciousness that influenced my thinking and approach to this material.

fine nature writers, have played no small part in the environmental movement, but they seldom receive the medals and awards that are given so freely to authors” (xii).

Toward this unanswered question, archival materials point again to Boynton, who perhaps curtailed one possibility for Fuertes to have risen to prominence faster in an environmental context: the production of a book by Rachel Carson. Correspondence of Boynton and Carson in Cornell’s archival materials mostly does not include Boynton’s letters—except for the copy of a crucial one that perhaps ended the interchange. Boynton looked widely for materials by or about her father when putting her biography together, and she became connected to Carson through the Fish and Wildlife Service, which held paintings by Fuertes and for which Carson served as editor. From Carson’s initial outreach to Boynton, she makes her admiration for Fuertes’s work evident, and she raises the idea of publishing a book of paintings for which she herself could write text about its depicted birds. Even as Carson is putting the manuscript of *The Sea Around Us* through the press, she pursues finding a publisher and writes delighted to Boynton announcing that she secures interest from Harper’s. It’s clear that Carson is strategizing to raise Fuertes’s profile, as she observes that moving quickly on the project would allow them to bring the book out on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Fuertes’s death (14 March 1951) which publishers would prefer as a marketing occasion. The correspondence spans a couple of years, and it suggests the two met in person (“It was a pleasure to talk with you” 11 Oct. 1949).

It’s not clear why Boynton waited so long into the correspondence, but she turned Carson down. After consulting family, she writes that “In spite of your enviable successes we are not able to reconcile the idea of your authorship with the best interests of a book about my father, because you did not know him” (26 March 1951). The letter reasons that Boynton’s intention is to have a book not so much about the birds or bird paintings but on her father as a person, and

this she sees as more her purview than Carson's. "Need I say more? If there is to be a text I should like to write it, of course." It's the final "of course" that seems a little stinging, and the letter ends by trying to get Carson to put her own interests aside to do what's best for Fuertes and his paintings. Since the two projects seem different in focus, it's not actually clear why both books could not be brought out together as complements. Regardless, by precluding Carson's direct involvement (though she gets a brief name-check in Boynton's acknowledgements), Boynton foreclosed a chance to connect her father with the developing legacy of nature writing.

None of this is to blame Boynton, however. She was entitled to frame her father as she chose, and there was no way for her to anticipate the value of connecting her father to either nature writing or Latinidad. Further, highlighting the particular contributions of her father as an ornithologist could very well match Fuertes's own self-concept. My argument has simply traced the attention Fuertes has received back to her influential choices. The book she produced has served as a resource for what attention Fuertes has received, and Fuertes is perhaps on-course to receive wider attention in due time.

That appreciation will no doubt include more in-depth looking at his writing from his travels—which have been outside my scope here. These writings will allow for going more into his travels that create the network of locations I have only suggested above. To be sure, Louis Agassiz Fuertes offers an example of someone with a strong connection to a home place but who also traveled extensively beyond it, which offers an example of something different from the localist emphasis often associated with nineteenth-century nature writing. Fuertes's recognition will also continue to take even more seriously his drawings and paintings themselves. As Paul Johnsgard notes, Fuertes's "overall output of published and unpublished paintings must have easily exceeded three thousand items," an achievement "both real and symbolic" (139, 138). I,

for one, remain unendingly stricken by his painting of a Pomarine jaeger from the Harriman Expedition (<https://goo.gl/images/t8P3GA>).⁸⁹ Only after looking at this image for several seconds do I remind myself that it has not actually made a sound—so persuasive are the posture and lines of the beak for depicting that kind of movement. The soft brushstrokes pushing out from around its face, too, convincingly render feathers and movement. Indeed, like Fiertes’s writings and images more broadly, the Pomarine jaeger has a lightness of touch and a force of character that make it engaging to consider and revisit. Such qualities are promising for Fiertes in a larger sense, since persuasive recovery should not exhaust its subject but make evident that more remains to be said.

Reading Beyond the Romantic Writer Manqué: Alexander Posey’s Nature Writing

*It may seem ridiculous
For an Indian of political stance
To give praise to a Daffodil,
But deep down you were a poet*
-Louis Littlecoon Oliver (Weaver 94)

As a figure hidden in plain sight—that is, already present within the books on the shelves that make up familiar ideas of nature writing, but unnoticed by ecocritics in particular not primed to notice something they were seeing—Louis Agassiz Fiertes presents one kind of recovery imperative to retread familiar ground. Louis Littlecoon Oliver’s poem, from which I have drawn this section’s epigraph, suggests another. In four economical lines, the poem stages an apparent problem of what “seem[s] ridiculous,” namely the combination of a politically insurgent American Indian thinker and implicitly apolitical nature lover prone to smaller things like “a

⁸⁹ The Audubon Society lists the Pomarine jaeger as “climate endangered”: <http://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/pomarine-jaeger>

Daffodil” (also, implicitly through allusion to Wordsworth, aesthetic appreciation as contrasted with “political stance” reinforced by the line break). When that problem gets resolved by the “But” of the fourth line into a figure, the poet, capacious enough to be both, Oliver reconciles what scholars have had a thornier time trying to evaluate in the work of the poem’s subject, Alexander Posey.

Though Posey’s widow Minnie tried, solicited as she was by various interested parties after Alex’s tragic drowning at the age of thirty-four, to publish her husband’s poems and journals, his books did not sell well, and his writing faded into obscurity until efforts were made to recover Indigenous voices and perspectives to diversify histories of American print and literary culture. Recovery efforts first focused on compiling *The Fus Fixico Letters*,⁹⁰ a set of satirical editorial columns written by Posey as letters from a conservative Creek (the eponymous Fus Fixico) about local politics, allotment, and statehood. The Fus Fixico letters make for a discontinuous narrative, as Posey’s focus shifts from one topic to another, and they were often republished as one-offs by other newspapers, but together they follow a swath of history and catalog both the mundane and philosophical concerns of their characters, Hotgun, Tookpafka Micco, Wolf Warrior, and Kono Harjo. Aside from *The Fus Fixico Letters*, some of Posey’s miscellaneous other works—lyric poetry, stories, journals, and public addresses—have also been put back into print, rounding out the legacy of this writer and intellectual who worked across various forms.

Not much criticism has followed the recovery work aimed at putting Posey’s various writings in print, but in much of what has been produced Posey is remembered for his stance as a

⁹⁰ I will follow convention here of using the italicized *Fus Fixico Letters* to refer to the compiled single text (a form they never took in Posey’s lifetime) as distinct from general reference to the letters themselves as Fus Fixico letters. Littlefield provides helpful comments on the textual history of the letters in his portion of the Preface.

‘progressive’ Creek who documented, satirized, and participated in both the allotment process that formally dismantled the Creek Nation in Indian Territory and the formation of Oklahoma statehood. As opposed to ‘conservative’ Creeks, who refused to acquiesce to Euro-American standards of property and cultural progress, progressive Creeks like Posey insisted that making cultural changes was both necessary for survival and culturally salutary. From Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr.’s biography of Posey, the figure that emerges is a writer and intellectual faced with resolving his own ambitions and political convictions on one hand and his respect for conservatives’ traditional approach to their Indigenous culture on the other. Alexia Kosmider, author of the sole full-length critical work on Posey, turns up the dial of Littlefield’s assessment, discussing Posey as having two sides in “conflict.”

Kosmider opens her book, in fact, by discussing a photo of Posey that she sees as a summary of her broader point, that Posey’s “conflict” ultimately leads him to awkwardly posture himself toward a literary ideal. She is explicit about her use of this single photograph as a window into Posey’s mind and writing:

I try to imagine how Alex Posey must have wanted to be “seen” in this picture. Perhaps, in some way, his photograph is an important key to understanding his literary work. Posey writes to dispel stereotypical ideas about Indians, but he takes on some of the dominant culture’s ideas and values. His photograph also may seem to suggest that it is possible to erase “culture,” yet his “Indianness” surfaces. Posey tries to frame his world as he so desired, creating his own self-image, assuming a posture that attempts to speak of a Euroamerican world-view. This confrontation between Euroamerican and Creek cultures drives much of his literary work. (1)

Craig Womack (Creek/Cherokee) has already written a thorough response to Kosmider’s reading of Posey in a chapter of his influential book *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, and I largely concur with his analysis. His response to Kosmider’s reading of the photo is particularly crisp:

Wow! All of that on account of poor Alex just getting cleaned up and getting his picture took! Just what, I would like to ask, is an Indian in a tweed coat and derby hat trying to erase? Many Creek people, just about all of them that I have ever seen from photos taken during this time period, got dressed up to go to town and get photographed. What might Posey have worn that would have been more appropriate? He wasn't at the stomp grounds, mind you, he was at the photo studio. (137)

Essentially, Womack argues that arguments about Indian writers as torn between cultures often overstate the vulnerability of Indigenous heritage to Euro-American values; with sufficient historicizing and attention to cultural context, it is possible, he argues, to judge better the uses to which Indigenous writers put non-Indigenous tools. Womack thus responds to hybridity-based arguments like Kosmider's as having misunderstood indigeneity; that analysis is trenchant, so my own entry into the conversation is primarily complementary. I revisit Posey here to limn ways that, sublimated within these arguments about indigeneity are related misunderstandings about reading.

The dialogue about Posey's portrait merits rehearsing because I am interested in a different photograph of him, and because all these readings of photographs can be situated alongside another scholar in the field of American Indian Studies who opens his book with a reading of yet another photograph that helps lay the groundwork for my argument for recovering Posey into accounts of nature writing. Philip J. Deloria's (Dakota) *Indians in Unexpected Places* starts with his reading of a photograph, "Red Cloud Woman in Beauty Shop, Denver 1941," that might elicit a chuckle from viewers, and he goes on to unpack how such a chuckle results from the disruption of viewers' expectations. As he lays out, such "broad cultural expectations are both the products and the tools of domination[, and] they are an inheritance that haunts each and every one of us" (4). As this quotation suggests and by his own admission, Deloria focuses most on "non-Indian expectations" (7). As commentary on Posey reveals and as other scholarship on

Indigenous reading and readers will help me show, though, expectations on the relationship of Indigenous writers to nature writing come from a variety of sources. Studying Posey can refract such expectations, extending some of Womack's conclusions while also prompting new work for ecocritics and other scholars of nature writing.

The photograph I want to juxtapose with the individual portrait important to Kosmider's interpretation is a class photo, and Posey's place in it helps illustrate the "Indians in Unexpected Places" dynamic at the basis of my claims about Posey's importance to accounts of nature writing. Otherwise a standard-looking class photo, "Advanced Students, Bacone Indian University, June, 1891" is rendered humorous by the again dapper Alex—essentially front-row-center—nonchalantly reading while most of the others pictured look into the camera except for another student who turns from the camera to look with apparent interest at the book Alex holds (Lawson). In this photo, Posey's bookishness defies expectations in several ways. First and foremost, it interrupts the expectation of the returned docile gaze into the camera, and the fact that he resists that passive norm through reading is suggestive. Relatedly, it prompts a recalibration of expectations in terms of the disparate locations associated with bookishness broadly (seldom connected with Indian communities on or off reservations, where schooling typically had a more vocational rather than intellectual focus) and the intellection nature writing invokes more specifically (so often associated with New England). At the same time, Posey's records of *what* he read defy expectations from those who chiefly celebrate his uses of Este Charte English. By all accounts, Posey delighted in reading, and his tastes, in addition to reading through newspapers or journals near at hand, were decidedly literary; in his journals, he writes of reading Plutarch, Washington Irving, and Robert Burns among others. And, as part of my larger project, it should be no surprise that my specific interest is the existing documentation that Alex

Posey was an appreciative reader of works of nature writing—works by John Burroughs, Donald Mitchell, and Henry David Thoreau among them.

If Posey's reading choices initially come as a surprise, maybe they shouldn't. Other scholars in the broad field of book history have opened up what we know about reading in Indian Country. Phillip H. Round's monograph *Removable Type*, for one, researches the material circumstances of book production by and for American Indians to complicate accounts of the book as merely a colonial technology that overtook oral cultures; finding evidence of the print book as a tool also used for resistance to imperialism, he challenges enduring romantic stereotypes about Indigenous experience and book culture. Even more recently, Bernadette Lear has studied reading at the infamous Carlisle Industrial School, where over 10,000 Indigenous children were taken for an assimilative education program from 1879 to 1918. Lear points out, based on multiple forms of evidence, that "some Carlisle students willingly collected books and enjoyed reading, despite the Euro-American worldview frequently represented in reading materials, and in the act of using books as sources of entertainment and knowledge" (169). Through various efforts, the students, librarians, and others routinely defied racist expectations about American Indians' unsuitability for complex texts and higher education. Although Posey attended Bacone and not Carlisle, Posey's ownership of a newspaper in Indian Territory and eclectic reading tastes as a student and afterward suggest that he makes a compelling extension of these historical arguments.

Records of readers are hard to come by and difficult to extrapolate from reliably. In Posey's case, some basics emerge after piecing together his reading from the list of books that made up his library and his inconsistent journaling. Even still, these records obviously remain partial. Nonetheless, the resources made available by Matthew Wynn Sivils's work putting some

of Posey's writing back into print indicate Posey's substantial interest in works that were being categorized as nature writing. He owned several books by John Burroughs, one by John Muir, and the twenty-volume Riverside Edition of Thoreau's works and nature journals (the edition influential in reorienting Thoreau's nature-based reception). It also included Donald Mitchell's (Ik Marvel's) *My Farm of Edgewood* (Sivils "Appendix" 142-159). These works, which mostly focus on places in the Northeast, might make for unexpected reading for an Indigenous reader living in Oklahoma who himself never traveled there in person. How these works came to Posey's attention is unclear, but Posey notes that he received a group of books that included the Mitchell all at once from someone named "Knisely" ("Journal" 87) are suggestive of the how if not the why.

But nature writing seems to have been portable in more than simply material ways. Kosmider hones in on Posey's reading of Thoreau, and sees in Posey's journaling only imitation (34). Craig Womack, writing about Posey's nature journals, emphasizes instead that the genre allowed Posey to write in highly localizable ways, showing off through phenological observations not only knowledge about plants but also awareness of cyclical, seasonal changes in the land around him ("Alexander Posey's Nature Journals," 52).⁹¹ Womack's point and Posey's example is evocative of many more research questions about the different actual fields where nature writing reached readers beyond New England as well as through whose hands. Yet what

⁹¹ Joshua Nelson offers one rejoinder to the accuracy of Posey's observations in his review essay of Sivils's *Lost Creeks* and *Songs of the Oktahutche* volumes: "No one who has tried to wash the Canadian's mud out of cutoff Wranglers would buy Posey's description of its sky-blue tide or fail to shudder at the remark, "This river water ain't so bad, is it? Tastes pretty good, I think" (*Lost Creeks* 103). Despite the occasional casting of local flavor in felicitous terms, Posey in these books previews the acute eye and ear for detail that made his Fus Fixico letters such an innovative contribution to American literature" (89). It is tempting to consider this note about "felicitous" depiction as a credit to Kosmider's argument, but I also wonder whether changes in land use or environmental history also help explain the disparity.

makes Posey a special reader to examine is that the records of the works of nature writing he owned are supplemented by occasional notes and marginalia providing insight and specifics about his reception of them.

Besides documenting that he read *My Farm of Edgewood* in his journal, for example, Posey makes notes both upon starting the book and upon finishing it. He likes it from the start: “Begin reading ‘My Farm of Edgewood,’ a book that promises to be entertaining. The first chapter has lifted my face to blue skies, with here and there a white cloud dreamily drifting; has taken me to the mountain top overlooking cozy New England hamlets, arms of the sea and glimpses of the lordly Hudson in the distance” (“Journal” 88). When he finished, he writes, “Donald Mitchell, like Irving, never tires me. Can beautiful language, faultless and pure, delightful descriptions of Nature, so true that you hear the rustling of the poplar leaves, and philosophical excursions ever tire?” (90). In both entries, Posey expresses feeling himself transported from the page by Mitchell’s evocative style, adopting a lofty prospect over New England and later feeling himself amid the poplars in the pages. These comments at the bookends make for compelling evidence that Posey understood the text in layered ways that involve both aesthetic appreciation and more probing “philosophical” questions.

The first chapter of *My Farm of Edgewood*, which he mentions explicitly, stages the overarching questions the rest of the book explores. It would be easy to read past the beginning of the chapter, where Mitchell frames the book’s thought-experiment, to enjoy the various humorous and thoughtful anecdotes of his visiting farms. That experiment, as I have argued of nature writing more generally, has to do with ground-truthing ideas—in this case of the yeoman farmer:

I must confess to having felt an anxiety to test the question, as to whether a country liver was really made the poorer by all the acres he possessed beyond the

one or two immediately about his homestead. Indeed I may say that I felt a somewhat enthusiastic curiosity to know, and to determine by actual experience, if farm lands were simply a cost and an annoyance to any one who would not wholly forswear books, enter the mud trenches valorously, and take the pig by the ears, with his own hands. (Mitchell 6)

The interesting components of this project are subtle. First, “to determine by actual experience” is not in neat apposition to the verb “to know”; the mediating “and” suggests that knowledge is a broader status to which actual experience constitutes some but not all means. As the sentence continues, books emerge as other means, both in the sense of competition (implicitly, if the actual experience tests something from the narrator’s reading) but also cooperation (because after all the narrator is unwilling to “wholly forswear” them). The rest of the chapter builds on this midway point between knowledge from print and on-the-ground experience through the device of Mitchell’s advertisement for his ideal property. Although many responses come to him offering to sell farms that ostensibly meet his description, he visits several that humorously fail to pan out. As Posey writes, Mitchell does give “delightful descriptions,” but Mitchell’s literal excursions to various properties do also double as “philosophical excursions” into the basis of good living and the realizability of ideals negotiated through print and experience.

Both Littlefield and Sivils point to Mitchell’s text as an inspiration for Posey’s choice to pursue life as a “poet-farmer,” though neither establishes much to link the two beyond the obvious connection of Mitchell’s book to farming. Though Sivils is slightly more circumspect, writing that “It seemed that Posey’s summer of reading the works of writers such as Donald Mitchell, Joaquin Miller, and John Burroughs had fueled his desire to pursue an agrarian life of farming and writing,” he and Littlefield both characterize Posey’s reading as essentially uncritical (“The Life of Alexander Posey” 28-9). Alongside the question introduced as the heart of *My Farm of Edgewood* in the first chapter and Posey’s own notes (which Littlefield quotes in

full in the paragraph preceding the link to poet-farming), characterizing Posey's response as Littlefield does seems ironic, or at least incomplete—especially in light of historical work like Round's and Lear's I mentioned before. Moreover, over the same period of time that Posey was reading Mitchell, he wrote in the same journal that "A white man never made a promise with an Indian that he kept," a reflection occasioned by a legal delay in Checotah where Posey was testifying. As I will elaborate, Womack's work on Posey has already brought this supposition on Littlefield's part into question as part of a broader pattern assuming Indian writers always caved to Euroamerican influence.

Littlefield's treatment of Posey's reading makes more sense within the larger narrative his biography conveys; for Littlefield, these inspire some of the close observations of nature in Posey's journals and signal Posey's gravitation toward prose, but they are nonetheless part of a phase from which Alex turns as he started paying more attention to "social, political, and economic realities of the Creek Nation" (121). That is, because Littlefield structures his biography with the *Fus Fixico* Letters period of Posey's life as the climax, these interests in British and American Romantics and are at best a stepping stone, at worst a distraction. Posey wrote much of his poetry during his stint as the head of the above-mentioned Orphan Asylum, where his close social circle included one of his life's closest friends, a poet named George Riley Hall; referring to these circumstances, Littlefield writes: "The very closeness of their circle, however, may have worked against Alex's development as an artist. Hall's influence at a time when Alex's literary urge was at one of its peaks reinforced earlier reading and writing habits that limited the range of his poetic achievement" (93). Littlefield goes on to contrast "Hall's influence" with Posey's "most significant poetic expression[, which] would occur later in

another setting” (93).⁹² The last sentence betrays an ambivalence that reappears within the biography—Littlefield acknowledges at one moment that the time was “productive for Alex” but relegates it in the next to something less than another, “more significant poetic expression.” Although Littlefield does not elaborate what he means by “more significant” here, he most logically means something about Posey’s reception history—the Fus Fixico letters had wider readership than the poems, and they dealt with subject matter of more timely stakes. As a result, they remain what Posey is best known for. But there is an undertone as well, because the unstated phrase that follows such an evaluation is “more significant [to some readers, Littlefield among them].” What is *more significant* than Posey’s engagement with Anglo and Anglo-American writers is his political writing about Indian Territory, and Littlefield’s biography can emphasize this priority by breaking these productions off from one another into separate phases.

Biographers obviously must shape the narratives they tell, and Littlefield’s attention to Posey’s career in journalism is hardly unwarranted. Furthermore, Littlefield’s biography remains the longest and most in-depth; it will justly continue to guide scholarship on Posey and his work. Yet for the same reason—Littlefield’s potential outsized influence on Posey’s reception—remembering that biographical narratives are not transparent remains worthwhile. I hold it accountable for these details and these particular frames for two reasons. First, like Freudian slips, they reveal an assumed split among Posey’s various interests that I argue can be reconciled. Second, they also speak to more general trends in the way scholarship imagines Indigenous readers, trends that continue vexing how different communities can work within or

⁹² Nelson likewise falls into this vein when he reviews Posey’s poetry as “but shadows of the robust Creek voices Posey would develop in the Fus Fixico letters,” though his reading, as I will note below, nonetheless comes to a reconciliation of Posey’s various works, which is what I advocate for below as well (91).

alongside environmental political efforts.

For starters, I would argue it is possible to reframe Posey's Fus Fixico letters as chronicling one intellectual's evolving commentaries in a time of significant political *and* environmental change. As Carol A. Hunter (Osage) and Littlefield put it, "The Fus Fixico letters were a literary reaction to the dramatic transformation of the Indian nations of Indian Territory. They were a response, in part, to the shift in land tenure from common tribal or Indian national title to private ownership" (3). Whatever allotment's best pragmatic rationales, it also of course proved to be a massive land-grab by white settlers and big industries hungry to transform land use in Indian Territory—as the Fus Fixico Letters engage, the process of allotment was rife with graft. Further, the environmental history the letters tap into has to do not only with water and irrigation but also with Oklahoma's petroleum industries.⁹³ It is, to emphasize Hunter and Littlefield's wording, because of the letters' role as a "response" to policies that would inform environmental history—and policies fraught with racial dynamics in particular—that ecocritics interested in nature writing should take up *The Fus Fixico Letters* in addition to some of Posey's more obvious works that fit within already recognizable conceptions of nature writing.

Some of the Fus Fixico letters combine environmental and political interests more explicitly than others. Because Letter 23 covers weather, print culture, and the politics of statehood together, I quote it here in full to set up a reading with implications for the letters more generally:

"Well, so Hotgun he say he was for double statehood, 'cause they was too much

⁹³ As Littlefield notes, Posey's own life is curiously entangled in some of these issues since, in the last year of his life, he became involved not only in real estate dealings but also oil and gas companies. As Sivils notes, Alex "acquired tracts of land for himself, and he and John Thornton began the Posey-Thornton Oil and Gas Company" ("The Life of Alexander Posey" 36-37). For more on Oklahoma oil, see Franks. For a different focus on allotment as an environmental historical event but with a focus on water rights, see Pisani.

long-tailed cyclones out in Oklahoma and people was had to live right close to a hole in the ground like prairie dogs to keep out a they way. Hotgun he say he was not used to that kind a living and was get too old to learn to act like a prairie dog. Then he say sometime the people what had a hole in the ground was not out a danger, 'cause the rivers out in Oklahoma had no banks to um and was spread out all over the country when they get up, like maple syrup on a hot flapjack. He say he was druther be where he was had a show for his life.

“Then Tookpafka Micco he say Hotgun aint told half of it, 'cause out in Oklahoma they was had a drought in the summer time and hard times in the fall, 'sides blizzards in the winter time and cyclones with long tails in the spring. Tookpafka Micco was mighty bitter and he say he was druther had a sofky patch in Injin Territory than a big county full a debt and chinch bugs in Oklahoma. He say he's glad he wasn't a delegate to the powwow what make Chief Make Certain was pulled off in Eufaula 'cause he might got arrested for slander against Oklahoma.

“Then Hotgun he say they was no one want to be spliced onto Oklahoma but some thumb papers that was printed out in the country and didn't had no circulation except when they was being printed. He say he was for single statehood long time, 'cause he didn't see no other straw to grab at. But now, Hotgun he say, Secretary It's Cocked and Chief Make Certain was made a good raft to ride on and prospects was bright like a new tin pan for double statehood.

“Well, so Creek politics was getting warm like hot tamale and candidates for chief was thick like fleas under a pole cabin in the summer time, or maybe so bed bugs in a dollar day hotel when you blow the light out. Some fellers that was call they selves the Union party was fixing to hold big convention up to Okmulgee putty soon to see how many want to run against Charley Gibson for chief. Charley was fixing to had a convention on Flat Rock, maybe so he could had a good foundation to start on. Chief Porter was had his convention 'bout a year ago, and Hotgun he say maybe so he was trying to fudge. (*The Fus Fixico Letters*, 102-4)

In characteristic dialect humor, Fus Fixico reports on the quotidian responses to political goings-on from the distance of a full-blood Creek outside decision-making circles. The weather rationales offered by Hotgun and Tookpafka Micco are, on a literal level, an apparent non sequitur to the complex social and structural concerns involved in joining the Oklahoma Territory to Indian Territory in statehood. After all, state lines don't stop the weather. But their concerns about tornados, flooding, and blizzards operate as metaphors of risk exposure, with the figurative language of Creek politics “getting warm” as the clearest indication of politics and meteorology blending. These metaphors make the case that, with statehood, political relations

come bound up with shared exposure to financial and other problems. Weather connects to other issues in other letters, if not always so dramatically; Hunter and Littlefield note that “Commentary on the weather, its sudden changes, and its impact on farming was always of interest to Indian Territory readers, whose livelihood depended for the most part on agriculture and livestock production” (67). Even in such cases, then, the invocation of weather simultaneously invokes community. In Letter 23 perhaps most distinctly, however, Posey makes the case that politics are not separate from the land they govern—Posey’s metonymic execution is humorous, but the point is serious. Statehood does not join mere areas of contiguous blank lands but, as Tookpafka Micco notes here, the arable parts of “Injin Territory” with the “big county” of more arid regions, with associated drains and risks to the former such as the “debt and chinch bugs” of the latter.

If not recognizably nature writing per se, this letter like many others draws from minute observations of Indian Territory and its rhythms to anchor moments of political satire. Moreover, that kind of awareness is contrasted here with those who might merely read about the issue—those who get their information from the “thumb papers” and whose politics are as much a residue of their reading as those papers’ cheap ink is upon their fingers. By contrast, Posey’s layered humor calls readers to the porch-front with the characters to draw conclusions among the perspectives on display. Regardless of whether scholarship classifies the Fus Fixico letters *as* nature writing, considering them *in the context of Posey’s reading* nature writing powerfully opens up their intervention not just in political history as discourse about territory but also within environmental history, by extension re-territorializing the basis of those politics.

With this understanding of the Fus Fixico letters in mind, we can then also turn to other pieces of writing by Posey to get a sense of how his politics, which have often been what

interested critics, factor into this own experimentation in works more easily recognizable as nature writing. Sivils gathers a few pieces that seem part of Posey's effort to participate in the genre he was reading, but the four pieces he identifies as "The Hains Letters" offer a particularly intriguing example of his reading and writing converging in addition to offering the easiest lateral move from Fus Fixico. Whereas considering the Fus Fixico letters as nature writing might necessitate appropriating a work into a legacy exterior to its author's intentions, the Hains letters and other journals and fragments like Posey's "Notes Afield," by presenting a more direct outgrowth from Posey's reading, provide a solid foundation for his recovery as a potential nature writer without relying on anachronistic maneuvers that might otherwise count as Owens's "ethnographical salvage." Furthermore, this recovery effort pushes outward on the historical possibilities of the genre itself and the kinds of authorship imaginable within it.

While probably still an incipient fragment of a larger set, Posey's "Hains Letters" are the most polished of these recoverable nature writings. The four letters were published in March 1905, in various issues of the *Muskogee Democrat*, which was edited by Henry Hains, about whom little is now known.⁹⁴ They use neither the Fus Fixico persona nor the Este Charte Creek dialect of the Fus Fixico Letters. But in other ways, the Hains Letters connect to Posey's better known and more developed work, not least through the formal choice of their being letters and published while Posey was still writing Fus Fixico letters—their publication venue is one sign of their political component, and they still draw from Posey's humor and knowledge of Indian Territory.

⁹⁴ I would like to express my thanks to Theresa Murdock and other librarian query-fielders who valiantly collaborated to help me learn more about Hains. It seems from one grave that he lived from 8 June 1873 to 22 Jun 1957, and a wedding notice for the same figure was announced in the *Muskogee Democrat* (27 September 1905). Additional information could be revelatory in terms of what it reveals about both the narratee and the actual audience of these texts.

The four Hains Letters vary in their content, though they are united by Posey's examinations of Indian Country. In the first, he narrates a sort of mock-epic ramble with a canine companion. The second also recounts a ramble but focuses on the soil, plants, and weather of the area. The third tracks notices of the oncoming spring, and the fourth looks at the political formation of the town of Dustin. Each is framed as content from Posey's journal; indeed, they describe areas Posey traveled to during his time in the Creek enrollment Field Party, though otherwise they don't draw explicitly from the journal Sivils collected in the same volume. They do, though, perhaps draw from various sources. The opening lines of the first letter, for example, are a prose resetting of lines from a poem he'd published several years before: "I went out for a stroll this morning in the low-lying hills just east of Paden in answer to the call of the wild. I said to myself as I sauntered forth, I'm tired of the gloom in a four-walled room; heart weary, I sigh for the open sky and the solitude of the greening wood" ("Hains Letters" 116; "Lovingly" 159). Not only does the itch to get outside recall a style like Muir's, but the episode that follows seems like a bathos-inspired retelling of his narrative published as "Stickeen" in *The Century* in 1897, in which Muir crosses a glacier crevice (more successfully) with a tag-along dog.

Posey lived mostly in and around Muskogee and Eufaula, so it bears keeping in mind, as Littlefield also briefly notes, that the locations surveyed by these letters were mostly inhabited by conservative Creeks, meaning that the terrain is actually inflected by political difference for the piece's likely readers. Perhaps this helps explain why Posey ends the first letter and begins the second by musing, "This is a strange sort of land" (117). But even if parts of the second and fourth letter are critical—in one case of the soil and "squatty and shriveled" trees, and in the other of towns' naming by Republicans—he engages that strangeness with some sensitivity. When he mentions, to draw from the second letter again, the vulnerability of the areas to storms

(recalling Fus Fixico Letter 23 and its figuration of weather and risk), he recounts that a recent hailstorm “blew over Paden last May and crushed it like an eggshell” (117). From the detailing of damage that follows, the fragility of the eggshell image conveys that Posey registers hardship in the area.

The style of all four letters is ambulatory, perhaps not unlike the work Posey was engaged in at the time. This is most pronounced in the third letter:

My Dear Hains:

Another entry in my journal runs as follows: “Spring is here. In fact, it has been here for some time; for on the second of March, while Skaggs and I were driving along near Bearden, we heard the frogs. Truthfully speaking, it was I that heard the frogs; for Skaggs, as is his wont, was humming a ragtime air and entirely oblivious. When I called his attention to the concert in the neighboring swamp, he wanted to know where the lambs were.

“It is the time to go fishing. The angleworms are bestirring themselves. When I went abroad the other morning, after a heavy shower, I found angleworms crawling around everywhere. They do that after the first spring rain. The thunder seems to jar them loose and cause them to come to the surface. It is a good sign, they’ll bite! It is time to cut a dogwood switch and kick about in the trash for a rusty can.

“The elms are in full bud along Fish Creek, near Spokogee. The bluets are in bloom and the crocus is due. Wood violets are awakening and throwing off the coverlid. Already a pink atmosphere hovers about the redbud.

“Skaggs hums and drones like a burly bumblebee in a field of clover. The spell is upon him. Right here I am tempted to quote Tennyson.

“Ere long the old milch cow will hoist her tail and plunge wildly into the cool depths of the old swimming-hole.

“Every morning a new voice is heard in the forest choir.

“The blackbirds are falling like autumn leaves in the furrow behind the plowman.

“There is an old codger doing menial service at the hotel where we are stopping that knows all about angling. He can give Sir Izaak cards and spades. He recommends dough for bass and beef for catfish. But, he says, the quickest way to catch a mess of fish is to hang a dead rabbit in the water and just drip your hook down beside it. Whole schools of the finny tribe will find your bait!”

Your friend,

The scattered attention of this letter is more pronounced than in the other three, though the common strand of this letter is the arrival of spring. In that way, this letter most resembles a journal entry—as all four, through some equivalent of the phrase here of “Another entry in my

journal runs as follows,” purport to be. Yet for all its fragmentation, the letter is not just about spring but uses the oncoming spring as an occasion to array various positions of authority and observations. The opening distinction between Posey and his “oblivious” partner Skaggs sets up the rest of the letter’s observations, such as the confident characterization of the angleworms that link one observation to an iteratively gathered knowledge, “They do that after the first spring rain.” The seasonal image of blackbirds gliding from branches like leaves likewise implies knowledge through cyclical iterations. Indeed, it seems clear enough that Posey’s phenological observations provide him with a more authoritative and meaningful idea of “spring” than even the calendar date, “the second of March”; he not only knows what “It is the time to” do but knows what will come next “Ere long.”

But like Thoreau, whom Posey is viewed as imitating, and like other writers discussed in previous chapters, Posey offers connection and comparison between authority from direct observation and from reading. These references allow for a return to questions about Posey’s anomalous—or not—bookishness. He wants to make a Tennyson reference, but he keeps it mostly to himself. He refers his readers to Walton, but one doesn’t really have to track down *The Compleat Angler* to catch the wink there. So one possibility is that Posey knew his readers would not follow the specifics but recognize his own learnedness—as the class picture would maybe corroborate. But there’s not much more than inference (and, Deloria might say, expectation) to endorse this, except perhaps the contrast of Posey and Skaggs. But what if the brief references gesture toward a wider readership of Tennyson or Walton in and around Indian Territory in the late nineteenth century? Couldn’t these gesture toward wider bookishness in the Territory, or otherwise suggest curiosity in these matters (also supported by the class picture, this time by the

student who looks on while Posey reads)?⁹⁵ Like many short texts, the Hains Letters are so suggestive for what they do not say. Yet, like nature writing more widely, this letter's contrast between Skaggs's field of attention and Posey's suggests connections between reading and observational practices.

For all that the incipient pieces by Posey resemble other nature writing, they also each deviate slightly from the mean, no doubt partly because Posey juggled reputations as a lyric poet and political commentator. In pieces such as the Hains Letters, he most clearly worked toward the prose combination of the two. Within his argument for what sets Posey's nature writing apart, Craig Womack observes that "Being grounded in the land enables [Posey] to narrate the politics of the land" (59). Such a description certainly helps explain the fourth letter, which otherwise might appear as a swerve from the other three. The letter lampoons the renaming of Spokogee to Dustin, a name he doesn't fail to point out sounds like "Common, dry, everyday dust." In discussing this renaming, Posey "narrate[s] the politics of the land" by making a direct reference, which is uncommon in these letters, to traditional native culture, writing, "Somewhat after the fashion of the women of the ancient legend who sacrificed their beautiful hair for bowstrings, Spokogee changed its poetic and musical name to Dustin for a division point on the Fort Smith and Western railroad" (119). The likening of the name change to this story stresses a sacrifice of the aesthetic and cultural for the utilitarian. It also, perhaps in line with Posey's 'progressive' Creek politics, positions momentary adaptations as a strategic sort of fighting back in a dire situation. If this kind of political commentary seems out of place in nature writing, it's worth remembering that economic necessity and the need to fight back marginalization were already transforming Indian Country's lands and locales. As a result, Posey's "grounded"

⁹⁵ As only one additional example, the main character of S. Alice Callahan's 1891 novel *Wynema, A Child of the Forest* is also an avid reader.

perspective reverses a convention so prevalent in what has come to be codified as nature writing that it has become transparent: whereas many nature writers presented themselves as intrepid place-makers in the wild, Posey writes from an inhabited place besieged by the possibility of its being remade out from under him through processes like allotment or the extension of the railroads.

It should be clear by extension, then, that I am disinclined to follow Kosmider, who writes that Posey “imbibes Thoreau’s view of nature” and “imitates” him in a simple way (34). But while Kosmider’s argument may by now appear an easy target, I turn in closing this section to suggestions about the broader value of her argument’s weaknesses to arguments about reading in some works by disparate influential voices in Indigenous studies. The ostensible incommensurability that leads Kosmider and, less centrally, Littlefield to see Posey’s mature reading and writing in conflict with his Creek culture itself evinces an expectation about what is germane to Indigenous experience—the “ridiculous[ness]” I elaborated from Oliver in opening. Sivils, writing partly in response to Kosmider’s framing of Posey, also hazards that Posey’s reading perhaps disrupts current critical expectations: “Though it may be unfashionable at this time in the history of American Indian literary criticism to note that an American Indian’s writing is the product of a syncretic literary education that simultaneously draws upon American Indian and Euro-American models, I find such a view particularly persuasive—even unavoidable—for someone like Posey” (50). “How else,” Sivils asks, “are we to think about a man who collected Muscogee oral traditions (with a view to publishing a collection), wrote poems emulating Burns and Whittier, and liked to carry a copy of *Walden* in his pocket (Littlefield 121, 205)?” (50). Posey’s back-pocket copy of *Walden* is, perhaps, a symbolic crux to be thought through.

Like Posey's reading of nature writers more generally, the pocket *Walden* underscores tensions in an argument like Daniel Heath Justice's "Seeing (and Reading) Red: Indian Outlaws in the Ivory Tower," which lays out a pedagogical argument about reading and the role of literary criticism in contemporary Indigenous studies. The initial moves of this argument about "decolonization and academic Ghost Dancing" assert powerful principles for an academic reorientation that creates space for Indigenous scholarship within a historically antagonistic institutional structure. Justice reasons that "If Nationhood and liberation are our goals, we must truly acknowledge the diversity of Native experiences by avoiding both the traps of 'mixed blood angst' and of 'full blood purity,'" noting that focusing on authenticity "ignores the wide variety of responses of different communities to colonialism" (104). At the outset, Justice's argument seems prepared to reconcile complex circulations that inform different Native intellectuals. The phrase "variety of responses of different communities to colonialism" in particular would leave an opening, for example, for a figure like Posey whose land-focused responses to colonialism draw from his eclectic syncretism of intellectual sources.

Despite his initial capacious moves, Justice goes on to propose a decolonization pedagogy that funnels aesthetic response considerably—a pedagogy that not only legitimates certain forms of response above others but, more curiously, does so in ways that would seem to reintroduce "'mixed blood angst' and 'full blood purity'" under different auspices. These tensions in his argument arise from a move he makes at the start of the "Reading Red" section, a move upon which he bases much of what follows. That is, he sets up the Indigenous aesthetics for his pedagogy against something of a straw-man version of fin-de-siècle aestheticism, represented for him by "as Oscar Wilde was fond of noting, it's the idea of 'art for art's sake'"; Justice contrasts this understanding of aestheticism with quotations from Indigenous writers

including Cherokee/Appalachian poet Marilou Awiakta, who writes of ‘art for Life’s sake, as opposed to art for Art’s sake’ (109). Justice subsequently deploys this phrase anaphorically in the essay, and one instance of this anaphora interests me in particular because it brings into focus some of the questions about reading and intellectual work that I have been arguing Alex Posey illustrates: “Art for life’s sake: this is why, in Native literature classes, I don’t teach any books that aren’t written by First Nations peoples” (110).

My query has to do less with the decision to fill a Native literature class with Native voices and rather with Justice’s alignment of the telos of the course and how that telos comes to have repercussions for what is valued in those Indigenous voices. Though Justice falls into a popular misattribution of “art for art’s sake” to Oscar Wilde, his contrast with fin-de-siècle aestheticism does come from being willing to assign texts a specific didactic purpose. But while “art for Life’s sake” threatens to become just as vague of a sentiment as its apparent opposite, Justice does write toward its elucidation that it “defines [his] approach to Nation-building, sovereignty, self-determination, and decolonization: the creation and critique of ‘art for life’s sake’ within specific tribal traditions, and the extension of those efforts to broader pan-tribal understandings” (109). If this is the telos of the course, twin questions raise their heads concerning the choice not to “teach any books that aren’t written by First Nations peoples”: Is it necessarily the case that books by First Nations peoples achieve these purposes, and is it necessarily the case that books by non-First Nations peoples won’t? At stake in these questions is the extent to which Indigenous readers are at liberty to select works themselves as part of their own intellectual self-formation. Combining history of reading approaches with Indigenous studies offers reasons to be skeptical of both questions, as Posey’s example can help render more clearly.

In fact, the history of literary instruction in Native communities may offer some of the clearest reasons to be wary of Justice's pedagogical approach to literary study. Literacy scholar Marlinda White-Kaulaity (Navajo) is interested, like Justice, in literacy as a form of "weapon" and "tool." She remains aware that literacy was introduced to native communities as one method for "removing the Indian from students": "The history of Indian education indicates that instruction in the white man's reading and writing came with damaging practices of indoctrination, assimilation, and colonization. When missionaries and other evangelists introduced Indians to books and schools, it was to remedy a deficit" (561). Curiously, in this context, Justice's decolonization pedagogy appears as the funhouse mirror opposite process (insofar as it tries exorcising the white man from the Indian), but otherwise not a process that fundamentally changes the idea of literacy itself as anything other than a means of indoctrination, which is something White-Kaulaity lays out more successfully. Put another way, Justice may have decolonized booklists, but fallen short of decolonizing reading. White-Kaulaity also recognizes a need for Native students to engage texts by other Native writers, but she locates the most important time for this exposure as long before college, in junior high.⁹⁶ But then, she notes, readers tend to develop themselves and their social ideas when they are let loose among the entire variety of available texts. Her way of linking literacy testimony to one interviewee's involvement in the American Indian Movement fits with Gerald Vizenor's reminder elsewhere that "English, learned under duress by tribal people at mission and federal schools, was one of

⁹⁶ Anecdotal evidence corroborates this. Having assigned literacy narratives to students in my composition classes several times, I have recognized a steady pattern. Many students stop reading for their own enjoyment at around the time reading becomes a formalized activity in schooling, typically around middle school, and high school English classes are mostly just endured. It's possible that many of the personal interventions and awakenings aimed for by secondary educators are coming far too late and to a fraction of the people who need them because reading is flattened for many students far before they reach university classrooms.

the languages that carried the Ghost Dance” (227). That is to say, the sources for alternative political visions are sometimes unexpected.

Where different theoretical or critical arguments bump up against expectations of what authors or genres Indigenous readers and writers should use as their source of self-definition is where Deloria’s argument reconnects to Posey’s bookishness. Posey writing in his book margins that John Burroughs shows “genius” or appreciating Thoreau as “a man after my own heart” runs against the expectations, held by some, for Indigenous intellectuals. The decolonial thinker Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Dakota/Lakota) is one example. In the eponymous essay of her collection *Why I Can’t Read Wallace Stegner and Other Essays*, she articulates clearly her disinterest in devoting time to white writers whose works enact the erasure of Indigenous peoples, relevant to nature writing including Burroughs’s and Thoreau’s, raising the critical question, “How may a contemporary American Indian reader of such fiction and history as Stegner’s work about the American West reconcile his or her imagination of mythological continuity and primordial historiography with the death and burial of his or her presence made so explicit?” (33). Womack offers a counter-question: “Why is it always assumed, furthermore, that Native is assimilated by white, not the other way around?” (143). In doing so, Womack’s work helps clarify an irony that runs through Cook-Lynn’s Stegner essay about the precarity of the “American Indian reader” who apparently reads books only to be either affirmed or erased—an irony registering even in her essay’s title, where “Can’t” suggests a passive inability that belies the insightfulness of her actual, careful reading of Stegner. Precisely because she displays such critical agency as a reader herself, “Don’t” or “Won’t” would have been more accurate.

The power and the decolonial promise of thinkers such as Justice and Cook-Lynn are why, when it comes to Posey’s potential continued value, critics may feel unease about his

enthusiasm for white writers, then either seeing him as fractured, like Kosmider and Littlefield, or becoming apologetic, as in Sivils's "Though it may be unfashionable at this time in the history of American Indian literary criticism" cited above. Joshua B. Nelson (Cherokee), reviewing Sivils's republication of Posey's poems and nature journals, makes a similar concessionary move, but like Womack is able to reconcile the apparent contradiction through Posey's agency as a reader: "Posey has particular artistic ideas in mind for what he reads and presumably for what he writes. That these might not line up perfectly with contemporary tastes in American Indian literary studies is no particular fault of his, and today's critics would do well to pay close attention to the historical, literary, and political circumstances in which his aesthetic projects developed" (92). Recognizing Posey's "implicit and explicit literary criticism" of what he reads, Nelson is able to view Posey not as anomalous or as a dupe, but as someone drawing imaginative resources from figures as disparate as William Shakespeare, Robert Burns, Washington Irving, and Oklahoma's other dialect writers.

What Deloria might identify as the "chuckle" accompanying the "ridiculous" appearance of Posey's flower appreciation in Oliver's poem is indicative of the continual expectation that Indigenous participation in any arena convened by Euro-Americans amounts to capitulation, that the Indigenous peoples of today, despite surviving colonialism, might forfeit their culture and sense of self by liking a book. Where the assumption comes from that Indigenous readers are so fragile or so insular is itself no doubt colonial. At the very least, continuing conversation along these lines would be well served to disentangle liking and likeness, which seem to be conflated by virtue of sounding similar, and remembering that deconstructing likeness entails the implicit recognition of difference.

As a caveat, I would delineate what this argument does not argue. My citations in this

section should bear out that I have no qualm with the directive offered at least as far back as Robert Allen Warrior's *Tribal Secrets* (1995) of a "bibliography dominated by the literature and, more important, the criticism of American Indian writers" (xvi). In fact, I see my argument about Posey aligning with his push for more "forums, in which complex critical problems of audience, reception, and representation are worked through" to better survey the dimensions of Indigenous intellectual histories (xix). In other words, while Posey's reading of white poets and nature writers helps to raise questions about his reception and audience, I do not depart from the consensus that study of Indigenous writers should be rigorously informed by the breadth of intellectual production by other Indigenous critics and theorists. At the same time, an individual's reading may bridge Indigenous writers to other areas of concern, as several of Warrior's own examples suggest.⁹⁷ Thus, the most significant disagreement I have with Warrior is that, while in Mathews's case he finds connections to "the tradition of U.S. nature writing that runs through Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Wendell Berry, and so on" to be "obvious," in Posey's criticism I have marked that making something of connections to that genre has proven anything but (xxi).

Like Warrior, I want to remain wary of hagiography; my argument here has instead been to present Alex Posey as a figure in whom the histories of nature writing and Indigenous politics cross in ways not necessarily at odds. Rather than continuing to understand his reading of nature writing in conflict with or as a distraction from his politics, I would suggest it be understood as further evidence that the substrata of his politics was the land. There is one further journal entry especially interesting in this regard from his time enrolling conservative Creeks for allotment. He

⁹⁷ I refer here to his comments on "the Charles Eastman who attended Mark Twain's seventieth birthday party or who read a paper at the First Universal Races Congress with W.E.B Du Bois and others in 1911" and the remainder of the paragraph that follows (xx).

records at length one man's reasons for refusing to sign up, such as the man's claim that "The real Indian does not change and is steadfast in the truth" (124). But then Posey lays out the factors undermining the tenability of the man's stance, and these reasons are fundamentally recognitions of environmental history: "The growth of towns, the building of railroads, the leasing and selling of land, the clearing of forests and opening of farms, the disappearance of game and hunting grounds and all the marvelous progress of the country cannot disturb his opinion. He will not vary. He stands pat" (124). If these events of environmental history inform his 'progressive' stance, then his interest in, or appreciation of and experimentation with, nature writing might take on new significance, and the history of the category itself should also take up new fields of action where its questions and its readers have found their place. Posey offers one case where the documented history of reading gives us an early example of a reader engaging with nature writing toward alternative and more diverse political means. As such, he and other readers whose responses might have left archival traces can serve as coordinates in larger histories of reading that query divisions between aesthetic appreciation and activist potential in environmentalist discourses.

Conclusion

Fuertes and Posey are just two figures awaiting recovery in relation to what nature writing has been and might be. Others include Ryōzō Azuma, whose inspiration by John Muir led to writing the first biography of Muir in Japanese, a Japanese translation of *Travels in Alaska*, and a lifelong cultural back-and-forth between the US and Japan over the national parks idea—a

cultural ambassadorship he negotiated even during wartime.⁹⁸ It could involve botanist and Sierra Club member Ynés Mexía, who like Azuma asks ecocritics and environmental humanists to think about the international spatial reach and transnational influence of nature writing—in her case through the botanical collecting trips that took her across the U.S.-Mexico border.⁹⁹ It could mean further work like John Claborn's on W.E.B. DuBois and the Grand Canyon. And it might encourage renewed work on Charles Eastman's relationship to nature study movements like the Boy Scouts, perhaps with particular attention to his participation and appearance in the print works they circulated. Working on such figures will hopefully spill over in public-facing ways, such that they don't simply shore up an academic conversation but inspire new audiences to enter more conversations about relationships between humankind and its environments. In terms of my larger argument more specifically, it is significant that each of these figures instantiate nodes of reception; through such nodes ecocritics can continue retelling the genre's history, such that the genre's formation becomes less a string of continuous names and more a web of interactions.

Some scholars, pointing to the necessary incompleteness, erasure, and dynamics of power inherent to the formation of the archives that would ostensibly make recovery possible, express ideological skepticism of certain recovery projects' telos in relation to concepts of canonicity *tout court*. One example would be Thomas J. Kinney who, in a 2002 volume of the *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage* series, writes that, "Though unquestionably successful in revaluing the literary and cultural productions of women and people of color, canon revision consequently legitimates the institution of the canon. In other words, it reinscribes the canonical

⁹⁸ On Azuma, see Kimes and Kimes, "Ryozo Azuma, the John Muir of Japan" and the John Muir Association, "Ryozo Azuma."

⁹⁹ On Mexía, see Moore.

economy” (64). That can be true, and so I sought at the beginning of this chapter to distinguish my efforts here from merely pulling Fuertes and Posey “into” nature writing via Owens’s coinage of “ethnographical salvage operation.” Without accounting for how these figures (among others) produce the category of nature writing through their creative actions (which includes writing and painting, but also reading), I think the category of nature writing can stay only artificially cohesive. Fuertes and Posey fray that cohesion in terms of geographical imagination, the purposes their work serves, and through the way their productions thwart any easy attempt to identify a “masterpiece” to slot into a canon.

These specific contributions do not, admittedly, undo “the canonical economy.” To this deeper point, I have another response. That response starts by noting that Kinney’s essay, despite the forum in which it is published, makes use of only five Hispanic scholars in a bibliography that has forty-seven entries and uses no “primary text” at all. Beyond mere accounting, I count this to reiterate Owens’s point about “symmetry of expectation” and to suggest that arguments about recovery that are not based in listening are indeed likely to be ineffectual. Furthermore, I would also recall here Martín-Rodríguez’s point, that recovery is most likely to serve canonicity as usual if telling the story of recovery becomes sublimated within some other scheme such as the chronological progression of compositions. My studies of Fuertes and Posey have tried to pay close attention to when, why, and how these figures have been made visible.

I would also like to leave the register of the visual and of the quantifiable to suggest something more general but no less important. My focus on reading and readers has endeavored to stress relations, not simply names. Remembering those relations enables the telling of new stories or retelling of old ones. Lisa Brooks (Abenaki) offers one example through her re-narration of the so-called “King Philip’s War” story through a triangulation of Mary

Rowlandson, James Printer, and Weetamoo. Rowlandson's text still has an interesting role to play, it turns out, but it's not the role American literary history has typically assigned it; its significance hinges instead on the restorative work in which it can be brought to participate. As a consequence, Brooks's storytelling instructs by example that "the work of recovering and re-presenting Native histories is central to the project of reinterpreting and re-placing American literature in Native space" (720). While I do not claim the same profundity or degree of reorientation for my examples, I do propose that thinking about nature writing as part of a hemispheric dialogue and in Indian Territory on the verge of becoming Oklahoma¹⁰⁰ points in a similar direction through an analogous effort to re-place what is commonly understood about nature writing and its potential through the relations Louis Agassiz Fuertes and Alex Posey have to them.

¹⁰⁰ Here I'm gesturing toward Fuertes and Posey respectively, but these do not need to remain separate arguments. For example, see Tereza M. Szeghi's work connecting Posey to Mexico.

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